



Mountains of Ignorance

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Dedicated to: Dr. Baig --

His kindness, generosity, and support helped me to undertake a journey – The Sufi Path/Islam -- whose purpose is to lead one away from ignorance and toward increased understanding concerning the nature of reality and one's essential identity and potential.

Table of Contents

Chapter One – page 9
Chapter Two – page 35
Chapter Three – page 55
Chapter Four – page 75
Chapter Five – page 91
Chapter Six – page 117
Chapter Seven – page 145
Chapter Eight – page 169
Conclusion – page 199
Postscript – page 209



Chapter One

Sam Harris begins his dialogue with Maajid Nawaz in the book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* by talking about “the prospects for reforming the faith” ... something that Maajid Nawaz is interested in doing. Perhaps, however, what has to be reformed is the understanding of various Muslims and non-Muslims with respect to the nature of Islam.

Dr. Harris assumes that he understands Islam, but he provides plenty of evidence in his books that such is not the case. In fact, Dr. Harris is presumptuous in precisely the same way as many fundamentalists are presumptuous for they all seem to be incapable of considering the possibility that they might be wrong about – along with quite a few other things -- their understanding concerning the nature of Islam.

At a dinner gathering associated with the Intelligence Squared debate in October 2010, Dr. Harris criticized Maajid Nawaz for arguing in the debate that Islam is a religion of peace that has been hijacked by extremists because, according to Dr. Harris, “Islam isn’t a religion of peace, and the so-called ‘extremists’ are seeking to implement what is arguably the most honest reading of the faith’s actual doctrine.”

What is the evidence that the “extremists” are implementing “the most honest reading of the

faith's actual doctrine"? What "actual doctrine of the faith" is Dr. Harris talking about, and on what is he basing his claim concerning the nature of such a doctrine? Moreover, what makes the reading of the "extremists" the most honest one? 10

Dr. Harris proclaims to Maajid Nawaz that: "Someone has to try to reform Islam from within. ... But the path of reform appears to be one of pretense. You seem obliged to pretend that the doctrine is something other than it is – for instance, you must pretend that jihad is just an inner spiritual struggle, whereas it's primarily a doctrine of holy war."

What is the evidential basis for Dr. Harris claiming that jihad is primarily a doctrine of war? He just makes the claim ... he never backs it up ... he never demonstrates how Islam and the Qur'an demand that jihad must primarily be understood as a doctrine of physical war and that any conflict with others on the part of Muslims automatically gives expression to holy war.

On the other hand, contrary to what Maajid Nawaz claims, the Qur'an should not be understood in terms of the historical contexts in which certain passages of the Qur'an were revealed. Rather, while those historical events might have been the occasion when revelation was manifested, the Qur'an must be understood as a whole, and the application of the Qur'an must be done in accordance with what constitutes the best way of engaging a given set of circumstances through the

entirety of the Qur'an's teachings and not just this or that cherry-picked passage of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an is guidance, not a rulebook or a law book. The Qur'an gives expression to a nuanced, multi-dimensional, rich, insightful understanding concerning the nature of existence and an individual's relationship to such existence. One must draw from the entirety of that understanding when engaging experience or one does injustice to the guidance.

According to Nawaz: "... what can unite us is a set of religion-neutral values. By focusing on the universality of human, democratic, and secular values, we can arrive at some common ground."

This all sounds very good, but it is almost meaningless. While there might be values that are held in common by humanists and Islam, those values are not necessarily religion-neutral because we don't know where ideas come from ... goodness, truth, character, value, justice, peace, harmony, and so on are concepts that refer to issues that have to do with the possible nature of the universe, and until we know the underlying nature of the reality to which such concepts give expression or what makes our understanding of such concepts possible, then, all one can say is that there are a number of potential points of intersection where non-believers and believers might be able to reach an agreement about how to proceed in order to provide everyone with an opportunity to continue

to be able to seek the truth concerning the nature of reality.

Just what does Nawaz mean when he talks about the “universality of human, democratic, and secular values”? Such values are universal in what sense? There are many different ways of parsing ideas such as: freedom, rights, fairness, justice, democracy, and so on.

The foregoing words might be universally used. However, there are tremendous differences in meanings ... it is a Tower of Babel.

Maajid Nawaz states: “Religion doesn’t inherently speak for itself; no scripture, no book, no piece of writing has its own voice.”

I disagree with him. If I write something, then, what is written gives expression to my voice.

If Nawaz, or anyone else, wishes to interpret what I am saying in some other way, then that interpretation gives expression to their voice. Nonetheless, to try to give priority to their interpretation over what I am intending through the writing is to try to deny my voice.

Moreover, reality has its own voice. It is what it is.

If a certain section of scripture – and this sentence is intended to be hypothetical in character -- gives expression to the voice of reality, then, in what sense does such scripture not have its own voice? If religion is a process of seeking to access the truth concerning the nature of reality, then, in

what sense does that reality not have its own voice, and isn't one of the problems that plagues many modes of understanding (whether in the case of religion or the case of science) a function of how people often seek to give priority to their own voice over the voice of reality, and, thereby, discount what reality has to say?

Nawaz goes on to argue that: "I asserted that Islam is a religion of peace simply because the vast majority of Muslims today do not subscribe to its being a religion of war. If it holds that Islam is only what its adherents interpret it to be, then it is currently a religion of peace."

Deen – or the way of Islam -- is neither a matter of interpretation nor a matter of majority vote. One has to be opened up to the reality of Deen.

One cannot impose one's own ideas onto it. Furthermore, one cannot impose the agreements of a collective set of individuals upon the nature of truth.

Although Nawaz wants to challenge "the narrative of violence that has been popularized by" militant fundamentalists, he is, in fact, introducing his own narrative into the discourse. In the process he has deprived Islam of its own voice ... the voice that God has given it and the voice that needs to be heard in order for an individual to be opened up to the essential nature of Islam.

The book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* has a footnote on page 8 that talks about a 2013 PEW poll conducted in eleven Muslim majority countries and shows that “support for suicide bombing against civilians in defense of Islam has declined in recent years.” Nonetheless, the footnote goes on to list the percentages by country “who still think that this form of violence against non-combatants is ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ justified are sobering ... Egypt 25%; Indonesia, 6%; Jordan, 12%; Lebanon, 33%; Malaysia, 27%, Nigeria, 8%; Pakistan, 3%; Palestinian territories, 62%, Senegal, 18%; Tunisia, 12%, and Turkey 16%.”

What does it actually mean when someone says that killing noncombatants is “sometimes” or “often” justified? Does it mean that they are prepared to do it themselves? Does it mean that while they wouldn’t necessarily engage in such acts themselves, voicing such things is the only options they are being given by the pollsters to express their disagreement with the way that the United States, Britain, or Israel goes about killing people with impunity? Or, does it mean that they are angry, and, therefore, they are prepared to say something violent because that is how they feel, but, if push came to shove, they would not commit that sort of violence? Unless one can meaningfully and precisely translate the extent to which words can be transformed into certain kinds of acts of violence, then, all such polls indicate is someone’s willingness to speak the language of violence

without necessarily being willing to act out the language of violence.

Millions of people around the world – including Sam Harris (for example, see page 129 of the 2005 Norton paperback edition of *The End of Faith*) -- use words of violence. However, only a very limited number of those individuals ever put those words into the sort of motion that ends in physical violence.

Moreover, what does it mean that: "... support for suicide bombing against civilians ... has declined in recent years"? Is the decline due to the way in which some individuals have had a chance to reflect on such actions and, therefore, no longer feel that those actions are justified ... even though at some point they might have been reluctantly sympathetic to that sort of behavior?

What has brought about such a decline? More importantly, if such opinions can change, then, what conclusions, if any, can one draw from an opinion poll except that, perhaps, one cannot necessarily be certain of just what those polls are reflecting or tapping into?

Relative to the United States, the vast majority of countries in the world that are not in a state of war consist of people who, if given a choice, are, for the most part, not violent. The United States, on the other hand, is one of the most violent countries in the world – both domestically and internationally, and the latter includes the unprovoked invasion of numerous countries around the world including

Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Vietnam, Yemen, Syria, Cuba, and so on that has led to the death of millions of people.

Whatever the shortcomings of the foregoing countries might be America is more of a terrorist nation than any of the foregoing countries or peoples. America has long been a country that propagandizes about the speck of terrorism in someone else's eye while ignoring the beam of terrorism in its own.

While discussing various military conflicts in the world, Dr. Harris indicates that many Muslims viewed some of those operations as being sacrilegious ... no matter how evil or secular the target of Western power happens to be. Dr. Harris says: "Saddam Hussein was the perfect example: he was a universally hated secular tyrant. But the moment a coalition of non-Muslim states attacked him, much of the Muslim world was outraged that 'Muslim lands' were being invaded by infidels

As usual, Dr. Harris has got his facts wrong. The several invasions of Iraq by a coalition of countries involved quite a few Muslim nations, and, therefore, infidels were not invading Muslim lands, but, rather, the invasion was carried out by a group of countries that, in one way or another, consisted of soldiers who could be considered to be "people of the book" (e.g., Christian, Jewish, and Muslim), but each of those countries had its own reasons – almost invariably bad ones – for invading Iraq.

Saddam Hussein might have been a secular tyrant, but the United States was quite happy with him when he was doing its bidding in, among other things, the horrendous Iran-Iraq war. It wasn't until Saddam Hussein started to work toward undermining the Petro-dollar by advocating the implementation of a new gold standard for making oil purchases on the international market that Saddam Hussein began to fall out of favor with the United States. 17

While, most murderously, Saddam Hussein did gas his own people, nonetheless, it was the West who supplied him with the chemical materials that enabled him to carry out that job. Moreover, Winston Churchill arranged for the Iraqi people to be gassed long before Saddam Hussein came up with the idea, and, perhaps, the actions of the supposedly great icon of British history who got away with such reprehensible actions inspired Saddam Hussein to follow suit.

In 1990, the case against Saddam Hussein's tyranny purportedly was so strong that the United States felt compelled to fabricate evidence in order to persuade the Saudis that the Iraqi army was massing along the border to Saudi Arabia when satellite imagery indicated this was not the case. In addition, in order to obtain Congressional permission to carry out a military attack on Iraq, elements within the U.S. government arranged for the daughter of a high-Kuwaiti official to lie during a hearing before Congress by claiming (falsely) that

she had witnessed Iraqi soldiers taking babies from incubators in Kuwait and smashing them on the hospital floors ... testimony that helped turn the tide of opinion within the United States in general, and the U.S. Congress in particular, to look favorably upon the idea of military action against Iraq. 18

In addition, let us not forget the role of Ambassador April Glaspie in helping to convince Saddam Hussein that the United States had no interest in Iraq's border dispute with Kuwait. By doing so, the United States misled Saddam Hussein and, thereby, helped make possible all the carnage that followed.

All the United States had to do was to let Saddam Hussein know that it would not look favorably on any invasion of, or attack on, Kuwait, and the crisis could have been averted ... at least for the moment. However, by playing games with Saddam Hussein, the United States government is, in part, culpable in relation to the tragic events that followed.

Moreover, one should keep in mind that both George W. Bush and Colin Powell went before the United Nations and put forth manufactured evidence in order to get international approval for the United States' desired illegal war with Iraq in 2003. Indeed, apparently, information is now coming out via the e-mail controversy involving former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that Bush, Powell, and Tony Blair conspired to generate an

array of false information in order to try to justify their intention to invade Iraq.

What is problematic about the United States invading Iraq – both through the 1990s as well as beginning in 2003 – is that there was no real justification for such actions. The United States -- together with a morally challenged group of coalition partners -- invaded a sovereign country without provocation and, in the process, killed hundreds of thousands of innocent non-combatants.

Whatever Saddam Hussein's sins might have been, they were his sins and not the sins of the Iraqi people. The United States, and its coalition partners, perpetrated war crimes against the people of Iraq

Whatever the tyrannical sins of Saddam Hussein might have been, the terrorist actions in Iraq by the United States along with its partners in crime were far worse. The United States destroyed the infrastructure of a once viable country, killed its citizens by the hundreds of thousands – many of whom were children -- detained and tortured large numbers of innocent citizens in places like Abu Ghraib, as well in a number of illegal black sites, and helped push the entire Middle East into a destabilized freefall.

Was Saddam Hussein a terrible tyrant? Yes, he was, but where is the evidence that Saddam Hussein did anything remotely like what the United States and its allies did to the people of Iraq? In

fact, the evidence indicates that the US military and its allies killed hundreds of times more innocent Iraqis than Saddam Hussein did.

Dr. Harris states: "One of the problems with religion is that it creates in-group loyalty and out-group hostility, even when members of one's own group are behaving like psychopaths." As usual, Dr. Harris frames things in a way that suits what appear to be demagogic purposes.

What are the 39 countries of the US led coalition but an exercise intended to whip up in-group loyalty in order to ferment in-group hostility against their out-group target -- namely, the people of Iraq? Why blame religion for doing what many, if not most, social groups -- religious and secular -- have done throughout history?

Moreover, what is Sam Harris doing by going after religion if not engaging in an exercise that seeks to establish an "out-group" with respect to those whom he and others who think like him can feel justified in harboring hostilities toward the members of such a group? Dr. Harris is so busy wagging his finger at religion for making in-group and out-group distinctions that he apparently fails to see that he is engaged in precisely the same kind of activity with his diatribes against religion.

The problem is not religion per se. The problem is human beings who use social forms of control, persuasion, indoctrination, and propaganda to create "us" and "them" scenarios for reasons having to do with the exercise of power.

While referring to Maajid Nawaz's distinction between "revolutionary Islamists" and "jihadists," Dr. Harris refers to a group of Muslims who: "...apparently wake each morning yearning to kill infidels and apostates. Many of them also seem eager to be martyred in the process. Most of us refer to these people as jihadists." Although years ago, I employed such terminology myself on several occasions, nonetheless, I think there are some problems entailed by such usage. 21

First of all, the primary sense of jihad – the greater jihad to which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) referred -- is an individual's struggle with his or her ego or nafs. This dimension of jihad remains relevant even if there had never been any armed conflicts involving Muslims throughout history.

