

“And the garment of Godwariness— that is best.

The Qur’an, 7:26

Indeed, you have in the Messenger of God a beautiful example for those who hope for God and the Last Day, and remember God much.

The Qur’an, 33:21

Primordial man sees the ‘greater’ in the ‘lesser’: the world of Nature, in fact, reflects Heaven, and conveys, in an existential language, a divine message that is at once multiple and unique. The moral result of this perspective of the ‘translucid’ cosmos is a respectful and even devotional attitude towards virgin Nature, this sanctuary—the key to which has been lost to the West since the disappearance of the mythologies— which fortifies and inspires those of its children who have retained the sense of its mysteries, as Terra did for Antheia.

-Frithjof Schuon, “The Symbolist Mind”

What is Good Life?

An Overview of Islamic Ethics

REL 279 (Spring 2019)

MWF 3:30-4:20 pm (Cunningham 109)

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? (Previously Course Description)

This course is an overview of Islamic ethical life and thought through an orientation in the Islamic view of the universe and humanity’s place within it, competing & complementing modes of being ethical, & proposals for a good human life. We will explore these themes through a close reading of seminal Muslim ethical texts. There

are three stages in our journey. In *STAGE I* we will learn about the foundations of Islamic ethics, i.e., the mythical, theological, scriptural and prophetic background of all-things-Islamic. In *STAGE II* we will survey the various modes of ethical thinking and proposals for good life within the Islamic religious and intellectual tradition. Here, we will explore legal, religious, theological, literary, mystical and philosophical strands of Islamic ethical life and thought. *STAGE III* will be a synthesis and culmination of various ideas discussed in *STAGES I & II* and our basis for wider claims and conclusions about Islamic ethical life. As a case study for application of these modes to a contemporary ethical issue, we will probe Muslim responses to the ecological crisis. Here, we will witness how these modes orient, navigate and shape debates regarding the environment. In *STAGE III*, we will also explore how the various ethical modes have fared or have been transformed in contemporary times. (*NOTE: Since learning is an evolving process, the course map, readings and intellectual practices may be shifted and adjusted as necessary.*)

TREE OF ISLAMIC ETHICS: SURVEY MAP

ROOTS: REVELATORY, PROPHETIC & MYTHICAL ORIENTATIONS

WEEK 1 (Jan 14-18): Orienting Tales

Readings:

MON: Preamble

WED: Review the Syllabus; HANDOUT: "Hadith of Gabriel"

FRI: Syed R Zamir, "So Tell Them the Tale: The Orienting Tale of All That's Islamic"
(Draft)

- ❖ Introduction to Islam/Hadith Gabriel
- ❖ The Islamic Myth and its Implications for Islamic Ethics

WEEK 2 (Jan 23-25): Orienting - Scriptural Roots: The Qur'an

Readings:

MON: *NO CLASS ON MONDAY DUE TO MLK HOLIDAY (JAN. 21 2018) ***

WED: Lecture: INTRODUCING ISLAMIC ETHICS

FRI: SRZ Lecture.

- ❖ Orienting and Rooting Ourselves in Islamic Ethics
- ❖ The Qur'anic Worldview and its Ethical Implications

WEEK 3 (Jan 28- Feb 1): The Qur'an - Prophetic Roots

Readings:

MON: Fazlur Rahman, Major Themes of the Quran (selections)

WED: Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran* (selections)

FRI: SRZ Lecture.

- ❖ Is the Qur'an an Ethical Text? How?
- ❖ Key Qur'anic Ethical Terms & Concepts
- ❖ The Prophetic Model of Ethical Life

WEEK 4 (Feb 4-8): Prophetic Roots- Islamic Law/Shari'ah

Readings:

MON: Hadith Selections 1) *Moral Teachings of Islam*, 49-65 & 2) Al-Amin Mazrui, *The Content of Character: Ethical Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*, pp. 14-20

WED: SRZ lecture: **MODES of Ethics**; Watch [Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet](#)

FRI: SRZ Lecture.

- ❖ How is the Prophet Source of Islamic Ethics?
- ❖ Complexities of Treating the Qur'an and the Prophet as Sources of Islamic Ethics
- ❖ Various "Modes" of Ethical Thinking and Life in the Islamic Tradition
- ❖ Ethics as Law, Law as Ethics: How is Shariah an Ethical Code?

~~~~~  
**BRANCHES: DIVERSE MODES OF ETHICAL LIFE**  
~~~~~

WEEK 5 (Feb 11-15): Islamic Law (Shari'ah) - Islamic Theology (Kalam)

Readings:

MON: Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: Questions and Answers* (selections)

WED: Open Session, TBD (To Be Discussed, Discovered, Decided)

FEB. 6: BEING HUMAN SERIES LECTURE #1: Being Human in Divine Perspective

(Sloan)

FRI: SRZ Lecture.

