ET-655 Contemporary Islamic Ethics

Instructor: Omer Awass
Office Address: TBA
Office Telephone: TBA
Email: awass@aicusa.edu

Course Info: Summer 2015
Class: Monday-Friday 9:00am-5:30pm
Morning break: 11:00 am-11:15 am
Lunch Break: 1pm-2pm
Afternoon Break: 3:45pm-4pm

Course Description: For Muslims committed to living Islam as a way of life, contemporary society offers many challenges. A commitment to the common good exists in tension with the need to protect individual rights. The desire to uphold family values may conflict with the need to defend pluralism and civil liberties. In a world threatened with violence from many sources, self-defense and security take on new meaning. In this class, we will examine these tensions and the Islamic principles that can help Muslims live ethically and with integrity in contemporary society.

After an introduction to the theoretical principles of Islamic ethics as presented in the works of modern scholars, the course will focus on these tensions as they exist in contemporary Islamic business ethics. Ethical issues that arise in the arena of contemporary business transactions (e.g. mortgages, loans, leasing, etc) are pervasive and of great concern to Muslims especially in the American context. Hence, the need to focus on contemporary principles and problems related to business ethics and practices. Yet Islamic ethical precepts for business are not confined to their immediate scope and apply to arenas in other parts of life. Students will have an opportunity to explore this diffusion as a significant portion of the assignments in the course will allow students to research contemporary ethical concerns of their own interest.

A dimension of the course will be very practically oriented where students will be expected in engage in problem based learning. Hence, a good deal of the assignments will require students to engage in the analysis and application of ethical principles to real life situations. On the other hand, there will be other aspects of the course that will require an engagement with theoretical research and writing as is expected in a traditional graduate seminar.

Prerequisites: This is not an introductory class to Islamic studies; coursework in Islamic Studies at the graduate level is a prerequisite. Also, proficiency in the use of Blackboard is expected as we will be using it daily. Class readings, student writings, course announcements and other course information and materials will be posted there.

Communication with Instructor: The best way to contact me is through email (see above).

Class: The class time will consist of lectures by the instructor on issues related to contemporary Islamic ethics and student discussion of the readings, assignments and main topics of the day. As for the student discussion component of the class, more will be said about this in the Description of Assignment section of the syllabus.

Attendance Policy: Since this is a condensed and short duration course, attendance in all classes throughout the period of the day is required. Exceptions will only be granted in emergencies that are corroborated by proper medical documentation or other documentation that warrants an
absence. An absence of an entire class without a proper excuse, will seriously compromise your grade. Missing part of the day, may lead to a diminishment of your grade.

**Required Text**


(Both books to be read in their entirety along with a submission of a book review for each prior to the beginning of classes. More will be said about this in the Description of Assignments).

**Non-Required Texts** (NO NEED TO PURCHASE THIS BOOK.)


(Several sections of this business ethics manual will be scanned and posted on Blackboard. Selections of this work will be read during the week of classes)

**Grade Distribution:** (See Description of Assignments at the end of the syllabus for details).

Book Reviews: 30% (Submitted prior to the beginning of classes).

Ask the Ethicist-Application Questions: 30% (Submitted throughout the week of classes).

Research Proposal Presentation: 10% (Final day of classes).

Research Paper: 30% (Submitted by 9am August 1, 2015).

**Course Outline:** I reserve the right to make changes in this outline and/or assignments in the course as is line with general aims of the course.

**SATURDAY:** (May16, 5pm): NO CLASS. Submit both book reviews.

**MONDAY:**

**Readings:** A Kevin Reinhart, “Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics,” Journal of Religious Ethics, v. 11/2 (Fall 1983): 186-203. (Blackboard)

**Shari’a Standards:** Loan (*Qard*): 343-358; Debit Cards, Charge Cards and Credit Cards: 17-28. (Blackboard)

**Lecture:** Presentation and discussion of general principles of Islamic ethics, its relations to Islamic law, contemporary Islamic ethical standards and personal business transactions.