By referring to fundamentalists as jihadists, one corrupts the idea of jihad – even in its minor, lesser sense. While the idea of jihad does encompass the possibility of using physical force to defend a Muslim community, any use of force that does not serve the more basic and greater sense of opposing the machinations of the ego is an inappropriate use of force and, therefore, does not give expression to the notion of jihad.

The people to whom Dr. Harris is referring are not jihadists. They are narcissistic, ideological psychopaths.

Like narcissists, the individuals to whom Dr. Harris is referring are deeply enamored with

themselves. Like narcissists, those people are incredibly delusional concerning their own sense of self-worth, and they become belligerent toward anyone who does not agree with their inflated sense of self-worth or takes exception with the manner in which they filter reality in accordance with their delusional belief systems concerning themselves and the world.

Like psychopaths, the people to whom Dr. Harris is referring have no conscience with respect to either destroying the lives of others or causing others pain. Like psychopaths, such individuals have poor impulse control and have little insight into the problematic nature of their own behavior. Like psychopaths, such individuals are interested only in their own gratification, and they don't care who has to suffer while they go about seeking to realize such gratification. Like psychopaths, the people to whom Dr. Harris is alluding are willing to engage in risky behavior with little appreciation for the consequences that might arise through pursuing that sort of risky behavior. Like psychopaths, such individuals are inclined toward manipulating and controlling situations to serve their own desire to pursue one, or another, form of self-gratification. Like psychopaths, they tend to use people and, then, discard them when the latter individuals no longer serve the purposes of the former individuals.

Finally, the narcissistic psychopathy that afflicts the individuals to whom Dr. Harris is

making reference entails being ideologically driven rather than being due to some set of biological, social and/or set of psychological conditions. That ideology is thoroughly delusional, and, therefore, everything they think, feel, and do is filtered through that delusional system of understanding.

To refer to them as jihadists – as Sam Harris and Maajid Nawaz do -- frames the conversation in a way that attempts to give some degree of unwarranted credence to their manner of portraying Islam. Such a usage gives the impression that what they are doing is just one of many, possible, legitimate ways of engaging or reading Islam.

However, there is absolutely nothing in the delusional systems of the manner in which fundamentalists and extremists understand things or in their manner of conducting themselves that reflects the teachings of Islam. Such individuals are deeply disturbed ... emotionally, psychologically, socially, and spiritually.

The Qur'an is very clear (Surah 2, Verse 256). There can be no element of force or compulsion present in the matter of Deen or the way in which one engages Islam.

Whoever treats Islam as if it were an imperialistic creed that is intended to control the people of the world and to which all of the people on Earth are required to submit has failed to come to grips with even the most rudimentary teaching

of Islam. Islam is, first and foremost, a matter of free choice.

Maajid Nawaz says that: "... Islam is a traditional religion like any other, replete with sects, denominations, and variant readings. But Islamism is the desire to impose any of those readings on society. It is commonly expressed as the desire to enforce a version of shari'ah as law. Political Islamists seek to impose their views through the ballot box ... Revolutionary Islamists seek change from outside the system in one clean sweep. Militant Islamists are jihadists."

Although many people of faith might have their interpretations and understandings of what is entailed by their approach to religion, one must distinguish between what a religion might actually mean and what various people take it to mean. Again, Nawaz seems comfortable with taking away the voice of religion itself – and this is true independently of whether religion is a human construction or it is something that is given through the nature of reality.

Individual Muslims and Muslim communities might be "replete with sects, denominations, and variant readings." However, Islam is not a function of any of those sects, denominations, or variant readings, irrespective of whether such hermeneutical orientations are considered individually or collectively.

To whatever extent a person seeks to impose his or her ideas about Islam on other people –

whether through political, legal, revolutionary, or military means – then, such an approach is rooted in a misunderstanding of the tenets of Islam. However one wishes to interpret this or that passage in the Qur’an, such passages must all be modulated in accordance with, among other things, the light of the Surah 2, Verse 256, and any “reading” of the Qur’an that ignores Surah 2, Verse 256 will be in error.

To the best of my understanding, the term shari’ah appears just once in the Qur’an. In Surah 45, Verse 18, one finds: “O Prophet, We have put you on the Right Way (shari’ah) concerning the Deen (way of Islam), so follow it, and do not yield to the desires of ignorant people.”

In Arabic, the noun shari’ah refers to a place where animals go for purposes of being able to drink water. The related verb shar’a involves the act of ‘taking a drink’. By extension, both the noun and the verb forms allude to a path, road, or way that leads to a place where one might take a drink.

There is another word, shari’, that is derived from the same root as the two foregoing terms. This other word refers to a lawgiver, legislator, or one who determines the law, but, as well, this term also can refer to a street, path, or way.

If one brings all of the foregoing senses into juxtaposition with one another, one arrives at the following sort of understanding. Shari’ah is a way, path, or means that leads to a place where one will have access to something that, like water, is of

existential import ... a set of circumstances that reality has organized into a means through which the individual, the way, the process of traversing the path, the act of drinking, and the value of what is imbibed are linked with one another. 26

The sense of law that is associated with the foregoing understanding has to do with the ordered nature of existence. God is the One Who has arranged reality in the way it is, and God is the one who has created the individual, the path, the water, and that which will happen when that water is drunk.

Being put on the Right Way – shari’ah – with respect to Deen, or the way of Islam, refers to the process of coming to realize one’s relationship with reality’s existential nature. Shari’ah has nothing to do with a legal system intended to control people or society, and shari’ah has everything to do with a process of struggling to find, and journey along, the path that will provide one with an opportunity to drink that which will assist one to realize one’s relationship with Being.

I consider both Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz to belong to the group of ignorant people with respect to whom the Qur’an was warning the Prophet against yielding to their desires concerning matters of Deen. They toss all kinds of terms about when it comes to Islam, but they have no understanding of what it is they are doing.

Dr. Harris refers to various groups that have analyzed the elections of Muslim-majority

countries over the last 40 years and goes on to state: “This suggests that 15 percent of the world’s Muslims are Islamists” – that is, people who wish to impose their beliefs on others through one means or another.

He goes on to argue: “However, poll results on the topic of shari’ah generally show much higher levels of support for implementation – killing adulterers, cutting off the hands of thieves, and so forth. I’m not sure what to think about a society in which 15% of people vote for an Islamist party, but 40 percent or even 60 percent want apostates killed.”

Even if one were to accept the foregoing analyses and poll results, there is a strange sort of inconsistency between the poll results and the results of election in Muslim-majority countries over the last forty years. If the so-called Islamists are all about shari’ah – at least as they understand it -- and if 40-60% of the people are in favor of the sort of severe punishments that are mentioned by Dr. Harris which forms part of what the Islamists are promoting, then, why isn’t the support for the fundamentalist approach to things up around 40-60% rather than holding at roughly 15% for more than 40 years?

Conceivably, people respond to polling questions in a way that they think will be least problematic or threatening for themselves and their families. After all, the person being polled has no idea who the person or people doing the polling

will talk to about what they hear from this or that individual who is responding to the poll ... better to respond in a fashion that meets the expectations of fundamentalists rather than to say something that might get the individuals answering the questions in trouble.

However, for the sake of argument, let's assume that Harris' information is accurate and reflects the actual position of Muslims worldwide. To answer Dr. Harris' question, what I would make of such societies is that Muslim leaders - educational, political, legal, and spiritual - have done a terrible job of teaching their respective peoples about the actual nature of Islam.

Let's approach the foregoing issues from a different vantage point. How many people in the United States believe that it was right to kill hundreds of thousands of innocent noncombatants in Iraq and Afghanistan despite the fact that neither country invaded the United States nor, prior to such invasions, took one American life?

The pretext for invading Afghanistan is that its government was giving safe harbor to Osama bin Laden and his followers. However, the Taliban government at the time of the invasion said that they would be willing to turn bin Laden over to US authorities if the latter would provide the Afghan government with proof that bin Laden did what the US claimed he did (e.g., arranged the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in

Washington), but the United States rejected that offer.

Incidentally, Robert Mueller who was the head of the FBI at the time of the September 11, 2001 events publically stated that there was no paper trail or hard evidence that tied bin Laden to 9/11. Moreover, on a number of occasions, bin Laden indicated during several interviews with media representatives that he did not have anything to do with 9/11.

Terrorists often take credit for atrocities irrespective of whether they did them or not ... since this is, after all, a way of helping to bring a sense of terror into the lives of the people being targeted. Yet, on several occasions, bin Laden publicly disavowed any connection to the events of 9/11.

Much of the so-called information concerning bin Laden's alleged involvement with 9/11 came from an individual (Khalid Shaikh Mohammed) who was water-boarded by the CIA at least 183 times and whom the CIA would not permit the 9/11 Commission to interview directly. Therefore, whatever information came via Khalid Sheikh Mohammed is completely unreliable and has not been substantiated in any independent manner that is not also substantially tainted with respect to its methodology or process of analyzing the data gained through such methodology.

Moreover, even if bin Laden were complicit in some way with the events of 9/11, the United

States did not have such evidence at the time it invaded Afghanistan in the fall of 2001. When, prior to the invasion, NATO asked the United States to provide evidence that Afghanistan was involved in the events of 9/11, Colin Powell promised to give NATO such evidence but never did so, and, therefore, there was no legal grounds for either NATO or the United States to become involved in the Afghanistan invasion because, according to the rules of engagement of NATO, a member country must be able to show hard, concrete evidence that one, or more, of the members of NATO have been attacked by another country in order for an attack on the latter country to be justified ... and this was not done by the United States.

The United States government did not provide evidence to NATO members that the Afghani government co-operated with bin Laden, or co-operated with other individuals, to attack the United States on September 11, 2001. Furthermore, the United States government did not provide the members of NATO with evidence that bin Laden was responsible for the 9/11 attacks on the United States, and even if the United States government had been able to provide such evidence, the rules of engagement governing the conditions under which NATO members might go to war involve the aggression of countries against one, or more, NATO members rather than the acts of a small group of non-governmental criminals.

Millions of people in the United States were caught up in the fog of war created by the US government and its media puppets during the hysteria and the climate of fear that were generated following the events of 9/11. Vast portions of the population of the United States wanted Muslim blood, and they didn't care whether the Muslims were innocent or guilty.

For example, first Madeline Albright, former Secretary of State, during a *60 Minutes* interview, and, then, Bill Richardson, former US Ambassador to the United Nations, during an interview with Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now*, both responded to a question about whether, or not, the US actions in Iraq during the first Gulf War were worth it given that as many as 500,000 innocent people died there and especially given that many of these casualties were children. Both of the aforementioned individuals indicated that what had been gained through the US's actions in Iraq was worth the price that was paid for by Iraqi lives.

Unfortunately, nothing was really gained. The world did not become a safer, better, more stable place.

Instead, Iraq was destroyed, millions of people in that country were killed or displaced, the Middle East was destabilized, and the actions of the United States in that region were a primary cause underlying the rise of such psychopathic groups as the Islamic State.

One might think that attitudes of people like Madeline Albright and Bill Richardson, could not get much more barbaric. Then, however, one remembers that it was the United States that used 'Shock and Awe' as a form of collective reprisal or punishment against the Iraqi people as retribution for the sins of Saddam Hussein, as well as committed extensive acts of torture in locations such as Abu Ghraib, and used white phosphorus in places like Fallujah, as well as extensively made use of depleted uranium throughout Iraq (and the latter is deeply implicated in the massive increases in cancer and birth defects that have been recorded among Iraqis).

When one recalls such horrors, one realizes that the West is also filled with its share of narcissistic, psychopathic ideologues. The only thing that distinguishes the narcissistic, psychopathic ideologues of the West from their counterparts in various fundamentalist groups in the Middle East is that the West has conducted its psychopathic acts of barbarity on a far, far greater scale than have the fundamentalist groups in the Middle East.

And just in case people like Sam Harris forget – as he seems to be wont to do -- using collective punishment against the Iraqi people for things that Saddam Hussein did, and/or invading countries without provocation, and/or torturing its citizens, and/or using white phosphorous on the inhabitants of such countries, as well as using

munitions made with depleted uranium to attack those people are all in contravention of international agreements. The West likes to think of itself as civilized, but its actions indicate otherwise.

One can acknowledge that many, if not most, of the individuals who are members of the Islamic State are narcissistic, psychopathic ideologues. Yet, despite all of their terrible, reprehensible, and vicious actions, those people don't begin to approach the magnitude of the atrocities that the United States has visited upon, among others, the people of Afghanistan for the past fourteen years, along with the people of Iraq for more than a quarter of a century ... and Iraq is another country that had nothing to do with 9/11 except in the power-drunk, delusional thinking of people like Dick Cheney and his minions.

Dr. Harris is worried about the number of so-called Islamists (people who supposedly wish to impose their religious beliefs on others) around the world as being in the vicinity of 20%. Perhaps he should be just as worried, if not more so, about the 40-70% of Americans (depending on the issue) who have supported, and continue to support, the militaristic and imperialistic policies of numerous US administrations to actively work to help bring about the death and displacement of millions of innocent people in Korea, Honduras, Iran, Vietnam, Chile, South Africa, Argentina, Palestine, Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and beyond ... the

same type of mentality that helped commit genocide with respect to Native Peoples in North America and instituted a series of racist policies concerning African-Americans that continues to operate right up until the present time. 34

Martin Luther King, Jr. got it right nearly 50 years ago during a speech he gave in 1967 against the war in Vietnam. He stated that: "The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" is the United States government, and one might add that the greatest perpetrator of terrorism in the world has been, and continues to be, the United States government.

Dr. Harris vociferously and constantly criticizes, and rightly so, the misguided Muslims who serve as suicide bombers. Too bad he doesn't spend as much time and energy criticizing the far more egregious misguided actions of the United States government when it comes to the dispensing of violence, death, and destruction around the world.

