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A Pathological Analysis of the Jurisprudential Marginalization of Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil with Emphasis on the Transformation of the Foundations of Authority in Imam Khomeini's Thought

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ABSTRACT

Despite its foundational status in Islamic teachings, the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil has, in the course of jurisprudential developments, been subject to a form of structural marginalization and individualistic readings. The present study aims to provide a jurisprudential pathology of this obligation, with a particular focus on the views of Imam Khomeini, seeking to answer the question of which factors have led to the restriction of this religious duty at the level of implementation and what solutions may enable its revival. The findings of the study, developed through a descriptive–analytical method, indicate that “instability in the theoretical foundations of the authority of the non-infallible jurist during the Occultation” and “ambiguity regarding the nature of governmental rulings” constitute two of the most significant challenges confronting the practical (manual) and executive level of this obligation. Moreover, situating this discussion within the jurisprudential chapters of jihad and hudud in Imami jurisprudence has tied its applicability to the expansion of the jurist's authority, leading in certain historical periods to its effective eclipse. In contrast, Imam Khomeini, through redefining the foundations of the absolute authority of the jurist (wilayat al-faqih al-mutlaqa) and emphasizing the non-requirement of the “probability of effectiveness” when confronting innovations and large-scale social harms, elevated this obligation from a fragile, discretionary duty to a governmental and institutional necessity, thereby facilitating the revival of its socio-political dimensions.

Keywords: *Enjoining good and forbidding evil; jurisprudential pathology; Imam Khomeini; authority of the jurist (wilayat al-faqih); governmental rulings; practical (manual) level.*

Introduction

The obligation of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* occupies a central position in the epistemic system of Islam as the “foundation of the continuity of religious obligations” and a fundamental pillar of social reform. Nevertheless, an examination of jurisprudential developments indicates that this divine duty has consistently faced various forms of marginalization and restriction at both the levels of legal derivation and implementation. The roots of this



phenomenon must be sought in foundational challenges encountered by jurists when confronting the issues of “power” and “governance of society” during the era of Occultation. One of the most serious problems in this domain is ambiguity concerning the scope of authority of a non-infallible ruler and, consequently, instability regarding the obligation to obey governmental rulings. This ambiguity has led to the marginalization of the *manual (executive)* level of this obligation—which necessarily entails the exercise of authority—in favor of the internal (heart-based) and verbal levels throughout many periods of Imami jurisprudence.

By contrast, diversity in the positioning of this obligation among Sunni jurists has prevented its complete marginalization in the history of Sunni jurisprudence. On the one hand, al-Mawardi places it alongside acts of worship such as prayer and pilgrimage and considers it a general obligation; on the other hand, al-Ghazali situates it within the “Quarter of Customs,” emphasizing its role in political reform and advising rulers (1). Likewise, Ibn Taymiyyah regards the establishment of this obligation as the direct responsibility of political authority (2), while more recent thinkers such as Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh view the proper realization of this duty as contingent upon the existence of a just government (2).

This comparison demonstrates that in Imami jurisprudence, the inseparable linkage between the execution of this obligation and the presence of an infallible authority or the full authority (*bast al-yad*) of the jurist created a historical vacuum in the governmental sphere. Within this context, the thought of Imam Khomeini represents a decisive turning point. By articulating the theory of the *absolute authority of the jurist (wilayat al-faqih al-mutlaqa)* and reinterpreting the relationship between jurisprudence and governance, he sought to repair this historical rupture. Moving beyond individualistic and discretionary approaches, Imam Khomeini reconceptualized enjoining good as a “governmental necessity” and an instrument for preserving the Islamic system and confronting innovations. Accordingly, this article aims, through a pathological examination of prior jurisprudential obstacles, to explain how Imam Khomeini’s jurisprudential foundations resolved the executive impasses surrounding this obligation and removed it from marginalization. The main research question is therefore: what structural jurisprudential deficiencies led to the marginalization of the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil, and how did Imam Khomeini’s thought overcome this blockage?

The Concept of Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil

The term *enjoining good and forbidding evil*, like many key jurisprudential concepts, possesses two interconnected levels of meaning: lexical and technical. In its lexical sense, *good (ma’ruf)* derives from the root ‘*urf*, meaning that which is recognized, virtuous, and commendable—something with which sound human nature is familiar and finds tranquility. In contrast, *evil (munkar)* derives from *inkar* and *nukr*, denoting that which is unfamiliar, reprehensible, and rejected by both reason and the Sharia (3).

In technical usage, *good* refers to any commendable act whose desirability is affirmed by reason or the Sharia, while *evil* denotes any blameworthy act rejected by both reason and the Sharia. A critical issue in the pathological analysis of this concept is the dependence of some of its instances on cultural context and social perception. Although certain evils are universally condemned across cultures, identifying many religious instances requires precise clarification. Therefore, at the level of implementation, a distinction must be made between “obstinate persistence in sin” and “deficiency in recognition,” since, according to jurisprudential principles, those who have not been negligent in recognizing good and evil and do not disobey out of obstinacy (*jahil qasir*) are excused before God (4).

Nevertheless, what constitutes a foundational innovation in Imam Khomeini's conceptualization of this obligation is his departure from confining good and evil to the narrow sphere of individual moral sins. By elevating the concept to the governmental level, he identifies "preserving the Islamic system" as the highest good and regards any action aimed at "undermining the foundations of Islamic society" or introducing "innovation in religion" as the greatest evil. Within this transformative framework, good and evil become intertwined with the notion of public interest (*maslahah 'ammah*), such that obedience to the enacted laws of the Islamic system—when oriented toward safeguarding societal interests—emerges as one of the most prominent instances of good. This reconceptualization constitutes the first step in removing the obligation from jurisprudential isolation and integrating it into a framework of structural and institutional pathology.

