



International Conference

From the Divine to the Human: New Perspectives on Evil, Suffering, and the Global Pandemic

Organizers:

Muhammad U. Faruque, University of Cincinnati

Mohammed Rustom, Carleton University

Jun 28-30, 2022

Program Book

A Virtual Conference on Zoom
All Sessions are Held in Eastern Standard Time

Day 1: June 28

10:00 – 10:15 a.m. Welcome Remarks by the organizers

10:15 a.m. - 11:45 a.m. Panel 1 Session 1

Cyrus Zargar (University of Central Florida): “Suffering as Metaphysical Narrative: Another Author’s Story”

Hina Khalid (University of Cambridge): “Sacred Somatics: An Islamic Perspective on the Role of the Body in the Care of the Dying”

Panel Chair: Sayeh Meisami (University of Dayton)

11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Lunch Break

1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. Keynote Speaker: Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr

(The George Washington University)

“Reflections on Evil, Suffering, and the Pandemic”

1.30 p.m. – 3.45 p.m. Panel 1 Session 2

Muhammad Faruque (University of Cincinnati): “Hume on Trial: Can Evil and Suffering be Justified?”

Mohammad Mansouri (University of Toronto): “Human Suffering in Light of the Oneness of Being”

Panel Chair: Sayeh Meisami (University of Dayton)

Day 2: June 29

10:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. Panel 2 Session 1

Justin Cancelliere (Independent Scholar): “Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s Metaphysical Theodicy”

Taraneh Wilkinson (University of Cincinnati): “Transformative Love Amid Suffering: A Perspective from Hilmi Ziya Ülken (1901-1974)”

Sara Aziz (Harvard University): “Suffering Before God: The Hermeneutics of Tawhid in the Act of Supplication”

Panel Chair: Sayeh Meisami (University of Dayton)

12:15 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. Lunch Break

1.00 p.m. – 3.15 p.m. Panel 2 Session 2

Amer Latif (Emerson College): “Living with Pain, Confronting Addiction”

Nicholas Boylston (Seattle University): “Aesthetic Theodicy: Light from the Horizon of Karbala”

Mukhtar H. Ali (University of Illinois): “Self-knowledge, Divine Trial and Discipleship”

Panel Chair: Sayeh Meisami (University of Dayton)

Day 3: June 30

10:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. Panel 3 Session 1

Khalil Andani (Augustana College): “Unnecessary Evil: An Islamic Neoplatonic Theodicy from the Ismaili Tradition”

Özgür Koca (Bayan Islamic Graduate School): “Necessity and Freedom in God, Evil, and the Human Response”

Rosabel Ansari (Stony Brook University): “Climate Change and Specific Evil: An Avicennan Reading”

Panel Chair: Sayeh Meisami (University of Dayton)

12:15 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. Lunch Break

1.00 p.m. – 2.45 p.m. Panel 3 Session 2

Mohammed Rustom (Carleton University): “Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn.”

Atif Khalil (University of Lethbridge): “On Suffering and the Human Condition: Reflections from the Sufi Tradition”

Ailya Vajid (Independent Scholar): “Trials as Transformation: Islamic Chaplaincy and the Problem of Human Suffering”

Panel Chair: Sayeh Meisami (University of Dayton)

2.45 p.m. – 3.45 p.m. Roundtable Discussion (open to all)

3.45 p.m. Concluding Remarks (Mohammed Rustom)

Biographical Profiles of Participants

Muhammad U. Faruque (PI) is the Inayat Malik Assistant Professor at the University of Cincinnati. His research lies at the intersection of religion, science, philosophy, and literature, especially in relation to the Islamic intellectual tradition. He earned his PhD (with distinction) from the University of California, Berkeley, and served as Exchange Scholar at Harvard University and as George Ames Postdoctoral Fellow at Fordham University. His highly acclaimed book *Sculpting the Self* (University of Michigan Press, 2021) addresses “what it means to be human” in a secular, post-Enlightenment world by exploring notions of selfhood and subjectivity in Islamic and non-Islamic literatures including modern philosophy and neuroscience. Dr. Faruque’s work has been supported by Templeton Foundation, the Ames Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the Bestway Foundation, among others and has appeared in a number of peer-reviewed journals such as *Philosophy East and West*, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* (Cambridge), *Brill Journal of Sufi Studies*, *Religious Studies* (Cambridge), and *Ancient Philosophy*. He has delivered lectures in many North American, European, Asian, and Middle Eastern universities. He gives public lectures on a wide range of topics such as climate change, spirituality, meditation, A.I., Islamic psychology, and Islam and the West. He is also the recipient of numerous awards, grants, and fellowships, including a *Templeton Foundation Global Philosophy of Religion Project* grant.

