
ENGAGING THE HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION ABOUT ISLAMIC FAITH AND PRACTICE

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International experience with Islamist extremism such as that by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) requires both Muslims and non-Muslims to question what is essential to Islamic belief, especially if the religion is to overcome a suspicion now widely manifest in the polemics that articulate public perceptions and influence foreign and domestic security policy. Here this issue is engaged as a problem of epistemology, i.e., as a problem of intellectual and moral discernment, insofar as there is serious and unsettled concern today about the distinction of “good” Muslim and “bad” Muslim. Such distinction is to be made foremost by practicing Muslims faced with the task of clarification of Islam as religious experience and as a key element of contemporary identity. It is suggested, in conclusion, that the interpretive position of Nasr Abû Zayd provides an important avenue for epistemological clarification and, indeed, a call for an “Islamic Reformation.”

“We are all, believers and non-believers, caught up in the same movement of the world.”

—Mutsapha Chérif, *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (2008)

INTRODUCTION

After the event of “9/11,” Mahmood Mamdani published an important paper, followed by a book-length treatment of the subject, engaging what has remained since then a central question of conceptual distinction in the evaluation of contemporary “Islamist” terrorism: Does it make sense, (1) as a matter of *religious identity* per se and (2) as a matter of *political identity* relative to religious practice, to distinguish between a “good” Muslim and a “bad” Muslim?¹ As Mamdani put it then, with this conceptual distinction the *religious*

experience of Islam has been assigned a category of *political* experience. This act of categorization, Mamdani observed, has a major undisguised political implication: “Whether in Afghanistan, Palestine, or Pakistan, Islam must be quarantined and the devil must be exorcised from it by a civil war between good Muslims and bad Muslims.”²² But, such a civil war presumes once again the historical problem of epistemologically warranted discernment: One side claims itself to be the repository of divine truth and the other is then charged with either lacking the truth or manipulating the truth irresponsibly in the direction of religious heterodoxy at best and apostasy at worst. Moreover, the problem of discernment extends to the hermeneutic

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task of having to clarify the meaning of “good” and “bad,” especially when the latter is associated with “evil” in public discourse. It is by no means decided on what scholarly grounds—theological, juridical, philosophical, historical, political—one is to engage the indictment that “Islam is evil.” Such, however, are the polemics, which may not be set aside as insignificant in present-day disputations about the legitimacy of Islamic religious belief and practice, especially in Europe and the USA.

This paper, therefore, seeks to engage the general *problematique* of epistemological discernment, accounting for both the polemical rhetoric and the

serious Islamic scholarship that contribute both positively and negatively to the ongoing debate about what counts as a “good” Muslim in contrast to a “bad” Muslim. It is argued here that only in the context of such epistemological discernment may one appreciate the relevance of distinguishing a “hermeneutics of suspicion” and a “hermeneutics of faith” that are part and parcel of this ongoing debate. It is argued, furthermore, that what is needed instead is a “humanistic hermeneutics” that is grounded in historical-critical methodology, such as that issued by the Egyptian scholar Nasr Abû Zayd, this as a prerequisite to strategic transition in the direction

of an Islamic Reformation. Such clarification is needed as a matter of intellectual response to the polemics that unreasonably inform foreign policy and domestic security policy in Europe and the USA, especially as they are now faced with responding to the dire human toll of armed conflict in the Middle East consequent to the actions of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as “ISIL” and “Daesh”).

SITUATING THE DEBATE ABOUT ISLAM

Today the proposition among many non-Muslims is to quarantine the whole of Islamic belief and practice, especially in Europe, given current sociopolitical tensions having to do with the massive influx of refugees and terrorist attacks emanating from some Muslims having pledged their loyalty to “the Caliphate” of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. If the sociopolitical consequences of Islamic belief are manifested for all to see as “evil” consequent to acts of terror, then, it is argued, the call for quarantine eventually must move in the direction of intolerance and denial of the validity of the religion. Even Islam’s grounding text, the Qur’ân, becomes, from that interpretive indictment, the equivalent of “satanic verses” rather than a legitimate divine revelation, despite the protest that such indictments amount to “Islamophobia.”³ Where there is a claim of intrusion of the devil into the delivered message *in part*, despite claims of later abrogation or deletion of questionable verses, a *hermeneutics of suspicion*⁴ enters into the dialogue about the validity of *the whole* of the text and its source, as is well-known by reputable present-day scholars who have taken more progressive, historical-critical methodological approaches to the study of Islam.⁵ That was the point of opposition to Muhammad’s message in Mecca, as Nasr Abû Zayd reminded: “The people of Mecca contest[ed] the issue of the authenticity of the divine source of the Qur’ân, and therefore the issue of the sincerity, honesty,

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[*sic*: trustworthiness of the prophet]—his credibility—is challenged.” That challenge is renewed today in the face of Islamic extremism—despite the scholarly claim that “answers provided in the dialogical context” of what counts as legitimate Islamic belief and practice are to be accounted as more or less “final legislation,” especially in the disputations about authenticity and reliability of founding texts.⁶

In short, the polemical argument goes, confessant Muslims must themselves sort out *what is essential* to Islamic belief and practice and, thereby, provide the epistemological-religious basis for distinction between good Muslims and bad Muslims.⁷ This means they must engage Islamic religious dogma in a self-examination that

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clarifies its contemporary political consequences in terms of what is essential to the religion and, therefore, essential to how the religion may be expressed legitimately in politics, especially relative to the privileged status of Islam as “state religion” (such as occurs in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc., and now, the “extraterritorial” ISIS caliphate). This is important in light of empirical data positively correlating state religion with increase in religious participation and religious beliefs, including religious monopolies in politics and

economics.⁸ This is important furthermore in light of the claim of even some Muslims in the West that recent ISIS terrorism is a violence “rooted” in Islam: “Terror is a Muslim issue, an Islamic issue within the house of Islam,” said M. Zuhdi Jasser, founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, “and we must ‘own it’ to fight it.”⁹ Here there is a call for *reform* against “literalist” interpretations of the grounding texts of Islam, for a “progressive” position directed at separation of Islamic religion and politics, hence the epistemological problem of discernment.

The call for self-examination issues not just for avowed Muslims themselves,¹⁰ but also for all who, as non-Muslims, encounter a “militant” form of Islam (“Islamic extremism”) that engages in armed conflict and inspires

and produces terror across the globe visibly and deliberately directed at non-Muslims (be they religious—Jew, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist—or atheist, secular), even to the point that it is characterized today by political scientist Hamed Abdel-Samad as “Islamic fascism.”¹¹ That view, of course, contradicts the self-understanding of those who adhere to the religious position of ISIS, which position is avowedly “Salafist” and, presumably therefore, non-political.¹² Accordingly, if it is at least reasonably doubtful (if not immediately objectionable or false) that one can meaningfully (and responsibly) juxtapose ‘Islam’ and ‘fascism’ conceptually, then an epistemological analysis is requisite. Here it is argued that it is at least reasonably doubtful that one can meaningfully (and responsibly) juxtapose ‘Islam’ and ‘fascism’ conceptually, in which case there is warrant for a sustained epistemological analysis. However, that said, the epistemological task properly undertaken requires that Islamic scholars themselves, who work within the classical and contemporary traditions of Sunni and Shi’a Islamic jurisprudence, engage what presents itself as the dogma of Islamist extremism from the purview of such jurisprudential reasoning. Such dogma must be examined with a view to clarification of what is defensible on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence that is itself grounded on defensible exegesis from the foundational sources of Islamic belief and practice.