Structural Pathology: Instability in the Foundations of Authority and the Crisis of Legitimacy during the Occultation

One of the fundamental challenges leading to the marginalization of the governmental dimension of enjoining good in Imami jurisprudence is ambiguity regarding the scope of authority of the non-infallible ruler and, consequently, instability concerning the obligation to obey governmental rulings. A survey of jurisprudential opinions reveals that in many periods, disobedience to the commands of the ruler (*wali al-faqih*) was not, in itself, considered a religious sin, except in specific cases where such disobedience was accompanied by secondary titles. This approach has inflicted three major forms of damage on the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil.

First, the conditionalization of obedience upon customary perception. According to this view, obedience to the command of a non-infallible ruler becomes obligatory only when, in customary understanding, disobedience to him is regarded as disobedience to the Prophet or an infallible Imam. This dependence on customary judgment transforms the "sovereign" nature of the obligation into an abstract and fluid matter. Although Qur'anic verses and narrations clearly establish the religious obligation to obey the Prophet and his infallible successors, extending this obligation to non-infallible deputies has faced serious theological and jurisprudential challenges. The fundamental question is whether disobedience to the directives of officials such as Malik al-Ashtar also constitutes a religious sin. While such disobedience is deemed impermissible, its sinful nature cannot be readily inferred from the evidences concerning the infallible Imams and requires recourse to additional proofs (5).

Second, the reduction of sovereign authority to merely advisory commands. Another problem lies in restricting the binding force of the ruler's command to guidance toward an already established religious ruling. Under this interpretation, if the jurist issues an order for jihad or defense, obedience becomes obligatory not because of his independent authority, but because the command merely guides toward a definitive divine obligation, such as defending Islam. This reading reduces the role of the jurist from an autonomous holder of authority to a mere guide. In such a framework, enjoining good is transformed into a purely ethical duty, and its governmental function in reforming social structures and enforcing legal compliance is significantly weakened (6).

Third, the confinement of obedience to the rule of "disruption of order." Perhaps the most serious jurisprudential problem is linking the obligation to observe laws solely to the prohibition of social disorder. According to this approach, violating the laws of an Islamic government is not sinful in itself unless the scale of violations reaches a level that results in the collapse of social order. This cautious perspective deprives forbidding evil of its preventive power and confines it to exceptional and crisis situations.

In opposition to this jurisprudential stagnation, Imam Khomeini, through articulating the theory of the absolute authority of the jurist, repaired the rupture between "religious ruling" and "governmental law." By grounding the

obligation of obedience to the ruler in divine authority, he considered disobedience to enacted laws—when formulated in accordance with public interests—to constitute a religious sin and an instance of committing evil. From his perspective, the ruler's authority in implementing the *manual* level of enjoining good is not an emergency measure, but a permanent necessity for preserving the integrity of Islam.

Pathology of the Jurisprudential Placement of the Obligation and Its Consequences for Social Function

One of the serious problems that has led to the restriction of the scope of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* in Imami jurisprudence concerns the manner in which this obligation has been positioned and classified within juridical works. The placement of a ruling within the structure of jurisprudence is not merely a formal matter; rather, it reflects the jurist's understanding of its *nature* and the *conditions of its implementation*.

1. The Sunni Jurisprudential Approach: Diversity across Devotional and Social Domains

In Sunni jurisprudence, diversity in the positioning of this obligation has prevented its complete marginalization throughout history. The placement of this discussion alongside acts of worship such as prayer and pilgrimage by jurists such as al-Mawardi underscores its character as a “general obligation.” Likewise, al-Ghazali's approach in situating it within the “Quarter of Customs” redefines this obligation as an influential institution for regulating social behavior and offering counsel to rulers (1). This structural diversity enabled *enjoining good* in Sunni jurisprudence to simultaneously preserve ethical, social, and governmental dimensions.

2. The Imami Jurisprudential Approach: Emphasis on the Governmental Sphere and the Impasse of the Occultation

By contrast, Imami jurisprudence has traditionally placed this obligation alongside *jihad* and *hudud*. Although this classification reflects the strength and gravity of the ruling, it produced a major practical problem at the level of implementation. This is because, in dominant jurisprudential thought, the execution of *jihad* and *hudud* is inseparably linked to the presence of an infallible Imam or the full authority (*bast al-yad*) of the jurist as a general deputy. This structural linkage resulted in the eclipse of the social and political dimensions of this obligation during long periods of the Occultation, owing to the absence of governing conditions, in favor of its individual and ethical levels.

In Imami jurisprudential sources, some jurists placed this discussion after the Book of *Jihad* and alongside it, thereby situating it at the end of the section on acts of worship—where *jihad* itself is regarded as a form of worship with broad social impact, often described as political worship (3).

Shaykh al-Tusi, in *al-Nihayah*, discusses *enjoining good and forbidding evil* immediately after the chapter on *jihad*, while jurists such as the First Martyr (*al-Shahid al-Awwal*) in *al-Lum'ah al-Dimashqiyyah* designate it as the fifth chapter of the Book of *Jihad*. Shaykh al-Mufid, in *al-Muqni'ah*, presents the chapter on enjoining good as an appendix to the Book of *Hudud*. These arrangements effectively directed the dominant understanding toward linking the *manual* (*executive*) level—the most crucial instrument for realizing this obligation—to the authority of governance, the enforcement of *hudud*, and judicial power.

Shaykh al-Mufid, in his jurisprudential work *al-Muqni'ah*, opens a chapter appended to the Book of *Hudud* under the title “The Book of Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil and the Establishment of *Hudud*.” At the same time, he maintains that if the individual who enjoins and forbids possesses sufficient competence and does not perceive social conditions as dangerous for such action, that individual may be entrusted with carrying out this obligation (7).

Shaykh al-Tusi, in *al-Nihayah*, places the discussion of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* after jihad. Muhaqqiq al-Hilli and 'Allamah al-Hilli position this book at the conclusion of the discussions on acts of worship. During the Safavid era, the opening of the sphere of governance led to an expansion of discussions on this obligation, including independent treatises such as those attributed to Muhaqqiq al-Karaki (3).

