Al-Asy’ariyyah Theory of Al-Kasb and Its Urgency in Work Productivity Improvement

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ABSTRACT
This article discusses the al-Asy’ariyyah theory of al-Kasb and its important role in improving work productivity. It further analyzes how the al-Asy’ariyyah school of thought exists in Muslim life; examines whether the theory has shackled the mind and freedom of human beings and led the adherents to fatalism, determinism, or Jabariyyah; and determines the specific roles played by the theory in improving work productivity. This study adopted a library research method by analyzing the works of Abū al-Hasan al-Asy‘arī, al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, and al-gazālī to reveal the theory’s methodology and theology. The results of the analysis suggest that al-Asy’ariyyah contains openness, realistic, and dynamic theological concepts that can encourage the adherents to be creative and productive in upholding the dignity of humanity and responding to the advancement of science and technology. In conclusion, al-Asy’ariyyah cannot be categorized as fatalism, determinism, or Jabariyyah since this theological concept respects the mind (aql) as the divine gift from Allah and intelligence (naqal) as actual divine guidance.

Keywords: al-kasb theory, al-asy’ariyyah, work productivity.

1. INTRODUCTION
Al-Asy’ariyyah was a theological concept first introduced by Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Ismail al-Ash’ary (260-324 H) (Ibn ‘Asakir, 1979). For eleven centuries in the Islamic history, it has experienced ups and downs in the spread and varied in the development of its doctrine. This school of thought arose after Abu al-Hasan al-Asy‘ary declared himself out of Muktazilah, a theological concept he had adopted until the age of 40. Al-Asy’ariyyah has gained a lot of followers because it is considered as the continuity of Sunni adopted by the majority of Muslims. Despite its popularity, Sunni has never been formulated in a comprehensive and systematic manner (Rahman, 1979).

According to the history of Islam, Al-Asy’ariyyah arose right in the midst of a heated conflict between two extreme groups, the Muktazilah supported by the authorities and the Hadith expert supported by the majority of the public. Al-Ash’ary's efforts to reconcile these two opposing groups have led many experts to consider the al-Asy’ariyya school of thought as the mediating Kalam. On one hand, al-Asy’ariyyah bridges the gap between the Muktazilah and Hadith experts; on the other hand, the theology mediates Jabariyyah and Qadariyyah. According to Imarah, there were three prominent schools of thoughts existing in the al-Asy’ary’s era, including Salafiah which is very textual, Islamic philosophical schools that understand Islam based on the mind (aql) and intelligence (naqal) and Muktazilah which combines the mind (aql) and intelligence (naqal) (Hasyim, 2005).

As a "middle ground" school of thought that exists between the rationalist-metaphorical Muktazilah and the extreme textualist Hadith scholars, al-Asy’ariyyah applies rational methods such as Aristotle's logic. In addition to using primary sources and sacred texts from the Koran and al-Sunnah, as practiced by the Hadith experts, the Asy'ariyyah school is also characterized by the balanced use of the mind (aql) and intelligence (naqal).

A few centuries after the al-Asy’ariyyah school reached its perfect development and distribution, Muslims under the Uthmaniyyah Khilafah, suffered a setback. Meanwhile, the Western world began to rise with the advancement of science and technology. Some Islamic philosophers concluded that one of the causes that led Muslims to that difficult situation was fatalism that enveloped their mentality. Other scholars and
researchers even claimed that al-Asy’ariyyah's theology was responsible for the development of fatalism. They alleged that al-Asy’ariyyah’s theology could fetter human thought and freedom so that the followers were led to fatalism or Jabariyyah.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized library sources to answer the problem. The primary sources of the data consisted of the works of Abû al- Hasan al- Asy’ari, al-Baqillâni, al-Juwaynî, and al-gazâlî. These four figures were considered as the major figures who had a big role in bringing the al-Asy’ariyyah school towards excellence. Therefore, these key figures were able to represent other al-Asy’ariyyah personalities in terms of the school’s progress, development and perfection. Many other individuals were also important, but their significance seemed inseparable from the efforts of these four figures.