Chapter Two

Maajid Nawaz makes a distinction between fundamentalists and Islamists. He claims that the former's: "... support of death for apostates hails more from a medieval, tribal desire to punish the 'out-group,' that is justified by religious scripture than from a belief in the Islamist ideological project of codifying shari'ah as law and imposing it on society."

Earlier I noted how Nawaz had argued that: "Religion doesn't inherently speak for itself; no scripture, no book, no piece of writing has its own voice." If religion and scripture don't speak for themselves, then, he cannot simultaneously claim that religious scripture justifies enforcing the death of apostates.

In fact from his perspective, he can't argue that religion or scripture justify anything. Everything is a function of the voice that a given group of individuals impose on religion and/or scripture.

Philosophically speaking, Nawaz is really not all that different from the Islamists he wishes to criticize. After all, just like the Islamists and the fundamentalists that he is critiquing, Nawaz is seeking to misdirect people away from the idea that scripture might have a voice of its own that does not reflect what Nawaz, the fundamentalists,

or the Islamists are trying to argue with respect to the nature of Islam.

Nawaz goes on to refer to such non-Islamist fundamentalists as conservative Muslims. He points out that such individuals are “extremely conservative in their own families and lifestyles” and in the process often pose problems for various dimensions of human rights.

According to Nawaz, conservative Muslims don’t want the state to impose religion. Instead, “they want to retain the right to have their own understanding of what this religious conservatism means.”

I think the foregoing way of saying things is somewhat disingenuous. Conservative Muslims (just like conservative Christians and conservative Jews) do want the state to enforce their view of things, but when the state has a different take on any given issue and wishes to move in a direction (be this fundamentalist or liberal in nature) that is opposed to what conservative Muslims believe, then, the latter want to be free to either agitate for change in government policy or to take matters into their own hands ... such as occurs in relation to the issue of honor killings.

Nawaz believes that the great majority of Muslims in Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and so on are conservative Muslims rather than Islamists. He argues that, on the one hand, such people are opposed to groups like al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Jamat-e-Islami (i.e.,

who advocate some version of a so-called Islamist ideology), but, on the other hand, conservative Muslims are often opposed to various ideas involving the advancement of human rights. 37

If one takes seriously the Quranic injunction that “there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen” (Surah 2, Verse 256), then, not only are so-called Islamists and conservative Muslims in error when they wish to enforce their perspective on others (whether socially, politically, and/or legally), but, so too, is Nawaz for trying to argue that the only way to proceed is through some form of democratically enforced system of human rights that denies the possibility that religion and scripture might have a voice of their own that is not dependent on the opinions of this or that person or this or that group or government.

Everyone has the right to seek the truth. No one has the right to use that right to interfere with, undermine, or curtail the like right of others.

Nawaz notes how the organization Quilliam that he cofounded is dedicated to the process of promoting “secular democratic counter-messages” to the so-called “Islamists and other forms of cultural extremism” that are espoused by, among others, conservative Muslims. Democracy – secular or otherwise -- cannot resolve the tensions and problems that arise in conjunction with the idea of neither seeking to control the lives of others nor being forced to cede agency with respect to such matters of control.

The answers – to whatever extent they can be accessed by human beings – rests with the issue of sovereignty. The idea of sovereignty is something that I believe is inherent in every authentic religious tradition that has appeared on Earth, and resonates, as well, with the Magna Carta that was agreed upon at Runnymede in June of 1215. 38

The United States did not begin as a democracy. In fact, democracy was a “dirty” word for many of the so-called Founding Fathers.

Instead, the document that came out of Philadelphia in 1787 was rooted in the Enlightenment philosophy of ‘republicanism’. This was a moral philosophy that was supposed to govern the behavior of those who were in power and, thereby, provide a form of governance that, supposedly, had never been established previously in human history.

One can confirm the foregoing – at least in a limited way – by reading Article IV, Section 4 of the United States Constitution. That portion of the Constitution guarantees every state a republican form of government ... and do take note of the fact that what is being guaranteed is not a democratic form of government but a republican form of government.

The meaning of republican government has nothing to do with the philosophy of the Republican Party. As previously indicated, it refers to a form of Enlightenment morality that was

intended to govern the behavior of those who were in power.

Unfortunately, the principles of republicanism were abandoned even before the Constitution was ratified over several years following the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention of 1787. In fact, the convening of that Convention violated many of the moral principles of republicanism, but, apparently, as Ralph Waldo Emerson is reported to have said: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.”

Prior to, during, and following the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, there were many individuals frequenting the teahouses and taverns on both sides of the Atlantic who were interested in something more than democracy and republicanism. Thomas Paine was one of those individuals.

Such individuals were interested in the issue of sovereignty. This is a concept that transcends both democracy and republicanism (For an in-depth exploration of the idea of sovereignty, one might read my book: *The Unfinished Revolution*. These matters are also critically explored in my book: *Shari’ah: A Muslim’s Declaration of Independence*).

Nawaz refers to the activities of Quilliam as being reformist in nature. He says: “By ‘reform’ I mean renew or update interpretations.” He goes on to assert that: “... by pointing to historical and contemporary pluralism in scriptural reasoning, we

can challenge the rigidity of violent, fundamentalist, or ideological dogma.”

I am not sure how such an approach will be able to “challenge the rigidity of violent, fundamentalist, or ideological dogma.” More specifically, how does citing historical pluralism concerning the interpretation of Islam challenge dogma?

Dogmatic ideologues are true believers. If they were patient – which they usually aren’t – they would listen to all of Nawaz’s historical data, and, say: “So what? ... The people that Nawaz is citing are all wrong, and we are right”, or they would point to the teachings of certain individuals ensconced within such historical data and claim that those people got it right and everyone else being cited by Nawaz is wrong.

Nawaz wishes to relativize Islam. He wants to deprive Islam of its own voice and argue that because historically speaking there have been a plurality of views concerning the meaning of Islam, then, the Islamist voice is just one voice among many, and, therefore, does not give expression to what a majority of Muslims believe about the nature of Islam – irrespective of whether one is talking in current terms or with respect to the past.

If scripture or religion has no voice of its own, then, what does it matter how this or that person interprets the meaning of Islam? Revelation alludes to the idea that something not human is conveying information to human beings, and, therefore,

revelation is not a function of how someone interprets that information but, whether, or not, an individual can grasp the significance and value of the information that is being disseminated through non-human agency. 41

Sam Harris, of course, doesn't believe in revelation, and that is his choice. I don't agree with him, but I acknowledge his God-given right to make such a choice.

More perplexingly, however, is the fact that, apparently, Nawaz doesn't believe in revelation either. If he did, he would understand that the existence of a plurality of meanings concerning the possible meaning of Islam is irrelevant to the question of trying to determine the nature of the reality that is being conveyed to human beings by a non-human Agent.

Everyone who offers an opinion concerning the nature of Islam believes that his or her opinion is correct. However, just as not every hypothesis that is offered in science is necessarily correct and, as a result, must be tested against, and considered in conjunction with, the available evidence, so, too, not every opinion ventured in relation to Islam is necessarily tenable.

The task facing any given Muslim is not a matter of going about parsing or interpreting Islam in this or that fashion. The challenge is to struggle toward realizing the truth of what has been revealed to human beings.

Harris responds to Nawaz's use of the term "secular" by saying: "... you're using a more precise definition of the word 'secular' than is common in this context. To spell it out for our readers: Secularism is simply a commitment to keeping religion out of politics and public policy." 42

Why stop with religion? Why not keep every form of philosophy, ideology, and belief out of politics and public policy?

What is the difference between imposing religion on people and using some set of philosophical, political, legal, and/or economic doctrines to generate a version of politics and public policy that will be imposed on people?

In his book, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, Sam Harris tries – unsuccessfully -- to put forth a conceptual framework that might form – or so he believes -- a tenable basis for shaping politics and public policy in a secular manner. His book is filled with unresolved problems, questions, and difficulties, and anyone who cares to pursue the matter can read about such issues in my book: *Epistle To A Sam Harris Nation: Debunking the Moral Landscape* where I engage Dr. Harris on his own turf – that of science and philosophy – and leave religion out of the matter.

Many secularists tend to be every bit as fundamentalist, rigid, and dogmatic in their approaches to life as do many people of religion. The choice before us is not a matter of having to

choose between either some form of secularism or some kind of religion but of trying to come up with a way of doing things that provides everyone with the opportunity to work toward an understanding that transcends ideological dogmatism of whatever kind ... and, when properly understood, sovereignty does offer a means of bringing about the foregoing sort of opportunity for everyone better than democracy, republicanism, or any other form of 'ism' does. 43

While discussing polling data in Britain, Dr. Harris states: "To learn that 78 percent of British Muslims think anyone who published the Danish cartoons should have been punished – and surely some significant number would have wanted them killed – is extremely troubling."

First of all, why is it any more troubling that 78 percent of British Muslims voiced the opinion that "anyone who published the Danish cartoons should have been punished" than that various newspapers inside and outside of Denmark saw fit to publish those cartoons? If the issue is freedom of speech, then, why is one exercise of free speech any more troubling than some other exercise of free speech?

Complaining, criticizing, commenting, grumbling, and disagreeing are virtually universal human characteristics. People speak out under all sorts of circumstances ... when alone, with family, among friends, with strangers, in e-mails, on blogs, in bars, in letters to the editor.

However, while Dr. Harris gives the Danish cartoons a pass, he finds it troubling that polls indicated how 78 % of British Muslims exercised their right to free speech and responded to a poll that was intended to put Muslims in a negative light, and, in the process, stated that people who published such cartoons should be prosecuted. Apparently, Harris is among those whose perspective on things can be summed up in the line from Orwell's *Animal Farm* that stipulates that: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Why wasn't Dr. Harris troubled by the way Danish cartoonists and the papers that published those cartoons knew that what they were doing would stir up trouble? Why didn't Harris find it troubling that hatred, hostility, and antipathy were behind the drawing of such cartoons and their publication?

If the Danish cartoonists had selected the Jewish community and its religious tradition as their targets of opportunity, many people in the West would have been outraged about the anti-Semitism being displayed in those cartoons and publications. Moreover, I am fairly certain that many people from the Jewish community would have demanded that the cartoonists and papers involved should be prosecuted for hate speech.

In the West, however, many people feel it is perfectly okay to deride and belittle Muslims and/or Islam. Moreover, to add insult to injury,

many people in the West get upset with Muslims because the latter individuals seem reluctant to accept such discriminatory treatment as expressions of the “very best” of what democracy has to offer. 45

At least one of the Danish cartoons portrayed the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as someone who supports violence in general if not suicide bombing in particular. Dr. Harris seems oblivious to -- or, perhaps, is merely indifferent to - - the historical realities that counter such a depiction.

Neither the cartoonist in question, nor the owner(s) of the paper(s) that published that pictorial editorial had ever met the Prophet. Apparently, those cartoonists and publishers knew little, or nothing, about the life of the Prophet or what kind of a person he was.

Furthermore, the Prophet hadn't done anything of a hurtful nature to any of those cartoonists or publishers or to the Danish people. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would never have endorsed or supported the killing of innocent people.

The Prophet taught that: Women, children, the elderly, and other non-combatants were off-limits as targets in any armed conflict. Therefore, what suicide bombers do and what members of the Islamic State have been doing (for example in relation to Yazidis and Christians) runs contrary to the teachings of the Prophet.

So, why use the image of Muhammad (peace be upon him) to make a point about Muslim violence when the Prophet was against the very sort of violence that the cartoonist and the publisher(s) were protesting? Either the cartoonists and their publishers were completely ignorant of what the Prophet taught and stood for, or, perhaps, they didn't care what the truth of the matter was and decided to indiscriminately besmirch the integrity of the Prophet as well as to smear Islam when their grievances actually were against people who call themselves Muslims and, yet, do not act in accordance with the principles and values of Islam.

The form of the foregoing logic is along the following lines. Some Jewish people have murdered Palestinians, and, therefore, all Jews – along with their religious tradition -- are evil.

Such logic is faulty when used in conjunction with Judaism and the Jewish people. That same logic is also faulty when extended to all Muslims and Islam.

Unfortunately, the Danish defenders of secular democracy [i.e., the cartoonist(s) and their publishers] went ahead and gave expression to their hostility toward, and hatred of, someone (i.e., the Prophet) whom they didn't even know or understand. Perhaps more to the point, the cartoonist(s) and publishers knew they could get away with doing what they did.

After all, there are nearly six million people who live in Denmark while approximately only

175,000 to 200,000 individuals of that total are Muslim ... a rather large mismatch in relative power. Moreover, recent polls have indicated that some 50% of the Danish population believes that various kinds of limits should be placed on both Muslims and Muslim immigration within Denmark

There was nothing noble about a number of the published Danish cartoons. The problematic cartoons and their publication were not giving expression to hallowed features of secular, humanistic, democratic, critical reflection, but, instead, were giving expression to ignorance, fear, hostility, hatred, and bigotry concerning Islam and its Prophet.

Some of the cartoonists and their publishers had the mentality of a gang of schoolyard bullies that picks on kids that the members of the gang know are unpopular within the school system, and, therefore, such actions occur with the understanding that members of the gang are not likely to be taken to task for their hate-speech. Whatever points the Danish cartoonists and publishers were trying to make about the immorality of suicide bombings or any other shortcomings they perceive to exist within the Muslim community, such points are embedded in a deep-rooted hostility toward Muslims as well as a fear of Islam ... and Islam is something that they – along with, unfortunately, all too many Muslims – don't even understand.

The published cartoons weren't meant to resolve any problems or to constructively further the discussion in a civilized fashion. Rather, they were intended to ridicule a religion, its Prophet, and its adherents. 48

I don't have a problem when cartoonists or editorial columns go after the bad behavior of Muslims (or non-Muslims). Bad behavior is fair game for such forms of commentary.