Al-Shahid al-Awwal, in *al-Lum'ah*, divides the Book of Jihad into five chapters, dedicating the fifth chapter to *enjoining good*. In effect, he treats enjoining good as an integral part of jihad rather than a topic subsequent to it. In this same section, he addresses the establishment of hudud by jurists during the Occultation and issues a permissive ruling, stating that jurists may establish hudud in the absence of harm, and he further attaches judicial authority to this role and deems recourse to them obligatory. This perspective—often described as a form of “government in the shadows”—represents an effort to preserve the governmental functions of this obligation even during the Occultation (8).

The reality of this approach amounts to the formation of a shadow state and a kind of passive resistance to unjust rule. Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, in *Sharayi' al-Islam*, likewise discusses the establishment of hudud by jurists at the conclusion of the Book of Enjoining Good, reaffirming the social and governmental dimension inherent in this institution (3).

The continuity of these discussions indicates the deeply social and governmental character embedded in the very nature of *enjoining good and forbidding evil*. However, this structural dependence meant that throughout periods lacking a Shi'i government, the conditions for implementing jihad and hudud were unavailable. Consequently, the obligation of enjoining good—particularly at the *manual* level—was effectively removed from societal reach and reduced to minimal verbal and internal forms.

Recognizing this structural deficiency, Imam Khomeini redefined this obligation by releasing it from confinement within chapters tied to the “necessities of the era of presence” and recasting it as a *permanent governmental obligation*. From his perspective, *enjoining good* is not merely a ruling adjacent to jihad, but rather the very foundation of establishing and safeguarding governance. By emphasizing that “preserving the system is among the most obligatory of duties,” he elevated this obligation from a fragile responsibility during the Occultation to the principal pillar of stability in Islamic society (5, 9).

Pathological Analysis of the Condition of “Probability of Effectiveness”: From an Obstacle to Obligation to an Instrument for the Preservation of Religion

In jurisprudential chapters, one of the conditions for the obligation of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* is identified as the “probability of effectiveness.” This means that if a person believes that his words or actions will have no effect on the wrongdoer, the obligation is lifted from him. Although this condition appears rational at first glance, particular readings of it throughout the history of jurisprudence have produced serious social pathologies.

Transformation of the Obligation into Individual Precautionary Measures

The first pathology lies in the fact that conditioning the obligation upon the “probability of effectiveness” has, in many instances, become a pretext for complacency and the suspension of public oversight. When the assessment of effectiveness is delegated to the individual's personal conjecture, especially under authoritarian systems or within societies suffering from deep structural deviations, the predominance of the presumption of ineffectiveness

effectively renders the obligation nonfunctional. As a result, *enjoining good* became confined to minor admonitions in individual matters and was prevented from playing a reformative role in macro-level structures.

Imam Khomeini's Innovation: Distinguishing between "Minor Corruptions" and "Major Innovations"

Imam Khomeini, adopting a pathological and reform-oriented approach, resolved the impasse generated by the condition of probability of effectiveness at critical junctures in religious life. In *Tahrir al-Wasilah*, he draws a clear distinction between two domains:

- a) **Minor and individual matters**, in which the condition of probability of effectiveness remains applicable.
- b) **Foundational and destiny-shaping matters**, in which Imam Khomeini maintains that if the very essence of Islam is endangered or if an innovation is introduced into religion that leads to the misguidance of the public, the condition of "probability of effectiveness" is waived. He explicitly states that when confronting threats that imperil the foundations of Islam, even if one knows that his statement will not produce immediate effect, *protest* and *the expression of disapproval* remain obligatory so that truth is not concealed (9).

In discussions concerning the source and rationale of the obligation of *enjoining good and forbidding evil*, jurists have articulated two well-known views, each grounded in distinct theoretical premises. The first view is associated primarily with early jurists. According to this perspective, the obligation of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* is a transmitted (*sam'i*) obligation, meaning that its binding force is derived directly from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Proponents of this view hold that the scriptural texts are sufficiently explicit and authoritative, rendering recourse to an independent rational proof unnecessary (10, 11).

By contrast, the second view is predominantly advanced by later and contemporary jurists. This group argues that the obligation of this duty is fundamentally rational (*'aqli*). From this standpoint, independent practical reason—given the necessity of preserving social order, combating corruption, and preventing the collapse of values—judges *enjoining good and forbidding evil* to be obligatory in itself, even if transmitted texts also confirm it. In their view, rational proof alone suffices and does not require an additional independent scriptural foundation (6, 9).

In summary, earlier jurists tended to prioritize transmitted texts over reason and thus characterized the obligation as *sam'i*, whereas later jurists, by emphasizing the role of practical reason and overarching social principles, identified it as *'aqli*. Nevertheless, both groups are unanimous regarding the أصل obligation of this duty.

It should be noted that some have claimed this disagreement to be devoid of practical consequences; however, this assessment is inaccurate, as the distinction yields several important implications. For instance, if the obligation of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* is considered rational, one may prevent prospective wrongs—even before they occur and in the absence of explicit transmitted evidence—by appealing to rational obligation.

For this reason, Imam Khomeini regarded *avoiding evil* as obligatory in the same manner as *removing evil*. In his view, the criterion for the "obligation to abandon evil" and the "obligation to forbid evil" is rationally identical. Just as a person is obliged to refrain from sin, he is also obliged to prevent others from committing sin, because the Lawgiver is neither satisfied with the occurrence of evil nor with its perpetration (6).

If the obligation of this duty is rational, transmitted evidences function as endorsements of the rational judgment and as emphatic confirmations of its binding nature. Moreover, if transmitted proofs—due to the condition of probability of effectiveness—fail to establish the obligation of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* in certain cases, rational proof can nonetheless affirm it, since reason deems command and prohibition obligatory whenever they serve the purpose of preserving order and preventing corruption.

Accordingly, whether this obligation is classified as rational or transmitted entails distinct theoretical and practical consequences, rendering attention to this distinction both necessary and beneficial.

