

The Subject of *Yashā’u* and *Yaqdiru* in Rizq/Provision Verses

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Abstract

This paper looks into some Qur’ānic verses that feature the verbs *yashā’u* and *yaqdiru* in relation to the concept of 'giving rizq/provision' or 'providing sustenance'. *Yashā’u* means 'to will'/'to wish' and *yaqdiru* is traditionally understood to mean 'to give limited provision', but I argue that it means 'to be able to'. These verses are traditionally interpreted to mean that Allah decides on whom to give abundant provision and whom to give limited provision. The paper examines the linguistic structure and properties of these verses and argues that while Allah makes it possible for people to seek rizq (i.e. *Allāhu yabsutu al-rizq-a*), He does *not* decide on whom to give abundant provision and whom to give limited provision; that is, the human being decides on the amount of rizq/provision that he/she earns. Linguistically speaking, I argue that while *Allāhu* is the subject of the verb *yabsutu*, which means 'to provide in abundance' or 'to make easy', the human being is the subject of both *yashā’u* and *yaqdiru*; traditional exegesis sources analyze *Allāhu* as the subject of all three verbs. Evidence from the Holy Qur’an and Sunnah is provided to make the case for this new understanding.

Keywords: yabsutu; yashā’u; yaqdiru; rizq/provision; sakhkhara; ability/willingness.

1. Background

1.1. The Concept of Rizq

Allah Almighty provides rizq (i.e. sustenance) to human beings as well as to other creatures on earth, as stated in various Qur’ānic verses. The verse in (1), 3 of sūrat Fāṭir (Originator, 35), translated in (2), talks about providing rizq to human beings, and the verse in (3), 6 of sūrat Hūd (Hūd, 11), translated in (4), addresses the provision of rizq to animals.

¹ I am indebted to the editor of *Islamic Studies* for allowing the dissemination of the pre-final version of the paper, despite the journal’s closed-access policy.

1. "يا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ ۗ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالأَرْضِ ۗ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۗ فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ (3)."2

2. "O mankind! Remember Allah's blessing upon you! Is there any creator other than Allah who provides [rizq] for you from the sky and the earth? There is no god except Him. So where do you stray? (3)"2

3. "وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الأَرْضِ إِلاَّ عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ مُسْتَقَرَّهَا وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا ۗ كُلٌّ فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ (6)."3

4. "There is no animal on the earth, but that its sustenance lies with Allah, and He knows its [enduring] abode and its temporary place of lodging. Everything is in a manifest Book (6)."3

While most people associate the concept of rizq with money, scholars assert that the concept of rizq includes every positive aspect of a human being's life (i.e. all *ni'am* 'blessings'). Faith in Allah, general and specialized knowledge, good health, good spouse, good children, good friends, and the ability to learn and work to earn a livelihood, as well as safety and security, are all examples of rizq. Because most people do not recognize all these aspects of life as rizq, they think that Allah has favored the richer people by giving them more money. Nonetheless, since Allah is The Just (Al-'Adl), argues Shaikh Muḥammad Al-Sha'rāwī, He has given each human being the same amount of rizq, in its comprehensive conception; some are given more money, some more or better (e.g. healthier) children, some better health, some more physical strength, some better knowledge, and some better jobs.⁴

But who decides which of these types or aspects of rizq a human being earns, or gets more of? While offspring-related rizq is largely determined by Allah, I believe the aspect or type of rizq that a human being earns is determined by the desire of that specific human being and the kind of activities that they perform to earn the rizq that they prefer. This is because some people think that rizq is money, while others think that it is good health, or good children, or good education, or good spouse, or good job. And based on people's beliefs about what constitutes rizq, or based on their preferences, they will use their resources to earn that aspect of rizq (or more of it). If they do not invest their resources (e.g. effort, time, energy, thinking, planning, relations, knowledge, prestige, etc...) to earn any type of rizq, they will end up being poor, but

² <https://al-quran.info/#35>

³ <https://al-quran.info/#11>

⁴ Muḥammad Mitwallī al-Sha'rāwī, *Tafsīr al-Sha'rāwī*, Cairo, Dār 'akhbār al-yawm, 1991, p. 129 and p. 188.

this end-state is not predetermined by Allah, though known to Allah even before the human being is created.

In other words, having little money and some of the other aspects of rizq does not make a human being poor. Such a human being considers health the best of rizq, and so they spend their time taking care of their health, practicing sports, and eating healthy food, while someone else believes that rizq is in having better qualifications, and so they spend their time studying hard, pursuing academic degrees, and joining first-class universities. Yet, a third human being thinks that rizq is in having more money, and so they spend their time finding ways to establish businesses and running them, investing their money to make even more.

The point that this paper is trying to make is that while Allah is The Sustainer and The Just, it is He who *provides rizq to all people by making it possible for people to seek and earn rizq*. Nonetheless, He gives rizq only to those who seek it (except for some limited cases that will be discussed later), those who *want* it (i.e. *yashā'u*) and are *willing to exert effort* and invest other resources to earn it (i.e. *yaqdiru*). Therefore, it is generally the human being who determines how much rizq they get (given the available means and resources), and also determines which aspect of rizq they get (or earn more of), but given Allah's Omnipotence and Wisdom, He may interfere in certain aspects or stages of the rizq-earning process, for the good of the human being. Despite the freedom assigned to the human being with regard to the amount and type of rizq that he/she ends up earning, the current proposal acknowledges Allah's knowledge of it and His proven ability to allow or disallow it.

In other words, the current proposal is against the Qadariyya creed, according to which the human being creates his/her own *Qadar* (i.e. predetermination), having absolute control over his/her life and what might happen to him/her; they also maintain that Allah does not know human beings' deeds before they happen.⁵ However, Allah, Al-Ḥakīm (The Wise) and Al-Ra'ūf (The Most Kind), still has the power to reduce the amount of rizq a human being may seek to earn if He knows that the more of that aspect of rizq may lead that good-willed human being or any of their dependents to any aspect of the misguided path. Allah also has the power to increase the amount of a human being's rizq, either for their own good, or by way of trial (i.e. testing their faith).⁶

⁵ Yaḥyā bin Abī al-Khayr al-'Umrānī, *al-'intiṣār fī al-radd 'alā al-Mu'tazila al-Qadariyya al-'ashrār* (vol. I), Riyadh, Maktabat 'aḍwā' al-Salaf, 1999, p. 62-69.

⁶ To see whether they will use that money to engage in immoral activities, or to give charity, for example.

Besides, since He is the Owner of the Dominion (Mālik-ul-Mulk), He decides the type(s) and amount(s) of rizq that the human race can have access to at different times and in different places. This is stated in verse 21 of sūrat al-Ḥijr (The Rock, 15) in (5), translated in (6).

5. "وَإِن مِّن شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ (21)."

6. "There is not a thing but with Us are its stores, and We send it down only in precise measure (21)."⁷

1.2. The Debate on Rizq

All scholars agree that Allah is The Sustainer, The Provider (Al-Razzāq) who gives rizq to people. They also agree that He knows the type or aspect of rizq that a human being is going to earn (e.g. money, certificates, children, health, prestige, rich spouse, etc...), and agree that He also knows the exact amount of that rizq, given His Absolute Omniscience.

Most scholars agree that although rizq is provided by Allah, a human being must still work to earn their rizq, whichever that is, seeking it using legitimate means.⁸ Evidence for this view is stated in many verses, like 15 of sūrat al-Mulk (The Dominion, 67) in (7), translated in (8). Thus, 'eating of Allah's provisions' requires the stage of 'moving about in the regions of the earth', which signifies 'the work that human beings have to do to earn their livelihood'.

7. "هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ ذُلُولًا فَامشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا وَكُلُوا مِن رِّزْقِهِ وَإِلَيْهِ النُّشُورُ (15)."

8. "He is the One Who smoothed out the earth for you, so move about in its regions and eat from His provisions. And to Him is the resurrection of all (15)."⁹

Other scholars maintain that Allah knows the type and amount of a human being's rizq because He has decided on this aspect of a human being's life, just as He decided to create that human being; that is, rizq has already been decreed by Allah.¹⁰ These scholars use verse 32 of sūrat al-Zukhruf (Decorations, 43) in (9), translated in (10), to advocate this view.

⁷ <https://www.clearquran.com/015.html>

⁸ Abū al-'Abbās Taqīyy al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* [vol. 8], Medina, King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'ān, 2004, p. 530-531.

⁹ <https://quran.com/67>

¹⁰ Rājīḥ 'Abdul-Ḥamīd Kurdī and Sharīf al-Shaikh Ṣāliḥ al-Khaṭīb, "Maḥmūm al-Rizq bayn al-Mu'tazilah wa 'ahl al-Sunnah wa 'Ilāqatuhu bi-l-Qadar", *Ulūm al-Sharī'ah wa al-Qānūn*, 32,1, 2005, p. 140-155.

13. "وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى (39)."15

14. "and that each person will only have what they endeavored towards (39)."¹⁵

15. "وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ (7)."16

16. "And 'remember' when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely My punishment is severe (7).'¹⁶

To contribute to this debate, I will provide an alternative interpretation for verse 32 of sūrat al-Zukhruf (The Decorations, 43) in (9-10), the verse which provides the most compelling argument that the amount and type of people's rizq have already been predestined by Allah. This verse is generally understood to mean that Allah has decided who is going to be rich and who is going to be poor, and who is whose employer and who is whose servant. I will show that this understanding is not accurate.

