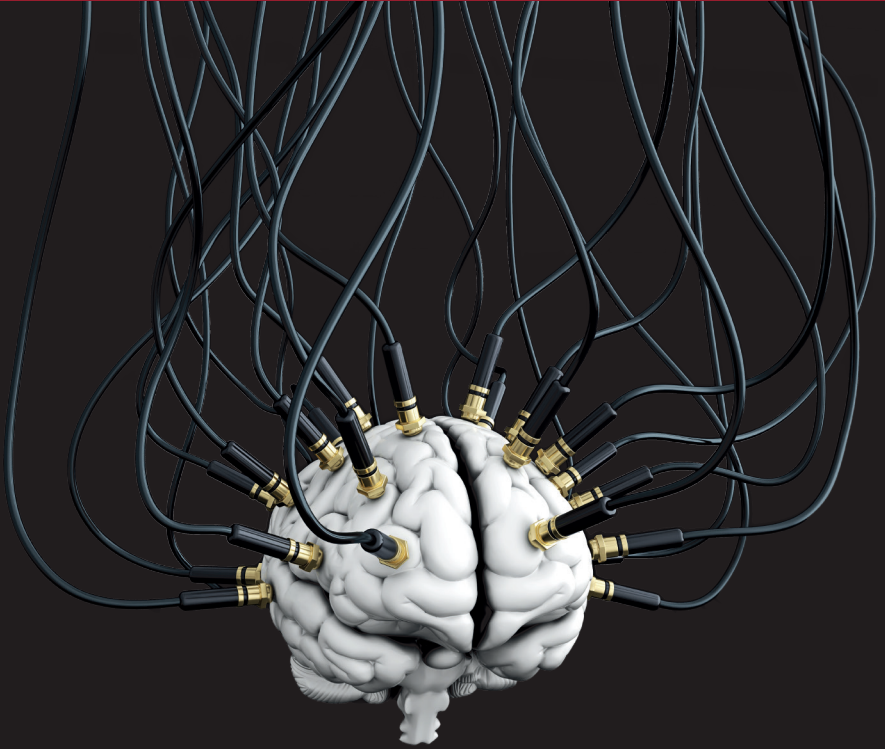


THE MODERNIST MENACE TO ISLAM

A Muslim Critique of Modern -isms



DANIEL HAQIQATJOU

Physics and Philosophy Graduate of
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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In Loving Memory of My Sister

Donna



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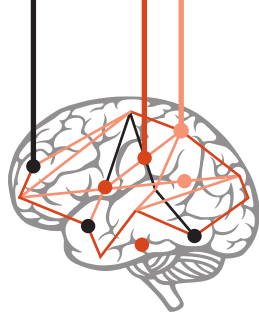
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Haqiqatjou is the founder of Alasna Institute, an online learning institute dedicated to teaching Muslims how to fight doubts about Islam and strengthen their faith.

He was born in Houston, Texas, USA and comes from a liberal secular Muslim background but rediscovered a commitment to Islam in his youth. He studied physics as an undergraduate at Harvard University and completed graduate studies in philosophy, studying with some of the top physicists and philosophers in the world, including Nobel Prize winners. He also studies Islam traditionally with respected scholars of Islam.

Through Alasna Institute, he writes and lectures on contemporary issues surrounding Muslims and modernity and has spoken at universities, mosques, and madrasas around the world.

CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, the Master and King of existence, the All-Merciful, Beneficent, who has power over all things. May peace and blessings be upon His final Messenger, Muhammad ﷺ, and his Family, and his Companions.

Modernity is a menace to Islam. It is a menace to the human race. But to understand this, we have to take a step back.

Historians generally identify the sixteenth century as the beginning of modernity. This was a century that saw great upheaval in Europe, as the Reformation pitted Christian sects in a bitter conflict from which the secular age was born. War, tribalism, and bloodshed did their part to disenchant intellectuals from religion and scripture, which were increasingly seen as sources of ignorance and suffering. But what would replace God and scripture? What else could be the source of morality? What else could be the source of knowledge about the nature of existence and of humanity's ultimate destiny?

The early modernists elected their own minds to this position of metaphysical and worldly authority. The mind alone, they argued, could guide mankind. The success of the mathematical sciences and Isaac Newton's empirical philosophy seemed to bolster this conclusion. Through reason and empirical observation, the human mind could

become a god. The mind, it seemed, had infinite ability to reason, calculate, and discover. All the mysteries of the universe and of human nature would be solved like an equation. It was simply a matter of time.

But knowledge was only half of the story. What distinguished mortals from gods was not only knowledge but also power, i.e., the ability to enact one's will and, thereby, refashion the world accordingly. This need could be met by technology, which could be continuously developed and advanced. To the modernists, this meant that technology promised infinite power and, therefore, godhood. Finally, man could recreate himself in his own image. Here again, achieving unlimited power was simply a matter of time.

This focus on time is the hallmark of modernism and modernism's chief characteristic: Progressivism. As time marches forward, humanity improves in its knowledge and power. Civilization grows in rationality and morality as it races to a utopian future that resembles the heavenly paradise described in many religious texts. The humanity of tomorrow is better than the humanity of today. The humanity of today is better than the humanity of yesterday. This notion of progress became the grundnorm underlying all modern thought and an unquestioned truth devoutly held by layman and intellectual alike.

Here we begin to see the basis of modernity's menacing nature. Progress means that change becomes a virtue all unto itself. Constancy, in contrast, becomes the greatest vice. To resist change is seen as a literal assault on the human race. Modernity's number one enemy, therefore, is tradition since devotion to tradition means, among other things, resistance to change.

Tradition, in whatever form, calls to consistency over time. A basic commitment to tradition means accepting that some principles are timeless. Some values cannot be updated. To be devoted to a tradition requires reliance on the past in one way or another, and that requirement by itself pits tradition against modernity. Cultural traditions, linguistic traditions, and especially religious traditions are constantly under threat of being bulldozed by modern innovation and reform.

Religious tradition has no place in the modern world. Modern or modernized religion amounts to nothing more than a garnish on the side of the main course. The piece of parsley sits on the edge of the plate, inconsequential in every way. Modernity can tolerate parsley as long as it doesn't affect anything. At the end of the day, modernity requires everyone stuff themselves with its steaming pile of entree. If some choose to nibble on parsley as well, who cares? But if anyone rejects modernity's main course in favor of religion, this is not allowed. Those religions that want to be more than garnish will not be tolerated.

The question that sits at the back of the modernist mind is: Who needs religion when all the main questions of life are (supposedly) answered by modernity and its epistemologies?

Where did humans come from?

Darwinism (supposedly) has the answer.

How does the universe work?

The physical sciences (supposedly) have the answer.

What does it mean to be good?

Liberalism answers this; just treat others how you want to be treated. Freedom and equality are the ultimate goods.

What does it all mean?

There is no objective meaning. At best, we make our own meaning. At worst we are just collections of atoms floating in the void of infinite space.

In this way, according to the modernist mentality, humanity has no real need for religion, as religion adds no substantive value. According to this mindset, the only reason someone would be religious is out of some a-rational cultural bias or, maybe, force of habit.

In the light of modernity, nothing could be more contrary to progress than “closed-minded” believers “blindly” reading one-thousand-year-old texts and maintaining canonized religious law. Modernity, therefore, aims to destroy this religious impediment to progress with a multi-faceted assault involving media, education, law, and global politics. This assault is as comprehensive in scope as it is brutal.

Islam can rightly be described as the antithesis of modernity. This is partly due to the fact that the European Enlightenment thinkers in the 18th and 19th century, who developed the main theoretical philosophy underlying modernity, viewed Islam as a more brutish, less forward-thinking version of the same stagnant Church they had so thoroughly neutered. Famous 18th century atheist French philosopher Voltaire, for example, caricatured Islam as a barbaric religion. He even wrote a play *Mahomet* satirizing

the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, portraying him as a fanatical tyrant and depicting his enemies, the pagan Arabs, as freethinking saints of reason. This bitter Orientalism colored the thinking of many European philosophers. Islam, in their minds, was despotic while modernism meant freedom. Islam was irrational while modernism put a premium on the mind. Above all, to them Islam meant stagnation and decay while their modern outlook represented continuous change and renewal.

Beyond that intellectual history, the very nature of modernity clashes with Islam. After all, Islam is the most consistently traditional of all religions. Preservation of the Prophetic Sunnah is paramount in Islam, and Islam's entire epistemology is built on the notion of preserving and transmitting past knowledge, not only past knowledge from the time of revelation but, indeed, past knowledge from the very beginning of human existence, when Allah created humanity and asked them, "Am I not your Rabb [i.e., Lord and Master]?" And all of humanity responded, "Yes, we testify," as described in Surat Al-Ar'af (verse 17) in the Quran. This primordial knowledge of the Creator, His Oneness, and His right to be worshipped is preserved in the human instinct known as the fitra. This is the instinct that drives mankind to goodness, purity, and righteousness unless it becomes corrupted due to the vicissitudes of the dunya, corrupted whether due to idolatry (shirk), arrogant egoism (nafs), lust (shahwa), the whispering of satan (shaytan), or false whims and prejudices (hawa). The practice of Islam functionally serves as preservation of the fitra in the sense of ensuring constancy in one's worship to the Creator alone without partner. Constancy of will is equally paramount, as the believer must ensure that he brings his will and his

desires into utmost congruence with the Divine will, always intending Allah's good pleasure (ridwan).

All of these values and this entire existential framework immediately and uncompromisingly conflict with modernism as well as all its concomitant -isms.

But the hostility between Islam and modernity did not remain theoretical. The first clash between Muslims and the adherents of modernity occurred in the early nineteenth century as European colonization of the Muslim world began. The colonial powers first and foremost desired to expand economic power and control and, secondly, to bring the light of modernity and progress to the "savage" Muslim populace "stuck in the seventh century." Islam stood in the way of both goals. In response, the colonizers developed a sophisticated strategy to weaken the influence of Islam over the Muslim mind. From North Africa to South Asia to Indonesia, the colonial project attacked Islamic religious institutions and scholars by systematically defunding them and replacing them with pro-European alternatives. In terms of religious practice, everything from Islamic language (Arabic) to Islamic dress to Islamic family structure was targeted by the colonizer and systematically dismantled in many parts of the Muslim world. The Caliphate itself continued to suffer from the modernizing influence until it was completely abolished in 1924. This top-to-bottom overhaul of Muslim society often meant nothing short of annihilation and, at times, outright genocide, as those Muslims who resisted the colonial threat and "stood in the way of progress" were summarily exterminated. In the final analysis, tens of millions of Muslims were brutally killed, sacrifices to the Western god of progress and enlightenment.

Those Muslims who survived and their children were brainwashed over time to adopt modernity and its -isms. The formulation of “modern = good” was branded on the Muslim consciousness through a Westernized educational system as well as media, literature, and political influence. The fundamental paradox which few modernized Muslims could resist was the idea that modernism held the key to reviving the lost glory of the Muslim peoples. To return to the global dominance that Muslims historically enjoyed, they must, paradoxically, follow the modernized West, learn its science, adopt its way of life, embrace its technology, emulate its economy, etc. This lie is as powerful today as it was two centuries ago. It is a lie, of course, because adopting modernism means abandoning Islam. Therefore, even if Muslims were to attain civilizational ascendance by aping modernity and the West, by the end, they would no longer be Muslims. It would be, at best, a hollow “victory.” In the end, no true victory can come from other than Islam as mentioned in the following verse.

“...and victory is not except from Allah, the Exalted in
Might, the Wise.”

Ali 'Imran (Q3:126)

This we hold as a sacred, inviolable truth.

Once we understand the toxic nature of modernism, it becomes easy to recognize its effect on the Muslim mind. How can the progressiveness of modernism and the traditionalism of Islam coexist in the same mind and heart? How can one simultaneously believe the progressive narrative—*viz.*, that the present day is the peak of continuous human moral and intellectual advancement—whilst also believing that the best generation was the generation of

the Prophet ﷺ and then the righteous Salaf? Logically, one cannot. Yet, the colonized mind will twist and contort in order to reconcile the two. Perhaps the answer lies in reforming Islam, bringing the religion up to date and up to code. Perhaps everything in Islam that is anti-liberal, anti-secular, anti-feminism, anti-materialism, anti-scientism, etc., can be expunged from the religion.

Such thoughts constitute the source of numerous doubts in Islam that are plaguing some Muslims in this day and age. In response to this tension, the tendency—nurtured by an environment polluted with the heavy stench of modernism—is to distort Islam, bending it to the mold set by modernism. Muslims who have such doubts would be better served by breaking that modernist mold rather than attempting to warp the Straight Path that is Islam. Successfully breaking this modernist mold requires debunking the -isms and disenchanting these Muslims from the false gold modernism sells. Once the Muslim mind is deprogrammed, decolonized, demodernized, and cleared of the radioactive waste products of the West, then once again the pure light of Islam can shine through.

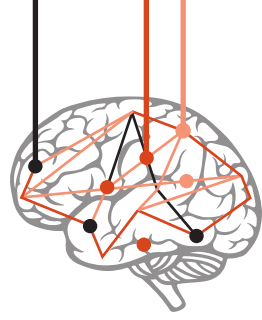
This book collects short essays and reflections I have written over the years critiquing these -isms. I have written primarily for a Muslim audience but non-Muslims, many of whom also recognize the scourge of modernity, can also understand most of the arguments, save for a few Islamic terms they might not know. The book can be read in any order as each chapter and section can be read independently of everything else. The critiques themselves are not comprehensive, though they are meant to pack a punch against some of the more persistent dogmas of the

day. But the hope is that this book is the first volume in a series that, as a whole, will provide the reader plenty of food for thought and, if Allah wills, a paradigm shift towards understanding that the modernist emperor has no clothes.

And Allah is the King of kings.

May Allah accept this work and forgive its faults. May He shine the light of sincerity and guidance onto our hearts and let us and our children not die except as Muslims and as submissive slaves to Him. Amin.

CHAPTER 2



ATHEISM

THE SELF WORSHIP OF HAWKING AND PHYSICS —

I read Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* in middle school and thought it was great. I also got a chance to see him speak in person when I was in high school. He was one of the populizers of science who sparked my interest in studying physics that eventually led to receiving my degree in the subject from Harvard.

What was always clear about Hawking was that he was a man of great faith. Not faith in God, though. He was a staunch atheist. He put his faith in the human mind's ability to discover the "Grand Unified Theory of Everything." Does such a theory exist? Hawking strongly believed so, and like Einstein and many other physicists, he dedicated his life to attempting to discover it.

How do we know such a theory exists? And how do we know it can be discovered at all? These were questions that troubled me as a student of physics. And none of my professors had compelling answers. The most that they could say is that the universe is so intricate and demonstrates such complexity and sublime order that there must be something that underlies it all. There must be a deeper truth! There must be a reason why this order, this "Grand Design" exists! And the reason, Hawking

surmised, is that an all-encompassing theory, perhaps even one all-explanatory equation, a “God equation” as some physicists call it, underpins it all.

The shirk explicit in this mentality is clear, especially for those like Hawking who militantly reject God in lieu of this kind of metaphysical speculation about the world and its history. Rather than recognize that the order of the universe and its comprehensibility to the mind in the first place are due to an all powerful Creator of both the universe and the human mind, Hawking obstinately turned away from the obvious to insist on a figment of his imagination, the blasphemously-named “God equation.”

What folly it is to imagine that one’s mind is powerful enough to not only comprehend the secrets and grandeur of the universe but also to systematize it in a theoretical framework of one’s making! This is nothing but self worship, the kind of shirk seen from the likes of Iblis and Pharaoh.

I find the first several verses of Surat al-Mulk in the Quran very relevant to Hawking and his demise and the demise of those like him who worship their whims, thinking they are enlightened geniuses, but deluding none but themselves.

“Blessed is He in whose hand is dominion, and He is over all things powerful, who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed—and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving. Who created seven heavens in layers. You do not see in the creation of the Most Merciful any inconsistency. So return [your] vision [to the sky]; do you see any breaks? Then return [your] vision twice again. [Your] vision will return to you humbled while it is fatigued. And We have certainly beautified the nearest heaven with stars

and have made [from] them what is thrown at the devils and have prepared for them the punishment of the Blaze. And for those who disbelieved in their Lord is the punishment of Hell, and wretched is the destination.”

Al-Mulk (Q67:1-6)

ANYTHING EXCEPT GOD ---

Naturalists and atheists will propose any theory no matter how outlandish to avoid having to admit the existence of God.

Is the universe a massive computer simulation created by aliens?

“Very likely!”

Is the universe just one instantiation of an infinite number of other universes in a much larger but undetectable multiverse?

“Seems reasonable!”

Is the universe one massive, integrated consciousness that controls itself?

“Probably!”

Is the universe just the disembodied intelligence of advanced alien life forms?

“Sounds cool!”

Is the universe the creation of an All Powerful Divine Creator?

“Wow, how irrational? How silly? Is this the stone age? You believe in fairy tales?”

Why are the world’s leading scientists proposing these far-fetched theories in the first place?

Because they realize that a purely physicalist explanation of the world cannot be adequate. They realize that a purely naturalistic picture cannot answer the biggest, most pressing questions. They recognize that the universe has all the appearances of being designed, created, as if there is some intentionality and will behind it all.

But they refuse to admit that what they really have in mind is God. So they have to come up with aliens, computer simulations, and other just-so stories to make sense of what is nonsensical as far as a strict materialism is concerned. Maybe one day they will unbury the truth that they have worked so hard to cover.

“I LOVE SCIENCE!” AND OTHER CONFUSIONS ———

When the NASA New Horizons pictures of Pluto were recently published, many people online reacted with declarations of: “I LOVE SCIENCE!” and of how amazing, awe-inspiring, and praiseworthy science is. There is nothing inherently wrong about appreciating science, loving it even. But, do people realize that science did not create Pluto? That science has nothing to do with the existence of Pluto?

You might think that this phenomenon of people declaring their love of science has nothing to do with shirk and is absolutely harmless. And in many cases, I would

agree. But in our cultural circumstance, where people are increasingly leaving religion, becoming agnostic and atheist, and generally denying the relevance and power of God, these statements are not without a deeper significance.

The universal human response upon seeing the sublime wonders of nature is to be in awe, to be dumbfounded with the splendor that is the natural world. Also, universally it is human to feel that someone, some agent, is responsible for this splendor — that it did not just come from nothing, that it didn't just create itself — and then to praise and appreciate that agent. For those who do not believe in God, these involuntary sentiments have to be directed somewhere. So people divert their declarations of adoration to science or “Mother Nature,” etc. Obviously, these people do not believe that there is an actual entity or deity of Mother Nature. And they do not and could not believe that science is responsible for the creation or preservation of natural phenomena (science does not have agency or will, after all). So in what sense should the sight of Pluto elicit that kind of glee, joy, adoration, excitement, and love toward a man-made academic discipline?

Or put another way, if people show this much love and appreciation toward science for its ability to produce images of or to discover details about the natural world, then what about the Creator of those details and the objects of those images?

How utterly stupid and senseless is it for humans to praise science for what they see in the natural world, in essence praising their own minds, without at least acknowledging, if not being certain about, the possibility of a Creator?

You could imagine a person who does not show any appreciation for nature. You show him these pictures of Pluto, take him to see the most beautiful sunset, etc., and he says, “So what? What’s the big deal? These are not impressive.” That would be a more intellectually consistent attitude.

Also, more intellectually consistent would be to praise and love Pluto itself. And that is what nature worship throughout history has been. It is no coincidence that all the planets in our solar system have the names of Greek and Roman gods. But since, according to modern materialism, it would make little sense to praise, love, or show devotion to a lifeless, unconscious rock in outer space, that option is also closed. So people praise science instead, as if that makes any sense.

And the rest of us are left wondering, how idiotic to deny a Creator but also praise science. At most, science is a lens. If you were to read a food photo blog or architectural design blog and were particularly impressed with what you saw therein, you wouldn’t gush over the photographer and ignore the chef or the architect, would you? That would be completely illogical. And if you believe that there is no chef or architect, that the cuisine or the architectural marvel built itself, then, still, why praise anything? The photographer or photography in general has nothing to do with the object of the photograph. If photography is what is spurring this adoration, read a book on photography. If science is what is really praiseworthy, go read Newton’s *Principia*. Don’t browse space photos and spurt on about how mindblowingly amazing science is.

THE SELF-DEFEATING NATURE OF ATHEISM

Do we have a good reason to think that supernatural entities exist?

Here is a reason. The vast majority of human beings throughout time have explicitly believed in some supernatural entity or entities. The fact that not everyone has agreed on what those supernatural entities are does not diminish the fact that these people all believe in some supernatural entity or other. Furthermore, these beliefs are held by people across the world and across time independently of each other.

The burden is on the materialist atheist to explain this phenomenon. If these beliefs have not been induced by actual experiences, then they must be the result of a state of delusion humans almost universally and naturally suffer from or a predisposition humans have in making big mistakes about what does and does not in fact exist in the world. The delusions must be so strong, in fact, that they drive all these people to great lengths of religious devotion. In other words, these are not simply passing hallucinations. This delusion, i.e., the “God delusion,” must be deeply and consistently felt to such an extent that the people suffering from it don’t even have the slightest clue about their mentally disturbed condition.

But by claiming that human beings are prone to suffer from such deep and abiding delusions and are liable to make such significant cognitive errors, this does nothing other than impeach the human mind itself and its ability to accurately recognize and understand the world. But this, of course, undermines the very minds and hence the conclusions of the materialist atheists themselves,

who put ultimate stock in the ability of the human mind to understand its place in the universe and discover its greatest secrets.

In other words, the recognition of the supernatural is so universal and hence so inherent to what it means to be human and the human mind's experience of the world around it that, to discredit that general notion of the supernatural is to discredit the human mind itself and humanity's capacity to be in and experience the world as it really is. That is what materialistic atheism has committed itself to, not realizing the self-defeating nature of its program.

UNINTENDED IMPLICATIONS OF ATHEISM —————

Materialists, naturalists, and atheists have a long history of denying the existence of things that do not fit into their very narrow, limited conception of existence. God is always number one on their list of targets for denial.

But what the public does not realize and atheists do not publicize is that their naturalistic, materialistic philosophy requires the denial of much more than God. They do not want the public at large to be aware of this because then, the people will wake up and see what a silly picture of the world these philosophies commit one to.

For example, the strict scientific empiricism required by new atheists — the idea that the only things that exist are those observable/detectable by science — also requires denying the existence of the mind and certainly the minds of others. Science has not detected the mind. Only electrical

signals in the brain can be detected, but that is not the same thing as the mind.

Have you ever seen someone else's mind? Have you experienced their inner thoughts? Have you felt their emotions? No. All we can see is external behavior. The internal mind of others is inaccessible to our perceptual faculties. So does that mean that we disbelieve that others possess consciousness like our own? If we consistently apply the standards of scientific empiricism used by atheists, that would be the inescapable conclusion.

Doing so is preposterous. Which is why we reject scientific empiricism and the simple-minded atheism that relies on it.

WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE FOR GOD? ---

Where is the evidence for God? Where is the evidence for the truth of Islam? There is evidence, lots of evidence. But what *counts* as evidence depends on a lot of factors. This is a basic truth about the way reason and rationality work and it is just as true about religious claims as it is about scientific (or mathematical) claims.

Imagine you are a scientist living in a world that is bitterly anti-science. The masses are taught from a very young age to distrust science, to look down on scientists, and to view science itself as charlatanism at best, a violent death cult at worst. In this world, of course, there is no institutionalized science education. The vast majority of people have zero exposure to science in the classroom growing up. This results in a severe lack of scientific literacy in the general population. But the ignorance runs deeper than that because even universities are anti-science. The

vast majority of university professors and the cognoscenti worldwide view science with snarky contempt. The only way to study science is in small, underfunded, understaffed independent schools scattered around the world. To study at those schools requires great personal and financial sacrifice on the part of students, which means that very few legitimate scientists are trained relative to the size of the population.

Now, for some reason in this world, the public believes that burning forests is great for the world's climate. As a scientist, you know better. You tell people that actually burning the world's forests will cause environmental disaster. Most people laugh at you and ignore everything you have to say given that you are just a kooky scientist. Others are more respectful and tell you that you have the right to believe whatever you want as long as you don't try to impose your beliefs on others by, for example, insisting that they are true beliefs. But there are also some science skeptics who enjoy trolling scientists.

So they start a dialogue with you. And they demand evidence. How do you know burning forests will lead to disaster? Where's the evidence?

Now, you might be inclined to explain to them about greenhouse gases. But, of course, these people know absolutely nothing about chemistry or physics or biology. You could try to explain to them how CO₂ traps heat, but they have no idea what chemical elements are, let alone CO₂. You could tell them about how trees trap CO₂ and give off oxygen and how living things like humans need oxygen, but then they would ask you for the evidence of all that. So you might try to explain some basic chemistry, but of course,

that is not enough because ultimately chemistry as a body of empirical knowledge relies on molecular physics. So you would have to explain and justify why that is epistemically reliable. And when it comes to understanding molecular physics, a working knowledge of nuclear physics and even quantum mechanics is required, and on and on.

Obviously, these skeptics are going to understand very little of anything you might explain, let alone assume that what you are saying is true. After all, these people had doubts about your initial claim as a scientist. There is nothing that would make them less doubtful about any of the other claims you would have to make about the supporting science that justifies that initial claim.

Now you might tell them: Look, if you want to know with certainty how I know burning forests is a bad idea, you need to get a thorough science education and then do some basic experiments and then go onto advanced studies, etc., etc., and then you will have the evidence you need. To which the skeptics laugh uproariously.

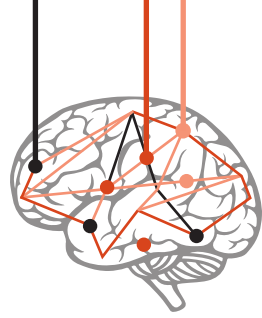
The lesson here is that what counts as evidence, i.e., compelling evidence that justifies belief, requires a gigantic body of contextual knowledge. In discussions about science, that body of contextual knowledge is simply assumed on the basis of scientific authority. People trust scientists to know what they are talking about, so they won't press them too far to justify every single thing. But when those same people talk about God, the skepticism is turned up to a whole different level because religion has no intellectual or epistemic authority in the secular world we live in. There is plenty of evidence for God, evidence far more compelling, consistent, and "objective" than anything in empirical

science. But two things impede people from recognizing this.

First, the contextual knowledge is not there. Islamic education is nonexistent for most of the world, including Muslims. Instead, Muslims worldwide are educated through secular models of learning. Obviously, that will impact Muslims' ability to intellectually arrive at conviction in the existence of Allah and the truth of Islam. And if that wasn't bad enough, the second impeding factor is a very active anti-religion, anti-Islamic current that permeates the culture, the media, the academy, etc. The state of iman and conviction of Muslims around the world is severely impacted by these two factors.

The evidence for Allah and the truth of Islam comes from different sources that mutually reinforce each other. This is the way any body of knowledge works, including scientific knowledge, as the example above was meant to show. A skeptic can undermine any specific point of knowledge, but he can do this only in virtue of an ignorance of the larger context or paradigm or episteme or plausibility structure or web of belief (or whatever other philosophical/sociological term you want to use).

CHAPTER 3



SECULARISM & DEMOCRACY

SECULARISM IS NOT NEUTRAL. IT IS SUPPRESSION —

No version of secularism is the neutral space that it claims to be. Once we accept that, we can move on to more productive conversations.

In a 2015 op-ed, Anglican priest Giles Fraser wrote on the history of secularism:

“At the end of the 18th century, France’s war against the Catholic church reached its bloody conclusion. By Easter 1794, the same revolution that once proclaimed freedom of conscience had forcedly closed down the vast majority of France’s 40,000 churches. What began with the confiscation of church property and the smashing of crosses and chalices, ended with forced conversions and the slaughter of priests and nuns at the guillotine.”

“It is in this period, the so-called Reign of Terror, that the modern English word terrorism – deriving from the French, ‘terrorisme’ – has its origins. ‘Terror is nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue,’ argued Robespierre, in what now sounds like a sick press release from ISIS. Over in the Vendée, those who

remained loyal to their centuries-old faith were massacred in what historian Mark Levene has called ‘an archetype of modern genocide.’ The systematic de-Christianisation of France was not the natural and inevitable collapse of sclerotic religion and the natural and inevitable rise of Enlightenment rationality. It was murderous, state-sponsored suppression.”

A great example of how secularism is just as imposing as theocracy in enforcing its moral prescriptions on the public based on specific metaphysical beliefs comes from Belgium.

In 2017, Belgium’s Walloon region voted to ban kosher and halal meat by outlawing the slaughter of unstunned animals. As of today, seven European countries have banned kosher and halal slaughter: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Slovenia, Austria, Iceland, and Belgium.¹

The justification for the ban is that animals that are not stunned suffer and that that is inhumane, therefore slaughter without stunning is banned. But how do we know any of that? No animal can testify to its internal state. No animal can tell us, “Hey! This really hurts, please stop!” We can only make assumptions about what an animal may experience in the slaughter process. It is far from clear how a bolt blast to the skull or electric shock is less painful than a slit throat. If anything, the former seem much more agonizing. But there is no way to tell.

Nonetheless, the legislators in these countries made a decision based on what they *believe* to be morally correct and then forced others to abide by those *beliefs*. This is not

1. <https://forward.com/food/416983/all-the-european-countries-where-kosher-and-halal-meat-production-are-now/>

something avoidable. This is the nature of law, whether in a secular or a theocratic state.

But Islamic states are singled out for not upholding “religious freedom” when they allow their moral positions and beliefs, viz., Islam, to inform the law. “For legislation to be based on Islam and the Sharia is barbaric theocracy!” they shout. “But for our legislation to be based on our liberal materialist beliefs, that’s fair and neutral.”

The hypocrisy is clear.

So, it is ineffective to argue against this halal ban by saying it is “racist,” “bigoted,” “anti-Muslim,” “islamophobic,” etc., though these biases probably did factor into the bans. It is ineffective because the secular legislators will simply defend themselves by claiming to be legislating on the basis of reducing harm, pain, etc.

A more effective line of argument would be this:

On one level, we cannot fault Belgians for legislating according to their deepest beliefs about right and wrong. We can, however, criticize the beliefs themselves. We can say, “You are wrong on this, and we are right.” We can say, “Our beliefs on the matter come from the Creator of the cows, sheep, chickens, and you and me, whereas your beliefs are based on nothing but hot air.” That would be a meaningful dialectic that could develop and be substantive.

Sadly, substantive dialectic is not on people’s radars nowadays. Nowadays, the only spark that starts the engines of many people’s moral reasoning, the only moral argument that they can wrap their heads around, is: “That’s bigotry!” Meanwhile, the deception of secularism proceeds undetected.

THE VOID OF THE SECULAR

Secularism is all about the means and actively distracts people from the ends. Because the ends are the domain of religion.

Secularism will tell you the importance of action but will only give you vague assertions about the results. Because results are the domain of religion.

Secularism will tell you that you have to vote but won't give you a substantive ethical vision on the basis of which to vote. Because substantive ethical visions are the domain of religion.

Secularism will tell you to respect everyone equally but won't tell you what it means to be respectable. Because the core of respect and respectability is the domain of religion.

You might think that all this implies that as people become more secular, they become more neutral, more detached from anything of ethical substance, more disconnected from anything of meaning.

But you would be wrong because the heart can never be empty. The emptiness created by liberal secular vacuousness is quickly filled up with base cultural artifacts produced by corporate conglomerates and disseminated by a profit-driven mass media at the ready to broadcast and normalize *fahisha* (obscene iniquity) and denigration. This becomes the religion of the masses, the contents of their character. This is the end, the purpose that secularism is meant to produce by design: To make you an obedient slave.

“Actions are by intentions” is the antidote for this poison. Constantly connecting your acts and your existence to their Source. Deeply reflecting on your purpose and your ends.

This is something that only your Creator, the One who made you, can provide. So cleanse your heart of the accretions of base liberal secular consumerist culture and connect yourself to the only thing of true worth. This is the *wasila* (connection or means) that is sought.

BANNING THE HIJAB IN GERMANY

This is a perfect example of the contradictions inherent to secularism. In 2016, it was reported:

“Two influential German legal associations are calling for headscarves to be banned for judges and lawyers to uphold ‘neutrality’ in court.

“Robert Seegmüller, chairman of the Association of German Administrative Judges, said the required uniform of black robes, white shirt and white bow tie, cravat or neckerchief is important to show that the outcome of a case ‘does not depend on the person, but solely on what the law says.’”²

What do you think are the origins of the black robe? According to reserchers at the NY Times: “Although the judicial robe’s origin remains uncertain, some believe it has its origins in the church, when the clergy and judiciary were one and the same. Robes appeared in the British judiciary in the 14th century.”³

Could it be that, centuries ago, the robe was borrowed from the Muslim *thawb*, which itself was considered a

2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/german-judges-call-for-headscarf-hijab-ban-in-court-lawyers-to-show-neutrality-a7180591.html>

3. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/06/nyregion/06robes.html>

garment of status, erudition, and religious prestige in our tradition?

Regardless, it is clear that the robe which these German secularists are insisting on has religious origins. And even to this day, the long robe has religious significance for Muslims, as both Muslim men and women will wear it. Women in particular wear black robes, i.e., the *jilbab*. Jewish and Christian religious figures also utilize the black robe. Whether past or present, the black robe is permeated with religious significance.

There are those who are arguing for the ban of the hijab as well as other religious symbols and claim that they are upholding “neutrality.” The straightforward objection is, of course, who decided what is “neutral” dress?

This is the central conceit of secularism, namely that if you subtract everything that is “religious,” what you are left with is truly neutral and that is where secularism ought to begin. In reality, however, there is no neutral core that is completely free of the same metaphysicality and normativity that is supposedly so objectionable about religion.

The only way to get to this neutral, secular core is to *create* it. You simply assert that a particular custom, cultural norm, style of dress, normative commitment, etc., is “secular” or “neutral” and everything else is “religious.”

This labeling process gains legitimacy through shared cultural assumptions. Muslim practices and dress happen to be relatively foreign, so they are easily seen by all as distinctly “religious.” But more familiar Western modes of dress, many of which also technically have religious origins and significance, can be deemed “cultural” and hence

“secular” and hence “neutral.” These are just language games.

So, this kerfuffle about black robes and the headscarf is a perfect example of secularism fabricating neutral ground in order to artificially maintain a hollow semblance of impartiality.

I also want to mention something about religious freedom. As Muslims, we should not resort to freedom of religion arguments to defend ourselves against the secular assault. We should instead point out the internal contradictions of secularism (like the above) and force the secularists to admit that their problem with the Muslim headscarf is nothing more than a cultural bias. If they can admit that, fine. But we should not allow them to get away with pretending that their opposition to the hijab is due to some rational commitment to neutrality and even-handedness because, as we have seen, that is clearly not the case.

At the end of the day, if they want to insist that their objections to the hijab are due to cultural bias, Muslims can live with that. Because in Muslim societies, we should feel comfortable instituting our own standards of dress, standards which are not due to ever-changing cultural whims but based on our religious values and standards of decency and modesty set by Allah. This is where we want the discussion to end up.

DOWN WITH THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Separation of church and state. Is this a coherent idea or not?

What is supposed to distinguish civilized countries from uncivilized ones is respect for the rule of law.

Yet Trump, left wing activists, and pretty much everyone else in secular countries appeal to the rule of law when it serves their political ends but argue that the law should be changed when it does not serve those ends.

The assumption is that just because something is legal, doesn't make it morally right and just because it is illegal, doesn't make it morally wrong.

So ultimately, it is those underlying morals that are all determinative, not the rule of law.

But what are those morals supposed to be based on? If those underlying morals have such an important role, shouldn't there be more discussion on the moral level, on the level of good and evil, human purpose and aspiration, sanctity and depravity?

But we do not find discussions happening on this level because moralizing is what religion is about and we all know that secular countries are not supposed to allow religion to influence law.

But that brings us back to the original dilemma. What morals should underlie the law?

There must be some morality down there somewhere. But no one talks about it. It only comes up in context of people protesting "unjust laws," but that only raises the

question of what is justice itself. And that is not a question that can be answered without appealing to some theory of right and wrong, good and bad, etc.

Of course, there are such theories. They're called "religion."

To be fair, there are theories that are godless, but they are no less dogmatic than theories that proceed from a Godly source. Even without appealing to God, these godless theories still prescribe what people should or should not do, how they should or should not live their lives, etc.

So is there any functional difference—insofar as it pertains to lawmaking—whether the law presupposes a godless morality or a Godly one?

Personally, I prefer the latter. And I recognize that not everyone will agree.

But at least do me the courtesy of recognizing that, as someone living in a secular state, I have to submit to laws and state structures dictated by a godless morality which I have significant problems with, that I do not believe in, but is nonetheless imposed on me with no less force than what is imposed on nonbelievers in a theocracy.

If that simple fact can be recognized and all this empty rhetoric about "freedom of religion," etc., can be dropped and not be used as a hammer to beat over the heads of Muslims and their devotion to Sharia, that is all that I ask.

Separation of church and state is a farce.

SHAKING HANDS IN SWITZERLAND

In 2016, Switzerland began fining Muslim male students if they refused to shake the hands of their female teachers.⁴ And not a small fine, either. Students could be fined up to \$5000.

Is this not a kind of sexual assault — to force a person into bodily contact against his will? What happened to all the secular feminist bluster about bodily integrity and the centrality of consent? Guess none of that matters if you are a Muslim man. If a Muslim man refuses to give you a shake, it means he is trying to oppress you like he does with all the female members of his family, right?

As a man, this reminds me of the women who feel disrespected if you lower your gaze and do not stare into their eyes and smile and laugh. Why is that disrespect? Just because it does not accord with exactly what you are used to in terms of social custom does not mean it is disrespect. Don't Western nations claim to be culturally tolerant and open to diversity, yet incessantly accuse Muslim society of intolerance? Or by "tolerance" do they just mean eating "ethnic" food every now and then and dressing up in cultural costumes for Halloween?

And the argument that refusing to shake hands reinforces gender roles and gender separation — yeah of course it does! That's the whole point! If you believe those things to be bad, fine. Can't help it if you're ignorant.

And if you want to force Muslims to violate their principles in this regard, fine to do that too. But don't point to Muslim

4. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/05/25/in-switzerland-muslim-schoolchildren-who-refuse-to-shake-their-teachers-hand-may-be-fined-5000/>

countries that have mandatory dress codes and mandatory gender separation and cry foul because that would be inconsistent. The West wants to enforce its cultural values; Muslims want to enforce their Islamic values. Except Muslim nations do not claim, hypocritically, to offer a neutral secular land of religious freedom and tolerance for all.

Honestly, if the West wants to force Muslims to violate Islamic norms, it will just be the latest thing that proves how the supposed neutrality of secularism is a mirage. There is no neutrality. It is just Western cultural norms that underlie and inform everything. That is why I never appeal to “religious freedom” in my arguments. This is because the term “religious freedom” comes from a Western philosophical context with a very particular definition of “religion” based on Western cultural conceptions. If the culture shifts enough, you can shove anything down people’s throats and tell them it is consistent with “religious freedom.”

Look at “homosexuality.” At first, it was something universally condemned. Then the culture shifted a little and it became a matter of religious doctrine — some religions look down on it, other modernist hippy religions do not. And then, it fell within the domain of religious freedom and “agree to disagree.” Then another cultural shift happened and now it is universally celebrated and those who fail to join the jubilation are not doing so out of acceptable religious conviction. No, they are doing so out of *bigotry*, *hate*, and *prejudice* and these are all things that cause harm and that is something that can be regulated and now you have to bake a cake for the gay wedding, whether you like to or not. JUST SHUT UP AND BAKE THE CAKE.