That said, it is to be noted in fairness to the validity of any critique, whether one grounded in relevant textual authority or one of public discourse, that there is a problem with American and European public perceptions of Islamic beliefs and practices. The problem is one of ignorance, misinformation, and alienation consequent to the media’s representations of Islam in mostly negative light. This fact requires anyone advancing such a critique to be clear as to whether it is grounded in a *subjectivist* or *objectivist* assessment, i.e., making a distinction between what are mere *appearances* and what is the *reality* of Islam per se. The distinction here is not spurious, given the adage that appearances can be deceiving and,

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thereby, misleading as to the truth, which is all the more so in politics and, hence, in the representation of the political dimension of the Islamic faith.¹³ Following political theorist William Connolly in his remarks concerning social and political theoretical distinctions, one can posit that the dichotomy of appearance and reality about Islam is itself today bound up with distinctions of “theory and ideology,” “thought and action,” “the actual and the possible,” “consciousness and self-consciousness;” in which case, the “goal of [social and political] theory... is to pierce through appearances to the real structure, to allow (at least some) participants to see things as they really are, and either to reconcile the newly self-conscious agents to necessity or to encourage them to bring the society into closer harmony with their real interests.”¹⁴

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Epistemological critique, then, moves in the direction of identifying or, more important, urging the participants themselves to identify the *real interests of Islam* as religious experience and, in consequence, to disavow what presents itself in the guise of a false consciousness about Islam. This false consciousness is present, e.g., as Connolly observed, whenever that which is “particular” in its expression (in this case “Islamist extremism”) manipulatively presents itself “as a universal,” i.e., as the sole repository of religious truth for both Muslims and non-Muslims, when as a matter of fact/

reality neither the dogma nor the ideology presented squares with the truth.

Usually, any reasonably defensible distinction of “good” and “evil” conceptually presupposes an objectivist position, i.e., one that at minimum clarifies what is common to all phenomena construed as “good” and, in opposition, what is common to all phenomena construed as “evil.”¹⁵ Such would be, e.g., the epistemological position of a classical Islamic scholar such as Ibn Rushd. But, the present situation requires contemporary Islamic scholars to engage both their classical tradition and contemporary interpretive positions within Islamic religious discourse. Thus, one may

consider (a) what, in the setting of personal belief and practice, Islamic scholars are prepared to *defend* as the “reality” of Islam, as vouchsafed by epistemological/jurisprudential reasoning in relation to authoritative texts governing personal beliefs and practices, and (b) what these same scholars are prepared to *reject*—and reject categorically—as merely the “appearance” of Islam (e.g., such as in the “Islamist” extremism of ISIS), precisely because such extremism *must* be (not *may* be) construed *merely as terrorism* and *not* in any sense as the reality of *Islam per se*. Such is the requirement at the level of serious Islamic scholarship that is for the moment lacking, assuming the fundamentals of Islamic religious orthodoxy are reasonably to be articulated for a common understanding of Muslim and non-Muslim.

However, this is not the case when questions of good and evil are engaged in the contemporary setting of public perception, which Islamic scholars may not reasonably ignore or reject out of hand, either in relation to applicable moral principles or in the assessment of moral consequences. As John Kaltner observed years ago, just prior to the events of 9/11, “In the United States and other countries where Muslims are in a minority, exposure to Islam is primarily gotten through the media,” in which case “distortions and caricatures continue to be prevalent,”¹⁶ to the point that there are the usual complaints of “Islamophobia,” “racism” (understood here as a social construct and not as a biological variable), and “bigotry.”¹⁷ But, there is ample reason from the perspective of epistemological discernment to evaluate whether such representations of Islam are indeed merely faulty evidence of phobia, or exhibitions of racism, or evidence of bigotry. Where the scholarly work is left undone by Islamic scholars grounded in jurisprudential reasoning in particular, there is then no legitimate clarification made against the appearance that what ISIS does is indeed action truly representative of some fundamental elements of “Islamic” belief and practice.

Even the Israeli press has spoken to the question of the conceptual distinction of good Muslim and bad Muslim, albeit on the side of Israeli prejudice against the religious convictions of Muslim Arabs in general. In an op-ed contribution on *ynet News*, Shoulo Romano Horing commented, “The French and Europeans cannot win the war against radical Islam if they continue differentiating between good and bad Islamic terrorists.”¹⁸ For Horing, terrorist acts in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

occur against Israel “because it represents the values that all Muslim Arab terrorists despise about the West,” and because “it is a Western, democratic, and Jewish nation located in the barbaric, primitive, Islamist neighborhood where radical Islam originates.” What is left unsaid here is precisely why radical Islam is labeled as barbaric and primitive in the radicalness (“from the roots”) of its expression, and whether indeed this expression really has anything to do with the “roots” of Islam per se. Similarly, Eidad Beck cites Waleed al-Husseini (a Palestinian self-declared atheist, blogger and founder of the Council of Ex-Muslims in France), who opines that the attacks from ISIS are “part of an attempt to impose a religious ideology on the West.”¹⁹ With the attacks in Paris,

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he asserts, “Muslims must decide where they stand,” his recommendation being that Europe close borders and teach “a different Islam,” viz., an Islam that does not have political ideology as either the root or the surface of its expression in public life.

But there are other “media-pundits” such as Hamed Abdel-Samad, author of *Mohammed: The Reckoning*, who rejects the prospect of such reform and insists on a much more radical critique, i.e., (a) critique of the idealizations of the founding figure himself (despite a *fatwa* issued in Egypt against Abdel-Samad

for his “heretical” writings) and (b) critique of the tendentious apologies for a moderate or progressive Islam that seeks to counter the ideology of militant Islam. “What’s sad,” Abdel-Samad opines, is that, “it’s not just the radical Islamists threatening us, but intellectuals from the liberal left demand that we respect the believers’ feelings...But criticism of Islam... is related to enlightenment, to teaching, to humanism.”²⁰ Despite reasonable criticism of his negative critique,²¹ Abdel-Samad’s is nevertheless an important argument against those who naively associate criticism of Islam with phobia, racism, or bigotry. The operating assumption here is that enlightened critique is possible, meaningful, and efficacious in contributing

to the task of epistemological clarification. An enlightened critique of Islam must, then, go beyond the usual differentiations to engage what is essential (thus, *a fortiori*, what is legitimate) to the political expression of the religion. Presumably, it will not do to accept ISIS as a legitimate representation of Islam insofar as “this Islam divides the world into friends and enemies, into the faithful and the infidels.”²² But, even so, whatever such division, the more salient political claim is that, “the majority of Muslims don’t want theocracy ruling their lives.”²³ If so, this must become not only an *empirically warranted* claim; it must also be a claim *grounded in the basic belief structure of the religion* such that, as a matter of religious dogma, theocracy is neither obligatory (*wajib*) nor to be recommended (*mandub*) even though it is a permissible (*halal*) form of government Muslims may install. Such would be the requisite argumentation advanced by Islamic scholars on the basis of relevant jurisprudential reasoning, and thus a reasoning that contradicts the claims of ISIS concerning theocracy and the legitimacy of any attempt to inaugurate and install an Islamic caliphate in the context of the contemporary world order.

