

*“And the garment of Godwariness— that is best.*

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.*

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”

## Islamic Ethics

(Muslim Deliberations on Good Life)

REL 279 (Fall 2018)

MWF 9:30-10:20 am (Hance Auditorium)

### WHAT IS IT ABOUT? (Previously 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 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, i.e., the Qur’anic ethical viewpoint, and ethical life built on the imitation of the Prophet’s example. In STAGE II we will survey the various modes of ethical thinking and lived practice 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. Here, we will also explore how the various ethical modes have fared or have been transformed in contemporary times. (NOTE: In view of the view that learning is an evolutionary process, course map, readings and intellectual practices may shift and adjust as necessary.)

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:** Thurs & Fri 2:00-3:30 (Schedule appointments <https://bit.ly/2vGoLYD>)

## 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. Applied knowledge of Islamic ethics to a pressing ethical concern and evaluated results;
5. 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;
6. Thought about the place and significance of “ethics”;
7. Improved academic skills of careful interpretation of texts and posing thoughtful questions to and through those for engagement & conversation with others;
8. Reflected often on how to relate to one’s cultural and religious other and his/her texts.

**NOTE:** 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.

### INSTRUCTEES, PARTICIPANTS, CONTRIBUTORS, COLLABORATORS (YOURS)?

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

### INTELLECTUAL PRACTICES (Previously Course Requirements/Assignments)

Various “Intellectual Practices” are in place as “building blocks” to help build synthesis and deep comprehension. They include 1) A Review to ensure that we have learned the basics; 2) Short reflective activities as needed; 3) “What is Islamic Ethics?” geared towards synthesis of our study; and 4) “Culminating Team Investigation” where the insights from our study throughout the semester will be brought to bear upon a pressing ethical concern of students’ choice.

Active Presence	14%
Midterm Review	30%
Compiling & Comparing Definitions of Islamic Ethics	9%
What is Islamic Ethics? (Discussion 6%; Paper 11%)	17%
Culminating Team Investigation (Annot. Biblio+Outline+Teaching+Interview)	30%

**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](http://rizwanzamir.net)).

#### TEXT-GUIDES (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. Cyrus Ali Zargar, *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy*

and Sufism, New York: OneWorld, 2018.

3. Other Text-Guides can be found on or through Moodle.

### 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}

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## THE MAP

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### OVERVIEW (& INTRODUCTION)

WEEK 1 (Aug 20-24): Introduction, Method of Study & Overview of the Terrain

Readings:

**WED:** Review the Syllabus; John Renard “Muslim Ethics: Sources, Interpretation and Challenges”;  
**FRI:** Yasien Mohamed, “The Evolution of Early Islamic Ethics”

- Study of Islamic Ethics: History, Approaches, Debates
- Defining Islam, Defining Ethics, Defining Islamic Ethics
- The Four Meanings of “Ethics” (Intention, Disposition-Attitude, Action, Inter-Action)

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### STAGE I: FOUNDATIONS & SOURCES

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WEEK 2 (Aug 27-31): ORIENTATION: The Mytho-Theological Backdrop of Islamic Ethics

Readings:

**MON:** Syed R Zamir, “Wheresoever You Turn...: The Orienting Tale of All That’s Islamic” (Draft)  
**WED:** Vincent Cornell, “Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge”  
**FRI:** HANDOUT: “Hadith of Gabriel”; Imam Birgivi: 3-8, 29-56

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

WEEK 3 (Sep 3-7): Sources of Islamic Ethics: The Qur’an

Readings:

**MON:** Frederick Denny, “Ethics and the Quran: Community and the Worldview”

**WED:** TB Irving, *The Quran: Basic Teachings* (selections);  
**FRI:** Fazlur Rahman, “Key Ethical Concepts of the Qur’an (M);

- Is the Qur’an an Ethical Text? How?
- The Qur’anic Worldview and its Ethical Implications
- Key Qur’anic Ethical Terms & Concepts

WEEK 4 (Sep 10-14): Sources of Islamic Ethics: The Prophet

Readings:

**MON:** Watch [Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet](#)

**WED:** Imam Birgivi, 61-65, 70-71 & 8-29

**FRI:** 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

- 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

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## STAGE II: MODES OF ETHICAL LIFE

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WEEK 5 (Sep 17-21): Islamic Law/Shari‘ah

Readings:

