CALL FOR PAPERS

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

Key Concepts in the Islamic Ethical Tradition: Semantics, Methods and Approaches

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Concepts and terms are at the heart of all disciplines and reflect their theoretical structures and general taxonomies, serving as gateways to understanding them. Specialized encyclopedias in any field include entries to key concepts and terms that serve to introduce and define them. Equally, the foundational texts of any discipline can only be understood if analyzed through an approach that explicates their language and defines the meanings of their key words. For this reason, lexical enquiry has been central to understanding the Qur'an and has been studied as a major subject in exegesis. Qurʾanic lexicography is placed typologically on par with the authoritative exegetical books dealing with Sunnah and the other sciences of the text, each of which having its own specialized lexicon. It would, therefore, be arbitrary to approach a text or a discipline before analyzing the concepts and terms upon which this text bases its worldviews and theories.

While the various Islamic sciences have claimed their fair share of lexical works for their concepts and terms, "Islamic ethics" as a major Islamic field of human inquiry that occupies a distinct place in contemporary scholarship is still in need of in-depth studies of its concepts and terms that remain scattered across texts and disciplines) where ethics constitutes the main subject matter.

Many researchers have come to grips with the importance of ethical terminology and some of its key terms have figured in numerous studies that treated of pivotal concepts in Islamic ethics such as the concept of 'justice' (Daud Rahbar, 1953), in combination with others axiological - negative and positive- concepts (Salih al-Shamma, 1959), or focusing on a single ethical semantic-field in the Qur'an (Izutsu, 1966), or on a single concept (Helli, 2017). This is in addition to dozens of dissertations featuring titles inspired by ethical vocabulary and content consisting of philological studies, whether in the fields of exegesis, Ḥadīth, Islamic speculative theology, Sufism or contemporary philosophy. The existing models of studies on Islamic ethical concepts, limited in number as they may be, reflect the importance of focusing on this field and exploring it further, since the framing of the meaning of a given concept would help change the view towards a cumulative series of perceptions that are built on it and have accumulated by virtue of effects that do not necessarily reflect its nature and meanings solely within its context. Moreover, the study of a network of ethical concepts in a given field reveals an ethical system or paradigm that is more amenable to comprehension, theorization and further construction.

Therefore, the importance of dedicating a seminar to ethical concepts is justified by the need to elucidate and enhance the following aspects:

1. Ethical concepts represent an interdisciplinary field in which specializations and disciplines intersect, in the same way the subject areas of ethics do. At the level of the texts, these include materials from pre-Islamic literature, as manifested in poetry and other genres, that have been 'processed' through the semantic shift to which the Qur'an has contributed by adding its own conceptual elements and shades of meaning. The resulting semantic shifts have led to of the Qur'an becoming the focal point in the history of the concept of ethics. As such, the use of an ethical lexicon for the texts of the Prophetic Ḥadīths (both the narrated verbatim and the paraphrased). In addition, Philosophical, Islamic literary and scientific texts, and more emphatically and specifically exegetical sciences, Ḥadīth interpretation, Islamic speculative theology, philosophy, Sufism, the fundamentals of jurisprudence, and political and literary books constitute the loci classici of ethical concepts. Interplay and commonality may exist among these texts and disciplines at the semantic level; yet, some of them must claim their unique semantic values that are not shared by others. This variation of commonality and distinctiveness is an important catalyst for new interdisciplinary approaches that have rarely received the necessary attention befitting their status (Al-Khatib, 2015).

2. The study of concept in texts or in sciences is a two-dimensional process: theoretical and practical, and the function of the ethical concept itself varies between theoretical and practical uses. Tracking the concept as such would result in important standards for the theoretical and practical classification of the subject of ethics and other related sciences.