The Link with the Principles of “Negation of Domination” and “Preservation of the System”

From Imam Khomeini’s perspective, silence in the face of major injustices under the pretext of ineffectiveness constitutes the greatest form of evil, as it reinforces the camp of falsehood and undermines religion itself. By invoking the paradigm of Imam al-Husayn, he demonstrates that effectiveness may sometimes be realized in the long term—through martyrdom and disclosure—rather than through immediate behavioral change on the part of the oppressor. This perspective transformed the obligation from a fragile and conditional duty into an *absolute* responsibility in the face of grave deviations.

Beyond structural obstacles, one of the most serious pathologies arising from traditional readings is the dominance of *relativism in assessing effectiveness* over this obligation. Because jurisprudential texts often delegated the determination of effectiveness to the individual’s personal conjecture, this condition effectively opened the door to subjective approaches and complacent interpretations. In sensitive political contexts and confrontations with structural wrongs, many duty-bearers—and even elites—exempted themselves from responsibility by invoking the absence of immediate effectiveness. This relativism led to a form of *voluntary suspension* in the face of major governmental corruptions, as the atmosphere of fear or the overwhelming power of unjust authority consistently reinforced the presumption of ineffectiveness in the mind of the obligated individual. Consequently, an obligation intended to safeguard the health of the social order became confined within the labyrinth of individual judgments and lost its supervisory function at critical historical moments. Recognizing this impasse, Imam Khomeini invalidated the authority of such unstable personal conjecture in destiny-shaping matters by declaring the obligation to be absolute in confronting *innovations* and *grave corruptions* (5).

Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil in Imam Khomeini’s View

In *Tahrir al-Wasilah*, Imam Khomeini addresses the discussion of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* through an approach that is highly significant and clearly distinct from what is found in many other jurisprudential works. Before analyzing the content of this discussion, noting several preliminary points is useful.

On the one hand, Ayatollah Abu al-Hasan al-Isfahani, in his jurisprudential work *Wasilat al-Najat*, does not present any discussion of *enjoining good and forbidding evil*. By contrast, Imam Khomeini gives special attention to this topic in *Tahrir al-Wasilah* and sets out its issues and subsidiary rulings in considerable detail (9). Despite the exceptional importance of this obligation, it has remained so neglected and marginalized over the past centuries that in many jurisprudential texts not only is there no dedicated discussion of it, but it is not even treated as a noteworthy legal question. After the subject was addressed in *Jawahir al-Kalam* and *Jami’-i ‘Abbasi* (by Shaykh Baha’i), it was in practice removed from most juridical works. Among demonstrative (*istidlali*) texts, it survives only in a limited number of cases, such as *Tabsirat al-Muta’allimin* by al-‘Allamah al-Hilli and *Jami’ al-Madarik* by Ayatollah Sayyid Ahmad Khwansari, who devoted the final chapter—within his commentary on *Shara’i’ al-Islam*—to *enjoining good and forbidding evil*. Among fatwa-oriented works, it can be found in texts such as *Minhaj al-Salihin* by Ayatollah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim, or in certain marginal commentaries—such as Mulla Ahmad Naraqī’s marginalia on *al-Rawdah al-Bahiyyah*—yet in most juridical works it is not mentioned.

Neglect of *enjoining good and forbidding evil*—and the causes of its omission—is an independent topic that merits detailed study; however, several possibilities may be summarized.

First, this obligation is exceptionally demanding and difficult—particularly when its addressees are holders of power—and because neither the public nor scholars have consistently shown sufficient readiness to enter such a domain, the duty was gradually set aside in juridical writing. In this regard, the view attributed to Fayz Kashani is noteworthy: he maintains that commanding and forbidding in relation to kings and rulers exposes the person to hardship and danger, and that scriptural texts recommend avoiding those whom it is beyond one's capacity to command or forbid. He also views certain historical examples of confronting political power—at times attributed to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali—as the product of “the folly of ambitious individuals” who, imagining they were seeking martyrdom, issued commands and prohibitions recklessly and thereby caused difficulties for themselves and others (1).

Second, the delay or removal of this discussion from juridical works may have resulted from factors such as “fear of harm,” “lack of apparent benefit,” or the belief that this issue was not among the practical concerns of ordinary people. This, in turn, contributed to the gradual disappearance of the obligation from jurisprudential texts.

Third, because this obligation is directly connected to the conduct of rulers and power-holders, addressing it in juridical works—especially those accessible to the public—could at times provoke sensitivity or generate threats from political authorities, and this appears to have been another reason for marginalizing the discussion.

Ultimately, the spread of cultural Westernization and the popular perception that this obligation amounts to interference in others' private lives led first the public, and later some jurists, to become indifferent to it, and thus this divine command was increasingly forgotten.

Fourth, some Shi'i jurists, rather than treating *enjoining good and forbidding evil* exclusively within juridical works, addressed it in their ethical writings and, within moral discussions, also referred to certain jurisprudential rulings relevant to the topic. Among such works are *al-Mahajjah al-Bayda' fi Tahdhib al-Ihya'* (attributed to Fayz Kashani), *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* by al-Ghazali (1), *Jami' al-Sa'adat* by Mulla Mahdi Naraq, *Mi'raj al-Sa'adah* by Mulla Ahmad Naraq, and *Kashf al-Ghita'*.

Imam Khomeini also speaks about the importance of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* in *Tahrir al-Wasilah* as well as in his ethical and mystical works; however, he differs in that he stresses employing effective methods and—by reference to the Qur'anic command instructing Moses and Aaron to speak gently to Pharaoh—insists on compassion and kindness in fulfilling this divine obligation (9).

An example of Imam Khomeini's formulation is as follows.

In the matter of *enjoining good and forbidding evil*, one of the most important considerations is “forbearance.” It is possible that if a person deals harshly with someone who commits a sin or abandons an obligation, that individual may turn away from the path of truth and, from minor slips, be drawn into major sins or even disbelief. Commanding and forbidding are bitter and unpleasant for people and can provoke anger and agitation. It is therefore necessary for the one who enjoins good and forbids evil to compensate for this bitterness through good character, so that the heart of the sinner may soften.

