

Islamic Ethics

(Muslim Visions of Moral Life)
REL 376 (Fall 2014)
T & TH 03:05 – 4:20 (Chambers 2164)

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Office Hours: Mon & Wed 9:45-11:30 (Schedule appointments via [this LINK](#)).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an overview of Islamic ethical life and thought through 1) a survey of various modes of Islamic ethical thinking and 2) a close reading of seminal Muslim ethical texts. There are three parts to the course. PART I surveys the various modes of ethical thinking and lived practice within the Islamic religious and intellectual tradition. Here, we will explore the Qur’anic ethical viewpoint, ethical life built on the imitation of the Prophet’s example, and religious, theological, philosophical, and mystical strands of ethical life and thought. PART II (Seminal Classical Texts of Islamic Ethics) & III (Contemporary Muslim Ethical Texts) then focuses on a close reading and discussion of some of the seminal classical and contemporary Muslim texts of ethical bent. The survey of ethical modes (PART I) and close study of selected texts (PART II & III) will be our basis for wider claims about Islamic ethical life in PART IV where we will seek to build synthesis and draw wider conclusions. The synthesis will be possible through numerous interrelated activities 1) short but rigorous interpretive reflections 2) a longer paper geared towards synthesis of our study; and 3) a final group project wherein in addition to carrying out original research, the insights from our study throughout the semester will be brought to bear upon a pressing ethical concern, on a topic of students’ own choice. Here, we will also explore how the various ethical modes have fared or have been transformed in contemporary times. PART I is primarily interactive lecturing; PART II-IV, since these involve close reading of seminal Muslim texts, will mostly be discussion-based thus requiring active participation of every student.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

Although it is impossible for this course to be more than an *overview* of Islamic Ethics, it is expected that by the end of the class, the students will have: 1) Adequate familiarity with the language and conversations of Islamic ethics (i.e., with the key concerns, ideas, issues, debates, terms, categories, traditions, important figures and various modes of Islamic ethical life and thought); 2) Applied this learning to a pressing ethical concern and evaluated the results; 3) Cultivated skills and appreciation for a close reading of the texts; 4) Gained skills and appreciation for class-discussion that is geared towards accomplishing better understanding of important texts, and through these texts, the issues that they raise; and 5) Reflected often on how to relate to one's cultural and religious other and his/her texts.

The most significant goal of this class is to make learning *relevant, useful, enjoyable* and *meaningful* for all involved. Making the class more relevant to you personally is something that will require your engagement and deep interest. Feel free to talk to the instructor about ways in which you (or/and the instructor) could contribute in achieving these goals, personally and as a class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

(NOTE: In view of the needs of the class the instructor may alter the syllabus as appropriate)

4 Interpretive Reflections (500 words, 6% each, 1% for overall quality)	25%
"Conceptions of Islamic Ethical Life" Paper (7 pages)	10%
Group Project	40%
Presentations & Participation (includes all Blog activities)	20%
Introducing the Text and the Author (includes annotated bibliography)	5%

ATTENDANCE POLICY, CLASS DISCUSSION, AND PARTICIPATION

1. You will be responsible for keeping track of your attendance. The last class of the term, you will turn in a pledged sheet detailing your attendance to the instructor. You will also provide your own assessment of your overall participation grade.

2. Attendance is compulsory in this course. More than 1 **absence** without valid excuse such as sickness or family emergency etc. will result in the lowering of grade. (B+ will become a B, B a B- and so on)
3. It is an absolute must that electronic devices, if used at all, be used in the class for class-related activities only (e.g., taking notes, pulling up readings etc.).¹
4. Always bring the syllabus & assigned readings for the week to the class.
5. In case of absence it is your responsibility to obtain notes and ‘catch-up’. Absence will not be a good excuse for not knowing what happened in the class.
6. Occasionally, you may be asked to 1) summarize or present formally selective portion of the readings, 2) make critical comments, 3) work in groups, 4) turn in questions from the readings, and 5) bring examples from the media (audio/video, blogs, magazines, and social media) for further discussion and clarification.
7. Please do not come in late or leave early—it is disruptive.
8. Your participation grade will reflect the overall *quality* (and not simply quantity) of your contributions to the class throughout the semester. This includes proper class etiquette, attentiveness, preparing for the class, asking engaging questions and active and thoughtful engagement with the texts and **Blog-related activities**.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE SEMESTER:

General Guidelines:

1. *The audience for all your written assignments is your REL 376 class.*
2. Use Standard font (Times New Roman) and margins (one inch on all sides).
3. Save paper: print on both sides and DO NOT create a separate cover page.
4. Only cite fully if it is a text other than those assigned. Use Chicago or MLA.
5. Do mention the WORD COUNT in the end.
6. Unless stated otherwise, all assignments will be posted on to the Blog.
7. Each 24-hour delay will result in corresponding 10-point deduction.