3. The ethical concept in the Islamic field is also interdisciplinary in nature, since the ethical meanings, which are reflective expressions of texts, religions and philosophies, are common across religions. These texts reflect this commonality explicitly or tacitly. Many of them, have commonalities with conventional practice at the time of the Revelation, both at the literary and aesthetic levels, and are markedly present in pre-Islamic poetry. Also, within the purview of the sciences, other philosophies influenced the significance of ethical concepts, including, inter alia, the concept of "Creation" itself, as well as borrowing or Arabization of concepts that were alien to the Islamic domain. The seminar will seek to examine in depth this interesting movement and development of the concept.

4. The presence of concepts in fields whose subject matters vary in terms of importance and content is worth considering here. In ethical concepts, there is a difference between recurrent and rarely used concepts, and within the recurrent and the rare, there are those that central and others that are secondary. Identifying both can only be attained through the study of the concept itself within the semantic field, which would help unfold standards that enable identifying the central and the secondary in ethical concepts, and then its relation to other dependent concepts. As such, the proposed enquiry will serve as a rigorous introduction to the division of the subjects of Islamic ethics and the arrangement of their levels of importance in theory and practice.

Within the larger context of the organization of this seminar by the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE) to explore methodological theorization within Islamic ethics as a science, by framing it within its introductory texts ("Seminar on Quran and Ethics", 2015 – Hadīth and Ethics, 2019, or by introducing a central concept in approaching it (Trusteeship

) or through surveying its theoretical or practical subjects (Migration, Ijtihad, Genome, etc.). This seminar seeks to discuss comprehensive critical approaches that can provide a basis for the study of ethical concepts in Islamic texts and heritage as well as their utility in modern thought. It seeks to identify their semantic values and thereby provide a coherent conception of the ethical structure of the central texts and enable a comparative approach with the traditional sciences.

In addressing the seminar's topics, authors of papers are expected to take into consideration the questions and issues raised in the above introductory statement and the definition of the axes, and should focus in particular on the following general methodological approaches:

- Historical: Periodization of the semantics of the ethical word(s) under study at the level of language, texts and contexts.

- Polyvalent: considering the variation or diversity in the semantics of the word within the structure of a single text or a single context at a particular stage, depending on the place and grounds of its incidence, derivation or difference in typology.

- Theoretical: treating the basic problem of conceptual analysis as such, and methodological difficulties related to identifying its semantic charge, highlighting its commonalities with and differences from other concepts, and the value that this kind of study adds to our knowledge of Islamic ethics in theory and practice.

- Comparative: to consider, as far as possible, the comparative framework, noting the linguistic, textual, religious and philosophical origins of each concept, tracking its semantic development until it becomes firmly anchored, and documenting it through its oldest specialized sources.

- Specificity: the allocation of each axis to a particular ought not to prevent a comparative approach into different disciplines, since the study of an ethical concept from an intertextual and interdisciplinary perspective is the worthiest of objectives.

Themes and Topics:

1. **Approaches to ethical concepts in the Qur'an**: Qur'anic ethical concepts constitute a semantic field and an integrated system. Most of the interpretations and studies have dealt with these words in a simplistic way that does not reveal the semantic specificity of each and its function in integration with other words. Therefore, it is expected that the papers submitted under this theme deal with the Quranic ethical concepts from a semantic perspective combining linguistic discourse in a way that helps detect the common Arab linguistic, religious and cultural practices in the era of the Revelation, while studying the linguistic root of the lexical item, its uses in Arabic and perhaps in other Semitic languages to help understand its meaning. This should also include analysis of the related textual approaches, such as pre-Islamic poetry and prosaic literature, and analysis of their implications in terms of contextual linguistic, literary or religious meanings in the pre-Revelation period, followed by scriptural study within the Qur'an, to enable the process of tracking the evolution of the use the concept through the stages of the Revelation. Papers should also look into the extent of the evolution of the uses of the concept, analyzing the structure of the text that contains the lexical item