Muslims have been able to live in the West and practice their religion to a satisfactory extent not because of some hallowed, magical principles of religious tolerance and freedom and secularism blah blah blah. Absolutely not. Please, please stop believing this nonsense. It is just a coincidence that Western culture, which has its roots in Christianity, is compatible enough with Islam for Muslims to be able to get by. That has been a fortunate happenstance for us *alhamdulillah*.

But that could change at any time. As the West moves away from the influence of its Christian roots and continues to adopt paganistic and satanic ideologies, the day will come that the law of the land will make it impossible to practice the Islamic religious obligations. And those laws, when they are imposed, will be seen as perfectly consistent with religious freedom. In fact, it will be said that religious freedom is what justifies those laws in the first place. And then there will be some Muslims who continue to drink the kool-aid and believe they can live freely as Muslims, except at that point what they think is “Islam” will be nothing like what we know is Islam. And other Muslims, those Muslims who are not asleep, will have a lot of trials and tribulations to contend with at that time. It might not happen in our lifetime. Or maybe it will. But if things continue to proceed as they have been for the past decade in America and Europe, it is a matter of time. Allah knows best.

I do not mean to be overly pessimistic, but I think we have to give a lot of credit to our non-Muslim neighbors who do sincerely tolerate us (with a real and not superficial tolerance) and what for them must be a lot of weirdness. My belief is that, it is that deep cultural memory from the days when these were traditional Christian societies. Tolerance in

the real sense itself is a religious value, not a secular liberal one. Our duty as Muslims is to be good neighbors in kind and be true to our faith so that they can see that there are some people left on the face of the earth who worship God as He has been worshiped from the time of revelation. They deserve that and we fail them and ourselves by abandoning *himma* and *istiqama* (zeal/fortitude and steadfastness).

ONLY TYRANTS WANT TO REPLACE SHARIA WITH RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Sharia was and is the source of so much justice and mercy. Only tyrants want to do away with it.

In his essay “Ideas Were Not Enough,” economist Mark Koyama gives an honest admission: Religious freedom is not a revolutionary idea that took the Western world by storm simply on the basis of its compellingness or virtue. Rather, tolerance for different religious groups was purely a practical matter politically and economically.⁵

How did this happen?

Koyama argues that, for various reasons, European states in the early stages of Western modernity grew less dependent on the Church for political legitimization. Previously, these states needed to ally with the Church in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Christian masses, which in turn led to political stability (something very valuable to ruling state authorities). States allying with the Church was bad for tolerance, however, since the Church required the state to punish heretics for them.

5. <https://aeon.co/amp/essays/the-modern-state-not-ideas-brought-about-religious-freedom>

Additionally, the author claims, states relied on the religious institutions to contribute to public order. Churches (and *awqaf* in the Islamic world) were better positioned and capable to help the poor, provide education, and conduct other public services relative to weak state institutions. Furthermore, laws and social rules of these times depended on religious identity as opposed to a general nationalistic identity (e.g., citizenship) that applied equally to all people. All this led to less tolerance for religious diversity. In this world, “religious freedom was inconceivable.”

What changed?

State institutions started taxing more and became more powerful, claims Koyama. This allowed them to forego a quid pro quo arrangement with the Church. With increased power, laws and social rules could be enforced more broadly without depending on religious identities to function. As far as the state was concerned, the Jew, Protestant, and Catholic were all equal sources for taxes, so it became unnecessary and a waste of bureaucratic resources to discriminate based on religious identity. Ultimately, “As they relied less on religious authority, states grew less inclined to value enforcing religious conformity.”

The result?

Religious freedom born of convenience rather than principle. Still a good thing, though, right?

Well, not if you look at it honestly. From beginning to end, the aim of the state was to bend the people according to its will in order to draw wealth from them. At first, the Church was a convenient medium for this, but then, more effective means were found that made the Church obsolete. As Koyama notes, the most formidable state institution was

the military, which grew in power, size, and technological ability throughout this historical era. What better tool for controlling one's own population than sheer military force? No need to co-opt the idea of God's wrath to exercise state might. Just use the state military infrastructure.

Is this really an improvement? Did the waning of religious institutions really lead to more "autonomy" and "freedom" for the average person? Or was this simply the replacement of one source of authority with another?

Well, as far as Jews and Christians are concerned, maybe the brutal military-state was/is more benevolent than the brutal Church. So the trade was/is still a net positive for them, which is why "religious freedom" is appealing at all.

But this is not the case with Islamic Law. Historically, we do not find the kind of brutality and oppression from religious institutions in the Muslim world that were seen from European Churches. Brutality, oppression, and mass violence in the Muslim world were usually undertaken in direct contradiction to Islamic Law and the opinion of religious scholars. Simply consider the long history of persecution of orthodox Islamic religious authorities over the centuries. The tradition of *ulama* resisting co-option by the ruling elite is well established. The *ulama* were very careful to avoid mixing with power based on the statement attributed to the Prophet ﷺ: "Whoever goes to the gates of the ruler will be tried with fitna. A servant does not move closer to the ruler except that he moves further away from Allah."⁶ Because of this principle, Muslim religious orthodoxy was historically in an uneasy, if not outright antagonistic, relationship with ruling authority, and it was

6. Musnad Aḥmad 8619

often precisely because of the little regard many of these rulers had for the Sharia. The Sharia was and is the source of so much justice and mercy. Only tyrants want to do away with it.

Up until the present day.

WRAPPING OUR LANGUAGE IN A LIBERAL VENEER GETS US NOWHERE

We judge rulers and governmental institutions by their actions and whether those actions conform with justice as delineated by Allah. We do not hide our beliefs behind superfluous and ultimately meaningless designations of “democratic” or “undemocratic.”

If there were any doubt left about whether these terms have any meaning, the Western reaction to the 2016 coup in Turkey versus the reaction to the 2013 coup in Egypt should have settled the issue conclusively.

Two coups, in two countries: Egypt and Turkey. Depending on one’s personal commitments and religious orientation, one coup was “certainly” democratic and the other was “clearly” undemocratic. Why? Because one coup “obviously” represented the will of the people and the other “undoubtedly” did not. The people killed in each coup were “martyrs” or “traitors” depending on who you ask, depending on which coup you are talking about.

So we can debate democratic-ness till we are blue in the face, but we will never get anywhere because this is an empty, hopelessly subjective concept that can be projected onto any political act or governmental structure.

By wrapping our language in this liberal veneer and employing empty concepts like “democracy” to convey our opinions, what we are really doing is postponing a real discussion. The real discussion is: At the end of the day, what does a governing authority owe its people and what do the people owe it and, more importantly, how do we know what is the right answer? Are we nihilists who do not believe there is a right answer? Or do we believe that there is a right answer, in which case, how do we determine it?

These are the kinds of questions that make us think about human purpose and the nature of our existence and our relationship to our Maker. But liberal secularism does not want us to have a conversation on that level. Liberal secularism does not want people to think on that level, to bring God to mind. So it tells us that God is irrelevant. Deeper metaphysical questions are irrelevant. The meaning of your existence is irrelevant. Just busy yourself with these artificial terms. Just bicker about what empty labels are applicable to this or that regime. Submerge yourself in a debate that, by design, has no fruitful end. Talking about God is too uncomfortable, too childish. You might as well argue about Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny. Instead, join the ranks of the secular intelligentsia and have a “serious,” “intellectual” conversation about democratic representation, secularization, etc.

I think I'll pass.

IS DEMOCRACY BETTER THAN ISLAMIC GOVERNANCE?

Is democracy the ideal form of government? This is something that Muslims have to think about very carefully. We hear from our context in the modern day about how democracy is supposed to be the best form of government, the most just form of government, but this claim can create doubt for Muslims. Why? Because democracy is not something that is advocated explicitly within the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ did not establish a representational democracy in Medina. The rightly guided caliphs did not establish a kind of democratic system with branches of government and so forth. So if this is the best form of government, then why was it not revealed by Allah? Why isn't it a part of Divine Guidance? How could it be that human beings could theorize and conceive a form of government that is better than what came to the Prophet ﷺ in the final revelation? How do we address this kind of doubt?

Well, we have to, in my opinion, go and ask a very fundamental question: Why do some today consider democracy the best form of government?

If you take any kind of government class within grade school or college, what you will hear is that one of the main features of democracies that make them superior and more just is the notion of checks and balances. What are checks and balances?

The idea is that power is distributed across different branches within the government and these three branches

check each other's power so that no one group or one individual can monopolize power and exercise unfettered, unhindered authority over the rest of the nation. In the United States, for example, you have the Executive branch, the Judicial branch, and the Legislative branch, basically the President, the Congress, and the Supreme Court. These three branches check each other's power and one single branch alone cannot make decisions about what laws the country should follow or what wars should be fought. All of these major national decisions have to be made in light of all three branches, not just one branch making decisions for everyone.

This is checks and balances, and theoretically it seems to make a lot of sense. In Islam, however, we also have this notion of checks and balances, but the checks and balances that we find in Islam are much more real and tangible than what I consider to be fake or superficial checks and balances found within Western democracies in the modern day. Let me explain what I mean by this.

If we look at the US government or the government of any democratic Western nation, we find great corruption, where lobbyists and different political action groups manipulate the branches of government in their favor. For example, in the US context, health insurance companies lobby the Congress and the President as they are trying to influence these branches of government with money to make laws that will benefit the insurance companies financially. This is a type of corruption because these congressmen, the president, senators, et al., are supposed to represent the interests of the people, but because of money, they end up representing the interests of the corporations that are lobbying them and paying them.

It is very easy, as we see throughout US history, for interest groups to lobby and influence the different branches of government in this way, and this has a major negative effect. And this is why we see so much injustice in the history of the United States, e.g., the genocide of the Native Americans, the oppression of African Americans, atrocities like the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, etc. More recently, consider the invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. All of these crimes happened with the branches of government all in agreement. Thus, this idea that having three branches prevents injustice or, at least, mitigates it, is completely undermined by history itself. After all, not many injustices are greater than genocide, yet secular democracies like the US have overseen such crimes and even legislated them in their halls of power, by agreement of mutually checking branches of government.

Now democracy enthusiasts could say that these historical examples should not be blamed on democracy itself but rather “democracy gone wrong.” They argue that democracy in the ideal case works, and, yeah, there are all kinds of problems that can crop up, but those are not really essential to what democracy is. They argue that, if we could have an ideal situation and if we just implement a few more anti-corruption laws or maybe anti-lobbying laws, then we wouldn’t have these kinds of problems.

This is a counter argument, so as critical thinkers, we have to anticipate this counter argument and give a response. My response (and maybe you can have a different response if you think about it) is: No, there is a fundamental problem here with democracy because we have to ask: What are the laws of a democracy going to be based on?

If they're going to be based on popular opinion and people who are voting for representatives in Congress or the President, i.e., people who are going to implement laws based on popular opinion, then who says that popular opinion is going to be moral? Who says that popular opinion is going to arrive at what is truly just? Why would we assume that a mass of people voting would vote for what is actually morally correct? Seems more likely that people would vote based on individual self-interest, perhaps. And why would this lead to morality or justice? We would expect the exact opposite.

Beyond this question, we have to also recognize the fact that it is very easy to manipulate a population and we see this throughout American history and even to this day. If you look at the way that mass media, social media, and educational institutions are able to manipulate society at large, you can see that public opinion is no check on people's baser instincts. In fact, popular opinion can lead a nation quite astray in terms of justice and morality.

The glaring truth here is that democracy cannot be a substitute for morality, and this is where religion is so important, and this is where Islam—as the religion of truth with true morality and God our Creator, Allah, sending guidance, sending rules on right and wrong and what is truly just—is so important. And that morality is what can really be a check on a government. If one has a standard, an objective standard of morality, then that can be used as a check to basically identify whether a government or a leader is making decisions that are good or bad, just or unjust.

Such a standard is necessary. If you do not have that standard, as is the case with modern secular democracies,

then there can be no check or balance. What we see today in the US, for example, is that all three branches of government will more or less have the same opinions on what they perceive as moral and just. It seems to always boil down to the popular view of right and wrong in wider society at the time. There is no independent standard to judge whether those views of morality are just or unjust, right or wrong, and so there is not really a check. Even though you have different branches of government, they can all collude. They can be all aligned and there is not a true standard to hold against and to judge them by, and that is why it is so easy for secular liberal democracies to commit atrocities and to commit all kinds of crimes that we see throughout their histories.

When we look at Islamic history, we see that this is not the case because the objective standard of morality is Islamic law. And who are the guardians of Islamic law and that objective standard of morality? It is the ulama (Islamic religious scholars), and the ulama were very careful not to involve themselves with the sultan, the amir, or the khalifa. This is because there is the recognition that power can corrupt and that if a scholar is too close to the sultan, then the sultan can negatively impact the scholar and corrupt the scholar to make religious rulings that benefit the sultan. So, this is a very strong check. It is a real check unlike the superficial facade of a check that we find within democratic systems.

And this distance between the ulama and the sultan is something that the Prophet ﷺ explicitly mentions in the aforementioned hadith: “Whoever goes to the gates of the ruler will be tried with fitna. A servant does not move closer

to the ruler except that he moves further away from Allah.”⁷ Based on this hadith and many other examples from the life of the Prophet ﷺ and his statements as well as the practice of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and the majority of scholars of history, the ulama came to the conclusion that there needs to be a very big distance between the sultan and the ulama. This is a real check and balance based on real morality. While it is the case that the sultan or the khalifa can be corrupt and he can manipulate a population or manipulate an economy for his material gain, there is always the *`alim* (scholar) who is going to call that out and object to that kind of corruption and abuse of power.

And we see many examples of this within Islamic history where scholars were tortured, imprisoned, and sometimes even killed because they opposed the sultan. This is something that is very unique about Islamic history and Islamic governance, and it means that there is not this notion of “separation of church and state” within Islamic thought. The expectation was that the khalifa or the sultan is going to implement Islamic law, and he is going to rule according to Islamic ethics and jurisprudence. The entire system of governance is based on that, but the bearers of the objective standard of morality are people who remain separate and independent ,i.e., the ulama who are not involved directly with the sultan and, therefore, are shielded from the corrupting influence of power and money.

That is a real check on power. That is a real check on corruption. And that is something that we do not see within secular democracies.

7. Musnad Aḥmad 8619

There is a fundamental flaw in secular democracies because who says that popular opinion is going to be right? In most cases, mob rule is very wrong. Mob rule is very unjust and even if you put limits on what the mob can do with, for example, a Bill of Rights within your constitution, that is still a very tenuous and unreliable system of morality to base governance on. And that is why we see so many changes in what is considered right and wrong within Western history. Opinion about morality is constantly shifting because popular views are constantly shifting. What might appear to be just and reasonable today might turn out to be considered an atrocity tomorrow, and vice versa.

As Muslims, we need to recognize this for what it is. We need to recognize that we have a better system within our tradition. Yes, we have wars in our history, we have corrupt leaders, and even atrocities. But we also have consistent morality, i.e., the Sharia, that provides that anchor that keeps us as an Ummah on the Straight Path while understanding what is justice. And that is true guidance from Allah—a big blessing that we have to recognize while not having an inferiority complex in thinking that other people, other nations and their philosophers from a particular part of the world have understood justice and morality and government better than Allah, the Quran, and the Prophet ﷺ.

SECULARISM CANNOT SQUARE THE CIRCLE —————

Contrary to what secularism claims, competing moral visions cannot be reconciled within one legal system. Example: Abortion.

I have talked to many Muslims who consider themselves orthodox and “traditional” believers who accept the consensus fiqh position that 120 days after conception, barring threat to the mother’s life, termination of pregnancy is tantamount to murder. But those same Muslims will support a woman’s absolute “right to choose.” How is that reconcilable?

The fiqh is based on an ontological fact, namely the point at which the soul is breathed into a fetus, i.e., 120 days after conception (or 40 days according to other opinions). That fact does not vary based on whether the mother is Muslim or kafir. Whether Muslim or not, 120 days after conception, there will be a soul breathed into the fetus’ body. This means that even if the mother is non-Muslim, abortion after 120 days is still the unjust taking of a soul, i.e., murder. So how could Muslims who accept the ontological fact nonetheless support a woman’s unconditional “right to choose”?

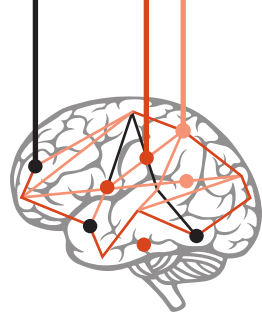
These Muslims are supporting murder and there are no two ways about it. Murder is also not a “personal choice” that can validly occur “behind closed doors.” Furthermore no Islamic scholar ever held that, in a multi-faith polity under Muslim rule, the Shar`i prohibition of murder only applied to Muslims and could not be enforced upon a non-Muslim “minority.” In other words, all the usual strategies modernist Muslims today use to justify supporting liberal, un-Islamic political positions spectacularly fail in the case of abortion.

The only way a woman’s unconditional right to terminate pregnancy can be supported by Muslims is if they reject scholarly consensus and the clear indicants in revelation that support that consensus. Obviously some deviants have no problem with that. As far as the politics go, Muslim

leaders have also opted to take a “neutral” stance despite the fact that the Islamic morality of the situation is clear. Every year, nearly 1 million abortions are documented in the US alone. In order to avoid the label of “religious fundamentalism” and being lumped in with the religious right, these Muslim prefer to stay silent in the face of rampant murder.

Often, these are the same people who will wax poetic from the minbar about how Islam abolished the pre Islamic practice of burying daughters. But because of myopic, ill-informed political calculations, they stay silent about the burying of daughters AND sons happening today all around us. MashaAllah, how “prophetic.” How dedicated to “social justice.”

CHAPTER 4



FREEDOM, EQUALITY AND LIBERTY

RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

“Freedom is more important than *la ilaha illaAllah* because without freedom we are not free to believe whatever we choose.”

This is what one Syrian activist told me several years ago regarding the Arab Spring. It seemed like he was setting up a false dichotomy, but he was just trying to emphasize the place of freedom as a value, as compared to everything else.

But freedom is a misunderstood concept. The truly free person, according to liberal philosophy beginning with the European empiricists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the person who starts off with a blank slate, i.e., the *tabula rasa*. This person has no prior beliefs or commitments. His mind is not contaminated with falsely imposed ideas about the world, about God, about the state of nature. This person, with his free mind, is then able to form his own authentic beliefs from scratch. Ideally, those beliefs will be formed on the basis of sound scientific investigation — that’s what the empiricists hoped for at least in their philosophy of mind and epistemology. But, even if

a person does not develop beliefs scientifically, at least he does so authentically and, hence, freely. In this way, it is OK for a person to be religious so long as that person started from a blank slate, which for all intents and purposes is a starting point of non-religion.

It is interesting when you put it like that. If I was born into a family with a certain religion and that family taught me that religion from Day 1, and I grow up professing that faith, does that mean I did not freely choose that faith for myself? I might argue that, as an adult, I am making a conscious choice and exercising my free will to commit to my particular faith. But, then, how can I know that it is really “me” making that choice and not the “me” that grew up in a certain household and is a product of a certain kind of “religious indoctrination”? Maybe I’ve been brainwashed, in which case my “choice” is not really a choice at all.

But if that’s the case for children growing up in religious households, then the same kind of indoctrination happens in non-religious households too. It is just brainwashing of the non-religious variety. If a child is raised to not believe in a Higher Power and to not think much of faithful devotion, then if he grows up and decides to be an atheist and mock religion, etc., then was that truly a free choice? Or is he also the product of his environment?

Point being that the tabula rasa does not exist and neither does the neutral blank slate liberal thinkers imagined we could freely develop our beliefs from. There is no blank slate. We all are born into a certain condition and raised to believe certain ideas and values that are imposed on us as children and then throughout our adult lives. The only question is, are those ideas and values true and just? If yes, who cares if

one arrives at them from a position of freedom, i.e., a blank slate that, in reality, does not exist? And if those ideas and values are false and unjust, then the only way to counter that is with truth and justice, not with an abstract notion of freedom, which again, is a figment of the Enlightenment's imagination. Either way, *la ilaha illaAllah*, as the ultimate expression of truth and justice, comes out on top.

Put another way, freedom of religion in secular nations assumes a starting point of non-religion. But why is non-religion the starting point, the neutral ground? Why are non-religious values the default? One might say, well, there are a variety of religious beliefs so rather than prefer or endorse one, the secular state chooses none. But this is a gross mischaracterization of the reality. Non-religion is also a particular set of beliefs. If the secular state chooses non-religion, it has still preferred and endorsed a particular belief system over others. This is essentially no different from a theocratic state that also chooses one particular set of beliefs over all others. The difference is, the theocratic state does not delude itself into thinking it is neutral. And of course, the primary difference is that the theocratic state based on Islam is upholding truth and justice, which can only be found in Islam.

ISLAM DOES NOT RESPECT FREEDOM OF RELIGION ·

Many (but not all) of those who have a problem with the claim, "Islam does not respect freedom of religion," actually have a problem with the idea that God does not respect freedom of religion. That is really the core of their problem. The idea that there is only one religion acceptable to God is inherently repulsive to them.

How could God not respect people's freedom of conscience? How could a merciful God not respect people's freedom of choice?

This is also why we see some Muslims who adopt a value like religious freedom ultimately leave Islam because of that value. Why? Well, why should tolerance for religious belief end at death? If we demand, as a matter of principle, ethics, and justice, that worldly rulers tolerate every and all beliefs equally, then why wouldn't we demand that of God as well?

But then we learn that, no, the reality is that it *does* matter what a person believes. It matters to God as He has informed us, not only in the last revelation, but also in all previous revelations as well!

To maintain a principle like religious freedom for *dunya* but salvific exclusivity for the *akhira* is, to say the least, a major tension, if not an outright contradiction. Many Muslims today, as they are living under the hegemonic influence of liberal secularism, increasingly have opted to abandon salvific exclusivity and to maintain that beliefs neither matter in *dunya* nor in *akhira*. Such people preach: "All religions are essentially the same," "All religions are paths to God," "All religions lead to good," etc. It might appear that respecting the value of religious freedom is merely a political and pragmatic issue that Muslims can disagree about. In reality, political ideals have severe consequences for the *iman* of the average Muslim. This is how philosophical liberalism—from which the value of religious freedom originates—is able to subtly but significantly distort Muslim belief and misguide otherwise faithful believers. May Allah protect us all.

THE GOLDEN RULE, SELF-WORSHIP, AND SATANISM

“Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.” This is the central value of Satanism, as expressed by Aleister Crowley, in his foundational book on Satanic belief, *The Book of the Law*.

Question: How do you effectively control a person?

Methods can vary, but history has shown that one of the most effective tools for this purpose is to tell people that they are in charge, that they are the masters of their own destiny. That they are their own gods.

Humans are predictable creatures. We make predictable choices: We often submit to our desires, we do whatever we can to preserve and bolster our egos, we wallow in short-term pleasures, and we hoard shiny things. This is the base core of the average human person.

If you tell people to be free, to do what they want, to “follow their heart,” and all the other self-help, positive psychology, liberal philosophy cliches and doctrines we constantly are being fed — everything from the jingoistic promise of “liberty, freedom, and empowerment for all” to a commercial slogan like “Just do it” — then people are all going to converge on that same basic core, all the while believing that they are truly the masters of their own destiny and firmly in control of who they are.

It is not unlike being a drug addict. Addicts feel like they are in control and feel like they are making their own decisions. And actually they are! But the problem is, those decisions are predictably bad and lead to nowhere except utter destruction. This is also how imperial powers used

the introduction of drugs and alcohol to destroy and gain control of once powerful native peoples around the world.

Point being, reduce people to their base selves and they can be effectively controlled for whatever purpose.

And here's the kicker. The "Golden Rule" is nothing other than, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."

"Do unto others what you would have them do unto you." This, by itself, is an empty principle. It has no content. It cannot direct you to any action. It cannot help you make a moral choice. Why? Because it leaves open the question: what exactly would you have others do unto you? Treat others how you want to be treated? Well, how exactly do you want others to treat you? This is just another way of putting yourself at the center of the equation. What matters to you is *all* that matters. Your moral compass shall be your own graven image projected onto the world. That is not righteousness. That is idolatry.

Is it any wonder then that the Golden Rule is the central pillar of liberalism?

And, yes, you will see those hackneyed posters about how all religions have a form of the Golden Rule. But that is deceptive because those versions of the Golden Rule are not meant to stand alone. They come in conjunction with religious law. So when the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said, "None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself," he doesn't mean that if a person wishes for himself to be married to his gay partner, for example, that he should wish that for others as well. No. What is meant is that a person wishes goodness for himself, and goodness is decided by Allah and not open to anyone's personal whims and interpretation.

So, by cutting off the Golden Rule from its religious context and cleaving it from its place firmly embedded in the edifice of Allah's commands — i.e., the Sharia — liberalism further propagates self-worship. And who was the first being to worship himself?

“Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay.”

Al-A'raf (Q7:157)

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT ---

Freedom of thought is something all people assume they have by default. No one thinks his thoughts are not his own. In reality, the vast majority of people's thoughts are heavily dictated and outright controlled by larger societal forces. Today's loud and proud (and obnoxious) “free thinkers” are no exception.

But here is a broader example. What if I were to tell you that there are clear conflicts between Islam and American (and Western) values?

I am not going to elaborate on this claim because that's not the point. The point is that even the thought that there is a conflict between being Muslim and being American is considered all but blasphemy to many American Muslims.

Now pause for a second. If you are reading the above and feel annoyance, anger, incredulity, or you're just thinking about all the ways that that statement is wrong, stop and ask yourself: Why?

Why should this simple claim cause you so much discomfort? It's not like the claim is actually blasphemous

or has anything to do with theology. Also, when you think about the claim in the abstract, it is hardly peculiar or worthy of outrage, even if it turns out to be wrong. To understand this, ask yourself: Does Islam conflict with Vietnamese values? Does Islam conflict with the cultural values of Chile? You probably don't know, but it is possible, right? Why couldn't it be? So why the sensitivity with America or the West in particular?

I noticed this in myself. I noticed that I hesitated in even articulating to myself the claim that Islam and American values could potentially ever be in conflict. I felt a tinge of discomfort and trepidation and that bothered me about myself. It was a clear indication of how my thoughts are deeply influenced by my context in ways that I am not even aware of.

Now my point is not some relativistic, perspectival, postmodern nonsense about how “We are all biased,” etc. It is possible to transcend these cognitive biases. We do this by bringing our thoughts and inner states in conformity with the Higher Truth. And we do that by following the Sunnah.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ is reported to have said,

“None of you truly believes until his desires are subservient to that which I have brought.”⁸

ALCOHOL AND FREEDOM ---

One of the common lines you hear is that Islam does not respect freedom of choice. This is highlighted by Islam's prohibition of alcohol, its consumption and sale. In the

8. *Al-Arba'in* of Imam al-Nawawi

freedom-loving West, alcohol flows freely. If you wish to partake, you have that freedom of choice. If not, you can choose to abstain. Ultimately, alcohol just affects your own body and doesn't cause anyone else any harm. So as an adult, you can make that decision for yourself and it would be oppressive for a person or a religion to prevent you from exercising that choice.

Let's investigate this.

All legal systems constrain choice in one shape or another and there are justifications that are given for the laws of that system. For example, US law requires a person to have a driver's license in order to operate an automobile. That law severely constrains people's freedom of mobility, but it is seen as necessary for practical reasons. If people are allowed to drive without a license, the number of car accidents will skyrocket. Car accident fatalities will balloon. Damage to people's property will increase exponentially. So, these are all practical reasons why we would want to have such a law in place. It prevents harm.

Now, one theoretical point that can always be pursued is: What is considered "harm" and what is considered "practical" depend on the assumptions you make about the world and your broader beliefs and commitments. But let's bracket that for now.

Let's just assume common Western standards of practicality and harm and take a closer look at alcohol consumption. According to the most recent research, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) affects at least 5% of the population in the US and in some communities affects 40%. FASD causes all kinds of psychological and learning disabilities and can result in severe anti-social behavior. A

lot of the kids affected by this have to go through special education, many end up in prison, many are unemployable and end up falling into drugs and crime. All of this is the result of a disorder caused by pregnant women who drink. Even a small amount of alcohol consumption can be enough to cause an infant to be on this spectrum. The thing is, sometimes women don't realize they are pregnant and continue their drinking habits not knowing that they are potentially giving their unborn child FASD.

In any case, the harm that is caused to a child is astronomical. There are fewer harms greater than causing a person to have mental retardation. And beyond the harm caused to the child, there is also the harm caused to society overall. These children become wards of the state. It is state institutions that have to take care of these kids or clean up after them, police them, etc. This is a gigantic public cost that is paid for with our tax dollars coming from our income. All of these things restrict and attenuate the freedom that Western culture so ardently claims to covet.

Given all these facts and from this perspective, US law is not clearly more "freedom-loving" and "choice-preserving" than Islamic law as far as alcohol is concerned. It is reasoning like this that shows us how vacuous and ultimately meaningless these appeals to freedom and choice really are. Yet, it is precisely these appeals that are supposed to get us to realize how restrictive, backwards, and contrary to human progress Islamic law is and how empowering, forward-thinking, and conducive to human progress secular law is. Don't be a sucker.

And the human cost of alcohol is best illustrated with human stories. One news article shared the following:

Susan Earl is still coming to terms with the partying she did in her mid-20s, before she became a mother. Back then, she used to spend most weekends at clubs with friends. She usually had a few drinks. Her boyfriend at the time encouraged her because it loosened her up. She was about six weeks into a pregnancy when she learned she was expecting.

“I stopped drinking as soon as I found out,” Earl said. It wasn’t soon enough.

Quinton Mills, her son, born four weeks early, had the characteristic facial features of fetal alcohol syndrome. His speech was delayed, and in kindergarten he started biting, kicking, and screaming. He was bullied by classmates. He wet his bed until he was 12.⁹

I challenge you not to be heartbroken after reading about this innocent child. Anyone with the slightest amount of sense and compassion would know that something needs to be done to further restrict people’s access to alcohol and condition people not to drink. Islam and Islamic culture have successfully maintained virtually alcohol-free societies for centuries. Why can’t the rest of the world learn from Islamic success?

In any case, it wasn’t until relatively recently after colonization that this poison has been not only reintroduced into Muslim societies but has been glamorized by Western media and entertainment, such that Muslims from Tehran to Karachi to Rabat see drinking as a form of liberation and a mark of sophistication.

9. “This Chicago doctor stumbled on a hidden epidemic of fetal brain damage.” <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/this-chicago-doctor-stumbled-on-a-hidden-epidemic-of-fetal-brain-damage>

How liberating and sophisticated is a society actively inducing mental retardation in its precious children? Is that what you want? If you are not human enough to submit to your Maker, at least be human enough to spare innocent children.

HADITH ON HUDUD, CORRUPTION, AND EQUALITY ·

Equality is a crucial component of Islamic ethics. But not all notions of “equality” are the same. The modern liberal notion of equality, for example, significantly diverges from the notion of equality propounded by classical liberal thinkers. For example, according to America’s founding fathers, barring women and blacks from voting or owning property was perfectly consistent with their understanding of equality.

Be that as it may, one very explicit expression of equality as it relates to justice from the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ is found in Sahih Bukhari as follows:

Usama approached the Prophet ﷺ on behalf of a woman who had committed theft. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The people before you were destroyed because they used to inflict the legal punishments on the poor and forgive the rich. By Him in Whose Hand my soul is! If Fatima (the daughter of the Prophet ﷺ) did that (i.e. stole), I would cut off her hand.”

Another narration on the matter that provides further details:

“The Quraish became very worried about the Makhzumiya lady who had committed theft.

They said, “Nobody can speak (in favor of the lady) to Allah’s Messenger ﷺ and nobody dares do that except Usama who is the favorite of Allah’s Messenger ﷺ.” When Usama spoke to Allah’s Messenger ﷺ about that matter, Allah’s Messenger ﷺ said, “Do you intercede (with me) to violate one of the legal punishments of Allah?” Then he got up and addressed the people, saying, “O people! The nations before you went astray because if a noble person committed theft, they used to leave him, but if a weak person among them committed theft, they used to inflict the legal punishment on him. By Allah, if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad committed theft, Muhammad would cut off her hand!”

Some non-Muslims may bristle at the idea of corporal punishment, but I certainly don’t see why reasonable non-Muslims should automatically disqualify the possibility of such punishment as a deterrent for egregious theft.

Look at today’s world, where investment banks and major corporations have no qualms committing fraud on a global scale, literally stealing billions of dollars from the public and causing all manner of financial crises that have rocked the world over the past decades. Even when some of these bankers were convicted of committing these crimes, did they serve a day in jail? Absolutely not! At most they were fined. Imagine that: you steal a billion dollars and only have to pay a fine of a few million dollars. Sounds like a great profit margin to me.

But look at how harshly the “justice” system in many countries treats petty crime by the poor. Steal a cheap TV

and you could face years in prison. How is that proportional? Where is the equality there? Corporate malfeasance and illegality on the part of investment banks have resulted in immeasurable suffering the world over as millions of people lost their jobs, lost their homes, and lost their lives. These are crimes that truly deserve hand-cutting.

In any case, the Prophet ﷺ forewarned the results of such injustice and as citizens and residents of these nations, that is bad news for all of us.

JE SUIS HYPOCRITE

This was my response to “je suis charlie” a year ago after the Charlie Hebdo shooting in France. Charlie Hebdo is the French satirical magazine that often publishes cartoons insulting and mocking the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as well as other prophets.

I find these calls for “freedom of expression” and “freedom to offend” so hollow and hypocritical. All these people pining for blasphemous cartoons to be published have nothing to lose because they are either not religious or are a religious minority and feel the pressure to conform to the dictates of the secular establishment. If these people were real “freedom of expression” purists, instead of going for the easy target, they would advocate for the dissemination of something that really offends them, things that go against mainstream liberal secular values.

You want to know what is really blasphemous in this post-religious age? Let’s see cartoons that denigrate women or their intelligence, cartoons lampooning the disabled, anti-gay cartoons, cartoons that depict the President and

other elected officials as pedophiles and sexual deviants, cartoons that mock military personnel as cowards, cartoons that insult the memory of disaster victims, the Holocaust, etc.

How willing are people to see these kinds of cartoons in their mainstream publications, distributed across the globe? Of course, I am not really advocating for such things because I am consistent and reject the hollow liberal ideology and empty slogans like “freedom to offend,” etc. But, my point is, until you are willing to see something that you find truly vulgar and utterly despicable plastered everywhere for you, your children, and your family to see, don’t tell me “je suis charlie” or whatever.

IS ISLAM ABOUT LIBERTY? ---

Both left and right wing critics of Islam appeal to philosophical liberalism in their critiques of Islam, employing concepts like freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of dress, gender equality, separation of church and state, etc.

Please keep in mind that a losing strategy is to argue back against these critics that these liberal concepts are indeed Islamic and that Islam endorses these notions. (Yes, there are Islamic positions that can be conceivably understood as partially supporting some of these notions, but it’s a highly conditioned endorsement at best.)

Even if Muslims accept every contemporary Western practice related to freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of dress, gender equality, marriage equality, etc., *it will never be enough*. Even if Muslims start performing

gay weddings in Mecca today, tomorrow the West will ask why there are no transvestite, cross dressing imams leading prayers in the haram! And if tomorrow, they bring tranny imams to the haram, the day after, there will be a new criticism of Islam being “too restrictive” compared to the ever-evolving, ever-progressing West.

This is the nature of progressivism, which is the pillar of Western thought and culture. According to this philosophy, constant change is necessary and good. To remain stagnant is to fall behind and end up on the “wrong side of history.” This philosophy, of course, is completely contrary to Islam (and all traditions because traditions require depending on the past). We know as Muslims that the best of times were in the past, with the Prophet ﷺ and the salaf and things have been deteriorating ever since. We can never win the battle of “Who is more progressive? Who is more free?”

So we shouldn’t play a losing game.

Our winning strategy should be to say that these concepts of liberty, freedom, etc., are incoherent for such and such reasons and they don’t contribute to justice and goodness, and Islam offers the best alternatives for humanity for such and such reasons. This is the blueprint for all such debates with modernist progressives.

SHOULDN’T WE ALL SUPPORT FREEDOM OF CHOICE? ---

Question: Isn’t the main concept of liberal thought to maximize individual choice and rights? Individual choice and freedom is paramount, and by and large, there is

no absolute standard to judge that. So shouldn't we as minorities in the West support that paradigm?

Answer: The problem is that the existence of law precludes individual choice in any and every society. All people are constrained by laws. Everyone's will and freedom of choice is constricted by the law.

But what liberal secularism claims is that laws are only justified when they prevent people from harming others. That's why secular law is acceptable in its restricting of people's unfettered freedom of choice whereas religious law is unacceptable. The former merely prevents harm, which is a universal interest of all human beings, while the latter is aimed at religious devotion, which only some people who belong to that religion care about and nobody else.

There are many conceptual problems with this purported distinction between secular law and religious law. Chief among them the fact that what is or is not considered "harm" is highly debatable. Why is the secular conception of harm the only valid conception?

What is or is not harmful depends on one's greater metaphysical commitments and beliefs about human nature and the world. These commitments are not considered "religion" per se, but are not categorically different from religious theology. This is how secular liberalism smuggles in its metaphysical and normative imperatives: by masking them as universal features of human nature.

A simple and familiar example: Abortion. The issue of abortion is often framed as a debate between a religious and a secular side. Depending on what you think about the fetus, its status as a "person," the moral responsibilities of the biological parents, etc., abortion is or is not immoral and

the subject of legal regulation. The position of the pro-life faction is considered to be driven by religious commitments (which it is), but the pro-choice side is seen as driven by secular concerns and a pursuit of freedom and individual autonomy, but their underlying beliefs about the fetus and the female body, etc., are no less metaphysical than the beliefs of their religious interlocutors.

But the debate is not framed in terms of one set of metaphysical beliefs against another, one religion against another. Rather, it is framed as religious conservatism vs. secular liberty, religious conviction vs. freedom of choice.

Why?

If we understood the debate as a disagreement between two sets of metaphysical commitments, then we would naturally ask why should one set be automatically preferred over the other. This is the precise question we should ask for all secular laws. They are all based on metaphysical beliefs that are fundamentally “religious” in nature, but are not perceived as such. Those beliefs are enshrined in the law and imposed on everyone. We are all forced to abide by the secular religious order and the tyranny of the secular theocratic regime.

DOES ISLAM PROMOTE EQUALITY?

There is major confusion on this question. In one sense, yes, of course Muslims accept the principle of equality because that is at the essence of all morality. How so?

Implicit in any and all moral systems is that two like things ought to be treated equally. If Person A shoplifts at a grocery store and we judge that as wrong, then if Person

B does the same thing, we should also judge that act as wrong, *all else being equal*. The “all else being equal” part is important because, in one sense, Person A and Person B are never equal for the simple reason that Person A and Person B are two different people with different circumstances, different backgrounds, etc.

What is important from the standpoint of morality, however, is that Person A and Person B are equal in a relevant way and there are no differences that are morally relevant. For example, if Person A has green eyes and Person B has blue eyes, that is not morally relevant to the fact that both men have committed theft, so we will treat them as equal before the law. But if Person A is a millionaire and Person B is a starving homeless person, then that is a morally relevant difference and we should treat and understand Person B’s actions differently.

What we learn from this is that our notion of equality is highly dependent on these “morally relevant factors.” This is important because people nowadays look at Islamic law and say, “Look at how Islam treats women and men differently! Clearly, Muslims reject equality!” Some Muslims unfortunately also make this mistaken assessment.