First, this verse does not state (nor mean) that Allah has decided whom to give abundant provision and whom to give limited provision. The word *qasamnā* (قَسَمْنَا) means 'divided'; it does not even indicate that Allah has allocated more for a human being and less for another human being. Now, if one of us wants to divide an orange, for example, among his/her 4 children, how would they divide it? Of course equally, into 4 quarters. But, then, why do we think that Allah, who loves us more than we love our own children, and who is much more just than all humanity combined, and who brought us to this life for our advantage (in this world and in the hereafter) would divide our shares of this vanishing world's resources and advantages unequally? It is unfair to think of Allah this way.

Therefore, the sentence "نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَعِيشَتَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا" translated as 'We 'alone' have distributed their 'very' livelihood among them in this worldly life' should be understood as follows: 'Allah creates human beings with a passion for a profession/craft or a speciality that they can pursue, but that He does *not* predetermine their passions or interests'.¹⁷ This should lead to a situation where those professions and specialities are sufficiently diverse so that each human being will complement the other, leading to a world with people with different interests and walks-of-life, so that each human being will need the other ones; being self-sufficient is not an option for human

¹⁵ <https://quran.com/53>

¹⁶ <https://quran.com/14>

¹⁷ This is similar to Allah creating human beings with an aptitude for acquiring language (an undeniable necessity of life, just as having a profession is), in general, without specifying which language that is.

beings. The inevitable result is that some people will be interested in medicine, while others inclined to be engineers, lawyers, farmers, or fishermen, and some interested in business. In other words, what has been 'divided' by Allah is not the amount of rizq, but rather the passion for some rizq-seeking approach, and it is left to human beings to decide on the roles (i.e. professions and specialities) that they want to play, to be of benefit for the rest of humanity. That the qualifications and professions do not always determine the amount of rizq is illustrated by the fact that there are some farmers and fishermen who are richer than many doctors and lawyers. Besides, if Allah does not control our decisions regarding the path, guided (الهداية) or misled (الضلال), that we choose to pursue in this life,¹⁸ which is a much more crucial decision, then He is not likely to control our passions or amounts of rizq in this life.

Second, the next sentence in the verse (i.e. "رَفَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ") translated as '[We] raised some of them in rank above others' does not mean that Allah has decided that some should be rich and some should be poor, so that the rich may employ the poor for their service. An alternative understanding is that creating us with passions for different walks-of-life (i.e. career domains) has resulted in each one of us being a provider of a commodity or a service to other human beings. Thus, the lawyer is of a higher status when a doctor seeks his/her services. And a farmer is of a higher status when they provide the food that lawyers and engineers cannot live without. And the teacher is of a higher status when he/she teaches ministers' and presidents' children. Thus, any service or commodity provider (which is true of all human beings with professions) is of a higher status compared to the rest of the community in that field, which makes every human being of a higher status or of more importance at some time and in certain situations. This understanding follows the example of Allah, The Provider who provides for all humanity, being of the Highest Status and Example ("And Allah sets the Highest Example").¹⁹

This leads to another understanding of the following sentence in this verse, (i.e. "الْيَتَّخِذْ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا سُخْرِيًّا") translated as 'so that some may employ others in service'. This sentence does not mean that the affluent would employ the impoverished (money-wise) in their service, or that some human beings may hire some human beings. It actually means that all human beings may employ all human beings; that is, all human beings

¹⁸ Rashid Al-Balushi, "On the Subject of 'yashā' in Some Qur'anic Verses", *Journal of Islamic Research*, 33, 2, 596-616, 2022.

¹⁹ Sūrat al-Naḥl (The Bees, 16), verse 60. Translation is of <https://www.clearquran.com/016.html>

may be of service or of benefit or of use to all human beings, which is the same concept of each human being being the provider of some service or commodity, or being of a higher status with regard to his/her profession or speciality. This is similar to Shaikh Al-Sha'arāwī's understanding of these two parts of this verse, though he states that some people were created to be rich and some to be poor, some masters and some servants.²⁰

Third, the word "سُخْرِيًّا" *sukhriyyā*, which is interpreted to mean 'employ someone in service' does not necessarily mean that the people with less money will need the people with more money, but rather that all will need all. Can the rich live without the services of farmers or fishermen or even house maids? The point is that *sukhriyyā* implies that no human being is self-sufficient; they all need some service or commodity provided by other human beings. The only Self-Sufficient Being is Allah, a property that He has not bestowed on any human being, since it contradicts the very nature of the mission of human beings in this world, which is constructing it, each in his/her chosen role/speciality.

The noun *sukhriyyā* is a derivative of the verb *sakhkhara* (سَخَّرَ), which most dictionaries say means 'to assign someone or even force him/her to do work that they do not want to do or cannot do, or even without paying them'.²¹ Nonetheless, the fact that most dictionaries were compiled after many classical Qur'ān exegesis books had been written means that dictionary meanings have been influenced by the available Qur'ānic interpretations. This means that a better understanding of Qur'ānic verses should lead to more insightful meanings of Arabic words, and vice versa. In this regard, I propose that *sakhkhara* be interpreted to mean 'using someone in the same area or field of their specialization or for the same service or job that they have decided for themselves, to carry out a duty or provide a service or a commodity or play a positive role in the life of the rest of humanity'.

But, then, who does the *taskhīr*? That is, who is the *musakhkhir* (the active participle of *sakhkhara*)? I argue that it is Allah, not a human being. For one thing, the only subject for this verb, سَخَّرَ (*sakhkhara*), in the Holy Qur'ān is Allah; Allah exercises this *musakhkhir* role with the different creatures that He has created, each in the duty He created it for. For another, it is Allah who runs the whole universe and manages the lives of human beings, each having chosen his/her path (guided or misled) and chosen

²⁰ Al-Sha'arāwī, *Tafsīr al-Sha'arāwī*, 1991, p. 13888.

²¹ For example, ALAC [Arabic Language Academy in Cairo], *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīlī*, Cairo, International Sunrise Press, 2004, p. 421.

his/her profession or speciality. And so, each human being is *musakhkhar* (the passive participle of *sakhkhara*) by Allah to provide a service or a commodity to other human beings.²²

Differently stated, the verb *sakhkhara* does not mean that some are predestined to be rich, and so they will employ others or be their masters, and some are predetermined to be poor and so have to be servants for the others. It simply means that each one of us is going to be in need of the others, or of help or use to the others. For example, the housemaid is *musakhkharat-un* to serve at the doctor's house (because he/she needs her service), and the doctor is *musakhkhar-un* to provide medical treatment to her (because she needs his/her service). Likewise, the engineer is *musakhkhar-un* for the farmers and fishermen (to invent engines to irrigate their land/crops or run their boats and ships), and the farmers and fishermen are *musakhkhar-ūn* to provide the engineer with food. The minister is also *musakhkhar-un* for all the citizens, since he/she serves the whole country, given the nature of his/her post. So, Allah employed (*sakhkhara*) every human being to serve the other, to help the other carry out his/her duties in this life, just like He employed (*sakhkhara*) all that is on earth and in the heavens (e.g. clouds, the sun, the moon, the stars, ships, rivers, night, daytime, the sea, birds, cattle) to help mankind carry out their mission in this life.

Evidence for this understanding of the concept of *taskhīr* (i.e. carrying out duties without compulsion) comes from the Qur'ān. The view that *sakhkhara* does not mean 'to compel people/things to serve someone, or be his/her servants without payment', as dictionaries state, is supported by the statement of verse 11 of sūrat Fuṣṣilat (Explained-in-detail, 41) in (17), translated in (18).

17. "ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ (11)"

18. "Then He turned to the sky, and it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth, "Come, willingly or unwillingly." They said, "We come willingly."²³

The verse says that the sky and the earth, and probably the creatures therein (i.e. sun, moon, stars, angels, etc...), are willingly carrying out the duties assigned to them, without compulsion. Now, if Allah treats these creatures, which have no learning, path-choosing intellect and which are not held accountable on the Day of Judgment, without

²² Karin Ryding, *A Reference Grammar of Modern Standard Arabic*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 83-86.

²³ <https://www.clearquran.com/041.html>

compulsion, then would He, The Wise, treat the human being, the creature with a path-choosing intellect and eventually subjected to accountability, with compulsion?

Basically, people carry out the duties of the professions that they have chosen for themselves, being of importance to the rest of humanity. And if Allah does not exercise compulsion on human beings, He would certainly not allow a human being to exercise compulsion against another human being. Various instances of incidents that involve compulsion are basically instances of injustice being practiced by human beings against others, instances of oppression, which Allah has forbidden.

The claim that this paper is trying to make is that Allah provides equal opportunities for all people to earn rizq, and that human beings choose the specialities and professions that they pursue to earn their rizq, both type-wise and amount-wise. This proposal, though, acknowledges exceptions, but considers them 'limited cases', as well as acknowledging Allah's ability to control the type and amount of rizq that we earn.

