

The Center for Middle East Studies and the King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud Chair in Islamic Studies present:

## Underdetermination in Late Ḥanafī Legal Theories



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**Monday, April 9**  
**5:00 pm**  
**HSSB 4080**

This paper argues that Ḥanafī *uṣūlīs* of the latter phases of the postclassical period understood *uṣūl* to be universal propositions that were underdetermined with respect to their evidentiary bases. Though the purpose of such propositions was to confer actionable certainty to particular legal effects, the later tradition imagined the charge of *uṣūl* on a meta-theoretic level, i.e., to determine how such propositions could themselves be suitably grounded. In casting the discourse within the framework of naturalized technical methods and distinctions from the fields of logic and philosophy, the tradition generally granted the relational and systemic validity of any given proposition in terms of the grounding it received from another underdetermined proposition. *Uṣūl*, therefore, are best imagined as systemically valid, but individually underdetermined. In such cases, the application of the attribute of relational validity to them or to the effects for which they are serviceable is more apt.

**Asad Q. Ahmed**, associate professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, is a social and intellectual historian with a specialized focus on Muslim South Asia. He is the author of *The Religious Elite of the Early Islamic Hijaz*, *Avicenna's Deliverance*, and of the forthcoming *Palimpsests of Themselves: Philosophical Commentaries in Postclassical Islam*. He has written several articles and co-edited collected volumes in the fields of Islamic history, philosophy in the Islamic world, and Muslim legal theories.



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