

The Ontological Nature of Reason in *Uṣūlī* Literature

This paper examines the ontological nature of reason (*ʿaql*) in *uṣūlī* literature, engaging with classical scholarly perspectives on its definition, essence, and epistemological status. Despite the extensive presence of hadith and philosophical discussions in Shi'i literature, *uṣūlī* works have not explored this issue in depth. By contrast, several Sunni *uṣūlī* texts dedicate sections to the subject, diverging in their conceptualisations. While some define reason as a natural faculty that distinguishes between truths, the dominant Sunni *uṣūlī* perspective regards it as a category of necessary self-evident knowledge (*ʿulūm ḍarūriyyah*), encompassing logical principles such as the impossibility of contradictions and the classification of entities as either existent or non-existent. These scholars critically engage with the question of whether reason is a *jawhar* (substance) or an *ʿaraḍ* (accidental property). Some *uṣūlīs* reject the notion of reason as a substance, arguing that all substances share fundamental similarities; if reason were a substance, all substances would possess it, which is demonstrably false. Instead, they conceptualise reason as an accidental property, specifically a form of knowledge. However, they refute the idea that reason encompasses all self-evident or acquired knowledge, as individuals may be rational without possessing them all. Many Sunni scholars also reject the inclusion of intuitive knowledge of normative good and bad (*al-ḥusn wa-al-qubh*), asserting that such knowledge is contingent upon divine injunctions. Some argue that the intended meaning of "messenger" in the verse "We would not punish until We had sent a messenger" could be reason. The paper also explores whether individuals differ in the extent of their rational faculty. Al-Juwayni, for instance, denies inherent disparities in reason, attributing variations in intelligence to experience rather than innate differences in rational capacity. Additionally, *uṣūlī* literature debates the locus of reason: while Qur'anic and hadith evidence suggest it resides in the heart, alternative perspectives locate it in the brain, citing physiological and cognitive arguments. The paper further considers the variability of reason, questioning whether it is universally distributed or subject to individual differences.



Professor Seyed Mohammad Ghari Seyed Fatemi

Al-Mahdi Institute & Mofid University

Seyed Mohammad Ghari Seyed Fatemi is Professor of Comparative Human Rights and Islamic Studies at Al-Mahdi Institute and Mofid University. He has taught at various academic institutions, including Shahid Beheshti University and the University of Birmingham. Professor Fatemi has published several monographs and numerous scholarly articles.