1.3 Introducing the Current Study

Although it is true that Allah provides rizq to human beings, this almost always depends on some effort on the part of the individual human being; it is rarely the case that rizq is provided to the human being without him/her first seeking it. In other words, the provision of rizq by Allah to the human being is usually, and logically, a result of the human being engaging in some rizq-earning behavior, like a profession.²⁴ This, of course, excludes the cases in which Allah provides rizq 'without reckoning' (i.e. "بغير حساب"), which will be discussed in section 2 together with their relevance to the current proposal.

Seeking rizq is a prerequisite for getting it so that human beings will learn the value that what they eventually earn (whether for this life or for the hereafter) essentially reflects the quality and quantity of their deeds. If they choose the guided path and do good deeds, they enter Paradise, but if they choose the misled path and do evil deeds, they enter Hellfire. Likewise, if they work very hard on their studies and seek a good career and perform in a productive manner, they earn more rizq in general.

²⁴ 'Ali Muṣṭafā al-Ṭanṭāwī, *al-Rizq Maqṣūm lākin al-'Amal lahu wājib*, published online, 2017, p. 6. <https://ar.islamway.net/book/4235/الرزق-مقسوم-ولكن-العمل-له-واجب>

But if they are lazy in their studies, and seek a low-paid job, they should expect less rizq.

This, therefore, leads to the conclusion that it is the human being who decides on whether to earn rizq, and also on the amount of rizq that they end up earning, and that Allah only provides the opportunities that make it possible for people to seek rizq. And because Allah is the Just (Al-'Adl), He provides equal opportunities for all human beings to earn good amounts of rizq (given their needs and circumstances), and might make it relatively harder for some and easier for others to earn rizq, for wise reasons. However, Allah would normally not decide on behalf of the human being with regard to seeking rizq. It is the human being's decision to seek rizq, both in terms of its quantity and quality, and these are determined by how much time, energy, passion, and other resources he/she is willing to put into the task of earning rizq, that determines how much he/she earns.

This is because if Allah was the one to decide what human beings earn, then there would not be much value in seeking rizq and the various practices that we perform to gain more and better. In other words, if Allah decided how much and how good we earn, then we should not be held accountable for some of the possible consequences. For example, if Allah decided that a certain human being earn very little, then he/she deserves a pardon if they had to engage in illegitimate or illegal practices when earning rizq. Differently stated, if the quantity and quality of rizq are determined by Allah, not by our plans, practices, and deeds, then some less fortunate people (i.e. earning little rizq) might engage in corruption (i.e. robbing or embezzling money), and then use the decision by Allah to allow them to earn little rizq as an excuse for the corrupt behavior. In fact, the view that Allah has predetermined the quantity and quality of our rizq is reminiscent of the deviant Jabriyya creed, according to which "human actions are created by God, and forced upon human beings, thus defining God as the real agent of human actions".²⁵ This is because the proponents of this doctrine ascribe human deeds to Allah's will, and so claim that human beings must not be held accountable on the Day of Judgment, since they should be viewed as innocent.

To avoid this situation, Allah must have left it for the individual human being to devote as many of their resources and ability to the rizq-earning task. Those who

²⁵ Livnat Holtzman, *Debating the doctrine of jabr (compulsion): Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya reads Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, In *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, De Gruyter, 2013, p. 61.

work very hard make more, and those who take it easy earn less, and so they decide how much they earn, and so will not have an excuse on the Day of Judgment for engaging in corruption, for example.

Unfortunately, the standard interpretation of some rizq-related Qur'ānic verses states that it is Allah who decides on whom to give more and whom to give less. Verse 26 of sūrat al-Ra'd (The Thunder, 13) in (19), translated in (20), provides an example. As the translation of the verse shows, itself inspired by the standard interpretations, to be presented soon, it is Allah who decides on whom to give abundant provision and whom to give limited provision, which contradicts the concept of Divine Justice.

19. "اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ".²⁶

20. "Allah gives abundant or limited provisions to whoever He wills."²⁶

This translation speaks for the interpretations provided in various exegesis books. For example, Al-Ṭabarī states that this verse means that "Allah provides in abundance to whomever He wishes from His servants, by providing more earning opportunities, because the great provision is better for those servants. And He gives very little to whomever He wishes by making it hard for them to earn more, because poverty is better for those servants".²⁷ Al-Qurtubī states, "after Allah Almighty mentioned the end-state of the believers and disbelievers [in the previous verse], He is making it clear that it is Him who gives abundant or limited provision in this life, because it is a life of trial. And so giving abundant provision to disbelievers does not mean that Allah is honoring them, and giving limited provision to some believers does not mean that Allah is humiliating them".²⁸ He also states that *yaqdiru* means 'to give little' or 'to make it hard to earn more' and also 'to give according to basic needs'. Ibn Kathīr states, "Allah Almighty mentions that it is Him who gives abundant provision to whomever He wishes, and gives limited provision to whomever He wishes, since He has the necessary wisdom and justice".²⁹ Al-Baghawī states that the first part of this verse means that "Allah gives abundant provision to whomever He wishes and gives limited provision to whomever He wishes".³⁰ Al-Sa'dī states, "He [Allah] alone

²⁶ <https://quran.com/13>

²⁷ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* [vol. 4], Beirut, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1994, p. 422.

²⁸ Abū Abdullah Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-'Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* [vol. 12], Beirut, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2006, p. 63.

²⁹ Abū al-Fidā Ismael bin Omar bin Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* [vol. 4], Riyadh, Dār Ṭaibah for Publication and Distribution, 1999, p. 453.

³⁰ Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusain bin Mas'ūd al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī: Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl* [vol. 4], Riyadh, Dār Ṭaibah for Publication and Distribution, 1989, p. 315.

provides abundant provision to whomever He wishes, and He also provides limited provision to whomever He wishes".³¹

The cited interpretations all state that Allah gives in abundance to whom He wishes, and gives little to whom He wishes. In other words, they all attribute to Allah the decision about how much human beings can earn; that is, Allah chooses some people to be rich and others to be poor. However, as we noted earlier, if this were the case, some poor people might have a good argument for engaging in corrupt behavior to earn needed rizq.

Therefore, this paper takes as the object of study this verse, together with another eight verses with the same wording and interpretation, and argues that a more plausible understanding of the relevant parts of these nine verses should be as in (21).

21. 'Allah provides more rizq to those who wish to earn it and are able/willing to invest the required resources (i.e. time, effort, energy, thinking, planning, etc...)', and this also implies that He provides little rizq to those who do not wish to seek more by investing the necessary resources.

Thus, the suggested interpretation assigns a different meaning to the verb *yaqdiru*, one that is closer to its literal meaning, which includes connotations of 'ability and endurance'. This understanding also assigns the whole clause a different analysis at the syntactic level. To illustrate, the traditional interpretations assign Allah the status of the subject of all three verbs in the verse, *yabsutu* 'to provide in abundance/to make easy', *yashā'u* 'to wish/to will', and *yaqdiru* 'to provide little'. The new interpretation, however, assigns Allah the status of the subject of *yabsutu*, but assigns the human being the status of the subject of both *yashā'u* and *yaqdiru*, the latter meaning 'to be able to'.

The other eight verses are (17:30), (28:82), (29:62), (30:37), (34:36), (34:39), (39:52), and (42:12). They all have the same interpretation in the standard exegesis books; for example, Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of (Q. 17:30) is in (22):

22. Allah is saying that He is The Sustainer, The Withholder (i.e. who gives nothing), The Extender (i.e. who gives a lot), who does what He wishes with His servants, making whom He wishes rich, and making whom He wishes poor, since He has the wisdom, knowing who deserves wealth and who deserves poverty.³²

³¹ Abdul Raḥmān bin Nāsir al-Sa'dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām al-Mannān*, Riyadh, Darussalam for Publication and Distribution, 2002, p. 483.

³² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* [vol. 5], 1999, p. 71.

Before we proceed, it must be pointed out that the current proposal is in line with Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah's position on the relevant notions of 'irādah (decision-making) and mashī'ah (will). The current proposal assumes that the mashī'ah of human beings is subject to the mashī'ah of Allah, though the human being is granted 'ikhtiyār (authority to choose), that is, he/she is mukhayyar (i.e. not compelled to behave in a predetermined manner).³³ And even when the human being decides to earn more rizq or different types of rizq and works hard for it and gets it, what he/she does is still within the mashī'ah of Allah, in the sense that it is still a decision that is permitted by Allah, since nothing can happen against or without the mashī'ah of Allah; this is confirmed by verse 29 of sūrat al-Takwīr (The Rolling, 81) in (23), translated in (24).³⁴ And thus the 'ikhtiyār (choice) of a specific deed and kasb (earning) of that deed by a human being is contingent on Allah's permission, but this does not contradict the present proposal that the human being can earn more if he/she invests more resources in the rizq-earning task.

23. "وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (29)."35

24. "But you cannot will, unless God wills—The Lord of the Worlds (29)."³⁵

Section 2 provides arguments for the new interpretation. Section 3 discusses the particulars of the linguistic structure of these verses, and provides the syntactic analysis that derives the new interpretation. Section 4 concludes the paper.

2. Evidence for the New Proposal

This section provides three arguments that the view that Allah gives whom He wishes abundant provision and whom He wishes limited provision, or that He makes a human being rich and another one poor, as an interpretation of the nine relevant verses, is inaccurate. An alternative proposal, namely that human beings decide on how much they can earn through the amount of effort (i.e. work, time, thinking, planning, etc...)