Imam Khomeini emphasizes in his jurisprudential writings that the one who enjoins and forbids should act like a compassionate physician or a kind father who, out of sincere benevolence, engages the one who abandons good or commits evil. He also stresses that people must, in commanding and forbidding, consider only God's pleasure, purify their act from ostentation and self-superiority, cleanse themselves of sin, and not regard themselves as

superior to the wrongdoer—because it is possible that the other person, despite committing several major sins, may possess qualities pleasing to God (9).

A review of Imam Khomeini's treatment of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* in *Tahrir al-Wasilah* shows that, contrary to the common pattern in jurisprudential texts—where authors typically discuss the Qur'anic verses and narrations on the virtue of commanding and forbidding, define *ma'ruf* and *munkar*, and explain whether the obligation is legal or rational, individual or collective—he proposes a new perspective and method. In this study, the same new points are presented, and repetition of well-known conventional discussions has been avoided.

Observing the Principle of “More Important and Less Important”

The first noteworthy point in Imam Khomeini's discussion of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* in *Tahrir al-Wasilah* is the necessity of observing the principle of prioritization—commonly expressed as the rule of “the more important and the less important.” The instances in which Imam Khomeini applies this rule include the following.

First Basis: Probability of Effectiveness

Whereas jurists generally consider the condition of “probability of effectiveness” necessary for the obligation of commanding and forbidding—and regard the duty as waived where such probability is absent—Imam Khomeini repeatedly emphasizes the prioritization rule within this very discussion. For example:

If a person is affected by two sins—such as abandoning prayer and abandoning fasting—the duty of the one who forbids evil is to apply the prioritization rule and forbid the more serious sin (9).

If the one who forbids knows that commanding and forbidding will be effective only if he permits the commission of one sin, he must carefully compare the sin being permitted with the sin he seeks to eliminate. If permitting a minor sin results in abandoning a major sin, this is permissible; otherwise, it is not.

If commanding and forbidding will be effective only if a person abandons an obligation or commits a prohibition, then, in ordinary circumstances, commanding and forbidding are not permissible and the duty is waived—unless abandoning that obligation or committing that prohibition is necessary to prevent a greater sin. In short, observing the rule of prioritization is necessary.

If the good or evil at issue relates to matters to which the Lawgiver attaches special importance—such as safeguarding the lives of a group of Muslims, protecting their honor, preventing widespread misguidance among Muslims, or preventing the destruction of Islamic symbols—then observing the rule of prioritization becomes obligatory.

The mere existence of harm—whether bodily harm or otherwise—does not automatically remove the obligation. Therefore, if ending people's misguidance and establishing God's proof depends upon putting one's life at risk, that act becomes obligatory.

It is noteworthy that the author of *Jawahir al-Kalam* (Shaykh Muhammad Husayn al-Najafi), unlike Shaykh al-Hurr al-'Amili, does not consider bearing harm in this domain to be recommended; rather, in such a case, he deems it prohibited (11).

The Imams consistently recommended—directly and indirectly—observing priorities and preferential criteria. Several examples are noted here.

“When two sanctities conflict, the lesser is set aside for the greater.” The attribution of this sentence as a hadith is doubtful, even though it enjoys widespread acceptance.

It is reported from 'Ali ibn al-Husayn that "when an obligation and a recommendation coincide, one begins with the obligation: 'If a Sunnah and an obligation coincide, one begins with the obligation'" (8, 12).

It is also reported from Imam 'Ali that "if supererogatory acts harm obligatory acts, abandon the supererogatory: 'If supererogatory acts harm obligations, reject them'" (12, 13).

Second Basis: The Relationship between Scholars and Tyrannical Governments

In several jurisprudential subsidiary rulings, Imam Khomeini, when examining the relationship between scholars and oppressive governments, likewise emphasizes the necessity of observing the rule of prioritization (*the more important and the less important*). He states that if refusing the gifts of tyrannical rulers results in an increase in their oppression or deprives scholars of the ability to forbid evil and pursue reform, then rejecting such gifts is not obligatory. However, if accepting gifts may contribute to reducing oppression, observing the rule of prioritization becomes obligatory.

What Imam Khomeini intends is that despite the inherent corruption involved in accepting gifts from unjust rulers, if it is reasonably assumed that acceptance may prevent the expansion of oppression, a comparison must be made between these two situations, and the option that entails greater public interest should be chosen.

However, if accepting gifts leads to an increase in oppression or the spread of innovation in religion, accepting them is prohibited. If there is merely a possibility of such corrupt consequences, rejecting the gift is a matter of precaution. Yet, if rejecting the gift results in a more severe corruption, then a comparative assessment between the two harms must be undertaken, and the lesser harm should be chosen (9).

The Dual Responsibility of Scholars

Another significant point in the discussion of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* concerns the special responsibility of scholars in the face of the spread of evils within Islamic society. Because Imam Khomeini's outlook extended far beyond that of many of his contemporaries, he paid particular attention to major and dangerous evils—those capable of threatening religion and the Islamic community.

In his advanced jurisprudential lectures, while discussing the Qur'anic verse "*Why do the rabbis and scholars not forbid them...*" and the expression "*devouring the unlawful*" (*akl al-suht*)—which Imam al-Husayn invoked when addressing the scholars of his time—Imam Khomeini explains:

Some individuals' intellectual horizons extend no further than the mosque. When "*devouring the unlawful*" is mentioned, they imagine only a shopkeeper who cheats in weights and measures. They fail to recognize those who swallow vast fortunes; who consume the public treasury; who sell the country's oil; who create inflation under the guise of foreign companies; who channel people's wealth into the pockets of foreign capitalists; who sell oil to several corrupt governments for personal gain; and who even seize what little remains for the people through deception. These represent the greatest and most terrifying form of *devouring the unlawful*, and this, indeed, constitutes the greatest evil (5).