- ❖ “How is Shariah an Ethical Code?” Explored
- ❖ The Principle of *Amr bi'l ma'ruf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*
- ❖ Islamic Theology, major schools and their Ethical Concerns
- ❖ Relationship between Islamic Law, Theology and Ethics

WEEK 6 (Feb. 18-22): Islamic Theology (Kalam) - Adab

Readings:

MON: *Kitāb al-uṣūl al-khamsa* (Mu'tazila Text, tr. Richard Martin, pp.90-115, English title: *Defenders of Reason in Islam* (Consult/Refer to the earlier chapter as & commentary as needed)

WED: Open Session, TBD (To Be Discussed, Discovered, Decided)

FRI: SRZ Lecture.

- ❖ Mu'tazilites and Asharites: What is at Stake in the Debate?
- ❖ Adab and its Various Meanings

WEEK 7 (Feb 25- Mar 1): Adab- Spirituality (Sufi or/and non-Sufi)

Readings:

MON: Ikhwan al-Safa, *The Animals Lawsuit against Humanity*

WED: Open Session, TBD (To Be Discussed, Discovered, Decided)

FEB. 27: BEING HUMAN SERIES LECTURE #2: To be Human is to be Punishable (Sloan)

FRI: SRZ Lecture.

- ❖ Ethics and Muslim Literature
- ❖ Ethics and the Sufi Tradition
- ❖ Sufi view of the World, Ways of Knowing and Ethics

SPRING BREAK: Mar 1 (4:30 P.M.) – Mar 11 (8:30 A.M.)

WEEK 8 (Mar 11-15): Sufi/Spirituality - Virtue in Islamic Philosophy

Readings:

MON: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth* (selections) I

WED: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth* (selections) II

FRI: **SRZ Lecture.**

- ❖ Islamic Spirituality and Ethics
- ❖ Virtue Ethics within the Islamic Tradition

WEEK 9 (Mar 18-22): Virtue in Islamic Philosophy II

Readings:

MON: Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character* (First Discourse)

WED: Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character* (Selections)

FRI: Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character* (Selections)

- ❖ Ethics within Islamic Philosophical Tradition

WEEK 10 (Mar 25-29): MIDTERM REVIEW

MON: PREPARATION FOR MIDTERM

WED: Open Session, TBD (To Be Discussed, Discovered, Decided)

MAR 27: BEING HUMAN SERIES LECTURE #3: A Christian Humanism (900 Room)

FRI: MIDTERM REVIEW (IN-CLASS)



FRUITS, NURTURING THE GARDEN & WHERE TO NOW



WEEK 11 (Apr 1-5): *Being Muslim, Being Pious & God-fearing Muslim*

Readings:

MON: Al-Ghazali, *Letter to a Disciple*

WED: Vincent Cornell, "Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge"

FRI: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth* (selections)

- ❖ Historical and Conceptual Interplay among the Various Modes of Islamic Ethics
- ❖ Unity of Muslim Moral Life & Synthesis of Modes/Branches
- ❖ KEY TERMS: *Taqwa/ Khulq* etc.

WEEK 12 (Apr 8-12): *Islamic Ethics Today*

MON: *Modern Muslim Theology: Engaging God and the World... I*

WED: *Modern Muslim Theology: Engaging God and the World... II*

FRI: *Modern Muslim Theology: Engaging God and the World... III*

- ❖ Continuities & Discontinuities of Modes of Islamic Ethics in the Modern World
- ❖ Contemporary Issues & Debates
- ❖ Imagining Muslim Responses to Ethical Issues

WEEK 13 (Apr 15-19): *A Case Study: Islam and the Current Ecological Crisis*

Readings:

MON: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern Man* (selections)

WED: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern Man* (selections)

FRI: SRZ Lecture.

EASTER BREAK: APR 19 (4:30 P.M.) – APR 24 (8:30 A.M.)

EARTH DAY: APR 22, 2018: Shall we garden?

