



Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics

S·S·M·E

2021 Annual Meeting Program

THURSDAY JANUARY 7

12:30-1:45PM

Ritual and Materiality in Muslim Ethics

Abstract: In this panel, Verena Meyer conceptualizes visiting and praying at graves (*ziarah*) among traditionalist Muslims in Java as a ritualized memory practice with an agency that is irreducible to cognitive processes of transmission, arguing that the effectiveness of this ritualized memory is contingent on a particular ethic that understands a virtuous relation between the living and the dead as reciprocal. Syeda Beena Butool and Jesse Miller explore the deployment of Qur'anic verses in monuments during the Umayyad and early Abbasid eras and argue that a hermeneutical approach to these monumental inscriptions illuminates the degree to which they may be understood as ethical arguments in favor of power and authority.

Panelists: Verena Meyer, Columbia University

Syeda Beena Butool, Florida State University

Jesse Miller, Florida State University

Convener: Cyrus Zargar, University of Central Florida

2:00-3:15PM

Emerging Perspectives in Religious Ethics

Abstract: Composed of emerging scholars and members across the three sister ethics societies (SCE, SJE, and SSME), this panel analytically and constructively addresses a number of today's most pressing societal challenges such as the relationship between religion and science as well as how Jewish, Christian, and Muslim ethics might provide resources for resisting the dominating forces of the surveillance state and late capitalism along with white supremacy. Though diverse in their approaches, what unites the panelists is a commitment to interdisciplinarity, the welcoming of theologically thick voices, and the belief that collaboration among religious and theological ethicists is crucial as we seek to address those moral challenges confronting pluralistic societies today.

Panelists: Yonatan Brafman, Jewish Theological Seminary

Niki Kasumi Clements, Rice University

Sam Houston, Stetson University

Ross Moret, Florida State University

Bharat Ranganathan, Case Western Reserve University

Convener: Darlene Fozard Weaver, Duquesne University

5:30-6:45PM

Mental Health and Doing Muslim Ethics in 2020: An Open Discussion

Abstract: During this session, Omar Farahat will lead all of those in attendance in an open discussion about mental health, COVID, and ethics. All who attend are encouraged to come prepared to share their own experiences and observations.

Convener: Omar Farahat, McGill University

FRIDAY JANUARY 8

12:45-2:00PM

Ethics and Muslim Gender Norms and Practices: Between Texts and Lived Realities

Abstract: This panel speaks to the overall question of how and why the question of Muslim gender norms and practices as well as some of their related problems such as gender inequality, injustice, and gendered morality can be better addressed from the lens of Islamic ethics. The four presentations engage with this question from different angles, examining both Islamic textual tradition and the lived realities of present-day Muslim women of diverse backgrounds. The overall aim of the session is to explore the interplay between norms, ethics, and practices in relation to the question of gender in textual and lived Islam, and the linkages (as well as the contestations) between the two.

Panelists: Amira Abou-Taleb, University of Helsinki

Nevin Reda, University of Toronto

Mulki Al-Sharmani, University of Helsinki

Didem Unal Abaday, University of Helsinki

Convener: Mairaj Syed, University of California, Davis

2:15-3:30PM

The Future of Political Theologies

Abstract: This panel, co-sponsored by the Society of Christian Ethics, the Society of Jewish Ethics, and the Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics, engages the discipline of political theology while emphasizing interreligious dialogue in the pursuit of a common moral discourse. What unites the presenters is their commitment to engage the political sphere (1) by locating themselves theologically within the interdisciplinary conversation, (2) by establishing clear methodological parameters for how they will participate in the conversation, and (3) by recognizing this conversation takes place in a religiously and politically pluralist global setting. This third and final point is crucial. Without denying that religions make exclusivist claims, participants all affirm that claims must be made and defended in the context of political pluralism, tolerance, and cooperation.

Panelists: Emily Fuller, Washington & Lee University

Najeeba Syeed, McCormick Theological Seminary

Nathaniel Wood, Fordham University

Moderator: Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, Saint Louis University

Convener: Tallessyn Zawn Grenfell-Lee, Climate Resilience Chaplaincy

3:45-5:00PM

Sex and Gender Between Islamic Law and Muslim Ethics

Abstract: In this panel, Mariam Sheibani examines “secret marriage” as a case study which reveals the tension and disjuncture between Islamic law and morality, arguing that a close reading and systematic analysis of jurists from the four Sunni schools concerning secret marriages sheds light on the ways in which legal doctrines and ethical reasoning can be at odds with one another. And in opposition to prevailing interpretations among scholars of Islamic law which have prevented women from serving as Sharia court judges, Wesam Shahed examines various strategies employed by advocates for the inclusion of women in the Sharia judiciary grounded in the Qur’an, hadith, and jurisprudential texts.