**Group Problem Solving:** *Ethical dilemmas and applications to credit and personal finance.*

**TUESDAY:**

**Readings:** Shari’a Standards: *Sharika* (Islamic Business Partnerships) and Modern Corporations:
199-230; Mudaraba (Islamic Investment Partnerships): 231-250. (Blackboard)

**Lecture:** Ethics of Islamic business and investment partnerships.

**Group Problem Solving:** Ethical dilemmas and applications in business/investment partnerships.

**WEDNESDAY:**

**Reading:** Shari’a Standards: Murabaha (Cost Plus Financing): 111-136; Ijarah (Leasing): 136-160. (Blackboard)

**Lecture:** Ethics of financing and leasing.

**Group Problem Solving:** Ethical dilemmas and applications in financing and leasing.

**THURSDAY:**

**Reading:** Shari’a Standards: Salam (Forward Sale): 161-176; Istisna’ (Manufacturing Contracts): 177-198. (Blackboard)

**Lecture:** Ethics of sales and contracts. Student Presentations of Research Proposals.

**Group Problem Solving:** Ethical dilemmas and applications in sales and contracts.

**FRIDAY:**

**Reading:** Shari’a Standards: Islamic Insurance: 461-482; Investment Sukuk (Securitization): 303-324. (Blackboard)

**Lecture:** Ethics of insurance and investment.

**Group Problem Solving:** Ethical dilemmas and applications in insurance and investment.

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**Description of Assignments**

**Readings:** There were will be readings that are assigned prior to beginning of class week (Attia and Zaman) and readings assigned during the week in which classes are held (readings from Shari’a Standards posted on Blackboard). You are expected to complete each of the reading assignments that have been assigned prior to beginning of class that are listed in the course outline. It is crucial that you complete these reading assignments in their stated due dates as writing assignments, lectures and class group discussion will be based on these readings.

**Book Reviews:** You are required to obtain two book for this course (Attia and Zaman) which are listed above. These books serve as a general introduction to the theoretical principles that govern Islamic ethical/legal practices as well as some of the contemporary debates about issues related ethics amongst Muslims. You are required to write a book review (1500-2000 words in length, approximately 5-7 double spaced pages) for each of these two works prior to beginning of the class sessions. Each book review should be submitted in the Safe Assign folder found in Content area of Blackboard by **5pm Saturday May 16**. Late submission will be penalized. Each
assignment is worth 15% and together 30% of the total grade. SUBMIT A HARD COPY OF BOOK REVIEW TO THE INSTRUCTOR ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS.

**Ask the Ethicist-Application Questions:** It is at times easy to comprehend the reasonability of ethical values, but one of the great ethical challenges is how to apply universal principles to particular situation. This is a matter of practical reasoning and often there are no fixed rules for how to render ethical judgments for actual scenarios. The use of practical reasoning in applying universals to real life situations is best honed through practice and during the course we will spend good deal of effort and time, both on an individual and group basis, in exercising those skills.

So, along with the readings, **two** questions/scenarios will be assigned daily to each of you that will give you an opportunity to apply both universal Islamic ethical principles and the specific Islamic ethical business standards, as presented in the class readings, to real life situations. In other words, all of you will have an opportunity to **act as ethicist.** This feature of the course is designed to make it more practically oriented and will be especially helpful to those who are involved in chaplaincy/counseling work as you will find yourself consistently being asked these types of questions by your constituency.

In your responses to these questions/scenarios, you are to **carefully argue your ethical point of view** through the use of sound logic as well as citing the specific Islamic ethical principles or standards that are applicable to your case. In other words, these solutions are not merely opinion responses. Instead, they should judiciously crafted answers based on rational and/or scriptural reasoning. Be sure to **cite the author and page numbers** of the ethical precepts from the readings that you invoke in your response.