On this basis, Imam Khomeini applied the obligation of forbidding evil and combating innovation against the Pahlavi regime during the Islamic movement of the Iranian people. He made this obligation one of the jurisprudential foundations of the Revolution, just as Imam al-Husayn grounded his uprising in this very duty when he declared: "*I seek to enjoin good and forbid evil and to act according to the conduct of my grandfather and my father, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.*"

In response to a journalist from *The Times*, Imam Khomeini stated:

“This Shah is the very person who, through lies and various pretexts, has distorted God’s religion and sought to impose his satanic desires upon the oppressed people of Iran in the name of Islamic laws, thereby reversing truth and falsehood. It is obligatory upon religious scholars to reveal his true face to the people of the world” (5).

In the field of legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*), the *practice and conduct of rational agents* (*bina’ al-‘uqala’*) occupies a central role in major discussions. The principal basis for the probative force of the jurisprudential–rational rule of prioritization (*the more important over the less important*) is precisely this rational practice, which the Sacred Law has endorsed. That is, rational agents—regardless of race, religion, or cultural and environmental conditions—when faced with conflicting duties, give precedence to the more important over the less important in the context of compliance. According to some legal theorists, including Imam Khomeini, even knowledge that rational agents will adopt such a practice in the future suffices to establish its probative authority, enabling the derivation of a legal ruling from it (6).

Moreover, customary understanding (*‘urf*)—in addition to serving as a reference for identifying subjects and their instances—can itself establish a practice which, once endorsed by the Law, becomes a means of discovering a legal ruling. Thus, when two conflicting rulings are presented to common understanding, once relative importance is recognized, precedence is given to the more important, a process referred to as *customary prioritization*. Imam Khomeini, in discussing similar rational–legal principles such as the rule of appropriation (*hiyazah*), writes that the practice of rational agents throughout human civilization has been to recognize ownership through revival and appropriation, and that none of the prophets, saints, or believers ever denied this practice (6). Likewise, the necessity of prioritizing the more important over the less important has been a consistent practice of rational agents since the dawn of civilization, and any disagreement in this regard arises from differences in identifying instances of importance and lesser importance, rooted in divergent worldviews and ideologies.

From Imam Khomeini’s perspective, scholars bear two fundamental responsibilities along this path.

Practicing Good and Abstaining from Evil

The first responsibility of scholars is to embody good in practice and to abstain from evil. Imam Khomeini states:

“If it is probable that the disengagement of religious scholars and leaders of the faith from tyrants and unjust rulers will have an effect upon them—even to the extent of reducing their oppression—then disengagement becomes obligatory. If, however, association and interaction with them leads to a reduction in their oppression, then the rule of prioritization must be observed and the more important option chosen. If association with them involves no such risk, nor any likelihood that it would enhance their power, embolden them to violate divine sanctities, or undermine the dignity of scholarship and the clergy or cause public suspicion toward religious scholars, then association for this purpose becomes obligatory.

If interaction between religious scholars and unjust rulers entails no benefit that must be observed, then it is impermissible—especially if such interaction leads people to suspect that scholars approve of the rulers’ actions.

If it is probable that refusing the gifts of tyrants and unjust rulers will reduce oppression or diminish their audacity in pursuing innovations, then refusing such gifts is obligatory and accepting them is impermissible. If the opposite is probable, then the dimensions of importance and lesser importance must be determined, and the more important must be observed, as previously explained” (9).

The significance of this issue is such that some jurists have interpreted the *manual level of enjoining good* in precisely this sense. Shaykh al-Tusi initially rejects this interpretation and then clarifies the correct meaning by stating: “*Enjoining good is sometimes by hand and sometimes by tongue. As for by hand, it is to perform good*

oneself so that others may emulate it; and as for by tongue, it is to invite others to it.” In other words, *enjoining good by hand* consists in personally performing good and avoiding evil so that people may follow one’s example (8). Ibn Barraj al-Trabulsi subsequently reiterates this interpretation.

Fadil al-Miqdad likewise considers this interpretation among those that regard *manual enjoining and forbidding* as the *first level* of this obligation—meaning that the process of commanding and forbidding must begin with the individual himself, inviting others through the performance of good and the abandonment of evil (14).

Confronting Innovations (*Bid’ah*)

The second responsibility of scholars is resistance against evils and innovations that threaten the very foundations of religion. Imam Khomeini emphasizes a crucial point here: from his perspective, *combating innovation* is not subject to the general conditions of *enjoining good and forbidding evil*; rather, it constitutes an independent and absolute duty incumbent upon scholars. This is because God has granted scholars distinction by virtue of their knowledge, entrusted them with the leadership of the community, and appointed them as supporters of religion and overseers of people’s conduct (9).

Accordingly, scholars are obliged to preserve religion from any deficiency or unwarranted addition, to monitor the condition of society, to restrain people from excess and negligence, and to act like compassionate physicians who are concerned with the intellectual and spiritual well-being of the community.

Some thinkers have conditioned the struggle against innovation upon the possession of power or the absence of fear and harm to believers. However, no one has considered the condition of “probability of effectiveness” to be valid in this duty. On the contrary, it has been explicitly stated that combating innovation is absolute, because the silence of scholars in the face of innovation is perceived by the public as tacit approval.

In this regard, Imam Khomeini states that if an innovation appears in Islam and the silence of religious scholars and leaders results in the desecration of Islam and the weakening of Muslims’ beliefs, it becomes obligatory to forbid that innovation by any means available, regardless of whether such forbidding is effective in eradicating corruption. Likewise, if their silence in the face of evils leads to such desecration, considerations of harm and hardship are not taken into account; rather, the rule of prioritization (*the more important over the less important*) must be observed (9).

Moreover, what is meant by “effectiveness” is not limited to the innovator’s repentance or the complete eradication of the innovation. Rather, it suffices that people recognize that religious scholars oppose the innovation and do not accept it; this alone constitutes an important and deterrent effect. It is therefore stated that the condition of effectiveness is not required, because preventing public misunderstanding—so that people do not assume the innovation to be among the established tenets of Islam—is itself sufficient.