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The point is important in light of ISIS’s “Salafist” political ideology added to its religious dogma. As an off-shoot of Al-Qaeda (and now in competition with Al-Qaeda for primacy in fundamentalist dogma), ISIS presents itself through a “theological vision,” which has “prioritized purging the Middle East of Shiites and other deviants. It openly rejects the political jargon of constitutions and modern politics. ISIS texts, much like those of other Salafists, are filled with discussions of hadith, early Islamic theological concepts, and statements from specific pre-modern figures thought to uphold the Salafist creed.”²⁴ What this means, in practice as a political consequence, is that an expression of *pre-modern* “classical” Islam is contraposed to all that is found to be “un-Islamic,” be it (1) other expressions of Islamic religious dogma (e.g., Shi’ite Islam, Sufi Islam, some Sunni Muslims, all declared to be either heretical or apostate) or (2) “the West” in its political-theoretical commitment to democracy, constitutions,

republics, and positive law so correlated (according to which, from the pre-Islamic view, modernity is to be rejected as contrary to religious orthodoxy). A pre-modern political commitment accompanies the expression of religious dogma: ISIS's success, Jacob Olidort advises, "will depend on... its unwavering commitment to establishing a theologically authentic state rather than a modern political one." Accordingly, it is entirely consistent with the epistemological task of discernment to have jurisprudentially grounded clarification from Islamic scholars that rejects the pre-modern hermeneutics of Islamic belief such as advanced by adherents of the Islamic State, this rejection having its correlative defense of a modern, progressive hermeneutics of Islamic belief. The latter would have to be articulated also such as to overcome any hermeneutics of suspicion that proposes intolerance of Islamic faith and practice or that denies it religious validity because of its

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political consequences. And, this hermeneutics of faith must have its appropriate articulation such as to have its efficacy against the misrepresentations, distortions, and caricatures that find their way into public perception through any number of polemical commentaries.

Despite such a call for an enlightened critique of Islam, with the two Gulf Wars, the (George W.) Bush Administration's ambiguous "war on terror" directed initially against Al Qaeda and its affiliates, and now the current political decisions in the USA and Europe to engage ISIS in the Middle East (i.e., in the geographic territories of Syria, Iraq, and Libya), the prescription of armed conflict has moved from (1) what has been represented as an internal conflict about (a) religious dogma among Muslims (Sunni vs. Shi'a; Shi'a vs. Salafi/Wahabi; ISIS vs. Sunni, Shi'a and Sufi) and (b) political visibility of Islam in the politics of religious contentions (Al Qaeda vs. both Sunni and Shi'a Islam as to "true" representation of the religion and "true" *jihad*) to (2) a prescription for conflict between "the West" and "militant Islam" wherever the latter presents itself worldwide (whether as Al Qaeda, ISIS, or other local extremist/terrorist groupings).²⁵ Mamdani accordingly questioned the analysis presupposed here, according

to which “Islamic politics” such as we experience it today is deemed an *effect* of “Islamic civilization,” i.e., to be explained only or principally in such causal terms).

In other words, a militant political identity is linked causally to what is construed as a “*traditional*” (*medieval*) *culture* (“pre-modern” Islam) that finds itself inextricably in a quarrel with “*Western modernity*,” a quarrel that violently and intolerantly pits the authority of the Islamic revelation [i.e., the authority of the Qur’ân itself, along with the Sunna, the oral traditions about the Prophet Muhammad—*al-sunna al-nabawiyya*—and the consensus (*ijmâ*) of the prophet’s companions (*al-sahâbah*) that augment interpretation of the Qur’ân and inform Islamic jurisprudence] against all extant non-Islamic religious authority, including that of “the people of the book” (Jews, Christians).²⁶ It is assumed, thereby, that one already knows what one means by “terrorism” generally and specifically in the context of the phenomenon “militant Islam,” given the initially available monographs (such as that of Rohan Gunaratna²⁷) and the world’s subsequent experience internationally with the militant Islam represented by Al Qaeda. But, this claim to a reasonably reliable understanding of terrorism is, of course, a contended claim among scholars concerned with ethics in international affairs and the law of armed conflict.²⁸

Militant political identity is linked causally to what is construed as a “traditional” (medieval) culture that finds itself inextricably in a quarrel with “Western modernity.”

Thus, it is not surprising that the prominent (albeit controversial) American “Orientalist” voice of Bernard Lewis has pronounced judgment that a once “rich,” “advanced,” and “enlightened” (albeit Middle Eastern, in contrast to that of the Indian sub-continent and Indonesia) Muslim civilization has, quite simply, gone “wrong.”²⁹ That is surely a severe indictment that provokes both critical and apologist positions from within the Islamic scholarly community.³⁰ Even so, Islam in some meaningful sense—e.g., the legacy of the Muslim Middle East, allowing here reasonable rejection of any notion of a monolithic “Islam”—has gone wrong most palpably to us today in the failure of 20th century “Muslim modernizers” to make good on a “long quest for freedom,” Lewis argues, leaving us with “a string

of shabby tyrannies, ranging from traditional autocracies to dictatorships that are modern only in their apparatus of repression and indoctrination.” The question, therefore, remains: What happened to the elements of classical Islamic culture that was once manifest in various categories of social development as “enlightened”? Lewis continues:

For most of the Middle Ages it was neither the older cultures of the Orient nor the newer cultures of the West that were the major centers of civilization and progress but the world of Islam. There old sciences were recovered and developed and new sciences were created; there new industries were born and manufactures and commerce were expanded to a level without precedent. There, too, governments and societies achieved a freedom of thought and expression that led persecuted Jews and even dissident Christians to flee Christendom for refuge in Islam.³¹

Even though such refuge was a limited freedom, Islamic centers were tolerant of the observance of other faiths and by no means insistent on their monopoly on religious truth. Indeed, as Lewis put it in his book-length treatment of the question, “In most of the arts and sciences of civilization, medieval Europe was a pupil and in a sense a dependent of the Islamic world, relying on Arabic versions even for many otherwise unknown Greek works.”³²

Notwithstanding critiques of Orientalist methodology in general (e.g., such as articulated by Edward Said³³) and that of Lewis himself, Lewis is correct to point to the significance of his question, given the “growing anguish,” the “mounting urgency,” and the “seething anger” manifest among diverse publics (be they Muslim or non-Muslim) whenever the question about Islamic extremism is raised today. Granted, this need not be restricted to the dichotomous categorization of “Islam” and “the West” that Lewis sets up. Something is definitely wrong, however, as a matter of political identity of Muslims, as protracted armed conflict and military responses to international terror are ongoing, without abatement, be it in the Middle East (Iraq, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, Israel, Palestine) or in Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, and, more recently in the deaths of bloggers and insecurity for intellectuals claiming freedom of expression in Muslim-majority Bangladesh). Something is definitely wrong, moreover, as Europe finds its solidarity as a European union with open

borders unsettled and threatened by a massive influx of refugees seeking asylum from war-torn countries. Some among these arrive with only a pretension to asylum and harbor a latent vengeance against European and American powers, some thereby recruited by ISIS for the spread of its terror, such as occurred in the Paris suicide bombings and mass shootings in November 2015, President Hollande declaring a national emergency for the whole of France, ISIS decidedly indicted for an “act of war” against France.³⁴

It is not surprising, then, that some will judge ISIS to be “evil” because of its manifested acts of terror ostensibly representing both a religious confession and a political expression of Islam.³⁵ It is not surprising that some will, therefore, seek ISIS’s elimination and defeat militarily.³⁶ But, more fundamentally, it is a major question whether this presentation of Islam—itsself fundamentally character-

ized as so corrupt as to be a menacing form of Muslim extremism that “flagrantly dares the world”—represents part of what is essential to Islamic faith and practice. From the perspective of epistemological clarification and discernment of the difference between “good” Muslim and “bad” Muslim, is ISIS a mere “appearance” of Islam (one of semblance and false consciousness) and, hence, *not really Islam* in what the best of Islamic jurisprudential reasoning vouchsafes as the essential configuration

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of Islam? This is the central question to be settled in current contestations about the legitimacy of the religion. The empirical fact is that, whatever the attribute ‘extremist’ connotes, all such individuals and groups remain construed *as Muslims* even as they clearly self-identify as Muslims. If this construal is empirically and epistemologically correct, then this can mean only that such extremism is defensible as one among any number of interpretations of Islamic faith and practice as advanced by adherents of Islam. Thus, Zakyi Ibrahim (a comparative religions scholar) has argued that the messages of the extremists “are reaching their intended audiences;” and

thus, Ibrahim advises, “Until effective alternative messages are formulated and implemented, defeating them will be almost impossible.”³⁷

