

The Source of the Problem: Both Islam and the West Have Forgotten Their Roots (A Philosophical Study of the Charlie Hebdo Shooting)*

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Introduction

In 2015, the entire world particularly Europe (especially the French speaking areas of Europe, e.g. France and the French speaking part of Belgium) witnessed very tragic and shocking attacks by extremist Muslims. Though the Islamic notion of Jihad played a central role in explaining the religious aspect of the events, Jihad did not play an explicit role in the Charlie Hebdo shooting in January 7, 2015, that was in response to cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad. This paper addresses this specific event, the relevant Islamic idea, and the destroyed potential for two civilizations, French and Muslim, to work toward mutual understanding and constructive dialogue based on philosophical analyses. It focuses on this case for two reasons: Since Muslims are very sensitive to mocking the Prophet, this case touches a wider range of Muslims; also, it indicates a major conflict between Islamic culture which is based on venerating the

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holy Prophet and European modernity which openly mocks and rejects the special place of holy texts, images, and persons.

Shocking and catastrophic events can be examined by external conditions as well as internal states. The tragic and dreadful events of Paris are not exceptions; they are related to inner and outer factors and if they are neglected we remain far from the nature of the tragedy. No doubt the attack occurred under the name of Islam. Also Charlie Hebdo, the French satirical weekly magazine, was featuring secular, atheist, far-left-wing, and anti-racist ideology. In other words, the attack in some way was linked with Islam and the magazine's cartoons and jokes with the Western culture rooted in the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Historically, the Western positive turn toward Islam after a very long period of negative approaches in the West, happened through the Enlightenment. Also, Islam historically is among the few religions which have showed high degrees of tolerance to others and which have a great esteem for the Enlightenment's self-sufficient rationalism². In many analyses extremist Muslims are condemned for this tragedy and blamed for their brutality. It may be better to examine the roots which touch both sides of the problem. How do these bitten fruits come from such fruitful trees? This short essay aims to highlight this point by explaining how losing the spirit of the Enlightenment in the West and the real faith in Islam leads to such catastrophic event.

The True Self of the Enlightenment

The core point is the questioning of the "Self" and the "Other" in the background of the event. The magazine as a part of modern Western civilization was enjoying the great and fundamental values like freedom of expression, criticism, and diversity. As a matter of fact, it was expressing "self" which appeared in modernity through the Enlightenment. In many ways current western civilization is the child of the Enlightenment. Regardless of how we approach toward the Enlightenment, nobody can deny its central position in the formation of Modernity. Free thinkers from Scotland, France, England, and the United States revealed the latent potential of Francis Bacon's vision and Isaac Newton's paradigm in order to preach social and moral progress in humanity. This fed the disciplines of psychology, economics, sociology, and anthropology. Many social thinkers and philosophers elaborated how the Enlightenment shaped Modernity.

²See Hussaini (Akhlaq), Sayed Hassan, *Rationality in Islamic Peripatetic and Enlightenment Philosophies*, in "Philosophy Emerging from Culture," William McLean and et al. (Ed), (DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2013), Pp. 71-86.

Nietzsche and Heidegger articulated the issue in their philosophies. The Frankfurt School, particularly Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, took a strong position in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Contrary to them, postmodernists like Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida attached one of the core ideas of the Enlightenment, namely progress. Nevertheless, Jurgen Habermas has defended enlightened modernity as “an unfinished project.”³ All these discussions and scholarly studies highlight the significant role of the Enlightenment in forming current Western civilization; so tackling the philosophical roots of the West requires understanding the Enlightenment and its fundamental values. This paper studies these core values with regards to the respect for other cultures.