³³ Ḥasan Abū al-'Ashbāl al-Zuhayrī, sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, undated, part 76, p. 11 (<https://shamela.ws/book/37026>). Al-Zuhayrī also states that even the disbelief and corruption by human beings happen with the mashī'ah of Allah; but this shouldn't be understood to mean that Allah wishes that human beings disbelieve in Him or engage in corruption, but rather that He permits it, since He allows human beings to choose their path, good or evil. So, choosing the evil path by human beings is still within the mashī'ah or permission of Allah.

³⁴ Abdulaziz Bayinder, Dirāsah Qur'āniyya ḥawla fi'l shā'a wa mā yata'llaq bihī, 2014 (<https://www.hablullah.com/?p=2243>). Interested readers are referred to this article for a novel view of the verb *yashā'* and how it was derived from the noun *shay'* 'thing' and how this led to the invention of the concept of mashī'ah and how it is different from 'irādah (despite the old claim that they refer to the same notion), as well as how *yashā'* applies to Allah and the human being as grammatical subjects.

³⁵ <https://www.clearquran.com/081.html>

they decide to put into their professions or businesses is more reasonable, for the following reasons.

First, Allah is 'The Just', and if it were up to Him, He would have given each human being the same amount of provision, simply because He requires the same belief, worship, and obedience from all (normal) human beings.³⁶ Verse 40 of sūrat al-Nisā' (Women, 4) in (25), translated in (26), stresses that Allah may never be unfair to human beings.

25. "إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ." "

26. "God does not commit an atom's weight of injustice."³⁷

The claim that Allah gives some people abundant provision and others limited provision because He is the Knowledgeable who knows what is best for every human being is not a valid one. This is because Allah should not treat human beings and hold them accountable based on His Omniscience, that is, what He knows about them, but rather based on what they actually decide to do. If Allah interferes in this aspect of our lives, then some poor people who engage in corruption and embezzlement will have a good argument when Allah asks them why they earned their rizq through illegitimate means.

As we said earlier, the fact that Allah is The Just does not contradict the reality that He may give some human beings much more than others, even without them doing anything, for purposes of trial and testing. This is exemplified by the situation of people inheriting big amounts of money and properties or receiving gifts from relatives or others, without them working or even needing that. Such cases show that both understandings of some of these nine verses could be correct.³⁸ Nonetheless, it is vitally important to recognize that such cases (i.e. people getting a lot without working for it) make up a very small percentage, and thus should be treated as exceptions, not the norm.

The new understanding is also supported by the fact that various Western and Eastern countries have been working very hard to be wealthy, and powerful both economically and militarily, resulting in them being the superior first-world nations

³⁶ Allah requires all normal human beings to believe in Him without seeing Him (Belief in the Unseen). This means that He must endow them all with the same intellectual abilities and skills and provide them with the same livelihood earning opportunities. This is because some might have a good argument on the Day of Judgment if they had to devote most of their intellectual abilities to earning their living, and very few of these abilities to the task of reaching Allah through the evidence for His existence.

³⁷ <https://www.clearquran.com/004.html>

³⁸ In section 3.3, I will further discuss the structure of two of these nine verses.

(i.e. world powers). All of these nations are non-Muslim nations, and in fact, they are using their power to control Muslim nations in a way that serves their own interests. Now, if it were up to Allah to give whom He wishes abundant provision and whom He wishes limited provision, He would have given the Muslim nations the bigger share. The fact that Muslim nations are poorer and weaker is a natural result of them not engaging in the appropriate practices (e.g. promoting science, technology and research, wise investment of human and natural resources, planning, etc...) that can make them more influential and powerful nations. For example, unlike the case in Western and Asian universities, research is not a top priority at many Arab universities, despite the resonant slogans.³⁹ This thus means that Allah gives abundant provision to those who *want* it and necessarily *work* for it, and limited provision to those who are satisfied with little and are not willing to exert more effort to be among the rich and powerful. To this effect, Allah says verse 11 of sūrat al-Ra‘d (The Thunder, 13) in (27), translated in (28).

27. "إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ."

28. "God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves."⁴⁰

Second, it is not wise to think that Allah gives abundant provision to some people and limited provision to others. Rather, He provides equal opportunities to all people (except a small percentage who are treated differently for certain reasons), and lets people decide how much they wish to earn, and thus how much effort they need to invest. This is because the type of rizq and its exact amount are a major component of the whole life test/trial for human beings because it determines much of their subsequent behavior. Therefore, Allah is not likely to determine how much they earn; it is their plans and efforts that are the main determinant of the amount of their rizq/provision. If Allah gives a human being abundant provision without him/her working for it, they might turn to Allah on the Day of Judgment with a lot of excuses if they (or any of their dependents) used that provision to do evil deeds (e.g. You gave me the money that corrupted me!). In line with this approach, Allah says verse 27 of sūrat al-Shūrā (The Consultation, 42) in (29), translated in (30).

29. "وَلَوْ بَسَطَ اللَّهُ الرِّزْقَ لِعِبَادِهِ لَبَغَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَكِن يُنَزِّلُ بِقَدَرٍ مَّا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّهُ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ."
".(27)

³⁹ Sana Almansour, "The crisis of research and global recognition in Arab universities", *Near and Middle Eastern Journal of Research in Education*, 1, 2016.

⁴⁰ <https://www.clearquran.com/013.html>

30. "If God were to increase the provision to His servants, they would transgress on earth; but He sends down in precise measure whatever He wills. Surely, regarding His servants, He is Expert and Observant (27)."⁴¹

The verse should be understood to mean, "if Allah increased our provision, He would be responsible for our corrupt deeds", which is against the concept of accountability. It is important to note that Allah uses in this verse the same words that He uses in the nine relevant verses, namely, *basāṭa* (the past tense of *yabsuṭu*) and *al-rizq-a*. This is to inform us that it is our plans and practices that determine our rizq, not Allah, since the amount of our rizq may determine our subsequent deeds (though He has the absolute power and wisdom to give us more or less than we deserve).

Also, the meaning derived from verse 27 of sūrat al-Shūrā (The Consultation, 42) in (29-30), with the conditional particle *law* 'if' and the contrastive conjunction *wa lākin* 'but', indicates that Allah does *not* give provision to His servants, to avoid being responsible for their anticipated transgression. However, the nine verses which are the object of study of this paper are all traditionally understood to mean that 'Allah gives abundant provision to whom He wishes (and limited provision to whom He wishes)'. So, does Allah give abundant provision or not? According to verse (The Consultation, 42:27), He doesn't, but according to the nine verses, He apparently does. So, how can we establish agreement between Q. 42:27 and the nine verses (since there can by no means be disagreement between Qur'ānic verses)? To attempt a solution, I would say that, to avoid being responsible for human beings' transgression, Allah does not give abundant provision to human beings (which is in line with Q. 42:27), but that He *provides the opportunities* through which any human being can earn his/her provision, but only if they, themselves, wished (i.e. *yashā'u*) and invested the necessary resources (*yaqdiru*), which would make them responsible for their own deeds.

In other words, Allah only makes it possible for human beings to seek rizq (i.e. *yabsuṭu al-rizq-a*), but He does not give it to them without them desiring it (i.e. *yashā'ūn*) and working for it (i.e. *yaqdirūn*); and so, Allah does not determine the amount or type of human beings' rizq.⁴² The suggested solution thus supports the

⁴¹ <https://www.clearquran.com/042.html>

⁴² It is noteworthy that one of the meanings of *yabsuṭu* is 'to make easy'; *basīṭ* means 'easy, uncomplicated' (Jubran Mas'ūd, *Mu'jam al-Rā'id: A contemporary linguistic dictionary*, Beirut, Dār al-'ilm li-l-malāyīn Publishers, 1992, p. 173). And so, Allah just makes seeking rizq possible for human beings, necessary for life and worship, but does not decide on the amount (determined by need) or type (determined by passion) of rizq.

current proposal, and shows the standard interpretation to be lacking, since Q. 42:27 can be plainly understood to mean that Allah does not give abundant provision to human beings (unless they seize the opportunity). This way, the majority of human beings with abundant provision have earned this big amount through their own desire and hard work (i.e. it is not a plan by Allah), so that they would be held accountable for any possible transgression. Likewise, the majority of human beings with little provision did not earn much because they did not seize the opportunities, and so they will be held accountable if they engage in corruption to earn more.

Third, the notions that our practices determine our rizq or reward and that Allah has the power to give us more (if He wants) receive support from verses related to charity. To illustrate, the current claim about the nine relevant verses in this paper is that the human being is the subject of the verbs *yashā'u* and *yaqdiru*, deciding on the amount of rizq. One source of rizq or provision is the reward that human beings get from Allah for giving charity. When Muslims, for example, give charity, in the way of Allah, He multiplies the amount of their reward (in this life and in the hereafter), as stated in verse 261 of sūrat al-Baqarah in (31), translated in (32).

31. "مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ سُنْبُلَةٍ مِائَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ (261)."