Imam Khomeini likewise considers this point a basis for the obligation of forbidding evil and maintains that expressing opposition to innovation, injustice, and sin—and making divine rulings manifest—is effective and beneficial. Such opposition causes people to become repelled by social corruption and the ظلم of rulers, to rise up, to refrain from aiding oppressors, and to abandon obedience to corrupt and treacherous governments. Such stances by scholars, in reality, constitute forbidding evil by religious leaders and can generate a wave of forbidding evil throughout society (5).

Therefore, although *combating innovation* is a form of forbidding evil, due to its particular evidences it transcends the general framework of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* and acquires an independent ruling.

In *Tahrir al-Wasilah*, Imam Khomeini provides several examples of this ruling. Among them are the following: if an innovation emerges in Islam and the silence of scholars leads to the desecration of religion, its denunciation is obligatory in all circumstances, whether it is effective or not. In such cases, harm and hardship play no role in lifting the obligation; what matters is the gravity of the issue. If scholars' silence results in the inversion of good and evil, they are obliged to make their knowledge public, and their silence is impermissible even if their denunciation appears ineffective (9).

Evidences and Foundations for Combating Innovation

Imam Khomeini regards the *prohibition of innovation in religion* as one of the certainties and necessities of Islam. Numerous Qur'anic verses and narrations provide support for his juridical positions concerning the obligation to combat innovation. Several of these are noted here.

a. First Evidence: Qur'anic Verses

God states: *"Who is more unjust than one who fabricates a lie against God or denies His signs? Indeed, the wrongdoers will not prosper"* (Qur'an 10:17).

Imam Khomeini defines *innovation* as introducing into religion something that is not part of it. Technically, any statement, action, or doctrine presented as a component of religion without having been legislated by God is considered innovation. Contrary to some Sunni jurists who classify innovation into multiple categories, Shi'i jurists regard it as a single category: attributing falsehood to God by declaring something obligatory or forbidden without justification.

On this basis, the applicability of the above verse to innovators becomes clear, since from the Qur'anic perspective, one who lies against God is among the most unjust of people. This meaning is also expressed in the Prophetic hadith: *"Every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Fire."*

Accordingly, events following the Prophet's demise—such as preferring the non-infallible over the infallible, usurping rightful authority, tyrannical conduct by rulers in public wealth, and waging war against the people of truth—are all regarded as instances of innovation. If innovation in religion constitutes injustice toward God and His servants, then no one is more deserving than religious scholars to confront this injustice. Innovators commit two forms of wrongdoing: first, attributing falsehood to God's religion; second, deceiving people and corrupting their faith. Hence, recognizing innovation and safeguarding pure religion is a duty that rests uniquely upon scholars.

God also states: *"Indeed, those who conceal what We sent down of clear proofs and guidance after We made it clear for the people in the Scripture—those are cursed by God and cursed by those who curse"* (Qur'an 2:159).

At first glance, the connection between this verse and innovation may not be obvious, but closer reflection shows that a scholar's silence in the face of innovation and deviation constitutes concealment of truth. God has taken a covenant from scholars to clarify and expound divine teachings; any scholar who abandons this duty, in reality, conceals the truth.

God further states: *"Why do the rabbis and the scholars not forbid them from sinful speech and from devouring the unlawful? How evil is what they do"* (Qur'an 5:63).

Although this verse addresses Jews and Christians, its ruling is general and encompasses all scholars. It demonstrates that religious scholars are responsible for confronting all evils, especially sinful speech and the consumption of unlawful wealth. Based on these verses and the teachings of Imam 'Ali, Imam Khomeini concludes that if Islamic scholars fail to respond to misleading speech and innovations, they fall under Qur'anic reproach (9).

b. Second Evidence: Narrations

Numerous narrations condemn innovation and specify the responsibility of religious scholars in confronting it. These include Prophetic traditions declaring that every innovation is misguidance and that any act introduced into religion without basis is rejected. On this basis, innovators commit injustice both toward God and toward people, while the Qur'an condemns scholars' silence as concealment of truth.

Shaykh Zayn al-Din al-'Amili (al-Shahid al-Thani), drawing upon these narrations, maintains that a scholar must manifest the truth; if he observes deviation, he must counsel and guide the deviant, and if this proves ineffective, he must employ other methods of commanding and forbidding—even to the extent of dissociation—because the scholar functions like the leader of society, whose words carry influence (15).

Imam Khomeini likewise invoked these narrations at the outset of the Islamic movement, when opposing the *Provincial and District Councils*—which he regarded as a form of innovation in religion—and reminded Muhammad Reza Shah of these principles (5).

Narration of Imam al-Baqir and Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon them)

Al-Shahid al-Thani, on the basis of the Prophetic hadith stating, “*When innovations appear in my community, the scholar must make his knowledge manifest; whoever fails to do so, upon him is the curse of God,*” emphasizes that a religious scholar is obliged to disclose the truth. If he encounters someone on a path of deviation, he must first advise and guide him; if this proves ineffective, he should employ other methods of *enjoining good and forbidding evil*, even to the extent of dissociation if necessary. This is because the scholar functions like the head of society, whose words are influential (15). Imam Khomeini likewise, at the outset of the Islamic movement, invoked this very narration in opposing the *Provincial and District Councils*—which he regarded as a form of religious innovation—and stressed the necessity of manifesting the truth and confronting deviations (5).

Narration of the Prophet (peace be upon him)

In another narration, the Prophet warns: “*Whoever goes to an innovator and honors him is in fact striving to demolish Islam.*” This narration underscores the importance of confronting innovation and the necessity of refraining from accompanying or magnifying innovators. It shows that honoring or appeasing deviant individuals can have dangerous and detrimental consequences for Islamic society (12).

Authentic Narration from Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him)

Imam al-Sadiq advises believers: “*Do not associate with the people of innovation, nor sit with them, lest you be regarded by people as one of them.*” This narration highlights the social impact of association with innovators and the risk of being identified with them in public perception (10).