In reality, however, Islamic law recognizes that there are, in some circumstances, morally relevant differences between men and women. Given that men and women are in actuality very different in certain respects, it would make sense that there are scenarios where those differences would, morally speaking, come into play. From this perspective then, it is not Islamic law that is unjust and oppressive but rather any system of morality and law that ignores these differences.

Furthermore, cheering for and rallying behind the notion of equality, as liberalism does, as if they discovered the concept, is so silly and vapid. They are taking credit for a value that literally everyone has.

Again, equality is implicit to normativity itself. Where moral systems differ is how they understand and define those morally relevant factors, and that is a discussion that happens on the meta-ethical and metaphysical levels. For example, instead of pointlessly debating meaningless questions such as whether liberal secularism respects the principle of equality more than Islamic law does, why not debate what an ideal human life looks like? Why not debate what human flourishing entails and what an ideal society consists of? These are the real questions that will, among other things, illuminate these morally relevant factors. But liberal secularism, while hiding behind empty slogans of “freedom” and “equality,” says these questions are irrelevant, that people can decide for themselves, and that there is no right or wrong answer. This, of course, is nonsense.

SPREADING RELIGION VS. SPREADING HUMAN RIGHTS

Believe it or not, there is not much difference between –

1. Politically liberal Western powers who want to use military and diplomatic strength to bring the Muslim world into the “light of freedom, democracy, and human rights”
2. Politically conservative Western powers who want to use military and diplomatic strength to bring the Muslim world into the light of Christianity.

Yet, many Muslims seem to find the latter somehow more offensive and objectionable, even when the reality on the ground is the same regardless.

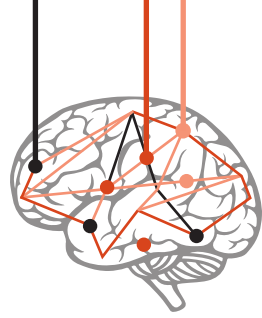
FREEDOM TO PURSUE YOUR DESIRES ---

Ibn al-Qayyim said, “Opposing base desires will allow the servant to acquire strength in his body, his heart, and his speech. Some of the righteous predecessors would say that conquering base desires needs more strength than one who could conquer a city by himself.”¹⁰

Modernity teaches people that depriving yourself of what you desire can make you weak, ill, or even cause psychological problems. But in reality, deprivation with respect to our base desires is a source of strength for body, heart, and mind.

10. Rawḍah al-Muḥibbīn

CHAPTER 5



FEMINISM

THE GRAVE IMPLICATIONS OF FEMINIST ISLAM —

I met my wife when we were both college students at Harvard. We both considered ourselves feminists as young adults. This is because we had seen firsthand and heard about the damage done by domestic abuse against women. We both felt a strong desire to fight against such abuse and prevent other women from getting hurt, whether emotionally or physically. We both felt a strong desire to work towards a world where women and girls lived with respect, kindness, love, support, and the full measure of rights they deserve.

We still feel this way. We still feel this pressing desire.

From our perspective, then, feminism seemed to be the best path towards that world. But with each passing year, we realized that feminism was not a solution. In fact, it was part of a much larger problem.

The problems with feminist philosophy are overwhelming. From its very inception, feminism began as an anti-religious, anti-family movement. It is not merely one strand of feminism that is corrosive to Muslim faith. As difficult as it is for some Muslims to hear, it is all strands. To see this, simply read the writings of all the most notable feminist

theorists in history, from feminism's "first wave" all the way to its "third wave," and this conclusion is undeniable.

Muslims need to understand these issues with feminism because many Muslims today consider themselves feminists, mostly for the same reasons that my wife and I adopted a feminist identity in our youth. This is dangerous because, as my wife and I discovered, feminism contains so much within it that is antithetical to Islam and that endangers Muslim faith. There are surface-level conflicts between Islam and feminism, and there are deeper contradictions as well. Meticulously detailing these problems is necessary, but as far as Muslims are concerned, we can start by simply judging a tree by its fruits. We have to ask ourselves: Why do so many Muslim feminists end up leaving Islam?

The Numbers

Women who identify as feminists are far less likely to be religious than the general female population.¹¹ In the general population, about 7 out of 10 women say they are affiliated with an organized religion like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc. Among feminist women, however, only 1 out of 10 report any such affiliation.¹²

But does this indicate a trend of women leaving faith due to feminism? Other statistics support this contention. For example, between 1993 and 2013, the number of nonreligious women tripled in the US.¹³ Nonreligious

11. Aune, Kristin. "Much Less Religious, A Little More Spiritual." *Feminist Review*, vol. 97, no. 1, Mar. 2011, pp. 32–55.

12. Aune, Kristin. "Why Feminists Are Less Religious." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 29 Mar. 2011.

13. Marcotte, Amanda. "America Is Losing Religion: Why More and More Women Are Embracing Non-Belief." *Alternet*, 14 May 2015.

people in general increased in this time range, but what is particularly telling is that the growth of the nonreligious women demographic outpaced the overall increase. In 1993, 16 percent of atheists and agnostics were women, but within 20 years, that number nearly tripled to 43 percent.¹⁴ Analysts contend that it is the spread of feminist and secular ideology through mass media and increasingly the internet and social media that is responsible for these jumps in non-religiosity.¹⁵

Beyond the statistics, many of us have seen these trends play out all around us in the Muslim community, so much so that it has become a cliché. Nowadays, women and men who have left Islam are writing about exactly what led to their apostasy, so we do not even have to speculate about the causes.¹⁶ They spell it out explicitly: Islam, the Quran, and the Prophet ﷺ are enablers of patriarchy and oppression. In other words, Islam is not compatible with feminism, therefore how could a feminist be a Muslim?

Backlash

Self-described Muslim feminists will strongly dispute that their feminism has put them on the path to apostasy. And, to be clear, I am not claiming that everyone who considers himself a Muslim feminist today will eventually apostatize. To repeat, *I am not claiming that everyone who considers himself a Muslim feminist today will eventually apostatize.*

That being said, not everyone who is thrown into shark-infested waters will fall prey to sharks, but the odds are

14. "2015 State of Atheism in America." Barna Group, 24 Mar. 201

15. Aune, Kristin. "Why Feminists Are Less Religious."

16. Bolt, Andrew. "On Leaving Islam." Herald Sun, 18 June 201

not favorable. The stronger swimmers might make it out of the water bruised and bloody but still breathing, while everyone else is shark food.

Feminism similarly has devoured entire swaths of the Muslim community. If we care about iman in general and the iman of the next generation in particular, we can no longer afford to overlook this dynamic.

In order to address a problem, one first must recognize that the problem exists. This has been the frustration of myself and others. The Muslim community, especially in the US, does not want to acknowledge that feminism is noxious and a direct threat to faith. This is because, saying as much is politically incorrect to such an extent that misguided activists pounce with fury on anyone who fails to satisfactorily toe the party line.

But, as uncomfortable as it may be, we must confront the bullies. The silence must be broken and it is the responsibility of religious leaders, imams, and scholars to start calling a spade a spade. The stakes are too high and the outcome of the feminist malaise of today won't be fully realized until later. In ten years or maybe even five, we will look back and wonder what went wrong, but it will be too late then. Action is required now.

My purpose here is to substantiate how feminism is a path to apostasy. The hope is that if Muslims understand this path, they will recognize it when they see it around them (or within themselves) and will be inspired to speak out against it (or reconsider their own path, much like my wife and I did many years ago).

Without further ado, here is the Muslim feminist path to apostasy.

Stage 1

It all starts with legitimate grievances about the way that some Muslim men treat some Muslim women. There are violations of rights in our community against women. There are Muslim institutions that ignore the needs and concerns of women. In some of our cultures around the world, girls are subjected to criminally unjust double standards vis-à-vis boys. And the kicker is that sometimes the responsible parties selfishly and ignorantly attempt to justify their practices of abuse and outright neglect by citing the Quran or certain hadith.

The solution to these problems is not feminism. The solution is correcting the ignorance with Islamic knowledge. And this is knowledge that comes from true scholars (ulama), namely ulama that are not under the suffocating influence of modernism, liberalism, and feminism itself.

But unfortunately, true knowledge is hard to find, so Muslim women (and men) have turned to feminism as a vehicle for expressing their frustration and their trauma. This is how Muslims enter the feminist path. And the results have been an unmitigated disaster.

If the abuse of women is a disease, then Islamic precepts and ethics are the natural, “organic,” wholesome cure whereas feminism is a harsh toxic chemical treatment, which might get rid of the disease but only by nearly killing the patient while creating ten more ailments in its place.

How does feminism conceptualize domestic abuse, masjid neglect, etc.? By shouting: “Patriarchy!” It is men as a category, we are told, who are the problem (as well as those women who have “internalized” patriarchy). It is

men as a category, we are told, who inherently desire to dominate women, to abuse them, and to take advantage of them.

This is the illegitimate language used to address a legitimate problem. But then, that language slowly takes over...

Stage 2

In Stage 1, it was the tangible abuses of certain men (and women) that were the problem. In Stage 2, the problems become more abstract and conceptual.

Why does the panel at the Islamic conference not include any women? Why does the event poster have photos of the male speakers but only generic icons for the women speakers? Why is a male imam talking about hijab and what women should wear? Why are Muslim men concerned about what women wear at all? Why does the masjid have a partition between men and women? Why is gender separation (derogatorily termed “gender apartheid”) even relevant in this day and age? Why don’t Muslim men recognize their male privilege? Why is modesty such a big deal anyway? How dare men even talk about women’s issues! How dare men even opine about feminism (despite the fact that feminism accuses men of systematically oppressing half the population, and one would think that the accused should have a chance to address such grave charges, but no, that would be “mansplaining”!). Etc., etc.

The automatic answer to all these questions is, of course, the same as it was in Stage 1: “Patriarchy!”

Unlike in Stage 1, Stage 2 problems are not defined by a grounded understanding of Islam and its normative tradition. They are defined and posed by Western feminist and liberal discourse. This is evident by the fact that Stage 2 Muslim feminists will rail against things that have a strong basis in Islamic law and its scholarship, like gender separation, modesty, dress codes, limiting women's visibility to and interaction with non-mahram men, etc. But usually Stage 2 feminists are ignorant of this scholarship. And when they are informed that these practices are firmly rooted in Islamic scholarship, that is when they progress to...

Stage 3

In Stage 3, it is Islamic scholarship itself that comes under fire. In Stage 2, the grievances were about the practices and attitudes of contemporary Muslims. But now, that ire extends to Muslims historically, specifically the ulama.

If patriarchy as this overarching system is the source of so much oppression of women today, the feminist muses, then it only stands to reason that that oppression existed to the same, if not greater, extent in the past. In other words, the feminist in this stage asks himself, why wouldn't the scholars of Islam throughout history operate under those same assumptions and through those same misogynistic modes of thought that we see from scholars today?

And when we look at the writings of the giants of Islamic scholarship, it is chock-full of material that feminism considers to be the epitome of the most vile patriarchy and misogyny. For this reason, you will find a lot of Muslim women in Stage 3 who started out by enthusiastically pursuing sacred knowledge (ilm) with ulama or Islamic

studies at the university and then came across these texts and were horrified by them such that they ultimately became disenchanted with Islamic scholarship, considering the whole thing tainted by nauseating patriarchy.

At this stage, the Muslim feminist contents himself with the idea that the Quran and the Prophetic hadith are solely to be relied upon because those are the only things untainted and unfiltered by the ugly distortions of men. But then, even that comes under fire...

Stage 4

Quran 4:34. Quran 2:228. Two witnesses. Inheritance. Incomplete `aql and deen. The majority in the fire. If I were to command anyone to prostrate. And on and on and on. We know the ayat and the ahadith.

How can the Muslim feminist reconcile all this? How could revelation from God contain not one, not two, but multitudes of seeming expressions of misogyny? This becomes a wellspring of delusion as the Stage-3-turning-Stage-4 feminist gropes for solutions:

Well, maybe these things have all been misinterpreted. Maybe if we bend and contort and reach, we can explain this verse or that hadith. Maybe we can reconcile the revelation that was seen and understood as the pinnacle of eloquence and wisdom and justice by people of the 7th century (and 8th, and 9th, and 10th, ...) with the incoherent ramblings of 20th and 21st century secular gender studies professors. Maybe, just maybe! Anything is possible!

This naive attitude can only be sustained for so long and only in light of ignorance of the sheer amount of Quranic

ayat and hadith that fly in the face of modern feminism. The more aware of these ayat and hadith the Muslim feminist is, the more likely she is to proceed to Stage 4.

The Stage 4 Muslim feminist realizes that the only way to square the circle and fully reconcile feminism with the totality of Islam is to deny the divinity of the Quran and to deny the applicability of the Prophetic Sunnah.

In Stage 4, you will find Muslim reformers who outright say things like, “We must say no to the Quran.” You will find reformers who go so far as to insult the prophets and call them despicable names because, you guessed it: “Patriarchy!”

In Stage 4, it becomes possible to casually utter blasphemy. It also becomes possible to advocate for things like women leading a mixed congregation in prayer, Muslim women being able to marry non-Muslim men, same-sex behavior being permissible, transgenderism being acceptable, adultery and fornication (zina) being permissible, and on and on. This is because those in Stage 4 have not only renounced any and all scholarly precedent, they also do not believe that there is anything like an objective, authoritative Sharia or Sunnah that can even begin to dictate a Muslim’s behavior. And anyone who claims to speak authoritatively on “What God commands,” is immediately denounced as a patriarchal oppressor (“authority” is a patriarchal concept anyway according to them).

Now, there are not many Muslim feminists who stay in Stage 4 because it becomes virtually impossible to justify all these things and still consider oneself a Muslim. The level of cognitive dissonance required to maintain one’s identity is crippling and the fact that the Muslim community at large is

also (rightly) antagonistic to the blasphemy and disregard for the symbols of Islam coming from these individuals makes them increasingly bitter about being Muslim at all. Which is how we get to...

Stage 5

The mental anguish and torment at Stage 5 is unbearable. And it does not take much at this point to push someone over the edge.

If God is gender-egalitarian, why would He refer to Himself as “He” in revelation, as opposed to “She” or “It”? Why was the first human being a man and not a woman? Why are most of the historical narratives in the Quran about men and not women? Why was the last Prophet of God ﷺ a man and not a woman? Why did revelation from God come to us via a man and not a woman?

This barrage of simple but maddening questions takes them to the cliff’s edge of kufr and *irtidad*. And then the same thought that drove them down this path in the first place gives them a final push into the abyss:

Why does God allow patriarchy to exist at all? Did He not care about the subjugation and rape of billions of innocent women over the millennia?

The only answer feminism can provide at this stage is the only answer it could ever provide at any stage: It was all a lie made up by men to control women.

The End

The danger of feminism is that it works like dominoes. Once a person gets on the path of explaining everything in terms of, “Patriarchy!” the rest is just a matter of time. This is because the logic of analyzing every injustice by invoking patriarchy is too all-encompassing (but no less inaccurate, misleading, and destructive) of an explanation. The feminists in Stage 5 are simply more honest, more intellectually consistent than feminists in Stage 1, 2, 3, or 4. Stage 5 feminists have worked out the implications of feminism to its bitter end.

From Its Very First Wave

The reader might ask, “What branch or flavor or definition of feminism is really the problem here?” The truth is, it is feminism itself at its core, in its generality that is the problem. To draw an analogy, most of us will recognize that racism is a problem and that racism against people of a certain skin color or ethnicity is toxic to faith. In reality, however, the racism within the ideology of the KKK is not exactly the same as the racism within the ideology of Neo-Nazis or the “Alt-Right,” etc. There are nuances. But does it really matter when the core of racism is shared among all the disparate groups?

To be clear, my point is not that the problem with feminism is that it is a racist ideology. The problem, one of many, with feminism is simply that adopting a feminist outlook consistently and systematically leads Muslims into crises of faith and the leaving of Islam entirely. And this is not a coincidence or a statistical anomaly. When we

understand the process of Muslims progressing from Stage 1 to Stage 5, it is clear how this happens. And if we are still not convinced, we can look to the roots of feminism itself, as expressed by some of its most notable figures throughout history.

From its very inception, feminism has been anti-religion. In fact, the most prominent figures of each wave of feminism have been viciously anti-religious.

From its beginning in the 19th century as a social movement for women's suffrage, feminism in its "first wave" targeted traditional religion as the source of women's subjugation. The earliest feminist thinkers believed that religious institutions not only contributed to attenuating women's rights but, indeed, were the original fount from which anti-women beliefs and practices emerged. Susan B. Anthony, one of the central figures in the women's suffrage movement, noted, "The worst enemy [women] have is in the pulpit."¹⁷

Anthony often railed against traditional religion and was considered agnostic by those who knew her personally. Among her statements on religion, included is: "What a dreadful creature their God must be to keep sending hungry mouths while he withholds the bread to fill them!"¹⁸ On the idea of organized religion in particular, Anthony stated: "I can not imagine a God of the universe made happy by my getting down on my knees and calling him 'great.'"¹⁹

17. MicMillen, Sally as cited in: "Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movements."

18. *New York World*, February 2, 1896, quoted in *Harper* (1898–1908), Vol. pp. 858–60.

19. *Ibid.*

Another early first wave feminist from the 19th century, Helen H. Gardener, wrote at length about the “crimes” and “abuses” of the Bible and Christianity in their treatment of women:

This religion and the Bible require of woman everything, and give her nothing. They ask her support and her love, and repay her with contempt and oppression [...] Every injustice that has ever been fastened upon women in a Christian country has been ‘authorised by the Bible’ and riveted and perpetuated by the pulpit.²⁰

Gardener’s contempt for religion did not stop at Christianity, however. She comments in her book *Men, Women, and Gods*:

Even though a religion claims a superhuman origin — and I believe they all claim that — it must be tested by human reason, and if our highest moral sentiments revolt at any of its dictates, its dictates must go. For the only good thing about any religion is its morality, and morality has nothing to do with faith. The one has to do with right actions in this world; the other with unknown quantities in the next. The one is a necessity of time the other a dream of Eternity. Morality depends upon universal evolution; Faith upon special ‘revelation;’ and no woman can afford to accept any “revelation” that has yet been offered to this world.

That Moses or Confucius, Mohammed or Paul, Abraham or Brigham Young asserts that his particular dogma came directly from God, and that it was a personal communication to either or all of these

20. Gardener, Helen Hamilton. *Men, Women, and Gods*. S.l., Forgotten Books, 2017.

avored individuals, is a fact that can have no power over us unless their teachings are in harmony with our highest thought; our noblest purpose, and our purest conception of life. Which of them can bear the test? Not one 'revelation' known to man to-day can look in the face of the nineteenth century and say, 'I am parallel with your richest development; I still lead your highest thought; none of my teachings shock your sense of justice.' Not one.²¹

We can find this animosity towards religion throughout the writing and speeches of many of the most prominent first-wave feminists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who spearheaded the writing of the highly subversive *The Women's Bible*. If Muslim feminists today wrote *The Women's Quran*, they would just be catching up to feminists from over 100 years ago who were part of the first wave, which was supposedly the least extreme and the least objectionable of the feminist waves.

But the anti-religious animus does not end there. Consider the so-called "second wave." The philosopher who is said to have ushered in this glorious wave is Simone de Beauvoir, who expressed her opposition to religion thus:

Man enjoys the great advantage of having a god that endorses the code he writes; and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women it is especially fortunate that this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being. For the Jews, Mohammedans and Christians among others, man is master by divine right; the fear of God will

21. Ibid.

therefore repress any impulse towards revolt in the
downtrodden female.²²

On religion, prominent second-wave feminist Gloria Steinem contends, “It’s an incredible con job, when you think of it, to believe something now in exchange for life after death. Even corporations, with all their reward systems, don’t try to make it posthumous.”²³

In a recent interview, Steinem was asked, “What do you think the biggest problem with feminism today is?” to which she remarked, “What we don’t talk about enough is religion. I think that spirituality is one thing. But religion is just politics in the sky. I think we really have to talk about it. Because it gains power from silence.”²⁴

Within the third wave, the animosity towards organized religion only intensifies, but this animosity takes many forms including the form of devotion to “alternative religion” and “non-denominational spirituality.” Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Susan Shaw argues that, in light of traditional religious institutions like the Church, the Mosque, and the Synagogue, “Patriarchy is the prevailing religion of the planet,” and:

The world has a problem of gender of religious proportions. We need a reformation, perhaps a revolution, to tear down the altars to male power

22. Beauvoir, Simone de, and H. M. Parshley. *The Second Sex*. South Yarra, Vic., Louis Braille Productions, 1989.

23. Gloria Steinem. Freedom From Religion Foundation, ffrf.org/news/day/dayitems/item/14362-gloria-steinem. Accessed 12 Sept. 2017.

24. Calloway-Hanauer, Jamie. “Is Religion the ‘Biggest Problem’ Facing Feminism Today?” *Sojourners*, 6 May 2015

and rebuild a global sanctuary of inclusion, equity, justice, peace, and love.²⁵

Radical lesbian feminist philosopher Mary Daly believed that religion was inherently oppressive towards women and characterized this by saying, “Woman’s asking for equality in the church would be comparable to a black person’s demanding equality in the Ku Klux Klan.”²⁶

Daly also noted in her provocative essay “Sin Big”:

The word ‘sin’ is derived from the Indo-European root ‘es-,’ meaning ‘to be.’ When I discovered this etymology, I intuitively understood that for a [person] trapped in patriarchy, which is the religion of the entire planet, ‘to be’ in the fullest sense is ‘to sin’.²⁷

In the essay, Daly encourages women to have the “courage to sin,” where sinning in the religious sense is conceived as the highest form of protest against patriarchy. Subverting patriarchy goes hand in hand with subverting religious norms. In fact, no distinction exists between the two since religion is patriarchy and patriarchy is religion. To destroy one is to destroy the other.

The feminist canon is saturated with similarly subversive views, enough to fill multiple volumes. And of course we see that religious subversion and blasphemy mirrored by Muslim feminists themselves (especially those in Stage 5). One learns from one’s teachers, even despite one’s self.

25. Shaw, Susan M. “Is Patriarchy the Religion of the Planet?” The Huffington Post, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 1 Oct. 2011.

26. “Mary Daly.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 8 Sept. 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Daly#cite_note-2 Accessed 12 Sept. 2017.

27. Daly, Mary. “Sin Big.” The New Yorker, The New Yorker, 19 June 2017, www.newyorker.com/magazine/1996/02/26/sin-big. Accessed 12 Sept. 2017.

Given the sheer ubiquity of caustically anti-religious sentiment across all strands of feminist thought throughout history, how could we ever imagine that adopting such an ideology in any way, shape, or form would do anything other than decay a Muslim's faith?

Another Path

Again, my wife and I considered ourselves feminists at one point, but *alhamdulillah* we quickly realized where the feminist path leads. Yet, abandoning our feminism was small consolation given the reality that some women endure severe injustice in life. Furthermore, how can the fact that Islamic law has different provisions depending on one's gender be reconciled with an overall sense of justice and egalitarianism? These were questions that bothered us, but the beginnings of the answer came when we realized: Maybe we need to recalibrate our sense of justice and egalitarianism. And what better way to recalibrate than with the Source of Justice and Mercy in His own Words:

Our Lord, indeed we have heard a caller calling to faith, [saying], 'Believe in your Lord,' and we have believed. Our Lord, so forgive us our sins and remove from us our misdeeds and cause us to die with the righteous. Our Lord, and grant us what You promised us through Your messengers and do not disgrace us on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed, You do not fail in [Your] promise." And their Lord responded to them, "Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another. So those who emigrated or were evicted from their homes or were harmed in My cause or fought

or were killed – I will surely remove from them their misdeeds, and I will surely admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow as reward from Allah, and Allah has with Him the best reward.” Be not deceived by the [uninhibited] movement of the disbelievers throughout the land. [It is but] a small enjoyment; then their [final] refuge is Hell, and wretched is the resting place.²⁸

Ali ‘Imran (Q3:193-197)

Furthermore, Allah says:

And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.²⁹

Al-Ma’idah (Q5:48)

Allah will not waste anyone’s work, whether male or female, and Allah will only judge us by what He has tested us with, nothing more or less. Women will not be judged according to what men have been given and men will not be judged according to what women have been given. This is the standard of gender justice that Allah gives us in the

28. Sahih International Translation.

29. Sahih International Translation.

Quran. It is not the case that men and women are subject to the same exact prescribed law. It is not the case that men and women are tasked with the same exact responsibilities. And it is not the case that men and women are endowed with the same exact traits. Just like Allah created different varieties of beings — angels, jinn, clouds, mountains, animals, etc. — and gave each class of being its own station and role in the Creation, similarly Allah has created men and women differently, yet they are still “of one another” (*ba`dukum min ba`d*). Muslim men and women must support each other in these trying and confusing times.

Additionally, all the kinds of abuse and mistreatment of women that those in Stage 1 are reacting to can fully be addressed by Islamic norms and guidelines as established by the Quran and Sunnah. The Prophet ﷺ summarizes these guidelines with his statement: “The best of you are those who are the best to their wives, and I am the best of you to my wives.”³⁰ Regarding physical abuse, the Prophet ﷺ specifically remarked, “Many women have gone around Muhammad’s family complaining of their husbands. Those who do so, that is, those who take to beating their wives, are not the best among you.”³¹

But the abuse many women endure is not limited to the physical. Emotional abuse and neglect can be even more devastating than physical blows. Many Muslim women do not feel cherished by their husbands, much less respected. Some feel as if they are nothing more than maids in their own homes. Yet, in the Quran, in Surat al-Mujadila, Allah Himself says that,

30. Tirmidhi. Vol. 1, Book 46, Hadith 3895.

31. Abu Dawud. Book 1, Hadith 279.

Certainly [He] has heard the speech of the one who argues with you, [O Muhammad], concerning her husband and directs her complaint to Allah.”³²

Al-Mujadila (Q58:1)

Allah, Master of all that exists, manifests His Consideration and Mercy in hearing the complaints of mistreated women. How, then, could a Muslim husband be so callous and cold-hearted as to ignore the emotional needs of his own wife? Furthermore, a detailed look at the life of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions shows that nowhere did they resort to belittling, insulting, or denigrating women, whether their wives, sisters, or daughters. Many narrations relate how these blessed men took extra care to be emotionally sensitive to their wives and to fulfill their rights towards them with *ihsan*, i.e., excellence.³³

Much more can be elaborated on these points and more. For now, as Muslims, we must redouble our confidence in the power of Islam, not “feminist Islam,” to address injustice. The Prophetic example is our model and standard for gender justice, not the (often anti-religious) musings of Susan B. Anthony, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, or Bell Hooks.

32. Quran 58:Sahih International Translation.

33. Consider the lengthy narration where Umar (rn) describes the Prophet's ﷺ behavior toward his wives, where they would openly argue with him and the Prophet ﷺ did not admonish them for that but treated them with due care and consideration. This narration can be found in Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 3, Book 43, Hadith 648.

And Finally

I implore imams, religious scholars, and leaders to take more seriously the need to broach otherwise uncomfortable subjects like feminism that have long been avoided. Avoiding such subjects might have been fine in the days before the internet and social media, when the average Muslim could live without being inundated with anti-Islam propaganda. But today, avoidance is only likely to feed increasing dissatisfaction and disenchantment with Islam and Islamic scholarship.

This is because one cannot hide the “controversial” ayat, hadith, *turath*, etc., from the masses indefinitely. People will find out primarily because atheists and liberal activists alike are on a mission to “expose” Islam and are pushing these traditions into the spotlight. As the Muslim masses discover this information, they will feel deeply confused, deeply betrayed, and will leave Islam in droves. This process is already well underway. Simply peruse the prominent Muslim feminist social media outlets and the websites dedicated to Muslim women’s issues to see the rising antagonism and furor against orthodox Islam.

Rather than give feminism carte blanche to wreak havoc on the Ummah, we must redouble our efforts to critique and deconstruct feminism on an intellectual and academic basis. In the end, dismantling feminism will afford Muslims with the intellectual and emotional room to properly understand gender and gender relations in Islam and to see how far superior in terms of justice and mercy it is to what feminism has to offer.

THE LOGIC OF PATRIARCHY

One of the things I never understood about the idea of patriarchy that feminism opposes is this: Why would men throughout history across numerous patriarchal cultures and civilizations systematically oppress their counterparts, i.e., their wives, their sisters, their mothers?

To oppress someone means to prevent that person from what she needs, what is her due, and to otherwise cause harm. And I can understand how that happens in isolated situations, e.g., domestic abuse where a husband abuses his wife, etc. But I don't understand how this can happen globally or across an entire society. Why? Because men are smarter than that and so are women. What I mean is, it would be completely irrational for men to inflict this kind of program within their own households. How do men benefit by crippling their female companions and continually frustrating their needs? That is simply not functional. Have you ever known a family where the husband/father (or the wife/mother) is a tyrant, wields all the control, rules with an iron fist? Those situations are never sustainable and everyone involved is miserable and looking for an exit. Are we supposed to believe that it was only modern people that realized, "Wow, constant *dhulm* (injustice) in the household is neither optimal nor sustainable?"

Also, the idea that women have been the perpetual victims of this scheme by men to oppress them over thousands of years is really insulting to the intelligence and capabilities of women. Again, are modern women the only ones enlightened enough to understand that they are being oppressed by patriarchy and to fight back, whereas

past women were too stupid to notice or successfully effect change? That makes no sense.

If you look at what is required to effectively oppress a group of people, it is not a trivial task. Look at it from a practical perspective. Look at the current state of the Arab world. Dictators have had to marshal all kinds of resources, military and police force, all kinds of programs of monitoring and institutions of propaganda and intimidation to maintain some semblance of (illegitimate) power and control over their populations. They've been doing this for 60 or 70 years, and look at how much resistance they've been getting and how much turmoil has resulted. The same is the case throughout world history. Oppression is inherently unstable and requires a lot of resources and energy to maintain for any extended period of time because the victims of oppression inevitably resist.

This casts doubt on the notion of oppressive patriarchy on two counts. First, the idea that men have been successfully keeping women down for millennia is absurd in the sense that, if that were the program, why would men put themselves through that incessant turmoil, constantly battling "uprising" from their own family members, presumably the same people they are sleeping next to in their beds every night? Second, if that were indeed the program, where would the resources for such a program come from? On the family level, historically it would have been difficult to keep money and means that are available to a husband away from a wife. It is possible and did happen, again in isolated cases, but not on a systematic level or something that could be widespread.

Now it is a historical fact that women and men played different roles in maintaining their households. But it is only modern feminism that imposes a hierarchy on these roles and claims that the traditional roles of women have put them at a disadvantage vis-a-vis men. But as I have argued elsewhere, there is no basis for these determinations. For example, it is not clear how a traditional female role like raising and educating children is inherently less powerful than roles involving commercial trade, etc.

Let me make the point like this: Feminism wants us to believe that a man would choose other men to collude with and establish systems of power with *over* his own family, *over* his own wife and daughters and mother. This goes against human experience and basic self interest. If you are a woman, ask yourself: Is your father or your husband or your brother going to privilege the interests of a strange man over your interests, solely on the basis that “men stick together against women”? If so, that just means your father, husband, and brother are psychologically disturbed and possibly insane, not representatives of this global conspiracy to oppress one gender. And if you are a man, ask yourself: Are you going to look out for strange men and prioritize their interests over the interests of your wife, daughters, and mother? If so, you are very likely mentally unstable, not a patriarch who is part of this global brotherhood holding back women.

IS FEMINISM THE CAUSE OF WOMEN LEAVING ISLAM?

Yes. Without a doubt. The evidence is overwhelming.

It's really not hard to understand why. Feminism is a liberal secular philosophy. In the same way that liberal secularism attacks traditional religion, feminism attacks traditional religion. Arguably, feminism is the main weapon in liberal secularism's attack on traditional religion. So it is no surprise that those Muslims who adopt feminist ideas will have deep problems with traditional religions like Islam.

To say that feminism has nothing to do with women leaving Islam is like saying the KKK has nothing to do with its members hating black people. If someone were to deny that the KKK and hating black people go hand in hand, that would mean that that person does not understand what the KKK is.

And this is exactly the case with Muslims who defend feminism. Those Muslims who want to deny feminism's corrosive effects on Muslim faith are simply ignorant of what feminism is and its real history. If you ask them what feminism is, they will give you a whitewashed history that is peddled in establishment institutions of learning, e.g., grade school. And when you question them on this history, they will appeal to mainstream, pro-feminist academic works, e.g., schlock like *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*.

This is like trying to get an understanding of American history by reading some right-wing patriot's history of the US that extols the "brave Founding Fathers" who fought for independence and inalienable rights while ignoring things like the Native American genocide, the Transatlantic slave trade, Jim Crow, etc.

The reality is, feminism has been instrumental in attacking religion in general and Islam in particular.

But I also want to take the opportunity to respond to some of the tired talking points we hear by feminists and “white knights” on this question.

The main claim that we hear nowadays is that “Muslim women are leaving Islam, not because of feminism but because they are mistreated by Muslim men.” Those who make this claim usually cite three things:

1. Anecdotes/personal experience with abusive Muslim men
2. The lack of space/visibility of women at mosques
3. The lack of women in leadership roles

What people fail to notice is that none of these things explain why we see more Muslim women today frustrated with traditional Islam. Not even close.

If more Muslim women are frustrated with Islam or have doubts about Islam or are taking off the hijab, etc., that means that there must be more of 1, 2, and/or 3. If more women are frustrated, then that must be because more Muslim men are abusive or women have decreasing space/visibility at mosques, or women have fewer and fewer leadership roles.

But none of this is true.

There is no evidence to suggest that Muslim men are more abusive now than they were, say, 5 years ago or 10, 20, 50, or 100 years ago. In fact, according to the feminist logic, Muslim men should overall be less abusive now than they were in the previous generation or two, since Muslim men now at least have the light of intersectional feminism to inform them of things like “toxic masculinity” and “mansplaining,” etc., i.e., things of which our fathers and grandfathers were

blissfully ignorant. Do feminists think that our fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers were on average less abusive than the current generation of Muslim males? If the previous generation of men were more abusive, then shouldn't there have been more frustration in our mother's, grandmother's, and great grandmother's generations than there is now? But there wasn't more frustration then. So this explanation makes no sense.

Similarly with the supposed lack of space/visibility and leadership points. Women are more visible than ever at mosques (whether or not this is a good thing is a separate issue). They are in more positions of leadership as well. No one denies this. Yet the rate of Muslim women losing faith is not slowing or reversing. By all appearances, it is accelerating. So what gives?

Ironically, if space/visibility/leadership are in fact tied to the rate of Muslim women leaving Islam, as the feminists argue, then if we want to reverse the trend, basic logic would dictate that we had better reduce women's space/visibility/leadership in mosques and roll things back to that Golden, pre-feminist era of Muslim history, i.e., the vast majority of Muslim history.

Be honest. How many Muslim women do you know — friends, family, classmates, co-workers, etc. — who have, in recent years, taken off their hijabs completely or have gone the way of the turban (garish and off-putting as feminized turbans are)?

Be honest. How many Muslim women do you know who were by all considerations “pretty religious” not more than two or three years ago but now are constantly

kvetching about the patriarchy and the “gendered” nature of traditional Islam, Islamic law, Islamic scholarship, etc.?

Be honest. How many Muslim women do you know who were serious students of knowledge, merrily learning about Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya or perhaps Imam Al-Shafi`i, perhaps wearing niqab and avoiding things like make-up and mixing, but now are cheap Linda Sarsour clones with genitalia hats ranting about intersectionality and trans rights at the spoken word night at the local night club?

Let's be honest.

Alhamdulillah, there are plenty of sisters who are holding things down and rejecting the feminist tide. But outside of them, things are getting worse and worse as far as some Western Muslim women are concerned. To insist that this has nothing to do with the adoption of feminist ideology is sheer delusion. Irresponsible delusion.

So if abuse, space/visibility, and leadership don't explain the loss of modesty and faith, how exactly does adoption of feminism explain apostasy among Muslim women?

Well, call me crazy, but it seems obvious to me that if a Muslima adopts the feminist premise that genders must be treated exactly equally, she is going to be disinclined towards a religion, like Islam, that specifies very different roles for each gender. If a Muslima adopts the feminist premise that modesty and dress codes are a way for men to manipulate women, she is going to be disinclined towards a religion that emphasizes modesty and strict female dress codes. If a Muslima adopts the feminist premise that historically men have subjugated women through an evil patriarchal cabal, she is going to be disinclined towards a religion that teaches that “Men are authorities over women,”

(Quran 4:34) and where the vast majority of its scholars and religious authorities were and continue to be men. And so on. This is not a mystery, folks.

Let me also say that the majority of the blame for this crisis goes to white knights. White knights are those religious men who give currency to feminist ideas. These are the self-hating men who are constantly shouting about how much, “Muslim men are trash!” and how “We do really have a problem with patriarchy.” These men are dangerous because they lend religious legitimacy to the feminist project. These are the men who allow the feminist virus to spread and to thrive. And whenever anyone points out the problems with the feminist project, these white knights are the loudest in shouting down objectors with red herrings and other fallacies.

So, white knights are the real problem here, especially the imams among them. The Muslim feminists would fizzle out very quickly were it not for religious leaders constantly pandering to them and legitimizing their garbage by pretending to be “good Muslim men.” The only thing more vapid and more dangerous than the Muslim feminist is the Muslim white knight.

WHO WANTS TO DEBATE PATRIARCHY?

In 2015, I was asked to participate in a debate on patriarchy and feminism at a local masjid. A month or so after the date was set and announced on social media, the event was abruptly canceled for reasons that were never made clear to me.

I'll be honest: This was not the first time that something like this had happened and I'm sure it won't be the last. I am not going to speculate as to why this particular masjid canceled this particular event. I don't even know who was responsible for canceling the event or exactly why he/she/they did so.

In preparing for the debate, I put together some brief notes on the basic thrust of my position (below). Obviously, it is a position some find deeply offensive — offensive enough to censor. But I think it is high time we ask these important questions even though, for whatever reason, they are considered politically incorrect. I think we should be able to debate ideas in a respectful and academic fashion, especially ideas that have such a major influence on the Muslim community and the Muslim mind and are the source of much doubt.

Unfortunately, there are those who do not want to see such a conversation happen and will shut down anyone who tries to have it.

In any case, what I had planned to do was defend my position using a wide range of arguments and evidence from historical and philosophical material as well as the work of feminists themselves. I also had arguments lined up in defense of classical scholars that Muslim feminists have viciously attacked over the years.

There is a common perspective that has grown increasingly more influential since the dawn of Second Wave feminism that one of the primary power dynamics within every society — in addition to the dynamics between different socio-economic classes, races, tribal affiliations, etc. — is the power dynamics between the genders. Just like

different political factions and classes are vying for power in every society, so are the genders, men against women. All societies experience a power differential in this regard, and universally it has been the case that men dominate women — this is patriarchy.

In our times, this domination is not necessarily overt such that men are consciously dominating women, though in some instances, that may be true as well. Rather, we have inherited a patriarchal system with ossified power structures that continue to subjugate women. It is our moral duty, argue feminists, to fight against these patriarchal structures. All of this applies in spades to Islamic history. Here feminists will have some disagreements. The default feminist position as represented by their leading scholars is that all religion is inherently patriarchal and therefore oppressive to women.