in each of the contexts of its incidence, the associated lexical items, subjects or methods, and investing all these data in tracking the meaning of the concept, especially as it relates to other terms, and its function in the ethical system structure of the Qur'an. The study of the Qur'anic ethical concept should of necessity deal in a critical manner with the approaches to interpretation, lexicon and research studies so as to define the concept. The proposed study may also be a critique of studies or interpretations of a specific ethical concept or concepts in the Qur'an. Examples of concepts or semantic fields that can be studied may include: "ethical concepts and values related to divine justice: Mercy, punishment, etc.", "ethical concepts and values of rights: justice, equity, injustice, etc.", "ethical concepts and values related to human relations: charity, etc.", "universal concepts and values: virtue and vice, good and evil, righteous deed, patience, etc."

2. **Approaches to ethical concepts in Ḥadīth**: The texts of the Sunnah are replete with elements of ethical concepts, some of which overlap with the Quranic text. Some Ḥadīth texts have their unique wording system that is not found in the Qur'an; each has its own semantic system, either in terms of the very meaning that the Ḥadīth context adds to the Qur'anic lexical items, or the uniqueness of the meanings of the Ḥadīth as such. It is expected that research papers proposed under this axis adhere to the abovementioned methodological elements of the study of the Quranic concept, in particular the use of periodization as an approach. The study of the uses of lexical items in the Ḥadīth text is concerned with the framing of information, documentation, the analysis of the text, differentiation between what is narrated verbatim and what is paraphrased with a view to distinguishing between the periods of Ḥadīth production from the moment of the Prophetic utterance to its historical transfer, passing through the stages of compilation and interpretation. The papers under this axis may deal with ethical concepts as covered under the studies of Ḥadīth sciences but which should be approached from the ethical perspective, including concepts like "manners" (*adab, paideia*) "Nobilities of Character," "virtues," "branches of faith," and "character traits." Papers may also take the form of practical studies that explore the meanings of the common ethical words in Ḥadīth texts.

3. **Ethical concepts in *'ilm al-kalām* (Islamic speculative theology)**: Islamic speculative theology is a broad incubator of scientific theorization for a number of ethical matters, whether in the affirmation of Islamic creed or the discussion of the differences of Islamic schools and their teachings, or in religious and philosophical rhetoric. Terms and principles like "justice, good and evil, promotion of good and prevention of vice, faith and work, etc." constitute in essence an ethico-religious discourse. The approaches used to examine them have been predominated by doctrinal or philosophical analysis. Papers under this axis are expected to unravel the ethical meaning and its semantic implications specifically in conceptual terms, showing the extent of their impact on the related polemics. In addition to the elements of the conceptological study, the topics under this axis require investigation into the relevance of the concept to the texts and the extent of its derivation from them or from other sources, especially philosophy, as well as the study of its development and the factors influencing it. The study of concept can also be carried out through a particular school or the corpus of a particular oeuvre.

4. **Ethical concepts in the fundamentals of jurisprudence**: While the mission of jurisprudence consisted of tracking the normative provisions set by the domain's practitioners, an important aspect of its provisions has been founded on ethical grounds

and references, especially in those parts where no textual provision is to be found. Many of the jurisprudential concepts, especially ones that under to different disciplinary rubrics, such as "aleatory, mitigating harm, achieving interest, averting vices, mitigating hardship, etc.). Also, the fundamentals of jurisprudence represent the theoretical framework on which jurisprudential provisions have been founded, and there exist fundamental conceptual principles which bear ethical significance, particularly in relation to the objectives of Sharia, such as "meliorism, etc." Framing the ethical significance of the concepts of jurisprudence and its fundamentals is important in the development of the jurisprudential view and ethical theorization.

5. **Ethical concepts in Sufism**: Sufism reflects the basic practical ethics of behavior. Sufi codes of different types enjoy a rich and unique repertoire of ethical terminology, which distinguishes the movement from other disciplines in their use of textual or commonplace ethical concepts. This axis will focus on Sufi ethical term within a conceptological framework by demonstrating its significance, sources and development, and comparing the ethical meaning it comprises to the ethical words used in other fields. The numerous lexical models used in the field of Sufism include "asceticism, piety, striving, forsaking, progressive expression of ethical values, etc."

