

Establishing Rational Verbal Principles (Uṣūl-i Lafẓīyah-yi ‘Aqlī) for Deriving Supra-Conventional Meanings, Relying on the Transcendent Theosophy’s (Ḥikmat-i Muta‘āliyah) Formulation of the “Spirit of Meaning” (Rūḥ-i Ma‘nā)

Javad Fazaeli Noghani¹, Seyed Mohammad Mousavi Bayegi²,
and Mohsen Jahangiri³

1. Ph.D. Student in Islamic Philosophy and Theology (Kalām), Razavi University of Islamic Sciences, Mashhad, Iran. Email: pm.poolad@yahoo.com
2. *Corresponding Author*, Associate Professor, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Kalam, Razavi University of Islamic Sciences, Mashhad, Iran. Email: moosavi@razavi.ac.ir
3. Associate Professor, Department of Jurisprudence and Principles of Islamic Law, Razavi University of Islamic Sciences, Mashhad, Iran. Email: dr.jahangiri@razavi.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received
17 May 2025
Received in revised form
4 June 2025
Accepted
9 August 2025
Available online
22 December 2025

Keywords:

Verbal principles
(uṣūl-i lafẓīyah),
doctrines (‘aqā’id),
rational juridical
reasoning (ijtihād-i
‘aqlī),
spirit of meaning (rūḥ-i
ma‘nā)

ABSTRACT

Correct derivation (istinbāt) from Qur’ānic verses and ḥadīth traditions has long been influenced by the method of “verbal principles” (uṣūl-i lafẓīyah). However, these principles are grounded in conventional understanding (fahm-i ‘urf) and are therefore limited to deriving conventional meanings. This article asks: In deriving concepts beyond the conventional limit, can one, relying on rational analysis and a specific formulation of the “spirit of meaning” (rūḥ-i ma‘nā), arrive at a correct method? Employing a descriptive-analytical method, it examines the verbal principles, explaining the criterion of authority (mullāk-i ḥujjiyat) and the cases of reference to them, and argues that due to their reliance on conventional understanding, they are applicable only to meanings perceptible by convention (‘urf). Subsequently, the consequence of referring to these principles in verses expressing sublime themes—such as “the Hand of God” (yad Allāh) and “God’s descent among the clouds”—is examined. While explaining the absurd consequences (tawālī-i fāsid) of such reference, it is demonstrated that verbal principles cannot be relied upon for deriving sublime, supra-conventional (farā’urfī) meanings. Finally, relying on the formulation of the “spirit of meaning” by the great masters of Transcendent Theosophy (Ḥikmat-i Muta‘āliyah), the article establishes rational verbal principles (uṣūl-i lafẓīyah-yi ‘aqlī) for deriving sublime themes from verses and traditions.

Cite this article: Fazaeli Noghani, J., Mousavi Bayegi, S. M., & Jahangiri, M. (2025). Establishing Rational Verbal Principles (Uṣūl-i Lafẓīyah-yi ‘Aqlī) for Deriving Supra-Conventional Meanings, Relying on the Transcendent Theosophy’s (Ḥikmat-i Muta‘āliyah) Formulation of the “Spirit of Meaning” (Rūḥ-i Ma‘nā). *Theology Journal*, 12(2), 179-203. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pke.2025.21744.2016>.



1. Introduction

The correct understanding of Qur'ānic verses and ḥadīth traditions is among the most important domains of Islamic sciences, both in the fields of jurisprudence (fiqh) and doctrines ('aqā'id). The science of principles of jurisprudence (uṣūl al-fiqh) is responsible for providing the tools for understanding these texts. Within this science, verbal principles (uṣūl-i lafzīyah)—such as the presumption of literal meaning (aṣālat al-ẓuhūr), the presumption of generality (aṣālat al-'umūm), and the presumption of absence of qualification (aṣālat al-iṭlāq)—constitute a set of methods for derivation (istinbāt) that play a fundamental role in correctly understanding and deriving the intended meaning from Islamic texts, allowing scholars to comprehend the speaker's intended meaning based on conventional understanding (fahm-i 'urf).

However, the use of these principles in cases where religious texts address matters beyond ordinary human perception—such as the principles of doctrines—has always faced challenges. For this reason, Shī'ī scholars, especially those from the school of philosophy (ḥikmah), do not consider reliance on these principles useful for supra-material (farā-māddī) concepts outside the scope of conventional understanding. This is because the absence of any indication to the contrary (qarīnah 'alā khilāf) of the principle's requirement is a condition for the authority (ḥujjīyah) of and reliance upon these principles. Yet, the dependence of these principles on conventional understanding and their ineffectiveness in supra-material meanings constitutes itself a definitive indication (qarīnah-yi qaṭ'ī) contradicting the requirement of verbal principles.

Attributing contingent attributes (awṣāf-i imkānī) to God Almighty, describing exalted existences with material attributes, attributing disobedience to God to prophets and angels, compelling sinners by God Almighty in their disobedience—all of these are consequences of relying on these principles in matters where one cannot suffice with the limits of conventional perception but rather require rational precision.

Now that the limits of the application of verbal principles and their lack of disclosure (kāshifīyat) regarding these concepts have been clarified: Is the derivation of these meanings beyond human capacity? In confronting these concepts, should one resort to the path of metaphorical interpretation (majāz) and affirming literary devices in verses and traditions? How is it possible, while preserving the literal form (ẓāhir) of expressions, to derive their precise and correct meanings and overcome the aforementioned challenges?

