Debating the common good:
Islam, social theory, and the ethics of cross-cultural analysis

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One of the most significant features of the modern era is the variety of ways that people in communities around the world define the common—or public—good. This talk explores how we can develop a model to compare these perspectives across cultures, focusing especially on the dynamic between secularly and religiously inclined understandings of collective life in Muslim majority communities. Along the way, we will consider the ethics of cross-cultural analysis and how the humanistic investigation of Muslim majority communities can contribute to public debates about the common good in the United States.

Caleb Elfenbein is an assistant professor of history and religious studies at Grinnell College. His work on secularism, colonial and postcolonial histories in Muslim communities, and the thought of Sayyid Qutb has appeared in Method and Theory in the Study of Religion, Comparative Islamic Studies, and the Journal of the American Academy of Religion. He is currently working on a project on Islam, social theory, and the ethics of cross-cultural analysis.

Wednesday, October 21, 2015 | 4:15 p.m. | Williams Hall, Roemmele Global Commons