However, I do believe that problems tend to arise when someone uses the bad behavior of the few to denigrate the many, or someone uses such bad behavior as a means of trying to justify the denigration of a religious tradition that does not support or advocate that sort of bad behavior.

Free speech is not an absolute right. There are limits to free speech.

Yelling "Fire" in a crowded theater if there is no fire does not fall under the umbrella of free speech. Giving false witness and/or perjuring oneself while giving testimony in a court of law are not protected forms of free speech.

Claiming that a product is safe or free of defects when one knows this is not the case is not covered by the right to free speech. Furthermore, the principle of free speech does not give one the right to demean, denigrate, ridicule, or belittle someone because of his or her race, religion, creed, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity.

By doing what they did, the Danish cartoonists to whom I am alluding – along with their enabling publishers -- demonstrated their lack of creative imagination. This is the case because if the cartoonists and publishers wanted to critically examine some belief, value, or behavior of the Muslim community in order to improve the quality of life in Denmark, then, they should have found a way of doing so that constructively engaged Muslims rather than using their artistic talents and positions of power within the media to belittle and hurt Muslims within or outside of Denmark and, in the process, add fuel to a fire that is already burning out of control. 49

In the previously given quote, Dr. Harris says that: “ ... surely some significant number would have wanted them killed.” He is talking about “some significant number” of Muslims, and the “them” to whom he is referring are the Danish cartoonists and publishers.”

The foregoing statement is problematic on several levels. To begin with, Dr. Harris is merely speculating when he alludes to some significant number of Muslims who would have wanted the cartoonists and publishers killed since if he had evidence to back up what he is saying, then, he would have put forth such evidence.

Secondly, putting aside the fact that the phrase “ some significant number” is relatively meaningless in its amorphousness, even if one were to come up with hard evidence that “some

significant number” of Muslims might have wanted the cartoonists and publishers killed, Dr. Harris has no way of knowing who, if anyone, would have tried to realize such a desire. Many people talk about wanting to kill this or that person, but only a limited number of such people actually carry through with such a course of action.

Some husbands say it to their wives, and some wives say it to their husbands. Some kids say it to their parents, and some parents say it to their kids.

Some people in the out-group say it about members of the in-group. Some people in the in-group say it about members of the out-group.

Dr. Harris stated in his book, *The End of Faith*, “... the only thing likely to ensure our survival might be a nuclear first strike of our own. Needless to say, this would be an unthinkable crime – as it would kill tens of millions of innocent civilians in a single day – but it might be the only course of action available to us, given what Islamists believe.” (Page 129 of the 2005 Norton paperback edition). Dr. Harris is disturbingly reckless with his language since no matter what so-called Islamists might believe, killing millions of innocent people is not a solution to any problem.

Yet, here is Dr. Harris contemplating the possibility of killing people ... killing tens of millions of innocent people. He recognizes that what he is contemplating is an unthinkable crime and, yet, he claims that such a course of action might be the only way to proceed.

Will Harris ever follow through on his talk of killing Muslims? I don't know ... I hope not, but, nonetheless, he has given expression to such a thought. 51

So, if a Muslim extremist should make a statement about wanting to kill Danish cartoonists and their publishers, how – and why – should one distinguish such statements from Dr. Harris's own stated idea about killing tens of millions of innocent Muslims. Are these instances of reckless verbiage, or should we be every bit as concerned about the possible lethal, future actions of Dr. Harris as Dr. Harris is concerned about the possible lethal, future actions of some unknown number of Muslims who might make statements about killing someone ... or, perhaps, it is all a matter of the pot wanting to call the kettle black and failing to realize the hypocrisy present in such published statements.

Are there pathological idiots present in almost any given group of people who believe they have the right to kill whomever they like? Yes, there are.

Are there some individuals in virtually every race, religion, political persuasion, ethnicity, creed, and socio-economic niche who have acted on the foregoing sorts of lethal desires? Yes, there are.

However, even in the United States, where tens of thousands of people are murdered – year in and year out -- the number of people who actually act on their murderous ideation is extremely small.

Not everyone who speaks about killing someone is prepared to follow through on those words.

In fact, thankfully, only a very small percentage of people are willing to do so in any given society. Unfortunately, some individuals within the aforementioned small percentage of people have power, and, consequently, they are able to leverage that power in ways that enable them to kill others more efficiently ... as is the case with all too many politicians, military commanders, and corporate leaders.

While on occasion this or that Muslim in the United States, Britain, France, or some other country in the West might have ceded agency to their base instincts and either attempted to kill someone or succeeded in doing so, there is no evidence of which I am aware to indicate that Muslims in the West – or anywhere else -- are more willing or more likely to translate any given desire to kill someone into an active reality than are individuals from other religious, political, racial, philosophical, or ethnic backgrounds.

Unfortunately, Dr. Harris appears to want to engage in the politics of fearmongering. In other words, he puts forth carefully framed arguments – often based on faulty reasoning -- that have the effect of encouraging people in the West to have unreasonable fears concerning Muslims and Islam in general, when the actual problems posed by Muslim extremists is far more narrow in scope.

Citizens of the United States are as likely (perhaps more so) to be killed by their furniture than be killed by Muslim terrorists. All one has to do to verify this claim is to look up the numbers in the reports of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and The National Counter Terrorism Center.

All the time that Dr. Harris has been engaged in a variety of propagandistic activities against religion, the West busily goes about its military, political, financial, and corporate policies that are killing, oppressing, and displacing millions of people (some of them Muslim) in virtually every part of the world. So-called "Islamists" constitute a very real problem for the world. Nonetheless, such people are not the only terrorists about whom one has to be concerned.

Many governments in the West have been actively pursuing policies that are intended to terrorize various populations around the world. In fact, it is the terrorist activities of Western governments in places like: Indonesia, Vietnam, Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and beyond that have been one of the most significant causal factors underlying the spawning of several generations of the sort of non-governmental and non-institutional terrorism about which Dr. Harris is so hysterically invested.

I do not agree with, nor do I support, the activities of any Muslim group or individual that employs the tactics of terrorism and/or seeks to

oppress Muslims or non-Muslims. However, I also do not agree with, nor do I support, the activities of military, institutional, governmental, financial, corporate, or coalition groups that terrorize and/or seek to oppress people – both Muslim and non-Muslim – throughout the world in order to exploit territory, societies, peoples, or resources for the selfish, narrow, greedy, and corrupt ends of the foregoing sorts of groups and who, by proceeding in such a fashion, help create the conditions out of which the limited terrorism of individuals and disaffected groups arises.

Chapter Three

Maajid Nawaz states: "... one of the most alarming polls reported recently by the London Times found that one in every seven young Britons has 'warm feelings' toward the Islamic State. Whether or not this is accurate, it suggests a level of grassroots sympathy that is too high for comfort."

I assume that when Nawaz mentions "one in every seven Britons" he is referring to just Muslim youth. He doesn't say anything about the ages of the individuals that were polled, and it would be interesting to know how much of the "warm feelings toward the Islamic State" is a function of British Muslim youth having had to endure various forms of abuse, bigotry, profiling, racism, and discrimination in Britain as those young people grew up while the British government was waging war on innocent Muslims in different parts of the world.

Nawaz says that he is not sure whether, or not, the figures cited in the poll are accurate. If he doesn't know their accuracy, why is he reporting them? Moreover, why is he claiming that such uncertain figures suggest a "level of grassroots sympathy that is too high for comfort"?

Ignorance doesn't suggest anything but ignorance. However, because the unknown

accuracy of the poll serves his purposes, he proceeds to indicate that such data is discomfoting. 56

Another problem with Nawaz's foregoing statement involves the ambiguity that permeates his use of the term "warm feelings". Just what does this mean?

Does it mean that such British Muslims support the beheadings and slaughter of innocent people? Or, does it mean that those individuals are somewhat positively disposed toward the idea that someone - despite engaging in reprehensible behaviors with respect to innocent people - is trying to oppose the attempt of Western powers, as well as entrenched Muslim tyrants, to continue running things in the same old way?

I like the line from the song "For What Its Worth" by the Buffalo Springfield that runs: "Nobody's right if everybody's wrong." And, surely, there are few, if any, right ways that are being pursued throughout the Middle East irrespective of whether one is talking about Muslims or non-Muslims.

However, some British Muslim youths might dislike the Islamic State for the way in which it slaughters innocents, while liking the fact that someone is fighting against Western and Muslim governments who engage in their own forms of slaughter of innocent people. We live in a world in which many of our choices are done against a backdrop of an array of undesirable possibilities,

and, unfortunately, oftentimes, many of the options that are available are highly problematic ones.

A person might feel compelled to act in some manner. Yet, trying to navigate one's way through all the pitfalls and problems on the way to realizing one form of action or another is not an easy process.

Life is complicated and often messy. A person's feelings about some given group might not be as black and white as Nawaz and Harris seem to want to make things, and conceivably, some Muslims might consider the Islamic State – as reprehensible as its actions are – to be the lesser of the many evils that are at play in the Middle East.

Nawaz indicates that some 500-1000 Muslims who live in Britain have gone to Iraq and Syria in order to join the Islamic State. There are nearly 3 million people who identify themselves as Muslim that live in Great Britain, and a considerable proportion of that population involves young people, so, the percentage of Muslims in Britain that actually went off to join the Islamic State is quite small.

If, based on recent demographic data indicating that due to rising birth rates the Muslim population in England has doubled in the last ten years, then, somewhere in the vicinity of half to two-thirds of the Muslim population in Britain is likely to be under 25 years of age. Previously I noted how Nawaz indicated that a recent poll in England showed that one in seven British Muslim

youth had some sort of “warm feelings” toward Islamic State, and, as well, Nawaz estimates that somewhere between 500-1,000 Muslims left to join the Islamic State. 58

One in seven amounts to a little over 14%. If one multiplies that figure times the number of Muslim youth who live in Great Britain, one comes out with a figure that falls somewhere between 210,000 and 280,000 individuals who had “warm feelings” toward the Islamic State, and, yet, only 500-1,000 people (and we don’t know their ages) actually went to join up ... an extremely small percentage of the possible candidates who could have joined given the number of people who, according to a poll, expressed some degree of “warm feelings” toward the Islamic State.

Assuming that any of the 500-1,000 British Muslims who joined the Islamic State actually live long enough to return to England, one wonders how many of them will still have “warm feelings” toward the Islamic State after they have had the opportunity to see that organization operate up close and personal. Starting out, fighting a war might seem to be all about glory, principle, defending the moral high ground, and the like, but, very quickly, people find that war is cruel, barbaric, dishonest, brutal, arbitrary, duplicitous, hypocritical, disillusioning, and oppressive with virtually all moral principles being among the first casualties of armed conflict ... there is a reason why the suicide rate among American veterans

returning from Afghanistan and Iraq has been so high.

Dr. Harris states: “To return to your personal story for a moment, your Islamism seems to have been primarily political, borne of some legitimate grievances – primarily racial injustice – that you began to view through the lens of Islam. But you haven’t said, as members of al-Qaeda do, that you were incensed by the sacrilege of infidel boots on the ground near Muslim holy sites on the Arabian Peninsula. To what degree did religious beliefs – a desire for martyrdom, for instance – motivate you and your fellow Islamists? And if no such ideas were operative, can you discuss the religious difference between a revolutionary Islamist outlook and a jihadist one?”

I don’t know why Dr. Harris is treating Nawaz as if he is an expert on everything that has to do with fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, and the like. To be sure, Nawaz might – or might not – have a certain amount of insight into his own reasoning process that led him to make the choices he did concerning such groups, and, and as well, he might have derived a certain amount of insight with respect to some of the individuals with whom he had the opportunity to talk and interact that were operating in the same circles within which Nawaz was working, but none of this necessarily makes Nawaz an expert on the outlook of fundamentalists, extremists, and terrorists in general. In fact, one can’t even be certain that

Nawaz correctly understands his own motivations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with respect to such matters. 60

In any event, earlier in *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*, Nawaz indicated that the Islamist group to which he belonged “didn’t exist in Pakistan until we exported it from Britain.” So, what Nawaz is familiar with is a British export, and this does not qualify him to speak with any degree of expertise or insight concerning the reasons why people from other parts of the world make the choices they do with respect to joining extremist and fundamentalist groups.

During his travels, Nawaz might have had extensive contact with a small circle of people. He might, or might not, have some understanding of the individuals with whom he might have had extensive contact, but as for the rest of the world, Nawaz is only speculating about the factors that shape the decisions of the hundreds and thousands of people with whom he has had little, or no, interaction, and, therefore, I think that anything he has to say about such issues needs to be reflected upon with some degree of critical caution.

Nawaz provides an outline of his theory about what he believes motivates those he refers to as Islamists and jihadists to do what they do. He states: “... I believe that four elements exist in all forms of ideological recruitment: “a grievance narrative, whether real or perceived; an identity

crisis; a charismatic recruiter; and ideological dogma. The dogma's 'narrative' is its propaganda." 61

The four elements listed by Nawaz are so amorphous that virtually every single philosophical, political, religious, economic, scientific, and social system of ideas could satisfy his set of conditions. If his intention is to account for why fundamentalists and extremists do what they do, I don't think his intention will be well served by his explanatory framework because it doesn't provide any insight as to why a person might decide to move in one ideological direction rather than another.

Society, politics, law, communities, nations, the media, education, and most institutions are replete with "grievance narratives" ... both "real and perceived." The problem is to try to figure out which, if any, of such grievance narrative reflects the actual data of life.

How does a person go about resolving the foregoing problem? How does a person epistemologically engage experience to be able to filter out the false and retain the truth?

According to Nawaz, a charismatic recruiter plays a significant role with respect to resolving such problems. However, charisma is something of a will-o'-the-wisp kind of phenomenon ... what one person finds to be charismatic another person will find to be boring and uninteresting.

Charisma is not necessarily a matter of one individual having a quality that magically attracts other people. Charisma might be a function of a complex dynamic in which one person has to be in a condition that renders him or her open to certain qualities that are manifested through another human being.