**MON:** Kamali, “Law and Society” in *Oxford History of Islam* [*Oxford Islamic Studies Online*];

**WED:** M. Abdul Haq Ansari, “Islamic Ethics” (p.745-769) in UNESCO volume (online)

**FRI:** K. Reinhart, “Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics” (M);

- Various “Modes” of Ethical Thinking and Life in the Islamic Tradition
- Ethics as Law, Law as Ethics: How is Shariah an Ethical Code?
- The Principle of *Amr bi’l ma’rūf wa nahy ‘an al-munkar*

WEEK 6 (Sep 24-28): Islamic Theology

Readings:

**MON:** Steefan Stelzer, “Ethics” in *Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology*

**WED:** Richard Frank, “Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology”

**FRI:** *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 per your need)

- 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 7 (Oct 1-5): *Adab*

##### Readings:

**MON:** Ormsby, "Literature"; Sa'di, *Gulistan* 46-53;

**WED:** Lapidus, "Knowledge, Virtue and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of *Adab* and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam"

**FRI:** Bowering, "The *Adab* Literature of Classical Sufism: Ansari's Code of Conduct"

- *Adab* and its Various Meanings
- Ethics and Muslim Literature

**FALL BREAK: Oct 5 (4:30 P.M.) – Oct 10 (8:30 A.M.)**

#### WEEK 8 (Oct 10-12): MIDTERM REVIEW

**WED:** PREPARATION FOR MIDTERM

**FRI:** MIDTERM REVIEW (IN-CLASS)

#### WEEK 9 (Oct 15-19): Spirituality (Sufi or/and non-Sufi)

##### Readings:

**MON:** Hamid Algar, "The Inner, Experiential Dimension" UNESCO volume, pp. 771-789

**WED:** Peter Awn, "Ethical Concerns of Classical Sufism"

**FRI:** Birgivi, pp. 77-83, 94-98, 104-112 & 120-152 + ONE chapter of your choice [Be prepared to summarize and teach it to others]

- Ethics and the Sufi Tradition
- *Tariqa Muhammadiyya*

#### WEEK 10 (Oct 22-26): Virtue in Islamic Philosophy

##### Readings:

**MON:** Daniel Frank, "Ethics" in *History of Islamic Philosophy; The Polished Mirror*, "Introduction"

**WED:** *The Polished Mirror*, Chapter 1

**FRI:** *The Polished Mirror*, Chapter 2

- Virtue Ethics within the Islamic Tradition
- Ethics within Islamic Philosophical Tradition
- Intersections of Ethics with the Greco-Islamic Medical Tradition

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## STAGE III: INTEGRATION, SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSION

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WEEK 11 (Oct 29-Nov 2): Islamic Virtue Ethics between Philosophy and Sufism

Readings:

**MON:** *The Polished Mirror*, Chapter 3

**WED:** Ibn Miskawayh *The Refinement of Character*, "First Discourse" pp. 5-26

**FRI:** Ghazali, *Ihya* pp. 165-199

WEEK 12 (Nov 5-9): What is Islamic Ethics?

Readings:

**MON:** *Comparing Compiled Definitions*

**WED:** *Collaboration on What is Islamic Ethics*

**FRI:** OPEN SPACE

\*What is Islamic Ethics? Manifesto (Made Public) Due\*

WEEK 13 (Nov 12-16): A Case Study: Islam and the Current Ecological Crisis Islamic Ethics Today

Readings:

**MON:** LECTURE: "Islamic Ethics and the Modern World"

**WED:** LECTURE: "Islamic Eco-Theology"

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Islamic View of the Universe", UNESCO volume, pp.189-215.

**FRI:** OPEN SPACE

- Ethics of Social and Political Life
- Historical and Conceptual Interplay among the Various Modes of Islamic Ethics
- Continuities & Discontinuities of Modes of Islamic Ethics in the Modern World
- Contemporary Muslim Writings & Debates
- Imagining Muslim Responses to Ethical Issues
- Revisiting Definition of Islamic Ethics

WEEK 14 (Mon. Nov 19): Class on Nov 19?

**THANKSGIVING BREAK: NOV 20 (4:30 P.M.) – Nov 26 (8:30 A.M.)**

Week 15 (Nov. 26-30): Culminating Investigation Presentations & Turned In.

*Group Interviews on the Culminating Investigation on Optional Days.*