

CILE International Seminar (In Collaboration with the University of Cambridge)

The Conceptual Ground of Good and Evil in Islamic Discourse: A Fecund Domain For

Ethical Reflections

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Background Paper

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Overview

The notions of good and bad/evil in Islamic thought carries multifarious overtones, and their conceptual and linguistic translatability cannot be limited to gauging human conducts. The complexity of these notions is rooted in the interpretive associations of good and evil (*khayr* and *sharr*) to different domains of ethical reflections, which range from aesthetic undertones reflected in the Arabic terms *qabīḥ* and *ḥasan* (ugly and beautiful) and connotations to truth and falsehood associated to terms like *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil* but also to communal basis of what is praised and what is blamed such as *mamdūḥ* and *madhmūm*, as well as the legal spectrum of norms which includes the obligatory *wājib*, forbidden *ḥarām* as well as what is recommended *mandūb* and finally the metaphysical connotations associated to existence found in philosophical discussions of concepts such as the notion of the ultimate good *al-khayr al-maḥḍ* or *khayriyyat al-wujūd*. All these nuances deserve close attention when tackling Islamic ethics. This diversity is also captured in the nature of the reflection found in queries related to the ontology of good and evil, the nature/moral character of human and divine actions, the basis of normativity and the methods of norms construction in relation to scripture and communal practice, the origin of moral agency and responsibility in this world, the concept of happiness and misery and its realization both in this world and the hereafter, virtues and vices as well as

theological and philosophical positions on theodicy, God's moral code, the nature of creation, providence and the problem of evil, the nature of poetic discourse and its ethical dimension, as well as the psychological role of good and bad actions on the purification of the soul and its rapport to mystical aims. This conference is the first attempt to tap into the different conceptual discussions on the notion of good and evil in the variegated areas of knowledge production in Islam ranging from: philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, Sufism, Quranic exegesis, Hadith, and *adab*, and political thought in both classical and modern period.

Scope

The conference invites scholars into conceptual inquiry of the question of good and evil in the Islamic tradition both in the classical and modern context, which can serve as a model to showcase the reflective aspect and diversity of the ethical discourses in Islam. In so doing, the conference will offer a new fresh perspective to unpack the different ontological, epistemological, and practical views on good and evil through mapping out definitions, concepts, questions and argumentative approaches used in Islamic discourses on ethics. Overall, the aims of the conference are threefold: (1) Delineate the conceptual foundation of ethical notion such as a good and evil in its theoretical framework as well as its practical implications. (2) Define and discuss the argumentative or discursive approach in each field to address the conceptual and practical framework of the concept of good and evil. (3) Showcase the dynamic nature and diversity of ethical discourses in Islamic tradition and grasp the distinctive elements across the different disciplines.

By exploring conceptions of good and evil in the different ethical discourses in Islamic thought, the conference aspires to overcome the hackneyed opposition between scripturalism and rationalism as the only authoritative approaches to normativity in Islam and unpack novel venues of research, which can formulate a new grammar to engage with modern ethicist across different religious and secular discourses.

Themes and Key Questions

- The ontology of good and evil, nature of God's actions, the nature of human actions, divine justice and suffering, God's wisdom and beneficence, good and evil as attributes of actions

- Theodicy / anti-theodicy: The problem evil, the goodness of the universe, the privative theory of evil, providence, theories of virtues and vices and Eudaimonia as basis for fulfilling happiness in this world and the hereafter
- The relation between good and evil and the Islamic legal norms, epistemology and ontology of values, the moral basis of legal obligation (*taklīf*), the intention of the lawgiver and the objectives of the law
- Mystical conception of the good, the good and the conception of creation, the question of good and the etiquette of the mystics, the purification of the soul, and virtue and vices
- Conceptions of good and evil in scriptural narrative and communal practice or ethical narratives and arguments in Quran and Hadith
- Conceptions of good and bad in Aphoristic literature, mirror of princes, *adab* works and ethical reflections on good and evil in popular philosophy
- Concept of good and bad in modern Islamic reformist discourse, moral reform and its rapport to the concept of objectives of the law
- The concept of good and evil in modern political discourse, gender studies, environmental issues and bioethics-the problem of evil in relation to natural disaster, pandemics, conflicts, and migration policies
- The above-outlined themes are not meant to give a comprehensive list of the topics to be addressed by the commissioned authors. Researchers are welcome to address other relevant issues and engage with other disciplines, provided that the prospective papers fall within the broad scope of the seminar.

Prospective participants are kindly requested to submit the following:

- (a) **A short abstract** (300-500 words), describing the research's core ideas and how they will be addressed in the light of this Background Paper, and
- (b) **A brief biography** (max. 500 words) outlining the participant's academic background, main research interests and key publications.

The deadline to send both abstract and brief biography is January 15, 2022.

Languages

Submissions (abstracts, bios and full papers) can be written in **English, Arabic and French**. Simultaneous translation will be available throughout the conference.

Peer-reviewed publication with Brill

After the conference, the full proceedings will undergo a double-blind review process. The papers which will successfully go through this process will be published as part of a thematic issue in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Islamic Ethics (JIE)*, both published by Brill.

Benefits

CILE will offer the authors of accepted papers the following:

- Peer-reviewed publication
- Covering the costs of making the publication available via open access.
- Travel and accommodation costs during the conference (if the corona virus status remain risky, the conference will be held online).

Important dates

- **15 January 2022:** Deadline for submitting an abstract and short bio.
- **15 February 2022:** Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be notified and invited to write the full papers.
- **1 July 2022:** Deadline for submitting the full papers to circulate them between participants.
- **1 August 2022:** Authors will be notified about the acceptance (or not) of their full-text papers.
- **5-7 October 2022:** The proceedings of the seminar will take place in Doha.

Contact us

Submissions should be sent to good.evil@cilecenter.org.

For any inquiries about this call-for-papers, please contact Dr Ferial Bouhafa (fb482@cam.ac.uk).