Muslim feminists take issue with this and claim, to the contrary, that God is not patriarchal and does not desire to subjugate women to men. Rather, God's revealed religion, Islam, is fully egalitarian and it is only a patriarchal *reading* of that religion by men which gives us rules and customs that oppress Muslim women. From this point, different Muslim feminists draw the line in different places. Are the rules of polygyny, say, part of true Islam or are they patriarchal accretions? Some say yes, some say no. Are certain hadith on women true Islam or just patriarchal fabrications? Are certain classical scholars opining on women presenting an honest, valid understanding of true Islam, or is it just a patriarchal bias coloring their views? There are over a hundred "controversial" examples of where, from the perspective of your average modern non-Muslim feminist, Islam oppresses, or at least disenfranchises women. And

different Muslim feminists will take different strategies in countering that perspective in defending the notion that true Islam is egalitarian.

My view is that the entire feminist project, whether of the secular or Muslim variety, is misguided. In reality, there are major conceptual and evidential problems with the entire notion of societal conflict based on gender. The idea that men have constructed and maintained a universal structure, namely patriarchy, to systematically take advantage of women and prioritize men's interests over women's is not substantiated by historical facts or theoretical scrutiny. Yes, patriarchy exists in the sense that men have had authority in every society of history. But that authority was for the benefit of all, not merely the benefit of men at the expense of women.

As far as what is at stake in this conversation, these are some of the main questions that come to my mind.

What are the theological implications of understanding 1400 years of the Muslim scholarly tradition as being by and large immersed in and, to at least some extent, guided by patriarchal oppression? What are the ontological implications of claiming that every society past and present suffered from patriarchy, i.e., what does this mean for human nature and, by extension, God Himself, who created that human nature and that human history? Is patriarchy an adequate or accurate explanation of the problems Muslim societies face with regard to gender relations, domestic abuse, etc. (i.e., problems that I do not deny exist)?

As these questions are meant to imply, the idea of patriarchy as a universal system of male oppression against women is extremely damaging to the Muslim mind. This

is because the idea effectively renders all of religion and religious authority as an arm of patriarchy, which means that religion, either in its entirety or in large part, is a tool to oppress women for the benefit of men.

Is it any surprise, then, that Muslim feminists accept and espouse increasingly radical and deviant views and many of them ultimately apostatize?

Certainly, it is depressing to see even otherwise religiously devout Muslim women accepting the basic premises of feminism, including the idea of universal oppressive patriarchy extending throughout history.

In reality, all branches and varieties of feminism are anathema to Islam. Muslim feminists might disagree with this, but it does not change the fact. This is proven by a simple argument:

1. One cannot be committed to feminism without accepting the Patriarchal Thesis, i.e., the thesis that there exists a social structure perpetuated by men designed to subjugate and oppress women that has existed since the dawn of civilization.
2. The Patriarchal Thesis is anathema to Islam.
3. Therefore, Feminism is anathema to Islam.

Why is the Patriarchal Thesis (PT) so noxious as far as Islam is concerned?

First of all, PT undermines the very notion of *nubuwwa*. All *anbiya* who preached to humanity and stood in front of their people to call to Islam were men. Were all these *anbiya* part of the patriarchal structure used to dominate women?

PT also undermines the scholarly tradition. The vast majority of *ulama* in our tradition were men, and the

most influential and prolific of them were men. And all of them, literally all of them, espoused a plethora of views that modern feminists consider toxic masculine misogynist drivel of the worst kind. Were all these men part of the patriarchal system used to oppress women?

PT undermines Islamic theology itself. If the patriarchy is this entrenched, destructive force plaguing humanity and inflicting so much pain and suffering, why doesn't the Quran address it? Why didn't the Prophet ﷺ address it? Can the Quran and Sunnah be considered complete guidance when they do not call out this systematic oppression? Feminists maintain that patriarchy is among the greatest forces of evil in all human history, yet there is not even a word for it in Arabic. Not a single verse or hadith dedicated to sounding the alarm bells, warning humanity of this terrible oppression. Why?

These are the logical entailments feminists make with respect to Islam and that is why Muslim feminists go through phases of disillusion with Islam and many end up leaving. They start by throwing the scholars of our tradition under the bus for having "evil" patriarchal views of women. Then they graduate to attacking the prophets (remember "Muslim reformist" Amina Wadud insulting Prophet Ibrahim?). Then they graduate to criticizing the Quran. Why did Allah use masculine pronouns to refer to Himself? Why did Allah create Adam, a man, first? Why did Allah reveal verse 4:34? etc.

This is the inherent theological tension created by the Patriarchal Thesis. And it leads many Muslim feminists to adopt increasingly deviant views and even apostatize.

So those who want to claim that Feminism and Islam are compatible, confront the 1-2-3 argument above. You have limited options. I'll make it easy and lay it out:

1. You can either argue that one *can* be a feminist and *not* accept PT, i.e., the idea of ever-present patriarchy subjugating women since time immemorial.
2. Or you can argue that PT does not undermine Islam.

Which one is it?

Those who are fine with throwing the male-dominated scholarly tradition under the bus (the “reform,” “progressive” type as well as “Quranists,” et al.) will take Option 2. But normal Muslims with correct *aqida* recognize that without the male-dominated scholarly tradition, the Quran would not have reached us, the Sunnah would not have reached us, Islam would not have been preserved, etc. If you throw the *ulama* out, you throw Islam out. The scholars are the inheritors of the prophets. Anyone who wants to claim that the scholars were systematically biased on a global scale and unjust against women is undermining the morality of the *ulama* and is therefore undermining Islam itself.

In any case, I maintain that this is a logical assessment. Those who disagree are free to provide logical rebuttals. Spare me the emotional appeals, *ad hominem* whining, and white knight histrionics.

NB: Let me provide some disambiguation. Of course, the patriarchy does exist. Islam is a patriarchal religion. According to Islamic Law, lineage is patrilineal and social and family structures have authority flowing through the patriarch and other males figures. But patriarchy in the feminist sense is different in that it ascribes maliciousness to these structures. The feminist claim is that these patriarchal

institutions are designed by men with the evil intention to frustrate the interests of women for the benefit of men. In other words, an evil cabal of men are perpetually conspiring to sabotage poor, innocent, naive women at every turn and the brave feminists have discovered this dastardly plot only in the past few decades and are fighting the good fight to abolish it. Yeah, it sounds crazy because it is.

It has become absolutely critical for Muslim intellectuals and imams to debunk this Patriarchy Thesis before another generation of Muslims falls under the spell. There are many ways to do this.

First of all, one should acknowledge that, yes, there are men who abuse women and there are larger institutions, including some religious institutions, that mistreat women and usurp their rights. This cannot be ignored—domestic abuse (physical and emotional), treating women like garbage, preventing women from having any influence on their household and their larger communities, overlooking sexual abuse, etc. These are all problems that need to be addressed in all societies of the world. But do these problems stem from a large, inescapable system of men working to keep women subjugated? Or are these problems that arise due to certain abusive, selfish, ignorant, evil people that happen to be men (or even women)?

ISLAMIC LAW MAKES IT EASY FOR HUSBANDS TO OPPRESS WIVES

Q: Why does Islamic law make it easy for an evil husband to oppress his wife?

A: In today's age and with today's social structures and some of the backwards cultural practices we find in some Muslim countries, yes, it may be easy for a malevolent husband to oppress his wife, to divorce her, to take advantage of her, to abuse her, and so on. But for most of Muslim history, this was not so easy. This is because the familial and social structure in most places throughout history were kinship based, i.e., based on the "extended" family. While it is easy for a husband to oppress his wife in today's world, where families are very small and isolated and people have no connection to their parents, extended family, relatives, and so on, in the past, a wife could rely on these networks to support her against an oppressive or otherwise unreasonable husband. In fact, it was in the best interest of the family to defend its female members from such abuse, since dysfunctional families cannot produce functional children who will contribute positively to the tribe or extended family. It just made sense to watch for your own and with that kind of backing, women were not automatically in a position of de facto weakness in the face of a potentially malevolent husband.

It is today in modern society that women do not have much recourse against abusive husbands. Women today have to rely on state institutions to provide them support, and obviously state institutions are not always in a position to help, and at the end of the day, women are forced to rely on a cold bureaucratic system whereas family networks of the past could prosecute and hold an abusive husband accountable in a direct and immediate way. As the historical record will attest, this is how things were done for thousands of years, but modern society has dissolved the extended family and forced people to rely on state (and corporate)

bureaucracy. The extended family is a crucial structure of functional human living according to Islam's vision of human existence and this is emphasized in and assumed by the Sharia itself. The fact that many of our societies in the East and West are suffering such problems should tell us something about the viability of certain modern social structures and the dismantling of the extended family and its authority in our time.

So the real question is, should we reform Islamic law to conform to the diktats of modern society, which is suffering from all these problems, or should we reform these social structures and bring back those institutions that past civilizations, Muslim and non-Muslim, took for granted for thousands of years?

CRITICIZING FEMINISM THE RIGHT WAY ---

Yes, I have my (many) criticisms of feminism, but I have to say that it is not right to silence or dismiss others by branding them feminists. There are many instances of abuse against women all around us and even in our families. And when that abuse is called out, those cries for help and justice shouldn't be delegitimized by being called feminist. If being concerned for the well-being of women is feminism, then I would count myself as a feminist.

The reality, however, is that feminism is only superficially concerned with the well-being of women. When you look deeper and study the historical development and conceptual genealogy of feminism, it is apparent how much of it is contrary to women's interests. So, no, I don't actually consider myself a feminist. But we need to be able

to distinguish an academic critique of a philosophy from this kind of despicable enablement of abuse of women.

And abuse is not limited to the physical, of course. Emotional manipulation is equally if not more damaging.

WOMEN'S WELLBEING, NOT FEMINISM ---

I thought it was obvious, but I guess I was wrong, so here it is spelled out. Being opposed to feminism does not mean one is opposed to women's rights. And being in favor of women's rights does not mean one is a feminist. Feminism does not have a monopoly on representing the interests of women. In fact, it often sabotages those interests.

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL POWER OF MOTHERHOOD ---

Modern society has denigrated the importance of motherhood to such a degree that even mothers develop severe insecurities and depression at the thought of being a "mere housewife" or "just a stay-at-home mom." The word "stay-at-home mom" itself is a dirty word, and bears connotations of powerlessness, meekness, timidity, abject dependence, and victimhood. To be a stay-at-home mother means that you have either been coerced into such a destitute position or, even worse, you chose it for yourself. And sure, as long as it was your choice, that is fine — society will tolerate that purely for the sake of freedom of choice. That's the only value that that decision could have in the eyes of modern people: that it was a decision freely made. If you decided to dedicate your life to something trivial and

meaningless, that would be just as valuable as choosing to be a stay-at-home mom.

Motherhood in itself, however, has no larger significance in our day and age. Sure, people recognize the importance of loving your mom in the personal sense of “I guess I should not be a complete jerk to the person who brought me into this world. Maybe I will send her a card on Mother’s Day.” But beyond that, there is not much more of an understanding of the significance and influence mothers really have and ought to have.

Consider this quote from a Christian writer:

“Yes, my wife is JUST a mother. JUST. She JUST brings forth life into the universe, and she JUST shapes and molds and raises those lives. She JUST manages, directs and maintains the workings of the household, while caring for children who JUST rely on her for everything. She JUST teaches our twins how to be human beings, and, as they grow, she will JUST train them in all things, from morals, to manners, to the ABC’s, to hygiene, etc. She is JUST my spiritual foundation and the rock on which our family is built. She is JUST everything to everyone. And society would JUST fall apart at the seams if she, and her fellow moms, failed in any of the tasks I outlined. Yes, she is just a mother. Which is sort of like looking at the sky and saying, ‘Hey, it’s just the sun.’”

This blogger is speaking in terms of appreciation, i.e., we should appreciate mothers and not think that just because some of them may not have 9 to 5 jobs, that doesn’t mean they are not contributing to society, are lazy, etc.

Appreciation is a good message, but the other aspect of it is that we should understand the sheer influence of mothers. Ultimately, they are the ones molding the next generation of humanity as they see fit. Why do modernity and feminism not recognize the power inherent to that? Supposedly, all the power in society is found in the public sphere, in business, in politics, etc., and these are arenas dominated by men in patriarchal societies. But that view completely disregards the exercise of power in the private sphere (if we can even make such neat distinctions between “public” and “private”).

From this perspective, by choosing to be stay-at-home moms, women would be taking back a major source of economic, social, and political power — the power to deeply influence the upbringing of all members of society and thus to shape the world itself. Rather than be insecure or depressed at the thought of motherhood, today’s women should seize the opportunity and be enterprising in their approach. We associate qualities like intelligence, dedication, vision, resourcefulness, and tenacity to professional careers, e.g., working for a start-up or a Fortune 500 company. But these qualities apply in spades to motherhood, so why do people insist that women who go to college or even get advanced degrees and then become mothers are “wasting” their talent and “throwing away professional opportunities”? People are miserably confused.

TRIPLE TALAQ

Many people don’t understand the issue of triple talaq. Obviously, a husband who issues three talaqs altogether against his wife has committed a stupid and offensive act.

And the fact that the divorce is binding and final according to all the *madhahib* means the husband is the one getting punished, not the wife! The husband loses his *mahr* and his wife. The wife should feel fortunate to get out of a marriage to a man who is so careless and unhinged that he loses control and utters talaq three times like a petulant child.

So how is it helping Muslim women when the new Indian law, passed by the racist criminal thugs of the Indian Hindu BJP political party, bans triple talaq?

Banning triple talaq means that the husband doesn't get punished for his reckless behavior and the wife has to continue living with such a person. And if she wants to get out of the marriage through *khul`*, she has to give up her *mahr*. So it is a lose-lose situation for her.

Muslim feminists celebrating this new law simply don't know what they're talking about (as per usual).

Rather than focusing on banning triple talaq, the focus should be on bad cultural attitudes toward divorce that are not a part of Islam. Why should a woman be seen as a *persona non grata* simply because she is a divorcee? Why should her family or the community shun her or see her in a bad light? This is not right. Divorce happens. It is unfortunate, but that is life and that is why Allah has made it permissible out of His wisdom. Do people think they know better than Allah?

It is not the Islamic tradition and its *fiqh* that need to be reformed. Yes, triple talaq is an abuse of the husband's right of talaq, but the *fiqh* has inbuilt deterrent against it, viz., making the divorce final. But any right given in the Sharia can be abused. For example, a woman's right to *nafaqa* (maintenance) can be and is abused by some Muslim

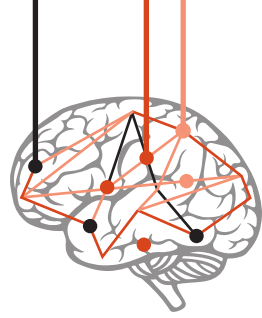
women, who basically gouge their husbands financially. The right to *mahr* can be and is also abused by asking for exorbitant *mahr*. Does this mean we dissolve a Muslim woman's right to *nafaqa* and *mahr*? Doing so would mean dissolving Islamic marriage itself. Same with reforming or banning the right of talaq for men.

In reality, what needs to be reformed and excised is attitudes towards divorce that have been borrowed from Hinduism and Christianity.

May Allah allow us to be true guardians and protectors of our Muslim mothers, daughters, and sisters by following the Quran, Sunnah, and its scholarly tradition, not by reforming and ignoring those sources of guidance.

NB: I know that a small minority of scholars considered triple talaq at one time as one talaq and I know some contemporary scholars use this position for their fatawa. The above is not trying to argue about the fiqh. Rather the concern is with how traditional fiqh is misunderstood and how that misunderstanding leads to mistaken calls for reform of Islam.

CHAPTER 6



HIJAB

WHAT IS OPPRESSIVE ABOUT HIJAB REQUIREMENTS IN SOME MUSLIM COUNTRIES? ---

Question What is oppressive about the mandatory hijab requirements for women in some Muslim countries?

Answer It is oppressive because women can't wear whatever they want. They don't have the ability to choose.

Question But is there any country in the world that allows people to wear whatever they want, i.e., unlimited choice?

Answer Yes, Western countries of course!

Question In these Western countries, can a person walk around in public with his genitals exposed?

Answer Well, no.

Question So would requiring her to cover herself be oppressive according to your definition of oppression? Wouldn't this mean that, in these countries, a person can't always choose?

Answer No, because exposing one's genitals violates principles of decency and civility. It's very different from exposing one's hair.

Question Who decided that exposing one particular area of the body (genitalia) violates decency and civility and exposing another part of the body (hair) is perfectly acceptable?

Answer Uh, that's just what is normal.

Question Who decided that? What is that based on? Where does such an idea even come from?

Answer Uh...

Question Are you not aware of the hundreds of cultures and societies past and present that draw the lines differently, that have different conceptions of nudity, that have different standards of decency, etc.?

Answer Uh...

Question Do you have any principled basis to appeal to, to at least try to justify why Western standards should be the default around the world, and even in Muslim countries?

Answer Uh...

You see, Islamic standards of public dress are based on Divine commands. What should or should not be covered comes from what Allah has commanded, and insofar as we believe in Allah, we follow that guidance and strive to understand the larger cosmic significance and wisdom of those commands. Others might not believe in any of this, but at least Muslims have some reasoning that follows higher principles.

But the Western standards of dress imposed on all are based on nothing more than cultural norms, and cultural norms have no principled basis. They ultimately boil down

to, “This is just what we do,” or “This is what we found our forefathers doing and we just follow them because that’s what is comfortable.” There’s nothing more to it.

Yet, they are so confident and so militant when it comes to their views on dress, views that are ultimately based on nothing. But our views are based on the firmest foundation, yet we easily cave in and throw it away for the sake of meaningless clichés about “choice” and “freedom,” clichés that fall apart with the slightest bit of scrutiny.

NB: The above does not constitute “the reason” a Muslim woman should wear hijab. It is, rather, the response to a very specific and very common argument made against Islam and Muslim societies, namely that they are oppressive, irrational, and do not respect the freedom of choice.

PRODUCTIVE WAYS TO DISCUSS THE HIJAB —————

Do we have a problem with countries that ban people from wearing KKK garb or Nazi uniforms or Confederate flags in public? Hopefully not. But what if the people of a country — like France — feel about the hijab how we feel about KKK, Nazi, and Confederate dress?

This is not speculation. This is more or less what secularists in France, Germany, and elsewhere argue, namely that the hijab represents to them the worst kind of oppression and it doesn’t matter what Muslims say the hijab means any more than what neo-Nazis say the swastika means. All that matters is what the hijab *symbolizes to them*, and to their society at large.

Muslims should contest that characterization. But that would have to involve something more substantive than

“I should have the freedom to wear whatever I want.” That argument is certainly not going to move anyone, much less disabuse the secularists of their negative attitudes toward the hijab.

Insisting that the “hijab is a choice” is equally ineffective since the secularists don’t really disagree: they believe the hijab is part of a larger system of patriarchal oppression and that Muslim women are so steeped in that system that they don’t even realize that they are being subjugated by means of veil despite their conscious choice to wear it.

So how else could Muslims engage in a productive dialogue with non-Muslims about the hijab? Using the example of the Virgin Mary when speaking to Christians is an obvious choice.

We should draw on other historical examples. Modern bare-all dress, after all, is a recent aberration. We should discuss the effects of nudity and the sexualization of public spaces on people’s behavior and their psychologies (i.e., their hearts and minds).

What about the significance of covering up and adorning oneself with fabric being uniquely human? Muslims of course draw on our knowledge of Adam and Eve, but even secularists have to admit that animals don’t cover in the same way. Animals don’t use fabric to hide the body and obfuscate its contours. Secularists certainly celebrate human reason, which is another distinguishing factor that sets humanity apart from the animal kingdom. Covering the body ought to be understood similarly, as a mark of humanity.

But even if secularists want to invoke naturalism and claim that “nudity is more natural” as demonstrated by

the animals kingdom, we should consider how even that is not exactly the case. Look at mating rituals and how males and females will adorn themselves and will participate in intricate dances and movements to attract the other. Even for animals, mating is not some brute affair of two naked bodies coming in contact and copulating. No, even animals take each other's "clothes" very seriously: coloration, thickness of fur, intricacy of pigmentation pattern, etc. Even animals are concerned with externalities and form in a deliberate and even sophisticated way. And there are more than a few species where the female in particular will hide herself from males and make herself scarce so that the males have to work extra hard to "prove themselves" in order to win over their better half. But apparently, some humans think that stripping down to their skin or baring their bodies in other ways, taking pictures of said bodies, and "matching" on a smart phone dating app is all that is necessary and desirable before exposing themselves to intimacy and all its vulnerabilities.

And what about futurism? If you look at the cusp of experimental fashion, you will see much that is reminiscent of the hijab. Certainly women covering the face and hair is a part of some of these fashions. If Western culture and society is continuously advancing, undoubtedly the styles of today will be obsolete tomorrow. Such is the endless march of "progress," we are told. If women today are inclined to skimpier outfits and brandishing their hair, it serves to reason that preferences will shift and the trend will reverse. In which case, Muslim dress is hardly out of place in that wider context.

These are just brief examples, but each one has the potential to lead to thought-provoking discussions about

the significance and meaning of dress, and as I keep saying, that's the level of discussion that needs to happen: on the level of meaning and values. Invoking empty notions like "freedom of choice" forestalls that discussion, sabotages it, and puts Muslims in a losing position. Time to change our strategy.

THE FRENCH AND THE HIJAB

You have to admire the French. They have strong views about what parts of the body should and should not be covered.

Muslims used to have strong views about what parts of the body should and should not be covered.

The French base their views on some vague, baseless metaphysical notions of human dignity and, of course, a rejection of God. But their conviction is unmatched.

Muslims base their views on their commitment to God, His laws, and the grounding of religious and spiritual ethics. But apparently all that does not inspire real conviction in some of them, at least not the conviction the French enjoy.

After all, the French are willing to stake a claim and say boldly, "This is what is proper. This is what is right."

The most some Muslims can say in response to this is, "Yeah, you're probably right. But maybe some women want to wear a veil every now and then and their choice should be respected if that's OK with you. And if not, then shame on you for not respecting their choice, boo hoo hoo."

Why should the French or anyone else respect that? They believe that the veil is fundamentally an affront to

civilization. They believe it is an abomination. There is no respect for what one finds morally detestable.

Rather than address the issue on that moral level, rather than find a backbone and make the deeper arguments that cut to the core of the issue and doggedly interrogate the assumptions and inconsistencies underlying French and Western attitudes about the human body, nudity, sex, and gender — rather than do this serious work, we are content to sit and whine about “respecting choice” and “religious freedom” and all this nonsense which is not even our vocabulary, it’s not a part of our intellectual tradition, but we use it anyway because we think others will accept it.

Newsflash. They won’t.

So a tip of the hat to the French. If only some of these Muslims had an ounce of your conviction, it would be Muslims setting standards of dress for you instead of the other way around.

FALLACIES REGARDING HIJAB

Does Hijab Have Any Affect on Sexual Harassment?

This is a common argument I hear against the utility of modest dress and the hijab, namely that “modestly dressed women, even women in full hijab, are still victims of catcalling and sexual assault. So clearly modest dress and hijab have no impact in protecting women from sexual harassment.”

But this is a flawed argument because no one claims that dressing modestly will completely foreclose on the possibility of receiving negative attention. The claim is

simply that, all else being equal, modest dress, e.g., hijab, significantly reduces the likelihood of such harassment.

So, yes, while women in hijab are, unfortunately, frequent victims of catcalling in Cairo's busy streets, for example, the undeniable fact remains that the harassment would be much, much worse if these same women were dressed in yoga pants, tank tops, and other common Western styles.

And it helps that the relevant ayah is clear on its own:

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. *That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.*”

Al-Ahzab [Q33:59]

THERE IS NO PRACTICAL PURPOSE FOR THE HIJAB —

Person A: I am done with seat-belts. They're a waste of time.

Person B: What? Are you crazy?!

Person A: Not at all. Wearing a seat-belt is just symbolic, an empty ritual, some would even say a “performance of piety” to show the world how much you abide by arbitrary laws sent down to us from on high. And while some people choose to undertake that performance — and I respect their choice — I choose to forego it.

Person B: Well, yeah, you can describe it like that but that doesn't mean seat-belts are useless. They serve an important practical purpose.

Person A: Ha! Like what?

Person B: For starters, they protect you from getting hurt in a car accident.

Person A: That's ridiculous. Did you know that some people wear seat-belts and still get injured when they get into a car wreck? Some people even die despite wearing a seat-belt. Clearly seat-belts are useless and do absolutely nothing to protect you.

Person B: ...what? Just because a seat-belt doesn't magically save you from any and all harm, doesn't mean it's useless.

Person A: Sorry, but you're wrong. I know plenty of people who were wearing a seat-belt and still got injured. Some of these people were even driving in countries where wearing seat-belts is very common. Can you believe that?

Person B: You're making a logical error. Just because a seat-belt does not and cannot protect you 100% doesn't mean that it provides no protection at all. All else being equal, wearing the seat-belt significantly reduces the possibility of injury and death.

Person A: Stop shaming non-seat-belt wearers! If I am driving without a seat-belt and I get hit by a drunk driver and I get seriously injured or die, that's the drunk driver's fault, not mine. Stop it with your disgusting victim blaming!

Person B: ...what? Obviously the drunk driver is at fault, but that has nothing to do with wearing a seat-belt. The fact that there are crazy, irresponsible people in the world doesn't take anything away from the practicality of wearing a seat-belt. In fact, the existence of those irresponsible people makes wearing a seat-belt all the more essential from a practical perspective.

Person A: GAH! I'm done with your seatbelt-splaining! You disgust me!

Person B: ...uh...

Person A: Just another example of seat-belt wearer's privilege, smugly judging those of us who want to exercise our free choice about what we wear while driving. This is EXACTLY what is wrong with the world today.

Person B: I don't mean to offend you. Actually, if you look in your car's owners manual, even the car manufacturers themselves say you need to wear a seat-belt to prevent injury. Are the car manufacturers being smug and insensitive too?

Person A: That's just YOUR biased, seat-belt wearing interpretation of the owners manual. We need a non-seat-belt wearers interpretation of the owners manual. Stop pretending like you have EXCLUSIVE right to interpret the owners manual because you DON'T.

Person B: I don't think the owners manual is ambiguous on this-

Person A: THAT'S ENOUGH! You have NO idea what it is like to be me and what I have been through while driving my car, so you have a lot of NERVE telling me whether or not I should wear a seat-belt. And to make matters worse, you want to shame me into silence with the owners manual! Do you even own a car?

Person B: No, but I don't see how that changes...

Person A: WOW, you're not even a car owner but you want to lecture ME on seat-belts! Do yourself a favor and SHUT UP!

Thus concludes yet another productive discussion on hijab and sexual harassment.

By the way, here is the relevant passage from our "owners manual":

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. *That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused.* And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.”

Al-Ahzab [Q33:59]

HIJAB AND EMPOWERMENT CLICHES ---

Is wearing the hijab empowering? When Muslim feminists say this, they explain it by appealing to the notion of choice. A Muslim woman is empowered because she can choose to dress as she wants. The choice is what confers the power. But if this is what is meant by empowerment, then if a woman chooses to dress in a bikini or something else, that would be equally empowering since it is based on her choice.

Is it any wonder that young Muslim girls who have been raised on this notion of empowerment choose to forego the hijab entirely? Why bother with the hijab when what is

important is choice and feeling empowered? You can feel really empowered wearing fashionable clothes, looking sexy, getting guys to notice you. That feels a lot more empowering to the average woman or teen girl in our society than covering up, getting stared at by people, etc.

So let's drop the "empowerment" cliches please because, even if it did make sense to some people at some point, at the end of the day, it has done a lot more harm than good.

What is amazingly ironic is that, if we really want to talk about hijab in terms of empowerment, there is a very obvious and compelling way to do so. As it turns out, covering yourself, hiding in plain sight, shielding yourself from public view is universally understood as empowering. Think of the CIA, MI6, and other secret, covert agencies. A large part of their power comes from being out of public view and being hidden.

The most powerful people of the world stay out of public view. They avoid the tabloids and the photo ops. The US Supreme Court judges, for example, are notoriously private. Many of the meetings between the world's richest people and politicians happen behind closed doors.

And this is not something new. Sultans and kings of the past made an art out of avoiding the gaze of the commoner. To be seen by regular people was seen as diminishing to one's status. If they had no choice but to travel through common streets, some Ottoman sultans would even don the veil to avoid being seen. This is not unlike modern politicians and rulers riding in their black limos with tinted windows.

But for some reason, people today think that baring it all for all to see is what is empowering. How foolish. How

contrary to common sense. Not only do they uncover their bodies, they even display the intimate details of their private lives. Social media makes it increasingly easy to let strangers into your home. This is the opposite of empowering. This is enslaving yourself to the eyes of others. Instead of controlling the information people have about you, you give it away for free, handing them the key to your soul.

All societies understand the value of privacy but this is a concept that has been thoroughly eroded for us today due to the influence of corrupt ideologies like feminism. Seen in this light, we can reflect on a possible wisdom of the hijab. Women, as opposed to men, certainly have more that can be coveted, though men have much to hide as well. But women ultimately have more information to hide, so to speak. They are more vulnerable to the predatory gaze of others, whether those of men or even women. This is just due to the qualities Allah has given women. So given these assets, should women just give away everything for free? They could, but that would be contrary to reason and common sense. Not only would it be a major lost opportunity, it would also make them vulnerable to harm in a thousand different ways.

Fact of the matter is, women in the past understood the high value of not being available for public view and they leveraged this power for their personal ends, whether social, financial, familial, or even political. But modern academics and researchers simplistically think, “Those poor powerless, voiceless Muslim women and their veils. How degrading. How oppressive. What a tragedy!” Little do they know that they’re the ones living a tragedy.

And of course, we know that the ultimate reason one wears hijab is to be obedient to Allah and follow His Commands with devotion and sincerity. Allah knows best.

“HIJAB IS ABOUT CHOICE” AND OTHER CONFUSIONS

It is baseless and empty for Muslim women to talk about the hijab by endlessly invoking the concept of “choice.” In what sense does anyone “choose” his clothes?

Western women naively believe their wardrobes to be a function of free and independent choice, yet, despite that belief, the vast majority of garb “coincidentally” falls within the narrow bounds of current fashion and the diktats of Versace, Chanel, and an interminable supply of “hot or not” lists Western women follow with a fervent *taqlid* that would make the most fastidious Sufi murids seem delinquent.

If the way women in society dress were purely a function of independent choice, we would see widely varying styles, widely varying parts of the body exposed and covered, widely varying sources for those clothes, etc. But we don’t see that in Western society. We see relative uniformity in every way. Women (and men, too, obviously) in society tend to dress alike, abiding by shared notions of nudity, shared notions of what is appropriate, what is fashionable, etc. A big part of the uniformity is that the majority of people get their clothes from the same retail outlet chains.

Sure, colors might vary, cuts, and fabrics might vary, but it’s the same basic themes shared by all, yet people are under the impression that what they wear is “by choice.” Really, it’s nothing but an overexaggerated sense

of individualism. Sure, you might have chosen the kind of blouse to wear, but, in the larger sense, you didn't choose to cover your chest. You didn't choose the retail stores in your area. You didn't choose the mass distributed designs that were rolled out into those stores, etc., etc.

No matter how narrow a range of variation you give people, they will come to think of themselves as practicing agency within that narrow range. Given how obsessed Western society is with choice and individuality, this is inevitable.

You have an army of women with the same yoga pants, ugly boots, black jackets, wearing the same cheap accessories, wearing the same low-quality perfume from the same mass distributors, coloring their faces with the same chemicals, in the same patterns, and telling Muslim women in hijab that they are oppressed, lack agency, lack freedom of choice, etc.

And you have those same Muslim women writing op-eds, speaking out in interviews, pleading that they do indeed have a choice, just like their non-Muslim, non-veiled counterparts. GAH!

STOP SAYING DUMB THINGS ABOUT HIJAB

Unfortunately, everything Muslims today say and write about hijab is polluted with distortions and misconceptions that occlude the meaning, purpose, and significance of the veil.

The stark reality is the hijab cannot be defended by feminism. The hijab has nothing to do with “women’s liberation” or “women’s choice” or “women’s empowerment”

or “objectification,” or any of these modern philosophical concepts that are not only external to the Islamic worldview but were historically defined in opposition to the Islamic worldview as a means to attack it.

See, when someone says we should reject orthodox Islam because orthodox Islam is not compatible with feminism, our response should not be some strained attempt to show how Islam is indeed feminist and all Muslims are feminists and the Quran is feminist, etc., etc., ad nauseam.

Our response ought to be to ask, why should anyone care about feminism? It should then be followed a thorough intellectual critique of feminism, showing what a base, destructive, inconsistent, and incoherent philosophy it really is, and how despite its claim to further the interests of women, it actually undermines those interests and has done immeasurable damage to the female condition and the human condition in our times. That would be a principled response, but it would be politically incorrect, I guess, so never mind. Wouldn't want to offend anyone, right?

NON-MUSLIMS LOVE BURKINIS, BUT WHY? —————

Explaining Islam using the vocabulary of liberalism is, at best, counterproductive. Saying that something is “freeing” or “liberating” is an empty claim because anything and everything can be conceived by someone as liberating. Some people feel liberated by X and others feel liberated by Y. It's entirely subjective, so you're not saying anything meaningful by resorting to these empty terms (especially when people's understanding of liberty is so heavily influenced by contemporary cultural sensibilities and

hence they aren't inclined to believe Muslims when they say the hijab or whatever else is liberating or empowering, etc.). It is especially counterproductive for us as Muslims to use this vocabulary because there is so much meaning to convey in our deen and our tradition. Why don't we tap into that expansive, deep reservoir of meaning to talk to our neighbors, our friends, our family? Why do we insist on scraping the shallow puddle of liberalism instead?

HOW NOT TO ARGUE AGAINST THE BURKINI BAN —

When Muslims argue against the “burkini ban” or “hijab bans” on grounds of “freedom of choice,” they are being inconsistent.

All societies regulate dress and impose standards of dress in one way or another. They might not always do it through explicit laws banning garment X or mandating garment Y. Most often it is done through social pressure.

For example, the reason some Muslim women in the West decide to take off the hijab is due to social pressure. By wearing the hijab, they feel like fish out of water. They feel the stares from strangers and it makes them uncomfortable. Maybe they have secular relatives that bug them about it and pressure them to not wear it. Little things like that accumulate until they decide to take off the hijab or change their dress in other ways to conform to social standards. In this way, society controls how people dress and when it comes to Muslim garb, this pressure is quite powerful and relentless.

So this whole notion of “free choice” makes no sense in context of these powerful social pressures. People might

experience their choices as self-generated even though the truth of the matter is that people typically choose from the limited options social circumstances allow.

But that is not the point I want to make here. The point I want to make is that Muslims, too, should want to exert social control. In the ideal society of a Muslim, dressing according to Allah's standards is the norm. And even if in this ideal society there are no overt dress codes enforced by the law akin to what you find in some Muslim countries, there is still going to be social pressure of a religious bent. In that ideal society, the women in the bikinis and tight skirts are the fish out of water and they will feel the pressure to dress like everyone else around them, even if there weren't any dress code laws to penalize them. In this way, Islamic religious norms would be imposed in much the same way Western standards of dress are imposed today.

So what is the ideal society Muslims envision? Is it not the society of the Prophet ﷺ? Even if we suppose that the early Muslims abided by a strict secularism and did not have overt regulations policing the dress of Muslims and non-Muslims in public like we find in some Muslim countries today, we still know that the majority of people in that society dressed conservatively according to Islamic norms. And wouldn't those norms put a lot of pressure on everyone, Muslims and non-Muslims, to dress similarly? Wouldn't that amount to social control and religious imposition, i.e., exactly the kind of imposition secularism and these freedom of choice arguments eschew?

The only way to avoid that inconsistency is to either deny the validity of the freedom of choice arguments and stop

using them when convenient, or to deny that the societies ruled by the Prophet ﷺ and the Sahaba were ideal.

Put it another way. The kind of society that is implied by a commitment to freedom of choice does not exist, cannot exist even in theory. And if it could exist, it would not look like the kind of society Muslims value and aspire to. For these reasons, freedom of choice should not be invoked whenever hijab or other aspects of Islamic garb come under fire.

Consistency is important.

WEARING HIJAB AS DISOBEDIENCE

In a recent BBC documentary about Islam and women, a young Muslim woman (who wears hijab) was asked whether hijab is a form of oppression.³⁴ Her response was absolutely chilling:

“For someone to tell me I have to wear the hijab, if someone tells me to do that, I’m taking my hijab off. If you’re going to force me to wear the hijab, I’m taking it off. I wear this out of love, this is my identity, this is something that I love and I wouldn’t even say that I do it because my God tells me to do it. Everything that my God tells me to do, He gives me a choice, I’m doing it because [I] want to do it and I love it. It’s part of my religion and I own it.”

The scary thing is, many younger Muslims will not understand why this is so objectionable. They will not recognize the kufr implied in a statement like this.

34. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/taster/pilots/my-hijab-and-me>

This is the subtle corrosive power of liberalism that deeply affects people without them even realizing it. How could you think, “If God tells me to do something, I won’t do it”? Well, it makes sense if you have been indoctrinated. If you are forced to do something, then that takes away from your “autonomy.” It takes away from your ability to “freely choose.” And anything that reduces your freedom and liberty in this way is evil. To take away your ability to choose is to take away from your identity, from who you are. “And what could be worse than that?” asks the young Muslim who is steeped in the social-justice-warrior infused identity politics of the age, promoted by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The sticking point is here:

But doesn’t God command us to do certain things and prohibit us from other things? And aren’t there steep consequences for not submitting and obeying to God? This is precisely what force and coercion are!

It is through this line of reasoning that those Muslims affected by liberalism face two options. Option 1: God is evil (*wa na`udhu billah*) or, Option 2: God is not evil, but God doesn’t command us or prohibit us in anything either.

Both options are *kufur*.

The way out of this dilemma is to critique liberalism and to deconstruct concepts like freedom, autonomy, coercion, etc.

FEMINISM AND HIJAB (OR THE DANGERS OF UNCRITICALLY ADOPTING MODERNIST DISCOURSE)

The way we dress (or undress) can negatively impact others. Both Islamic ethics and secular law acknowledge this.

Islamically, for example, we know that the gaze affects the heart and mind. If society is saturated with images of people in a state of undress and the streets are full of men and women flaunting their bodies, this leads to corruption and widespread *fasad*.

But even secular culture recognizes the negative consequences of such nudity. This is proven by the fact that schools and other institutions maintain strict dress codes. Also, all countries have indecent exposure laws. And there have even been numerous scientific studies expounded on the psychological and neurological harms of pornography.

The point of all this is to show that: Yes, your clothes matter and it is wrong and deeply destructive for feminists to claim that “women can dress or undress however they want and no one has the right to tell them otherwise.” Yes, people do have that right to tell women how to dress. In fact Western governments exercise that right to tell women (and men) how to dress when it comes to what they define as “indecent exposure.” So, if Western governments exercise that right, why can’t Islamic law? It’s the same underlying principle, except that what Western society considers “indecent” is not exactly what Islamic law considers as such. What Western society considers indecent is highly influenced by changing culture. In contrast, Islamic standards are based on the timeless wisdom of the Creator

of human beings, who knows our nature and knows what is truly beneficial or harmful.

Consider the Quranic on the issue of women's dress:

“O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

Al-Ahzab [Q33:59]

One of the central purposes of covering is spelled out very clearly in this verse: To avoid molestation and harassment.