The theory of the "spirit of meaning" (rūḥ-i ma'nā), as one of the most prominent philosophical theories, seeks to offer a philosophical method for understanding supra-material meanings from verses and traditions. This theory examines the meanings hidden behind words and sentences and

attempts, through reason and philosophical analysis, to achieve a deeper and more precise understanding of texts. This research argues that, relying on a specific formulation of this theory, a new path in derivation can be opened.

The present article first articulates the verbal principles, examining the cases of reliance upon them and the evidence for their authority. It then explains the ineffectiveness of these principles in supra-material meanings. In the subsequent section, by examining the formulations of the spirit of meaning by the great masters of Transcendent Theosophy (Ḥikmat-i Muta'āliyah), it presents a common denominator (qadr-i mushtarak) and a single principle from these formulations. Finally, based on this single principle, it offers a new method and new tools for derivation—verbal principles that are useful and applicable in the derivation of supra-material meanings.

2. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical method (rawish-i tawşīfi-tahlīlī). The verbal principles, their cases of reliance, their foundations of authority, and their deficiencies were examined. Using a comparative method (rawish-i taṭbīqī), four formulations—those of Mullā Şadrā, Ḥakīm Sabzawārī, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and Professor Jawādī Āmulī—were studied, and their common denominator was used as the basis for proposing the theory in this article.

The research is library-based, drawing on primary sources in Uşul al-Fiqh, Islamic philosophy, and Transcendent Theosophy.

3. Findings

According to the common denominator of the Transcendent Theosophy formulation of the theory of the spirit of meaning, the true denoted meaning (mawḍū' lahu al-ḥaqīqī) of words is "the existence of things" (wujūd al-ashyā').

On this basis, three new verbal principles (uşul-i lafzīyah-yi jadīd) were derived:

3.1. Rational Presumption of Literal Meaning (Aşālat al-Ḥaqīqah al-'Aqlīyah)

After establishing that the denoted meaning of words is the existence of a thing (wujūd al-shay'), according to rational analysis, the use of a word in this meaning will be literal (ḥaqīqah) rather than metaphorical (majāz). It must be noted that using a word for an existence restricted by material constraints is not metaphorical; rather, the used-in meaning (musta'mal fīh) is restricted. The requirement of the rational presumption of literal meaning is that, in the absence of any indication to the contrary regarding the speaker's intent, the same literal meaning—the existence of the thing—is intended.

3.2. Rational Presumption of Absence of Qualification (Aṣālat al-Itlāq al-‘Aqlīyah)

According to this principle, if doubt arises as to whether the speaker's intended meaning is restricted by a qualification external to the denoted meaning (i.e., external to reality/existence), the presumption of absence of qualification rules that such a qualification is not a factor in the speaker's intent.

3.3. Rational Presumption of Apparent Meaning (Aṣālat al-Zuhūr al-‘Aqlīyah)

According to this principle, the meaning that is apparent to reason is the speaker's intended meaning, and intending a meaning contrary to this requires an indication. This is because attributing conventional meanings to words in expressions that contain rational knowledge has multiple absurd consequences (tawālī-i fāsīd).

The foundational principle underlying these three principles is the presumption of absence of qualification (aṣālat al-itlāq), as the basis for the other two principles is the non-restriction of the denoted meaning by material and essential (māhīyawī) constraints.

4. Conclusion

The precise derivation of rational concepts from Qur’ānic verses and ḥadīth traditions is the foundation for the formation of correct belief (i’ tiqād-i ṣaḥīḥ). Misunderstanding or hesitation in understanding these concepts leads to the formation of false beliefs, and more dangerously, to the attribution of these beliefs to religious texts. In this regard, providing a systematic tool grounded in rational evidence for the aforementioned derivation is the achievement of this research.

In this research, by taking as the criterion the formulation of the theory of the spirit of meaning in Transcendent Theosophy, the true denoted meaning of words was identified as "the existence of things," and three verbal principles were presented as tools for derivation and rational juridical reasoning (ijtihād) concerning sublime concepts from verses and traditions. These principles are not merely an interpretive foundation or a general theory like the spirit of meaning. Rather, they are a practical method for reviving ijtiḥād in a significant portion of verses and traditions.

The achievements of this research include:

Codification of a theoretical and specific framework for ijtiḥād in doctrinal sources, opening the door to principles for deriving doctrines just as there are principles for deriving jurisprudential rulings;

Revival of ijtiḥād in doctrinal texts in place of mere interpretation (tafṣīr) or hermeneutical interpretation (ta’wīl);

Attaining knowledge of sublime themes—such as the attributes and actions of God, the states of angels, and the descriptions of Paradise and Hell—through the aforementioned ijtiḥād;

Demonstrating the principles of doctrines not by presenting purely rational proofs nor by dry literalism (zāhirgarāyī), but rather through correct understanding and derivation from religious texts in accordance with reality;

Resolving the conflict between reason and the apparent meaning of certain religious propositions based on a correct understanding of texts, without needing to disregard the apparent meaning of transmitted reports or abandon what reason requires.

Declarations

Authors' Contributions: All three authors participated equally in the conception, research execution, and preparation of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: No acknowledgments are offered.

Ethical Considerations: The research was carried out ethically and all authors confirm that ethical standards were met.

Funding: The research was conducted without any specific financial support.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies Statement: No AI tools were utilized in the creation of this text.