Contemporary Approaches to Islamic Law
NYU Wagner
Spring 2014, Tuesdays 4:55-7:25PM
Syllabus

Instructor: Yousef Casewit (yac3@nyu.edu)

Course Description: Part I: Historical Background of this course surveys Muslim religious beliefs and practices with a stress on religious ideas, institutions and medieval history. Central issues, such as Islamic scripture and tradition, law and theology, mysticism and sectarianism, and the variety of Muslim understandings of monotheism, prophecy, ritual and society, will be the focus of this part of the course. Lectures are designed to provide groundwork for Part II and to give clarity to issues that arise in the readings. Part II: Islam’s Encounter with the Modern World is a topical survey of some of the “hot issues” that are debated both within and outside Muslim circles in the contemporary period. It begins by examining the encroachment upon, and finally colonization of, much of the Islamic world by the West and the spread of modern Western ideas among Muslims. Attention is then paid to the various Islamic responses to the advent of modernism, independence, and present-day relations between the two civilizations.

Course Readings: Students are required to purchase Ideals and Realities of Islam by S.H. Nasr. Other required readings for the course will be made available online in PDF format.

Grading:
Attendance (10%): Students are expected to be active learners and must come to class having read the assigned weekly readings and be prepared to share their informed perspectives with the rest of the class. The participation grade of 10% will be based on attendance taken randomly in 5 lectures.
Midterm (25%): 10 short definitions and 2 essay responses.
Final (35%): 10 short definitions and 2 essay responses. (cumulative)
Written Assignment (30%): A handout on the written assignment will be distributed in class in early February. The assignment will consist of a 6-8 page short essay (double-space, MLA style) responding to one of five questions, to be submitted in hardcopy on May 6th. Each paper should include a minimum of three scholarly sources, i.e. peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters. All responses will be evaluated based on the following: a) the overall strength of your main thesis argument, b) evidence and support of your arguments (including the diversity and quality of your references), c) clarity and coherency in your writing style given the condensed nature of the written assignment. Alternatively, students may chose to write a detailed 6-8 page book review after consulting with instructor.

Please note:
1. Late submissions will receive a 2% penalty per day (excluding weekends)
2. Plagiarism is the representation of the work of someone else as one’s own work and is a serious academic offense.
Lecture Sequence:

PART I: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1- The Prophet Muḥammad
Required Reading:
Nasr, Ideals and Realities, Chapter 3, “The Prophet and Prophetic Tradition.”
Suggested Reading:
Lings, Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources.

2- Muslim Scriptures: Qurʾān & Ḥadīth
Required Reading:
Nasr, Ideals and Realities, Chapter 2, “The Qur’an”
Brown, Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World, pp. 1-67
Suggested Reading:

3- Islamic Theology (kalām)
Required Reading:
Watt, Islamic Theology and Philosophy, pp. 13-55; 64-68; 75-97 (Muʿtazilites; Ashʿarī; Ashʿarism).
Suggested Reading:
Gibb, The Philosophy of the Kalam.

4- Islamic Philosophy (falsafa)
Required Reading:
Watt, Islamic Theology and Philosophy, pp. 69-74 (Islamic Philosophy).
Suggested Reading:
Nasr & Leaman, History of Islamic Philosophy.

5- Islamic Law & the Legal Schools (madhhabs)
Required Reading:
Nasr, Ideals and Realities, Chapter 4, “The Shari’a.”
Hallaq, An Introduction to Islamic Law, Chapters 1-6.

6- Despotism: Law and Rebellion in Islam
Required reading:
Abou El Fadl, Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law (Intro + Chapters 2, 8)
7- Jurisprudence of Muslim Minorities (fiqh al-aqalliyāt)  
Required reading:  
March, Islam and Liberal Citizenship: The Search for an Overlapping Consensus (Chapters 5-8)  

*** MIDTERM ***  

8- Islamic Mysticism (taṣawwuf)  
Required Reading:  
Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, Chapter 5, “The Tariqah.”  
Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, Chapter 3, “The Path” (pp. 8-148).  
Suggested Reading:  
Arberry, Sufism; A. Knysh, Islamic Mysticism  

PART II: ISLAM’S ENCOUNTER WITH THE MODERN WORLD  

9- Formation and Expansion of Islamic Civilization  
Required Reading:  
John Tolan, Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination,  
(Chapters 1-3)  

10- Colonialism and Post-Colonialism: Western Expansion into the Islamic World  
Required Reading:  
(Chapters 11-14).  

11- Women and Islam  
Required Reading:  

12- Islam and the Environment  
Required reading:  

13- Fundamentalism: Salafism & Wahhābism  
Required reading:  
Abou El Fadl, The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists,  
Chapters 1-4  

*** EXAM WEEK *** 5/14 — 5/20