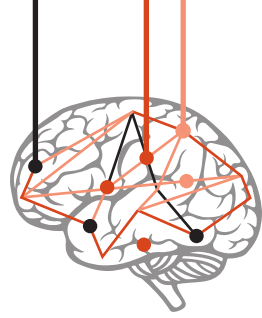
Here we see the wisdom of hijab, how it is objectively beneficial, how it is rational and most conducive to justice on the personal and societal level. Contrary to what modernist Muslims seem to believe, hijab is not an empty ritual with only symbolic significance. It is secular thought that wants to portray the hijab as a mere cultural fossil with no moral relevance at best, and as an impractical tool of oppression by men and nothing else at worst. It is a secular mindset to equate the hijab and the bikini and say that they are both equally expressions of women's freedom because they both represent a woman's choice and therefore her empowerment. No, hijab is practically, rationally, and morally superior. Be proud of that instead of repeating stale cliches about “the power of choice.”

Do you not believe that Allah has commanded the hijab for a purpose, a wisdom, and the benefit of humanity? If so, then you should reject the modernist claim that it is a good thing for people to expose their bodies. You

should reject the idea that everyone has a right to expose themselves to their own liking. You should believe that there is a practical benefit for hijab in the same way that there is a practical benefit that we readily recognize in avoiding alcohol, gambling, pork, etc. Obviously, if you live in a non-Muslim society, there's hardly ever a possibility of "imposing" these beliefs on others. But that doesn't mean you cannot believe that these injunctions are the most correct, just, and beneficial for all of humanity and that the way things are done all around us is detrimental and the cause of corruption and suffering. Cherishing and nurturing this belief is important if, among other things, we want our children to observe proper hijab in the future. If we don't believe that hijab has this practical benefit, there is little chance many in the next generation will feel the need to adopt what they will see as empty symbolic gestures or cultural relics of a prior, unenlightened generation. Indeed, this is what we see today, not only among the youth but also the previous few generations. If you look at our condition, Muslim women today are leaving the hijab en masse. Why is that? And this is not just to say that it is Muslim women who are at fault or to blame anyone who does not wear hijab. No, we are all responsible and we are all struggling. But let's struggle with clear-mindedness.

O Muslims, throw away the empty cliches and open your eyes.

CHAPTER 7



SCIENCE & SCIENTISM

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SCIENTIFIC MIRACLES IN THE QURAN

Do a Google search on “scientific miracles in the Quran” and you will get millions of results, including web pages, videos, and images. It is not surprising that, as Muslims, we would be keen to have our holy book validated by the dominant epistemic channel of the day, i.e., science. For the vast majority of the world’s population, regardless of race, ethnicity, or creed, science is synonymous with truth, and, if a religious book is truly from God, then it ought to be compatible with science.

By this reasoning, what clearer evidence could there be of the divine origin of the Quran than the fact that it miraculously contains foreknowledge of scientific matters that could not have been known 1400 years ago? While this sounds appealing and sensible, we should step back and clear up some confusions.

Misconception 1: “Science and the Quran never conflict.”

Some Muslims claim that the Quran is 100% “scientifically accurate.” Again, it is easy to understand why Muslims would say this. Science is seen as a perfect representation of reality and the Quran is the speech of the One who created that reality. Therefore, logically, there should be perfect accord between the two.

The problem with this, however, is that science is not a perfect representation of reality. You do not have to be a Kuhnian postmodernist to accept this. Even the scientific community acknowledges that much of science is provisional in nature, meaning that science is always updating and evolving as new facts are discovered.

For example, the most scientifically robust theory we have today is Quantum Field Theory (QFT). Yet, physicists believe that QFT is either completely false or, at best, an imperfect approximation of a more complete, more accurate theory (one that can take into account the force of gravity).

Few, if any, scientists today would claim that they know the absolute truth in their field of research. (Scientists with a Popperian bent might even say science can never know the truth 100% but only disconfirm competing hypotheses.) In short, science is incomplete, and often it is wrong. What scientists hold as fact one day is often overturned the next.

As a concrete example, physicists in the early twentieth century believed that the universe was in a steady state of infinite size and age. Only in the 1930s did scientists begin to seriously consider a Big Bang theory of the development

of the cosmos. Of course, the idea of an eternal universe contradicts the Quran, which describes a finite point of Creation. Had Muslims in the early 1900s, for example, decided to reinterpret the relevant verses of the Quran in order to accommodate the eternal steady-state model of the universe that was in vogue at the time, they would have had to backtrack three or four decades later when the Big Bang theory was popularized. In the same light, how can we be sure that the contemporary science used by some to reinterpret Quran and Islamic theology today will not similarly be overturned in three or four decades' time? Given the tumultuous history of science, this is much more likely than not.

In the end, contrary to what some may mistakenly believe, science is not a perfect representation of reality, at least not today and perhaps never. Given the perfection of Allah's speech, it would be inappropriate to make broad pronouncements on the Quran's compatibility with something man-made, like science, which is inherently imperfect, tenuous, and constantly in flux.

Does this mean that we should not reflect on the Quran and ponder verses in light of different ideas found in science? Of course we can. Some Muslims certainly experience a boost in their iman by doing this and that should not be undermined. But, ultimately, the concern is when that personal reflection turns into a tafsir that one shares with others or, worse, becomes a broader philosophy about "the Quran and science." This is problematic because, like any reflection on the Quran, publicly interpreting the Quran ought to follow the well-established norms of exegesis, i.e., tafsir, and adab with the Divine Address. We should heed the profound words of Allah's Messenger ﷺ:

“Whoever speaks of the Book of Allah from his own opinion is in error, even if correct.”³⁵

Misconception 2: “The Quran is not a science textbook.”

This is true, of course. The Quran is certainly not a science textbook. But, when some Muslims make this claim, they implicitly mean something else.

As we have seen, there are Muslims who overemphasize the compatibility of science and the Quran, claiming that science and the Quran never conflict. On the other hand, of the Muslims who declare that “the Quran is not a science textbook,” some of them mean to say that the Quran (and religion, in general) have nothing to say about the world at large. To borrow the term used by biologist Stephen Jay Gould, these Muslims believe science and religion to occupy “non-overlapping magisteria,” i.e., distinct and separate domains of authority and applicability. In other words, science’s authority lies in answering questions about the world around us while religion’s authority lies in answering questions about morality, spirituality, and the “meaning of it all,” and neither should meddle in the business of the other.

This, however, is a mischaracterization as far as the Quran is concerned for the simple reason that the Quran speaks about the world around us at length. It is true that the Quran does not use modern scientific language. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the Quran is replete with statements about the world and history. Some choice examples:

35. Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi

1. The createdness of the universe.
2. The existence of Angels and their activity in the world.
3. The existence of Jinn and their activity in the world.
4. The ability for consciousness to exist without a body or brain (in other words, the existence of the immaterial soul).
5. The resurrection of organisms after death and bodily decomposition.
6. The existence of Heaven and Hell.
7. The Night Journey and Ascension.
8. The various prophetic miracles (e.g., splitting of the moon, parting of the sea, raising the dead, etc.).
9. The extraordinarily long lives of certain persons (e.g., Nuh, the youth of the cave) [29:14, 18:11].
10. The Throne and Footstool of the Almighty.
11. The seven heavens (e.g., [65:12] and many others).
12. The rejection of the amana, or moral trust, by the heavens, earth, and mountains [33:72].
13. The creatures singing praises of their Lord and communicating with prophets.
14. The creation of Adam in Paradise.
15. The capabilities of Sulayman.
16. The existence of Magic and the “Evil Eye.”
17. The existence of life in the grave.
18. The annihilation of certain peoples by God due to their unrepentant criminality.
19. The reality of barakah, or blessing/sanctity.

These examples were deliberately chosen to contrast with modern science and history. It should be noted that many verses in the Quran also mention everyday phenomena like rainfall, the development of the human embryo, the movement of celestial bodies, etc.

Reading these verses and many others like them, what should Muslims living in this scientific age conclude? Are all these verses — all of which, on a plain reading, conflict with modern science — just colorful metaphors and fables intended to be understood purely for their moral/spiritual import? (Hopefully most Muslims do not believe this.) Or, perhaps, all these verses refer to miracles and/or the Ghayb (i.e., “Unseen”) and, therefore, remain outside the domain of science and empirical knowledge? Or some combination thereof?

Clearly, not all listed things fall under the heading of “miraculous.” And, it is questionable whether everything falls under the broad heading of the Ghayb. It is a common assumption among modern Muslims that the boundaries demarcating the Ghayb perfectly coincide with the limits of empirical science, which is all too convenient given the overarching belief in non-overlapping magisteria.

To put it another way, it would be an amazing coincidence if the classical Islamic categories of *ghayb* (“the unseen”) and *hiss* (roughly, “the perceptible”) for example, perfectly aligned with modern Western notions of the “empirical” and “scientific observation.” For example, would subatomic particles like the Higgs boson be considered part of the Ghayb in the same way that jinn are Unseen? Certainly, the Higgs boson is invisible to all our senses, and only recently has data from particle colliders provided hints of

its existence. But, no eye has ever seen the Higgs boson, and, as a matter of fact, no eye ever will.

The difficulty in categorizing such entities is revealing of the underlying problem. We lack a consistent categorization to apply across all entities, a *principled* categorization that is consistent with classical understandings but also accommodates modern science. I emphasize “principled” because simply stipulating that “whatever is invisible to modern science is de facto Ghayb” is toothless. This is because science, again, is continuously changing. What once was invisible to science may not be in the future. And, we would think that categorizing an entity as Unseen has to do with the inherent nature of the entity itself rather than merely being contingent on what random scientists are doing in their field at any given time!

Of course, I would not attempt to formulate such a categorization scheme myself, nor do I have an interest in doing so. We can leave that to qualified theologians.

That being said, what I see as important here is that, when we read the Quran, we realize that we are learning a great deal about the fundamental nature of the universe. In fact, we learn much more significant and penetrating facts than science could ever produce.

My observation is that, living in modern times, many Muslims do not viscerally feel the reality of the things on this list in the same way they feel the reality of entities acknowledged by science, even when the latter are as far removed from their daily experience as heaven, hell, miracles, etc.

For example, you have Muslims who have no science education, have never read a scientific paper in their

lives, have never been to a science lab, yet have utmost conviction (*yaqin*) in, say, the theory of evolution or the reality of atoms, while having less than *yaqin* when it comes to angels, jinn, the *barzakh*, etc. The aim here is not to impeach the value of science or question its legitimacy. Nonetheless, such attitudes we increasingly find in the Ummah are symptomatic of the fractured nature of modern Muslim ontology and epistemology.

So, what is the takeaway message? Ultimately, we must do away with the notion of non-overlapping magisteria. As we have seen, the Quran contains vast amount of knowledge regarding the universe and how it works. As soon as we say that only science has the epistemological authority to describe the world in which we live, realities detailed in the Quran wittingly or unwittingly take a back seat in our minds, relegated to a lower level of veridicality than entities sanctioned by science. It is not difficult to imagine the deeply negative spiritual consequences that can result from this.

Practically speaking, we should personally strive to internalize the revelatory thrust of the Quran (and Sunnah), to cultivate that visceral sense of “realness” and *yaqin* when we read, for example, that there is a personage actively trying to sabotage and conspire against us (Iblis) or that the mountains, the heavens, the earth, and everything in them (i.e., everything around us in day to day life, even if inanimate and seemingly unconscious) sing the praises of Allah (34:10, 17:44) or that everything that happens to us, no matter how miniscule or quotidian, happens because of Allah’s willing it so.

DO ISLAM AND SCIENCE EVER CONFLICT? YES. —

Many modern Muslims believe that “science and Islam can never contradict.” In other words, nothing in revelation (i.e., the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (s)) could ever contravene what we know of the world through science. At first blush, this seems logical. We can expect that man-made texts, especially those from antiquity, will contradict natural facts, since people of the past were ignorant of the scientific method. But the source of revelation, in contrast, is the All-Knowing Creator Himself who also created the universe. Therefore, no contradiction is possible.

The flaw in this logic is that it ignores the fallible nature, not of religious texts, but of... science. Scientific consensus is an ever-evolving discourse. What scientists hold as fact one day may be overturned the next. As an example, physicists in the early twentieth century believed that the universe was infinite in size and age. Only in the 1930s did scientists begin to seriously consider a Big Bang theory of the development of the cosmos. Of course, the idea of an eternal universe contradicts the theologies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which all posit a finite point of Creation. Had Muslims in the early 1900s, for example, decided to reinterpret their theology in order to accommodate the eternal steady-state model of the universe that was in vogue at the time, they would have had to backtrack a mere three or four decades later.

To reiterate, science is not always correct in its representation of the universe. In fact, historically, it is often wrong. Furthermore, scientists themselves acknowledge the provisional nature of science in that their research is

perpetually a “work in progress” and subject to change. Therefore, Islam’s incompatibility with some contemporary scientific contentions, such as evolution, is not problematic in the least. In fact, as far as we are concerned, it should be entirely expected. The Quran provides us with timeless truths describing, in many verses, the magnificence of creation, truths relayed by the Creator Himself with His perfect knowledge. It is expected that imperfect human knowledge, as represented by scientific discourse, will fail to match the Divine Address.

THERE IS NO “PLURALISM” IN SCIENCE ---

When it comes to certain fields, there is no such concept as pluralism. In science, for example, it is assumed that there is only one right answer. Sure, there can be multiple competing theories, but ultimately one theory is assumed to be the correct one and it is the job of scientists to investigate, to debate, to analyze, to carefully consider, and to work to come to that answer.

In contrast, today we are not taught to think of any given religion as being right or wrong. Rather religion is about personal identity, personal feelings, what you subjectively feel to be the case. Religion is not about facts and knowledge, therefore, the reasoning goes, how can any given religion be considered “correct” or “true”? If you are coming from this “subjectivist” view of religion, then you might be prone to think that, in a sense, “all religions are true” in one way or another.

But historically, people did not have this view of religion. Religion was thought of in a similar way to how people today think of science in the sense that understanding reality

means understanding God and understanding God means understanding what God has said. It was no coincidence, then, that typically the most knowledgeable and educated people in society in the past were also the most religiously learned. It is also not a coincidence that inter-religious debates in the past happened on the theological level, e.g., Christians and Muslims debating about the nature of God, His attributes, etc., whereas today, most of the handful of inter-religious debates that happen focus on moral concerns like human rights, women's rights, tolerance, etc.

It is important to note that having an "objectivist" view of religion does not in itself contravene tolerance. For example, our present secular society has an objectivist view when it comes to science, but there is still tolerance for people who are scientifically illiterate or who may even be downright wrong about what they scientifically believe. However, present society draws the line when it comes to people's incorrect scientific beliefs harming others, where harm itself is defined according to what is considered to be the correct scientific paradigm.

A simple example is the whole vaccination debate. People can believe whatever they want about the impact of vaccines on children, but at some point, the government was given the mandate to intervene and say that children must be vaccinated, etc. This is because there was a belief that if people were allowed to pursue their incorrect beliefs past a certain point, that would have wider negative ramifications.

Perhaps we should understand Islamic tolerance in the same light. In past Islamic societies, this kind of tolerance also existed. Muslim and Islamic law's tolerance for

Christians, Jews, and their respective religious practices are well known and documented. In other words, there was room for people to be wrong from the perspective of the dominant paradigm but there were limits to that tolerance. This is something we see in present secular society as well, though things are not conceived as such.

THE REALITY OF SCIENCE

Imagine a deaf, blind person who only has his sense of touch available to learn about his surroundings. But it gets worse than that. This person can only feel his surroundings by using a needle. He holds the needle and rubs its tip over the surfaces of objects around him. The tip of that needle is his only window into the world. That tiny needle tip is his only source of information about the entire universe.

So imagine our surprise when this man tries to tell us about the nature of reality. Imagine our confusion as he explains to us what “it all means.” Imagine our amusement when he insists that the only things that exist in the world are what he can feel through his needle.

Now imagine that instead of this needle, the man has to use a small piece of thread to feel out his environment by dragging the thread over surrounding objects. That will give you an even more accurate understanding of the scope of scientific inquiry.

Consider that human beings are only privy to a very small sliver of the electromagnetic spectrum, i.e., visible light, that we perceive with our eyes. Of course, due to relatively modern technology, we can detect other kinds of electromagnetic radiation that our ancestors had no idea

about, e.g., infrared, ultraviolet, x-rays, gamma rays, etc. What makes us think that there aren't other "channels" of information or "planes of existence" that we as of yet, due to current technological limitations for example, have no idea about?

Just considering our faculties of perception, there is simply no way for us to know what we don't know. If we get lucky, we might stumble upon something. But considering the vastness of the universe (the piece of it that we even know about, at least) and the fact that even so much of our own tiny planet has yet to be explored, there is plenty to suggest that we are in the dark on a whole lot.

Now consider our mental capacity. Perception, after all, is inexorably connected to the brain's ability to "process" sensory information. And that "processing" is a prerequisite for our ability to consciously register that information. What if our brains can't "see" certain things that our sensory organs nonetheless pick up? Again, there is no way to tell for sure because we cannot, as it were, step "outside" of our brains to see what we're missing.

The ironic thing is that science itself implicitly acknowledges these extreme limitations. According to scientific consensus, after all, we are nothing but evolved apes. Our perceptual and cognitive capacities, we are told, are suited for finding edible fruit in trees and getting the best warm body to mate with. Yet, somehow those functions of day-to-day ape-hood are also amenable to probing the depths of the universe, pondering what it all means, and waxing poetic about everything from human nature to the biological origins of morality.

We should all chuckle in the face of such blind, pathetic hubris.

ISLAM AND SCIENCE IN CONFLICT: DESCRIBING REALITY

What do we make of all the verses and ahadith that seem to imply that the earth is flat or that the earth does not revolve around the sun?

Consider the ayah in Surat al-Kahf:

“Until, when [Dhul-Qarnayn] reached the setting of the sun, he found it setting in a spring of dark mud, and he found near it a people. Allah said, ‘O Dhul-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or else adopt among them [a way of] goodness.’”

Al-Kahf (Q18:86)

And the hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ said one day: ‘Do you know where the Sun goes when it sets?’ They said: ‘Allah and His Messenger know best.’ He said: ‘It goes until it arrives at its place of settlement beneath the Throne. Then it falls down in prostration and remains like that until it is said to it: ‘Arise! Go back from whence you came.’ Then it goes back and rises from its place of rising. Then it goes until it arrives at its place of settlement beneath the Throne. Then it falls down in prostration and remains like that until it is said to it: ‘Arise! Go back from whence you came.’ Then it goes back and rises from its place of rising. Then it goes without people finding

anything wrong with it until it arrives at that place of settlement it has beneath the Throne. Then it will be told: 'Arise! Enter upon the morning rising from your setting place'." Then Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: 'Do you know when that will be? It will be when 'its faith will not avail a soul which had not believed before or earned some good from its faith.'³⁶

How do we understand all this? It is easy to say that these are all 'metaphorical.' Perhaps they are in some sense, but that's too hasty. Is there any other 'recourse'?

Imagine two people have equally correct knowledge about the universe. Those two people can describe that knowledge in different ways, i.e., they can describe the universe in different ways. They can use different language, different images, different concepts to explain the same thing. Furthermore, they can use different terms *even when they are describing things literally from their individual perspectives.*

What do I mean by this? Well, a simple example is all the different terms that Bedouin Arabs have for "lion." Or all the different terms that Eskimos have for "snow." The way that an Arab talks about a lion and the way that an Eskimo talks about snow will be very different from how a zoologist or a meteorologist speaks about these things. It is not that the Arab or the Eskimo are speaking metaphorically while the zoologist/meteorologist are speaking literally. No, in this example, everyone is speaking literally but there are just certain concepts that are in the language and at the disposal of the Arab/Eskimo that are not found in the language and

36. Sahih Muslim

conceptual architecture of the zoologist/meteorologist. And vice versa.

The assumption that people nowadays tend to make is that scientific language is the language that describes things as they really are. But we don't have to accept that. In fact, we shouldn't because scientific language is always changing. I explain the significance of this below.

The second layer is this: Imagine two people where one has correct knowledge about the universe and the other doesn't but thinks he does. This adds another wrinkle. In the previous example, the Bedouin Arab relying on the accumulated knowledge of centuries and generations of Bedouins living in the environment of the lion arguably has a better understanding of lions than the foreign zoologist from outside that environment who travels to the location for a couple of months at a time, does his fieldwork, and goes back home.

And of course zoology itself is a new discipline. So the language of the Bedouins will reflect their superior knowledge. But the zoologist will not necessarily accept this. In fact, the zoologist thinks that these Bedouins are fairly ignorant and their understanding of lions pales in comparison to his. And to prove that point, he will cite the Bedouin's descriptions of the lion and claim that those descriptions are inaccurate. But on what basis can he claim that the Bedouin's description is inaccurate? He can only do so on the basis of his own knowledge, which, in this example, we have stipulated is incorrect and certainly inferior to the knowledge of the Bedouins. Nonetheless, the zoologist is confident that these Bedouins simply do not know what they are talking about.

This is the folly and pitiful arrogance of modern science. First, scientific language is assumed to be the only accurate, literal, acceptable way to describe the world. Second, science assumes it knows what the universe is really like. Both these assumptions we easily reject out of hand.

Now, to give you a taste of this, consider that most of what they teach people in school about science, astronomy, and the shapes and the motions of the earth and other celestial bodies uses a Newtonian language. Since Isaac Newton's time, physicists by the end of the nineteenth century till now have speculated that the universe is really more than 3 spatial dimensions. Einstein pioneered this way of thinking about physics when he incorporated non-Euclidean mathematics — such as Riemannian geometry — into his treatment of gravitation.

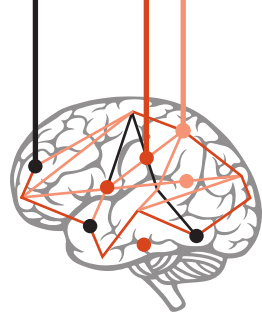
At one point in the past decade, String Theorists were even theorizing a 21-dimensional universe. Obviously, this is all speculation on their part and only Allah knows the reality. But even within the bounds of accepted theoretical physics, we can see how describing the world as “flat” or “rolling up the heavens” and so on are perfectly apt.

In 4 spatial dimensions, for example, a 3-dimensional sphere can be rolled up, just like how in 3 spatial dimensions a 2-dimensional circle can be rolled up. And so on. This goes back to my point about scientific language always changing. Part of this is because scientists' knowledge about the world, or what they purport to be knowledge at any rate, is always changing. And then their language evolves on top of that. So why should we take that language as a benchmark for judging the Words of Allah? We decidedly should not.

On a spiritual level, I really cherish the passages in the Quran and the ahadith that conflict with modern scientific understandings. Those are gems for me and provide me the most peace and boost in iman. Because those are instances where revelation from Allah is teaching me something or making me aware of something about the world that modern people and the most advanced science is not privy to (at least for the time being, perhaps). The ayat about Dhul-Qarnayn in Surat al-Kahf about, e.g., the setting place of the sun as well as the hadith cited above are really beautiful and powerful to me and there is no reason to rush to interpret them metaphorically or somehow anything less than a pure, pristine, direct description of the reality given to us by Allah, the Creator and Master of all reality.

May Allah strengthen our iman, illuminate our hearts and minds with His ayat, and fortify us against the whispering of Satan.

CHAPTER 8



LIBERALISM, LIBERAL HYPOCRISY

LIBERALISM DOESN'T SEE ANYTHING WRONG WITH INCEST

Incest is still illegal in the West. But whenever an incestuous couple is arrested, the reactions on social media represent a shift in attitudes on this despicable act:

“These are two consenting adults! They love each other and that’s all that matters! Just because it’s disgusting to us doesn’t mean it should be considered immoral, much less illegal! They are not harming anyone!”

But let’s stop and ask: Why is not harming anyone required for something to be morally permissible? What’s so bad about harming others? Sure, if we think about harming others, that might make us feel bad or even disgusted. It might cause us anger, but that doesn’t mean that it is immoral.

In moral philosophy, there is a theory of morality called emotivism. Emotivism says that our moral judgments are nothing but expressions of emotion. When we say, “X is wrong,” what that really amounts to and, hence, what it really means is just, “X makes me feel bad!” Of course,

feelings are subjective — different people can and will feel different things about X. As such, anyone who attempts to make a factual claim like, “X is wrong as a matter of fact,” as if that is universally or objectively the case is simply making a category error. As an analogy, just because I don’t like the taste of coconut, for example, that doesn’t mean that eating coconut is wrong.

There are obviously many problems with emotivism. But it is interesting how liberals use emotivism for their purposes and use it selectively. For those moral proscriptions they disagree with, liberals jump straight to emotivism, e.g., “Incest is not wrong just because it makes you feel icky.” But for those moral proscriptions that they believe in, emotivism goes out the window, e.g., “Harming others is the very essence of immorality and something that we have to use the force of law to prevent.”

The simple question is, why the selectivity? Why draw the line at this notion of “harm” (which itself is loosely defined and selectively applied)?

If you press liberals to explain why harming others is immoral, this forces them to get into the meta-ethical and metaphysical issues that they attack theists for. Either they have to dig in their heels and say it’s immoral because “it just is,” or they will just bite the bullet, reject the notion of morality in its entirety, and embrace what amounts to some form of nihilism. This can be responded to on its own terms but even absent that, to simply get a liberal to admit he is essentially a nihilist is itself a win that can be leveraged in further arguing against him.

This is how you play chess with these liberal humanists. Call them out for their atrocious selectivity and the checkmate will be close at hand.

LIBERAL MORAL "PROGRESS": THE CONSENT TABOO

Prominent atheists, like Lawrence Krauss and Richard Dawkins, have expressed their support for incest. They argue that as long as sex is between two consenting adults, then it should be permitted, even if it's between mother and son, daughter and father, or siblings with each other.

This is a familiar pattern in atheistic/secular ethics: taboo breaking. Fornication was always seen as immoral, but then secular ethics tells us that that is just an irrational taboo. Sodomy was always seen as vile, but then secular ethics tells us that that is just an irrational taboo born out of emotionality rather than reason and is therefore invalid.

And now the same thought process applies to sex with immediate family members.

But why should this habitual boundary-stomping and taboo-breaking from atheists stop there? What is stopping us from seeing the idea of consent as an irrational taboo driven by emotion? What makes consent so different from these other discarded taboos?

An atheist/secularist could argue that just like backwards people believed sodomy to be a disgusting and unnatural, ungodly act, similarly backwards people irrationally believe that sex without consent is a disgusting violation and, in both cases, there is no rational, scientific reason to abide by such outdated taboos.

Now before anyone accuses me of promoting rape, I am simply arguing on the basis of atheist morality, not my own. Does atheistic/secular morality provide a rational or scientific justification for the importance of consent? Not at all.

The vast majority of atheists today are liberals and they abide by liberal utilitarian ethics. According to utilitarianism, whatever maximizes pleasure and minimizes harm, broadly speaking, is morally good. And whatever maximizes harm and minimizes pleasure is morally evil. As they often put it, what doesn't harm others should be legal and morally permissible. This notion of harm and pleasure is implicit in all liberal arguments regarding sexuality. A taboo, according to utilitarianism, is meaningless because pleasure and harm are the ultimate determinants of morality, not whether or not people "feel icky" (as they put it).

Well, in that case, there are numerous examples of non-consensual acts that increase total pleasure and minimize harm. Consider voyeurism. A utilitarian could install a secret camera in a women's public bathroom and broadcast a live feed to millions of voyeurs around the world. Their aggregate pleasure would skyrocket, and there would be minimal harm since the women wouldn't know that they are being recorded. Their faces could also be blurred to protect their identities. Either way, the overall pleasure far outweighs the harm. An atheist could say, look, there is nothing wrong with this since no one is harmed and the net pleasure is huge, and the insistence on consent is just a backwards silly taboo that we all need to collectively get over.

If atheists and liberal secularists were consistent, they would promote this kind of voyeurism just as much as they promote incest, LGBT, etc.

This is among the many reasons atheism and secularism more broadly are nihilistic and, when taken to their ultimate conclusions, are clearly absurd and should be rejected by all rational people.

THE FAKE TOLERANCE OF LIBERALISM ---

The Liberal Charge: “You are not tolerant.”

The Translation: “You do not tolerate the precise things that I tolerate.”

One of the definitions of “tolerance” in the English language is: “An allowable amount of variation of a specified quantity, especially in the dimensions of a machine or part.”

Manufactured parts are never exactly the same. If a factory produces, say, 100,000 pistons, no two pistons will be exactly equal. There is always variation but that variation has to be within a specific tolerance. If a specific piston is beyond tolerance, it is deemed dysfunctional and has to be trashed.

Liberals pretend to be infinitely tolerant and accuse others of being intolerant when in reality their tolerance has limits. Infinite tolerance, of course, is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. The difference is liberal tolerance is ultimately based on whims and haphazard cultural beliefs whereas Islamic tolerance is based on *hikma* and guidance.

If we go back to the example of the manufactured mechanical part, if the tolerance levels are not correctly

calibrated, the resulting parts will be dysfunctional and useless. Similarly for human beings. The right kind of variation is tolerable, but not all kinds of variation can lead to a functioning, healthy human being. And who would know better about human health, function, and well-being — in the truest sense of those words — than the Creator and Maintainer of humankind?

LIBERALISM IS NOT MERELY IRRATIONAL. IT IS SHEER MADNESS

A Dubious Thesis:

Early liberal capitalist thinkers maintained the belief that acting in a self-interested fashion is to act rationally, and if everyone were to act rationally, then that is all that is needed for society as a whole to flourish.

A Really, Really Dubious Thesis:

Contemporary liberalism takes things a step further: Who's to say what rationality even consists of and what "interests" are indeed "rational" to pursue? For society to truly flourish, people should just pursue whatever makes them feel good (so long as it's all "harmless" and "consensual," of course!).

And then people wonder why the world is a mess.

LIBERAL SECULARISM'S BIGGEST DECEIT

What matters is not *what* you choose but the fact that you have a choice.

This is how liberal secularism attempts to nullify Divine guidance. If all that matters is choice and what you actually end up choosing is irrelevant, then what need do you have for guidance? What need do you have for light pointing you in the right direction, pointing you to the decisions that will bring you happiness and success?

Is there any philosophical or ethical system as vacuous as liberal secularism? Other man-made systems at least make an attempt to guide humanity with practical advice and principles that, in theory, should lead to individual and collective felicity. But liberal secularism doesn't bother with that. All we need, according to it, is just to make a choice without any hindrance in doing so. Any choice! Even if you choose the most destructive, vile, nonsensical choice, as long as you "freely" made that choice, it is infinitely better than not having a choice or, worse, having God tell you what is the right choice and making you feel bad for making the wrong choice.

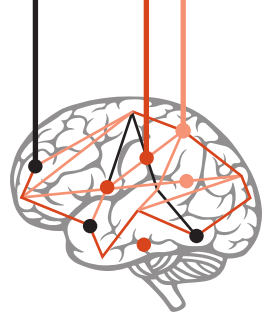
There never was a more incoherent way of thinking. But it is this thinking that rules the hearts of modern men.

LIBERAL FAUX-THEOLOGY ---

The Liberal Theist's Theology: There is no god except the god that different cultures created for themselves. Then each group attempts to impose their version of God on everyone else because people are selfish and mean and hateful. If only people realized that God doesn't exist in any objective (i.e., meaningful) sense and is at most an impersonal deity, we could all worry about more important things like celebrating the "right" of bourgeoisie men to sodomize each other.

If you were to compare the theology of liberal secularists to atheism, you would find them to be for all intents and purposes identical philosophies. God is just something people imagine for themselves. Religion is nothing more than human expression. There is no independent God or objective morality to worry about, other than liberal morality of course, which just happens to coincide with the prevailing cultural proclivities of Northwestern Europeans and Americans.

CHAPTER 9



PROGRESSIVISM, MORALITY

PROGRESSIVISM AND THE INHERITORS OF THE PHARAOHS

The Quran does not assume a progressivist view of history. When you read the accounts of the prophets, Musa, Esa, Yusuf, Ibrahim, in the Quran, you should not think, “These are stories of the past — we live in modern times. Our world is different, our societies, our institutions, our governments are more advanced and sophisticated.” No. Never think that for one second because those are the thoughts of the disbelievers as Allah mentions in the Quran itself, “Those who disbelieve say, this is nothing but stories of the ancients.”

There is a reason Allah gives us detailed historical information about the struggles of the prophets and their enemies. Because those are the struggles we face today. Just like there are “inheritors of the prophets” alive today, i.e., the righteous scholars, there are also inheritors of Iblis. There are inheritors of Pharaoh. There are inheritors of Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab. Let’s not be blind about this reality lest we be caught off guard because we did not heed clear warnings from our Lord.

THE INCOHERENCE OF MORAL PROGRESS ---

Liberal secular progressives (including humanists, atheists, reformists, etc.) think there is nothing wrong with morality changing over time and view it as a natural, inevitable process that we should all embrace. Unfortunately for them, they are deeply confused about the very nature of morality.

These individuals have no problem with religious morality being discarded over time because they do not view religious norms as morally compelling in the first place. They say things like, “Well, in the past, due to religious sentiment, sex outside of marriage, for example, was considered wrong, but times have changed and we don’t find it so bad anymore because we have progressed.”

It is very easy to show how muddled this thinking is. Simply consider a value that these people do find morally compelling, e.g., racial equality. Ask them, would they be OK with white supremacy being considered morally acceptable one day? Would it make sense to say that morality could evolve such that, one day, white supremacy is the ethical norm that all are expected to aspire to? Why not? What if there really isn’t anything wrong with white supremacy but we just don’t realize it yet and only future people will be able to realize it, similar to how at one point, fornication was considered wrong, but future people “discovered” that it’s not so bad? What’s the difference? Why couldn’t morality evolve in that way?

Now the response to this might be: “Morality does not evolve haphazardly. It evolves in a specific direction. Our morality becomes increasingly accurate as it sheds superstitions and identifies harms. The only truly immoral

act is to harm another person and this is called the ‘Harm Principle.’”

Those indoctrinated by liberal secularism tend to have this view: The only true moral principle is the Harm Principle. Using this logic, they claim (despite plenty of countervailing evidence) that we have discovered that fornication doesn’t really harm people, so it should not be considered immoral. Furthermore, we have discovered that white supremacy is harmful, therefore it should be considered immoral.

But let’s step back for a moment. First of all, if the Harm Principle is the keystone of all morality as liberal secularists claim, then would they concede that it could also evolve? If morality evolves and progresses, then could we one day discover that it is morally permissible to harm people and that the Harm Principle is an obsolete relic of the past? If liberal secular progressives maintain that this is not possible and the Harm Principle will always remain normatively compelling, then they are not really progressive when it comes to morality. They believe that there are moral absolutes. So how could they fault devout Muslims for also believing in moral absolutes that are invariant with time?

Now, refuting the Harm Principle is easy enough to do (simply question what truly constitutes harm and who gets to decide that; and additionally, point out that harm itself is a value-laden concept that depends on your broader moral and ontological commitments, etc.). But I want to focus on the idea of evolving morality. Those who are dedicated to the Harm Principle as a moral absolute explain changing moral attitudes through time as a function of discovering what is or is not truly harmful. But what is this discovery process?

Epistemologically speaking, is discovering harms akin to discovering new planets or new chemicals? Is it an empirical thing? Where can you see harm? And, more importantly, how does our ability to see it progress as a function of time? We can understand how discovering planets in the universe has become easier with improved telescope technology. But what is allowing us to discover new harms over time?

Clearly, the liberal secular progressive is not going to have a non-ridiculous, non-grasping-at-straws answer to this, so he will resort to this line: “Harms were always known but powerful, evil, self-serving people prevented moral sentiments from changing in order to address those harms.”

A couple of notes on this. First, where is the proof that certain harms were always known? If we survey world history, much of what is considered seriously “harmful” by present standards was unheard of historically. Homophobia is one example. Transphobia is another. Cultural appropriation is another. Microaggression is another. Oppression through pronoun usage is another. In fact, just attend a liberal arts class, preferably in the Gender Studies department at your nearest university, and virtually everything that is taught as oppression, disenfranchisement, sexism, etc., was historically unheard of. The very concepts upon which these “wrongs” are based were not coined prior to one or two generations ago. So how plausible is this view that many of the serious “harms” recognized by liberal secular progressives today were known historically?

Secondly, again this response undermines the whole idea of moral progress. If the Harm Principle is an un-evolving absolute and what is or is not harmful is an un-evolving

absolute and people's knowledge of what is or is not harmful is an un-evolving absolute, then where exactly is all the moral progress we keep hearing so much about? Our interlocutor could say that the progress happens when the bad guys get beat and true justice triumphs. But that is a very weak idea of moral progress. Everyone believes in this kind of moral progress! The fight between good and evil is perpetual and sometimes, the good guys win. Other times they lose. Even non-liberal, non-secular theists believe this! This is hardly the notion of continuous moral progress over the course of human history that liberal secularists like to appeal to.

Ultimately, when this idea of moral progress is critically examined, it does not withstand the most minimal amount of scrutiny. The notion suffers from serious epistemological problems and this is partly due to the conceptual deficiencies within the Harm Principle itself. When liberal secular progressives invoke moral progress, Muslims who maintain the universal, unchanging applicability of Islamic moral principles from the time of revelation to present, should push back. Muslims should point out these problems and demand that their ideological opponents address the gaping holes in their thought.

WE ARE THE LATEST AND GREATEST (FAMOUS LAST WORDS) ---

Modernity and the Quran

One of the main drivers of moral progressivism is the belief in scientific progress. If our knowledge of science and technology has advanced so much in the modern era, then it stands to reason that we as a civilization have also advanced morally, that our moral knowledge also is superior to that of peoples in the past. This line of reasoning is not new. It is something all major civilizations have believed of themselves, and it is a mindset that is directly opposed in the Quran when Allah tells us to look at the remnants and ruins of past civilizations who, despite their great technical achievements, were destroyed for their arrogance and rebellion against God and His messengers. In fact, the Quran goes further than this by saying, not only are you wrong for being arrogant in thinking that your strength and technical achievement translates to rectitude and moral superiority, but you are also wrong for thinking that you are the strongest and most technically advanced civilization of history. There were others greater in strength, numbers, and impact on the land.

“Have they not traveled through the land and observed how was the end of those before them? And they were greater than them in power.”

Fatir (Q35:44)

“Have they not traveled through the land and observed how was the end of those who were before them? They

were greater than them in strength and in impression on the land, but Allah seized them for their sins. And they had not from Allah any protector.”

Ghafir (Q40:21)

“Have they not traveled through the land and observed how was the end of those before them? They were more numerous than themselves and greater in strength and in impression on the land, but they were not availed by what they used to earn.”

Ghafir (Q40:82)

“Have they not traveled through the earth and observed how was the end of those before them? They were greater than them in power, and they plowed the earth and built it up more than they have built it up, and their messengers came to them with clear evidences. And Allah would not ever have wronged them, but they were wronging themselves.”

Ar-Rum (Q30:9)

“We raise in degrees whom We will, but over every possessor of knowledge is one [more] knowing.”

Yusuf (Q12:76)

We might wonder whether there were past civilizations that were more technically advanced than ours today. Only Allah knows. We shouldn't automatically assume that there weren't. More importantly, we should not judge a people's values by how “modern” they are but by how completely they accord with what the last Messenger ﷺ has brought.

MODERN VS. TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

The modern concept of knowledge is an anomaly. The notion that knowledge is something that can be found on a sheet of paper, in a book, in a hard drive, in the digital cloud, this is not the kind of knowledge that the Islamic tradition is based on.

True knowledge cannot be abstracted away from living, breathing people. For example, Allah sent revelation by way of the angel Jibril to the Messenger ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ passed on his knowledge through companionship — namely, by teaching his companions, who took instruction not only from his words but also his actions, his behavior, his blessed manners, etc. Human beings are thus the conduits of knowledge and the Islamic tradition has operationalized that through the concept of *isnad*, i.e., chain of transmission.