The secondary data of this study were collected in the form of books, journals, documents, magazines and other publications that were relevant to the research objective. Therefore, in addition to being literary, this study was also descriptive in nature because it explored the products of Ulama's thoughts for comparison.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Qadariyyah vs Jabariyyah

There are two fundamental views regarding human actions in Islam. These are known as af'al al'ibad in Islamic theology. The first group, called the Qadariyyah group, are those who believe in free will and human ability to realize their will and actions. The second group consists of those who believe in predestination. These people argue that humans are incapable of realizing their desires and actions because their fate has been determined by Allah as the creator of men. These people call themselves Jabariyyah.

Qadariyyah, or Muktazilah in this case, puts great emphasis on taking responsibility for every action. They reject the notion holding that Allah has absolute power over human actions (Al-Jabbar, 1965). According to Muktazilah, aql that is bestowed upon humans can enable them to distinguish between the good and the bad (Al-Shahristâni, 1992). With that ability and freedom, every human being has the power to create their own destiny. Thus, the good or bad, the faithful or unfaithful of a man depends on himself (Al-Khayyat, n.d.). Allah cannot be held responsible for human actions. Ghaylani states that humans are able to do good or evil deeds out of their own free will and power (Amin, 1964). Humans have the independence to do and to want something. They can decide whether they want to do good or bad; be faithful or unfaithful towards Allah. Humans get rewarded commensurable with what they have done. In addition to giving orders to humans to do something, Allah also equips them with the power or strength to act. It is impossible for Allah the Just to deny Himself by doing wrong to humans, such as by not giving power and strength to humans to carry out orders and stay away from His prohibitions (Amin, 1964).

In addition to using a rational approach, the Qadariyyah view also rests on the arguments of the Qur'an. Therefore, it is not appropriate if the Qadariyyah group is referred to as a group of people who no longer believe in revelation, as they are often accused of. Some verses that are often used as a basis for their opinions are: QS. al-Kahf (18: 29) which means: “The Truth is from your Lord; so whoever decides, then let him believe, and whoever decides, then let him disbelieve”. Allah also says: “indeed, Allah will not change the condition of people until they change what is in themselves.”

Unlike Qadariyyah, the Jabariyyah adherents argue otherwise. They believe in the unlimited power of Allah. Therefore, humans have no freedom of their wills and deeds (Al-Ghurabi, 1958). Allah is the Creator of everything, including humans and their actions (Madkur, 1983). Jabariyyah states that any movements and actions that take place in the universe take place on divine sacred and irradiance. If there is a will, a motion, or an action that occurs outside of the Divine craters and irradiance, just like human actions, it means that Allah’s power is limited. It is impossible if Allah is limited. Believing that Allah is limited, according to Jabariyyah, means acknowledging the existence of other actors in this universe besides Allah.

Jabariyyah in expressing their thoughts, also quote Qur’an verses such as follows: “He creates what He wills” (QS. Rum; ( 30:54). Another verse that lies the foundation of Jabariyyah is: “For indeed, Allah sends astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills” (QS. Fatir 35:8). Another verse that lies the foundation of Jabariyyah is: “No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being”.

3.2 Al-Kasb al-Asy’ariyyah Theory

To mediate the two schools (Qadariyyah and Jabariyyah), Abu Hasan al-Ash‘ary proposed the al-kasb theory, with the understanding that what manifests human actions is Allah (Al-Ash‘ari, 1950, Al-Bazdawi, Al-Imam Abî Al-Yusúf Muhammad, 2003). Humans are given the power and choice to act on Allah’s will. Man in his actions depends a lot on Allah’s will and power.
Therefore, humans in the view of al-Ash'ary, are not fa'il, but kasib. Based on that, al-kasb theory emerged. Al-Shahrustani clarifies the meaning of al-kasb by stating that the birth of human actions is by the way Allah treats His sunnah through the newly created power together with the occurrence of actions. In this connection, the concept of al-ikitisab was born (Al-Shahrastâni, n.d.).

