

The *Hujjiyyah* of Certainty in the Late Shī'ī *Uṣūl*: A Contemporary Assessment

In the late Shī'ī *uṣūl* tradition, the principle that "*qaṭ'* (certainty) is essentially *hujjah*" has played a central role in shaping discussions on the issue of *hujjiyyah*. By *qaṭ'*, *uṣūlīs* generally refer to psychological certainty—the highest degree of conviction one can achieve regarding a proposition. In this context, *hujjah* denotes a state or condition that determines blameworthiness or excusability concerning specific actions. Put very roughly, the notion that certainty is *hujjah* can be summarised in two theses:

- (H1) If a person is certain that the Divine Legislator has obligated an action, F, they are blameworthy for not performing F.
- (H2) If a person is certain that the Divine Legislator has permitted an action, F, they will not be blameworthy for performing F (i.e., they will be excused for doing F), even if F is actually prohibited by the Divine Legislator.

In many *uṣūl* texts, these two theses are accepted without imposing epistemic constraints on certainty, such as requiring that certainty be justified or non-culpably formed. However, later *uṣūl* writings have sometimes modified these theses by incorporating epistemic or quasi-epistemic qualifications to one or both theses.

Furthermore, *uṣūlīs* not only uphold the principle that certainty is *hujjah* (as articulated by H1 and H2 in their original or modified forms) but also generally endorse a second principle: the *hujjiyyah* of all other instances of *hujjah* ultimately derives from the *hujjiyyah* of certainty. This secondary principle, however, admits multiple interpretations, each of which raises its own set of issues.

In this paper, I critique the dominant view in late Shī'ī *uṣūl* regarding the *hujjiyyah* of certainty, drawing on ideas from contemporary epistemology and theories of rationality. I present two main criticisms:

As noted, the second principle can be interpreted in various ways, none of which, I argue, is tenable. Specifically, I contend that the primary source of *hujjiyyah* is not limited to doxastic states with the highest degree of conviction. For instance, drawing on the thesis held by many contemporary epistemologists that knowledge serves as a (or the) norm of practical reasoning (see, e.g., Williamson (2005), Hawthorne and Stanley (2008)), I argue that knowledge of divine obligations and permissions—even if not certain—can serve as *hujjah* in the *uṣūlī* sense, without its *hujjiyyah* deriving from that of certainty.

The unqualified versions of H1 and H2 are, I argue, unacceptable. Moreover, the modifications proposed by some *uṣūlīs* to address these shortcomings are, at best, vague and inadequate. These deficiencies necessitate a more rigorous and systematic reconsideration of the principles governing *hujjiyyah*.



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