WEEK 14 (Apr. 24-26): THE GENDER JIHAD

Readings:

Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith and Jurisprudence*

APR 24: BEING HUMAN SERIES LECTURE #4: Being Human: Disciplinary Perspectives (Sloan)

Week 15 (Apr 29- May 3rd): Culmination and Synthesis of Islamic Ethics

Readings:

FINISH Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith and Jurisprudence* & BOOK REPORT

MON: LECTURE/GUEST LECTURE (Dr. Waleed El-Ansary): "Islamic Ethics and Modern Economy"

Attend the public lecture by Prof. Waleed El-Ansary

THE JOURNAL-PORTFOLIO DUE MAY 8

TEXT-GUIDES

(Available at the Bookstore and on reserve in the library):

1. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an: Second Edition*
2. Mohammad Hashim Kamala, *Shariah Law: Questions and Answers*
3. Ikhwan al-Safa Rabbi Dan Bridge, & Rabbi Kalonymus, *The Animals' Lawsuit Against Humanity: An Illustrated 10th Century Iraqi Ecological Fable* (umm Kulthum (Illustrator); Rabbi Anson Laytner (Translator))

4. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition*
5. Ibn Miskawayh, *Refinement of Character (Great Books of the Islamic World)*
6. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali Letter to a Disciple (Ghazali Series)*
7. Martin Nguyen, *Modern Muslim Theology: Engaging God and the World with Faith and Imagination (Religion in the Modern World)*
8. Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith and Jurisprudence*

Text-Guides for Basic Background in Islam

Note: Prior knowledge of Islam and Muslim civilization is not expected or assumed. For your own comfort, you may pick ONE of the introductory books listed on Veils & Webs.

{Veils & Webs (rizwanzamir.net) > Dear Strangers > Resources}

INTELLECTUAL PRACTICES (Previously Course Requirements/Assignments)

Various "Intellectual Practices" are in place as "building blocks" to help build synthesis and deep comprehension. They include reviews to ensure that we have learned the basics and intellectual practices that require careful reading, & strong understanding, and reflecting upon, texts and themes related to our study of Islamic ethics.

Midterm REVIEW	30%
Final REVIEW	35%
The Journal-Portfolio (DUE MAY 8)	35%
+ Book Report (Kecia Ali, <i>Sexual Ethics</i>)	15%
+ 2 Interpretive Reflections	10%
+ Logged Entries in The Journal (Involves Peer- & Self-Assessment)	10%

LEARNING OUTCOMES

INSTRUCTOR'S:

It is expected that by the end of the class, the participants 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) → overall an ability to make sense of Islamic ethical life and thought;*
- 2. Firm intellectual foundations in the subject to engage texts and practitioners of Islamic ethical traditions;*
- 3. Explored and potentially appreciated the diversity and spectrum of ethical modes and reasoning within Islam (how these modes relate to one another) and ways Muslims live life “Islamically”;*
- 4. Learned how various modes of Islamic ethics apply (or do not apply) to a pressing ethical concern and evaluated results;*
- 5. Gained skills and appreciation for careful readings of texts that is geared towards accomplishing better understanding of both the texts and the issues that they raise;*
- 6. Thought about the place and significance of “ethics”;*
- 7. Engaged in various intellectual practices, for example: reflection, summarizing, synthesizing & interpreting texts;*
- 8. Learned to assess the intellectual quality of these practices in their own work as well as that of their peers*

NOTE: The most significant goal of this class is to make learning joyful, relevant 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.

YOURS?

For a note on this, see “A Note on Learning Outcomes (Yours?)” on Veils & Webs (rizwanzamir.net > Scroll Down, Bottom Left, “Notes” Section).

Disabilities: A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see the instructor immediately to discuss modifications to course requirements. “Davidson College values the diversity of its community and is an equal access institution that admits otherwise qualified applicants without regard to disability. The college seeks to accommodate requests for accommodations related to disability that are determined to be reasonable and do not compromise the integrity of a program or curriculum. To make such a request or to begin a conversation about a possible request, please contact Beth Bleil, Director of Academic Access and Disability Resources, in the Center for Teaching and Learning by visiting her office in the E.H. Little Library, by emailing her at [bebleil@davidson.edu](mailto:bebleil@ davidson.edu), or by calling 704-894-2129. It is best to submit accommodation requests within the drop/add period; however, requests can be made at any time in the semester. Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive.”

Honor and Conscience: The College expects students to fully abide by the Honor Code. The instructor wonders about our conscience and the convergence/divergence between the two.

Additional Resources & Support: There are numerous resources available to help you through the course. Please see the section entitled “Resources” under the “Dear Strangers” tab from Veils & Webs (rizwanzamir.net).

Prof. Syed Rizwan Zamir [Office: Eumenean Hall 104; Phone: (704) 894 2950]

Email: [rizamir@davidson.edu](mailto:rizamir@ davidson.edu) (Saturdays I am gone; Sundays I slowly re-emerge)

Meeting Hours: Mondays 8-11 am (Schedule appointments Sign-Up Genius)