Although the eighteenth century Enlightenment, the age of reason, consisted of various trends and reflected many ideologies and worldviews it is known for radical rationalism and realism. What are not clear and distinct for human minds were thought as the outcome of obscurantism. Humanity is the origin and the end of knowledge because “the proper study of mankind is man.”⁴ The way to explore facts and attain knowledge is limited to the human reason or common sense. Both knowledge and reason are limited but can improve and progress. This concept contrasts intuitional and revealed knowledge that were widely accepted; it adds that people are alike in terms of common sense which is the nature of humanity. This sameness leads to three significant conclusions: people are the same with the same rights; the path toward the ultimate truth is always open and not-finished-yet; humanity only through widespread and constructive efforts can reach progress and happiness.

The Enlightenment thinkers put their theory into practice as well. With regards to other cultures and religions they conducted not only a tolerant approach but also strove to learn from others. Here “self” grows up through interaction with “others” and wants to enrich itself by reflecting on unexamined ways of thinking. The nature of reason which is shared equally among all nations and people is openness to others, although they have to be examined by critical rationality. This rationality always is improving, far from any absolute claim. Therefore anti-religion here simply means anti-dogmatism and any dogmatism, no matter whether its subject is sacred or secular values, equates falling down in the fire of the opponent. “Tolerant, which religious fanatics dare to call a dangerous error and a monstrous

³Andrew Wernick, *Enlightenment* in “The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology,” Bryan S. Turner (Ed), UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006, P. 166.

⁴Ernest Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 5.

demand” Cassirer argues, “is termed the ‘appanage of reason’ (La panage de la raison) by Voltaire”⁵ who is the representative of the Enlightenment Spirit. There is, indeed, a great self-criticism through probing other cultures. If pre-modern Western man has thought whatever is common among other cultures and nations is meaningless and irrational, Descartes taught at the beginning of the modern time that traveling to other nations and among other peoples removes this assumption. Rousseau and Montesquieu in the Enlightenment went a step further saying this exploring travel proves our own traditions and customs are more irrational than those of others.⁶ At a crucial moment, in the course of the Enlightenment the people of the Orient particularly attract attention and demand equal recognition for their religious civilizations. Leibniz called attention to Chinese civilization; Wolf praised Confucius and ranked him next to Christ, and Voltaire transformed the historical view of Muhammad.⁷ Travel literature developed and acted as a main means to contribute new ideas about religion. However, the religious toleration in this context gradually evolved into freedom of religion and became the rights which nowadays are called human rights. This literature laid a foundation for Europeans to distance themselves from their own cultures and to see other religions as products of cultural systems rather than as conviction about absolute truths. However freedom of conscience also tends to create a kind of emotional distance from one’s own perspective and ability to think comparatively about other values.⁸

Philosophically these are the basis of modern human rights and modern institutions which celebrate freedom, plurality, critical thinking, and human rights. This article intends neither to avoid criticism of Islam, nor to stand for a single-reading of the Enlightenment’s concepts because both are self-contradicting in terms of the Enlightenment. However, both diverse and dynamic thought of the Enlightenment discourage us from concluding that it leads ultimately to a nihilism and anarchy of thought and practice.

⁵Ibid, p. 169.

⁶J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *the Western Intellectual Tradition: From Leonardo to Hegel* (Barnes & Nobel, 1993), p. 253.

⁷Cassirer, *supra* note 1, p. 144; See also Djavad Hadidi and Rene Etiemble, *Voltaire et l'Islam* (Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France, 1974).

⁸Lynn Hunt, *the Enlightenment and the Origins of Religious Toleration*, Burgerhart Lecture 2011, Series Burgerhart Lectures Dutch-Belgian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Number 4, <<https://achttiendeeuw.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/hunt.pdf>>, 27 August 2015; See also Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

