

Gendered Morality Reading/Teaching Guide for Lay Intellectuals and Undergraduates

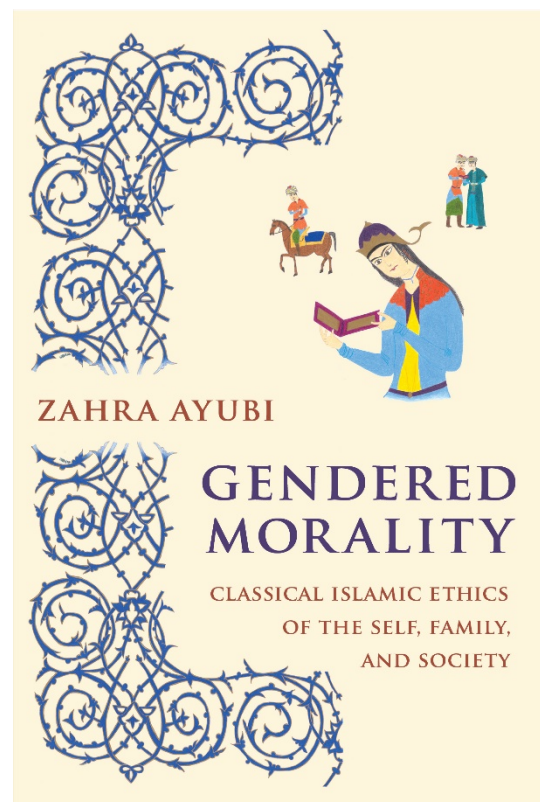
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The goal of this guide is to make *Gendered Morality* more accessible to undergraduate students and lay intellectuals who find the topic of the book interesting and important. I admire this camp of readers because of their willingness to expand their typical pool of conversation partners for the sake of ethics and gender justice.

Please note that the book is always available with a 30% discount with code CUP30 at <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/gendered-morality/9780231191333>

Simplifying the Theoretical Concepts in *Gendered Morality*

Below is a list of terms I use in *Gendered Morality* that sound like academicsese/jargon, but in reality, they are terms that scholars have coined to describe what they think is going on in a given text or context. Many of them are terms other scholars have come up with and I describe below how I'm using them. A few of them are terms I define based on my findings when I analyzed the medieval Persian Islamic ethics texts. Some of the terms are not necessarily from scholarly theories of what is going on in the text, but rather represent the typical language scholars use to talk about gender in premodern Islamic texts that might not be used in common language. Other terms are used in everyday language but have particular meanings in scholarship (and how I'm using them).



(Note: there is a glossary in the back of the book that provides simple definitions of Persian and Arabic terms)

Gender – the term gender means different things to different feminist theorists, but in this book, I use it as the social construct that medieval ethicists create in relation to their understandings of sex, sex differences, and the moral and social responsibilities that emerge from the quality of sex. Gender is not binary (i.e. only consisting of male and female) in the medieval Muslim context, but the gender roles described in the ethics texts are binary to a great extent. There are still multiple types of masculinities and femininities discussed in the texts, even though the ethicists operate on stereotypes of men and women's behavior.

Gender analytic – a term I use to describe how an analysis of gender is made possible when looking at the three texts together and examining their historical and scholarly contexts.

Male normativity – the ethicists have men in mind when they write. The audience for their texts are men. All ideas, morals, and ethics that are related to humans are actually referring to men only, even though they use universal language and definitions of humanity. Thus, men are considered the standard humans.

Immanence – Simone De Beauvoir, a feminist theorist, put forward a theory, or argument, that women have historically been marked by their physical presence, their bodily functions, and so on.

Transcendence – Simone De Beauvoir, a feminist theorist, put forward a theory that historically men have been marked by their intellectual presence, they transcend their bodily presence in pursuit of lofty goals and in the process, women who are weighed down by their bodily functions are doomed to being utilized (or instrumentalized) by men.

Homosociality – this refers to same sex social interactions, such as friendship, teacher-student, merchant-customer, or any other interaction that involves people of the same sex. Not to be confused with homosexuality or homoeroticism that specifically refers to same-sex sexual interactions or ideas. I use the term to describe men interacting with other men in social places such as bazars, mosques, universities, public baths, royal court/government, etc. The book makes several arguments about the ethics of homosocial interactions, especially compared to men-women interactions.

Masculinity - in this book, masculinity refers to the qualities associated with men.

Hegemonic masculinity – the lowliest, basest, and violent human behavior that is extreme but only associated with manhood, and so are considered exceptionally

masculine traits. In other words, the worst of human behavior is considered to be classic male behavior and often accepted as male behavior. Hegemonic masculinity can refer to the behavior that is passed off with the “boys will be boys” sentiment because men are expected to act lowly. I am using this term to refer to the kind of typical male behavior that the ethics texts are trying to correct/replace with a kind of manhood that is positive and humanistic.