While his past research has explored modern and premodern conceptions of selfhood and identity and their bearing on ethics, religion, science, and culture, his current project investigates whether or not Sufi philosophy and practice—as articulated in the School of Ibn ‘Arabī—support and foster an active engagement toward the planet’s well-being and an ecologically viable way of life and vision. He is also at work on a book on A.I. and the ethical challenges of information technology.

His interests and expertise encompass history and theory of subjectivity, Qur’anic studies, Perso-Arabic mystical literature, religion and climate change, gender hermeneutics, Islamic philosophy and ethics, and Graeco-Arabica. He teaches courses on Islam, Islamic humanities, religion and climate change, as well as on selfhood and identity in Islamic and contemporary thought.

Mohammed Rustom is Professor of Islamic Thought at Carleton University. His more recent books include *Inrushes of the Heart: The Sufi Philosophy of ‘Ayn al-Qudat* (SUNY Press, 2023), *The Essence of Reality: A Defense of Philosophical Sufism* (NYU Press, 2022), and *Global Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (forthcoming). Dr. Rustom is also the Editor of Equinox Publishing’s Global Philosophy series, Commissioning Editor of the *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* (JMIAS), and Editorial Board member of the Library of Arabic Literature (NYU Press).

Cyrus Ali Zargar is Al-Ghazali Distinguished Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Central Florida. His first book, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in Ibn ‘Arabi and ‘Iraqi*, was published in 2011 by the University of South Carolina Press. His most recent book, *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism*, was published in 2017 by Oneworld Press. His forthcoming book, *Religion of Love: Sufism and*

Self-Transformation in the Poetic Imagination of 'Atṭār, will be published by the Islamic Texts Society.

Sarah Aziz is a doctoral student in Harvard University's Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations Department. Her fields of interest include Islamic intellectual and cultural history, devotional literature, Shi'ism and Sufism. Her research focuses on the early modern period, in which she explores religious culture and intellectual exchange across the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. She is particularly interested in the role of prayer literature as a site of scholarly reflection and debate that cuts across linguistic and confessional divides. Sarah received her Masters degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 2019 and her BA in religious studies with honors in 2017 from Davidson College.

Hina Khalid is a PhD student at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, where she also received her undergraduate and MPhil degrees. She is working on a comparative study of the theology and poetry of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). She is particularly interested in the possibilities of comparative theology across Islamic and Indic traditions, and in the ways that shared devotional idioms have formed in and across the Indian subcontinent. Her previous publications have centred on a range of topics, including issues of embodiment, gender, and spirituality across the Christian, Islamic, and Indic worldviews.

Khalil Andani (khalilandani.com) holds a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from Harvard University (Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations) and serves as an Assistant Professor of Religion at Augustana College. His dissertation, "Revelation in Islam: Qur'anic, Sunni, and Shi'i Ismaili Perspectives", was awarded Best Ph.D. Dissertation of the Year by the Foundation for Iranian Studies in 2020. His first book project, based on this dissertation, will be an analytical and historical investigation of Muslim theologies of revelation in the formative and classical periods of Islam. Khalil's publications include articles in *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies*, *Brill's Journal of Sufi Studies*, *Religion Compass*, *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies*, chapters in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, *Deconstructing Islamic Studies*, *Global-Critical Philosophy of Religion*, and *The Routledge Companion to the Quran*. Khalil also maintains an active social media presence on Twitter, YouTube, and Academia.edu where he makes his scholarship available to wider, non-academic audiences.

Özgür Koca is an assistant professor of Islamic Studies and Philosophy at Bayan Islamic Graduate School. Koca's work focuses on the intersection of Islamic theology (kalam), philosophy (falsafa), and spirituality (Sufism) in classical and post-classical Islam. He also examines the implications of these legacies for the realities of modern Islam. This implicates issues of the religion and science debate, pluralism, interreligious discourse, and related areas of inquiry. He is the author of *Islam, Causality, and Freedom: From the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). He was awarded the *Fisher Faculty Teaching Award* in 2015 for excellence in teaching. He is currently working on a monograph, tentatively titled: "The Principles and Applications of Islamic Metaphysics."

Ailya Vajid is currently a student at the College of Medicine and Healing Arts pursuing a diploma in Unani Tibb. Previously she has served as a university chaplain at several institutions. Ailya holds

a BA in Religion and Islamic Studies from Swarthmore College and an MA in Theological Studies, with a focus in Islamic Studies, from Harvard Divinity School.

Atif Khalil is an Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Lethbridge (Alberta, Canada), where he has been teaching for more than a decade. He is the author of *Repentance and the Return to God: Tawba in Early Sufism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018), and thirty academic articles on Sufism, Islamic Theology and Philosophy, Virtue Ethics, the Judeo-Islamic Tradition, and the contemporary study of Islam. He is co-editor of *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* (SUNY Press, 2012) and *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam* (Beirut: AUB Press, 2022). At present, he is working on a monograph on the theory and practice of *dhikr* in Sufism, and another one on the mystical ethics of Ibn Arabi. In 2009 he completed his doctorate at the Center for Religious Studies at the University of Toronto.