Al-ikitisab, according to al-Asy’ary, refers to the state in which something happens by the power created and thus becomes an acquisition or kasb to the people who created the power (Al-Ash’ari, 1950). In al-Luma’, al-Asy’ary provides similar explanations, where al-kasb is defined as something that arises from al-muktasib (the acquirer) through the created power (Al-Ash’ari, 1955).

The arguments provided by al-Asy’ary regarding the creation of kasb by Allah are based on the following Qur'an verse: “And Allah created you and that which you do” (QS. al-Saffat 37:96). Based on this verse, al-Asy’ary argues that human actions are created by Allah (Al-Ash’ari, 1955). The is no creator or fa’il for kasb, except Allah (Al-Ash’ari, 1955). In other words, kasb or human actions are determined by Allah.

Therefore, it can be understood that since the al-Asy’ary era, there has been a lot of polemic and controversy of human actions (af’al al-ibad). One of which is that related to qadariyyah or free will suggested by Muktazilah people. In such situation, al-Asy’ary was called to put forward his idea along with the methodology he developed to bridge between the two extreme groups, Jabariyyah and Qadariyyah by offering the concept of 'central axis theology' (moderation in Islam) (Zahrah, 2018).

The Qur’an verse that supports the idea that naqil is the basis of the creation of kasb is: وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ “And Allah created you and that which you do” (QS. al-Saffat 37:96). The word تعْمَلُونَ in that verse was defined by al-Ash’ari as “what you do” instead of “what you create”. This means that it is Allah who creates you and your actions. Therefore, according to al-Asy’ary, human actions and kasb are created by Allah (Al-Ash’ari, 1955) and humans are only the places where the deeds of Allah apply.

Al-Asy’ary desired to make a compromise between human weaknesses with human responsibility for their actions, even though it seems to be twisted. One thing Al-Asy’ary wants to explain is the role of humans, but on the other hand it can be revealed that kasb is essentially an Allah’s creation (Mufid, 2013).

Al-Asy’ary categorizes human actions or movements into idtitir (unintentional actions, beyond control) and kasb. Each category contains two elements. Idtitir contains a movable element that embodies motion, and a moving body. The movable element is Allah, while the moving body is human. A moving body desires a physical place, while it is impossible for Allah to have a physical nature (Al-Ash’ari, 1955). Moreover kasb, according to al-Asy’ari, is the creator or the acquirer of the actions done in idtitir. Therefore, Allah serves as the creator of kasb and humans serve as the acquirer of kasb (Al-Ash’ari, 1955).

Al-Asy’ary has attempted to create a clear distinction between idtitir and kasb. The former, there is a compulsion element where humans have no control over what they do while the latter involved no ‘compulsion’. However, both are created by Allah (Al-Ash’ari, 1955). In line with with, Allah says: ﴿وَمَا تَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ﻋَلَى وَاحِدِ ﺑَيْنَكُمْ ﺃَﻥَّlichkeit ﴾ (QS. al-Insan 76:30) “But you cannot will, unless Allah wills”. According to al-Asy’ary, this verse emphasizes that humans cannot desire something unless it is desired by Allah. The dream of going to Mecca can only be realized if Allah wills it. If a human being has the same desire as Allah’s, what desired by the human is Allah’s will (Al-Ash’ari, 1955).

According to al-Asy’ari, power is bestowed upon humans when they do a particular action (Al-Ash’ari, 1955). Thus, one who in himself does not gain the power from Allah cannot do anything (Al-Ash’ari, 1955). This explanation leads to the conclusion that the power to actualize action is not human power but Allah’s (Al-Ash’ari, 1985).

The explanations of al-Asy’ary about kasb are obvious, uncomplicated, and straightforward. However, some critics have come from those who cannot fully understand the concept (Amin, 1964; Musa, 1975). Therefore, many people have come to the conclusion that the al-Asy’ary theory of kasb is classified into Jabariyyah (Amin, 1964).