32. "The parable of those who spend their wealth in God's way is that of a grain that produces seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. God multiplies for whom He wills. God is Bounteous and Knowing (261)."⁴³

Another understanding of this verse is that the human being is the subject of *yashā'u* in this verse. In other words, the human being determines the amount of reward (i.e. how many multiples he/she receives) by determining the amount that he/she gives as charity, as well as the quality of their intention (i.e. *niyyah*, is it for worldly purposes or truly seeking to please Allah?). Thus, the latter part of this verse (i.e. " وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ " و"لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ") may be interpreted to mean 'Allah multiplies for those who will or wish'. One piece of evidence for this understanding is that whenever the giving by Allah is in return for a human charity, the verb *yashā'u* is in the 3rd person, to refer to the human being as the subject.

However, when the giving by Allah is 'without reckoning', that is, is not in return for a charity (i.e. good deed) given by the human being, then the subject of *yashā'u* is

⁴³ <https://www.clearquran.com/002.html>

Allah. In other words, in this case, Allah decides how much to give a certain human being, since the human being has no hand in determining the amount of a gift for which he/she did not give anything. This concept of giving 'without reckoning' is expressed in verse 37 of sūrat 'Āl-'Imrān (The Family of 'Imrān, 2) in (33), translated in (34), and verse 38 of sūrat al-Nūr (The Light, 24) in (35), translated in (36).

33. "فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ حَسَنٍ وَأَنْبَتَهَا نَبَاتًا حَسَنًا وَكَفَّلَهَا زَكَرِيَّا كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ

عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا فَقَالَ يَا مَرْيَمُ أَنَّى لَكَ هَذَا قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ (37)."

34. "Her Lord accepted her with a gracious reception, and brought her a beautiful upbringing, and entrusted her to the care of Zechariah. Whenever Zechariah entered upon her in the sanctuary, he found her with provision. He said, "O Mary, where did you get this from?" She said, "It is from God; God provides to whom He wills without reckoning (37)."⁴⁴

35. "لِيَجْزِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ مَا عَمِلُوا وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ (38)."

36. " God will reward them according to the best of what they did, and He will increase them from His bounty. God provides for whomever He wills without reckoning (38)."⁴⁵

Evidence for this claim comes from the fact that when the Qur'ān talks about rizq without reckoning, the verb *yashā'u* may also come in the 2nd person, that is, the addressee, as *tashā'u*, to point out that it is Allah who gives and also who determines the amount of rizq. This is shown in verse 27 of sūrat 'Āl-'Imrān (The Family of 'Imran, 2), in (37), translated in (38). That Allah is the subject of *tashā'u* is supported by the fact that He is the subject of the other verbs in the other sentences of this verse; these are not verbs (i.e. actions) that a human being is capable of performing.

37. "تُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَتُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَتَرْزُقُ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ (27)."

38. "You merge the night into the day, and You merge the day into the night; and You bring the living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the living; and You provide for whom you will without measure (27)."⁴⁶

Nonetheless, what is important for the current claim is that when the Qur'ān talks about the giving by Allah *in return for a human charity* or as a reward for a human giving deed, the verb *yashā'u* never occurs in the 2nd person to refer to Allah, but is

⁴⁴ <https://www.clearquran.com/003.html>

⁴⁵ <https://www.clearquran.com/024.html>

⁴⁶ <https://www.clearquran.com/003.html>

always in the 3rd person to refer to the human being. This indicates that it is the human being who determines the amount of reward from Allah by determining the amount that he/she gives as charity (plus other factors, like the percentage of what they give in comparison to their total wealth).

This, therefore, supports the current proposal that the human being determines his/her provision by deciding on the amount of effort that he/she puts into the rizq-earning process. This supports the claim that although Allah, in some limited cases, determines the amount of provision a human being receives, He has largely left it to human beings to decide how much to earn by deciding how hard they are willing to work for it. This way, Allah informs us that we can even decide on the amount of reward and its multiples; that is, we are *mukhayyarūn*, not *musayyarūn*, which makes us responsible for what we earn and how we spend it.

3. The Linguistic Analysis

3.1. The Verb *Yaqdiru*

Before we discuss the structures that derive the two interpretations of the relevant verses, we need to show that the verb *yaqdiru*, which is traditionally understood to mean 'to give limited provision' can be construed to mean 'to be able to', or generally 'can show sufficient endurance'. The Divine Attributes Al-Qādir (The Capable) and Al-Qadīr (The Omnipotent) are derivatives of this meaning of the verb *yaqdiru*, as shown in verse 8 of sūrat al-Ṭāriq (The Nightly Visitor, 86) in (39), translated in (40), and in verse 2 of sūrat al-Ḥadīd (The Iron, 57) in (41), translated in (42), respectively.

39. "إِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ (8)."

40. "Surely He is fully capable of bringing them back 'to life' (8)."⁴⁷

41. "أَلَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (2)."

42. "To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He gives life and causes death. And He is Most Capable of everything (2)."⁴⁸

Verse 76 of sūrat al-Naḥl (The Bees, 16) in (43), translated in (44), shows that this verb has the connotations of ability and endurance, even as human properties.

⁴⁷ <https://quran.com/86>

⁴⁸ <https://quran.com/57>

According to *al-Mu'jam Al-Wasīṭ*, *qadara* means *tamakkana*, which means 'has the ability to do something'.⁴⁹

43. "وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلَيْنِ أَحَدُهُمَا أَبْكَمٌ لَا يَقْدِرُ عَلَى شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ كَلٌّ عَلَى مَوْلَاهُ أَيْنَمَا يُوَجِّههُ لَا يَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي هُوَ وَمَنْ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَهُوَ عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (76)."

44. "And God cites the example of two men: one of them dumb, unable to do anything, and is a burden on his master; whichever way he directs him, he achieves nothing good. Is he equal to him who commands justice, and is on a straight path? (76)."⁵⁰

The standard interpretation of the verses relevant to this study is based on the assumption that *qadara* in these verses means 'to give limited provision'. This assumption is itself based on the standard interpretation of two verses in which *qadara* is construed to have this connotation, which are verse 7 of sūrat al-Ṭalāq (Divorce, 65) in (45), translated in (46), and verse 16 of sūrat al-Fajr (Dawn, 89) in (47), translated in (48).

45. "الْيُنْفِقُ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِّن سَعَتِهِ وَمَنْ قُدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُ فَلْيُنْفِقْ مِمَّا آتَاهُ اللَّهُ لَا يُكْفِفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَا آتَاهَا ۗ سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا (7)."

46. "The wealthy shall spend according to his means; and he whose resources are restricted shall spend according to what God has given him. God never burdens a soul beyond what He has given it. God will bring ease after hardship (7)."⁵¹

47. " وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهْنَنِ (16). "

48. " But whenever He tests him, and restricts his livelihood for him, he says, "My Lord has insulted me (16)."⁵²

One potential issue with this understanding of the verb *qadara* (i.e. to give less) is that it receives a different interpretation in other verses, like 91 of sūrat al-'An'ām (The Livestock, 6) in (49), translated in (50), and verse 67 of sūrat al-Zumar (The Crowds, 39) in (51), translated in (52).

49. "وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ إِذْ قَالُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَى بَشَرٍ مِّن شَيْءٍ قُلْ مَنْ أَنْزَلَ الْكِتَابَ الَّذِي جَاءَ بِهِ مُوسَى نُورًا وَهُدًى لِلنَّاسِ تَجْعَلُونَهُ قَرَاطِيسٍ تُبْدُونَهَا وَتُخْفُونَ كَثِيرًا وَعُلَّمْتُمْ مَا لَمْ تَعْلَمُوا أَنْتُمْ وَلَا آبَاؤُكُمْ قُلْ اللَّهُ تَمَّ ذَرَهُمْ فِي خَوَاصِمِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ (91)."

⁴⁹ ALAC [Arabic Language Academy in Cairo]. (2004). *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*. Cairo, International Sunrise Press, p. 718.

⁵⁰ <https://www.clearquran.com/016.html>

⁵¹ <https://www.clearquran.com/065.html>

⁵² <https://www.clearquran.com/089.html>

50. "They do not value God as He should be valued, when they say, "God did not reveal anything to any human being." Say, "Who revealed the Scripture which Moses brought—a light and guidance for humanity?" You put it on scrolls, displaying them, yet concealing much. And you were taught what you did not know—neither you, nor your ancestors. Say, "God;" then leave them toying away in their speculation (91)."⁵³

51. " وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ (67)."

52. "They have not esteemed God as He ought to be esteemed. The entire earth will be in His grip on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His right. Immaculate is He, and Transcendent He is beyond the associations they make (67)."⁵⁴

In fact, the verb *qadara* in these two latter verses is assigned the *opposite* of the meaning that it is assigned in the previous two verses, 'assigning *limited* resources' vs. 'assigning *higher* value', respectively. This calls for a new understanding that establishes a reconciliation between the two interpretations of *qadara*, one that makes sense of the two sets of verses and also does not contradict the new understanding of the verses relevant to this study.

