

“And the garment of God-consciousness— that is best.”

The Qur'an, 7:26

The good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.

- Alasdair MacIntyre

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 A GOOD LIFE?

Proposals from within the Islamic Tradition

REL 279 (Fall 2019)
MW 2:30-3:45 pm (Chambers 2084)

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, humanity's place within it, and various proposals this religious tradition offers for a good human life. Fundamentally and consistently throughout the semester we will explore these themes through **a close reading of seminal Muslim texts**. There are three stages in our journey. In STAGE I we will document and probe our contemporary notions of what is a good human life. In STAGE II (the main section of the course) then we will look at various proposals that have emerged from within Islamic religious tradition that speak to this question, directly or in important indirect ways. In the process we will survey the various modes of ethical thinking and proposals for good life within the Islamic religious and intellectual tradition, i.e., 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 but also a move toward comparing Islamic proposals with other proposals and implications and applications of these ideas.

THE ROADMAP

SEE MOODLE FOR CALENDAR OF READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

BEING HUMAN SERIES

These lectures are quite relevant to the subject of our study this term. You are strongly recommended to attend any, all or at least ONE.

#1. Homo Narrans: Humans as Storytellers

Tuesday, September 3rd; 7:00 p.m.

Tyler-Tallman Recital Hall

Speaker: **Prof. Carol Quillen** (President, Davidson College)

Introduction: Prof. Scott Denham (German Studies and Humanities)

About the Talk:

We are humans. [...] We are the moral inhabitants of the globe. To deny this, regardless of our feeble attempts to live up to it, is to lie in prison.

-- Toni Morrison

For me, the question 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than the question 'Who will listen?'

--Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Humans have for centuries confronted the challenge of treating one another ethically when people have very different ideas of right and wrong. At this historical moment, many are skeptical of universalizing normative claims (for example, declarations of human rights), however emancipatory these may sound, either because such claims have been ineffectual or because they seem self-serving, an alibi for perpetuating the violence of colonialism. Asserting that all humans are rights-bearing individuals has not prevented us from dehumanizing and killing many human persons. This talk starts in a different place. What if, drawing on humanistic modes of inquiry and artistic creation, we begin by imagining all humans as tellers of stories that we, as other humans, are obligated to hear? Could this idea of *homo narrans*, human as storyteller, ground a productive quest to live freely as "moral inhabitants of the globe?"

#2. Title: TBA

Tuesday, October 8th; 7:00 p.m.

Tyler-Tallman Recital Hall

Speaker: **Prof. Shyam Gouri Suresh** (Economics)

Introduction: Prof. Paul Studtmann (Philosophy)

#3. Title: TBA

Thursday, November 7th; 7:00 p.m.

Tyler-Tallman Recital Hall

Speaker: TBA

Introduction: TBA

#4. Title: TBA

Tuesday, December 3rd; 7:00 p.m.

Tyler-Tallman Recital Hall

Speaker: **Prof. Matt Samson** (Anthropology and Latin American Studies)

Introduction: TBA

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, 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.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

INSTRUCTOR'S:

It is expected that by the end of the class, the participants will have:

1. Thought about the place and significance of “ethics” and questions regarding a good life;
2. Adequate familiarity with the Islamic proposals for a good human life (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;
3. Firm intellectual foundations in the subject to engage texts and practitioners of Islamic ethical traditions;
4. 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”;
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. Engaged in various intellectual practices, for example: reflection, summarizing, synthesizing & interpreting texts and learned to assess the intellectual quality of these practices in their own work as well as that of their peers

A NOTE:

If going through the course of our study will inspire joy of learning and experience of relevance of these themes to our lives, it will be an excellent learning outcome. Yet 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).

INTELLECTUAL PRACTICES (Previously Course Requirements/Assignments)

Various “Intellectual Practices” are in place as “building blocks” to help deepen comprehension and build synthesis. Reviews seek to ensure that we have learned the basics; other Intellectual Practices require engagement and reflection upon texts and themes of our study this term.