It is clear that through kasb theory, al-Asy’ary wished to argue that every human action is influenced by two fa’il, Allah and the human himself. Although the human has no effective influence, it can be understood that he is not absolutely passive but active at a minimum level. Therefore, the al-Asy’ary theory of kasb cannot be characterized as Jabariyyah nor Qadariyyah. Moreover, an assessment should not be merely focused or limited to the contents of the theory, but rather it must involve the background and purpose of the theory.

Al-Asy’ary was basically disinclined to see Muslims falling into the Jabariyyah or Qadariyyah circles. That is why he put forward a doctrine which takes the middle ground position, which in this paper is termed as the ‘Central Axis’ theology. The ‘central axis’ theology itself states that in their actions, humans are free but bound; bound but free on a certain scale. Herein lies the uniqueness of the al-Ash'ary theology. The theology provides an opportunity for the next generation to give positive interpretations and explanations, as revealed by the well-known al-Asy'ariyyah predecessors.
Al-Bāqillāni and al-Juwayni, for example, argue that actions occur due to human power, so the actions are entitled to the human himself (Al-Baqillani, 1957; Al-Juwayni, 1979). However, there are indeed some actions that occur under compulsion. When someone is sick, s/he is forced to lie down instead of sitting, walking or talking (Al-Baqillani, 1957). In relation to this, al-Bāqillāni points out that humans are only capable of doing the sacred things that Allah has created for them. This shows that one can only do something at one time, but cannot do the same at another time (Al-Baqillani, 1957).

Furthermore, according to al-Baqillani, humans are unable to “do” before deeds occur (iktiṣāb). Humans can only “do” when actions occur (fi ḥal al-iktiṣāb), after they are bestowed with Allah’s will (Al-Baqillani, 1957). With regard to this, al-Baqillani highlights the mutable nature of human beings. If human nature is fixed, naturally it must remain at the same time or at different times. Therefore, this is impossible (Al-Baqillani, 1957) Human abilities will only appear together with actions. If humans already possessed a certain ability before an action is conducted, then when the action occurs, he no longer needs Allah’s help. Such, according to al-Baqillani, is impossible (Al-Baqillani, 1957). Therefore, it can be said that Allah has created power in humans and human freedom lies in the use of that power. Allah bestows humans with two natures for two contradictory or similar actions. Allah blesses human beings with one nature for one action (Al-Baqillani, 1957). This meaningful view, according to al-Bāqillāni, shows that there is no compulsion in human actions. People who are forced to do something are people who are burdened with something they are not willing to do. While those who are said to be able to do are those who do it of their own volition. People who are forced to do and who are able to do something are different from people who are not able to do something at all. So in this case, people who do not do what they are told to do are those who are not able to do it (Al-Baqillani, 1957).

Besides, al-Bāqillāni also argues that Allah creates and bestows humans with the nature to do. That nature appeared along with the implementation of the action, such as a ring moves together with the finger. Likewise, someone will only know along with the appearance of the pain itself (Al-Baqillani, 1957). This argument is strengthened by the following words of Allah:  "لَا يَكُفُّ الَّذِي نَفَسَ إِلَّا (QS. al-Baqarah 2: 286) "Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity.". Allah also says: "لَا يَكُفُّ الَّذِي نَفَسَ إِلَّا مَا نَفَسَ (QS. al-Tal 84: 65) "Allah does not charge a soul except [according to] what He has given it". These two verses, according to al-Baqillāni, indicate that the nature to do will not exist before actions (Al-Baqillani, 1957). In Qur’an, it is also said that actions are carried out to pay fidyah (QS. al-Baqarah 2:184).

