

PHIL 2662G: Contemporary Philosophy of Islam

We will begin the course with Shahab Ahmed's magnum opus, "What is Islam?" and try to wrestle with this question. This might seem like an easy question to answer, but how can we apply the term to cultures as diverse as Moroccan to Malaysian: is it the Qur'an? No alcohol? Prohibition on homosexuality? etc. Ahmed shows for all of these examples, practices in Islam that don't connect to the Qur'an, Islamic practices that involve wine and Islamic practices that refer to homosexuality. We then move to explore Imran Aijaz's work on analytical philosophical problems in Islam. Then we look to the work of Talal Asad and his legacy to think about the relationship of Islam to secularism and if secularism's Enlightenment narrative of historical progress toward being less religious really is as progressive as it is assumed in the West. Next, we look at feminism in Islam. We start with a small unit on how Muslim feminists have thought through what are considered sexist parts of the Qur'an. We will read Amina Wadud, Aysha Hidayatullah and Fatema Amijee on this. We conclude this course with a reading that ties these last two units together with Talal Asad's most famous student, the feminist Saba Mahmood. We read her book "The Politics of Piety" to think through her critique of Western feminist assumptions by using ethnographic work on the Egyptian women's dawa movement. Just as Islam might have something to learn from feminism, it might also be the case that feminism has something to learn from Islam. There is no expectation of knowing Arabic as a prerequisite to be able to take this course.