- Random Pop-Quiz (Key Concepts/Terms/Passages for the day) [5%]
- Midterm Review [30%]
- Final Review [30%] – **mostly on the second half but inclusive of themes from the first half as well.**
- NOTE: If you miss more than ONE class you lose these) [5%]

GROUP PORTFOLIO (THREE PARTS)

General Guidelines:

- To be done in Groups of TWO;
- Though everything will be part of one bound submission, all **three parts** need to be clearly marked and separated in your portfolio;

PART I (5%) - DUE Oct 9

- **MAP I:** What is a Good Life? Where you are at! 5%

PART II (30% [10% each])

- I. In Groups of TWO contribute an Annotated Bibliography [AB] (10%)
 - i. At least 1 FILM with brief commentary
 - ii. At least 3 SONGS with brief commentary
 - iii. At least 1 VIDEO-GAME with brief commentary
 - iv. 2 popular MAGAZINE articles with brief commentary
 - v. At least 3 ADVERTISEMENTS with brief commentary
 - vi. 3 PROVERBS/IDIOMS/APHORISMS with brief commentary
 - vii. 2 SOCIAL MEDIA posts with brief commentary
 - viii. 2 BLOG posts with brief commentary
 - ix. 1 BOOK with brief commentary/2 JOURNAL articles
2. NOTE: Add your attendance sheet and your sense of your class presence and contributions

PART III - Creative Writing & Synthesis [20%] (First one is MUST; Choose the other by NOV 1)

1. **MUST:** Book Report on selected chapters of *Advice to a Serious Seeker* by James Cutsinger¹
2. *Map II:* Map comparing proposals for a Good Life based off of texts studied prior to Midterm
3. *Map III* (+Reflections and Conclusion): A dialogue between Maps II & I

¹ Your book report will be on the first half of the book, on **Preface through page 96**. If we could get to it we will discuss the section on Beauty in the class. But we might not get to that. It is supposed to be succinct (no more than 4 pages) yet rigorous. There are three parts to it:

1. *summarizing* first the content and the key themes/conclusions,
2. relating this text to our study and the texts we have studied thus far; and finally
3. Your observations, what stood out, analysis, reaction, criticism etc. (this is the shortest section of all)

No introductory paragraph is necessary in the usual sense of how that's done. Jump right into it.

4. Two Texts in Dialogue: Comparison-Contrast, Analysis, what is learned from the dialogue on the subject of this course and subthemes?
5. Dialogue with an author (3-pages max)
6. A letter to the class on our study (Peer-reviewed, 3-pages max)
7. A creative piece (1 story OR 1 poem OR 3 aphorism)
8. Building your own synthesis from our study write a [4-pages max] well-crafted intellectual ESSAY [i.e., not an opinion piece] on the theme, "What is a Good Life?"

NOTES:

- Your choice for PART III must be communicated to the instructor by NOV 1.

TEXT-GUIDES

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

The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction Paperback – June 30, 2008

by [Terry Eagleton](https://amzn.to/2YRZwSV) (Author) <https://amzn.to/2YRZwSV>

The Lives of Man: A Guide to the Human States: Before Life, In the World, and After Death 2nd Edition

by [Imam 'Abdallah Ibn Alawi al-Haddad](https://amzn.to/2ONNar) (Author), [Abdal-Hakim Murad](https://amzn.to/2ONNar) (Editor), [Dr. Mostafa al-Badawi](https://amzn.to/2ONNar) (Translator), [Tim Winter](https://amzn.to/2ONNar) (Introduction) <https://amzn.to/2ONNar>

Imam Al-Ghazali Mukhtasar Ihya Ulum Ad-din Hardcover – March 15, 2014

by [Imam Al-Ghazali](https://amzn.to/2OMhUc4) (Author) <https://amzn.to/2OMhUc4>

The Principles of Sufism (Library of Arabic Literature) by Aishah al-Bauniyyah (2016-03-15) Paperback – 1884

by [Aishah al-Bauniyyah](https://amzn.to/2MPMW0n) (Author) <https://amzn.to/2MPMW0n>

Refinement of Character (Great Books of the Islamic World) Paperback – March 28, 2003

by [Ibn Miskawayh](https://amzn.to/2GYNjs6) (Author) <https://amzn.to/2GYNjs6>

Advice on the Art of Governance (Mau'izah-i Jahangiri) of Muhammad Baqir Najm-i Sani: An Indo-Islamic Mirror for Princes (SUNY series in Near Eastern Studies) Paperback – July 1, 1989

by [Sajida Sultana Alvi](https://amzn.to/2GUbSQg) (Translator) <https://amzn.to/2GUbSQg>

Advice to the Serious Seeker: Meditations on the Teaching of Frithjof Schuon Paperback – April 25, 1997

by [James S. Cutsinger](https://amzn.to/2YRbCYF) (Author) <https://amzn.to/2YRbCYF>

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 }

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 (www.rizwanzamir.net).

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Meeting Hours: MW 12-1:30 pm