From the information above, it can be said that both al-Ash'ary and al-Bāqillāni agree in viewing human actions as Allah’s creation. However, al-Bāqillāni has perfected al-Ash’ary’s teachings by stating that humans have the freedom to do something. Moreover, Al-Bāqillāni perceives al-kasb as the movement followed by the existence of human nature. He further emphasizes the difference between the movement of a healthy person and a sick one, where the healthy do things intentionally while the sick moves under compulsion. Therefore, al-kasb is an endeavored act (Al-Baqillani, 1957) that contains freedom. Humans play an effective role in their actions. Allah creates movements within humans, while moving actions such as sitting, standing, talking are genuinely human actions (Al-Shahrastāni, n.d).

The Al-Bāqillāni theological view presented above was reformulated by al-Juwayni who argues that humans give an effective contribution to their actions (Al-Juwayni, 1979). Since humans are bestowed with the right to make a decision and use the power created by Allah, they can apply their knowledge in every day life in the form of actions. Furthermore, al-Juwayni states that Allah has created power within humans before they perform actions. The power is ‘ard (accidentally) and ‘ard is impermanent (al-ard la yabqā). Therefore, ‘ard cannot be used to realize any kind of actions (Al-Juwayni, 1959). An action can exist if Allah’s power accompanies it (Al-Juwayni, 1959; Al-Juwayni, 1979). Humans, according to al-Juwayni, have the freedom to direct the power created by Allah to realize their actions in accordance with their will. Thus, it is obvious that humans have an effective role to direct the power and realize the actions they want. Humans can do that because Allah always provides them with additional energy to do something.

Al-Ghazali also provides the same information. According to him, it is Allah who creates human actions and the desire to act in human beings (Al-Ghazali, 1962). Man’s deeds occur with the nature of Allah and not with the nature of humans, even though the latter is closely related to the acts. Therefore, it cannot be said that human beings create their actions. For that, al-Ghazālī argues, as mentioned in the Qur’an, human actions are al-kasb (Al-Ghazali, 1962).

Al-Ghazali further clarifies the possibility of two natures in one act, Allah’s and humans’, because the relationships between the two natures and human actions are different. Allah’s nature is related to al-khalq (creation), while human nature is associated with al-kasb. Al-Khalq comes from Allah whereas al-kasb comes from humans. Therefore, human actions are called al-kasb (Al-Ghazali, 1962).
3.3 Work Productivity Improvement

From the explanation above, it is clear that al-Asy'ariyyah's theology is concerned with practice (endeavor), as implied in the theory of al-Kasb. For this reason, in the context of faith, besides knowing or justifying that Allah truly exists, humans also need to put the position of charity (endeavor) in an important position in life. This statement shows that what is meant by al-Ash'ariyyah with al-kasb is the “acquisition” of infrastructure tools that should be projected in various aspects of life. The tools are endeavor and power in actions that lead to the so-called divine rewards or sins.

Therefore, by referring to the al-Kasb theory, believing in fate or destiny contains no fatalism at all, because fatalism leads to inactivity and Jabariyyah attitudes that make people easily surrender lose to fate. Because of that, believing in destiny, according to the al-Ash'ariyyah school of though, means believing in charity and efforts. It is impossible that 'destiny' has a meaning against activities and deeds. In other words, there are always endeavors in actions. It should not be denied that the existence of destiny makes people excited and dynamic in carrying out their activities.

Therefore, al-kasb means that humans still have a role in living their destiny, which is trying to carry out their work, which is within the 'limits' of Allah’s absolute power. In other words, humans are not forced, but also not free at will. In short, humans in their actions are not forced absolutely, but also not free without limits. The al-kasb theory contains dynamic aspects. In assessing the dynamism and staticism, activeness and passivity of a person, the standard commonly used is the extent to which the mind takes a role. Besides using textual arguments, al-Asy'ariyyah's theology also involves rational arguments. In Isithsan al-khawd fi 'ilm al-kalam, alAsh'ari explains the importance of logic in aqliyyah. He pictures it as important as Qur’an verses in Shariah.

The above facts further strengthen our conviction that the alAsy'ariyyah theological concept contains dynamism, an aspect that motivates the followers to always think and work and create new discoveries. This dynamic aspect also encourages or at least allows every Muslim to reinterpret and re-actualize various religious teachings in order to anticipate the development of the times and patterns of social life that are constantly changing.