Narration of Dawud ibn Sarhan from Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him)

Dawud ibn Sarhan reports from Imam al-Sadiq that the Prophet stated: when, after his passing, you encounter people of innovation and doubt, openly disavow them, reprimand them, and refute them with argument so that they cannot harm Islam and so that people do not learn their innovations. In this narration, *sabb* does not mean unrestrained insult; rather, it denotes principled, scholarly criticism within the framework of *enjoining good and*

forbidding evil. *Waqi'ah* signifies reproach and warning, and *bahituhum* means compelling the opponent through evidence and proof, not slander—since slander is prohibited even against innovators (11).

Denouncing Assistance to Tyrannical Governments

Imam Khomeini's sensitivity regarding assistance to oppressive governments is such that he subsumes even minor subsidiary issues under this major wrongdoing. He states that if the silence of religious scholars encourages tyrants, or emboldens them to commit prohibitions and introduce innovations, such silence is forbidden and expressing opposition becomes obligatory—even if this opposition does not yield practical results in eliminating injustice.

If the silence of scholars leads to public suspicion or results in insult and defamatory speech against them, they are obliged to abandon such silence in order to dispel these accusations, even if this public stance does not produce immediate practical effects.

Imam Khomeini's concern regarding scholarly cooperation with unjust governments extended to the point that he categorically deemed it unlawful for seminarians to enter educational institutions affiliated with the regime or to receive salaries and benefits from it.

Some commentators on *Tahrir al-Wasilah* have identified the underlying corruption of such conduct as the dependence of scholars upon the government and the consequent loss of their independence. Despite this strict stance, Imam Khomeini recognized certain exceptions and stated that if the involvement of scholars in specific governmental institutions leads to the fulfillment of religious duties and the removal of evils, without undermining their status and integrity, then such involvement is obligatory to the extent of necessity. If disengagement from tyrants and kings carries even the slightest probability of reducing oppression, such disengagement becomes obligatory. Conversely, if engagement with rulers results in the reduction of injustice, all aspects must be weighed and the most significant interest selected (9).

At the conclusion of the discussion on *enjoining good and forbidding evil*, Imam Khomeini addresses the assumption of economic, political, and other vital affairs of Islamic society. He states that during the presence of the infallible Imam, this responsibility rests with the Imam, whereas during the Occultation it devolves upon the fully qualified jurist. This stands in contrast to many jurisprudential works, which typically conclude discussions of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* with the topic of implementing *hudud*. While some jurists restrict the execution of *hudud* to the infallible Imam and deem it impermissible during the Occultation, others hold that implementing *hudud* during the Occultation is the responsibility of the just jurist as the Imam's deputy.

Conclusion

The present study set out to examine the jurisprudential challenges surrounding the obligation of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* and to analyze the transformation of its foundations in Imam Khomeini's thought. The findings demonstrate that the historical marginalization of the social and governmental dimensions of this divine duty was not primarily the result of negligence on the part of the religiously committed, but rather stemmed from *structural and foundational deficiencies* at the level of jurisprudential reasoning and derivation.

The first and most serious challenge was the instability in the theoretical foundations of the authority of the non-infallible ruler in earlier jurisprudential periods. This study clarified how doubt regarding the religious obligation to obey a non-infallible authority led to the paralysis of the *manual (executive)* level of this obligation. When obedience

to governmental laws and directives is not regarded as an independent divine duty, but is instead made conditional upon “customary indication,” “mere guidance toward a religious ruling,” or solely the prevention of “disruption of order,” *enjoining good* is reduced from a powerful governmental instrument for structural reform to a set of individual moral admonitions. In effect, earlier jurists—due to caution concerning life and property and the absence of a coherent theory of juristic authority—had deferred the executive dimension of this obligation to the era of the presence of the infallible Imam, a move that inflicted one of the greatest blows to the political dynamism of Shi’i jurisprudence.

The second major challenge arose from the manner in which this obligation was classified and positioned within the chapters of jurisprudence. The inseparable linkage of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* with the chapters on *jihad* and *hudud* in Imami jurisprudence, while indicative of the gravity of this ruling, in practice confined it to the impasse of the *Occultation*. In contrast to Sunni jurisprudence—which preserved the social function of this duty by distributing it across devotional and customary chapters—Imami jurisprudence tied its application to the notion of *full authority*, with the result that in the absence of a Shi’i government this divine obligation was reduced to its internal and verbal levels. Even the valuable efforts of jurists such as the First Martyr and Muhaqqiq al-Hilli to establish a form of “shadow governance” through the enforcement of legal penalties were unable to compensate for the absence of a coherent central authority capable of addressing systemic evils.

Within this context, Imam Khomeini’s thought represents a decisive turning point and a *new paradigm* for the revival of this obligation. His fundamental innovation lay in elevating *enjoining good* from a discretionary or auxiliary duty to a *governmental necessity*. By articulating the theory of the absolute authority of the jurist, Imam Khomeini eliminated the divide between “religious ruling” and “state law,” and characterized violation of the enacted laws of the Islamic system as a religious sin. Through this juristic intervention, he stabilized the basis of obedience and revived the *manual* level of this obligation as a permanent responsibility of both governance and society. Moreover, Imam Khomeini’s reinterpretation of the condition of “probability of effectiveness” constituted a major transformation in political jurisprudence. By distinguishing between minor individual wrongs and *major innovations*, he suspended this condition in cases where the foundations of Islam or the overarching interests of society are at risk. This approach freed the obligation from complacency and silence justified by the absence of immediate effect, and endowed it with an assertive character in confronting structural corruption.

In conclusion, the model proposed by Imam Khomeini—by linking *enjoining good and forbidding evil* to the concepts of *preserving the system* and *public interest*—not only remedied earlier structural deficiencies, but also transformed this obligation into a central pillar of public oversight and the protection of Islamic values in the contemporary era. To ensure the continuity of this path, it is essential that, at the level of macro-policy, *enjoining good* be freed from narrow traditional frameworks and redefined in terms of *systematic oversight* and *law-based accountability*, so that it may be safeguarded against arbitrariness and unnecessary social conflict.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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