To resolve this nontrivial issue, I will argue that *qadara* means both 'to be able to', which is the connotation of *qudrah* 'ability', relevant to the current proposal, and 'to assign a value', which applies to the verses in (45), (47), (49), and (51). In fact, *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ* (p. 718) states that one of the meanings of *qadara* is 'to show/clarify the value/status of something'.⁵⁵

Starting with the latter two verses (i.e. in 49 and 51), *qadarū* is appropriately translated as 'to assign Allah the high value or status that He deserves'. In the former two verses (i.e. 45 and 47), *qadara* also means 'to assign (i.e. give) the human being the appropriate amount of provision', which is '*limited*' in this case, since the preposition '*alā* ('*alay-hi* in both verses in (45) and (47)) has a *negative* connotation; that is, the amount of provision is *less* than that the human being needs (or wishes). This negative connotation of '*alā* is contrasted with the positive connotation of the preposition *la-*, as

⁵³ <https://www.clearquran.com/006.html>

⁵⁴ <https://www.clearquran.com/039.html>

⁵⁵ ALAC, *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, p. 718.

illustrated by verse 286 of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2) in (53), transliterated in (54), and translated in (55).

53. "لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ."

54. 'lā yukallifu Allāhu nafsan 'illā wus‘ahā, *la-hā mā kasabat wa ‘alay-hā mā ’iktasabat*'

55. "God does not burden any soul beyond its capacity. To its credit is what it earns, and against it is what it commits."⁵⁶

To address this point, I will appeal to Shaikh Al-Sha‘rāwī's interpretation of this verse. For him, *kasaba* means simply 'to earn', and *'iktasaba* means 'to go out of one's way to earn', which requires 'going against the *fiṭrah* or positive nature according to which Allah has created us'. The addition of the prefix *'i-* and the infix *-t-* signifies the extra meaning (i.e. not just earning, but also disobeying the inner call for integrity).

Al-Sha‘rāwī says that the verb *kasabat* (here in the feminine form) is logically followed by the preposition *la-* (in the Prepositional Phrase (PP) *la-hā*), and that the verb *'iktasabat* is also logically followed by the preposition *'alā* (in the PP *'alay-hā*). This is because the simple earning event associated with a good deed (i.e. a virtue) is in accordance with our positive nature or *fiṭrah*, and so it is indicative of winning some reward, hence the preposition *la-* '(beneficiary) for'. By contrast, the event of earning an evil deed (i.e. committing a sin) is not compatible with the positive nature that we have been created according to, and also indicates a loss in our endeavor for Paradise, which in turn makes the choice of the preposition *'alā* 'against' the more reasonable one.⁵⁷

This means that the meaning assigned to *qadara* in verse 7 of sūrat al-Ṭalāq (Divorce, 65) and verse 16 of sūrat al-Fajr (Dawn, 89), in (45) and (47), respectively, which is 'assigning a provision *less* than wished' is a result of the presence of the preposition *'alā* 'against'. The preposition (together with the pronoun that refers to the human being) has moved to precede the Noun Phrase (NP) object 'رِزْقَهُ' in 'فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ', where the original structure is 'فَقَدَرَ رِزْقَهُ عَلَيْهِ', or 'assigned him/her an amount of provision against his/her wish (for more)'. This preposing of *'alay-hi* (i.e. change from the original order), a syntactic operation, is probably another factor leading to the overall *negative* meaning. Thus the two meanings that *qadara* has are 'to assign a value

⁵⁶ <https://www.clearquran.com/002.html>

⁵⁷ <http://www.elsharawy.ebnmaryam.com/sharawy1/albakara/286.htm>

(of provision/of greatness)' and 'to be able to'.⁵⁸ *Qadara* has the first meaning in the verses in (45), (47), (49), and (51), and the second meaning in the verses relevant to this study.⁵⁹ Therefore, *qadara* on its own (i.e. without the preposition '*alā* 'against') does *not* mean 'to give little/less than wished'.

3.2. The Syntactic Analysis

As stated earlier, verse 26 of *sūrat al-Ra'd*, repeated in (56), has two interpretations, as stated in (57-58)

56. "اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ".

57. Allah gives abundant provision to whomever He wishes and gives limited provision to whomever He wishes.

58. Allah gives abundant provision to who wishes and is able to put in resources.

The interpretation in (57) is the standard one found in exegesis books and Qur'ān translations. The interpretation in (58) is the proposed one, which also implies that 'Allah gives limited provision to who does not want abundant provision and is not willing to exert effort to earn more'. This syntactic analysis is based on the relevant principles of generative syntax, and is in line with current proposals on the syntax of coordination and free relatives.⁶⁰ There are two linguistic reasons for this ambiguity; the first is the meaning of the verb *yaqdiru*. As discussed in section 3.1, the verb *yaqdiru* may be construed to mean both 'to assign a value' and 'to be able to (do something)'.⁶⁰

The second reason is that the structure of the sentence leads to two readings. The first reading is where the conjunction *wa* 'and' coordinates between *yabsutu* and *yaqdiru*, the subject of both being *Allāhu*, which is the old/standard interpretation. The second one is where the conjunction *wa* coordinates between *yashā'u* and *yaqdiru*, the

⁵⁸ It is noteworthy that these two meanings can be further collapsed into one meaning, which is 'assign/allocate a value/amount of one's ability/giving for a specific task/person'.

⁵⁹ The first meaning is conveyed using *qaddara* in Modern Standard Arabic. In fact, Ibn Zangalah (Ibn Zangalah, Abū Zar'ah 'Abdul Raḥmān b. Muḥammad. *Hujjat al-Qirā'āt*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1997, p. 761), states that "Ibn 'Amir read [verse 16 of *sūrat al-Fajr* (Dawn, 89) as] "fa-qaddara 'alayhi"".

⁶⁰ Chomsky, Noam. *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Dordrecht: Foris, 1981. Zhang, Niina Ning. *Coordination in syntax*. Vol. 123. Cambridge University Press, 2009. Camacho, José. "The structure of coordination." In *The Structure of Coordination*, pp. 33-90. Springer, Dordrecht, 2003. Goodall, Grant. "Coordination in syntax." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. 2017. Van Oirsouw, Robert R. *The syntax of coordination*. Routledge, 2019. Suaiech, Saadun Ismail. *Aspects of Arabic Relative Clauses: A Study of the Structure of Relative Clauses in Modern Written Arabic*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University. 1980.

de Vries, Mark. "Relative clauses in syntax." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. 2018.

subject of both being the human being, which makes the new interpretation. In what follows, I provide the syntactic structure of this verse.⁶¹

Since the verse has two readings, each reading is assigned a structure that reveals how it is derived. On both interpretations, *yashā'u* has a silent (i.e. unpronounced, marked here with the strikethrough) complement clause, which is the Complementizer Phrase (CP) that reads '*'an yabsuṭ-a-hu [Allāhu] la-hu*' (to give/to ease it to). Thus, the two readings are as in (59) and (60), respectively.

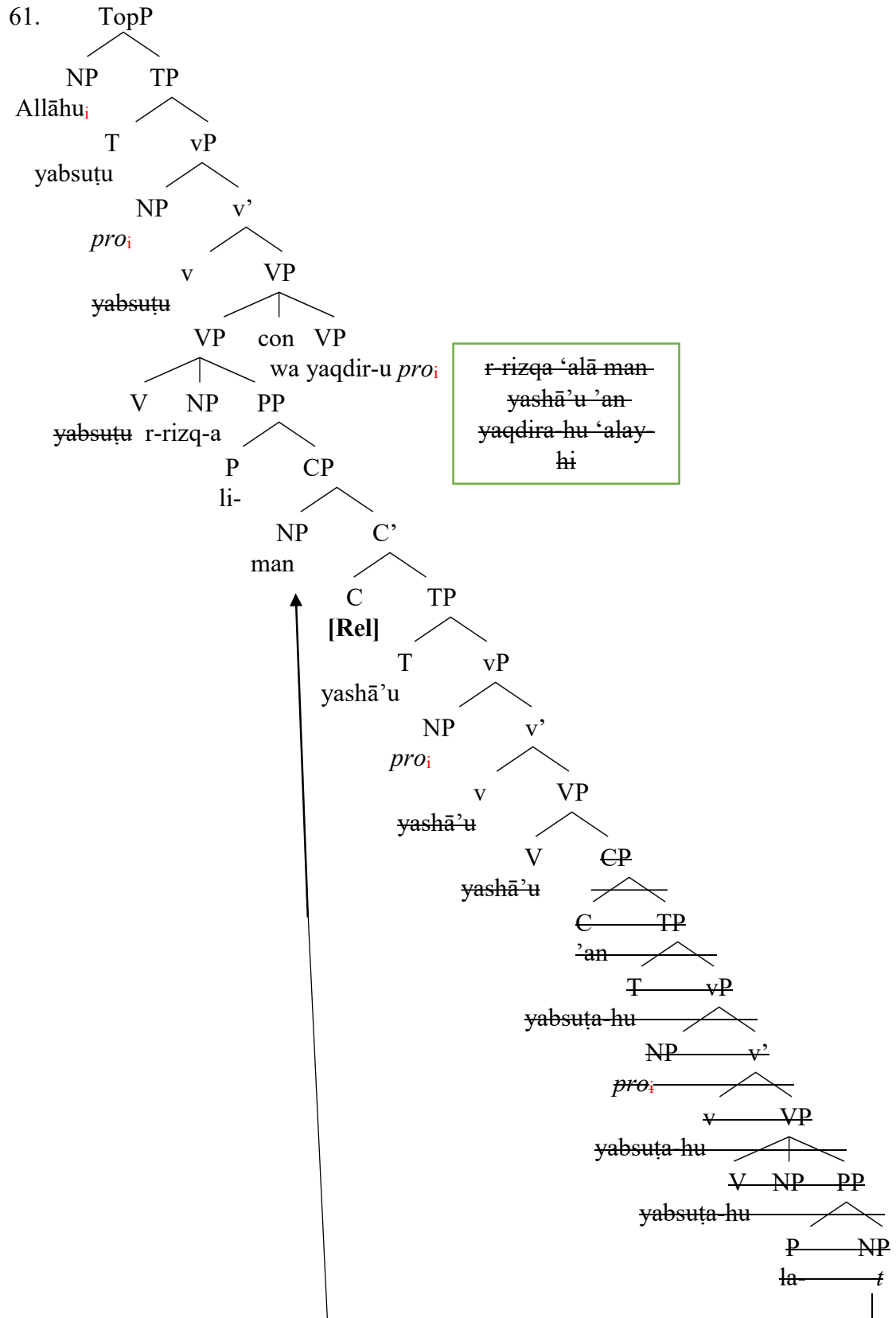
59. Allāhu yabsuṭu r-rizqa li-man yashā'u [Allāhu] ~~'an yabsuṭ-a-hu la-hu~~, wa yaqdiru [Allāhu] r-rizqa 'alā man yashā'u 'an yaqdīra-hu 'alay-hi. (old)