The call for alternative messages is a call for an interpretation of Islamic faith and practice (thus for a hermeneutics of faith) that, in its public presentation (especially in Western republics), is not “extremist.” The call, then, is for a “moderate” Islam that is disconnected from terror, first and foremost in doctrine and, in consequence, in its political expression. Such *moderate* Islam is to be privileged by proponents of the religion precisely *because* it is not extremist either in doctrine or in the legitimation of terror. But, this leaves the question begging: If the current message of ISIS is itself truly a *Muslim* message and not merely a *terrorist* message, accepted more or less uncritically by those who are poor, uneducated, disenchanting, or egoistic in their disaffection with “the West,” then Islam itself *as a religious experience* and not merely as a political category is subject to a fundamental critique. The antecedent of this conditional proposition is taken to be true as a matter of fact, in which case the consequent follows logically. Enlightened critique of Islam is warranted today, understood here to be historical criticism grounded in reliable textual sources, not mere polemics or propaganda—and this is the task first and foremost of Islamic scholars, be they Sunni, Shi’a, or Sufi.

If the message of ISIS is truly a Muslim message and not merely a terrorist message, then Islam as a religious experience and not merely as a political category is subject to a fundamental critique.

Thus, Islam is to be criticized both for what it spawns as its religious dogma and its ostensibly legitimated set of practices—including those behaviors that are terrorist and *supposedly warranted* by Muslim extremists *by appeal to Islam’s grounding sources* (Qur’ân, Sunna). Any deduction or, more likely, analogical legal reasoning (*qiyās fiqhī*) adduced in support of political action morally warranted *from scripture* counts as an “appeal to authority” (*al-masmū‘*) and not a free-will exercise of moral judgment grounded in an independent rationality, in which case such appeals are subject to critique on that basis. They are at issue precisely because, in the contestation of religious and secular discourses, one can posit the legitimacy of a right to free opinion (*ijtihād ar-ra’y*), despite the all too frequent assertions of defense

against religious critique from Islamic religious authorities, on the basis of which “orthodox” apologies many Muslims themselves are charged with heterodoxy, apostasy, blasphemy, and heresy. Thus, there is a responsibly meaningful sense in which Lewis’s attention to the question “what went wrong?” makes sense.

An historical-critical approach to Islamic religious ideology seems all the more in order if, as Mamdani argued, we are to see contemporary Islam as globally significant in its command of adherents to the faith and not in any way merely territorial, thus to be examined as the extraterritorial religious phenomenon that it is. If this is so—and there is ample reason to find the point correct—then even Islamic extremism is not to be identified merely as a “residue of premodern culture” (as Mamdani put it). Contemporary Muslim extremists such as those represented by ISIS have their messages. Both Muslim scholars and scholars of comparative religion categorize these messages as problems concerning what counts today as orthodoxy, heterodoxy, heresy, blasphemy, and apostasy relative to Islam’s authoritative texts, and what is thereby permitted or denied by the Islamic religion according to “the scope” of its tolerance for diversity *within* the faith and *in relation to* other religious beliefs and practices (Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, in particular). These categories of analysis are part of the scene of a radical contestation in discourse and conduct, be it between “the West” (variously identified to include Europe, USA, Australia, Russia) and “Islam” (as represented by religious authorities in various “Muslim-majority” countries) or internal to Islamic religious groups (whether subnational or transnational in the reach of their religious dogma).

Lewis, of course, locates part of the debate internal to contemporary representations of Islam as one between modernists and fanatics: “The modernists’ usual tactic is not to denounce religion as such, still less Islam in particular, but to level their criticism against fanaticism.”³⁸ That is, those identifiable as “Muslim extremists” are, quite simply, to be denominated as fanatics, as having an “unreasonable” conception of their religious dogma. Yet, some, like Mamdani, who are apologists for the legitimacy of Islamic faith in the modern world, reject this dichotomy, reminding that, “coexistence and toleration have been the norm, rather than the exception, in the political history of Islam.”³⁹ The latter points to an analytical skepticism that, “we can read people’s political behavior from their religion, or from

their culture.” Thus, Mamdani asked: “Could it be true that an orthodox Muslim is a potential terrorist? Or, the same thing, that an Orthodox Jew or [orthodox] Christian is a potential terrorist and only a Reform Jew or a Christian convert to Darwinian evolutionary theory is capable of being tolerant of those who do not share his or her convictions?”

One should not shy away from such questions insofar as they relate to the task of epistemological discernment. The operative assumption, grounded in experience of recent Islamic extremism, is that *every* “orthodox” or “radical” Muslim *is a potential* terrorist, given (a) any convenient set of sociopolitical circumstances that cater to such behavior and (b) an ideological appeal to the authority of the grounding texts (Qur’ân, Sunna) that warrants terrorist construals of violent *jihad*. The potential of such

One should not shy away from such questions insofar as they relate to the task of epistemological discernment.... It is “doctrinal” Islam in its contemporary configurations and not only “historical” Islam that is at issue.

behavior is either a consequence of appeal to the authority of the central texts or an appeal to the authority of quasi-religious political leaders who provide the ready interpretation and justification to the poor, the ignorant, the disenchanting, the disaffected, and those pursuing egoistic inclinations, despite their “incidental” association with Islamic dogma—an association that is incidental because of the naïveté of the disaffected and their ignorance of textual authority. And, this is why one cannot reasonably ask such questions

(as does Mamdani) by asking them “doctrinal tendencies aside.” On the contrary, such tendencies are essential to the current ideological appeal, to the religious dogma that grounds and ostensibly warrants the acts of terror perpetrated by militant Islamists.

It is “doctrinal” Islam in its contemporary configurations and not only “historical” Islam (diverse as it is) that is at issue. Otherwise, it makes no sense to speak of “radical” Muslims such as those politicized by the Reagan Administration’s recruitment and training of “*mujahideen*” (“guerilla training” having been integrated with “the teachings of Islam”) to engage the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.⁴⁰ *Radical* Islam, in most political

discourses, includes: (a) insistence on *sharī'a* as positive law, applicable to Muslim and non-Muslim alike, regardless of any declaration of state religion; (b) distinction of territories of peace and territories of war, according to classical concepts used by Arab Muslims; (c) patriarchy; (d) gender segregation, and relegation of women to the domain of the private; and (e) definite insistence on identifying and punishing those who are heterodox, heretic, apostate, or blasphemers, according to a given reading of the “retribution” that is supposedly authorized by either the Qur’ān and Sunna or both.