There are many factors involving family, friends, education, psychological tendencies, motivational elements, and personal history that might determine whether, or not, a given individual will be receptive to what someone else is saying. One might claim that what causes a match to light is the person who is operating on the match, but unless the match is made in the right way with the requisite ingredients that are in proper proportions with respect to one another, and unless conditions such as the amount of oxygen, wind, and dampness fall above, or below, certain parameters, then, obviously, whether or not the match lights when struck depends on more than the person doing the striking.

On one occasion, a person might listen to someone while operating out of one mixture of the aforementioned factors, and what the speaker has to say might be ignored or rejected at that point in time. However, the relationship among the psychological, emotional, conceptual, physical, and social factors that shape a listener's perspective can be so sensitive to slightly different mixtures and arrangement of such factors that listening to the

same speaker saying the same things on some other occasion might, suddenly, become strangely attractive to that same listener. 63

The dynamics of undue influence are complex. Indeed, they are far more complex than can be accounted for by the very simplistic outline provided by Maajid Nawaz during his conversation with Sam Harris.

Nawaz actually indicates that the presence of charisma, in and of itself, is not enough to account for why someone moves in the direction of fundamentalist or extremist ideological positions. He alludes to the importance of the role played by an array of psychological, social, emotional, and personal factors – which he terms “an identity crisis” – in helping to push or pull someone toward extremism or fundamentalism.

An identity crisis exists when one is not sure who one is or what one should believe in or whom one should trust or what one should do with one’s life. Almost everyone goes through an identity crisis at one, or more points, in their lives, and, yet, not everyone chooses to become committed to some sort of fundamentalist or extremist ideology.

The foregoing sorts of identity crises occur in contexts that are permeated with an array of ongoing grievance narratives. In addition, there are many people – so-called leaders -- who are proposing solutions concerning such narratives, and, as a result, might be perceived by a person

who is experiencing an identity crisis to be charismatic.

Even when considered collectively, the foregoing three elements (i.e., grievance narrative, charismatic recruiter, or identity crisis) do not account for why a person moves in one direction rather than another. What is missing is the moment-to-moment phenomenology of an individual as she or he attempts to come to some sort of understanding and decision in relation to an array of grievances, charismatic leaders, and an ongoing identity crisis.

Similarly, adding a fourth element – namely, ideological dogma – adds little to trying to figure out why a person moves in the direction of extremism or fundamentalism rather than in some other direction. We are all surrounded by ideological dogmas of one kind or another – political, economic, legal, social, scientific, religious, and philosophical – and, therefore, accounting for why a person becomes committed to one kind of ideological dogma rather than some other kind of dogma is not advanced by referring to the existence of ideological dogma per se.

Living amidst numerous forms of grievance narratives, potential charismatic recruiters, identity crises, and ideological dogma tends to be confusing, frustrating, disturbing, overwhelming, and anxiety provoking. People often become angry, impatient, fearful, envious, jealous, hateful, revengeful, guilt-ridden, ashamed, and despairing

under such conditions and, as a result, often make decisions based on a combination of emotional reactions to ongoing existential conditions that render them vulnerable to the attractions of one or another set of grievances, charismatic recruitment, and dogma at a time in their lives when they were experiencing an identity crisis.

The foregoing considerations provide a general framework through which to appreciate that people do make decisions to move in one direction rather than another under such a collection of factors and conditions. Nonetheless, the aforementioned considerations do not really account for why people make the decisions they do.

There is an element of: 'you had to be there (within an individual)' to have any chance of understanding what is transpiring in a person's mind, heart, soul, and life when he or she makes a decision to move in one direction rather than another in a given set of circumstances. Such dynamics can be so subtle that even the person himself, or herself, might not understand what is really driving a given decision.

Nawaz's four-element framework about what supposedly underlies a person's decision to move in the direction of fundamentalism or extremism rather than in some other direction gives the illusion of providing an explanation for the behavior of certain individuals. However, it does not offer the sort of detailed, nuanced, coherent framework that a tenable explanation requires.

Ironically, the theory being advanced by Nawaz can be directed toward his own activities. In other words, viewed in terms of his own model, Nawaz plays the role of a charismatic recruiter who is offering an ideological dogma (involving elements of secularism, human rights, rationalism, and democracy) – which constitutes a form of propaganda – to induce an identity crisis in those who currently are involved with some form of fundamentalism or extremism as their chosen way to try to cope with the presence of an array of grievances. If Nawaz succeeds in his agenda, then, the precipitation of an identity crisis in various targeted individuals through the use of propaganda and manipulation would bring about a condition of vulnerability thorough which the fundamentalist ideological dogma of an individual could be replaced by Nawaz’s brand of ideological dogma.

For Nawaz, truth doesn’t seem to matter. Everything appears to be a function of dogma, charismatic manipulation, propaganda, and leveraging people’s vulnerability (i.e., their sense of identity crisis) in order to push those individuals in one ideological direction rather than another.

Nawaz believes his form of ideology is superior to that of the fundamentalists and extremists. However, what he doesn’t seem to understand is that the sort of ideology he offers is just another form of fundamentalism and extremism because it appears to be indifferent to the issue of truth concerning the actual nature of reality or Islam.

Reality is not a function of ideology. Rather, the task facing human beings is to discover – to whatever extent this is possible -- a form of understanding that reflects the nature of reality rather than a form of understanding that imposes some form of an ideological dogma upon reality.

Being willing to accept anything less than the truth concerning the nature of reality tends to give expression to some form of fundamentalism or extremism. Committing oneself to seek out the truth is a very different kind of undertaking than is the process of committing oneself to this or that ideology, and this remains true irrespective of whether such an ideology consists of the kind of dogma that Nawaz is promulgating or the sort of ideology that so-called “Islamists” and “jihadists” are promoting.

Dr. Harris speaks about a possible distinction between people like Nawaz who experienced extensive prejudice in Britain and, then, becomes “politically radicalized by Islam,” and those individuals who decide “... to go fight for a group like the Islamic State because he genuinely believes that he’s participating in a cosmic war against evil, and will either spread the one true faith to the ends of the earth or get himself martyred in the process.” To begin with, Nawaz was not politically radicalized by Islam, but, instead, he was radicalized by his own choices.

The choices made by Nawaz were a process of his ceding agency to various influences and

understandings that came into his life. Islam did not take him by the hand and politically radicalize him, but, rather, he permitted his understanding to be shaped by a variety of individuals, books, events, experiences, feelings, and interpretations. 68

People should take responsibility for their decisions to proceed down some road of extremism or fundamentalism. Islam did not induce those individuals to make such decisions, but rather they chose to become committed to forms of understanding that don't actually reflect the nature of Islam.

When people -- whether Muslim or non-Muslim -- isolate and remove verses of the Qur'an from the full spiritual, dynamic, layered, nuanced, subtle, ecological context of that book, then, they will come to incorrect conclusions concerning the nature of the guidance that is being given through revelation. Their erroneous parsing of the Qur'an has nothing to do with Islam but has everything to do with the condition of ignorance in which they are immersed.

My spiritual guide often indicated that unless one approaches the Qur'an with the right attitude of humility, sincerity, courage, patience, perseverance, piety, respect, and willingness to abandon the machinations of one's ego or nafs, then, the Qur'an closes itself to such an individual. There are many native speakers of Arabic who haven't got the slightest idea about the actual nature of the guidance to which the Qur'an gives

expression because they lack the proper adab or spiritual etiquette to be able to benefit from what the Qur'an has to offer.

Moreover, even when one observes the proper adab concerning the Qur'an, the matter of whether, or not, one is opened up to such guidance is entirely dependent on God's Grace. The individual must struggle to become open to what the Qur'an has to offer, but -- and one can only do this with God's help -- whether, or not, any wine is poured into one's empty cup is up to God.

Furthermore, contrary to what Dr. Harris indicates in the previous quote, it is not the responsibility of anyone but God to spread Islam. Anyone -- such as this or that form of fundamentalist -- who arrogates to himself or herself the responsibility for spreading Islam is merely deceiving herself or himself.

The Qur'an makes clear that not even the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) can place Islam in the heart of another human being. Consequently, for some arrogant fool to suppose that God has assigned him or her the task of doing something (i.e., spreading Islam) that even the Prophet was not tasked to do constitutes the height of folly and, in fact, helps explain why so many atrocities are often committed by such individuals because they have ceded their moral agency to the machinations of their own spiritual ignorance and vulnerability to all manner of destructive forces that are flowing within and about them.

If a person is doing whatever she or he is doing for the sake of getting martyred, then, that individual is motivated by something other than service to God. Such service to God should be its own reward, and, therefore, when one introduces the idea of martyrdom to motivate one to do what one does, then, one muddies the waters of intention and, thereby, removes martyrdom from the picture because martyrdom only comes to those who have busied themselves with worshiping God as an end in itself and give no thought to how God will end their lives. 70

In the end, God slays us all. Anyone who offers up his life to the service of God while waging war on the most important battlefield of life – that is, the war with one’s ego or nafs -- and does so without thought of receiving a reward for such service will die a martyr.

Martyrdom has nothing to do with fighting wars or being killed in physical combat. Rather, martyrdom has everything to do with the purity of the niyat or intention through which one engages life in general.

Nawaz gives the impression that anyone who doesn’t seek martyrdom is insincere. However, I believe the reality is that anyone who seeks martyrdom as a reward for what they do is insincere because such a desire contaminates the sincerity of one’s worship of God.

Those misguided, Muslim simpletons who have been lured on, if not indoctrinated, with the belief

that their reward for killing innocent people will be 70 virgins are wrong on, at least, three counts. 71
Firstly, the Qur'an doesn't say what such individuals have been led to believe it does with respect to the promise of virgins and instead the Qur'an is being hermeneutically filtered through – quite incorrectly – the lenses of sexual desire rather than understood in terms of the dimensions of spiritual purity to which the Qur'an is actually making reference.

Secondly, irrespective of what the Quranic text in question means, Islam does not sanction the killing of innocent people under any circumstances. And, thirdly, since the goal of Islam is to realize one's relationship with Divinity, what a tawdry affair it is to reduce the rich potential of existence down to the dimension of lust in which a person only thinks about sex and forgets about the deeper purposes of life.

In effect, the foregoing sort of people have forgotten about God and become caught up in their obsession with a delusional fantasy. To sacrifice the actual teachings of Islam for the sake of physical desire is hardly a matter of martyrdom.

At one point, Dr. Harris states: "As you know, the public conversation about the connection between Islamic ideology and Muslim intolerance and violence has been stifled by political correctness. In the West, there is now a large industry of apology and obfuscation designed, it would seem, to protect Muslims from having to

grapple with the kinds of facts we've been talking about. ... These experts insist that we can never take Islamists and jihadists at their word and that none of their declarations about God, paradise, martyrdom, and the evils of apostasy have anything to do with their real motivations ... [the apologists] deny any connection between heartfelt religious beliefs and Muslim violence."

First of all, it is not at all clear just what "kinds of facts" are being discussed by the co-authors of *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*. There has been a lot of speculation, theorizing, hypothesizing, inferring, as well as extrapolating, interpolating, and so on with respect to the possible meaning of various poll numbers, but the facts that exist in the first 47 pages of the aforementioned book appear to have been few and far between ... mostly connected to the historical background that outlines some of the time Nawaz spent with an extremist political group.

Secondly, I don't have any problem with acknowledging the idea that some Muslims are violent due to the way in which they have misinterpreted the Qur'an and Islam, just as I don't have any problem with acknowledging the idea that many people in the United States are violent due to the manner in which they have misunderstood the nature of their own Constitution, together with their self-serving sense of American exceptionalism (which is the

counterpart to Muslim myths and ideologies concerning martyrdom).

What I object to is that people like Dr. Harris arrogates to himself an illegitimate authority to claim that what violent Muslims believe gives expression to the teachings of Islam. Extremists, militants, and fundamentalists can make all the statements they like about God, paradise, martyrdom and the evils of apostasy as being heartfelt beliefs that -- supposedly (but doesn't) -- justify their use of violence to achieve their stated ends, but none of this has anything to do with Islam.

Their heartfelt religious beliefs are their own philosophical invention. And, while those people might refer to such a construction as being Islamic, and while they might invoke the name of God, and while people like Dr. Harris might try to use their utterances as a form of "evidence" that such hermeneutical concoctions constitute legitimate and honest readings of the Qur'an, Dr. Harris just doesn't know what he is talking about.

He has every right to talk about the problematic connection between unwarranted Muslim violence and the "heartfelt religious convictions" (which are delusional in nature) that underlie such violence, and, in addition, I would agree with him that the sort of connection that is being described is a very real problem. However, Dr. Harris has no legitimate basis for trying to pass himself off as an expert on Islam or the Qur'an and,

in the process, make claims that the foregoing sorts
of delusional behavior gives expression to certain 74
ideas, values, and principles that are inherent in the
nature of Islam and the Qur'an or that such
delusional understandings constitute the "most
honest" reading of Islam.

Chapter Four

In passing, both Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz make remarks about, among other things, the individuals they consider to be perpetrators of the events of 9/11. Consequently, I also have a few comments to make in passing concerning the events of 9/11.

To begin with, the two authors of *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* have a discussion about the way in which a number of alleged 9/11 hijackers engaged in activities like frequenting strip clubs (and, apparently, one can add prostitutes, drugs, and alcohol to the list). In this context, Nawaz states: “Yes. The strip club thing is a red herring, because even in a traditional view of jihad, when you believe you’re engaged in an act of war, you’re allowed to deceive the enemy.”

While it might be true that deception is permitted during a time of war, this does not free a Muslim to commit any, and all, acts that he or she wishes. Lying to someone, or engaging in misdirection, or manipulating information is one thing, but going to strip clubs and engaging in drug and/or alcohol fueled sexual escapades is quite another matter.