60. Allāhu yabsuṭu r-rizqa li-man yashā'u [human being] ~~'an yabsuṭ-a-hu la-hu~~, wa yaqdiru [human being] 'alā matā'ibi r-rizqi. (new)

Also, when a silent pronoun, *pro*, carries an index (subscript like *i* or *k*) identical to that carried by a specific Noun Phrase (NP), then that *pro* is interpreted as referring to that NP. The '*t*' below an NP in the tree structures means that that position is filled with the *trace* of the element that has *moved* from that position.

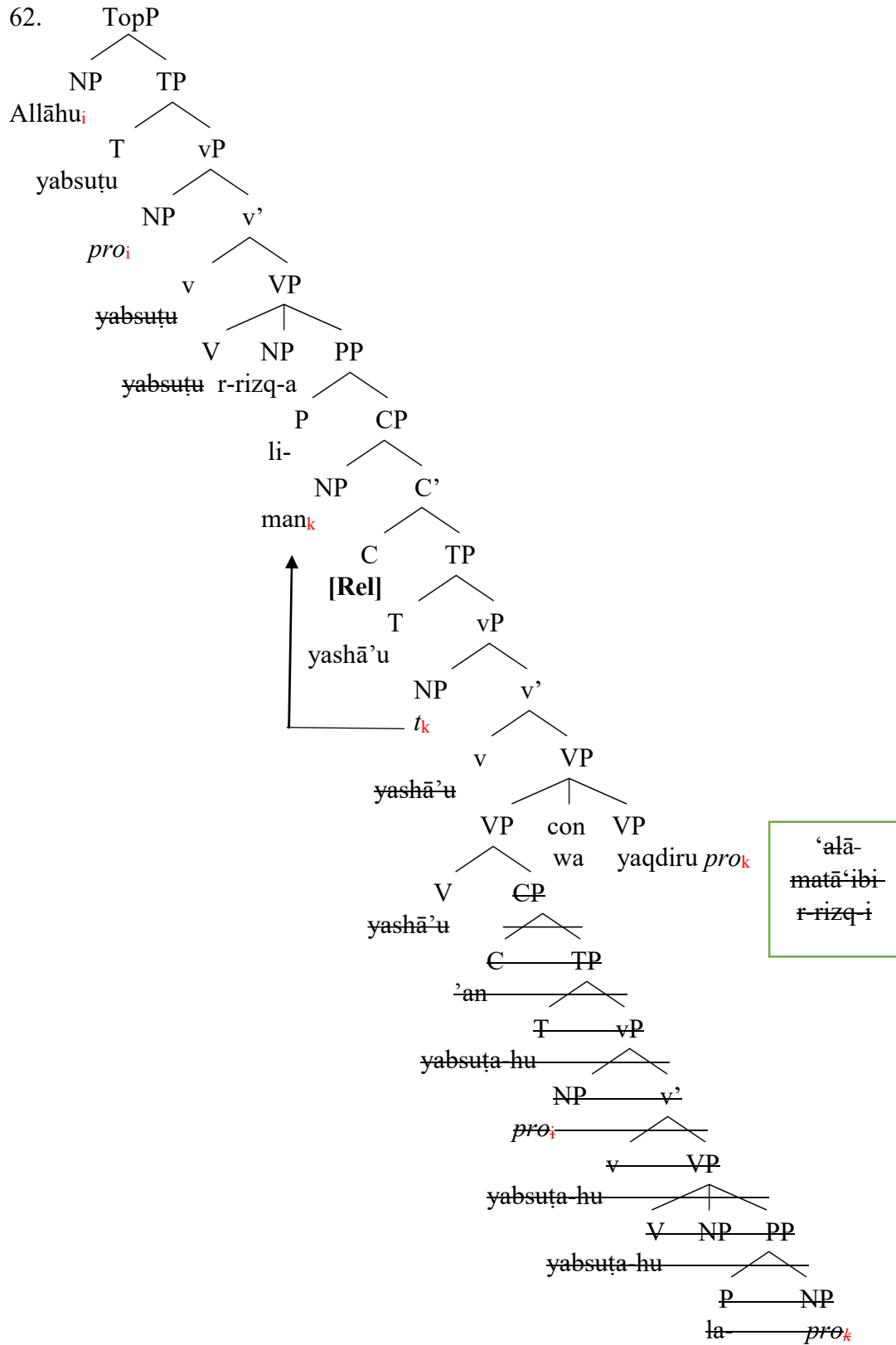
On the old interpretation, besides the coordination between *yabsuṭu* and *yaqdiru*, the relative pronoun *man* 'من' starts as the object of the preposition in the Prepositional Phrase (PP) that makes the second complement/object of the verb *yabsuṭu* in the silent clause. It then moves to its surface position, which is the Specifier position of the relative clause CP. The fact that *man* is base-generated in an object of preposition position explains why it is construed as 'whom'. As the tree in (61) shows, *man* is moving from an object position, and so it is interpreted as an object, which makes *Allāhu* the subject of *yabsuṭu*, *yashā'u*, and *yaqdiru*, which is illustrated by the index on the NP *Allāhu* and the three silent pronouns (i.e. instances of *pro*) following the verbs *yabsuṭu*, *yashā'u*, and *yaqdiru*. This leads to the reading that says 'Allah gives abundant provision to whom He wishes and limited provision to whom He wishes', which is the reading in (57).

⁶¹ It is noteworthy that this treatment is not in favor of any existing analysis of coordination, nor is it contingent on any specific analysis of the phenomenon of conjunction in natural language. Also, some highly technical theoretical details in the derivation of these sentences, which are irrelevant for the purposes of this paper, are not included in the trees and discussion.



The new interpretation is derived in the following manner. Besides the coordination between the verbs *yashā'u* and *yaqdiru*, *man* 'مَنْ', the relative pronoun, is moving to its surface position from another base-generated position. In this

interpretation, *man* moves to the same surface position (which is relevant for this type of movement and element), but it starts in a subject position.



As the tree in (62) shows, *man* starts in the subject position of the verb *yashā'u*, and because *yashā'u* and *yaqdiru* are coordinated, *man* is construed as the subject of both verbs. Thus the subject of *yabsuṭu* is different from the subject of both *yashā'u* and *yaqdiru*; this is illustrated by the index on the *pro* subject of *yabsuṭu*, which is 'i' (identical to that of the NP *Allāhu*), and the index on the *pro* subjects of *yashā'u* and *yaqdiru*, which is 'k'. This results in the reading that says 'Allah gives provision to who wishes and is able to endure its hardship', which is the reading in (58); thus the relative pronoun *man* is construed as 'who'.

Therefore, the source of the ambiguity, besides the proposed meaning of the verb *yaqdiru*, is the position in which the relative pronoun *man* 'مَنْ' is base-generated and eventually moves from. If *man* moves from an object position, it is analyzed as an object and thus construed as 'whom' (i.e. object), leading to the old interpretation. If *man* moves from a subject position, it is analyzed as 'who' (i.e. subject), resulting in the new interpretation.

Now, the question arises as to why there is a consensus on the old interpretation among exegesis and translation sources. One reason for this consensus is that Allah controls the *mashī'ah* of everything in the universe, including the fine details of our lives. But what this approach has neglected is that Allah did not create us to control us, but rather endowed us with the necessary intellect so that we can make decisions and choices and ultimately be responsible for them.⁶²

The other reason is that the old interpretation is actually syntactically *more salient* because the dropped (i.e. elided/silent) material, which is *al-rizqa 'alā man yashā'u 'an yaqdira-hu 'alay-hi* after the verb *yaqdiru*, is almost identical to the post-verb material in the antecedent sentence (i.e. the first conjunct), [*Allāhu yabsuṭ-u*] *al-rizqa li-man yashā'u 'an yabsuṭa-hu la-hu*. The fact that most of the elided/silent material on the new interpretation, which is '*alā matā'ibi al-rizqi* 'endures the hardship of earning rizq', is not available in the antecedent sentence makes the new interpretation a less salient one, since the computational system needs to introduce new words (i.e. ideas not available in the antecedent sentence) to create it.