Amer Latif is an interdisciplinary scholar specializing in comparative religion and Islamic studies. Broadly speaking, Amer's research revolves around issues involved in the translation of cultures. Having grown up in Pakistan and with an undergraduate degree in Physics, Amer thrives on studying and creating containers that are capacious enough to hold seeming contradictions such as science and religion, East and West. Amer holds a PhD in Comparative Studies from Stony Brook University and is Associate Professor of Religion at Emerson College in the Marlboro Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies. His current book project is titled *Reading the Qur'an with Rumi*.

Mukhtar H. Ali, Ph.D. (2007) University of California, Berkeley, is a Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He specializes in Sufism, Islamic philosophy and ethics, and his areas of interest also include Arabic and Persian literature, Qur'anic studies and comparative religion. He is the author of *Philosophical Sufism: An Introduction to the School of Ibn al-'Arabī* (Routledge, 2021) and *The Horizons of Being: The Metaphysics of Ibn al-'Arabī in the Muqaddimat al-Qayṣarī* (Brill, 2020). His forthcoming work, *A Commentary on the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, is a translation and study of Jāmī's *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ Naqsh al-Fuṣūṣ*. He has also translated some contemporary metaphysical texts, such as *The New Creation* (Sage Press, 2018) and *The Law of Correspondence* (Sage Press, 2021).

Rosabel Ansari is a Fellow of the Institute for Globalization Studies and Lecturer in Asian and Asian-American Studies at Stony Brook University, SUNY. Her forthcoming book is entitled *Al-Fārābī and the Ambiguity of 'Being'* and her published articles cover various aspects of metaphysics in the post-Avicennan tradition.

Justin Cancelliere studied languages in Iran and Egypt before completing graduate work in Islamic philosophy and Sufism at the University of Georgia. His published articles include "Suhrawardī and the Problem of Universals," "Rudiments of a Pros Hen Hermeneutics," and "Proving God with Plato." Forthcoming articles include "Becoming What One Is: Liberative Knowledge and Human Perfection in the Writings of Seyyed Hossein Nasr," to be published in *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam*, edited by Bilal Orfali, Atif Khalil, and Mohammed Rustom (American University of Beirut Press), and "Fear, Deeds, and the Roots of Human Difference: A Divine Breath from al-Qūnawī's *Nafaḥāt*" (Brill).

Nicholas Boylston is Assistant Professor at Seattle University. Dr. Nicholas Boylston is a scholar of Islamic Studies focusing on Shii Studies, Quranic Studies, Sufism and Persian literature. He received his BA from Harvard College, his MA from the University of Tehran, and his PhD from Georgetown University, and from 2017 to 2021 taught at Harvard University as Lecturer and College Fellow. Dr. Boylston's research focuses on themes of diversity and unity in the writings of Sufis, philosophers and litterateurs from the Persianate world in both the Twelver Shii and Sunni traditions. He is currently investigating the role of Quranic exegesis in the development, articulation and negotiation of Shii-Sufi thought and identity, and is writing a manuscript on Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī's Quran commentary *The Greatest Ocean*. He also studies the development of pluralistic modes of discourse in 12th century Persian literature, and has published on Ḥakīm Sanā'ī and 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī.

Taraneh R. Wilkinson received her doctorate in Religious Pluralism from Georgetown University, where she examined conversations across Christian and Muslim perspectives on interreligious dialogue and the comparative study of religion. She is author of *Dialectical Encounters: Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019). From 2018-2019, she was an international post-doctoral fellow at FSCIRE in Bologna, Italy, where she pursued further research on attitudes regarding interreligious dialogue and comparative religion in the context of Turkish Islam. She is now pursuing her second doctorate in Philosophy of Science at the University of Cincinnati, with focus on Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Psychology. Her active research interests include philosophy of religion, world philosophy, applications of colonial critiques to informal science education, critical phenomenology, and eco-psychology. She is currently junior co-chair of the Schleiermacher Unit at the American Academy of Religion and serves in the office of the Philosophy of Science Association.

Mohammad Amin Mansouri is a doctoral candidate in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. Specializing in Islamic philosophy, Ismaili thought, Islamic occultism, and the Sufi tradition, a number of his articles have appeared (or will shortly appear) in several leading academic journals, such as the *Journal of Sufi Studies*, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, and *Studia Islamica*.

Sayeh Meisami is Associate Professor of Philosophy at University of Dayton in Ohio. She studied at Universities of Tehran and Toronto for her Postgraduate degrees. Before starting her position in Dayton, she taught Islamic philosophy in Iran and Canada. She has published several books and articles in the fields of philosophy and religion. She is the author of *Mulla Sadra* (2013), *Knowledge and Power in the Philosophies of Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī and Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī* (2018), and *Nasir al-Dīn Tusi: A Philosopher for All Seasons* (2019).