6. **Ethical concepts in modern thought and contemporary discourse:** The language of science is in constant flux, which also applies to everyday language and to key ethical words used in contemporary life belonging to different fields and specializations, such as philosophy, politics, sociology, media, etc. A number of these have been resuscitated from past legacies and texts, being theorized in books or used in discourse, while some new words have been coined and applied to emerging phenomena that carry ethical meanings. Some of these terms are inextricably associated with their authors (terminology of Taha Abderrahman), while others relate to public affairs (tyranny, etc.), popular words (bullying, intimidation, etc.) among many other neologisms, which could provide topical material for the conceptual approach and reveal its ethical dimension.

Description and Methodology of Research Papers:

The abstracts and research papers should observe the following criteria:

a. A specific ethical concept or concepts should be studied semantically using the conceptological methodology described above, or the submission may provide a critical appraisal of approaches to ethical concepts. Abstracts and papers that do not address the topical question will not be considered.

b. Abstracts and papers dealing with a general topic or those that do not address a clear and specific research problematic relevant to the subject of the seminar will not be considered.

c. Descriptive papers, which are based on compilation, statistics and typology and which do not offer an analytical and historical approach to the concept will not be accepted.

d. Papers that examine ethical conceptology as framed by a specific author or school should avoid delving into biographical information and should stick to only those biographical elements that serve the analytical purpose in relation to ethical theory.

e. In the event of proposing a topic that has already been studied, the abstract should justify the importance of offering it again, highlighting the gaps or deficiencies in the previous study and how the improvements will be carried out. Unless justified, no previously presented study will be taken into consideration.

The Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics invites researchers and academics interested in the above or related topics to send the following:

1. Abstract (300-500 words) which identifies the research problematic, the main question and the sub-questions to be addressed by the research paper, as well as the proposed methodology to answer them, highlighting the extent to which the study will differ from previous studies, if any.

2. A brief CV (500 words maximum) stating the researcher's (a) academic background, (b) major research interests, and (c) most important publications.

The authors of accepted abstracts will be notified and invited to submit full-length papers (7,000-10,000 words) according to the timeline shown below.

Proceedings of the Seminar:
Abstracts and full-length papers will be evaluated by a scientific committee which will select papers on the basis of scientific criteria and their relevance to the aims and objectives of the seminar as outlined in this Concept Paper. A limited number of the submitted papers will be selected for participation at the International Seminar organized by the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics. Accommodation and travel expenses will be covered by CILE.

Publication of Accepted Papers:
Accepted papers, as well as those presented at the seminar, will be sent to two academic referees for blind evaluation in accordance with accepted publication norms and standards. They will then be published in a special issue of *Journal of Islamic Ethics* or in a special volume in the book series *Studies in Islamic Ethics*, both of which are published by Brill. The open-access published works will be made accessible to the largest possible number of readers around the world.

Research and Seminar Languages:
Abstracts and research papers can be submitted in English or Arabic, and the discussion at the seminar will be conducted in both languages.

Important Dates:
➢ 20/07/2019: Deadline for abstract and short bio submission
➢ 27/07/2019: Notification of the committee's decision on abstracts
➢ 01/11/2019: Deadline for submission of full papers
➢ 10/11/2019: Notification of the committee's decision on papers
➢ 1-3/12/2019 Seminar at the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics in Doha, State of Qatar

➤ 10/01/2020: Deadline for the submission of final version of full papers after making the necessary editorial corrections in the light of the comments and suggestions of the scientific committee. The final papers will then be submitted to Brill for evaluation and publication

Contact:
- Submissions should be sent to: key.concepts@cilecenter.org
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- For all inquiries about *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, please write to: jie@brill.com