¹ Research has shown that students who multitask on a laptop during class receive lower test scores than students who do not (Sana, Weston, & Cepeda, 2013). Also, students who are around students who are multitasking on technology perform lower.

Introducing the Text and the Author:

1. For PART II & III each text will be introduced by two of you as a group. I will pass on the signup sheet the second week of the class (Sep 2nd). Please review all the texts and choose in order of priority the text you'd like to introduce. If there are conflicts of interest we can resolve it in the class. More instructions on that the first day.
2. Introduce the text from both *within* and *without*: *Within* means introducing the author of the text and his other works, the authorial intent (goals for writing this text), what you consider to be the key passages and significant themes within the text, and finally those ideas/passages that you consider puzzling and your reasons for why they are confusing; *Without* entails discussing the influence of this text upon Islamic ethical, literary and intellectual traditions, debates within the secondary scholarship and a bibliography of secondary scholarship on the text. Better you integrate your comments about *within* and *without*, more successful the introduction will be. **Most importantly**, you should bring this “background information” to bear upon the reading of the text: show if and how this information does or should inform/transform/influence our reading of the text.
3. Your class presentation will not be more than *10-12 minutes*. Eventually you will write this introduction and submit it along with a properly formatted annotated bibliography of the resources that were used for introducing the text.
4. You are encouraged to meet with the instructor to go over your plan of introducing the text beforehand or discuss any questions that you may have.
5. DEADLINE: Outline of your Introduction and annotated bibliography will be posted onto the blog by SEP 25.

Interpretive Reflection (IR)

1. PURPOSE: Your IR is **Your Two-Minute Class Insight**. Its purpose is to help critical engagement with the issues and associated readings, and raising the level of class discussion. Good grasp of the issues and assigned material is therefore assumed.
2. ENGAGE READINGS: A good IR will engage the readings and speak from both within and without these texts. Ask the instructor to explain this distinction.
3. AUDIENCE: In writing IR, imagine you are reading it aloud to the class to hear and engage it. *Remember you are writing for your fellow classmates* who have also read the

same material. Therefore, restating or summarizing the readings will be absolutely redundant. You may be asked to read it aloud in the class.

4. INTEREST: Choose to reflect on the aspects of readings that you find fascinating, intriguing, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing.
5. TONE: An IR is not an op-ed or an expression of how you felt about the readings. Like all writing and human communication, it is geared toward speaking to an audience and persuading it of your insight. You do not need to exclude yourself. So yes, you can use first person pronoun I! The question is what kind of “I” is speaking in the IR.
6. The key questions you should be asking yourself are the following:
 - i. DO YOU CARE? Is this idea worth your time and effort? Do you care about the topic? Would you enjoy thinking about it?
 - ii. FEASIBILITY: Is the idea manageable within the word-limit prescribed for the assignment? With limited words, write only after having fully developed your thoughts so you could state those as clearly and succinctly as possible.
 - iii. ILLUMINE: Will it be found interesting and illuminating by the class as a whole? Why should your classmates care about what you have to say? Does the reflection offer something different/new or merely summarizes?
 - iv. SHOW: Does it *show* (not just state) what it was meant to convey to the class?
 - v. PERSUADE: Does it successfully convince or persuade your classmates?
7. WITHIN/WITHOUT: In line with general methodology of the class, you should seek to speak from both *within* and *without* the text.
8. Besides posting your IR, you are also expected to regularly read and comment on IRs posted by your classmates. You may also be asked to peer-grade these IRs.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR THE BLOG:

(Note: The document will be in effect beginning PART II of the course)

1. Post your questions and/or comments no later than **by noon** on the class day.
2. The quality of your contribution to the Blog will be assessed in relation to how thoughtfully you engage the assigned texts in asking and responding to questions.
3. Your question should be substantial. It must:

- a. Provide clarification as to how it is related to our study, the stake in the question for the one asking it (and for us as a class); in other words why is this question important to be discussed?
 - b. Make *within/without* distinction and emerge from and relate to the text/readings assigned for the day/week;
 - c. Be clearly and carefully articulated. It should display careful reading of the text and must not miss the obvious. Avoid typos and grammatical errors.
4. Your comment should:
- a. Not be about how you feel (i.e., your open-ended opinion) but should bring the texts and our conversation to bear upon the question asked by your classmate;
 - b. Reveal again careful thought and clarity of expression. Take time to make your comment comprehensible to the reader.
 - c. Not avoid challenging and debating ideas, yet in a respectful way