**Each question/scenario** requires a minimum of **300 word** response (no more than 400 words). The brevity of these responses leaves no room for including long quotations from the readings (i.e. more than 5 words long). **Be direct in answering the problem** (i.e skip all introductions and conclusions). **DO NOT INCLUDE THE TEXT OF THE QUESTION IN YOUR ANSWER SUBMITTED TO BLACKBOARD.** All responses will be submitted by the 8:45am the morning of the class for which those readings and related questions/scenarios are due. Post these answers in the appropriate Safe Assign link provided for them in the Content area of Blackboard. Because a significant portion of the class discussion will depend on the contributions of your responses to these questions/scenarios, **NO LATE SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED.** SUBMIT A HARD COPY FOR EACH RESPONSE TO THE INSTRUCTOR AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS THE DAY THOSE RESPONSES ARE DUE.

Your individual responses to each of these questions/scenarios will be the basis for further in-class group discussion, where you will come together with your classmates to share your individual answers with each other, debate the different positions, brainstorm further on the problem presented, come to consensus about relevant matters in the case, and craft/draft a new group solution to the same problem/scenario you worked on individually. Finally, each group will present their solution to the class for further class discussion and debate.

Each student will have a total of ten questions/scenarios to respond to throughout the five days of
the course **(two questions per day)**. Each question will be worth **3%**; **2%** of which you will earn based on the answers you submitted individually on Blackboard and the other **1%** will be based on your individual performance in the group (so don’t miss class). These assignments will be worth **30%** of the total grade.

**Research Proposal Presentation:** Prepare a 10-15 minute oral presentation on a topic selected from the list below for the last day of class: Friday May 22nd (actual time for the presentation will be assigned by instructor). This proposal will form the basis for the student’s final paper. The student must take a policy position on the topic and include in the presentation a summary of all relevant facts and norms he or she has gathered until this point considered in arriving at the position. Student must be prepared to discuss the topic with the rest of the class for another 10-15 minutes and will consider the new perspectives and information received from this discussion in the final paper. Topics must be selected from list below and approved by the professor before or by the first day of class. Only one topic per person; the first to ask has the right to the topic. An outline of the presentation and bibliography must be submitted to instructor on day of presentation.

**Research Paper:** Once you have chosen your research topic from issues outlined below, you will have about three weeks to complete your research paper from the last day of class (by 9am August 1, 2015). The paper should be **10-12 pages** in length (**double spaced, 12pt font, 1 inch margins**). The paper is to be submitted electronically in the Safe Assign link allotted to it in the Content area of Blackboard (no hard copy required). All students should adhere to Hartford Seminary’s **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR A RESEARCH PAPER** document located on its website under the Current Students/Online Forms Center tab (also posted in the Information section of Blackboard for your convenience). Your grade will be determined based on your adherence to guidelines in this document. The paper will be worth **30%** of your total grade. Late papers will be penalized.

**Issues for Contemporary Islamic Ethics Presentations and Research Papers:**

**Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Relations**

- Apostasy in Muslim majority countries
- Evangelization, religious relief work, mission and da`wa
- Balancing religious beliefs with activism for universal human rights

**Medical Ethics**

- Abortion
- Organ transplantation
- Medical assisted suicide
- Medical marijuana

**Family Life and Sexuality**
Adoption
Polygamy
Sexuality and the unmarried Muslim

Political Ethics
Citizenship
Military service
Partisan politics (joining a political party)

Public Policy Issues: What Position Should Muslims Take?

Health care
Gay marriage
Crime and punishment/rehabilitation
Death penalty
Taxation and/or another economic or financial issue

Ethics of War and Peace

Prisoners of war; enemy combatants
Torture vs. lawful interrogation procedures
Means of warfare
Who has the right to declare war?

Environmental Ethics and Animal Rights

What makes food lawful?
Industrialization vs. environment in developing countries.
Bibliography


Michael Cook, Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).


Majid Fakhry, Ethical Theories in Islam (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

Richard Foltz, Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).


John Kelsay and James Turner Johnston, Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions (Westport, CT: Greenwood


Farhat Moazam, Bioethics and Organ Transplantation in a Muslim Society (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).


Vardit Rispler-Chaim, Islamic Medical Ethics in the Twentieth Century (Leiden: Brill, 1993).