To claim to truly know something of *`ilm*, i.e., what Allah has revealed, one has to know all the persons through which that knowledge has passed over the centuries until it arrived at you by way of your teacher. Reading from a book or the internet is not a substitute for this. At most, one is merely familiarizing oneself with texts, which, don't get me wrong, has its own benefits if done correctly. But to be an *`alim*, to speak authoritatively about a religious issue of contention often requires *isnad*. This is how Allah has preserved the deen.

And this is why the Prophet ﷺ said,

“Verily, Allah does not take away knowledge by snatching it from the people but rather he takes away knowledge with the death of the scholars

until he leaves no scholar behind and the people turn to the ignorant as their leaders. They are asked to give religious judgments without knowledge, thus they are led astray and lead others astray.”³⁷

We can contrast this with the modern conception of knowledge, which usually has no moral component and can be abstracted as separate from people. Go to a university physics class and see if the professor mentions any history, where those formulas have come from, who taught them to whom, and so on. Perhaps that disconnect with history is fine for the sciences, but not for one’s religion. The source of all *deeni* knowledge is in the past, so to cut ourselves off from the past is to cut ourselves off from that knowledge. Muslims have to be careful not to conflate the modern, scientific understanding of knowledge with true religious knowledge.

MUSLIM SAVAGES CANNOT KEEP UP WITH SOCIAL PROGRESS

Do Muslim reformers really believe they are the first to notice that gender disparities exist in Islam? When it comes to marriage, eye witness testimony, inheritance, etc., were Muslims of the past just unaware of these disparities, or were they too ignorant to understand — as the modern reformers do — that gender disparity is tantamount to injustice, oppression, and abuse? And were they too incompetent to do anything about it? Only a couple of options. Either past people really were that stupid and/or

37. Sahih al-Bukhari

unethical. Or modern reformers are projecting non-existent injustices onto the past.

As a related example, the idea of transgender acceptance is becoming ever more popular. As soon as this peculiar social justice issue officially becomes status quo, that will immediately render every past society as unjust and intolerant for not recognizing what we modern enlightened people have come to realize about transgenderism. Until the next social justice issues comes along in another 5-10 years. And the next...

If people's ethics are constantly in flux and at the mercy of haphazard cultural shifts, those few who do have principles and believe in timeless Truth will necessarily and perpetually look like barbaric and backwards savages regardless. I, for one, wholeheartedly embrace my "savagery."

Many don't understand how shallow and provincial so many of the most cherished beliefs of modern times really are. If you compare those "savage" parts of Islamic law and ethics that people find most objectionable today to what was on offer for the vast majority of human history throughout the world, there are no significant differences. But the modern tendency is to view the past as a black hole of barbarity and oppression. Theologically, Muslims don't share that view—the earlier times were the best of times. So this will create conflict and misunderstanding. We are not willing to throw our past under the bus because we aren't deluded. Our reluctance makes a lot of our contemporaries very, very angry. Violently so.

IS ISLAM RELEVANT?

Is Islam relevant? How is Islam relevant to my life?

These are questions I was asked recently. I proceeded to give an answer in terms of how Islam gives life purpose where an atheistic, materialistic understanding of the world does not and how the negative impact of lacking purpose can be seen in the rates of depression and suicide affecting the secular, post-religious world of today.

But this answer wasn't really adequate for or convincing to the questioner. After thinking about it for a moment, I realized the problem. (You see, sometimes if you are asked a wrong question, you are all but forced to give a wrong answer.)

So, Islam doesn't have to be relevant to you. The Truth does not need to be validated by its utility to your personal, individual life. The Truth by its very nature is relevant — in fact, it is the only thing that is relevant.

Honestly, what is the standard of relevance we're operating under? Are professional sports relevant? Are popular culture, music, and movies relevant? Are political debates and world events relevant? Why? If that's our standard of relevance, then of course Islam will not seem relevant because, unlike those other things, Islam actually means something and is about something and has true, lasting significance.

Thus, the problem for us is two-fold. We have a mis-calibrated standard of relevance on the one hand. On the other, we judge importance on the basis of personal utility in the first place. We order the world according to

a subjective framework that assigns value according to: “What looks good, feels good, sounds good *to me*?”

In other words, we have put our egos at the center. That’s the only context in which the question “Is it relevant?” makes any sense.

No one asks if biology is relevant, or nuclear physics, or economics, or anything else related to the sciences or academic investigation. In those domains, the question of relevance has no sense. Of course, those are subjects we assume to be concerned with truth and, as such, are not attached to any individual’s personal feelings.

Well, your Maker is al-Haqq: the Highest Truth. Submission to Him, i.e., Islam, should be at the center of our paradigm. With respect to that core, we can judge the (ir)relevance of everything else.

WHO IS THE REAL “FREE THINKER”?

Who is the real “free thinker”?

The atheist, who:

1. Lives in a secular world,
2. Goes to schools with secular curricula based on secular philosophies that constantly question and critique faith on the basis of “critical thinking,”
3. Is embedded in an elitist secular culture that neither recognizes God nor religion,
4. Is every day exposed to media, movies, and music that ignore or question the existence of God,

5. Resides in an overall secular intellectual milieu where being “religious” is tantamount to naivety and being skeptical of religion is tantamount to enlightenment, and then, after all that, arrogantly proclaims as if, against all odds, he has made the discovery of the century, “Eureka! There is no God!”?

Or the Muslim, who:

1. Lives in a secular world,
2. Goes to schools with secular curricula based on secular philosophies that constantly question and critique faith on the basis of “critical thinking,”
3. Is embedded in an elitist secular culture that considers Islam retrograde and terroristic,
4. Is every day exposed to media, movies, and music that ignore or question the existence of God and attack Islam in particular,
5. Resides in an overall secular intellectual milieu where being “religious” is tantamount to naivety, being skeptical of religion is tantamount to enlightenment, and being Muslim is tantamount to simple-mindedness at best, medieval barbarity, at worst.

And then, after all that, maintains conviction and confidence in his Islamic beliefs and holds firm despite the all consuming pressure, like clutching a burning ember?

Who has really gone against the tide and sought after the truth in the face of overwhelming adversity?

THE LOGICAL DIRECTION OF MORALITY ---

We often hear that Islamic law needs to get with the times. We often hear the argument that clearly our world differs from the world of seventh-century Arabia at the advent of Islam. So, if times have changed, then law and ethics must change.

First of all, things have not changed as much as people like to think they have. Human beings are still human beings. Our fundamental nature has not drastically transformed such as would require the kind of reforms some Muslim progressives and reformers have been calling for.

Second of all, this entire attitude belies a fundamental confusion about the logical nature and direction of law and morality. Morality does not reflect how the world is but how the world ought to be. To want to edit our moral commitments on the basis of things that happen in the world is logically unsound. Sure, we can learn new things that may affect how we apply our moral standards. But such new things are not going to modify the actual moral principle at hand.

Example: As Muslims, we know the immorality of *riba*. In the modern world, *riba* is everywhere. Some might say that given this “new reality,” Muslims should reconsider how strict they are about usury. They will argue that Islam needs an “economic reformation” so to speak. In actuality, there is no groundbreaking new reality that would require such a reformation. The basics of buying, selling, and the pursuit of profit has remained fundamentally the same for all of human civilization. Granted that there are details in every context that need to be accounted for, and historically traditional Islamic scholarship has been very dynamic in

how it has spoken to the vagaries of every age. But, the basic moral principles are consistent. If the world is now drowning in usury, Muslims should be all the more vigilantly opposed to that new normal. That is the direction of normativity: On the basis of our ethical commitments, we desire to change the world for the better, not change our ethical commitments to accommodate the demands of the world around us.

Of course, sometimes the world seems unchangeable. Sometimes we are overwhelmed by how drastically the world diverges from what we know to be truth and justice. But we should never lose hope or descend into a nihilistic loathing for our brothers and sisters in humanity.

The most hopeful hadith in this regard is: “If the Hour [the day of Resurrection] is about to be established and one of you was holding a palm shoot, let him take advantage of even one second before the Hour is established to plant it.”³⁸

No matter how dire and hopeless the circumstances may seem, it is our moral responsibility to do what we can.

GOOD WITHOUT GOD? DO WE NEED RELIGION TO BE “GOOD PEOPLE”?

Do we need religion to be “good people”?

No.

In actuality, we specifically need Islam to be good people.

Yes, there are good people of other faiths, no doubt. But I am using the term “good” in a technical sense to

38. Musnad Ahmad

characterize a person who fulfills all basic moral obligations or at least feels bad about not fulfilling them.

To suggest that only Muslims are even in a position to fulfill all basic moral obligations and that adherents of other religions are missing out on these obligations violates principles of universalism that have become so widespread among people today. It is almost a truism in the minds of people that even those without religion can be morally upright. But is this true?

Those who make this claim focus their argument on a small set of moral truths.

“Of course I don’t need God to know that murder is wrong!”

“Of course I don’t need God to know that rape is wrong!”

*“If you only refrain from murder and rape because God told you so, then that shows how truly *immoral* you are!”*

In actuality, this shows how limited these people’s understanding of morality is. Their morality only consists of two line items: don’t kill and don’t rape.

There is usually also the platitude, “I don’t harm anyone. That’s what my morality is based on and it doesn’t require belief in God, much less Islam.”

This, of course, is a cop out because “harm” can be very vaguely defined and context-dependent. What one considers harmful can vary from time to time, culture to culture, and even from person to person within a single time and culture.

So, even if we all agree that morality is simply about preventing harm, different people will have widely divergent views on harm. Furthermore, it is not easy to “calculate” what causes harm in the first place or what causes the most or least harm in any given situation. And when we look at the way people behave in real life according to their morality, it does not seem like they are acting on the basis of a complex calculation of weighing harms. Mostly it seems people act on the basis of larger societal and cultural norms of acceptable behavior and then interpret whatever is socially unacceptable as “harmful.”

These are objections raised against what’s known as the Harm Principle in Western ethics.

But Islamic ethics is far richer, far more nuanced, and, yes, far superior to the vague, speculative musings of liberal deployments of the Harm Principle (which is, again, just a cover for transient cultural sensibilities anyway).

Central to Islamic ethics are the concepts of *adab* and *khuluq*, i.e., manners and character. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “The best amongst you are those who have the best manners and character.”³⁹

Allah also praised the Prophet ﷺ as having *khuluq adhim*, i.e., great superlative character.

When we look at the content of Islamic ethics, *adab*, and *khuluq*, we find a great deal that is not intuitive as far as Western liberal cultural sensibilities are concerned. Here are some of the more prominent examples:

- Great emphasis for respecting and taking care of one’s parents.

39. Sahih al-Bukhari

- The moral imperative of helping one's neighbors.
- The moral significance of visiting the sick.
- The premium placed on supporting orphans and the poor.
- The moral necessity of maintaining family ties.

Sure, you will find some impoverished semblance of these values in other religions and non-Islamic cultures. But in Islam, these are not niceties. They are duties. You are not considered a morally exemplary person for doing the above. Rather, you are merely doing your basic moral duties and if you fail in this, then you are morally culpable. It's a big difference.

But there are further imperatives:

- Can one be a moral person if one is racked with jealousy?
- Can one be of sound moral integrity if one habitually backbites?
- Can one be considered ethical in any sense if one fails to have good assumptions of people?
- Can one be of high moral character if one spreads hearsay without verifying the truth of the matter?
- Can one be characterized as morally upright if one partakes in usurious business transactions?

The answer to all these questions is a hard no: If a person has these qualities and does not feel guilt and shame and attempts to rectify himself, then he cannot be considered a moral person. So how could it be possible for someone who doesn't even know that these moral imperatives exist, to abide by them? Obviously they couldn't. You don't see

atheists, for example, emphasizing things like backbiting or jealousy or respecting one's parents. Ethics is only about "Rape!" and "Murder!" for them.

In truth, the above 10 points are a very small sliver of all the moral imperatives of Islam. For example, all these points concern moral duties to other people. What about moral duties towards one's Creator? Certainly there are moral imperatives there as well, which by themselves would mean that those who reject God are ipso facto morally deficient. But for the sake of argument, we can limit ourselves to moral duties with respect to other people and, still, the atheist and those who consign themselves to a liberal secular morality are to be found grossly lacking in their understanding of what morality even entails.

Some might argue that there really isn't a moral imperative to, for example, respect one's parents, etc. The response to this takes us deep into the subject of meta-ethics. How do we determine what is or is not moral in the first place?

Well, we can start from a completely skeptical position about all moral duties. This would make us nihilists. If we can ask, why is it a moral imperative to respect one's parents, we can also ask why is it a moral imperative to not harm others? The atheist and secularist do not have a compelling or even consistent response to this. Simply look at the state of moral philosophy in the halls of Western academia. There is no consensus on even the most basic questions. Everything is constantly in dispute. The confusion is tangible.

As far as we're concerned, atheists and secularists are not even in the running.

Theists, however, fair far better. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish theologies each provide an overarching theory of God, the universe, and humanity. It is in context of these broader theories that moral imperatives are grounded and find meaning. These theories can then be evaluated and compared. Which one is most consistent? Which one is most compelling?

When we look at Christian and Jewish ethics, they have undergone significant changes especially in the last 100 or even 50 years. For example, many Christian and Jewish denominations now find no moral qualms with same sex behavior. Their theological and ethical considerations of family relations and the family institution have also significantly shifted in order to mirror and accommodate the dominant social forces of modern secularism, liberalism, and capitalism. What justifies these shifts? Is it a belief in progress, namely that ethics must progress as civilization progresses?

Well what does civilizational progress even mean? And what does it mean for ethics to “progress” such that what was once considered a moral abomination 100 years ago is morally permissible or even laudatory now? These are questions that most Christian and Jewish denominations do not have answers for. They too have fallen victim to the pressures of modern cultural hegemony. Islam, in contrast, has resisted these pressures. This is often why, for example, Islam is considered morally “backwards” and retrograde, but Islam is only “retrograde” if the last 10 or 20 years of Western culture are considered the measuring stick by which to grade religions. By that measure, all of humanity prior to, say, the year 2000 or 2010 were in the dark abyss of moral purgatory. This is a baldly arrogant perspective

on world history and a thoroughly unconvincing narrative. Islam safely avoids the entire dilemma, where most Christians and Jews are embroiled in its plain implications.

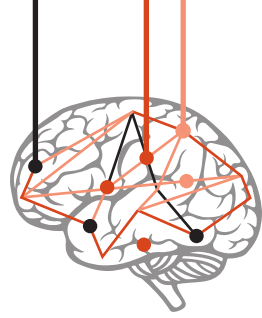
We can also evaluate the overarching theories of Christianity and Judaism. Providing full critiques is beyond the scope of this short chapter, but areas of pressure can be put on the Trinity, of course. As for Judaism, their theology historically borrowed a great deal from Islamic kalam discourse in the 12th century (Maimonides being the most prominent example of a Jewish theologian actively engaging in the debates and theological discourse of Islamic Spain).

The only objections people these days raise about Islam are that the Quran and Sunnah sanction practices that people with Western liberal cultural sensibilities find problematic. This is pretty weak. Many of the things that people today find objectionable about Islamic law and ethics were considered completely acceptable and unproblematic simply 10, 20, or 100 years ago. But again, the vague, inconsistent notion of “moral progress” is incessantly invoked to handle this obvious critique. Without substantiating what “moral progress” amounts to and explaining how moral truths concerning human nature can be conditional on time, these objections cannot be taken seriously.

In the end, Muslims have the most compelling overarching theory. And those of sound intellect can also investigate the specifics of Islamic morality, including imperatives such as the 10 listed above, to see how beautiful and profound Islamic normativity actually is. Muslims, meanwhile, enjoy the sweet fruits of abiding by the deen in this life

as well as the life to come *bi idhnillah*. Non-Muslims are always welcome to accept Islam and experience all this for themselves. And if they are not interested, we simply say, *lakum dinukum waliya din* (“For you all is your religion, and for me is my religion;” Quran 109:6).

CHAPTER 10



REFORMISTS, MODERNISTS

“TRADITIONAL” MUSLIMS VS. THE MODERNISTS —

Being a “traditionalist” Muslim is a reactionary term. The term had to be coined in order to make the necessary distinction against “modernist” and “reformist Muslim.”

The defining feature of a traditionalist is respect for the intellect of past Muslims and a skepticism in the validity of modern exceptionalism. The modernist, in contrast, is skeptical of the intellect of past Muslims and a firm believer in modern exceptionalism.

In other words, modernists believe we live in a unique time and that that necessitates practicing Islam in a way that it has never been practiced before. Modernists also tend to believe that, in modern times, we have unique knowledge that past Muslims were not privy to, and that knowledge licenses us to practice Islam in a way that it has never been practiced before.

The traditionalist, on the other hand, finds this reasoning not only unconvincing but even irrational. What is so unique about modern times that merits the adoption of unprecedented beliefs and practices? Over the past 1400 years, we are still the same species with the same needs

and basic mental makeup, the same tendencies, the same weaknesses. Which is not to say that the Sharia does not accommodate certain kinds of changes and variation across time and place. But our times are not exceptional and unique enough to even begin to justify some of the things modernists call for.

Traditionalists also respect the intellect and spiritual insight of the collective body of Muslim scholarship over the past 1400 years. If there are beliefs and practices that the vast majority of, if not all, scholars upheld, that in itself is evidence of the validity and soundness of those beliefs/practices. The community does not agree on error. What makes us so special, what unique intellectual capacity do we have to go against the tide of historical unanimity?

COMMUNIST ISLAM – WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THAT TRAVESTY

In the twentieth century, communism was very popular with a group of academic Muslims. For these Muslims, communism represented the peak of justice. It represented the peak of worldly civilization, as the USSR at that time was ascendant. So these Muslim academics wrote fervently about how Muslims needed to adopt communism and how true Islam was communist at its heart. They interpreted the Quran and hadith in that light, pointing to verses about zakat and sadaqa as divine directives against private property.

Of course, there were many parts of Islamic law that take certain property relations for granted, but since these conflicted with communism, the Muslim communists

attacked the fiqh, called it backwards, unjust, and nothing but a capitalistic distortion of God's true religion. According to them, the classical ulama were obviously just serving their own interests as property owners, so they created fiqh to advance their bourgeois agenda and oppress the working class.

Other Muslims of the day pushed back against this, poked holes in their arguments, and defended the ulama from their smears. Having been rebuffed intellectually and communally, these Muslims became more extreme little by little until they decided to leave Islam entirely. Didn't Marx say that religion was the opiate of the people? Didn't these traditional Muslims reject the clear justice of communism and the insights of historical materialism? It must be Islam itself that is the problem.

So they became apostates and denounced Islam along with the Muslim sheep who followed it blindly. Despite it all, they had high hopes that in the near future the light of communism would overcome the darkness of the Islamic tradition and the entire Muslim world would follow them into enlightenment.

Soon thereafter communism went out of vogue. The USSR fell. By the end of the twentieth century, no one remembered anything these people had written or advocated for. Their movement was flushed down the toilet of history.

Today's social justice, liberal Muslims — openly, militantly calling people to fahisha and disobedience, brazenly slandering the ulama and sowing the seeds of confusion in Muslims' hearts — are on the exact same path. May Allah expedite their fate!

IS ISLAM THE REASON THE MUSLIM WORLD IS “BACKWARDS”? LATIN AMERICA BEGS TO DIFFER —

The perennial question: Why does the Muslim world “lag behind”?

The perennial answer: Because of Islam!

We expect this kind of analysis from the likes of Orientalists, neoconservatives, and Barack Obama. But unfortunately, some Muslims also share such sentiments. From the beginning of the colonial period, self-hating Muslims have agreed with their colonial masters that Islam is the problem and the only way forward is to shed Islam.

Of course, the self-hating Muslims don’t come out and say, “Islam is the problem,” literally. They will, instead, say things like, “Islam needs to reform,” or, “We need to revisit classical fiqh and apply new ijihad as needed,” or, “Classical scholarship had misogynistic elements.”

This is the not-so-subtle approach of Muslim modernists, who oftentimes will be classically trained themselves and will wear all the trappings of traditional scholars. Not all modernists wear suits and ties.

Some wear more traditional garb.

Three arch-reformers: Jamal al-Din al-Afgani, Muhammad Abduh, Syed Ahmad Khan.

Yes.

By wielding religious authority and using religious language, these modernists are better able to influence the average Muslim, who generally has a deep respect for ulama and sacred knowledge. The colonial powers, of course, recognized this and took advantage by deputizing

some of these scholars to advocate for European interests. This dynamic is still used in full force to this day.

Now let's think more deeply about this question of "lagging behind."

Who stands to benefit when Muslims view their bad economic position in the world as a function of their own religious tradition?

Hmm...

Well, if that question is too difficult, let's look at other regions of the world that are lagging behind.

In the news recently is Venezuela.

Why do countries like Venezuela lag behind? According to Western liberal commentators, like the New York Times and, recently, Donald Trump, the answer is simple:

"That Mr. Maduro [President of Venezuela] must go has been obvious for some time. Since he succeeded the leftist strongman Hugo Chávez in 2013, his mismanagement, cronyism and corruption, exacerbated by the drop in the price of oil, Venezuela's dominant source of revenue, have brought the country to ruin. Hyperinflation has rendered wages virtually worthless, people are dying of starvation and lack of medical care, and millions have fled to neighboring countries."⁴⁰

See? Western powers only have the best interests of Venezuela's people at heart. These poor Venezuelans are starving to death! They have no medicine! They're experiencing hyperinflation! WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING!

40. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/24/opinion/venezuela-maduro-trump.html>

We have to support “regime change”! Perhaps, we need to invade! That is the only humanitarian option at this point!

Of course, no mention of the fact that the starvation, the lack of medicine, the hyperinflation, etc., are the direct result of years of sanctions on Venezuela. Gee, isn’t it amazing how when you put severe economic sanctions on a country, that country will suffer economically? Then, conveniently, you can blame whatever political faction you want to get rid of for the economic hardship in order to justify supporting a military coup or even a ground invasion. This is the circular reasoning the New York Times and other Western media outlets trot out without a shred of self-awareness.

Poor Venezuela is not the only victim of this tactic. Many other Latin American countries have been brought to their knees by way of American “humanitarianism.” America, the savior of the world, has to save these backwards countries from their own incompetence. It’s the only way.

TruthDig reports:

“A survey of The New York Times archives shows the Times editorial board has supported 10 out of 12 American-backed coups in Latin America, with two editorials—those involving the 1983 Grenada invasion and the 2009 Honduras coup—ranging from ambiguous to reluctant opposition.

“The reason the CIA and U.S. military and its corporate partisans historically target governments in Latin America is because those governments are hostile to U.S. capital and strategic interests, not because they are undemocratic. So while the points the Times makes about illiberalism may sometimes

be true, they're mostly a non sequitur when analyzing the reality of what's unfolding."⁴¹

So, in short, this is how America does things. First priority is American economic interests. Who is going to play ball? Who is going to let America and American corporations have their way and enjoy the world's economic resources for pennies on the dollar? Most countries will quickly open their doors because who doesn't love America?

"The West is so superior in every way. Freedom, democracy, human rights. *Please* teach us your ways. Just don't shoot!"

But of course, there will always be the troublemakers who just can't get with the program. So what does America do? Impose crippling sanctions, brutal sanctions that end up starving the population to death. Who can forget US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright saying 500,000 Iraqi children starving to death was "worth it"?

Then, the American media dutifully reports on the human misery and says, "See! These poor people are dying! We have to do something for those poor starving children!"

Of course, the human misery that is suffered due to the tyranny of American-friendly dictators is not commented upon or seen as a reason for action.

So, the Muslim world is not unique in its "backwardness." Not at all. Many regions outside of North America and Western Europe are economically stunted in the same way. So why does Islam get all the blame? Why does the Islamic tradition and traditional Islamic scholarship get the blame?

41. <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/your-complete-guide-to-the-n-y-times-support-of-u-s-backed-coups-in-latin-america/>

Why does Muslim male authority get the blame? This makes no sense.

We have to recognize what is really happening: A hostage situation. All these countries have the gun to their heads. After a while, Stockholm Syndrome sets in (i.e., a psychological phenomenon where the hostage starts to feel affection and affinity for the kidnapper).

Whenever someone starts running his mouth about the Muslim world lagging behind and how that is a function of Islam, just point him to all these other non-Muslim countries. What explains their plight? Is it just that a handful of countries in the West figured out the magic formula for not starving to death and wallowing in squalor and the other 90% of the world's population is utterly clueless? What allowed Western Europe to discover the magic formula and not the rest of the world? Is there some kind of racial superiority that Europeans have that allowed them to do this? Is the white aryan race special? Is that what the New York Times and Donald Trump want us to believe?

THE HYPOCRISY OF "ISLAMIC REFORM" ---

Sometimes Muslim reformists or Muslims taking on certain reformist positions will cite a rare, unusual classical opinion to support their view. This is, of course, "cherry picking" and it is intellectually dishonest. This is the same critique we would make against terror groups like ISIS and their approach to Islamic texts. What both ISIS and these reformists are doing is post hoc justification. They already have something they want to accomplish, whether it is advancing political terror or advancing some liberal ideology, whatever the case may be. And then they scan

the vast sea of Islamic scholarship for anything that might lend support to their particular agenda.

Most of the time, by the way, even their reading of the classical texts is wrong or ripped out of necessary context, but let's put that aside. We know that actions are by intentions, so that should be the question when we are confronted by these reform efforts. They will claim, "Such-and-such is a known opinion within the tradition." And that may be true. But our question should be: Why are we citing these unusual opinions? What is the intention here? To advance a certain point of liberal ideology, which itself is intellectually and morally questionable?

Rather than bastardizing Islamic scholarship, why not exercise a little bit of critical thinking and question that liberal position? In other words, sincerity entails being concerned with the majority position first and foremost (even if one does not always accept or follow it), because probabilistically speaking, the majority position is more likely to represent the truth. But if one's main concern is justifying one's own views, any opinion no matter how rare or underrepresented is good enough.

PROGRESSIVE AND MODERNIST MUSLIM REFORM —

When you compare the traditional schools of fiqh, you will find some of them to be more difficult to follow in some areas and easier to follow in other areas. For example, the requirements and conditions of wudu in School A might be more difficult to satisfy than School B but School B is easier or more lenient in terms of travel, etc.

But when you look at the opinions of modern reformers on matters of fiqh, they all trend in one direction. They all take very predictable positions with the only apparent common thread tying them together is that they accord with and accommodate the sensibilities, biases, and aspirations of modern Western bourgeois people. Any rational person can see that this is not a coincidence. This is the glaring red flag that signals to us that these reformers have no consistent *usul*, i.e., principles, by which they are deriving their opinions. Rather, they settle on their opinion, whatever is most concordant with the dominant social conventions, i.e., what they sometimes call “reason,” and then, after the fact, try to cobble together a justification from a highly selective reading of the Quran and hadith, and perhaps other rare minority opinions they may find from legit ulama.

Despite all this, these reformers insist on being taken seriously by the rest of us.

THE INSIGHT OF THE FAUX-TRADITIONALIST —————

Advocate a minority or even *shadh* opinion expressed somewhere by someone in the corpus of Islamic scholarship and so long as it conforms to modernist, liberal, feminist sensibilities, you are a sage traditionalist brimming with wisdom.

Advocate a majority or predominant position of the schools of thought within the Islamic sciences that conflicts with said modernist ideologies, and you are an out-of-touch, inflexible extremist who doesn't understand context and is driving the Ummah to mass apostasy.

THE MODERNIST PLAYBOOK ---

Use this handy guide to easily dispute every normative claim Islam makes that violates modern liberal secular values. Using these rebuttals, you can justify virtually anything and make it seem like the Islamic scholarly tradition is on your side. With this guide you can undermine those pesky traditional Muslims and champion your reformist Islam all the while coming across as a nuanced and learned scholar in your own right.

Traditionalist: “There is consensus on this topic.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “Actually, consensus is a highly contested issue.”

Traditionalist: “These narrations are *mutawatir* (i.e., mass transmitted).”

Modernist Rebuttal: “Actually, *tawatur* is a highly contested issue.”

Traditionalist: “This is the relied upon view of the four Sunni schools.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “We don’t have to limit ourselves to the schools because we live in a different context today.”

Traditionalist: “This is an established position in one school.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “Well, the majority of scholars say otherwise, so we can trash the minority position.”

Traditionalist: “This is the majority position.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “Well, there is a minority position that says otherwise, so we can safely ignore the majority.”

Traditionalist: “This ayah is *qat`i* (i.e., clear cut).”

Modernist Rebuttal: “No it’s not.”

Traditionalist: “This hadith is unequivocal.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “But it is an *ahad* hadith, so we can safely ignore it.”

Traditionalist: “This is the strongest position within the school.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “But there is a solitary narration relaying the statement of a Sahabi that contradicts that position, so we can safely ignore it.”

Traditionalist: “Most of the *tafsir* on these ayat convey the same interpretation.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “Yeah, but there is one tafsir that says something slightly different, so that proves that the other *tafsir* are the result of cultural bias.”

Traditionalist: “The *fuqaha* (i.e., Islamic jurists) are agreed on this.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “The *fuqaha* are limited in their knowledge of hadith. We have to look at what the *muhaddithun* (i.e., hadith specialists) said.”

Traditionalist: “The *muhaddithun* are agreed on this.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “The *muhaddithun* are limited in their knowledge of fiqh. We have to look at what the *fuqaha* said.”

Traditionalist: “The *fuqaha* and the *muhaddithun* are agreed on this.”

Modernist Rebuttal: “But we live in a different context, so our own *ijtihad* is necessary. Islam is a living tradition, etc.”

See how easy it is to weasel your way out of anything and everything? When you aren't beholden to standards of consistency and basic intellectual honesty, you can justify pretty much anything and look good doing it! Enjoy!

HYPOCRISY ON GENDER SEPARATION

Muslim reformists, liberals, progressives who oppose gender separation are often very aggressive, and their aggressiveness matches the indignation they feel at the notion that genders should be separated. But why is this such a problem? Even the most secular societies impose gender separation to some extent. Bathrooms are gendered.

Locker rooms are gendered. Sports are gendered in general. Secular societies recognize male and female and operationalize those gender distinctions in countless ways.

Muslims simply operationalize gender somewhat differently. But since Muslim practices and gender separation differ from the dominant, Western model, that is a problem. Rather than just acknowledge that Muslims do it differently, these reformists and critics of Islam make it seem like Islam is the only religion and worldview that facilitates gender separation and is therefore backwards and barbaric.

KNOWLEDGE VS. THE APPEARANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

And when it is said to them, ‘Believe as the people have believed,’ they say, ‘Should we believe as the fools have believed?’ Unquestionably, it is they who are the fools, but they do not know.

Al-Baqarah [Q2:13]

There are many people who call the believers fools in this day and age. Allah tells us that unquestionably, undoubtedly these people are the real fools and they themselves are unaware of this and do not know the truth. Unfortunately, many Muslims do not realize this either. Instead of seeing the rejectors and deniers as fools, they are often seen as respected experts, scholars, intelligentsia, etc., and their work is even promoted among the Muslims to such an extent that Muslims start modifying and editing their beliefs to conform to the theories and ideologies of those who have

very explicitly and adamantly rejected iman. And many Muslims don't see any contradiction in this.

And where it gets really sad and really pitiful is when Muslims look up to these people and because of their admiration and respect for them, they start denouncing their own scholars, calling the great ulama of the Ummah as essentially fools, who had limited intellects, were just speaking out of whim and desire, did not truly understand the meaning of the Quran and Sunnah, etc.

What is the cause of this? One of the main factors is that these Muslims have been enchanted with ideas that they do not fully understand. When you do not fully understand something, you have two options. You can just outright reject it (even when you don't know why you are rejecting it). Or you can judge its value according to appearances. Does this look like something legitimate? Does this sound like it is coming from a learned place? Are reputable people endorsing this? Do the masses accept this? Is it popular?

Basically, if something has all the appearances of knowledge, then that is good enough to accept it. Much of what Muslims today accept of these various modernist ideologies are done on this basis. You do have a handful who will just reject things regardless. That is the safer path, but it does not help the wider Ummah. Therefore, what is needed is to fully understand these ideologies. My experience is and my claim is that when that happens, it will be very obvious how foolish and contemptible they are. And then we will know indubitably and unquestionably who are the true fools.

“AMERICAN ISLAM”

If “American Islam” just means eating cheeseburgers after Friday prayers instead of biryani, then no one has any issue with that. The “American Islam” that people have a problem with is when deen is compromised for no other reason than to accommodate American sensibilities and culture.

Examples: In America, it is OK for Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is OK to have women and men pray side by side because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is ok for non-mahrams to go on dates and use hook-up apps because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is ok to smoke weed recreationally because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is ok for Muslims to attend and participate in the religious rituals of Christians, Jews, etc., because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is ok for Muslim kids to go to prom because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is ok to consume riba (which is technically not riba anyway!) because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is ok for Muslim women to get abortions if they are not financially stable because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is ok to support LGBT whatever because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. In America, it is ok to ignore norms of gender separation in the mosque or other religious gatherings because of x, y, z aspects of the culture. And on and on.

If this is “American Islam,” count me out. But I will be happy to sit down with you for a cheeseburger. Or biryani.

THE WESTERN STRATEGY FOR DOMINATING THE MUSLIM WORLD

“A leaked memo shows that the Trump White House was advised by the State Department to promote an ‘Islamic Reformation’ and to use women and young people in the Muslim majority world to front it. [...] Focusing on female-empowerment as the primary information messaging goal within the Islamic-influenced world will allow the United States to maintain a moral component for American power and its liberation narrative.”⁴²

Focusing on women and youth to control the Muslim world and distort Islam is not new. It has always been the central strategy of colonizers, not only in the Muslim world, but also Native America, aboriginal Australia, China, etc. for the past few hundred years.

Colonizers like Lord Cromer and others specifically focused on the claim that European values and European men came to empower Muslim women while Islamic values and Muslim men imprisoned women, abused them, subjugated them. They argued that Islamic law needs reform in order to accommodate women’s rights. First and foremost, Muslim women must take off hijab and dress like European women to be “free.” Second, women have to refuse and resist any and all male authority, whether the husband’s, the father’s, or the male scholar’s. Furthermore, the “barbaric” institution of polygyny must be abolished. Muslim women must insist on leaving “domestic drudgery” and joining the workforce, which conveniently meant

42. <https://theintercept.com/2018/06/18/islamic-reformation-trump-administration/>

becoming cheap, dispensable laborers for the colonizers. And much more that has been meticulously documented in many academic works.

The ultimate purpose of this multi-pronged attack was to destroy the Muslim family. The colonizers aimed to destroy that critical, central institution of Islam and the Ummah, which is the strong, cohesive Muslim family, pitting wives against husbands, daughters against fathers, sisters against brothers, to slowly but surely gain complete control of and authority over the Muslim masses. This has always been the plan.

All this was done under the mantra of “female empowerment.” That’s how it was marketed for the last couple of centuries. This is why Muslim feminists with their calls to upturn the tradition and reform the Sharia are simply advancing the work of colonizers and imperialists. This is why it is a contradiction in terms to be a feminist and “decolonial” or “anti-imperialist” at the same time.

I am often accused by detractors of being “obsessed” with feminism and its activism. Well, it’s not my fault that the main path of attack on Islam is through women’s issues, as good ol Trump’s State Department made clear in the leaked memo. I, for one, am not going to sit back and ignore this critical issue and let enemies feast on the Ummah unimpeded.

I have often detailed the nefarious activities of Muslim reformist group in the US and how they are receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars from the US government to advance “Muslim women’s empowerment.” Many wonder why the US government would pump so much money to help out small Muslim organizations. Well, here

is your answer. It is all part of the overarching plan to reform Islam according to the vision of imperialists. These reformist and feminist orgs are simply their enthusiastic agents aggressively trying to infiltrate our masjids, Islamic schools, etc.

HADITH AND EPISTEMOLOGY: ADAM'S HEIGHT —

Some Muslims react with extreme skepticism when they read the hadith:

“Allah created Adam and he was sixty cubits tall. Then He said, ‘Go and greet those angels and listen to how they greet you, for that will be your greeting and the greeting of your progeny.’ He said, ‘Al-salamu ‘alaykum (Peace be upon you).’ They said, ‘Al-salamu ‘alaykum wa rahmat-Allah (Peace be upon you and the mercy of Allah).’ So they added the words ‘wa rahmat Allah.’ And everyone who enters Paradise will be in the form of Adam. People kept on growing smaller until now.”⁴³

These Muslims want to know what is the evidence of Adam and humans being this height? It is a funny question because, if you are a Muslim, the evidence is the sahih hadith. That *is* the evidence. The only reason you would think that that is not evidence is if you are generally skeptical of all hadith, in which case you are just a confused person and have bigger things to worry about than the height of Adam, or you take current scientific consensus as a sounder source of knowledge about the height of Adam than sahih hadith,

43. Sahih Bukhari

in which case, you think either the Prophet ﷺ misdescribed his height or that the hadith transmitters made a mistake — and given the text of the hadith and the fact that the height of Adam is mentioned in multiple sahih hadith, it would have to have been a pretty extensive mistake.

We can evaluate all this. First, we should note that we don't take current scientific consensus as relevant when it comes to many things described in hadith. Think of *Al-Isra wal-mi`raj*. Or any of the miracles of the prophets. Think of any of the signs of the Day of Judgment, e.g., ya'juj and ma'juj, etc. And if you have a problem with hadith, then consider any of the events and things mentioned in the Quran. So, if current scientific consensus is not germane to any of these topics, why is it suddenly so all-determinative when it comes to the height of Adam?

Also, I am afraid that people who take current scientific consensus so seriously are often deeply ignorant about the nature and the history of science. I have personal experience with this as a physics student at Harvard as well as a philosophy and history of science student there and at Tufts. Some of my professors were either Nobel Prize winners or on their way to winning it, and their ignorance about some of the basics of science history was astounding. They simply didn't think it was important to know the history of science. Not surprisingly, that lack of interest and knowledge resulted in a very narrow, myopic understanding of science itself, which is ironic considering how accomplished they were in the sciences.

One piece of science history that is relevant to this discussion is that past archaeologists believed in the existence of giant human beings. They based their belief

on fossils and discovered bone fragments. Consider the fossils of the species named *Meganthropus*. Is it surprising that current scientists are unaware of this? No, they are simply ignorant of the history of their own field. But that does not erase the work and the historical record of their predecessors.

As for myself, as a Muslim, I don't privilege the speculative over the definite. And I have no hesitation or qualms taking that sahih hadith at face value and feeling perfectly intellectually content and confident. In fact, ahadith like that are gems that I treasure because they inform me about the true nature of the world and history that I wouldn't be privy to otherwise since current scientific consensus says something different.

(By the way, stop with the nonsense about bone strength versus height. If bones are sufficiently dense, they can support a creature of a given height. Arguing against this hadith on the basis of bone structure is like arguing against the possibility of Al-Isra on the basis that the Buraq couldn't have been aerodynamic enough to make the trip in such a short period of time.)

NB: One of the foremost scholars in the world, Mufti Taqi Usmani, relays an interpretation of this hadith from Shaykh Anwar Shah al-Kashimiri, according to which Adam was much taller in the Garden and then became smaller when he was sent to Earth.⁴⁴ He bases his opinion on an analysis of the language of the hadith. Whether or not this interpretation is correct, Allah knows best. But the point is,

44. Usmani, Muhammad Taqi, *Takmila Fath al-Mulhim*, Vol.6, p.15As cited by Waqar Akbar Cheema: <https://www.letmeturnthetables.com/2013/10/height-adam-60-cubits.html>

neither interpretation depends on contemporary scientific “facts.”

