

Teaching guide: ethical issues (Islam)

Our GCSE Religious Studies (8062, 8063) requires students to be aware of differences within and/or between religions and beliefs. We have created this guide to illustrate where ‘differing’ religious views of ethical issues might be found. It is not intended to be comprehensive and students will be rewarded for the appropriate application of all relevant knowledge.

Relationships and families

Contraception

- Most Muslims accept its use within marriage. It should be for a good reason, such as financial hardship. According to the Hadith, Muhammad accepted the use of contraception for this reason. The Qur’an states that Allah does not place extra burdens on his followers.
- Some Muslims disagree. They see its use as going against Allah’s plans and they believe that to use it shows a lack of trust in Allah. They interpret the Qur’an’s teaching on infanticide as applying also to contraception: ‘Do not kill your children for fear of want; we provide sustenance for them and for you’.

Sexual relationships before marriage

- Islam opposes sexual relationships before marriage. The Qur’an refers to it as fornication and Shari’ah law prescribes flogging as a punishment. Pre-marital sex is seen as devaluing Allah’s gift of sexuality. Muhammad stated that no man should be ‘in privacy with a woman who is not lawful to him’.

Homosexual relationships

- Islam condemns homosexual relationships as going against the natural order in which Allah created humans. It is therefore seen as a threat to social stability. The Qur’an describes how Allah destroyed a city for ignoring Lut’s denunciation of their behavior.
- Islam recognises that the diversity and richness of Allah’s creation means that people are capable of different sexual orientations. The orientation in itself is not sinful. The Qur’an teaches that those with homosexual inclinations must control their instincts so as not to go against Allah’s law.

Religion and life

Abortion

- Life is sacred because it has been given by Allah. To take it is therefore to go against Allah's plan. The Qur'an states that no one can die without Allah's permission.
- If Hadith 4 is taken as meaning that ensoulment takes place at 120 days, abortion before that point may be acceptable on certain grounds. Some Muslim scholars think that one ground for abortion is risk to the mother's life. They see abortion in this case as the lesser of two evils.

Euthanasia

- Allah has planned the course of all lives, so the suffering of someone who is terminally ill may be part of that plan. Active euthanasia is therefore to interfere with Allah's will. 'It is Allah who gives you life, then gives you death' (Qur'an).
- Islam accepts passive euthanasia, which is allowing someone for whom there is no hope to die by withholding life-prolonging treatment. Such treatment would in fact be interfering with Allah's will. 'It is Allah who gives you life, then gives you death' (Qur'an).

Animal experimentation

- Animal testing is permitted to meet human need where there are no alternatives. The Hadith states: 'Whoever kills anything bigger than a sparrow without just cause will be accountable to Allah'. Islam teaches that human welfare takes priority. Animal testing to develop medicine is justified as being for the greater good.
- Animal testing for cosmetics is not permitted. This would be purely to satisfy human vanity and would conflict with the concept of being a khalifah. Animals are created by Allah to help humanity, not satisfy trivial desires.

The existence of God and revelation

Visions

- Muhammad's vision in the cave is central to Islam. In this vision he received his call to become a prophet. This was something that he received from Allah, not something that he sought.

Miracles

- Allah alone can perform miracles. The greatest miracle is the Qur'an. This contains Allah's complete self-revelation.

Nature as general revelation

- Nature is one of the ways in which Allah reveals his majesty to his creation. The beauty of the world shows the beauty of Allah. One of Allah's 99 names is 'The shaper of beauty'.

Religion, peace and conflict

Violence

- Islam is a religion of peace. A Muslim's greeting is 'Peace be upon you' and so violence is to be rejected unless there is good cause for it. 'Hate your enemy mildly; for he may become your friend one day' (Hadith).
- Violence is accepted in defence of oneself, one's community or Islam. In such cases war is a duty so violence is inevitable. The Qur'an teaches: 'To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight'.

Weapons of mass destruction

- The amount and extent of destruction caused by these weapons contravene the rules of lesser jihad so their use is impermissible. They kill innocent civilians and harm the environment. Grand Ayatolla Javadi Amoli: 'Scholars believe that possession and development of atomic weapons and WMDs are not permitted'.
- Pakistan is a Muslim country and possesses nuclear weapons. It sees these as a deterrent against India. It is prepared to use them in self-defence. It would then be justified as lesser jihad.

Pacifism

- Lesser jihad is a duty for Muslims. It is wrong to allow the practice of Islam to be suppressed or injustice to prevail. The Qur'an instructs Muslims to fight in the cause of Allah and of those who are ill-treated and oppressed.
- Some Muslims are pacifist. Islam is based on the principles of peace. The Qur'an teaches that reconciliation and peace are a better way of fighting than war. 'Paradise is for those who curb their anger and forgive their fellow men' (Qur'an).

Religion, crime and punishment

Corporal punishment

- This is permitted in Shari'ah law for certain crimes. It is sanctioned by the Qur'an: 'as to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands'. It can be seen as merciful, as punishment is being given in this life instead of in the afterlife.

- Some Muslims oppose it because they think it is too harsh. It is culturally outdated, and in some Muslim countries, financial compensation is used as a substitute.

Death penalty

- The death penalty is sanctioned in the Qur'an: 'Take not life, which Allah has made sacred, except by way of justice'. The death penalty is seen as ensuring that justice is done. This is important for relatives
- Some Muslims believe that it is important for the victim's family to show mercy and take the option of so-called 'blood money'. The Qur'an states that financial compensation may be substituted and that it should be a reasonable demand. This is seen as a form of justice.

Forgiveness

- Allah is 'the Forgiving' and 'the Merciful' so Muslims should follow this. Judgement should be left to Allah. Muhammad set an example by forgiving those who had opposed him.
- Some Muslims believe that certain offences cannot be forgiven because they are so bad. An example is shirk. Committing shirk is a hadud crime that merits the death penalty.

Religion, human rights and social

Status of women in religion

- Men and women have the same spiritual nature and both are expected to pray 5 times a day. The reason why women pray separately is for their protection not because they are inferior. Women may teach both men and women about Islam. 'Women are the twin halves of men' (Hadith).

The uses of wealth

- Wealth is Allah's gift and its value lies in the good that it can do. Zakah is a religious duty and many Muslims give sadaqah. Muslims are encouraged to give generously to those in need. 'He who eats and drinks while his brother goes hungry is not one of us' (Hadith).
- Some Muslims might restrict what they give to the poor. They might view their poverty as a test from Allah and believe that the poor should help themselves. Too much charity could make the recipient aid-dependent.

Freedom of religious expression

- Muslims believe that Allah created all humanity in equality. This means people should have the right to freedom of belief. Muhammad set an example of religious tolerance in his attitude to Jews and Christians in

Madinah. 'Let him (or her) who will, believe, and let him (or her) who will, reject it' (Qur'an).

- Most Muslims view as apostasy the decision of a Muslim to reject Islam. They believe however that they should leave judgement for it to Allah. The Qur'an states that apostasy will not be accepted and that after death, apostates will be among the losers.