Writing and Speaking Centers:

Basic writing and speaking skills are expected in this course and quality of both will be critical to your success in this course. You are therefore strongly encouraged to consult writing and speaking centers for your assignments and class presentations. Look up the links below for more information on the services they provide:

Writing Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x11014.xml>

Speaking Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x15986.xml>

Disabilities: A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me *immediately* to discuss modifications to course requirements.

Academic Honesty: Students are expected to fully abide by the Honor Code as set out by the College and should pledge all their assignments and exams.

GROUP PROJECT:

(By the end of the second week you need to form your two or three-member group)

IMPORTANT NOTE: This course is about “Islamic Ethics” and fulfills the cultural diversity requirement. You should *choose an ethical subject that is of serious concern to you* and try to determine Muslim responses and perspectives on it. Furthermore, a project undertaken without bringing awareness and application of our study all semester to the subject matter will be deemed incomplete. Beyond completing the project, the process is of central importance and will be kept in view by the instructor while evaluating it. It is your responsibility and choice to seek help from the instructor. Though not enforced as a policy, you are *strongly advised to consult the instructor once every two weeks during office hours.*

DEALINES:

- *September 25:* Deadline for receiving APPROVAL of the Group Project. Also submit the first draft of the Annotated RESOURCES
- *April 30:* Submit GROUP PAPER & **“Updated”** BLOG/RESOURCES
- Group INTERVIEW & PREZI Presentation = Will be scheduled

VARIOUS COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT

1. **Annotated RESOURCES for the Study of your Topic (5% of the grade):**
 - a. Academic books, journal articles and other materials that qualify as “scholarly”
 - b. Interviews with 10 Muslims and 5 non-Muslims on the subject
 - c. Multimedia: images, audio, videos etc.
 - d. Popular stuff: news items, op-eds, blogs, interviews, and non-scholarly works
 - e. Statistical data, surveys, and polls
2. **Collaborative GROUP PAPER (10-12 page, 10%) should address:**
 - i. Topic/Question, why you chose it, its relevance/significance, who's the audience for your research, and whose question is it? Explain how and why each of the group member is interested in it? How is your topic related to the course?
 - ii. Research methodology: How did you research your question? How do you know it was an appropriate way for finding answers to your question? In sum, clarify and justify your approach to research. Be concrete.

- iii. Research process: its different elements, and in what order they were completed. Make sure the process is consistent with your methodology.
- iv. Findings and Typology: Compare, contrast and provide a typology of the various positions on your topic and question *within the academic sources*. Identify concretely who holds a certain position and why? This section is very important; there has to be a way of classifying various positions into some sort of scheme that your reader could make sense of and draw his or her own conclusions.
- v. What did you find in the *popular media* (see 1c above) on the same subject, how it contrasts with your findings? Why (if so) there is a gap between your findings and what is found in the popular media?
- vi. If available, discuss *the statistical data and polls* that are relevant to your research.
- vii. Discuss your findings in *the interviews* with Muslims and non-Muslims. The class has IRB exemption so you will not need IRB approval.
- viii. Your Findings/Conclusions - challenges or potential rebuttals to your research
- ix. Analyze and explain convergences and divergences between your findings within the academic sources, interviews, popular media and the stats (iv, v, vi & vii).
- x. Show concretely how our study (especially the texts we discussed) throughout the semester relate (or do not relate) to your research and inform your project. This is one of the most important aspects of the project.
- xi. Related to x) above show how your project relates to the course? Have *at least three significant points* you will make to your classmates with whom you have discussed “Islamic Ethics” the whole semester.
- xii. Where to now? Unresolved questions, confusions, paradoxes etc. If you were to pursue the topic further what would you do?

3. TEACHING Presentation (10%, Use PREZI, Powerpoint etc.)

- i. You will basically discuss number 2 above in the classroom.
- ii. DO NOT OVERWHELM YOUR AUDIENCE: Time limit on the one hand, and human ability to absorb information to a certain limit on the other should guide your selection of what should be in and what should be out.
- iii. MAKE IT IMPORTANT, INTERESTING & BE CREATIVE: Employ images, audio/video etc. for your presentation of the topic.
- iv. TIME LIMIT: **Strictly 30 min** (25 min =presentation; 5 min Q&A)

- v. **CONCLUDING INSIGHTS:** Leave your audience with concrete points that reflect your own synthesis and conclusions on the subject.