Femininity – in this book, femininity refers to the qualities associated with women.

Epistemology – study of the origins of knowledge, where knowledge comes from, what kinds of things count as knowledge or form our knowledge.

Ontology – nature of creation; the nature of things. If I say ontological equality, it means I’m talking about equality in the nature of created beings. Ontology is often used in contrast to epistemology. That is, ontology refers to qualities or realities that are considered innate or that exist without question, while epistemology often refers to how one comes to understand or know innate qualities or observed realities.

Premodern heteronormativity – I use this term to refer to the kind of heterosexual norms the ethicists promoted in men, such as being sexually intimate with women only (wives, specifically), but being emotionally intimate with men only because they are their mental equals.

Metaphysics – This is another term that has multiple meanings which have changed over time. For our purposes, it is a science that refers to the qualities, nature, and potential changes in the human soul (*nafs*) as imagined by the medieval ethicists.

Metaphysical tension – I coined this term to refer to the contradiction in the medieval ethicists’ beliefs that women are human beings because they have a rational soul, but they are deficient in rationality, which makes them less human.

Egalitarianism – human equality and ideas about organization of societies and families based on human and gender equality.

Flourishing – refers to the highest possible happiness a given human being can achieve. Also, flourishing can refer to the highest human potential.

Moral deserts – deserts refer to the things that people deserve. Moral deserts refer to the things that people deserve from a moral perspective. For example, a moral desert

could be a light punishment for someone who commits a petty crime, or a heavy punishment for someone who commits a serious crime.

Discussion Questions

Below I have written discussion questions which I derived directly from themes and arguments in the book as well as specific topics that readers have asked me about. I have divided them into the following categories: epistemology & history; metaphysics/virtue ethics; the ethics of marriage; male homosocial ethics; *akhlaq* today; and the philosophical questions posed by feminist critique of the *akhlaq* tradition. I hope that these questions serve as a starting point for your class/book club discussions on *Gendered Morality*, though I know that students/readers may find different aspects of the work of greater importance to them.

Epistemology & History:

- 1) In what ways are the Aristotelian/Platonic virtue ethics of Ghazali, Tusi, and Davani also Islamic?
- 2) What makes *akhlaq* a central genre to understand gender in Islam?
- 3) How does *akhlaq* compare to other genres of Islamic thought in terms of answering the questions: How is one supposed to live? What is Islamic? How does gender affect how one is supposed to live?
- 4) How does historical context affect the content of *akhlaq*, and specifically, historically specific understandings of gender?

Metaphysics/Virtue Ethics:

- 1) What is egalitarian about the metaphysics and how is it in tension with hierarchical virtue ethics?
- 2) How are instrumentality, immanence, and embodiment related in the *akhlaq* construction of femininity?
- 3) How are virtuosity, rationality, and transcendence related in the *akhlaq* construction of masculinity?

Ethics of Marriage:

- 1) How do the ethics of divorce demonstrate male normativity of ethical refinement?

- 2) How do the ethicists frame the curbing of male sexuality?
- 3) How do the ethicists describe the paternal role in childrearing? What makes it ethical for them?
- 4) How is the distribution of money/resources central to vicegerency (*khilafah*)?

Male Homosocial Ethics:

- 1) What is the line between homosociality and homosexuality in *akhlaq*? What does it say about masculinity and gender relations broadly?
- 2) How is homosocial male love contrasted with men-women relationships (in marriage)?
- 3) What does homosocial male associations across social/professional classes indicate about ethical masculinity?
- 4) What makes a ruler potentially the most ethical person or the least ethical person in the *akhlaq* cosmology?
- 5) How do the ethics of marriage and the ethics of treating one's subordinates violate the foundational principles of *akhlaq*?

***Akhlaq* Today:**

- 1) How do you see male-centered ethics playing out today?
- 2) What makes the *akhlaq* texts compelling for contemporary audiences/for you?
- 3) What do you find to be problematic in the *akhlaq* texts when comparing it to your own sense of ethics?

Philosophical Questions Posed by Feminist Critique:

- 1) What are the problematics of defining the human as the rational animal?
- 2) How is the concept of vicegerency (*khilafah*) found in the *akhlaq* texts patriarchal?
- 3) How does the essentialization of men and women lead to other forms of marginalization?

- 4) Is all hierarchy bad? What is the problem with hierarchy found in *akhlaq*?
- 5) Is it possible to create a world without exploitation or utilization of others?
- 6) What are the philosophical problematics of patriarchy as an organizing principle of society?
- 7) In your opinion, what are the responsibilities and limits of vicegerency (*khilafah*) in *akhlaq*?