⁶² Rashid Al-Balushi, "Belief in Allah is the Researcher's Natural Path", AlJumua Online Magazine, 2020. Al-Balushi, "On the Subject of 'yashā'" in Some Qur'anic Verses", 2022.

3.3. Verses (Q. 29:62) and (Q. 34:39)

This section discusses another aspect of the structure of these two verses, in (63) and (65), translated in (64 and (66), respectively, namely the identity of the NP antecedent of the pronoun *-hu* 'هُ' in the PP *la-hu* 'لَهُ' in both verses.

63. "اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ (62)."

64. "Allah expands the provision for whomever He wishes of His servants, and tightens it for him. Indeed Allah has knowledge of all things (62)."⁶³

65. "قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ (39)."

66. "Say: "Verily my Lord enlarges and restricts the Sustenance to such of his servants as He pleases: and nothing do ye spend in the least (in His cause) but He replaces it: for He is the Best of those who grant Sustenance (39)."⁶⁴

The problem posed by the PP *la-hu* in these two verses is that it is not clear what the pronoun *-hu* refers to. On the standard interpretation, the antecedent of *-hu* is the NP *man yashā'u*, which precedes it in the verse. But this construal presents yet another issue, which is that the person given limited provision is understood to be identical to the one given abundant provision, which is not the intended meaning of the verse. The standard interpretation of these verses is that abundant provision is given to a selected servant and limited provision is given to *another* servant. Also, the fact that another NP, which is *al-rizq-a*, precedes the pronoun in the verse makes the issue even more intriguing. Therefore, various Qur'ān commentators provided explanations that address this issue and at the same time support their interpretations. In what follows, I will cite the solutions provided in three exegesis books and comment on them.

For example, Al-Zamakhsharī states that "it is possible that the antecedent of the pronoun in *la-hu* is *man yashā'u*, as in '*wa yaqdiru li-man yashā'u*', and this does not constitute a problem, since both *man yashā'u* and the pronoun have no specific referent. Also, if the antecedent of the pronoun is construed to refer to *man yashā'u*, it would mean that Allah gives abundant provision to someone at certain times and limited provision to the same person at other times".⁶⁵ Also, Abū Ḥayyān states, "and it seems that the pronoun in *la-hu* refers to *man yashā'u*, and this would mean that Allah gives

⁶³ <https://al-quran.info/#29>

⁶⁴ <https://www.surah.my/34>

⁶⁵ Abū al-Qāsim Jār-u-Allāh Maḥmuud bin Omar al-Zamakhsharī al-Khawārizmī. *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, Beirut, Dār al-Ma'rifah, 2009, p. 823.

abundant provision to someone and limited provision to that same person [according to Allah's wisdom]. And the pronoun may refer to *man yashā'u* only verbally [without referring to a specific person], meaning that Allah gives limited provision to another *man yashā'u*, and this way, *man yashā'u* and the pronoun would refer to different people".⁶⁶ Furthermore, Al-Alūsī states, "and the pronoun refers to *man yashā'u* [who is given abundant provision], but that this must be construed such that Allah gives abundant provision to someone at certain times, and limited provision to the same person at other times. And it could be that the pronoun refers to another *man yashā'u*, that is, a human being other than the one that the first *man yashā'u* refers to, meaning that Allah gives abundant provision to some people and limited provision to other people".⁶⁷

All three scholars suggest that the pronoun *-hu* may refer to the NP *man yashā'u*, but that *man yashā'u* has no specific referent, and so does the pronoun, and this leads to the understanding that the pronoun and the NP *man yashā'u* may refer to different people, which is the desired meaning. Also, they argue that if the pronoun and the NP *man yashā'u* are construed to have the same referent, then the verse may be understood to refer to different times in the life of that specific human being. And because this applies to a single human being, it could be argued to also apply to all other human beings.

Though based mainly on pragmatic considerations (i.e. the fact that the same person may not be given abundant provision and limited provision at the same time with respect to the same rizq, and the fact that no human being may be given abundant provision all the time, and another human being be given limited provision all the time), the solution provided by these scholars is in fact both well-articulated and well supported, with evidence from the Holy Qur'ān, verse 11 of sūrat Fāṭir (Originator, 35), in (67), translated in (68), and from the speech of Arabs, in (69), translated in (70). The intended meaning of verse (Q. 35:11) is "no living creature is allowed to live a very long life, or the life of another living creature is made short; and the pronoun refers to another living creature".⁶⁸

67. "وَمَا يُعَمَّرُ مِنْ مُعَمَّرٍ وَلَا يُنْقَصُ مِنْ عُمُرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ"

⁶⁶ Abū Ḥayyān, Muḥammad bin Yūsuf al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* [vol. 7], Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1993, p. 154.

⁶⁷ Shihāb Al-Dīn Maḥmūd bin Abdullah al-’Alūsī al-Baghdādī, *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm wa al-Sab’ al-Mathānī* [vol. 20], Beirut, Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2010, p. 391.

⁶⁸ Al-’Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī* [vol. 22], 2010, p. 186.

68. "No living thing advances in years, or its life is shortened, except it be in a Record."⁶⁹

69. 'عندي درهمٌ ونصفه.'

70. Literal translation: I have a Dirham and its half.

Intended meaning: I have a Dirham and a half.

The main reason behind this elegant construal of the antecedence relations in this verse is the interpretation that these three scholars assign to these two verses and similar ones, which is that Allah has decreed how much each one of us can earn, and that we have no choice or decision in the matter, the view this paper is trying to show as inadequate. Though good enough for their purposes, this solution does not undermine the new proposal, which assigns the whole verse a new analysis at the syntactic level as well as the semantic relations.

Linguistically speaking, three NPs precede the pronoun in this verse; these are '*Allāh-u*', '*al-rizq-a*', and '*man yashā'u min 'ibādi-hi*'. On the old interpretation, *Allāh-u* may not be the antecedent of the pronoun, since *Allāh-u* is construed to be the subject of *yaqdir-u*. Also, *Allāh-u* cannot be the antecedent of the pronoun on the new interpretation either, since *yaqdiru* is interpreted to mean 'be able to', and since no human being can have the ability over Allah, this understanding is excluded. It is with regard to the remaining two NPs that the two interpretations converge, the old one preferring '*man yashā'u min 'ibādi-hi*', and the new one preferring '*al-rizq-a*'.

Nonetheless, the new interpretation, which says that the pronoun *-hu* in verses (29:62) and (34:39) refers to the NP '*al-rizq-a*' and *not* to the human being, also receives support from the statement of verses (65:7) and (89:16), repeated in (71) and (73), and transliterated in (72) and (74), respectively. This is because in both verses, Allah discusses decreasing the amount of one's rizq by using the verb *qadara* together with the preposition '*alā*' 'against', in *عَلَيْهِ* (in '*alayhi*'). The pronoun *-hi* in '*alayhi*' in both verses refers to the human being; it cannot refer to rizq, because rizq is the next NP in the verse. The relevant parts are italicized.

71. "الْيُنْفِقُ دُونَ سَعَةٍ مِّنْ سَعَتِهِ وَمَنْ قُدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُ فَلْيُنْفِقْ مِمَّا آتَاهُ اللَّهُ (7)."

72. "liyunfiq dhū sa'atin min sa'atihi wa man qudira '*alay-hi rizquhu* falyunfiq min mā 'ātāhu Allāh" (passive voice)

73. "وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهْنَن (16)."

⁶⁹ <https://www.clearquran.com/035.html>

74. “wa ’ammā ’idhā mā ’ibtalāhu *faqadara* ‘*alay-hi rizqahu* fayaqūlu rabbī ’ahānan” (active voice)

In other words, Allah did not use the preposition *la-* 'for' when discussing decreasing the amount of a human being’s rizq in verses (65:7) and (89:16). This means that if Allah was referring to the human being with the pronoun *-hu* in verses (29:62) and (34:39), repeated in (75) and (77) for convenience (transliterated in (76) and (78), respectively), as the standard interpretation says, then Allah would have chosen the preposition *alā* 'against', as He did in verses (65:7) and (89:16). The fact that Allah chose the preposition *la-* means that He is not referring to the human being, but rather to the NP *al-rizq-a*, as argued in this paper.

75. "اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ (62)."

76. “Allāh yabsuṭu *r-rizqa* liman yashā’u min ‘ibādihi wa *yaqdiru la-hu*”

77. "قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ (39)."

78. “qul ’inna rabbī yabsuṭu *r-rizqa* liman yashā’u min ‘ibādihi wa *yaqdiru la-hu*”

4. Concluding Remarks

This paper has shown that although Allah is the Sustainer who provides rizq to human beings (and to other living creatures as well), He has principally left it to the individual human being to decide what to earn and how much to earn by deciding how much effort and thinking they are willing to invest in the rizq-earning process. While not denying Allah's control over our lives and the type and amount of our rizq, the paper provided several arguments for this new understanding, the most compelling of which is the novel linguistic analysis of the relevant verses. This linguistic analysis is based on parsing the words and phrases of the relevant verses in an unconventional fashion, as well as assigning one word a new meaning.