4. **REFLECTIONS on the PROCESS (5%)**

NOTE: These reflections are separate from the group project paper, should not be more than 1 page per group member, and are to be submitted with the paper.

- i. Discussion notes/thread and significant points discussed, debated and choices made during the thinking or writing process
- ii. Reflections on the process of group research, where it helped, where it hindered etc. (list briefly as points)
- iii. What did you learn or got out of this project, individually and as a group? What is your personal take-away from this project?

5. **GROUP INTERVIEW (10%):** During optional days, your group will be interviewed during an hour-long meeting.

Required Texts (available at the Bookstore and on reserve in the library):

1. Imam Birgvi, *The Path of Muhammad: A Book on Islamic Morals & Ethics* (tr. Shaykh Tosun Bayrak), Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2005.
2. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Disciplining the Soul and Breaking the Two Desires: Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences* (tr. T. J. Winter), Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1997.
3. Jalaluddin Rumi, *Signs of the Unseen: The Discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi* (tr. W.M. Thackston), Boston: Shambhala, 1994.
4. Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *A Collection of Sufi Rules of Conduct* (tr. Elena Biagi), Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2010
5. Gai Eaton, *King of the Castle: Choice and Responsibility in the Modern World* (2nd edition). Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1997.
6. Ikhwan al-Safa. *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn* (transl. Lenn Goodman and Richard McGregor), Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.
7. Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam* (tr. Hamid Algar), Oneonta: American Council of Learned Societies, 2000.
8. Sherman Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
9. Lord Northbourne, *Of the Land and the Spirit: The Essential Lord Northbourne on Ecology and Religion*, (ed. Christopher James and Joseph Fitzgerald). Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2009.
10. John Renard, *Islamic Theological Themes: A Primary Source Reader*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2014.

Recommended Background Readings (Pick One)

- Gibb, Hamilton. *Mohammedanism: A Historical Survey* (? : Kessinger Publishing, 2010)
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam: An Introduction*. (New York: SUNY, 1992)
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam: Religion, History and Civilization* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003)

COURSE OUTLINE

Key: On Reserve (R), E-View Library (E) **Primary Readings (PR)**, On Moodle (M)

PART I: VARIOUS MODES OF ISLAMIC ETHICAL LIFE

WEEK 1 (Aug 26-28): Introduction & Method of Study

Readings: **Thurs** **Imam Birgivi: 3-9, 29-56 (Introduction to Islam)**; Azim Nanji “Islamic Ethics” (M); John Kelsay, “Ethics” in *Oxford Islamic Studies Online* (E); Ibrahim Kalin, “Akhlaq” in *Oxford Islamic Studies Online* (E);

- What is Ethics? What is Islamic Ethics?
- The Three Meanings of “Ethics”
- Various “Modes” of Ethical Thinking and Life in the Islamic Tradition
- Introduction to the study of Islamic Ethics: History, Approaches, Debates
- Key Terms in the Study of Islamic Ethics
- Origins of Islamic Ethics

WEEK 2 (Sep 2-4): Sources of Islamic Ethics: The Qur’an and the Prophet

Readings: **Tue** John Renard “Muslim Ethics: Sources, Interpretation and Challenges” (M); Fazlur Rahman, “Key Ethical Concepts of the Qur’an (M); **Renard, 3-12;**
Thurs **Imam Birgivi, 8-29 & 61-69; Renard, 12-26**

WATCH before SEP 4 Class: [Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet](#)

- Is the Qur’an an Ethical Text? How?
- The Qur’anic Worldview and its Ethical Implications
- How is the Prophet Source of Islamic Ethics?
- The Prophetic Model of Ethical Life
- Complexities of Treating the Qur’an and the Prophet as Sources of Islamic Ethics

WEEK 3 (Sep 9-11): Islamic Law and Theology

Readings: *Tue* Kamali, “Law and Society” in *Oxford History of Islam* [*Oxford Islamic Studies Online* (E & M)]; K. Reinhart, “Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics” (M); *Thurs* Richard Frank, “Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology” (M); Renard, 103-116, 160-164, 315-339; 342-367; 368-370; 384-399

- Ethics as Law, Law as Ethics: How is Shariah an Ethical Code?
- Islamic Theology, major schools and their Ethical Concerns
- Mu’tazilites and Asharites: What is at Stake in the Debate?
- Relationship between Islamic Law, Theology and Ethics