Doctrinal tendencies are important even if one takes Mamdani’s insistence on taking a historical view into account. For example, if one claims, epistemologically, that a distinction of “good” and “evil” requires a commitment to objectivism, such that one must distinguish between appearances and reality, then one can cite a classical scholar such as Ibn Rushd and the Mut‘azilites in support of such an epistemological position in classical Islamic doctrine. However, a subjectivist position has also been defended historically within the doctrinal tendencies of some prominent Islamic scholars. Hourani reminds that distinctions of good and bad have often been made by appeal to the authority of Islamic scripture, specifically appeal to “the commands of Allah,” in which case there is no independent reality to what may be declared good or bad. “Theistic subjectivism” or “ethical voluntarism,” Hourani writes, in Islamic context means that, “good [*khayr*] and evil [*sharr*], justice [*al-‘adl*] and injustice [*al-jawr*], are defined entirely by reference to the commands of God, as revealed to man in the *sharī'a*. Human acts, for example, are right only when God commands man or recommends to him to do them, without having any intrinsic character which would make them good in themselves.”⁴¹ In this case, clearly any debate between objectivists (e.g., Ibn Rushd) and subjectivists (e.g., al-Ghazālī) relative to Islamic doctrine would very likely end up privileging the subjectivist account, although this needs to be settled as an issue in contemporary Islamic religious discourse. Thus, Hourani provides a meaningful *historical* notice when he writes, “With the establishment of the four schools of Sunnite law and the spread of Ash‘arite theology, subjectivism in this form became the dominant theory of value in classical Islam.”⁴²

If that was the dominant theory of value, thus of good and bad, justice and injustice, in *classical* Islam, then that is evidence in support of a relevant interpretation of what is “essential” to Islamic religious belief and

practice carried forward into today's manifestations of Islam—even if one insists on distinguishing ostensibly “moderate” Muslims from those who are “extremist” in their articulation of Islamic beliefs and practices. That said, however, it is important that, in the historical context of classical Islam—in contrast to the Islamic extremism we see today—“The theory of value was not one of those questions on which the Qur’ân yielded conclusive evidence for either objectivism or subjectivism, and no one had been condemned for *kufir* [disbelief] for supporting objectivism.”⁴³ In the absence of a philosophically grounded hermeneutic of value in contemporary Islam, this question may well remain an ongoing issue of debate for scholars. But, even so, as a matter of doctrine and personal interpretation today, the militant Islamist, through his and her articulation of beliefs and practices, privileges a subjectivist interpretation that is nonetheless postulated to be essential to Islam. Therefore, the Islamist religious dogma, if it is to be sustained in its supposed legitimacy in the contemporary world, must either withstand the test of historical criticism or see its claim to legitimacy surrendered in the face of prevailing Muslim and non-Muslim interrogation that advances beyond a hermeneutics of suspicion.

ENGAGING CRITICISM OF ISLAMIST RELIGIOUS DOGMA

Consider some examples that affect public perceptions negatively. Michael Sherlock wrote recently that, “ISIS is Islam.” This claim is not merely about ISIS; it is about Islam *per se*. The claim centers on the validity of contemporary religious criticism, in this case aggressive criticism of whatever is essential to Islam and that is present in the legitimations of Islamist extremist beliefs and practices, including terror. To say that, “ISIS is Islam,” is not to say that *all* Muslims are terrorists, of course, as Sherlock clarifies. But, it is nonetheless a statement that is presented as true, warranted by (1) empirical facts and (2) what purports to be reasonable source criticism of Islamic texts.

Consider one among a number of Sherlock's arguments: “If one examines the central doctrines of Islam, one will easily find justification for many of the horrendous crimes committed by ISIS; from beheading infidels, amputating the hands of thieves, raping female captives, looting in the name of Allah, destroying non-Muslim literature and works of art, and

so on. Needless to say, if you can locate such crimes in the core doctrines, texts and practices of Islam...then you can't say that ISIS are un-Islamic, because such scrupulous adherence to scripture represents the perfection of Islam."⁴⁴

There is here presented a standard for critical assessment of the behavior of militant Islamists: *Scrupulous adherence to scripture is essential to Islam*. And, if this standard is central to ISIS and radical Islamist religious experience presented in both declarations of articles of faith and manifestations of practice, then ISIS and radical Islamists in general represent what is essential to Islam. If this is the standard, then the grounding texts (Qur'ân, Sunna) stand subject to even a hostile criticism that denies to the religion any meaningfully legitimate presence in the contemporary world. This is not to say that Muslims will not have their religious convictions. It means, more fundamentally, that the religion lacks rational grounding in relation to the law of nations in the contemporary world. Islam finds disbelief in Allah (*fitna*) a sin, a sin that is even "greater than committing murder," construed by some as a crime against divine right (*buddād*), for which sin the just "recompense" is the slaughter of the disbelieving individual (Qur'ân 2:191).⁴⁵ This is pronounced as an *unequivocal* doctrine, despite the Qur'anic injunction that there is (to be) no compulsion in (the acceptance of) religion (Qur'ân 2:256), which seemingly poses a contradiction to the former text.

Thus, as Elizabeth Peiffer observes, "Although Islamic criminal law is based on ideals such as justice and due process, the international community generally understands Islamic law to be harsh, characterized by brutal punishments and inhumane treatment of defendants and those who are convicted."⁴⁶ It is in this sense that the *shari'a* is presented as the "paradigm" source for both the concept of justice and the permissible or obligatory penalty dispensed in relation to a "just cause" indictment. Radical Islam today

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believes itself to have just cause to preserve and enhance the universality of Islamic belief and practices, thus to defend Islamic societies (territorially or extra-territorially defined) and the entirety of Muslims worldwide (the *ummah*), thus in particular to identify and engage individuals or groups who “threaten Islam” by committing acts construed to be acts against “the rights of Allah” (*haqq Allah*). Such “crimes” are apostasy, blasphemy, heresy, or heterodoxy, despite a lack of juridical authority other than spurious appeal to the schools of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to dictate the substance of an ostensibly defensible jurisprudential reasoning. Moreover, given the Sunni-Shi’a schism, what counts as a valid school of jurisprudence (four schools in Sunni Islam; twelve schools in Shi’a Islam) is itself contested internal to

Given the Sunni-Shi’a schism, what counts as a valid school of jurisprudence is itself contested internal to Islamic religious dogma—a point ISIS takes into account in its dismissal of and hostility towards Shi’ite Muslims.

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Consider the central concern in the case of alleged apostasy (*riddah*), i.e., “unbelief.” Peiffer comments that “apostasy” is evident whenever a Muslim either *converts* to a non-Islamic religion or *rejects* a basic tenet of Islam, in which case conviction for apostasy must recognize the Qur’anic injunction that “imposes a penalty of eternal damnation.” But, “The Sunnah later provided

that an apostate is subject to the death penalty, based on the statement of Muhammad, “Whoever changed his Islamic religion, kill him.”⁴⁷ When such a change in religion, i.e., disaffirming belief in Islam, occurs and it is construed furthermore as “an attack on the community,” then, it is claimed, the death penalty may be warranted.⁴⁸

Mohammad Kamali comments that, both *fiqh* jurists and Islamic fundamentalists “substantially concur in their perceptions of *huddud* as [having] fixed and mandatory penalties.”⁴⁹ In fact, wherever a Muslim accepts the distinction of a territory of peace (*dār al-Islam*) and a territory of war (*dār al-harb*), the latter including individual, subjective justification of armed resistance to attacks against the Muslim community (thus, the practice of militant *jihad*), then the penalty of death may be imposed by *any* pious

Muslim.⁵⁰ Indeed, in contemporary Muslim-dominated societies, in many cases apostasy is alleged whenever someone is accused of “offending Islamic morals,” which leaves much to interpretation and ambiguity as to admissible evidence from the perspective of Western standards of jurisprudence that relate to freedom of expression. Ordinarily this may be an allegation against a Muslim, but it is also applied to non-Muslims (e.g., to those who are considered secularized despite birth in a Muslim majority state or believers in religions other than Islam if they, through their national governments, are involved in armed conflict).

Thus, a critique such as that of Sherlock is not to be dismissed so readily when he characterizes ISIS’s conduct—and, therefore, its Islamic religious dogma—as “scripturally accurate.” He refers to Islam’s foundational texts, which makes his critique a reasonable challenge to the foundations of Islam. Thus, for example, despite sentiments expressed by the French Council of the Muslim Faith asserting their solidarity with French nationalism and the people of France against Islamic extremism, Sherlock cites the relevant scripture in contraposition:

“They but wish that ye should reject Faith, as they do, and thus be on the same footing (as they): But take not friends from their ranks until they flee in the way of Allah (From what is forbidden). But if they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them; and (in any case) take no friends or helpers from their ranks” (Qur’ân 4:89).