There is nothing to which Nawaz can point in the Qur’an or the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that is capable of defending

the sort of acts (strip clubs, illicit sex, alcohol consumption, or drug usage) that supposedly were engaged in by the alleged perpetrators of 9/11. Moreover, both Maajid Nawaz and Dr. Harris are assuming (i.e., they have no evidence to substantiate their claim) that the Muslims being alluded to were attempting to deceive people rather than openly catering to this or that desire. 76

The fact that some of the alleged perpetrators might have said they believed one thing but did something in contradistinction to their alleged beliefs is not necessarily an indication that they were merely trying to deceive the enemy. Hypocrisy is a common phenomenon in many parts of the world.

Dr. Harris wants to argue that people in the West should be taking extremists and fundamentalists at their word ... that such people fully believe what they say. I believe the more persuasive argument is that while such people might, or might not, believe what they say, nonetheless, what they say and believe has little, or nothing, to do with Islam.

In the foregoing discussion, I use the term “allegedly” in relation to the 19 Muslims who supposedly brought about the tragedy of 9/11. I do this because there is considerable uncertainty concerning the actual identity of those individuals since with respect to the photos that have been published depicting the identities of the 19 individuals who supposedly were responsible for

bringing about the tragedy of 9/11, at least seven of those depicted individuals have been interviewed and are still alive and, therefore, could not have been on board any of the planes that supposedly crashed into the World Trade Towers, the Pentagon, or at Shanksville, Pennsylvania. 77

Moreover, the hijacker, Hani Hanjour – who allegedly piloted the commercial Boeing 757 jet that supposedly crashed into the Pentagon -- tried to rent a small Cessna aircraft just a short time before 9/11, and the pilots running the company from whom he sought to rent that plane indicated he didn't know the first thing about flying even such a small aircraft, so one has to wonder who actually was flying the plane that supposedly flew into the Pentagon.

The term “supposedly” is used in conjunction with the events that took place at the Pentagon on 9/11 because there is a great deal of evidence – which doesn't appear in either the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* or the *9/11 Commission Report* – that things did not occur in the way that those two “official stories” indicate with respect to the events of 9/11.

Many ex-military and commercial pilots (e.g., Pilots for 9/11 Truth) have come forth and demonstrated aerodynamically that the commercial 757-jet that supposedly hit the Pentagon could not have followed the path claimed by the *Pentagon Building Performance Report*. In fact, among other issues, such a flight path would

have subjected the plane and its occupants to incredible g-forces as well as to the 'Ground Effect' and, therefore, would have prevented the plane from being flown in the manner described in the aforementioned report. 78

In fact, more than thirteen witnesses -- including a number of individuals who were members of the Pentagon Police -- indicated that the only plane to approach the Pentagon near the time of the explosions that took place on the morning of 9/11 flew over the Navy Annex as well as a portion of the Arlington National Cemetery that are on the north side of a Citgo station that was situated about a mile, or so, from the Pentagon. Such a flight path is totally at odds with the south side flight path that is relied on in the analysis that takes place in the *Pentagon Building Performance Report*.

If the foregoing plane is what struck the Pentagon -- and there appears to be no other commercial jet candidate capable of accounting for what was witnessed -- then, virtually everything concerning the flight path of, and ensuing damage from, what struck the Pentagon in the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* is incorrect. Moreover, there is considerable evidence (e.g., the work of Pierre-Henri Bunel, an explosives expert who served with General Schwarzkopf during the first Gulf War) to indicate that a great deal of the physical evidence involving the damage at the Pentagon on 9/11 is more consistent with what

would have occurred if a hollow charge device of some kind had been delivered by either a Global Hawk or Predator Drone. 79

The only photos and video that have been released in conjunction with the 9/11 Pentagon attack do not permit one to identify the nature of the craft that appears to be heading toward the Pentagon. The matter is further muddled by the fact that a problematic time-stamp (wrong day and/or time) appears on some of those photos and videos.

The FBI confiscated all Pentagon videos, as well as all of the videos that were captured by the surveillance equipment affixed to various businesses proximate to the Pentagon. For whatever reason, the government refuses to release such material to the public.

Irrespective of whether one is talking about the testimony of the aforementioned 13 witnesses concerning events at the Pentagon or one is talking about the possibility that some sort of missile system caused the damage at the Pentagon, the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* is seriously flawed. That report is inconsistent with a great deal of forensic evidence and eyewitness testimony.

Moreover, one should keep in mind that April Gallop -- who had just begun work at ground zero in the Pentagon when whatever happened, happened -- reported something that completely contradicts the "official story" concerning the 9/11 events at the Pentagon. She has given sworn

testimony that as soon as she sat down and turned her computer on, there was a tremendous explosion.

She indicated that there was considerable damage to the Pentagon due to an explosion of some kind. However, despite the fact that she was in the area where the commercial jet supposedly hit, she saw no airline wreckage, passenger bodies, or baggage as she helped lead people out of the damaged area of the Pentagon.

She further reports that a number of men in suits visited her in the hospital and tried to get her to change her story. The men never identified themselves.

Furthermore, even putting aside the aforementioned highly questionable flying skills of Hani Hanjour, one might find the following information interesting. On the afternoon of 9/11, John Lear, of the Lear Jet family, took a number of professional pilots into a commercial jet simulator and found that almost all of those highly skilled and experienced pilots could not manage to get their simulated aircraft to hit either of the Twin Towers, and the few who were able to succeed required a number of tries to accomplish the task.

One can mention “Beginner’s luck” if one likes, but it stretches credulity to the point of breaking to suppose that Arab pilots who were reported to have done an extremely limited amount of training with small aircraft were able to accomplish what skilled, experienced, commercial pilots could not

achieve or had great difficulty in doing so. As a veteran pilots themselves have indicated, the way a Boeing commercial jet handles involves a great many differences from the manner in which small aircraft operate.

Furthermore, one should note that many military and commercial pilots have come forward and indicated that large commercial jets of the kind that supposedly struck the Twin Towers could not possibly fly so close to sea level at the speeds indicated by the NIST reports concerning the events of 9/11 (National Institute of Standards and Technology, a division of the Department of Commerce). Consequently, the force of the impact and the damage that ensued from crashing aircraft would be considerably less than what appears in the NIST reports.

In addition, NIST claimed that one of the primary causes for collapse of the Twin Towers was due to way in which the floor assemblies in those buildings would have failed due to the conditions and forces to which they were exposed on the morning of 9/11. However, Underwriters Laboratory did an independent analysis and demonstrated that the floor assembly units of those buildings would not have failed under the conditions present in the Twin Towers on 9/11.

Prior to 9/11 there were no high-rise steel buildings that collapsed due to fires. On 9/11, three high-rise steel buildings within the World Trade

Center complex supposedly collapsed due to the presence of fires.

There have been numerous instances around the world (e.g., Philadelphia, Madrid, Caracas, and Beijing to name just a few) involving high-rise steel buildings that had been completely engulfed in raging fires for periods of time that lasted many hours longer than what occurred in relation to the Twin Towers on 9/11, and, yet, none of the foregoing buildings collapsed. Indeed, more than 2,300 architects and engineers have unanimously agreed that the damage which resulted from crashing commercial jets and jet fuel initiated fires would not have been able to cause the collapse of the Twin Towers.

Then, of course, there is the fact that the seismic data associated with the disappearance of the Twin Towers on 9/11 does not properly reflect what should have been recorded had two 500,000 to 600,000 ton buildings actually collapsed at the World Trade Center on 9/11. The seismic waves recorded on that day indicated that the measured length of the collapse was considerably less than one would expect (it actually took place in about 10-14 seconds, but the sort of pancake collapse proposed by NIST would have taken a number of minutes to unfold), and, in addition, the amplitude of the seismic waves that were recorded in conjunction with the disappearance of the Twin Towers on 9/11 were far less than one would

expect from several collapsing 600,000 ton buildings.

A further problem with the pancake collapse scenario proposed by NIST is that the pile of mangled steel that remained after the demise of the Twin Towers was far too small. There should have been 220 stories worth of debris, but the debris pile that existed at the World Trade Center was only about 10 to 12 stories high.

After the demise of the Twin Towers, there were 14 people who survived in Stairwell B of Tower 1. A few more people located just outside of that stairwell also survived.

The building came down in its own footprint. Why weren't the foregoing survivors crushed by more than a hundred stories of steel and concrete weighing in the vicinity of 500,000 to 600,000 tons?

If one likes, one can use the word "miracle" with respect to the foregoing survivors, and this might have been the case. However, using the word "miracle" does not explain how those survivors avoided being crushed by 110 stories consisting of some 500,000 to 600,000 tons of falling debris but, instead, described how when the dust cleared, all they saw above them was blue sky and sunshine.

Judy Wood, a materials scientist and mechanical engineer, also notes that the base of the World Trade Center was enveloped by a dike-like structure known as the 'Bathtub' that was built to

keep the Hudson River from flooding the Towers and Lower Manhattan. The Bathtub structure was so fragile – relatively speaking – that some of the heavy equipment that was brought in during the clean-up phase was breaking through the ‘Bathtub’, and, yet, two, 600,000 ton buildings did no damage to that structure. 84

One might also have anticipated that two, collapsing, 600,000-ton buildings would have obliterated the stores and subway tunnels that existed below the ground in the World Trade Center complex. Yet, this did not happen, and one has to wonder why this didn’t occur.

There were four transformers located at a number of sub-stations within the Twin Towers. Moreover, there were two such sub-stations on four different floors of each of the Towers.

The transformers weighed 30,000 pounds apiece. And, yet, none of those transformers were found in the wreckage piles at the World Trade Center.

What caused their disappearance? A pancake theory of collapse cannot account for the forces that would be necessary to completely obliterate all of those 30,000-pound transformers.

In fact, with the exception of the 14 stories, or so, of wreckage that remained at the feet of the former Twin Towers, virtually everything involving those two buildings had been turned to dust. The pancake theory of collapse put forth by NIST

cannot explain the extent of pulverizing destruction that occurred at the World Trade Center on 9/11. 85

Quite some time after 9/11, a debris field of body parts connected to those who perished on that day was discovered on the roof of one of the buildings near to Ground Zero. A building that pancakes down (the NIST theory) might crush people, but it doesn't generate body parts ... especially when such parts are found on the roof of a building outside of the World Trade Center rather than found in the debris pile that was situated at the foot of where the two Twin Towers previously stood.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, there was considerable evidence indicating that during the demise of the Twin Towers, massive, multi-ton steel beams were sent flying for hundreds of feet. The physics of a pancake collapse doesn't generate this kind of horizontal force.

The demise of Building 7, the 47-storey Salomon Brothers building, at the World Trade Center also should give one pause. No plane struck that building, and, although there were some fires in the building, none of those fires were capable of causing Building 7 to collapse at the nearly free-fall speeds that were recorded.

In fact, David Chandler, a New York high school physics teacher forced NIST to acknowledge that Building 7 was actually in free fall for at least 2 ½ seconds. The only way building materials can move

at free-fall speeds is if something has removed resistance to the fall of such materials ... something that could not possibly have happened if one accepts the NIST pancake account for the demise of Building 7.

A number of people (e.g., William Rodriguez who was a janitor for the North Tower that helped rescue many people on 9/11 and was honored by George W. Bush for doing so) reported huge explosions in some of the sub-basements of the North Tower prior to the time when that building allegedly was struck by an airplane. Mr. Rodriguez's account was verified by another janitor, Kenny Johannemann, who also was working at the Twin Towers and who was present in one of the sub-basement areas at the same time as William Rodriguez.

Mr. Johannemann indicated that a nearby elevator suddenly blew up. In the aftermath of that explosion, he pulled a burning man to safety.

If the airplanes didn't strike the Twin Towers until after such explosions occurred, then what caused those explosions. Philip Zelikow (the Director of the 9/11 Commission and the primary author of its report) didn't consider such information sufficiently important to explore in the main body of the *9/11 Commission Report* ... and such an omission is quite baffling because the foregoing information concerning the occurrence of explosions prior to the impact of hijacked planes

completely undermines the “official story” concerning 9/11.

On 9/11, Barry Jennings, who is now deceased, was the Deputy Director of Emergency Services of the New York City Housing Authority. Shortly after the first plane supposedly hit the North Tower, he was instructed to go to the 23rd floor of the Salomon Building (i.e., Building 7) where the city of New York had built an emergency control center that was located a little over 300 feet from the Twin Towers.

He was on the 23rd floor of WTC7 at the time when the second plane allegedly struck the South Tower. He states that he, then, received a notification that he was to leave the building.

Since the elevators were not working, Jennings began to go down one of the stairwells in the building. No one seems to have asked the question of why the elevators were not working given that at the time nothing had happened at WTC7.

During his journey down the stairwell, he encountered massive explosions on the 6th Floor of Building 7. As a result, he was trapped in the building for a period of time before finally being rescued by first responders.

He indicated that the explosions came from somewhere below the sixth floor but were sufficiently massive to destroy the 6th Floor stairwell landing and, therefore, forced Jennings to retreat back up to the 8th Floor of Building 7. When

rescued by first responders, he was taken out through the main floor of the building, and the main floor was in a devastated condition. 88

The explosions that destroyed, among other things, the 6th Floor landing took place shortly after 9:00 A.M, and, therefore, well before either of the two Twin Towers disappeared. So, what caused the explosions in, and damage to, Building 7, and why didn't the 9/11 Commission investigate this ... in fact, quite inexplicably, the 9/11 Commission Report has virtually nothing to say about Building 7.

I've written at length about many of the foregoing issues, along with many others (see *The Essence of September 11th, 2nd Edition*, and *Framing 9/11*) and, therefore, I will let things having to do with 9/11 conclude at this point. However, I mention the foregoing matters in passing because neither Sam Harris nor Maajid Nawaz (nor anyone else) can plausibly and credibly reconcile the existence of the foregoing sorts of problems with the official narrative concerning 9/11.

One might also note in passing that during the foregoing discussion I have not engaged in any sort of conspiracy theory concerning 9/11. In fact, the only conspiracy theory that appears in the foregoing discussion is that of the "official story" concerning 9/11 in which 19 Arabs conspired (supposedly with one another and with Osama bin Laden) to attack America on 9/11.