WEEK 4 (Sep 16-18): Adab and Sufism

Readings: *Tue*; Peter Awn, “Ethical Concerns of Classical Sufism” (M) & *Sufi Rules of Conduct*, 1-59; *Thurs* Guest Lecture

- Adab and its Various Meanings
- Ethics and Muslim Literature
- Ethics and the Sufi Tradition

SEPTEMBER 18: CLASS GUEST LECTURE & MANDATORY PUBLIC LECTURE IN THE EVENING by DR. EBRAHIM MOOSA (Duke University)

WEEK 5 (Sep 23-25): Philosophical Ethics

Readings: *Tue* TBA; *Thurs* Ibn Miskawayh’s *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* [The Health of the Soul] *Anthology of Philosophy in Persia vol. 1* (E)

- Ethics within Islamic Philosophical Tradition
- Intersections of Ethics with Medicine
- Intersections of the Ethical with the Political

SEPTEMBER 25: IR I DUE (Pick any text/theme of your choice from PART I)

SEPTEMBER 25: Deadline for Receiving Instructor’s Approval of the Group Project.

PART II: SEMINAL TEXTS OF ISLAMIC ETHICS

(NOTE: The BLOG will be in full effect beginning this section of the course)

WEEK 6 (Sep 30-Oct 2): Birgivi, *The Path of Muhammad*

Readings: **Tue** p. 70-83, 94-112, 120-152, 194-211; 233-287; **Thu** 288-306

WEEK 7 (Oct 7-9): Ghazali, *Disciplining the Soul and Breaking the Two Desires*

Readings: **Tue** p. 3-101; **Thu** 165-191

OCTOBER 9: IR II DUE (Pick any text/theme of your choice from PART I)

FALL BREAK: Oct 10 (4:30 P.M.) - Oct 15 (8:30 A.M.)

WEEK 8 (Oct 16): Rumi, *Signs of the Unseen*

Readings: **Tue** Fall Break; **Thu** 1-66 (14 Discourses)

WEEK 9 (Oct 21-23): al-Ikhwan al-Safa, *The Case of the Animals versus Man...*

Readings: **Tue** p. 63-229; **Thu** p. 229-316

PART III (MORE TEXTS): CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM ETHICAL THOUGHT

WEEK 10 (Oct 28-30): Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*

Readings: **Tue**, p. 19-168; **Thu** p. 261-319

OCTOBER 28: IR 3 (Pick any text/theme of your choice from PART II)

WEEK 11 (Nov 4-6): Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*

Readings: **Tue** p. 3-25; 47-98 & p.127-156; **Thu** p.157-163

WEEK 12 (Nov 11-13): Eaton, *King of the Castle: Choice and Responsibility in the Modern World*

Readings: **Tue**, p. 7-113; **Thu** p. 165-216

NOVEMBER 13: IR IV (Pick any text/theme of your choice from PART III)

PART IV: INTEGRATION, SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSION

WEEK 13 (Nov 18-20): Islamic Ethics & Practical Life

Readings: Northbourne, *Of the Land and the Spirit* *Tue* xvii-60, 135-179; *Thu* 195-226

- CASE STUDY: Ecology in Practice
- Relationship between Ethics, Aesthetics and Religion
- Advice on Aspects of Life

WEEK 14 (Nov 25): Concluding Our Study

Readings: TBA

- Imagining Muslim Responses to Ethical Issues
- Historical and Conceptual Interplay among Various Modes of Islamic Ethics
- Islamic Ethics Today

NOTE: The class on November 25 may be cancelled because of a conference.

NOV 25: PAPER ON ISLAMIC ETHICAL LIFE DUE

You have been invited to speak at a student-led forum in Davidson to discuss “Islamic Ethics/Ethical Life in Islam”. Through synthesis of everything studied (lectures, texts, and discussion), write a 7-page paper that you will read to your audience. 5 pages should simply be presentation of what you’d say. The rest of the 2-pages will be an analysis, description, and clarification of the approach you took, why you think this is most appropriate and effective. These papers will be posted on the blog and your classmates will respond to it. Responses to each other’s posts will be part of the grade.

Note: Before the Thanksgiving Break you are strongly recommended to meet with me and discuss your project. Earlier, of course, the better.

THANKSGIVING BREAK: NOV 25 (4:30 P.M.) - DEC 1 (8:30 A.M.)

Week 15 (Dec 2-4): GROUP PRESENTATIONS

DECEMBER 2: GROUP PROJECT DUE

Optional Days Classes will be used for Group Interview on the Final Project.