Panelists: Mariam Sheibani, University of Toronto-Scarborough
Wesam Shahed, Michigan State University College of Law

Convener: Omar Farahat, McGill University

5:30-6:45PM

Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics Business Meeting

SATURDAY JANUARY 9

12:45-2:00PM

New Directions in the Ethics of al-Ghazali

Abstract: In this panel, Marilie Coetsee argues that Western scholarship which has portrayed al-Ghazālī as a champion of Islamic mysticism has often presupposed a distinction between ‘mysticism’ and ‘rationality’ in his thought and thus has failed to notice the ways in which al-Ghazālī’s advocacy for ‘mystical’ experiential knowledge affirms the critical role that such knowledge plays in rationally supporting ethical cognition and conduct. Sami Al-Daghistani in turn analyses al-Ghazālī’s understudied contribution to economic thought by exploring its major ideas, illuminating the degree to which al-Ghazālī considered righteous economic conduct as part of his overall ethic of happiness or *sa’āda*. In so doing, he positions al-Ghazālī’s ethical-economic thought at the intersection of *taṣawwuf* and *Sharī’a*’s law.

Panelists: Marilie Coetsee, University of Richmond
Sami al-Daghistani, Columbia University

Convener: Martin Nguyen, Fairfield University

2:15-3:30PM

Back to Normal? Muslim Americans and the Tragedy of Liberalism Before and After Trump

Abstract: Tens of millions breathed a sigh of relief when Joe Biden won the November election. Many liberals and others anticipate a return to pre-Trump normalcy. In this plenary, Edward Curtis argues that that going back to liberalism as usual would be a tragedy. Centering the experience of Muslim Americans since the 1950s, Curtis shows how U.S. democracy has failed Muslim Americans first in its repression of Black Muslim dissent and then its terrifying wars against Muslims at home and abroad after 9/11. Curtis instead calls for resistance to the liberal status quo ante.

Keynote Speaker: Edward E. Curtis IV, Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis

Convener: Shannon Dunn, Gonzaga University

3:45-5:00PM

Methodological Interrogations in Muslim Ethics

Abstract: In this panel, Jonathan Lawrence discusses the representation of same-sex sexuality in the *hadith* corpus, examining the affective and generative role of *hadiths* as literary text-types within broader ideological framings. He moves beyond the question of what the *hadith* say to explore how they are used to express an ethical framework around *liwat* and *sihaq*. Asad Dandia argues that the secular disciplinary frameworks hitherto employed to study key texts of “political theorist” al-Mawardi (d. 1058) and “sociologist” Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) have fallen short in appreciating the moral-ethical episteme in which they were written, and that an ethically-informed reading in a decolonial mode offers novel insights for scholars approaching these works and the Islamic tradition as a whole.

Panelists: Jonathan Lawrence, University of Oxford
Asad Dandia, Columbia University

Convener: Betsy Mesard, Villanova University

5:30-6:45PM

Higher Education and Muslim Ethics in a Time of COVID: Some Time for Shared Reflection

Abstract: This open session will focus on COVID-related impacts on teaching, research, and the job market and will include an opportunity to discuss these issues in breakout rooms based on interest.

Conveners: Betsy Mesard, Villanova University; Sam Houston, Stetson University

SUNDAY JANUARY 10

12:30-1:45PM

War and (Il)legitimate Violence in Muslim Ethics

Abstract: In this panel, Daniel Spisak argues that in contradistinction to contemporary just war theory, al-Qaeda and ISIS construct their own versions of it that fit their strategic and operational goals, allowing them to develop a targeting doctrine that is less restrictive against non-combatants. Darian Shump in turn argues that the apparent violence of Qur’an 9:5 (known as the “sword verse”) can only be properly understood within the context of its biblical roots, specifically the covenant between the Israelites and God outlined in Deuteronomy 13:2-19 and 17:2-7. This both sheds light on the ways in which violence in these passages was understood to be a covenantal obligation, and also helps foreground the dangers of decontextualized approaches to textual religious violence.

Panelists: Daniel Spisak, United States Army
Darian Shump, Florida State University

Convener: Sam Houston, Stetson University