I have no idea who is actually behind the events of 9/11. However, to whatever extent 19 Arab hijackers and Osama bin Laden are parties to those tragic events, then, their involvement does not adequately account for the many, key, unanswered questions concerning physical evidence that permeate the events of 9/11 in New York and at the Pentagon. 89

Crashing planes and subsequent jet fuel initiated fires did not cause three buildings at the World Trade Center to collapse in pancake style. Moreover, a jet plane crash did not cause the damage to the Pentagon that is described in the *Pentagon Building Performance Report*.

There are thousands of people who are architects, engineers, professional pilots, scientists, and explosives experts who agree with me (or with whom I agree) on the foregoing issues involving 9/11. Apparently, Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz seem to have been bamboozled when it comes to critically reflecting on the evidence that is entailed by the events of 9/11.

One can't help but wonder if they have been so willing, apparently, to uncritically swallow -- hook, line, and sinker -- the official narrative on 9/11 because doing so serves their respective ideological agendas. Unfortunately, like so many Muslim extremists and fundamentalists, Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz appear to be quite reluctant to let actual evidence enter into their consciousness.



During a discussion about liberalism, Maajid Nawaz states: “While they [the pseudo-liberals to whom he is referring] rightly question every aspect of their ‘own’ Western culture in the name of progress, they censure liberal Muslims who attempt to do so within Islam, and they choose to side, instead, with every regressive reactionary in the name of ‘cultural authenticity’ and anti-colonialism.”

The term “progress” is an idea that is notoriously sensitive to the biases and assumptions of the individuals who invoke the word. I am less interested in the idea of progress than I am in the issue of truth and what this might entail with respect to human action.

Similarly, I am not all that enamored with the idea of “cultural authenticity”. While, within limits, I believe that any given community has the right to establish its own cultural approaches with respect to the engagement of life, nonetheless, to whatever extent such “cultural authenticity” prevents individuals from pursuing the truth concerning the nature of reality or seeks to advance its own cultural agendas at the expense of other ways of engaging life, then, the issue of “cultural authenticity” is problematic.

Finally, I tend to take exception with the reasoning of people like Nawaz who want to make

liberal progress with respect to Islam, when it is obvious that in so many ways he doesn't seem to understand that – namely, Islam – which he wishes to revise in order to better reflect his own ideas concerning liberal philosophy. Nawaz might want to take issue with the idea of “cultural authenticity” within various Muslim communities, but this has little, or nothing, to do with Islam.

“Cultural authenticity” is often a code word for the way in which a given community has distanced itself from the pursuit of truth and seeks to camouflage this feature of distancing by papering it over with this or that set of cultural beliefs, values, or practices. For example, honor killings within certain Muslim communities might give expression to some form of cultural authenticity in those communities, but it doesn't reflect the teachings of Islam.

Nawaz wishes to criticize – and rightly so -- such communities for the beliefs, values, and practices surrounding such honor killings. However, this has nothing to do with revising Islam and everything to do with stopping a barbaric practice that lacks any justification except in the delusional musings of people who are caught up in the circular reasoning of their own sense of “cultural authenticity.”

He continues on with his argument by saying: “... they [i.e., the pseudo-liberals to whom he is referring] leap whenever any (not merely their own) liberal democratic government commits a

policy error, while generally ignoring almost every fascist, theocratic, or Muslim-led dictatorial regime and group in the world.” Almost any time someone wants to control the lives of other people in the name of some ideology – whether this be liberalism, cultural authenticity, or something else – one is going to encounter problems.

The key to improving the life of any community or nation is rooted in the issues of character. If one can't induce the people of a community or nation to freely pursue the acquisition of such qualities as: Courage, patience, honesty, nobility, forgiveness, compassion, generosity, perseverance, humility, tolerance, love, and the like, while eschewing such qualities as: “Dishonesty, arrogance, intolerance, selfishness, cowardice, impatience, enmity, greed, and so on, then such a community or nation is in for a very difficult journey.

Nawaz states that” “Classical liberalism focuses on individual autonomy.” However, a personal autonomy that is devoid of the aforementioned positive, constructive character traits while being steeped in the foregoing sorts of negative, destructive character traits will lead to nothing but trouble.

Clearly, something more than giving reign to individual autonomy is needed. While individuals need to be free from the tyranny of society, so, too, society needs to be free from the tyranny of individuals.

I am not enamored with the idea that people such as Nawaz seem to want to impose their ideas about progress and liberalism on me. Nonetheless, I do believe that it is possible to work out negotiated settlements that balance individual autonomy and social harmony ... including the people for whom Nawaz is most worried such as: women, gay and lesbian individuals, and those who have decided, for whatever reason, to disengage from Islam.

However, I don't believe it is necessary to revise Islam in order to accomplish any of the foregoing possibilities. What is necessary is to revise the understanding of Muslims concerning the actual nature of the spiritual tradition to which they claim to subscribe ... but, unfortunately, in all too many cases just do not.

Whatever the sins of the West might be with respect to: Killing Muslims, illegally invading their countries, destroying their infrastructure, oppressing Muslims, and the like, the West is not responsible for the woeful condition of the way in which all too many Muslims understand Islam. The Muslim community is primarily at fault for having failed to properly educate succeeding generations of young people concerning the true nature of Islam ... in fact, it is all too many Muslims [aided and abetted over the years by a variety of Western Orientalists, as well as Machiavellian governments and corporations (both Muslim and non-Muslim)], who have laid a lot of the groundwork for

misleading people in the West, as well within the Muslim world, about the nature of Islam.

While discussing what Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz consider to be the difference between real liberals and pseudo-liberals, Nawaz indicates that the latter individuals often end up empowering fundamentalist and extremist Muslims by considering such individuals to be, in some amorphous sense, purer exemplars when it comes to the issue of what it means to be a Muslim. As a result, according to Nawaz, liberal and reform-minded Muslims are marginalized in any discussion of Islam, and, then, Nawaz adds that in the process pseudo-liberals "...adopt the role of thought police by asserting that liberalism isn't authentic to Muslims."

When it comes to the question of: What does being a Muslim mean, both the so-called pseudo-liberals and Nawaz are off the mark. A Muslim is someone who submits to the truth, and, therefore, the purest form of being Muslim is someone who adheres to truth and avoids what is false.

Being Muslim in the foregoing sense has nothing to do with either culture or language. Moreover, in order to identify such individuals one has to have some degree of insight and understanding concerning the nature of truth when it comes to Islam.

What are the evidential grounds on which pseudo-liberals base their claim that fundamentalists and extremists give expression to

the purest form of truth-seeking and truth-adherence? As far as I can see, they have no such grounds because they have little, or no, idea about the actual nature of Islam. 96

They look at Islam from some external perspective and make arbitrary judgments about what Islam entails and who best grasps such an understanding. They permit themselves to be misled by quite superficial issues such as: Linguistic skills, ethnicity, race, where a person was born, or in what kind of culture they were raised, as well as who her or his parents/relatives are or were.

Everyone who seeks to live in accordance with the truth concerning the nature of Islam aspires to be a Muslim. Only God knows the degree to which any given individual succeeds in such an endeavor.

Moreover, the Qur'an makes a distinction among individuals who are: Muslim, Mu'min, and Muhsin. As indicated previously, a Muslim is someone who seeks to submit to the truth concerning the nature of Islam, whereas a Mu'min is someone who actually has some degree of accurate insight into, understanding of, and accurate knowledge about the truth of Islam, and a Muhsin is someone who has ingested and realized the truth concerning Islam to such a degree that their actions become beneficent expressions of that truth.

I don't believe that anyone – such as pseudo-liberals -- who looks at Islam from afar is in a

position to distinguish whether a person is a Muslim, Mu'min, or Muhsin. Moreover, I rather doubt that anyone who goes about: Killing innocent people, abusing people, oppressing people, exploiting people, or misleading people about the nature of Islam -- as fundamentalists and extremists are inclined to do -- thereby becomes qualified to represent one, or more, of the foregoing three kinds of spirituality no matter how well they might be able to speak Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, Urdu, or the like and irrespective of the culture in which they might have grown up.

Just like there is no one kind of flower, and, yet, flowers are distinguishable from other kinds of life forms, so, too, there is no one kind of Muslim, Mu'min, or Muhsin, and, yet, there are qualities that distinguish such individuals from those who are non-Muslim, non-Mu'min, and non-Muhsin. However, anyone who, irrespective of what faith label is placed upon them, submits to, has knowledge about, and gives realized expression to the truth is, respectively, a Muslim, Mu'min, or Muhsin which is why Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) is referred to as being a Muslim (see Qur'an: Surah 2, Verse 131) long before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) appeared on the face of the Earth.

Human beings have been given free will. I note in passing that my Sufi guide once indicated to me that although we do have free will, we have a lot less of it than most people suppose.

To whatever degree human beings have free will, then, to that extent they have autonomy. Nonetheless, with autonomy comes responsibility.

We are free to make whatever choices we like. Nonetheless, from an Islamic perspective, the responsibility that one has in relation to her or his capacity for autonomy involves processes of seeking, grasping, and giving lived expression to the truth.

Every authentic spiritual tradition has taught the same kind of liberalism. Human beings possess free will, and we have autonomy, but we also have responsibility to the truth with respect to the manner in which we exercise such autonomy and free will.

Any political philosophy that wants to define liberalism only in terms of personal autonomy is flawed. An autonomy that is not balanced with a concomitant responsibility toward the truth leads nowhere but to chaos.

There are many ways of combining autonomy and responsibility. Therefore, there can be many possible ways to seek, come to know, and realize the truth through our lives and actions, but all feasible forms of liberalism are constrained by the truth.

When science establishes the truth of something through a responsible use of autonomy, it gives expression to the general principles of liberalism. When spirituality establishes the truth

of something through a responsible use of autonomy, it also gives expression to the general principles of liberalism. 99

The reason why liberalism – in the foregoing sense of a balance between the free exercise of autonomy and a responsibility to the truth -- appeals to so many people in the West is because it resonates with something deep within the structural character of being human. To whatever extent the foregoing sort of liberalism does not resonate with people within various Muslim communities, then, I believe this is due to the way in which such communities have lost touch with the spirit of Islam.

Liberalism did not create Islam. Rather, Islam gave rise to liberalism in the foregoing sense, and shari'ah, when properly understood, refers to a process that is intended to permit human beings to have autonomy with respect to the manner in which they exercise responsibility concerning their search for, and realization of, the truth.

There might be many differences of opinion concerning the nature of autonomy, responsibility, and the truth. However, we all are constrained by the need to establish a form of public space (social interaction) that assists people to seek the truth in ways that do not interfere with or undermine the capacity of the public space to enable people to engage the challenge of trying to balance autonomy and responsibility concerning the truth in a variety of ways.

In other words, unless principles of tolerance, within certain limits, are operational within the public space, then there is likely to be an excessive amount of interfering with, and undermining of, the attempt of people to exercise autonomy while, simultaneously, demonstrating responsibility toward the truth concerning the exercise of such autonomy. Nonetheless, tolerance is not a matter of letting anyone do whatever they like within the sphere of the public space, but, rather, tolerance is a matter of being willing to allow a multiplicity of approaches to the process of trying to balance autonomy with the need to exercise responsibility toward the truth.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Native Peoples, Humanists, and so on might all have different ways of trying to balance autonomy with exercising responsibility toward the truth. However, when any of those different ways begin to invade, interfere with, or undermine the manner in which individuals go about seeking the foregoing sort of balance, then, the public space must be organized in such a way that those modes of invasion, interference, and disruption are constrained and are not permitted to continue.

The degrees of freedom to which tolerance ought to be extended might be a legitimate subject of debate. Nevertheless, I believe that the issue of whether, or not, tolerance of some kind needs to be present to shape any given public space is beyond the need for debate.

Maajid Nawaz and Sam Harris should be free to balance personal autonomy and responsibility to the truth in ways that seem best to them as individuals. However, such freedom or autonomy doesn't give either one of them the right to denigrate something or seek to revise something – namely, Islam – when neither one of them appears to exhibit much responsibility with respect to trying to establish the truth about the nature of Islam. 101

Both Maajid Nawaz and Dr. Harris take exception with the ideas, beliefs, and actions of various Muslims. Within certain limits, there is nothing wrong with this.

Unfortunately, both of the aforementioned individuals take a further step and attempt to make an illegitimate jump that extends from criticizing individual Muslims to generalizing their criticisms to apply to Islam and Muslims as a whole. If liberalism is about personal autonomy, then, when someone abuses that autonomy, whatever criticism is being voiced should be directed at individuals and not that – i.e., Islam and the entirety of Muslims – which is being abused by the misuse of such autonomy.

In fact, there are two misuses of autonomy taking place in the foregoing context. One misuse of autonomy is by the fundamentalists and extremists who try to distort the nature of Islam, while the other misuse of autonomy belongs to Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz when they go about -- each in

his own individual manner -- distorting Islam in a fashion that is similar to what the fundamentalists and extremists are attempting to do with respect to Islam. 102

The extremist and fundamentalists do not exhibit a proper responsibility toward establishing the truth concerning Islam. Yet, Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz make precisely the same mistake when they try to argue that Muslim fundamentalists and extremists give expression to some dimension of Islam and that, therefore, Islam deserves to be denigrated and/or revised.

The extremists, fundamentalists, Dr. Harris, and Maajid Nawaz have all exercised personal autonomy. At the same time, they all have made mistakes when it comes to exercising responsibility toward the truth in the manner through which they have given expression to their autonomy, and, as a result, they all are trying to undermine or interfere with the opportunity of people in general to come to the truth, to whatever extent such people are able to do so, with respect to Islam.