THE PROGRESSIVES VS. THE FAUX-TRADITIONALISTS

Which person poses more of a danger to the Ummah? The openly “progressive Muslim” calling for the reform of Islam by, among other things, throwing away all hadith, since there are so many “misogynistic” narrations in the sahih collections, etc.? Or: The “learned shaykh” who has studied at Al-Azhar or elsewhere who is no less under the influence of modern ideologies like secularism, liberalism, and feminism, but rather than openly calling for a complete overhaul of the deen, instead resorts to misapplying obscure “minority opinions,” bastardizing the concept of *maqasid*, disqualifying otherwise sound hadith on dubious grounds, employing highly creative Arabic etymological contortions, bastardizing the concept of *`urf*, downplaying the scholarly acumen of luminaries like Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyya, the four imams, etc., may Allah have mercy on them, in order to present a “nuanced” and “scholarly” opinion that is more relevant for modern times?

THE MULTI-HEADED HYDRA OF MUSLIM REFORMISM

Is it necessary to provide a rebuttal to so-called reformist/progressive Muslims? Not really. If you try to engage in debate with them, it is a fruitless exercise because they have no *usul*. They have no clear, explicit principles they use to derive all the strange, divergent opinions they come up with. So if you try to hold them to something, they quickly pivot

to something else and the conversation goes nowhere. I speak from experience... A lot of face-palming experience...

But you don't need to engage reformist/progressive Muslims in order to completely debunk everything they stand for. You do this by attacking the root of their ideology: liberal, modernist thought. That is something worth spending your time on. Consider this example.

Reformists make a big deal about hijab and gender separation in general and how it is oppressive, patriarchal, etc., etc. The more sophisticated reformists will cherry pick from different historical texts and trot out a generous helping of "*maqasid*-based reasoning" to make their case. Some people might certainly want to get their hands dirty and point out all the things they get wrong about the texts and their bastardization of *maqasid*, *maslaha*, and other fiqh principles. And this is an admirable endeavor in its own right. But unfortunately the reformists will just shift the argument and use another set of texts and another set of arguments. Like fighting a mythological Hydra: You cut off one head and two more grow in its place.

A more efficient route is to just stab the Hydra in the heart by critiquing the modernist assumptions about dress, oppression, patriarchy, gender roles, etc. By debunking these notions, you take the wind out of the reformist's sails. And since the vast majority of these reformists are such shallow thinkers, they usually haven't even reflected on the roots of their own ideology to see if they are sound or hold up to the least amount of scrutiny. It is quite sad actually that people destroy their iman and try to change the religion on the basis of such flimsy philosophies that are relevant only because they are trendy at this point in time,

but otherwise have no redeeming intellectual or moral quality.

LIZARD HOLE COMETH ---

In the Quran, Allah gave us such a detailed description of Bani Isra'il and their crimes and spiritual deficiencies because the Muslims would mirror their evolution. The well-known hadith of Muslims following the path of those before them, step by step, testifies to this depressing eventuality.

“You would walk the same path as was taken by those before you inch by inch and step by step so much so that if they had entered into the hole of the lizard, you would follow them in this also. We said: ‘Allah’s Messenger, do you mean Jews and Christians?’ He said: ‘Who else?’”

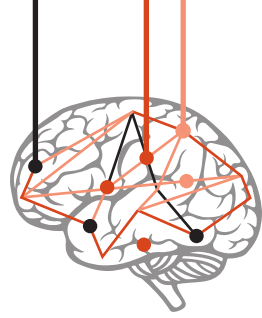
And when we look around us, we see as clear as day that the Messenger ﷺ undoubtedly spoke the truth. Reflect on the relevant ayat and you will see the same behaviors and actions, not with a small minority of the Ummah, but increasingly the majority and their leaders.

To those who are not satisfied with their religion and seek to “reform” it to their liking:

“And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people; then they will not be the likes of you.”

Muhammad [Q47:38]

CHAPTER 11



SEX & ZINA

SEX SELLS, THE SAME WAY DRUGS SELL

Why is the music and movie industry so sex-obsessed? We are told that it is because “sex sells,” i.e., that the masses want sex, they want to see that and consume that. So these industries are simply meeting an already existing demand.

In reality, these industries are creating the demand. They are forcing shamelessness down people’s throats until they create a dependency. It works the same way with the proliferation of drugs. No one naturally wants to inhale smoke. No one wakes up wanting to inject deadly chemicals into the veins. No one naturally desires to drink the rancid, rotten fermentation of putrid fruits and vegetables. These are all artificial desires that these industries spend billions of dollars a year implanting into people’s hearts by way of advertising and other forms of cultural engineering, until people think that these desires are naturally arising and therefore must be pursued and fulfilled.

This is why Western morality is so naturalistic. According to it, the most moral thing is to act in accordance with natural human rights and natural human interests. This is what the liberal human rights regime is predicated on. But no one cares to ask, well how natural are these rights and

interests? And even if they are natural, who decided we are morally required to act in line with whatever is “natural”?

THE SEXUAL MISERY OF THE WESTERN WORLD ———

After Woodstock came campus surveys on sexual assault. After bra-burning came date rape. The Sexual revolution of the 1960s aroused enthusiasm at first, but passions have since waned. Those movements have come to look imperfect, even ugly: For one thing, they have failed to touch meaning, purpose, or fulfillment, especially the fulfillment relating to sex. Revolution doesn't mean progress.

The recent finding that 1 in 4 Western women in college are victims of sexual assault by Western men ominously mirrors the fact that 1 in 4 Western women will be victims of domestic violence at some point in their lives. These grim stats have led people in the West to realize that one of the great miseries plaguing much of the so-called Western world, and the liberal secular world more generally, is its sick relationship with women and girls. If they are not being paraded around in sleazy beauty contests at the tender age of five or being berated by sex-positive Feminists for not embracing their “inner sex Goddess.” At a minimum, Western females can look forward to a life of chronic clinical depression and loneliness, if not outright domestic abuse and sexual violence. To address the latter, both Western universities and workplaces alike have taken to producing extensive guides of good conduct for college boys and male employees due to their preternatural propensity to date rape and sexually harass their female counterparts.

The Commodity of Sex

Sex is a complex commodity, commercialized — in places like New York, London, Paris, or Amsterdam — by way of liberalism’s hypersexualized culture, the voyeuristic pressures of social media, and the pornographic images of women (or their body parts) in the advertising-saturated West. These together create a potent environment of overexposure and desensitization, where people, like drug addicts looking for a stronger high, must increasingly resort to more extreme sexual acts and fetishes in order to generate the same arousal. Not surprisingly, this escalation has led to an epidemic of perversion and sexual abnormalities ranging from zoo- to pedo-philia, each deviance with its own group and its own social movement and dedicated Social Justice Warriors advocating for acceptance and celebration.

Today sex is a great paradox in many countries of the Western world: One acts as though it’s all that exists, and yet it means absolutely nothing. Overindulged in a Tinder-induced stupor of casual copulation, it weighs on the mind by its very vacuousness. Although Western females are regularly accosted by the unsolicited genitalia of sexting grade school football players as well as respected Congressmen, they are encouraged to bare their own “assets” on Instagram and Snapchat, in a social media stream of simultaneously narcissistic and desperate cries for validation.

The War on Women

Women are a recurrent theme in daily discourse, because the stakes they personify — for myths of Western superiority, progress, and exclusivism — are great. In some countries, they are allowed access to the public sphere only if they renounce their wombs: To be satisfied with women living as mothers and “mere homemakers” would be to uncover the paradox that feminists and progressives desperately need to deny: Maybe Western women can’t have it all. Mothers are seen as a source of destabilization — extended maternity leaves trigger profit loss, some say — and are respected only when defined by a corporate relationship, as the Senior VP of X or Up-and-Coming Manager of Y.

These contradictions create unbearable tensions. Womanhood has no outlet, no outcome; starting a family is no longer a means for support, love, and fulfillment, but a burden to be put off for as long as possible. The sexual and psychological misery that results can descend into absurdity and hysteria. Here, too, one hopes to experience familial love, but the mechanisms for that love — marriage, child-rearing, familial stability — are prevented: Half of all children born in the West are born to single mothers, which is disturbing given that there is a direct, undeniable correlation between single-family homes and crime rates — though this might partially explain why some Western countries have the highest rates of homicide and violent crime in the world. And for the few Westerners that are married, the spectre of infidelity looms large, as even adultery has been commercialized, where cheating websites like AshleyMadison cater to tens of millions of registered users.

In some Western lands, the war on women has the air of a theatrical farce. Western women spend over \$20 billion annually on cosmetics and perfumes and another \$12 billion on cosmetic surgery (while only \$22 billion is needed to feed, clothe, and provide basic health care for the entire world's poor) — all this expenditure to abide by artificial standards of fashion and beauty dictated by the corporate conglomerates profiting from the Western woman's need to be sexy. Of course, that very need only arises due to women being deliberately socialized to obsess over every detail of their bodies such that millions of females, some as young as 11 years-old, suffer from eating disorders and other forms of Body Dysmorphic maladies.

Unfortunately for these Western women, who are literally starving themselves for attention, Western men, in the thick of their own Crisis of Masculinity, don't seem to be too interested, as they've been thoroughly desensitized by endless amounts of internet porn. And when the ADHD-addled gentlemen are not masturbating, they're too busy playing video games and killing themselves: Tragically, suicide is the single biggest cause of death in men aged 20-49 in some Western countries.

Fantasy or Reality?

One result is that people fantasize about the trappings of another world: either the world peddled by popular culture and Disney films about romance and monogamous love between "soul mates," happily ever after, or the sexually promiscuous, at times violent world of "hook ups," no consequence, no commitment sex, more at home on the set of a pornographic film than in the realm of reality.

It's a choice perfectly illustrated by the offerings of the Western media. Miley Cyrus and other former Mousketeers "gone bad" are all the rage on television as is the sexualization of young girls and "tweens," pushed to empower themselves and "own their sexuality" by dressing and acting like pornstars, peddling the promise of their unattainable bodies and impossible sex well before puberty. Clothing is also given to extremes: Western women naively believe their wardrobes to be a function of free and independent choice, yet, despite that belief, they all dress more or less identically.

Sex therapists are legion in the Western world, and their advice, no matter how contradictory or ludicrous, is voraciously consumed. These self-anointed gurus have a de facto monopoly on talk about the body, sex, and love. With the internet, daytime TV, and gossip magazines galore, some of their "tips" have taken monstrous forms, devolving into a kind of porno Psychology. A simple perusal of the women's magazine covers at the typical Western grocery store: "Help your lover shop for an escort," and more.

Sex is Everywhere

Especially in schools.

Orgasms are required as soon as puberty is within reach and a warm body is available. To be a virgin past an arbitrary age is to be an outcast. These pressures combined with the barrage of sexualized images and content in media and environment make for a dangerous mix. Incidences of prepubescent elementary school boys gang raping their female classmates are a growing phenomena in many Western cities. But young girls don't just have their male

classmates to worry about. Violent sex offenders in the West, at least the ones who are caught and convicted, serve shockingly short prison sentences before being considered “rehabilitated” and let back into society. In some parts of the West, offenders who commit sex crimes against children on average serve less time in prison than offenders who commit the same crimes against adults.

And it is not only about degenerates molesting children. Producers, distributors, and consumers of child pornography and child sex slavery include famous filmmakers, celebrated sandwich spokesmen, and billionaire hedge fund bankers. Even prominent Harvard Law School professors like Alan Dershowitz are committing acts of pedophilia and sex trafficking on the weekends, allegedly. Apparently the lure of innocent, virginal children is too much for the West’s rich and famous. These otherworldly delights are the unspoken rewards for those who do well in the lands of sexual misery. Dreaming about such prospects, pedophilic business moguls surrender to a terrifying, surrealistic logic: The path to orgasm is through predatory domination, not love.

The West has long found comfort in exoticism, which exonerates differences. Satellite TV and the World Wide Web has a way of normalizing cultural variations and of excusing any abuses: Beyonce, Playboy, and “twerking” exempted some Easterners from considering the plight of Western women: Other than India and Zimbabwe, the rest of the top 10 countries with the highest incidence of rape in the world are Western. Despite all this soul-rending misery, Western imperialists have taken it upon themselves to export their unique brand of “sexual liberation” to the rest of the world, saving and rescuing women in “developing” nations by way of military occupation and an unending stream of NGOs

ready to civilize societies who know nothing of the superior sexual values of the morally “superior” West.

What long seemed like the foreign spectacles of faraway places now feels like a clash of cultures playing out around the globe. Differences once defused by distance and a sense of isolation have become an imminent threat. People around the globe — i.e., the long time subjects of Western imperialistic pillaging and rape — are discovering, with anxiety and fear, that sex in the Western world is sick, and that its venereal disease has long infected the rest of the world.

THERE IS ONLY ONE KIND OF “SAFE SEX” —————

It doesn't matter if you are religious or not, or if you believe in God or not. There is no such thing as “safe sex” if you are not married. If there is no paper involved between you and whoever you are sleeping with, you are at the mercy of that person and there is very little anyone can do to help you if something happens, be it accidental, deliberate, or malicious. This is a matter of life and death in the most literal sense, whether you are talking about the potential to create life, i.e., a human being, or the contraction of life threatening diseases, or any other kind of possible emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or all of the above.

This used to be common knowledge. This used to be common sense. But now, just pointing this out means you're a religious fundamentalist who has turned off his brain and doesn't understand human rights and the value of sexual autonomy, and blah blah blah. How blind can you be? Is this really so hard for people to understand?

As Muslims, yes, we abide by Islamic law when it comes to pre-marital abstinence and marriage, etc., first and foremost because we hear and obey our Creator. No doubt about it. But when we recognize the clear benefit and wisdom in His commands and make note of that in our crazy, topsy turvy world, does that mean we are “rationalists,” trying to revive *mu` tazili* philosophy, etc.? You don’t have to be a hardcore theological rationalist to point out the stupidity at play here.

PREMARITAL SEX IS NOT A “VICTIM-LESS CRIME” —

People sometimes jokingly ask, why is it that driving requires a license, but you can have children without a license or any kind of certification? It’s often a lighthearted remark, but, when you think about it, it’s a legitimate question. If driving or teaching at a school, practicing medicine or law, or even being a plumber requires certification, then what about something that is far more sensitive, far more significant like having children and raising them? After all, children are our future and the state of our society as a whole depends on how children are brought up — their morals, their sense of responsibility, their character, and so on. It’s no secret that children who grow up without proper parental influence are far more likely to become involved in drugs and crime, to face unemployment, to fail to become productive members of society and upright human beings. This, then, has a toll on all of us, on all members of society.

Given these high stakes, one has to wonder how any civilized nation could allow its people to have children without having some kind of regulations to ensure that all children have competent parents. Isn’t it a child’s right to have a stable household and parents who are capable of

properly raising him? Isn't it our right as members of society to make sure incompetent, irresponsible people in our midst aren't having children that they will neglect, children who will be more likely to become burdens on society?

Islam, of course, does require just such a license — a *nikah*. Properly done, according to Prophetic guidance, a *nikah* ensures that a couple is in the best position to raise a family, with the full support of the extended family and the community at large.

Yet, Islamic sexual ethics have been the target of unrelenting criticism from modernists and liberals for decades, who argue that Islamic law stifles the sexual freedom and autonomy of individuals by prohibiting premarital sex. To the contrary, this prohibition protects people's freedom and autonomy because it effectively curbs the amount of children being born to single mothers and couples who are not in a position to take adequate care of them. This in turn benefits the interests of children and hence, the interests of society at large. So, even if one is not religious per se, the rational merits of prohibiting premarital sex are more than clear. And all the sociological evidence supports this.

Put differently, premarital sex is not a victim-less crime, as some believe.⁴⁵ It is a major crime that most modern

45. The inevitable remark to this point is, what about contraception? If impregnation is impossible, then where is the victim? Two easy replies: First, on analogy with other kinds of certifications and licenses, airplanes have had autopilot for decades—that doesn't mean pilots don't need to be certified before flying commercial jets. Second, if the existence of contraception coupled with widespread sex education were enough to prevent unwanted pregnancies, why has single-motherhood continued to rise decade after decade for the past 50 years, such that today, nearly half of all children are in single parent homes? All the statistics prove indubitably that these children are worse off than children who grow up with their fathers in their lives.

nations have allowed to run rampant. This in turn affects the crime rate, it affects the percentage of the population that requires government assistance through welfare, unemployment benefits, etc. — in effect, it makes people far more dependent on the state, thus increasing state power exponentially. It is no wonder that modern nation states have shown no interest in upholding the sexual ethics that human societies of all religions have depended on for thousands of years.

In sum, we can make an unimpeachable case for why Islamic sexual ethics are rationally and ethically superior to the secular liberal alternative. So, if a religious argument against things like dating, hooking up, etc., is not convincing, then the rationalistic argument should suffice to make the moral case. At the very least, even if someone does not ultimately agree with this reasoning, he can admit that it is reasonable. And that is enough to characterize Islam's sexual ethics concerning zina as rational and not simply "prudish," "close-minded," "backwards," "cruel," and all the other cheap adjectives used to denigrate Islamic law.

"SEX IS TABOO IN ISLAM" ---

Does the fact that Muslims don't openly and explicitly talk about sex mean that "sex is taboo in Islam"? Does the fact that Muslims don't have the same approach to sex education and sexual expression as modern "sex-positive" feminists and psychologists mean that Muslims have an unhealthy attitude toward sex?

It is amusing how anything that does not fit in the mold that the modern gurus of sexuality have defined for themselves is characterized as "unhealthy." Well, Muslims

think there is plenty that is unhealthy, backwards, and destructive with the state of sexuality in modern society. So, you'll have to excuse us if we're not overly eager to get pointers from you on the subject.

THE PURPOSE OF "SEX EDUCATION" ---

Kids are getting sex education in school at younger and younger ages. When I was in grade school, sex ed wasn't taught until 10th grade. Now middle schools and sometimes elementary schools have these programs. What is the impact of this on a child's psyche and development and what will be the impact collectively for society?

My dad was telling me that in the past, in Muslim cultures, parents didn't talk to their kids about this until puberty and even then, they would not be explicit about it because they understood the power of human curiosity. If you talk to a child about this, they will be that much more likely to be curious about it. They would want to investigate further and try it, and that's not a positive result, no matter what modern psychologists tell us about being "sex positive," etc.

The content of the material being taught is also changing apparently. They are teaching elementary school children about sexual fluidity, sex orientation, and that you have the option of selecting your gender identity and whether you like boys or girls or both or neither or beyond. You don't have to be a fortune teller to guess what kind of impact this will have on our children and hence our future.

But you have to really be amazed by the liberal philosophy underlying all this, namely, why shouldn't small children learn about sex? Sex is just a healthy, natural part of life,

right? There is no shame in learning about what the human body can do! Besides, what possible reason is there to not teach kids this stuff? They probably know about it anyway from TV! Etc.

Consider the parallels this has to the satanic discourse, when Iblis deceived Adam and Hawwa to approach the tree and their shame became apparent to them. In the same vein, from the satanic perspective, there is nothing better than children knowing about sex as soon as they can talk and understand language. And of course this would be portrayed as positive, progressive, and healthy. The reality is, sex by default is something shameful in itself and it is only transformed to something very positive, beneficial, healthy, and elevated when it is in accord with Allah's commands, so much so that Allah rewards having sex when it is done in this lawful way. But this is not the perspective and logic our children are being taught. So it is no surprise that they increasingly see traditional religion as out of touch and irrelevant. If you learn in school that there is nothing more healthy than sex by default, then only something impractical, evil even, would hinder that in any way.

“CHILD MARRIAGE” IN BANGLADESH

Comparing “child marriage” in countries like Bangladesh to marriage in the US or Western Europe — where the average age of marriage is in the late 20s and early 30s — is comparing apples and oranges. Western media is at pains to portray 14, 15, and 16 year olds in Muslim countries as innocent little children forced into an institution against their will. The pertinent comparison to make is with Western 14, 15, and 16 years olds, who, due to circumstance, are

sexualized by peer pressure, the influence of pop culture, fashion, sex education, and so on. Look at the pressure “sexting” culture puts on children and how the internet and cell phone technology have dramatically changed youth sexuality in the West.

It is now very common for 12 and 13 years olds to be sexually active, and that is not seen as a problem in the West. Rather than teach abstinence, educators have decided that elementary and middle school children need to learn about “safe sex.” There is nothing objectionable for two teens under 18 to have sex (with “protection”), to pass around naked pictures of themselves through snapchat (as long as it’s only other teens seeing the pictures), etc. In fact, it’s healthy, empowering, and all but encouraged by parents, schools, and society at large. But if a 15-year old gets married in Bangladesh, that is a “heartbreaking,” “infuriating” violation of a girl’s dignity.

So the problem can’t be that teen brides are “sexualized.”

If the problem is that getting married at a young age hinders a teen’s education, that is also something that can be said about sexually active teens here in the West. How much time, mental energy, and resources are spent by our children participating in all these cultural practices revolving around dating, hooking up, sexting, prom, and on and on? Again, no one thinks of any of that in terms of opportunity cost vis-a-vis education.

Finally, if the problem is about coercion and consent and that these teen brides really don’t want to get married, I would simply argue that coercion is a context-dependent concept. I am sure that nowadays there are many brides in countries like Bangladesh that truly do feel miserable and

coerced to have to get married at 15. But these feelings do not arise in a vacuum. They arise in context of a society that has, through the influence of satellite TV and internet, adopted Western cultural norms, norms that portray being a teenager as a time for casual dating, boyfriend/girlfriend relations, and so on. If you grow up thinking that that is what it means to be normal, free, and liberated, then of course you will have to be coerced to follow a path that diverges from that model. But if that context is absent, what is inherently wrong with getting married young? What exactly is it that makes contemporary Western norms superior? Ironically, it is precisely that context of casual sex being imported from Western sources that is scaring traditional families into wanting their children, and especially their daughters, married at a young age, whereas before, there may have been more of an allowance for education.

Point being, this is a complex issue but Western media prefers to push a highly ethnocentric, simplistic narrative punctuated with manipulative pictures of “sad” brides. Usually the media reporting does not include actual quotes from the brides themselves. Everything we get is filtered through the perspective and ideological bias of the Western reporter.

Also, to be perfectly clear, I am not defending all the cultural practices surrounding marriage in Bangladesh or wherever else. My point is to highlight some of the double standards and unfair caricaturing Western media engages in in their portrayal of cultures they believe to be inferior.

IKHTILAT

It is very sad to see Muslims, including supposedly knowledgeable Muslims, whine and pout about the very basic Islamic principle which is avoidance of *ikhtilat* (blameworthy gender mixing).

Gender mixing leads to flirting. Flirting leads to touching. Touching leads to zina. Zina leads to the destruction of marriage. The destruction of marriage leads to the downfall of family. The downfall of family leads to the end of humanity. Keep the partitions up.

Is this exaggeration? Not at all. Anyone who has eyes, has knowledge, and is honest knows that blameworthy gender mixing not only leads to all this, it can also lead to much worse: The Fire.

I expect the usual liberal feminist reaction to such issues. But liberal feminists in shaykh's clothing also chime in with pro-*ikhtilat* attitudes and truly asinine statements that do nothing but show the pettiness and ignorance of the people making them.

If you disagree with my characterization of the consequences of *ikhtilat*, please answer these questions:

Does blameworthy gender mixing—as is common in today's society with Muslims and non-Muslims in social settings involving casual friendly interactions—involve plenty of flirting (not to mention other problems like sexual harassment, unwanted attention, etc.)?

Does this interaction, in many cases, lead to things that are clearly haram, e.g., gazing at non-mahrams, touching them, smelling them, etc.?

Does the prevalence of zina in society obstruct marriage as well as destroy marriages and lead to all kinds of societal harms with over 50% of children born in the West born into single mother households (where children born into single mother households are significantly more likely to get into crime, drugs, drop out of school, be unemployed, fall into depression, etc., etc.)?

Is the state of marriage in today's society anything but complete chaos, where over 50% end up in divorce and around 25% of married men admit to cheating and 15% of women admit to it, where adultery sites like AshleyMadison have millions of registered users, etc., etc.?

It is difficult to understand how a Muslim can know about all these things and not be alarmed. It is difficult to understand how a Muslim can know that one of the signs of the Last Day is the increase of zina and even zina being committed in the street and not be alarmed by everything around us. What do you think is the *prime* contributor of such a state of affairs at the end of times? If you don't think it is *ikhtilat*, please enlighten us with your own explanation.

And save the "Muslims just need to have *taqwa*" argument. It is surprising to see this new modernist line being used to dissolve some of the clear boundaries set by the Sharia and agreed upon by all scholars. It doesn't matter how much *taqwa* you have, if you are a man or a woman, being alone with the opposite sex is prohibited (whereas what constitutes *khalwa* itself has further details).

Casually hanging out with the opposite sex just for the purpose of socializing, having fun, joking around is prohibited. Yes, again there are many details and many situations that fall into a gray area. But let's not pretend

like Islamic law is OK with the kind of free for all that characterizes Western liberal cultural standards.

As for partitions in the masjid, that requires lengthy elaboration as well. But I find it shocking how inconsistent the people opining on this are in arguing that partitions are illegitimate. They know, of course, that they cannot argue that partitions are haram or blameworthy innovation. So they avoid that by making simplistic statements about the Prophet's mosque not having partitions between the men and women's prayer area. They conveniently don't comment, however, on all the *ahadith* that describe how the *Sahabiyyat* were dressed, what times of day they attended the masjid, how they were positioned in the masjid, in what conditions they were prohibited by the Prophet ﷺ from going to the masjid, etc., etc.

The prohibition of *ikhtilat* is not something Muslims should be ashamed of. Not only is the lack of *ikhtilat* required by piety and God-consciousness, it is the mark of high civilization, culture, and class that unmarried men and women do not freely mix, flirt, and roll around with each other like animals. This is the Islamic ethos which has been practiced for centuries throughout the Muslim world.

Muslims today who are embarrassed about this and hide it behind cherrypicked narrations to justify a liberalized view should just stop embarrassing themselves.

PS: Imam Ghazali (*rahimahu Allah*) wrote the following: "If the first inward thought is not warded off, it will generate a desire, then the desire will generate a wish, and the wish will generate an intention, and the intention will generate the action, and the action will result in ruin and Divine wrath. So evil must be cut off at its root, which is when it is

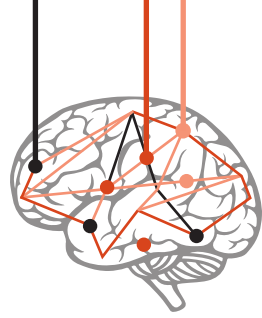
simply a thought that crosses the mind, from which all the other things follow on.”⁴⁶

Wow, is Imam Ghazali an extremist? He thinks that a spontaneous thought in the inner depths of one’s heart can lead to existential ruin and Divine wrath? Talk about a slippery slope!

How much more slippery is it when the first step is not a secret thought but actual physical activity and mixing?

46. *Ihya` Ulum al-Din*

CHAPTER 12



HOMOSEXUALITY & LGBT

GAY EQUALITY

Does Islam deny equality by prohibiting same-sex sexual behavior but allowing opposite-sex sexual behavior? Many Western Muslims, young and old, seem to believe this. And they argue that this is why Islamic law needs to be reformed—so that this clear discrimination can be eliminated. But is there really any discrimination going on? Is Islam oppressing people? The short answer is no: Islam is not systematically oppressing people by prohibiting certain sexual behaviors. In actuality, LGBT normalization is oppressing people by making them believe and feel that they need to engage in self-destructive same-sex behaviors in order to be sexually fulfilled.

IS ISLAM'S PROHIBITION OF SAME-SEX BEHAVIOR DISCRIMINATORY?

Does Islam deny equality for “homosexuals”? Does it provide an unfair benefit to “heterosexuals”?

Well, it depends on how you conceptualize that elusive, ambiguous concept known as equality.

Think of it like this. Islam certainly does not prohibit sexual release. Everyone has a possible sexual outlet (with the opposite sex) because, ultimately, sexual pleasure is something “mechanical” to a greater or lesser extent. Now, hear me out. If the right body parts are engaged in the right ways, that more often than not leads to the desired result, regardless of the gender of one’s partner. So, everyone is equally able to marry the opposite sex and experience that. Equality at its finest. No discrimination in sight.

Now, the modern LGBT objection to this is: No, gays and lesbians simply cannot experience sexual fulfillment with the opposite sex. They can only experience it with the same sex.

Well, why? This is not the case in principle.

What if a man said he can only experience sexual fulfillment with supermodels? Or a lady said she can only experience sexual fulfillment with millionaires?

Would we think that that man and that woman were being somehow fundamentally deprived sexually if they lived their whole lives without finding their supermodel(s) or millionaire(s) respectively? If not, why not? Is it because we don’t take their claims for what they need for sexual fulfillment seriously? Well, if we don’t, why should we take the claims of self-labeled gays and lesbians seriously?

Now, you might say that my examples are preposterous. But why? Is it because about 3% of the population considers itself to be gay/lesbian but, relatively, there just aren’t many people who claim they can only get sexual fulfillment through supermodels and millionaires?

Well, that’s not a relevant difference. Conditioning and social influence has a major effect on what people believe

they need for sexual fulfillment. What is “sexual fulfillment” really? Seems like a made-up concept. Who can really know what he needs to be “sexually fulfilled”? Is it something you can anticipate beforehand? What if what you need to be “sexually fulfilled” is a very specific Australian office worker exactly 5 years your senior who has a predilection for hamburgers and long walks on the beach? What if this and only this is what you need and your whole life, you never knew it. Sorry! Guess you won’t ever experience sexual fulfillment! You might mistakenly assume that you are sexually fulfilled, you poor naive fellow. But nope! You are missing out!

The idea of sexual fulfillment seems to be a wholly modern concept coming from 20th century psychology. It is as if one’s entire sense of self and well-being somehow depends on whether the stars align and one reaches this elusory point of fulfillment. In pop psychology, notions of love also come into the mix. In reality, this is all a hodge podge of contemporary metaphysical goop created to justify popular cultural notions of acceptable sexual behavior, which only very recently has come to include same-sex behavior between adults.

Conditioning through these cultural structures is quite powerful. It sets up people’s expectations for what they need to be happy. With enough media control, you could condition a good portion of the population to think that they really do need supermodels to be sexually satisfied and fulfilled. In fact, this is something that has already occurred to some extent due to pornography. Studies show that young men are less satisfied with “conventional” sex because pornography has completely distorted their expectations for what sexual fulfillment consists of. Their

brains have been rewired due to the influence of the online stimulus.

But women are not off the hook. Women's expectations of an ideal husband have also been distorted by things like Disney movies with Prince Charming, magazines, romance novels, the tendency of social media to selectively highlight happy couples doing happy things, etc. This all has an influence. Studies show how this can increase marital dissatisfaction on the part of women. The average man has a hard time living up to unrealistic, over-inflated standards of a romantic fantasy some women have built up in their imaginations. Women, as a result, are left unfulfilled.

So, in reality, sexual fulfillment is elusive for an increasingly large percentage of the population (far greater than the percentage of those who believe that only the same sex can provide them sexual satisfaction).

But do we think people are truly being deprived? Do we believe that all these people are victims of oppression or systematic inequality that allows some people to experience sexual fulfillment but not others? Is there really discrimination run amok?

Of course not. People's expectations just need to be adjusted.

This is how the Islamic prohibition of same-sex behavior does not discriminate. In the Islamic conception, it is understood that people can experience all kinds of desires (*shahawat*). But in most cases, these desires cannot or should not be pursued or fulfilled. This includes same-sex desire, incestuous desire, bestiality, etc. In context of such a panoply of diverse desires, it would be strange to fixate on one particular desire or set of desires and claim that

one can only be “sexually fulfilled” if that particular desire is met. Who says?

Whether that desire is for supermodels or millionaires, the expectation is that one must control that desire. If it can be fulfilled and it is a permissible desire to fulfill, then fine. If otherwise, then one must simply exercise self-control. This requirement for self-control is only “oppressive” and “discriminatory” if one has decided a priori that fulfilling said desire is a “fundamental necessity” for “sexual fulfillment,” etc., etc. Who gets to decide that? As we have seen, such a claim is tenuous at best, for numerous reasons.

Can those with same-sex desires adjust their expectations and mindset?

What I mean by this is, can those with same-sex desires get rid of the expectation that they can only experience “sexual fulfillment” by being intimate with someone of the same sex? It might be difficult, but it is not impossible. The same-sex attractions might not always be something that can be eliminated — but that’s not my point. My point is, it is probably more healthy in terms of one’s iman not to think that Allah has created a world where a segment of the population is categorically barred from attaining this special, life-enriching, life-changing, euphoric state of “sexual fulfillment.” If you do think in those terms, then it becomes very difficult not to see God as unjust or Islam as not discriminatory. It all goes back to how sexual fulfillment is defined and delineated.

Ultimately, a lifetime of conditioning is a difficult thing to counteract. But there are resources to help. At the end of the day, however, Islam is not systematically oppressing people by prohibiting certain sexual behaviors. LGBT normalization

is oppressing people by making them believe and feel that they need to engage in self-destructive same-sex behaviors in order to be fulfilled.

By the way, it is a real shame that the US Supreme Court did not pursue this line of reasoning in their ruling on same-sex marriage in 2016. Even the dissenters in the Obergefell case did not seriously question the other side's charge that prohibiting same-sex marriage would be discrimination and, hence, a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Technically it is discrimination, but so are laws that allow 16 year olds to drive but not 15 year olds. The question is, is this the kind of discrimination that causes unnecessary harm and disadvantages people in debilitating ways while not serving an overall greater interest for the individual and society overall? The answer to that obviously depends on how we are conceiving harms and benefits. But, in light of religious understandings of sexuality, it is fairly easy to understand these things in a way that makes the answer to the question a resounding, "No."

IF WE DON'T SUPPORT LGBT RIGHTS, WE WILL LOSE MUSLIM RIGHTS? ---

False analogy: LGBT groups advocate for Muslim rights therefore Muslim groups should advocate for same-sex marriage, transgender bathroom bills, pronoun preference, etc. Why is it a false analogy? Because the *particular* Muslim rights LGBT groups advocate for are not contrary to LGBT ideology. Muslims being able to build mosques is *not* contrary to LGBT ideology. Muslims not being banned from travel to the US is *not* contrary to LGBT ideology, etc.

But same-sex marriage, the dissolution of gender norms, the promotion of “LGBT lifestyles” *are* contrary to Islam. So it’s nowhere close to being a fair deal.

If we want to make this a fair situation, we would have to see if LGBT groups are willing to support Muslim causes and Islamic principles that *do* contradict LGBT ideology. For example, are LGBT “allies” willing to support Muslim events and causes that reinforce Islamic gender norms? For example, would they be willing to co-sponsor events, education, material that promote within the Muslim community the traditional Islamic role of women as mothers and men as breadwinners? Would they be willing to sponsor policies in Muslim countries that contravene liberal views on “gender equality,” e.g., laws that prohibit Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men, laws that uphold the Sharia’s distribution of inheritance between the genders, etc.? In fact, to make it perfectly analogous, LGBT groups should support Muslims’ upholding of Islamic sexual norms, including the prohibition of same-sex behavior. That would make it a true “I scratch your back, you scratch my back” situation. Muslims violate their sexual ethics by advocating for LGBT normalization, LGBT groups violate their sexual ethics by advocating for the normalization of anti-same-sex behavior. Perfect parity.

If and only if LGBT groups were enthusiastically endorsing, supporting, and sponsoring Muslims’ upholding of these Islamic principles, would it be analogous to demand Muslims to support same-sex marriage, etc.

But it’s never going to happen, so stop parroting asinine arguments to justify your contribution to the spread of *fahisha*.

EXTRASEXUAL RIGHTS NOW! ---

What is an extrasexual? Well, it's a term I made up, but it is very relevant to the LGBT confusion we are seeing today. Recent scientific research claims that people's inclinations or disinclinations to commit infidelity are biologically hardwired. Given this, we could say that the tendency to be unfaithful constitutes a portion of people's inherent, immutable sexual orientation. Based on this, would there be a need to categorize people into identity groups or communities based on that? For example, would those with a greater pull to cheat self-identify as "extrasexuals" with everyone else identifying as "intrasexuals"? Would there be "extrasexual pride parades" and an "extrasexual rights movement" that would demand that Islamic and Catholic schools make space for "alternative (read, 'adulterous') lifestyles" and give voice to loud and proud cheaters? Would refusal by these institutions then be stigmatized as "extraphobia"?"

We can duplicate this maneuver for any given sexual behavior or inclination and thereby dictate to and control religious institutions accordingly, all on the basis of "anti-discrimination." In fact, in recent times, groups like the Virtuous Pedophiles have argued along these exact lines, which goes to show how contingent and subjective the appeals to recognize and accommodate LGBT identities really are.

Right now, there isn't an extrasexual rights movement, but there could be one day. Why not? They would have as much claim to acceptance as self-identifying LGBT persons. This identity group could then claim that since pretty much every religion and even most secular codes of ethics

denounce adultery that they are all extraphobic and need to do some serious soul-searching to expunge their hatred and the government needs to intervene to make sure that all institutions enable extrasexual voices and make sure to accommodate extrasexual perspectives, etc. “How DARE these Muslims and Christians tell ME how to live MY life?! Don’t they know that this is just how I am and I have a RIGHT to happiness? Don’t they know the kind of psychological HARM they are causing by saying that infidelity is sinful?! WHEN WILL THESE WOUNDS HEAL?”

So, yes, there are those who suffer from same-sex attraction just like there are those who have a propensity to want to commit infidelity. I am not denying that or denying that those people have no choice in the desires that come to them. BUT they do have a choice not to create an identity out of that and define themselves according to it. We need to support people in managing and combating desires, and in all honesty, we all need support in managing desires because it is something that affects everyone. That is how we were created and that is one of the central tests in this life.

ARE THERE “GAYS” IN ISLAM? ---

Does Islam have a concept for “being gay”?

In the Islamic tradition, there is no analogous term for the concept of “homosexual,” i.e., the notion of a person who experiences stable and exclusive erotic attraction to the same sex while not feeling such attractions towards the opposite sex. There is also no term for “heterosexual.” Islamic scholars have employed terms to describe a person who committed the action of Qawm Lut. However, this

is not what Westerners mean when they use the word “homosexual.”

In the Western context, a “gay” person is one whose identity is defined by his attraction to the same sex. According to modern Western conceptions, an important and immutable characteristic of a person is his “sexual orientation.” Similar to popular notions of how a person can be born with a certain color of skin and, thus, belong to a certain race, a person can be born with a certain sexual orientation and, thus, belong to a sexual identity group, e.g., “gay,” “straight,” “bi,” etc.

The Islamic tradition, in contrast, has no such conception of a sexual identity. While it may be possible that a person be born with more of an affinity and attraction to the same sex (or even have the desire to be anally penetrated, as in the case of the “*ma’bun*,” which the classical scholars discussed at length), nonetheless, as far as Islamic categories are concerned, this does not make that person a “homosexual” or “gay” in terms of one’s essential identity, “who one is.” This is because who a person ultimately is – internally and externally – is not based on what that person desires or what thoughts might occur to him. Islamic sexual categories having to do with identity all revolve around action, not mere desire, e.g., *zani*, etc. Once an act has been committed and a person is convicted for that in a proper Islamic court, then that is the only time it is appropriate to use such terms in referring to specific persons. But this has nothing to do with being a “homosexual,” which itself is only a modern Western term coined in the 19th century CE (13th century AH).

THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY

There are defining moments in every culture's history. As far as American culture is concerned, we are in a transition period from an era where same-sex behavior was universally condemned to an era where it is universally accepted. In the future, I want to be able to look back on my life and say, in that important historical moment, I did what I could. I didn't let that moment slip by while remaining silent or indifferent with regards to the truth. If I had been alive during the 1960s during the "Sexual Revolution," I would like to think that as a Muslim, I would have been equally vocal in resisting those sweeping cultural changes that were going to negatively impact humanity on every level: materially, economically, spiritually.

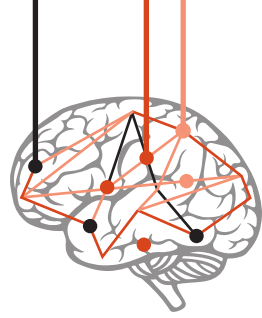
Today, Muslims have been so beaten down that they are too afraid to let out even a peep of protest (i.e., those Muslims who haven't already joined in the LGBT jubilation). Sure, people say that to oppose this cultural revolution is to be "homophobic" and insensitive, but we don't have to accept that narrative or let it define us. We should forcefully oppose it and assert that Muslims can be principled about this issue.

For those who are constantly preaching the importance of "American Islam" and how Islam needs to be relevant and part of the wider American cultural conversation and how Muslims needs to be a prophetic voice for all, now is the perfect opportunity—a historical moment of great significance. Yet they make every lame excuse to remain inactive and silent. Chief among those excuses: Look we are a minority. Most people here aren't Muslims. We can't expect others to accept our moral values. If we speak out, there will be backlash. This issue is not a priority, etc., etc.

As I have said over and over again, the only public issue Muslims have proven to care about is “Islamophobia” and racism because that’s the only social issue that directly impacts Muslim comfort levels and it fits in with a very popular national narrative. And I’m not saying that that isn’t a worthwhile cause but there are other issues that are far more negative in terms of sheer number of lives destroyed, both Muslim and non-Muslim, that many Muslims don’t speak out on, or advocate for, or even have on the radar. When was the last time you heard American Muslims on a national level, as Muslims, protest zina and rampant atheism? Or the surveillance state and domestic spying? How about Wall Street corruption? How about alcoholism and drug use? How about single parenthood and abortion? Usurious banking and financial structures? Militarization of the police force? The dissolution of stable families and the epidemic of institutionalization and assisted care? Rampant consumerism? Are any of these issues “important” enough for Muslims to come out and say, “*We as Muslims* do not stand for this”? Or is the only time we find a collective voice is when we are apologizing and offering condolences for some mass shooting, and only then because we want to avoid backlash?

So, it’s not really a surprise that some Muslims have decided to sit back and watch things from the sidelines yet again. But next time I get lectured at by a Muslim “leader” on the importance of being principled and following in the footsteps of Malcolm X or Muhammad Ali, I will know what all the bluster really amounts to. You want to claim Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali for yourself, but you don’t want to face the unpopularity, the hardship, the backlash that they faced? Ok.

CHAPTER 13



MALaise

KEEPING YOU MISINFORMED IS THEIR JOB

Mainstream media aims to be as relevant as possible to as many people as possible for the simple reason that more viewers mean more money. The not-so-unintentional consequence of this is a kind of nihilism about the truth.

The truth is not something CNN, Fox News, or the New York Times editorial board are really interested in, frankly. Outlets such as these have relegated themselves to merely “fostering debate” and covering “all sides of an issue.” But not all issues have multiple sides and not all matters require endless debate. Some issues are easily resolved or can be satisfactorily addressed through some quality research and analysis. But outside a handful of topics of consensus, the mainstream media tries its best to avoid resolution. It does this by amplifying the most misinformed, biased, and irrationally opinionated voices.

Consider the gun “debate” that crops up every 5 to 6 weeks in the news cycle in the US. Despite all appearances, there are clear answers to some of the fundamental questions everyone should have about gun violence, homicide rates, mass shootings, etc., and even if we don’t have answers now, at least there are research methodologies that can be pursued in a rational, scientific way to address those

questions. Anyone who is sincerely interested in the truth of the matter would want to follow those methodologies in seeking robust answers. With all its resources, the mainstream media should be responsible for conducting such research and/or enabling those who can do so, and then disseminate the results far and wide. And if the results are still ambiguous, then at least the pursuant conversation would be an informed one.

But that is not what the media is interested in. Because they are not interested in the truth. They are interested in viewership/readership and that means catering to the lowest common denominator. And given the abysmal state of literacy and education in the US — especially when it comes to logical analysis, science, etc. — that common denominator is quite low indeed.

CONSUMING CONTENT AND ITS EFFECT ON THE HEART

Most media content is determined on the basis of what will have the highest consumption. Content producers determine what people are most likely to consume and then generate their content on that basis. This is an inversion of knowledge, art, and creativity, which is why it's called "content" and not "speech," "writing," "discourse," "aesthetics," "artistic expression," and so on. Rather than be driven by a pursuit for truth, beauty, and meaning, content is literally nothing but the hollow pursuit of the dollar.

Western philosophers (e.g., Marxists) noted this commodification of the arts earlier in the 20th century, but

even they could not imagine the depths to which present media have sunk.

What is so subversive about media content today is that it often presents itself as profound, as meaningful, as sentimental, and heart-felt. The reality, though, is that much of that content is carefully engineered to artificially induce those emotions in the consumer because that reaction correlates with more consumption, more money, more profit. A cold, soulless machine that wraps itself in a chemise of love, truth, even justice. This, of course, is hypocrisy. And the danger for us living in an ethos of hypocrisy is that we will unknowingly take on that modality in our own expression, prioritizing form over substance, aiming to elicit a response instead of aiming for *haqq*, pursuing approval from creation instead of the Creator, our hearts, in turn, hardening as we become accustomed to the fake stuff instead of Reality, wallowing in an ersatz dunya of pseudo-significance.

THE SINGLE EYE OF MODERN POLITICS ---

If you have ever wondered how the prophesied Dajjal, i.e., the anti-Christ, could have such a large following among people, including Muslims, despite his physical disfigurement, his tyranny, and the word *kafir* literally spelled out on his face, look no further than modern politics.

I always wondered about this. Why would anyone follow such a clearly evil being? The answer is all around us. We see shades of the same thing happening today, in the East and West. You have politicians that openly commit all manner of atrocity against the human race. They massacre, drone strike, steal, corrupt, poison — all in full view of public

scrutiny. But no one seems to care. I mean, does a person really care about the murder and oppression wrought by the hands of someone like a President Obama if him making a sappy, pandering speech is enough to elicit drooling praise and slack-jawed devotion from that person?

So many crimes are whitewashed in the minds of people. Bombing, invading, occupying — these are nothing more than “geopolitics” or “hawkish foreign policy.” Killing innocent people is nothing more than “collateral damage.” Militarizing a police force that then terrorizes society and is responsible for an endless stream of brutality and death is nothing more than being “tough on crime” and “serious about security.”

Is creative wording all it takes for you people to fall in line? Just some carefully chosen terms and suddenly you can't see the butcher's knife mutilating the corpse? Is well-spun terminology like a magic elixir that your mind cannot resist?

If so, just try to hold on to one thing: God is not one-eyed.

HOW CAPITALISM DESTROYS CONTENTMENT ———

Contentment (*qana`a*) is a lost virtue in our times. Why?

We are constantly being conditioned by the modern capitalistic world to see ourselves as masters of our own destiny. All that separates us from success and riches is our own effort and passion and drive, so we are told. The concepts of Allah's decree and apportionment are nowhere in the picture. So people can never be content because they rely on themselves despite the reality that we are all impotent and it is Allah who decides.

These are matters of the heart. If you find yourself unsatisfied in life and restless, reflect on contentment and your conviction in the power and the control of your Creator.

THE CORPORATE VIRUS

If you're not growing, you're dying. This is the corporate assumption that underlies the capitalist economy of our times: The health of a business requires that revenue and profit increase every year.

In other contexts, it is seen as most reasonable to achieve equilibrium and “sustainability.” That’s certainly what so much of environmentalism is supposed to be about. A healthy planet is where people only consume what they need and do so in a way that is sustainable long term and doesn’t take away from the needs of others.

This is not possible if you believe that lack of growth means death. The notion that continuous growth is possible itself assumes infinite resources. For example, at some point, every person in the world could have an Apple iPhone. After that, there is no more conceivable growth, right?

Wrong! Every person on the planet could also own a Macbook. And after that, they could all own iPads. And after that, maybe Apple can expand into other verticals, like the clothing industry, etc. In other words, as long as a brand is not dominating every aspect of every person’s consumption, there is always room for growth. Until the brand consumes the consumer, there is room for improvement. Like a virus.

The Prophet ﷺ aptly describes this: “If the son of Adam were to own a valley full of gold, he would desire to have two. Nothing can fill his mouth except the earth [of the

grave]. Allah turns with mercy to him who turns to Him in repentance.”⁴⁷

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY, SELF HELP, THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

I recently watched a documentary called “Happy” about what brings people happiness and joy. The documentary interviewed many psychologists, neurologists, and other “happiness experts” as well as surveyed many different cultures around the world (but notably did not include a single Muslim nation or culture). The 1.5 hour long documentary had just 10 seconds on the fact that religion brings “some” people happiness and it included 30 seconds on how religion actually is a source of much pain and suffering in the world.

Ultimately, the documentary concludes that happiness is about being charitable, serving others, being grateful, being content, pursuing meaning, connecting with family and neighbors, not overvaluing money and material possessions, meditating and spending time on quiet reflection, and spending time in nature.

I thought to myself, all these things have analogs in Islam and organized religion generally. Do people not make that connection? If happiness is the goal and these are the factors that are conducive to happiness, then organized religion and especially Islam, which harmonizes these factors and brings them to their perfect expression in the Sunnah, is the clear answer for how people should lead their lives.

47. Sahih Bukhari

The only cost for that happiness is believing in Allah, and so even hedonistic modernity will sacrifice happiness to avoid submitting to a higher authority, preferring instead to define happiness in terms of an assortment of hollow truisms that may capture the form but miss the essence and source of true happiness.

THE REALITY OF BARAKA

Baraka is a reality.

Don't let the materialistic assumptions of the modern world infect your thinking and how you live your day to day life. Don't become cynical or complacent about this important aspect of the Unseen.

The blessings that Allah bestows on humanity are real and have tangible impact. And yes, sometimes that impact is not explainable in terms of the materialistic parameters of thought many of us have consigned ourselves to.

Don't just acknowledge *baraka* in a theoretical sense. *Know* it and see the world around you in light of it.

As a Muslim, *baraka* needs to be a part of how you see the world. That will furnish you with spiritual benefits because you will be seeking that *baraka* and you will gain greater consciousness of your Lord. Your iman will also experience periodic boosts as you start to recognize the place of *baraka* (or the lack thereof) in your life. You will notice that remembering Allah (*dhikr*) and good deeds bring you *baraka* and the opposite take it away. This will immensely improve your state of mind and heart.

This is because you will see and experience the connections between the world and the will and power of Allah. These are some of the many ayat all around us.

“We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?”

Fussilat [Q41:53]

There will also be material benefits in terms of your wealth, time, efficacy, efficiency, etc. Things will start “working out,” so to speak.

You will also benefit intellectually because you will gain more of an understanding of how the world really works. Again, instead of theoretical knowledge, you will have experiential knowledge because you will have experienced these things and seen them for yourself.

So seek *baraka* in all the many things that Allah and His Messenger ﷺ have specified. Make it a part of your daily life and make it the lens by which you understand your life. And may Allah bless us all.

RAMZAN VS. RAMADAN

Nationalism is a funny thing. It can be the source of bonding and camaraderie as well as the cause of animosity, chest-puffing, and downright silliness.

Just consider all the online debate about the article “Why are Indian Muslims using the Arabic word ‘Ramadan’ instead of the traditional ‘Ramzan’?”, written by Shoab Daniyal.

The article details how, historically, the Arabic word for Islam's sacred month "Ramadan" came to be pronounced "Ramzan" in the sub-continent and how, recently, many South Asian Muslims are reverting to the "Ramadan" pronunciation due to, as the author puts it, the effect of a "Saudi-influenced brand of Islam" and "cultural insecurity" on the part of said South Asians.

Apparently, this is a debate that has been cropping up annually in South Asian communities around Ramadan time, and there are a lot of competing socio-political tensions that underlie and color the conversation. As far as I am concerned, however, much of it is little more than nationalism and thinly-veiled anti-Arabism masquerading as serious historical and linguistic analysis.

The Urge to Purge

Calls for abandoning "arabized" language in preference for a more "authentic," "traditional," or "pure" use of language is hardly new and certainly not limited to South Asia. Historically, many nationalist movements in the Middle East have called for dropping vocabulary, pronunciation, and script associated with Arabs and Arabic. In 20th century Turkey, for example, part of Ataturk's compulsory modernization program was replacing the Perso-Arabic script of Ottoman Turkish with a new Latin-based Turkish alphabet that was meant to be truer to the modern secular Turkish identity. In Iran also, government programs under the rule of Muhammad Reza Shah attempted to "purify" the Persian language by excising any and all Arabic vocabulary and replacing it with Farsi equivalents, even if that meant inventing a Farsi word from scratch. Historically, these calls

for purging Arabic almost always coincided with efforts to secularize society and attenuate the influence of Islam in people's lives.

Beyond the Middle East and Arabic in particular, attempting to reform the way people use language is often little more than a way to bolster, entrench, or cultivate nationalistic identities. Mundane linguistic details become the battlefield for ideological tug of war. What often features in these debates, however, is partisan historiography and what Prof. Reza Zia-Ebrahimi of King's College in London calls "dislocative nationalism." Prof. Zia-Ebrahimi's research is concerned with how Persian nationalists in the 19th and 20th centuries invented an Aryan national identity that they then back-projected thousands of years to claim that Iran — as a cohesive nation with its own distinct identity, religion, and language — existed in ancient times and persisted throughout history despite the "corrupting" influence of invading forces and cross-cultural mixing. Nationalist reformers in modern times then attempted to "purify" what they anachronistically believed to be that essence of Aryanness by "decontaminating" cultural markers of anything believed to be foreign and non-Aryan, e.g., the Arabic language and even Islam as a whole.

What these nationalists failed to appreciate, however, is that the concept of a nation is a modern construction - strictly speaking, just a figment of our collective imagination - and that the history of any given geographic region is a rich tapestry of interweaving cultures, languages, and traditions. Only a highly selective (and, hence, inventive) reading of history could ignore all that diversity in partitioning off a specific nationalistic or racial essence. This kind of nationalistic essentialism is, of course, not unlike what

renowned scholar Edward Said identified and bemoaned as being operative in Orientalism and Western colonialism generally.

Truth be told, this kind of caricaturing and mythologizing of history in service of contemporary nationalistic identity politics is ubiquitous, whether it is modern Egyptians feeling a sense of connection to and national pride for the Ancient Pyramids or modern Americans celebrating Thanksgiving as a commemoration of a peaceful partnership between the Pilgrims and Native Americans.

What does all this have to do with Ramzan?

We can see this selective and romanticized reading of history in Daniyal's Ramadan vs. Ramzan article. For example, the author repeatedly uses the term "traditional" to characterize the "Ramzan" pronunciation. The question to ask is, what makes "Ramzan" so traditional? Given that the sub-continent is home to hundreds of distinct languages and dialects, each with its own storied history, why insist on this one particular pronunciation? As Mahtab Alam noted in his post on this issue last year, not all Indians, let alone South Asians, claim Urdu/Hindi as their mother tongue. Besides "Ramzan," many South Asians have Ramojan, Ramjan, Rumjan, Ramazan, and so on. As he succinctly puts it, "Insistence on one [variation] is as hegemonic as the other one."

Further selectivity can be seen in how Daniyal describes the historical influence of Persian/Farsi on the Indian native language as opposed to the purported influence of Saudi Arabia today. The author does not see anything problematic or objectionable about the adoption of Persian language

and culture in the evolution of the sub-continent over the course of centuries. But, when it comes to the contemporary adoption of Arabicized speech patterns, that is somehow indicative of Saudi meddling and “cultural insecurity” on the part of Indian Muslims.

So why the inconsistency? If it is a legitimate, natural, organic process for language to shift over time in the sub-continent due to Persian influence historically, why is it suddenly illegitimate, unnatural, objectionable when that language continues to shift in present times due to an Arab (or American, or English, etc.) influence today? In other words, why does Daniyal take a laissez faire attitude when it comes to language transformation historically, but when it comes to modern transformations, suddenly “tradition” is so important and we have to preserve the pronunciations of old? What is so special, culturally iconic, and indispensable about this one particular Persian variant, “Ramzan”?

All that Daniyal has to offer in response to this is that “Ramzan” is traditional because that is how “most Muslim” Indians have been pronouncing it for a few hundred years. Of course, he does not cite any statistics or census results to substantiate this. But, lack of verification aside, if we go back in time, at one point that “Ramzan” pronunciation itself was brand new and unprecedented in the sub-continent, just like “Ramadan” is (supposedly) brand new and unprecedented today. Maybe in a few hundred years, “Ramadan” too will be considered the “traditional” and culturally correct pronunciation. Only Khuda knows.

Persian Confidential

To step back and comment on this entire debate, I just want to say that, ultimately, it does not matter how one pronounces Ramadan or if a Muslim says “namaz” instead of “salat.” From my own life experience and observing the cross-cultural Muslim communities in the West and abroad, I have found that these cultural debates are often nothing more than tribalism (*`asabiyya*) rearing its ugly head.

In the interest of full disclosure, I am Persian American and grew up saying “Ramezan,” “namaz,” “roozeh,” “sahari,” “Khuda,” etc. I still use these words when speaking to my Iranian family members and do feel a warm connection to my Persian heritage. At the same time, I have no issue using the Arabic equivalents when speaking to others, e.g., my Egyptian wife, or my half-Persian, half-Egyptian sons, who speak both Farsi and Arabic *ma sha’ Allah*. And, coincidentally, in Persian, my first name, “Daniel,” is pronounced “Daniyal.” Hopefully, my pronunciation of my own name “Daniel” instead of “Daniyal” is not cultural insecurity on my part.

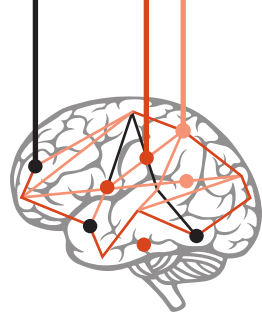
As far as orthoepy is concerned, correct pronunciation is religiously significant when it comes to obligatory prayers as well as the study of the Islamic sciences, e.g., transmission of hadith. Beyond this, as Muslims we should also not lose sight of the fact that Arabic is a special language for a number of reasons, chief among them that it is the language Allah chose for the Quran, His final revelation to mankind. Also, it is the mother tongue of the beloved Messenger of God ﷺ. Given these two facts alone, how can any Muslim not feel a deep abiding love for *lisan al-`arab*? As an American and a Persian, I personally feel no contradiction in or threat to my

sense of identity by acknowledging this love. And when we look at the history, literature, and scholarship of non-Arab Muslims the world over, we also see a reverence for Arabic.

Of course, it should go without saying that one's appreciation of Arabic has no bearing on one's opinion of the Saudi government or any other state institution. And, furthermore, this love of classical, formal Arabic, i.e., *fusha*, does not give modern Arabs the right to look down on non-Arab Muslims as somehow less authentically Muslim for any reason, least of which the fact that non-Arab Muslims use the words "Ramzan," "sehri," etc., in lieu of the formal Arabic counterparts. Keep in mind that the first and, arguably, most influential book of Arabic grammar ever written was completed in the 2nd century of the Hijri calendar by the Persian Muslim scholar Sibawayh, who was a non-native speaker of the language to boot.

Whether we like it or not, if we go far enough back in time, all of our personal family and cultural histories are inevitably an amalgamation of a multitude of cross-cultural influences, regardless of the modern national identities we may currently associate with. In that wider sense, vociferously insisting on a nationality and imbuing so much significance on a singular national identity and language just seems historically illiterate, chauvinistic, and, well, silly.

CHAPTER 14



MUSLIM SKEPTIC

THE VALUE OF DESTRUCTION TO MODERN ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP

My dad has always been a very handy person and loves to take on home projects mashaAllah. When I was young, he would try to get me to help him and I never really enjoyed it, but I still ended up learning a lot.

One of the things he taught me early on is that when you start a project, you have to make sure you are working on a clean, solid site. For example, if you want to re-paint the side of your house, you first have to clean off any old paint, take off any rotting wood, etc. Only after all that prep work is done can you actually start painting. You can always just forget the prep work and put new paint on top of the old stuff, but within a short period of time, the new paint will start to crack and peel and things will be even worse than before.

The same principle applies to pouring concrete or installing a new deck. The first step is very crucial. You have to disassemble, deconstruct, and, if needed, destroy the old structure and remove the debris. Only once the site is clear and level, can you build something that is solid and will last in the long run. It would be counterproductive and

quite silly to try to build something on the shaky remains of the previous structure because the final product, no matter how well-built it otherwise is, will likely be just as shaky and prone to collapse and dilapidation as the original.

Also if you are trying to build on the remains of the original structure, you will have to make adjustments and compensations to accommodate what you are building on. Rather than build something according to your own preferences and needs, you now have to build something which suits and takes into account the extant structure upon which you are building.

All this is just a metaphor for a situation our contemporary ulama have to deal with in the course of their scholarly work in light of modern issues. In this metaphor, the old paint or the old dilapidated structure is modernism and its concomitant -isms: liberalism, scientism, feminism, secularism, etc. This is the stuff that needs to be dismantled and thoroughly cleaned out because if a scholar builds on this, even if what he builds is of the highest quality and the most sound erudition, the end result is still going to be lopsided, shaky, and liable to collapse. But if the rot is scraped off and discarded, leaving a pristine, level work site, that is when the alim can build a true and lasting masterpiece *bi idhnillah*.

This is why we see so much *tawfiq* from our scholarly predecessors. They were building on solid ground. They were building on top of the solid scholarship of those before them, all of which was built on the unshakable foundation of revelation and the Prophet's Sunnah ﷺ. And that is how they were able to create this unmatched monument

of intellectual and spiritual achievement that is the Islamic sciences.

But at the dawn of the modern period, as the Muslims lost political power and European modernist philosophy increasingly became the dominant mode of thought around the world and in Muslim societies as well, that's when some of the discourse and some of the scholarship became reactive. All of a sudden, scholars are having to respond to these -isms and/or write their opinions in light of them, whether due to social pressure or political pressure or even outright coercion by colonizers and other agents of Western hegemony. And of course this — knowingly or unknowingly — affected the content of that scholarship. In effect, some of that scholarship ended up being built on rot.

We need to clean out the rot. We need to deconstruct and dismantle it and discard the rubbish. Then we can resume building with confidence and on our own terms, once again showing the world that nothing can match the magnificence and awe-inspiring splendor of this deen.

PURIFYING THE MIND

Just as one can suffer from diseases of the heart, so too can one suffer from diseases of the intellect. But in Islamic thought the heart and the intellect are intimately linked and inseparable such that they have a direct impact on each other.

Arrogance, for example, is typically understood as a disease of the heart, but arrogance also affects one's intellect, i.e., one's ability to understand and grasp truth. Arrogance can even affect the eyes such that one is blinded

from truths that are right before one's eyes. And this is an everyday thing that we can observe with people around us, where we wonder why some cannot see something so obvious. Same goes for maladies such as jealousy, malicious hate, and greed. Such diseases are so severe that they not only lay waste to the soul but also infect the entire body, up to the point of clouding one's ability to think clearly. When you analyze the work of some Muslim reformers, you can see the telltale signs of these diseases in the arguments they make and the conclusions they draw. May Allah spare us from such a condition.

Purifying the heart of its diseases allows the heart to be more receptive to guidance and light. But the mind and one's ability to think can also be diseased. By addressing these intellectual diseases and purifying the mind of them, the intellect is more receptive to guidance and light.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A "MUSLIM SKEPTIC"? -

Ibn `Abbas narrated a hadith from the Prophet ﷺ.

A man heard the hadith and became disturbed by it and objected to it. Upon hearing this, Ibn `Abbas commented, "What is it that they have to fear?! They easily accept what is clear, however when it comes to what is unclear, they are destroyed."

The modus operandi of the Western skeptic is to question and then object to anything that does not accord with his understanding. This is because he erroneously believes that his own mind can serve as the absolute criterion of Truth.

The Muslim Skeptic, however, questions himself and objects to anything within himself that does not accord

with Islam. This is because he correctly understands that his own mind is finite and that only Islam can serve as the absolute criterion of Truth.

The true weapons of mass destruction are immoral, irrational, destructive, fallacious ideas that appear convincing to people such that they accept those ideas as the truth, cherish them, and fight for them. In this case, it is far better to be a skeptic in the face of such “truth” than to be counted as a “believer.”

WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE MUSLIM SKEPTIC? —

Simply put, the Muslim Skeptic wants traditional Islam—as an intellectual tradition, as a spiritual tradition—to be taken more seriously in the world today, by Muslims and kuffar alike. Why? Because many Muslims have major obstacles crippling their faith, e.g., liberalism, secularism, scientism, etc. Many kuffar, too, have these obstacles preventing them from accepting Islam or, short of that, respecting the Prophet ﷺ and the Quran and the Islamic way. So let’s take down these obstacles. As Muslims, we understand the Prophet ﷺ, the Quran, and Islam as clearly beyond anything commonplace or within the realm of purely human, natural possibility. Imagine something of such beauty, power, and awe-inspiring splendor that to merely look upon it, one knows this is from beyond...this is from the Creator. This is the level of enchantment, amazement, and love we have or should have for our deen. The question then becomes, why isn’t everyone else seeing what we see? Why is everyone seeing barbarism and incivility, etc.? And there are a variety of reasons, but a major reason is these obstacles. So let’s address that problem in the best way.

WHY BE A MUSLIM SKEPTIC? ---

Allah says,

“And if you obey most of those in the earth, they will lead you astray from Allah’s way. They follow nothing but conjecture and they only lie.”

Al-An’am [Q6:116]

Conjecture, translated from *dhann*, is baseless opinion, assumptions, basically empty thought that is not grounded in truth, reality, and understanding. Allah tells us very clearly that most people live and breathe on the basis of *dhann*. But they incorrectly claim that they are on solid ground, so much so that they try to lead people. In other words, they put on a show of confidence and speak with authority, acting like they know what they are talking about. In this way, they try to get people to follow them in their error.

But the Muslim has to be skeptical of these false leaders. Even if a person speaks with authority or has credentials or uses charming, persuasive language, be careful. Judge on the basis of the manifest, undoubted truths of Islam. More likely than not, such people are only speaking from *dhann*.

As an example, every few years a new scientific study comes out on the “health benefits” of drinking alcohol. Secular, colonized Desis, Arabs, Persians, etc., point to the studies as proof of how backwards Islam is. But inevitably, all these studies turn out to be flawed and overturned or the results turn out to be ambiguous and ultimately un-repeatable and baseless.

A FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE FOR UNDERSTANDING ISLAM IN LIGHT OF MODERNITY -

Let me share a foundational principle with you that can greatly help address doubts in Islam in this day and age.

This is a principle that unfortunately very few understand, even despite having an extensive background in studying the secular sciences and even the Islamic sciences traditionally.

The principle is this: Not everything that people speak of as being real is, in fact, real.

Think about this for a second. How could large numbers of people speak about and presume that something is real when, in fact, that something is just a figment of their imagination?

Well, there are many ways for this to be the case and history has borne this out in countless examples. The most obvious example is religion. Obviously, entire societies and civilizations have been devoted to gods that don't exist. Entire religions have been established on the premise that these gods exist, yet those gods are based on nothing but supposition and misguided whims.

Another instructive example is found outside the domain of religion. This is in the empirical sciences.

Consider the scientific and empirical theories that were held as absolute and unquestionable fact one day but disregarded the next. There are so many examples from very recent history in the "hard sciences" like physics, chemistry, and biology.

Have you heard of the ether? Or phlogiston? Or corpuscles? These were empirical entities which were assumed to exist and were theorized about and seemingly verified experimentally by the scientific community but were later rejected as nonexistent.

How can that be? How could the scientific community have agreed that something is real based on empirical evidence and rational analysis yet that something turn out to have been nothing but a figment of its collective imagination?

We don't need to delve into the details of how this can happen for the purposes of this chapter. We just need to be aware that it can and does happen with surprising frequency in history, even in the scientific, "rational," "empirical" world.

Now let's apply that insight. In discussing politics and ethics and justice, there are presumed "moral realities." These are values that large groups of people believe to be true and real. Now think about it—if a large group of people can be wrong about something as seemingly solid as empirical reality, how more liable are they to be wrong about something like morality?

In our situation today, Islam is being attacked left and right on the basis of it not conforming to certain alleged moral realities. Islam does not respect freedom of conscience! Islam does not acknowledge democracy! Islam does not recognize religious liberty! Islam does not respect sexual autonomy! Islam does not acknowledge gender nonconformity! And on and on.

But what if these concepts have no basis in reality, i.e., have no moral weight? What if they're figments

of the collective imagination of modern people under the overwhelming influence of Western academic and intellectual hegemony?

If you can ask yourself this question and start from this skeptical posture, then this is the first step to resolving so many tensions and doubts that plague the minds of contemporary Muslims.

But unfortunately, many Muslim intellectuals and scholars completely bypass this skepticism. They just accept the moral reality of these concepts and values. This is an unmitigated disaster.

Why?

Because the obvious question is: If something like, for example, “freedom of conscience” is real, why is it not found in revelation?

“But it *is* found in revelation!” these intellectuals exclaim. And to prove this, they scan the Quran, hadith, and classical scholarly tradition to find anything and everything that can conceivably be construed as expressing the concept or value they adamantly insist to be real.

But their methodology is fundamentally flawed because for everything they cite as an example of that value in the texts, there are 10 examples that contradict it. But of course, those 10 examples don’t see the light of day in their research.

This is not always because the scholar or intellectual is trying to conceal anything or is being dishonest. Sometimes they honestly do not see the counterexamples because they have been conditioned to read and understand the texts with a lens that is inexorably colored by the same concepts

and values they are trying to discover in the texts. This creates a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle that often proves to be impossibly difficult to break out of.

The final point to make is to address the obvious counterargument: Well, why can't this skepticism be applied to Islam and Islamic values (whatever you may believe those to be)? Why should we believe those concepts and values have a basis in reality?

The simple answer is: We don't just assume this. We investigate. We analyze. We reflect. We ground ourselves in valid intellectual sources—i.e., Quran, Sunnah, and the classical scholarly tradition—cautious not to smuggle in any illegitimate biases. Of course, that is only the beginning. You also have to experience, feel, and taste. This comes through everything that Islam prescribes in terms of ibadah, dhikr, tilawa, etc. This is a comprehensive life program that allows one to arrive at reality and haqq empirically, rationally, and spiritually (since all these epistemic sources are interconnected).

But there is another important step. Clearly those who are entrenched in the modern worldview also claim that they “taste” the truth of their concepts and values. This is apparent from the passion and, at times, violence and animosity with which they advocate for those values. So what grounds do we have to deny the truth of those views?

Easy.

You simply deconstruct those theories of value. You point out their inconsistencies. You systematically pick them apart until it is clear to all involved that those ideas are vacuous and not worthy of respect or acceptance. Obviously

one might be less or more skilled in doing this. And the exemplar of this method is none other than our beloved prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him (Quran 6:74-83).

In any case, if you understand this method, you will immediately recognize what's contrary to it, i.e., apologetics, i.e., work that takes for granted modernist concepts and values and tries to justify them by appeal to selective citations from the Quran, Sunnah, and classical scholarly tradition. And then you will inshaAllah recognize how unconvincing and generally unappealing apologetics are until you can't stand them.

May Allah make us sincere seekers of truth.

CONFESSIONS OF A MUSLIM SKEPTIC

The other day, a Muslim teen asked me the purpose of prayer. Why should we believe in God? Why do bad things happen to good people? As it turns out, this barrage of questions only represented the tip of a big, ominous iceberg.

There are a whole host of questions like this that are festering in our community and causing many crises of faith. The unfortunate reality is that some Muslims are leaving Islam due to these unanswered questions, a trend that is exacerbated by the decreasing popularity of organized religion in society at large.

So Many Questions, So Few Answers

How do we address this challenge?

As someone who grew up as an American teenager in the 90s, the questions I had then were mere child's play

compared to the soul-swallowing issues that Muslim youth are struggling with today. Topics like gay rights, the war on terrorism, scientific proof for the existence of God, women's rights, the value of modesty, the merits of sexual abstinence, human evolution, the importance of family, etc. — anything and everything is up for debate, analysis, and, ultimately, disavowal.

In sum, religion is seen as lacking any intellectual credibility. The only way to restore that credibility in the minds of the doubting masses is to address these questions head on.

Skepticism Defined

Whether in the academic or professional sphere, the most effective way to address complicated, controversial questions is to take a step back and pinpoint the hidden assumptions that underlie those questions. This way, one can problematize (or undermine) the question itself and, thus, proactively address it on one's own terms.

Traditionally, this tendency to problematize and undermine common beliefs has been associated with skepticism. In the sense I am using the term, a skeptic is someone who will pause to deconstruct and critique a thought system in order to judge its intellectual merit (not to be confused with philosophical skeptics, who question the possibility of knowledge entirely).

Oftentimes, it is religious beliefs that are the target of skeptical questioning: Why should we believe God exists? Why should we believe the Quran to be the word of God? Why should we believe Muhammad ﷺ was the messenger of God? Skeptical questioning of this nature originated

with atheists and opponents of religion but, over time, has spread to all corners of the globe. Nowadays, even the faithful ask themselves these questions, and, when they cannot find answers, they either abandon the religion or ignore the questions entirely.

But there is another way.

Muslim Skepticism Against Liberal Secular Double Standards

From my experience, skeptics of religion often are hypocrites in that they do not attack all thought systems equally. They save their most rabid lines of critique for religion, especially Islam, but give certain non-religious beliefs a free pass.

For example, someone like Bill Maher, a self-proclaimed liberal, has no shortage of animosity in critiquing Islam. But does he take that same critical, skeptical mindset to his evaluation of, say, liberalism? Has he spent any time on TV delving into the many different critiques and questions plaguing liberal thought? Has he dedicated any of his programming to contemplating the amount of violence and death modern liberalism has wrought?

Maher portrays himself as an objective, neutral analyst using the power of rational thought to discover the truth, but, in actuality, he is a propagandist, as detached from objectivity and rationality as the fervent Bible-thumpers he lampoons. The only difference is he proselytizes liberalism instead of Christianity.

The Muslim Skeptic, then, is someone who gives such hypocrites a taste of their own medicine.

Why can't Muslims turn the tables by expressing skepticism about liberalism, the nation-state paradigm, scientism, humanism, progressivism, and the rest of the unquestioned modernist dogmas of our times?

Turning the Tables

Consider this small sample of “controversial” or “tough” questions:

- What is the scientific proof for the existence of Allah, angels, the afterlife, the soul, etc.?
- Why does Islamic Law require women to wear the hijab but not men?
- Why would an all-merciful God allow evil to exist?
- Do we have free will to make our own choices?
- Why does Islamic Law prohibit homosexual acts?
- Why do many Muslims not accept the evolutionary theory of man's origins?

What we often fail to realize is that these questions do not arise in a vacuum. Most of these are not questions that troubled or even arose in the minds of Muslims 30, 40, or 500 years ago.

These are questions that are characteristic of our time and intellectual culture in the 15th/21st century. As such, there are complex, deeply ingrained assumptions that underlie each of them. The only reason they may seem “tough” to address is that we are blind to those assumptions and take them for granted.

The Muslim Skeptic must dig out these assumptions in order to scrutinize and interrogate them. In this way, rather

than resolving such “tough” questions, the Muslim Skeptic aims to dissolve them.

Given the number of such questions threatening the faith some Muslims, there is a pressing need for such a skeptical approach.

Skepticism in Action

As a brief example, consider the question of God’s existence. Some modern Muslim commentators concede that there is no objective evidence for the existence of God, and it all boils down to a “leap of faith.” The Muslim Skeptic’s approach, in contrast, would be to first investigate the word “objective.” The concept of objectivity itself has a convoluted and interesting history that we cannot take for granted.

Then, the Muslim Skeptic would reflect on widely accepted standards of evidence used to undermine belief in God, e.g., scientific evidence, and evaluate them for consistency. For example, if we are supposed to reject the existence of God due to an alleged lack of scientific evidence, should we also reject the existence of things like the passage of time, human consciousness, abstract mathematical entities, etc., that similarly lack scientific or physical modalities? Clearly, most people are not extreme enough to deny such things that clearly have a reality, despite a lack of scientific evidence. And so on.

In this way, the Muslim Skeptic is not afraid to question widely held, cherished beliefs, such as the authority of science, in order to unpack hidden assumptions that cloud the issue and confuse people.

The best example of this strategy is found with Prophet Ibrahim, who literally and metaphorically deconstructed the idols of his time, showing their fundamental irrationality.

Conclusion

To be sure, skepticism is a negative, deconstructive exercise. Its purpose is to use rational argumentation to topple false idols so that the light of Truth has a chance to shine through. One of the greatest Muslim Sceptics then, in these terms, was Prophet Ibrahim who cleverly undermined the idolatry of his people, as related in the following verses:

And thus did We show Ibrahim the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith]. So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "I like not those that set [i.e., disappear]." And when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray." And when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my lord; this is greater." But when it set, he said, "O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah. Indeed, I have turned my face [i.e., self] toward He who created the heavens and the earth, inclining toward truth, and I am not of those who associate others with Allah." And his people argued with him. He said, "Do you argue with me concerning Allah while He has guided me? And I fear not what you associate with Him [and will not be harmed] unless my Lord should will something. My

Lord encompasses all things in knowledge; then will
you not remember?

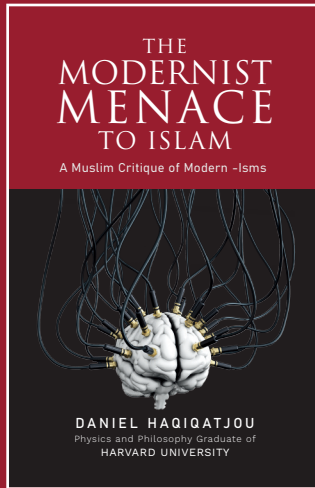
Al-An'am (Q6:75-80)

By pointing to a star, the moon, and the sun, saying, "This is my lord," Ibrahim mirrored the discourse of his detractors in order to reveal the internal inconsistency of their beliefs.

Muslim intellectual history is full of Muslim Skeptics who employed all manner of rational stratagem to evaluate, undermine, critique, and overturn philosophies they deemed dangerous or subversive. This is a lost art Muslims today should be keen to revive, especially given that we find ourselves in an intellectual climate that has proved time and again to be hostile to our deen.

As Sayyidina `Umar once asked, rhetorically, "Are we not on the Truth?" (*Alasna `ala al-haqq?*)

It is time for us to start acting like it.



Modernism is the religion of the colonizer. Modernism is the religion of the imperialists who bomb and occupy the Muslim world. Modernism is the religion of secularists subjugating Muslims around the world. Modernism is the religion of those who publish cartoons insulting the Prophet ﷺ. Modernism is the religion of the governments that ban hijab and halal meat. Modernism is the religion of the anti-Muslim bigots who want to see Islam wiped off the face of the Earth. Modernism is the religion that is being forced onto Muslims, pressuring them to abandon Islam and the Islamic tradition. This book is a response to the Modernist menace.

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