Thus, as Sherlock reminded, Dr. Ahmad Abu Halabiya “enunciated the correct Quranic position on befriending non-Muslims,” saying:

Allah the almighty has called upon us not to ally with the Jews or the Christians, not to like them, not to become their partners, not to support them, and not to sign agreements with them. And he who does that is one of them, as Allah said: ‘O you who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies, for they are allies of one another. Who from among you takes them as allies will indeed be one of them’... Have no mercy on the Jews, no matter where they are, in any country. Fight them, wherever you are. Wherever you meet them, kill them.⁵¹

For a literalist in interpretation, this passage from the Qur’ân is starkly clear as a divine imperative that is then taken up by a “pious” militant

Muslim as an imperative governing his or her individual conduct in any society where Jews and Christians are encountered. Must one then counter with the objection that such citations of Islamic texts are *politically incorrect* introductions of “evidence” against the religious dogma of Islam? This is a problematic position to take, whether one’s conception of truth is that of correspondence, coherence, or pragmatism:⁵² The political reality is correspondent (in the sense that the concepts correspond to the matters of fact); the texts are coherent (in the sense of the logical consistency internal to the texts); and the citation of the text is pragmatic (in the sense that it makes a difference in one’s commitment to and assessment of the religious dogma).

Islamic extremists engage in what Westerners view as terrorist acts but which radical Muslims defend with reference to the Qur’ân:

“Surely Allah has bought of the believers their persons and their property for this, that they shall have the garden; they fight in the way of Allah, so they slay and are slain.” (Qur’ân 9:111)

This is one scriptural appeal to the Qur’ân in support of individual *jihad* that expresses itself in armed conflict and suicide bombing according to a promise of the jihadist’s admission to Paradise after death.⁵³ Such appeals to the authority of the Qur’an cannot but be interpreted in light of the religion’s universalist-monotheist quest:

Fight them (non-Muslim pagans) until there will be no disbelief in God [*fitnah*] and until God’s [Allah’s] religion [Islam] will become dominant. If they change their behaviour, there would be no hostility against anyone except the unjust” (Qur’ân 2:193).

Clearly, as long as there are other religions that represent themselves as repositories of truth (revealed or natural), any “orthodox” Muslim is admonished to be intolerant of disbelief in Allah to the point of taking offensive action such as we see expressed in contemporary Islamist extremism.

Contemporary Muslims are bound to engage the polemic and rhetoric advanced by adherents of the ISIS leadership, especially when it comes to the latter’s critique of Christian religion, a critique that amounts to a threat of genocide, as delineated by international human rights lawyer J. J. Daniels.⁵⁴ Daniels reminds, “We must understand that when ISIS proclaims ‘holy war’ against Christians and then carries out their mass murders, they

sincerely believe they are fulfilling a spiritual mandate to restore the purity of the Caliphate. If we dismiss their statements, then we raise the burden of proof for victims (and prosecutors) to show that ISIS' leaders had the mental intent to commit genocide.”

Further, surely ISIS's public representations of its dogma almost automatically force the distinction of “good” Muslim and “bad” Muslim so long as so-called “moderate” or “progressive” Muslims denounce the dogma but do not engage their own religion more fundamentally to clarify why there must be either moderation or progression in relation to contemporary international politics and why ISIS's dogma is not representative of Islam. Thus, in a somewhat more sinister commentary, Graeme Wood opines, “There is a temptation to rehearse this observation—that jihadists are modern secular people, with modern political concerns, wearing medieval religious disguise—and make it fit the Islamic State. In fact, much of what the group does looks nonsensical except in light of a sincere, carefully considered commitment to returning civilization to a seventh-century legal environment, and ultimately to bringing about the apocalypse.”⁵⁵

Surely, no self-respecting modern or progressive Muslim accepts ISIS's pronounced commitments. Yet, the required self-examination of Islamic dogma even for them remains to be done if today there is to be sincere tolerance of Islamic belief and practice (as a basic freedom of religious conviction) in the presence of such extremist behavior. Princeton scholar Bernard Haykel, represented as an expert on ISIS's theology, has commented, “Slavery, crucifixion, and beheadings are not something that freakish [jihadists] are cherry-picking from the medieval tradition’...Islamic State fighters ‘are smack in the middle of the medieval tradition and are bringing it wholesale into the present day.’”⁵⁶ Moreover, says Haykel, “The only principled ground that the Islamic State's opponents could take is to say that certain

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core texts and traditional teachings of Islam are no longer valid... That really would be an act of apostasy.” Hence, no contemporary Muslim can ignore this “medievalist” assertion of religious dogma grounded in its founding texts—even if it means they are charged by medievalist-literalists as modernist apostates from the purity of belief and practice upon which ISIS insists.

THE RELEVANCE OF NASR ABÛ ZAYD TODAY

It is to be noted that some Islamic scholars have raised this question of self-examination in relation to reform of the Islamic tradition. Among them is Nasr Abû Zayd, recipient of the Ibn Rushd Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2005. He has argued in his *Rethinking the Qur’ân* for a new hermeneutics in reading the foundational text of Islam.⁵⁷ After all, it is well known to scholars of Islam that there was a classical discipline (*‘ulûm al-Qur’ân*)

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that engaged questions concerning the nature, history, and structure of the Qur’ân, even if contemporary Muslims are for the most uninformed by this tradition. If one is to move away from a literalist interpretation of the Qur’ân (and thus away from a radical Islam that legitimizes terrorist acts as justified acts of *jihad*), then the alternative may well find its message emanating from a more scientific and humanistic reading of the Qur’an. This will require application of

contemporary methods that are applied to religious texts such as in biblical studies, such as historical criticism, semiotics, and discourse analysis, methodological approaches not well received by those who claim an “orthodox” religious heritage.

For Abû Zayd, the challenge is to move from analysis of *text* (thus to avoid both polemics and apologies) to analysis of *discourse* in relation to the historically determinable installation of Islamic religious convictions. The task here is one of study of communicative function, especially in contrasting the differential effect on the elite and the masses in their appropriation of those convictions. Thus, Abû Zayd opines, “It is no longer sufficient

to re-contextualize a passage or some passages when it is only needed to fight against literalism and fundamentalism or when it is needed to wave away certain historical practice that seems unfit in our modern context.”⁵⁸ Moreover, he argues, “It is also not enough to invoke modern hermeneutics in order to justify the historicity and, therefore, the relativity of every mode of understanding claiming in the meantime that our modern interpretation is the more appropriate and the more valid.” These two interpretive methods will not have the sort of efficacy required for meaningful critique at the level of individual religious professions of faith.

In the context of current engagement with the theology of ISIS, therefore, Abû Zayd’s remarks are entirely pertinent. Concerning punishment (*hudūd*), for example, he informs us that, “This level exists in the Qur’ân but it does not belong to the worldview of the Qur’ân. It does not even belong to the category of ‘rules’...Cutting off the hands of the thief, flogging an adulterer and those who falsely accuse others of adultery (*qadhif*)—not to mention stoning, *rajm*, (which is not a rule in the *muṣḥaf* but is claimed have been abrogated in its textual form only, *nusikha lafẓan la hukman*) are *not genuine Qur’ânic rulings*. These forms of punishment existed before the Qur’ân, and the Qur’ân borrowed them in order to protect society against crimes.”⁵⁹ Thus, in the context of this discourse analysis

What matters theologically is to provide a reasonable response to ISIS’s religious dogma such as is enabled through Abû Zayd’s renovative approach in discourse analysis; and, what matters politically is to engage terrorist acts precisely for what they are—crimes.

and historical criticism, one can argue that, following Abû Zayd’s method of engagement of the Qur’ân one need not commit to a conclusion that Islam is “evil” because the grounding text is “evil,” either in the objectivist or subjectivist sense of the word. Granted, Western critics find radical Islamist interpretation of penal law appalling, their criticism pointing to a set of practices reasonably to be discarded in the contemporary context of human rights discourse, despite ostensible ground for their legitimacy in the *sharī‘a*. What matters *theologically*, then, is to provide a reasonable response

to ISIS’s religious dogma such as is enabled through Abû Zayd’s renovative approach in discourse analysis; and, what matters *politically* is to engage terrorist acts precisely for what they are—crimes (*not* necessarily as “acts of war”) subject to penalty under applicable national and international laws.