On the contrary, this paper suggests a harmony between the enlightenment and Islamic rationality and openness. Fear of the consequences cannot prevent from following reason. This is said in Islamic classic thought by a well-known motto "we follow the arguments; we go wherever it goes." Moreover, the consistency between this philosophy and what already was suggested by Immanuel Kant who is known as the crowning philosopher of the Enlightenment. The point is to put our feet in the shoes of "Other" before judging them and then try to improve "self." The enlightenment's rationality stresses that we cannot improve and comfort human life without respecting others' worldviews or by reducing rational criteria and values to our own. The Enlightenment's spirit is the spirit of dialogue rather than monologue. It is a call to association instead of domination. In other words, although cosmopolitanism is central for the enlightenment, its respect for other cultures as well as its realism teach that freedom of expression is different from freedom of insulting; moreover what is insulting can be understood through culture rather than some universal rules, for what is an insult rather than criticism or mockery is in nature a context-dependent reality. As long as cartoons and jokes bring people closer together and help them to understand each other, and they improve constructively the human knowledge and freedom, they are consistent with the spirit of the Enlightenment, Western modernity; otherwise it is sitting on the branch of tree and cutting the trunk.

The Real Teaching on Mockery in Islam

The same distance from the original "self" is taken up by extremist Muslims which led to a deformation of faith. Although Islam is in the category of religion, it has its unique features. Its Prophet preached for twenty-three years and acted in accordance with space and time's requirements; this long time shapes the authentic nature of Islam. The substance of Islam can be grasped only through considering and analyzing its dynamic of living revelation within changing circumstances. I would like to point out some Quranic verses and the Prophet's tradition during Medina time, the second half of the Prophet's life which was associated with his government and socio-political authority. Many non-Islamic critics think the ethical and humanistic aspects of Islam have belonged to Mecca period, the first half of course while the Prophet and his group were weak and oppressed. Also some radical Muslims think that many verses revealed in Mecca time promoting reconciliation and blessing with the "Others" are brogated. There are certain verses and historical documents which reject

both hypotheses. Only two premises are mentioned here; the freedom of conscience and tolerance for mockers of faith.

In Islam faith is based on free choice and self-autonomy and the Quran. This core authority of Islam recognizes it clearly, saying, "[t]here is no compulsion in religion."⁹ This fundamental Islamic value is revealed in Medina where the Prophet Muhammad had strong political and legal authority and power. Most early commentators of the Quran including Ibn Abbas, a cousin and a companion of the Prophet, narrated that this verse was revealed regarding examples where the Companions had children who had converted to Judaism and Christianity; the Companions were forbidden, on the basis of this verse, from forcing their children to convert to Islam.¹⁰ Also there is another verse revealed in Medina that if Muslims face a community who are denying Islam and mocking it they must not engage them in that subject, but they can still accompany them in another subject.¹¹ It means that God does not ask Muslims to function brutally because they are mocked and ridiculed. Responding to one who insults a person, even a holy man like the Prophet, with his or her words cannot be killing. The Prophet is the best role model for Muslims and they are encouraged to follow him.¹² The Quran features for the Prophet this feeling toward those who rejected and ridiculed him; feel sadness and intense grief, no anger against them, for he used to blame himself that maybe he was not doing enough for their guidance.¹³ A very clear example is the deal of the Prophet with Abdullah bin Ubayy, Ibn Salul. He was the leader of the hypocrites of Medina; these hypocrites had converted to Islam because of its dominant position there compared to the Jewish, Christian and polytheist communities. However, the hypocrites constantly made fun of the Muslims including the Prophet himself, and also betrayed the Muslims, including their last-minute withdrawal from the Muslim army on the eve of the Battle of Uhud. Ibn Sulul, the head of them, was one of the Prophet's most vicious enemies in Medina. As the Prophet and his companions were returning from one battle, Ibn Salul said to his group of people, "Fatten

⁹*The Noble Quran*, Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Trans.) (Medina: King Fahad Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, 1420 A.H.), 2:256.

¹⁰Abi al-Fida Ismail Ibn Kathir al-Qurashi al-Demeshqi, *Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim* (Sami bin Muhammad al-Salamah (Ed.), Riyadh: Dar Rayyiba, 1999), Vol. 1, p. 682; *See also The Noble Quran*, 39:17-18.