Thus, al-Kasb's theory in al-Asy'ariyyah's theological system can reflect an attitude and creativity in facing life on a daily basis. More importantly, the theory inspires humans to act and carry out their function as a Khalifah on Earth who needs to respond to the effects of world civilization today. Therefore, working is part of worship, and that is what is meant as 'work productivity' which every Muslim has to strive for.

As an implementation of the belief, according to Islamic teachings, every time a Muslim starts an activity, s/he needs to recite basmalah “Bismi Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim”. By reading basmalah, someone not only expects a blessing but also understands the message. Therefore, positive productivity and attitudes can be promoted.

The word bi which appears in the beginning of basmalah, can be translated into 'with', which is, according to Islamic scholars, related to the word “to begin”. Therefore, every individual who recites basmalah basically says that: “Now I begin the work for the sake of Allah”. If we do our work 'in the name of Allah', then the work will definitely not result in the loss of others, and also will not cause damage to the property of others. Because at that time, we have fortified ourselves and our work from the temptations of lust and personal ambition. The word bi is also associated with ‘power and help’, so that every individual who recites basmalah realizes that the work is done by Allah’s will. By reciting basmalah, the individual also prays for help from Allah so that the work can be done perfectly. With that request, the soul of the speaker of basmalah admits its weaknesses before Allah. However, at the same time, strength, self-confidence, and optimism are embedded, because the soul feels that it has received help and strength from Allah, the source of all strength. If a work is done with the help of Allah, then surely it is perfect, beautiful, good and right because the attributes of Allah are attached in the work.

The above arguments emphasize how much one's understanding of the values embedded in the al-Kasb al-Asy'ariyyah theory can provide a positive effect on his work productivity. This theory always orientates the adherents to always feel close to Allah. In the end, this theory makes people aware that they are weak before the absolute power of Allah. However, humans can also feel strong and confident, when dealing with other creatures created by Allah because he is aware of Allah’s inclusion (مَعْهُ اللَّه)).

In al-Asy'ariyyah theology, this principle is known as “Aqidah or Tawhid”. This foundation is supposed to underlie the attitudes, movements, and mindset (ittijah) of every Muslim. One's commitment to aqidah or monotheism should be demonstrated in his behavior (suluk), morality (akhlaq), and visions (wijjah al-Nazr) in real life. A strong understanding of these concepts will form a strong attitude and identity in projecting a dynamic, productive, and progress-loving life.

In fact, certain parts of the theological conceptual framework of 'Max Weber's thesis' have been widely appreciated to encourage people to work hard in overcoming their setbacks in the economic field.
Sacrilization of work with the formulation "working is part of worship" can be compared to "hard work is a calling and must be carried out in worldly life". The success of living in this world is a logical consequence of hard work, and it is a sign that the person is a chosen person who is bestowed with salvation (Abdullah, 1979).

The above information leads us to a belief that in arranging a bright future, the most productive thing we can do is to improve the quality of our endeavor (al-kasb). We must attempt to do something more meaningful and productive in anticipating the development of science and technology.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that the al-Asy’ariyyah theological concept contains no fatalism at all. Fatalism leads to the inactivity and Jabariyyah attitudes of surrendering to fate. Believing in destiny, such as suggested by al-Asy’ariyyah theory means working hard and giving to charity. Therefore, al-kasb theory refers to the fact that humans still have an important role in life even though it is believed that the work result always depends on Allah’s will. The Al-Asy’ariyyah school of thought is open, realistic and dynamic so that it can encourage the adherents to keep creating, doing, and being productive in upholding the dignity and humanity in addressing the development of science and technology. Finally, it is inappropriate to classify al-Asy’ariyyah theory into fatalism, determinism, or Jabariyyah because this theological concept is highly respectful of the mind (aql) as the gift from Allah and of the intelligence (naqal) as the divine guidance that is always actual.

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