That said, however, it is of paramount significance in the presence of the self-declared Islamic State “Caliphate” that Muslims confront their own texts on the matter of what counts today as Qur’ânic obligation. Abû Zayd reminds, “If an Islamic state is not established, every individual Muslim is [supposedly] responsible before God for such a religious failure; so preach the representatives of the radical Islamic groups and the representatives of the so-called ‘moderate’ Islamic discourse.”⁶⁰ But, clearly, if such a state has the configuration of ISIS, with its particular installation and imple-

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mentation of the *sharî‘a*, then clearly any modernist or progressive Muslim is unlikely to diminish (or otherwise eliminate) “Western” depreciation and dismissal of Islam as a meaningful contemporary faith. This is all the more so when Muslims do not account for the historical fact that any juridical appeal to the *sharî‘a* is an appeal *not to divine law per se* but to a conjunction of principles of interpretation (*ijtihâd*) that are the substance of *a tradition of judgment* and,

as such, by no means a set of necessary truths essential to a prospective renovation of Islamic thought. In that case, given the contemporary logic of statecraft with its principle of sovereignty, as well as ongoing normative critiques of that logic in the direction of reform of international institutional structures and patterns of behavior, as well as reform of normative orientations proper to international morality, there is no necessity to either theocracy or an “Islamic” state *per se*. A self-respecting Muslim who is prepared to learn from the results of historical criticism and discourse analysis is, therefore, obligated to reform his and her individual religious consciousness accordingly. This becomes, then, a matter of both scholarly consensus and public perception about the essentials of Islamic faith and practice.

There is a significant consequence to such analysis that many Muslims

may find difficult to countenance, and they may respond with a calculated obstinate comportment. This consequence has to do with the fact that it has long been claimed that the teaching of the Qur'ân is one that legitimates its *universality*, in contrast to that of the Sunna, which is recognizably *historically delimited* such that scholars must distinguish between “authentic/reliable” and “inauthentic/unreliable” judgments (*hadīth*). However, all contemporary scientific methods applicable to analysis of the grounding texts of Islam require all Muslims to be careful of “buttressing myths” embedded in the long-standing claim to the universality of the Qur'ân. Religious belief is itself always both *historically delimited* and *historically contested*, whatever one may claim about the veracity of the scriptures as a repository of divine truth. The requisite move away from all fundamentalisms is a move contemporary Western and Islamic philosophy as well as Islamic scholarship recommend in the interest of ongoing human enlightenment that abandons the appeal of “the Dark Ages” once again entering our time through Islamic extremism.⁶¹

The relations of states and peoples are not reasonably to be held hostage to differential claims to “universal justice” or “universal rationality” ostensibly warranted by this or that religious dogma, given the facts of religious pluralism continuously contraposed in the history of human affairs. What matters today, then, is to counter militant Islamic extremism with an *Islamic Reformation* that (a) salvages a reasonably defensible solidarity of the faithful (the *umma*) while (b) acknowledging the historical contingency of Islamic religious beliefs and practices, the fact of contingency thus contraposed to any who would pretend to be “the true heir” of prophetic authority. Such a reformation must also eschew all linkages to “the pragmatic policy of political regimes,” especially in the context of Muslim-majority nation-states that stipulate Islam as the state religion and thus marginalize other professions of faith despite claims of equality under the law and a place for secularist appeals.⁶² A genuine Islamic Reformation must be transnational in its efficacy, supervening upon any and

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all self-interested and expedient appropriation of the religion by political regimes. In the absence of such a reformation, it is highly probable the world will find the international peace perpetually disturbed by continued Islamist extremism, despite military response to terrorist actions.

Indeed, the locus of reform must be first and foremost in the standard source of appeal, viz., the Qur'ân itself. This means that all Muslims must recognize what Abû Zayd concludes from his methodological approach even as he does not abandon his faith: "The Qur'ân was the outcome of dialoguing, debating, augmenting, accepting and rejecting. This horizontal, communicative, and humanistic dimension is in the 'structure' of the Qur'ân, not outside it."⁶³ As a matter of historical record, this dialogue, debate, augmentation, acceptance, and rejection cannot but continue reasonably to frame the contemporary scene of Islamic discourse. All strategies of interrogation from this framework are essential to reformation, to demythologization and to demystification of Islam, in its dialogue with the non-Muslim West. The task before us, then, is not to articulate religion within the limits of *revelation* alone (as a hermeneutics of faith expects), or within the limits of *reason* alone (as a philosophical theology expects), but religion within the limits of the *spiritual* (alone?)—such an interrogation all the while sustaining this ambiguity, even as our present time is unavoidably situated in a simultaneous concealment/unconcealment of our common future. This future need not be one of illusion (in Freud's sense), false consciousness (in Marx's sense), or mere ideological appeal to fundamentalism in all its many guises (in the sense of Islamist extremism) if, but only if, the rhetoric of polemics yields to the practical rationality that vouchsafes an Islamic Reformation.

Notes

1. Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism," *American Anthropologist*, 2002, 104(3): 766-775.

2. Mamdani, p. 766.

3. Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses* published in 1989, has commented on recent events to say, "A word I dislike greatly, 'Islamophobia', has been coined to discredit those who point at these excesses, by labelling them as bigots. But in the first place, if I don't like your ideas, it must be acceptable for me to say so, just as it is acceptable for you to say that you don't like mine. Ideas cannot be ring-fenced just because they claim to have this or that fictional sky god on their side. And in the second place, it's important to remember that most of those who suffer under the yoke of the new Islamic fanaticism are other Muslims...It is right to feel phobia towards such matters. As several commentators have said, what is being killed in Iraq is not just human beings, but a whole culture. To feel aversion towards such a force is not bigotry. It is the only possible response to the horror of events." See here Anita Singh, "Salman Rushdie condemns 'hate-filled rhetoric' of Islamic fanaticism," *The Telegraph*, 09 October 2014; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/11152718/Salman-Rushdie-condemns-hate-filled-rhetoric-of-Islamic-fanaticism.html>.

4. The concept of "hermeneutics of suspicion" was presented by philosopher Paul Ricoeur as an interpretive comportment contrasting to a hermeneutics of faith. The concept of suspicion refers to methodological commitments taken by Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche on the epistemological problem of the relation of appearance to reality, with appearance including here semblance and falsification (thus "false consciousness" and "illusion"). Suspicion then entails a task of "decoding" what is hidden in a text, but with distrust or skepticism in what is transmitted, however authoritative or canonical the declared sources. This comportment is not so in the case of a hermeneutics of faith that accepts and trusts the received text and works to clarify and deliver reasonable meaning. See here Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

5. Notably, even the eminent Islamic scholar Nasr Abû Zayd commented on this in his *Rethinking the Qur'ân: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics* (Utrecht: Humanistics University Press, 2004), pp. 22-23.

6. Abû Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'ân*, p. 25.

7. See here, e.g., Cathy L. Grossman, "'Own it'—Terrorism is an Islamic Issue, say some Muslims," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 05 December 2015; <http://www.sltrib.com/home/3267795-155/own-it-terrorism-is-an>. Also see Dina Al Raffie, "Whose Hearts and Minds? Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Salafi Jihadism," *Journal of Terrorism Research*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, Autumn 2012.

8. Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary, “Which Countries Have State Religions?” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, November 2005, pp. 1331-1370; http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/rachelmccleary/files/state_religion.pdf.

9. Grossman, “Own it...” Jasser’s remarks were presented at a “Summit of Western Muslim Voices of Reform against the Islamic State and Islamism,” sponsored by the Heritage Foundation.

10. Kelly James Clark, “Why Don’t Moderate Muslims Denounce Terrorism?” *Huffington Post*, 04 December 2015; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kelly-james-clark/why-dont-moderate-muslims_b_8722518.html.

11. Hamed Abdel-Samad, *Islamic Fascism* (Prometheus Books, 2016); translation of *der Islamische Faschismus* (Droemer Knauer, 2004).

12. Jacob Olidort, “What is Salafism? How a Nonpolitical Ideology Became a Political Force,” *Foreign Affairs*, 24 November 2015; <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/1116033>. Olidort distinguishes ‘Islamism’ and ‘Salafism’ (which originates from the Arabic “*al-salaf al-salib*”) thus: “Salafism...has sought to ‘purify’ Islam of Western influence and centuries’ worth of ‘deviant’ digressions from the true Islam (which, according to its practitioners, include Shiism, Sufism, and even non-Salafist Sunni). Salafism is strictly Sunni...” Further, “Salafists define Islam as anything that was explicitly condoned by Muhammad and that was upheld by his first three generations of Sunni followers (until the ninth century). This view is based on a hadith, a statement of Muhammad’s [sic], in which he allegedly said that ‘the best of my community is my generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow them.’ By extension, anything that appeared after that—and anything Muhammad did not explicitly condone—is considered un-Islamic, an extremely broad category.”

13. See here William E. Connolly, *Appearance and Reality in Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Chapter 3, “Appearance and Reality in Politics,” pp. 63-89, which is a revised and expanded version of Connolly’s paper of the same title that appeared in the journal *Political Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 4, November 1979, pp. 445-468.

14. Connolly, *Appearance and Reality in Politics*, p. 63.

15. See George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

16. John Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac: An Introduction to the Qur’an for Bible Readers* (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 10.

17. Jack Mirkinson, “The *New York Post* has no shame: The ugly truth about its outrageous ‘Muslim Killers’ cover,” *Salon*, 03 December 2015, http://www.salon.com/2015/12/03/the_new_york_post_has_no_shame_the_ugly_truth_about_its_outrageous_muslim_killers_cover/.

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25. Thus, the UN Security Council passed a resolution unanimously authorizing "all necessary measures" (thus military action included) against the Islamic State. See UN Security Council, "Security Council 'Unequivocally' Condemns ISIL Terrorist Attacks, Unanimously Adopting Text that Determines Extremist Group Poses 'Unprecedented' Threat," <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12132.doc.htm>.

26. See here, Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac*.

27. See here Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

28. See here Norman K. Swazo, "'My brother is my king': Evaluating the Moral Duty of Global Jihad," *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. 25, No. 4, December 2008, pp. 7-47; also see Christian Walter, "Defining Terrorism in National and International Law," in C. Walter, et al., (eds.) *Terrorism as a Challenge for National and International Law: Security versus Liberty?* (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer, 2003), https://www.unodc.org/tldb/bibliography/Biblio_Int_humanitarian_law_Walter_2003.pdf.

29. Bernard Lewis, "What Went Wrong?" *The Atlantic*, January 2002a, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/01/what-went-wrong/302387/>. See also Lewis' *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002b).

30. See here University of Michigan historian Juan Cole's review, "Review of Bernard Lewis' 'What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response,'" <https://electronicintifada.net/content/review->

bernard-lewis-what-went-wrong-western-impact-and-middle-eastern-response/3441; originally appearing in *Global Dialogue*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Autumn 2002.

31. Lewis, *What Went Wrong?* (2002b, p. 4): “For most medieval Muslims, Christendom meant, primarily, the Byzantine Empire, which gradually became smaller and weaker until its final disappearance with the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453.”

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33. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

34. Anthony Faiola and Souad Mekhennet, “Paris Attacks were carried out by three groups tied to Islamic State, official says,” *The Washington Post*, 14 November 2015.

35. Michael Sherlock, “ISIS is Islam,” 01 April 2015, <https://michaelsherlockauthor.wordpress.com/2015/04/01/isis-is-islam/>.

36. Zakyi Ibrahim, “Editorial: Violent Muslim Extremism Flagrantly Dares the World: A Critical Reflection,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 32:4, Fall 2015, pp. i-vi.

37. Ibrahim, “Violent Muslim Extremism...” p. ii.

38. Lewis, *What Went Wrong?* (2002a).

39. Mamdani, “Good Muslim...,” p. 768.

40. Mamdani (2002, p. 770) puts it thus: “Thus was the tradition of jihad—of a just war with religious sanction, nonexistent in the last 400 years—revived with the U.S. help in the 1980s.”

41. Hourani, p. 251.

42. Hourani, p. 251; italics added.

43. Hourani, p. 252.

44. Sherlock, “ISIS is Islam,” p. 1.

45. See here Marwa Rifhahie, Marwa, “The Death Penalty in the Islamic Legal Tradition,” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, January/February 2007, pp. 57-58.

46. Elizabeth Peiffer, “The Death Penalty in Traditional Islamic Law and as Interpreted in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria,” 11 *Wm. & Mary J. Women & L.* 507, 2005, <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmjowl/vol11/iss3/9>.

47. Peiffer, p. 511.

48. Robert Postawko, “Comment: Towards an Islamic Critique of Capital Punishment,” *UCLA Journal of Islamic & Near Eastern Law*, 2002, 269, 285, p. 292.

49. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari’ah Law: An Introduction* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009).

50. Majid AlKaduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybānī's Siyar* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

51. Sherlock here cites from Robert Spencer, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)*, Regnery Publishing Co., 2005, p. 30.

52. Theories of truth fall into various categories. 'Correspondence' concerns the relation of concept to the object to which it refers, assuming the concept adequately describes or represents the object. 'Coherence' concerns the logic of argument, the internal consistency of the reasoning. 'Pragmatism' is concerned to determine truth in terms of what difference a given commitment makes to belief or practice.

53. For a scholarly discussion of *jihad*, see Robinson, Chase F. Robinson, *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. 1: The Formation of the Islamic World Sixth to Eleventh Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

54. J. J. Daniels, "The Islamic State's Genocide of Christians," *The Daily Signal*, 04 December 2015; <http://dailysignal.com/2015/12/04/the-islamic-states-genocide-of-christians/>.

55. Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

56. Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

57. Abû Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'ân*.

58. Abû Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'ân*, p. 11.

59. "Nasr Hamid Abû Zayd," italics added. Deen Research Center, <http://www.deenresearchcenter.com/DRC/NasrAbuZaydslegacy/tabid/108/Default.aspx>.

60. Abû Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'ân*, p. 35.

61. Abû Zayd (*Rethinking the Qur'ân*, p. 58), commented, e.g., on the reform efforts of Egyptian scholar Muhammad 'Abdu's *Tafsîr al-Manâr*, which represented an explicit effort to re-contextualize the text of the Qur'ân against its 7th century cultural background, a process that "led 'Abdu to de-mythologize the Qurânic narrative as well as to come close to a de-mystification of the Holy Text."

62. As Abû Zayd (*Rethinking the Qur'ân*, p. 52), reminded, "The example of Pakistan could be found in different degree in other Muslim countries where the state is able to manipulate intellectuals to serve the regime ideology."

63. Abû Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'ân*, p. 63.

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