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Sadrāian Metaphysics and Rational Foundations of Epistemic Hierarchies

The relationship between independent rational propositions and Sharī'ah normativity occupies a central position in the Imāmī *uṣūlī* tradition. Rooted in moral rationalism, this discourse interrogates the capacity of reason to independently discern moral values—good and bad—and whether such discernment can serve as a legitimate foundation for normative Sharī'ah rulings. At its core, it asks: Can rational moral judgments correlate with divine sanction?

This paper critically examines the perspectives of three prominent twentieth-century *uṣūlī* scholars—Muḥammad Riḍā al-Muẓaffar, Abū al-Qāsim al-Khū'ī, and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr—on the epistemic and normative status of rational moral judgments. While these scholars acknowledge that the theoretical intellect (*al-'aql al-naẓarī*) can, in principle, apprehend moral values independently of revelation, they argue that its epistemic limitations prevent the satisfaction required to affirm that Sharī'ah rulings align with such judgments. Thus, despite theoretically recognizing a rational correlation, they maintain that it, in practice, does not translate into actual Sharī'ah determinations.

In contrast, this paper argues that grounding the rational-Sharī'ah correlation in the practical intellect (*al-'aql al-'amalī*) through the consensus of rational agents (*ārā' al-maḥmūda*) as it stands, introduces internal tensions within the *uṣūlī* framework, particularly with its assumptions regarding the universality and permanence of Sharī'ah rulings in the domain of social interactions.

Drawing on Ṣadrīan metaphysical doctrines—specifically the principiality of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) and substantial motion (*ḥarakat al-jawhariyya*)—the paper advances four key claims:

1. Sharī'ah normativity is existentially grounded and teleologically directed toward human growth, reflecting a value-oriented framework.
2. The consensus of rational agents reflects an intuitive grasp of existential growth, paralleling the theoretical intellect's rational apprehension.
3. Existence is in a state of continuous evolutionary flux, implying that the existential foundations upon which certain Sharī'ah norms—particularly those governing social interactions—were originally formulated may render them obsolete or sub-optimal in contemporary contexts.
4. In the absence of epistemic access to definitive sources (*insidād al-'ilm wa al-'ilmī*), and given the dynamic nature of rational judgment, a fallibilistic rational framework becomes essential. This framework allows rational judgments to play an equal role in appraising Sharī'ah normativity, especially where norms have become sub-optimal.



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Shaykh Arif Abdulhussain founded Al-Mahdi Institute in 1993 and currently serves as its Director and Senior Lecturer in *Usul al-Fiqh* and Muslim Philosophy. For over twenty years, Shaykh Arif has been at the forefront of developing and delivering advanced Islamic studies, tailored toward training students capable of addressing the needs of contemporary societies. He is also a Senior Lecturer and Researcher at Al-Mahdi, Institute, Co-director of CIMS (The Centre for Intra-Muslim Studies), and an active contributor in interfaith dialogue. He is the author and translator of many academic articles on various Islamic topics.