¹¹*The Noble Quran*, *supra* note 6, 4:140.

¹²*Ibid*, 33:21.

¹³*Ibid*, 18:6; 36:76.

your dog and it eats you. By God, when we return to Medina, the honorable will expel the disgraceful." Of course he meant the Prophet, the immigrant Mecca man, who acquired power when he got support from the Medina people. The Prophet was aware of Ibn Salul's statement but left him alone. A couple of faithful insisted that the insulting traitors should be executed, a step that was common within the rules of war at the time. The Prophet replied, "Lest people should say that 'Muhammad kills his companions'". Ibn Salul indeed had inflicted much harm on the Prophet, when he was ill the Prophet visited him several times. When finally he was on his deathbed and still argued with the Prophet, the Prophet showed him his mercy and blessing. Ibn Salul feeling he is passing away asked the Prophet, "Give me your shirt, wrap my body with it, and pray for me." The Prophet gave his shirt. When he stood to pray for him, Umar ibn al-Khattab, the companion of the Prophet who later became the second caliph of Islam, pulled the Prophet saying to him, "Oh Prophet, this was the disgraceful man who ridiculed and harmed you. How can you pray for him?" The Prophet replied, "Leave me, Umar, for God has given me the option. And by God, if I knew that God would forgive him if I prayed for him more than 70 times, I would do it." It is said that the Prophet had not been seen to expend time in funeral of somebody as long as he spent on Ibn Salul's.¹⁴ The Prophet emulates the nature of faith¹⁵ which must be followed by his followers.

There Is No Conflict between these Two "Self"

There is no conflict between the spirit of the French Enlightenment, as the inspiring mother of Human Rights Values, and the spirit of Islam which promotes loving all humanity as the signs of God. Concerning the Enlightenment, the absolutism is its whoreson; also the insulting other cultures is as an illegitimate son of freedom of expression. Humanity is not an isolated entity; as we are born in physical and cultural surroundings the "self" grows and shapes in relation to the "Other" so respecting the "Other" is a kind of respecting the "self." This is why the freedom of expression goes alongside diversity, respect and tolerance, and forms a pluralist society. When current modern Western civilization, including the French one, practices the freedom of speech it must consider two more concerns: an internal and an external one. By internal concern, it means the modern

¹⁴Sayed Muhammad Hussain Hussaini Tehrani, *Imam Shinasi* (Mashhad: Allameh Tabataba'ii, [No Date]), Vol. 10, pp. 321-341.

¹⁵The Noble Quran, *supra* note 6, 21:107; 3:159.

France has to be in consistence with its enlightening approach. It cannot expect from others openness and keep itself closed. I saw an argument from a French lawyer for banning face covering based on the French sociable spirit. I disagreed with covering the face based on some Islamic advices as well as with this argument for the modern French root in the Enlightenment. Philosophically the world is impressed by French postmodernism which radically rejects both meta-narrative and a single form of rationalism.

Given that, how can a person justify a fixed and totalitarian spirit for France? The current intellectualism also has to keep a realistic approach and accept the reality that we live in a global era. The very smallest thing can be reflected worldwide and be interpreted in an opposite way. I do not, of course, suggest a conservative perspective but I aim to remind the intellectualism of its responsibility; it merely does not want to express itself, but in addition it wants to realize its purpose and fulfill its commitment to progress, rationality, and humanity. How much do such cartoons inspire its audiences toward acquiring further rationality, improve humanity, or further progress? Realism requires looking at other culture, here the Islamic one, its concerns and interests by an empathy and appreciation of their historical revolution and an attempt to comprehend them from within. It also asks us to be aware of targeted people's conditions.

The majority of Muslim countries mostly are impressed with the memory of colonialism in the past. They also unfortunately experience and deal with the Western civilization through political agendas which in some way advocate many current corrupt governments for example in the Middle East. All these issues create obstacles between Western moderns and contemporary Muslims. It is also worthwhile to mention that most Muslim countries arrive at a new world, a post-modern civilization, directly from pre-modern conditions. Unlike Western societies who benefit from a gradual progress and have learned the way to deal with current cultural and physical achievements, Muslim countries have to encounter with their forgotten history on one hand and with Western development which is inexperienced to them from another hand. This severe term causes crisis in both national and religious identity which the larger Middle Eastern countries are suffering from.¹⁶

As a result, with respect to intellectual trend and political systems many Muslim societies can be seen as at earlier steps of the Enlightenment.

¹⁶See this paper about the case of Afghanistan, Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, *the Crisis of National and Religious Identity in Afghanistan Today*, <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/sayed-hassan-akhlaq/crisis-of-national-and-religious-identity-in-afghanistan-today>>, 27 August 2015.

manuel Kant's word in 1784 still fits most Islamic societies, "If it is now
ed whether we at present live in an *enlightened* age, the answer is: No, but
do live in an *age of enlightenment*." If so, the advanced community needs
elp people out of both "*self-imposed*" and "*other-imposed*" immaturity
er than provoke and instigate them. Enlightening is not a physical and
ernal treatment to be injected; it is an intellectual and internal
erience which must be explored gradually and internally. This is true no
ter who is the target, the ordinary Western or Muslim individual.

uslims Need to Be Honest with others on Faith

uslims need more to show honesty with their faith in its substance. I list
w points here. If they repeat a couple of times during a day the Quranic
yer "Guide us to the straight path"¹⁷ it means they need to constantly
mine their relevance with God who is of the most merciful and the most
passionate, the divine attributes which appear as many times as the
nber of the Quranic chapters in the Book and is the beginning words of
uslims in any initiation. The Quranic chapter 106 recognizes security and
nomical comforts as God's bounty which must be appreciated.
efore how can Muslims appear non-merciful and lack caring for safety
l economic growth and then feel themselves in harmony with the
ranic statements? God's names are very significant in Islam. Among His
nes are "the safer and securer" (*Mu'min*) and "Peace" (*Salam*)¹⁸ and also
ple are created as vice-gerent (*Khalifah*) for God;¹⁹ how can a faithful
resent another thing but security and peace under the name of God?
reover, there is very much evidence that depicts Islamic culture and
lition as a combination of sacred and secular affairs so that even acts of
rship (*Ibadat*) like daily prayers and fasting which fully are related to
d are associated with secular concerns and conditions. It means personal
ditions, space, and times all affect how to perform them. The acts of
eractions (*Mu'amilat*) of course are subject to circumstances so that
tom and tradition (*Urf*) plays a big role in Islamic jurisprudence.
he Quran ordered the Prophet to get counsel from his people in major
tters of public interest, although their previous counsel resulted in
ure and they were imperfect.²⁰ The Prophet himself practiced respecting
ple's opinions and group's tradition in many crucial occasions like the

constitution of Medina and battle of Uhud and of the Trench. An
outstanding example is what Imam Muslim narrated from the Prophet who
said, "You know better about your worldly affairs."²¹ All these points
encourage Muslims to examine cultural phenomena in its contextual
meaning and intellectual atmosphere. The huge problem is that Islamic
intellectualism has not produced innovative doctrines and systems able to
face new questions and concerns. Still we as Muslims are proud of
exceptional figures like Abu Hanifah, Qadhi Abul al-Jabbar Mutazillite,
Avicenna, Rumi, and Sheikh Mufid respectively in Jurisprudence,
theology, philosophy, Sufism, and Shia-Islam, all from the first period of
the Islamic course. The later scholars remain merely their commentators.
The inability to produce new ideas in addition to Western colonialism is
among the reasons which paved the path for political Islam to emerge and
to nourish extremism. To the extent of my knowledge I believe there is
larger capacity within traditionally institutionalized Islam to foster reconcil-
iation between Islamic mind and contemporary world because it is both
aware and committed to both sacred and secular aspects of Islam while the
modern intellectualism leaves one aspect in favor of the other.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as much as Islam and Western modernity are sharing the
same fundamental values like social justice, freedom, rationalism,
humanism and the high value of scientific knowledge they exercise getting
away from each other for the lack of mutual understanding. The current
awareness of the "Other" occurs through reactionary meeting rather than
constructive knowledge. They approach each other through glasses of
presuppositions: many influential Muslims equate Western modernity with
imperialistic politics, a materialistic worldview, subjective philosophy,
unrestrained ethics, lustful art, and a broken family system. In contrast,
much of the Western mass media reflects many brutal phenomena under
the name of Islam like civil war, very conservative faithful, antirational
events, mystical philosophy, violent demonstrations, poor people, and
undeveloped areas. The main victim of this clash of stereotypes is
humanity and Human Rights. In many Muslim countries, particularly
middle east, people are not enjoying their fundamental Rights; for
examples their human dignity is not respected, they cannot determine the
kind of government they want; they cannot choose the way they dress; they

The Noble Quran, *supra* note 6, 1:6.

Ibid, 59:23.

Ibid, 2:30.

Ibid, 3:159; See also Sayed Yahya Yasrebi, *Tafsir-e Rooz* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1387).

²¹Abu Hussain Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Trans.)
(Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), Vol. 6, p. 210.

Book Reviews

Edited by Nadia Barsoum

Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa

LIFE AFTER RUIN: The Struggle Over Israel's Depopulated Arab Spaces by Noam Leshem United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press 2017, 242 pages. Despite the prevalence of rubble and debris, this book breaks from conventional focus on explicit sites of violence and devastation. Instead it begins with a question: why is so much is there? This question resonates throughout this research, which forms an exploration of spatial transformation and resilience in Israel. Physical and social planning mechanisms were harnessed to ensure the separation of the two communities, though as Gil Eyal importantly notes, these policies often resulted in the blurring of boundaries where strict demarcations were supposed to be found.

OF GARDENS AND GRAVES: Kashmir, Poetry, Politics by Suvir Kaul, published North Carolina, Durham: Duke University Press 2017, 224 pages. This book was written in an effort to come to terms with the state of affairs in Kashmir by reporting both on the embattled condition of Kashmiri life in recent years and by turning to older histories and political events that have shaped the present. This book calls attention to the political, cultural and existential dimension of the conflict of Kashmir.

SECTARIANIZATION: Mapping the new politics of the Middle East edited by Nader Hashemi & Danny Postel. New York: Oxford University Press, 384 pages. The key claim of this book is that sectarianism fails to explain the current disorder in the Middle East. The current instability is more accurately seen as rooted in a series of development crises stemming from the collapse of state authority. The foreign policies of leading Western states toward the Arab-Islamic world have only made matters worse. The book's contributors demonstrate, the sectarianization process involves the manipulations of passions and the "cultivation of hatred" it is driven by the machinations of dictators and tyrants and fueled by the bad faith of preachers and demagogues.

cannot practice in terms of their conscience; they cannot live where they want; they cannot travel where they want, they cannot choose the job they want; and they are not recognized equal before law. There are so many cases which prove humanity does not matter for many Middle Eastern States who are major allies of Western governments. Talking of humanity costs so much there and calls for many sacrifices. Both sides, Islamic and Western, thus, need to prioritize their aims with regards to human dignity and how they can contribute to celebrate it within its cultural and real conditions. It does no good to teach someone calculus if he does not know arithmetic. Moreover, there is a great opportunity for both Western and Islamic thought to develop a philosophical and religious dialogue to help scholars transcend the secular subjects and look to enhance tolerance and respect for all mankind in a broader way.²²

²²For example, for the Sufi foundations for tolerance in Islam see my paper "The Theoretical Foundations of Tolerance in Rumi," in *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions*, Vol. 8, Pp. 165-188 (World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish; CANADA), 2012.