Nawaz asks: "What does killing the Yazidi population on Mount Sinjar have to do with US foreign policy? What does enforcing headscarves (tents, in fact) on women in Waziristan and Afghanistan, and lashing them, forcing men to grow beards under threat of a whip, chopping off hands, and so forth, have to do with US foreign policy?" The answer, of course, is that none of the foregoing actions have anything to do with US foreign policy

... unless, of course, one wishes to point out that US foreign policy fooled around with Afghanistan, Iraq, and other places in the Muslim world in a way that helped create a set of circumstances that enabled people with the foregoing sorts of ideas to assume a position of social, political, institutional, educational, and physical dominance in such places. 103

The foregoing list of actions cited by Nawaz also has little, or nothing, to do with Islam. Islam provides spiritual guidance, but people are the ones who exercise their autonomy with respect to that guidance and such individuals either pursue, or fail to pursue, an appropriate mode of responsibility toward the truth in relation to such guidance.

Dr. Harris adds to the litany of mistakes that have been committed by various fundamentalists and extremists when he says: "What does the Sunni bombing of Shia and Ahmadi mosques in Pakistan have to do with Israel and US foreign policy?" Again, the answer is nothing at all.

All of the foregoing actions noted by Nawaz and Dr. Harris give expression to a failed responsibility on the part of fundamentalists and extremists with respect to seeking and realizing the truth concerning Islam. On the one hand, the fundamentalists and extremists have failed to understand the basis – namely, the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – that they cite as justification for what they

impose on others, but, unfortunately, on the other hand, Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz have failed to point out that such a fundamentalist and extremist perspective is not based on any correct understanding of Islam, and, consequently, they, themselves, both use the actions of various extremists and fundamentalists to also obscure the truth concerning Islam as they each advance their own individual agendas. 104

Dr. Harris raises the following issue. While addressing a question to Nawaz, he states: "... what do you make of the fact that there are more protests in Muslim communities over Israel than over the Islamic State? Even more preposterous is the fact that if a pastor in Florida burns a copy of the Qur'an - or merely threatens to do so - it reliably produces more outrage in dozens of Muslim societies than the atrocities committed daily by Sunnis against Shia ever will."

While, currently, there might be more protests in various parts of the Muslim world concerning Israel than with respect to the Islamic State, the fact of the matter is that Israel has been every bit as barbaric - if not more so -- in its treatment of Palestinians as the Islamic State has been with respect to the people it has terrorized and slaughtered. A much more balanced question might be: "Why aren't people such as Sam Harris as upset about the activities of Israel with respect to the Palestinians as they are about the actions of the Islamic State - especially given that Israel, with the

assistance of the United States, has been perpetrating its atrocities, oppression, and terrorism in relation to the Palestinians for nearly 70 years, whereas the Islamic State has been in operation for only a few years?"

There is virtually nowhere in the world in which “the atrocities committed daily by Sunnis against Shia” have not been facilitated by, and made possible through, the manner in which Western powers and Israel have actively interfered with, manipulated, undermined, and sought to control what takes place in those communities. This doesn’t excuse the sectarian bloodshed that is taking place between Sunnis and Shi’a in various communities around the world, but one needs to place such conflicts in a more accurate context.

Moreover, there are 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. How much of that total protested when the pastor in Florida sought to organize a burning of the Qur’an a few years ago, and how many of the relatively small amount of people who did protest were organized by so-called leaders who were seeking to whip up emotions to advance the agendas of the latter individuals, and how many of the aforementioned total of 1.6 billion Muslims voiced disillusionment with one another concerning the state of the Muslim world?

The fact that the latter discussion did not assume the form of a public protest does not mean that such issues are not being actively and critically explored by Muslims the world over. Apparently, if

Muslims do not engage problems in the way in which Dr. Harris wishes them to do so, then, he feels this constitutes evidence that Muslims are more concerned with what a pastor does in Florida than with what Sunni and Shi'a do in relation to one another.

I do not believe that Dr. Harris has the slightest clue about what goes on in the minds, hearts, and souls of 1.6 billion Muslims. His claim that those individuals are not concerned about all that is taking place in the Muslim world – including the sectarian strife that pits Muslim against Muslim – is not based on any amount of factual evidence other than that some Muslims (and most Muslims do not engage in public protests) are more likely to hold public protests about certain issues (e.g., Israel) than they are about other issues (i.e., Islamic State) ... and the issue of being able to safely (physically and politically) conduct such demonstrations might have a lot to do with what is publicly protested and what is not publicly protested.

There were hundreds of millions of people in the United States who did not participate in the civil rights marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and there were hundreds of millions of people in India who did not join Gandhi during his public protests, and, yet, many, if not most, of those hundreds of millions of people in the US and India probably had strong opinions, one way or the other, concerning what was taking place with respect to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi. One

cannot really use participation in public demonstrations as a reliable gauge for determining how people think and feel about any given issue. 107

According to Dr. Harris: “tribalism is one of the consequences of religion. There are other sources of tribalism – nationalism and racism, for instance – but a shared religious identity has global reach. As I’ve said, it creates in-group loyalty and out-group hostility. ... Muslims often rally to the cause of other Muslims, no matter how badly behaved they are, simply because they happen to be Muslim. Other groups do this as well, but it is especially a problem among Muslims in the twenty-first century.”

Dr. Harris mentions religion, nationalism, and racism as sources of tribalism, but he fails to mention corporatism, militarism, and atheism as also being sources of tribalism. For example, the United States is the largest supplier of arms in the world, and those arms are not used to promote harmony and peace among the nations of the world, but, instead, the weapons are used by military forces around the world to make the world safe for banks, corporations, and tyrants of one description or another.

Smedley Butler, a United States Marine Corps major general who at the time of his death was the most decorated man in US military history -- including two Medals of Honor -- said in a 1933 speech (which is also the title of his 1935 book on the same subject) that “War is a racket.” He stated

that war “is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses.”

Contrary to the propaganda put out by the real purveyors of wars, the latter are not conducted for the purpose of promoting freedom, justice, democracy, and the like. Rather, war is conducted for purposes of securing profits for the few by expending the lives of the many, as well as for purposes of controlling the many by the few.

The purveyors of war often stir up religious, racial, and national sentiments in order to fuel a lust for war among the common people. Consequently, the “Masters of War” – as Bob Dylan refers to them in one of his songs – are the bankers, corporations, military commanders, and rulers who manipulate various sectarian differences among various populations in order to serve the economic and political purposes of those “Masters of War.”

In addition, all too many atheists also appear to be champions of a very virulent form of tribalism. After all, isn't the effect of many of Dr. Harris's books a matter of establishing atheists as some sort of in-group while treating people of religion as being members of some kind of 'degenerate' out-group, and isn't one of the effects of many of Dr. Harris's books to encourage hostility toward people of religion?

Dr. Harris seems to believe that he is the voice of reason. However, for the most part, all he appears to do is give expression to the logic of his own fundamental biases concerning an atheistic

perspective while deluding himself that he is actually arguing in accordance with what facts and reason indicate should be said. 109

While there might be Muslims here and there who are prepared to defend certain Muslims irrespective of how bad the behavior of the latter individuals might be, just as there are atheists who are prepared to cheer Dr. Harris on no matter how ridiculous, irresponsible, and factually challenged his pronouncements might be, I really don't know what Dr. Harris is talking about when he tries to argue that Muslims are among the worst perpetrators of tribalism in the twenty-first century.

It was not the people of Afghanistan who attacked the United States in the fall of 2001, but, rather, it was the United States who attacked the people of Afghanistan. However one wishes to parse the whole harboring a terrorist issue (i.e., Osama bin Laden), not only was the Afghani government prepared to hand over bin Laden to the United States if the latter would merely produce the evidence that bin Laden was guilty of what he was being accused of (which the U.S. never did) but, even more importantly, the United States, in contravention of the Geneva Conventions, was using a form of collective punishment involving the Afghanistan people to deal with whatever sins might have been committed by its Taliban rulers.

In my opinion, many – if not all -- of the people who are members of the Taliban give expression to

the actions of a bunch of ignorant thugs who pursue policies of terror that are directed toward women, children, and helpless individuals. I have a hard time distinguishing such oppressors from their American counterparts who also are in Afghanistan.

Moreover, it was not Iraqi Muslims who attacked the United States without provocation in early 2003. Rather, it was the United States government that attacked the Iraqi people without provocation.

The United States government is responsible for the death and displacement of millions of people, in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East in general. Yet, somehow, in the mind of Sam Harris, this all proves that Muslims are the real troublemakers in all of this.

It is not Muslims who have some 700-800 military bases all over the world. Instead, the United States government is the one who is using its power and military might to terrorize people around the globe.

It is not various countries in the Muslim world that are outspending the rest of the world combined with respect to military spending. Rather, the United States government is the one that is seeking to impose its will on everyone else through its projection of military power.

It is not Muslims who are using drone technology in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen to

kill innocent people. The individuals who are responsible for drone attacks on innocent people work for the United States government. 111

It is not Muslim Palestinians who are attacking the United States. Rather, it is the United States who, for nearly three-quarters of a century, has been providing the Israeli government with billions of dollars in military aide to help the latter government continue to occupy, kill, torture, steal from, oppress, and brutalize Palestinians.

I don't approve of suicide bombers killing innocent people. I also don't approve of the US government killing innocent people either ... whether this is done directly or indirectly by the United States.

I was never a fan of Saddam Hussein. However, it was the United States and its allies who supplied him with the weapons that he used against his own people and who encouraged him to go to war with Iran and, then, after that war was over, tricked him into attacking Kuwait so that the US would have an excuse to realize the war it longed for in the Middle East.

I was never a fan of Muammar Gaddafi. However, it was the United States and its allies who brought about the death of many innocent Libyans through the bombing campaigns of the former ruler's government and who, as well, supplied arms to whomever the West felt might advance the corporate agenda of the West with respect to Libyan natural resources while remaining

indifferent to the reprehensible acts that might be committed by the militants that were being supported by the United States and its allies. 112

I was never a fan of the al-Assad family dictatorship in Syria. However, irrespective of however badly that family abused its power with respect to the people of Syria, the people of Syria did not attack the United States, and, yet the people of Syria are the ones whom the United States is attacking, killing, and helping to displace through its use of military force in Syria.

I am not a fan of al-Qaeda or ISIS. However, it is the actions of the United States government that brought about the emergence of both groups through its many oppressive forms of military, economic, political, and financial interference with respect to Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The Muslim world is united about virtually nothing. They differ linguistically, culturally, socially, politically, economically, educationally, tactically, strategically, militarily, and spiritually.

Even the polling data that Dr. Harris loves to throw about indicates that the Muslim world is divided on many issues. Unfortunately, Sam Harris appears inclined to misinterpret such information in a way that attempts to support his contention that Muslims are among the worst purveyors of tribalism on the face of the Earth, and even more unfortunately, Maajid Nawaz says nothing to disabuse Dr. Harris of the latter's delusional ideas concerning such matters.

While discussing the issue of fundamentalism, Dr. Harris raises the issue that Muslims look at the Qur'an in the same way that fundamentalist Christians look at the Bible – that is, as the literal and inerrant word of God. By raising this issue, Dr. Harris wants to make the further point that: "... basically all 'moderate' Muslims – that is, those who aren't remotely like Islamists, or even especially conservative – are nevertheless fundamentalists by the Christian standard, because they believe the Qur'an to be the literal and inerrant word of God." 113

What does it mean to be the "literal" word of God? Normally speaking, using the term "literal" in the way that Dr. Harris does in the foregoing quote refers to a process of engaging words in their most usual linguistic sense and, thereby, ignoring whatever allegorical, metaphorical, or nuanced senses that might be given expression through the more common understandings concerning such words.

Now, while it might be possible that some people – including Dr. Harris and certain Muslims – would want to reduce the Qur'an down to only certain limited ways of parsing its meanings, I don't recall God saying that this is the way the Qur'an should be understood.

In fact, throughout the Qur'an, one is encouraged to reflect on, think about, and seek to gain insight into what is being said. Why would the Qur'an place such an emphasis on reflecting upon

the meanings of the Qur'an if that book is supposed to be engaged in only a literal manner?

Moreover, the foregoing question remains irrespective of whether, or not, someone considers the Qur'an to be a human construction or a Divine revelation. Whomever someone might consider the source of the Qur'an to be – whether, or not, that individual is a Muslim or a non-Muslim – then, nonetheless, that S(s)ource is giving many indications throughout the Qur'an that the book is not meant to be understood in a literal way, and, yet, its meanings will be made clear to whoever has taqwa or piety.

Let's take the foregoing points a step further. There are more than 6,000 verses in the Qur'an, of which only about 500, or so, have to do with various proclamations concerning dietary habits, marriage, divorce, adultery, apostasy, murder, theft, and the like.

Why assume that the themes in the Qur'an that should take precedence are the 500, or so, verses that talk about the foregoing sorts of proclamations? The Qur'an speaks again and again throughout its more than 6,000 verses about the importance of: Love, forgiveness, tolerance, patience, courage, piety, balance, perseverance, nobility, justice, honesty, humility, compassion, generosity, equanimity, and repentance, so, why shouldn't the ideas and values that are repeated again and again throughout the Qur'an take precedence over some sort of legalistic

understanding of a number of verses that only occupy a twelfth, or less, of the Qur'an.

The foregoing does not mean that issues of marriage, divorce, theft, murder, and so on are not important. Rather, what the foregoing suggests is that, perhaps, one needs to spend considerable time reflecting on how all of the different dimensions, principles, values, and ideas of the Qur'an relate to one another and that, unless one engages such issues through an orientation of piety, one will not be able to understand what is being said.

Who are the pious ones? God alone knows the answer to such a question, and, therefore, one cannot automatically assume – in a self-serving fashion -- that one is pious and, therefore, whatever one believes must be what the Qur'an means.

One either accepts the guidance that the Qur'an offers, or one does not accept such guidance. However, even assuming that one understands the nature of the spiritual guidance that is being offered, this does not give one the right to forcibly impose that guidance on other people – whether they be Muslims or non-Muslims.

The Qur'an often addresses its audience with the words: "O Ye who believe." However, as the Qur'an itself indicates when it talks about certain Bedouins who have professed their belief in Islam and, yet, such individuals were corrected by God and told they were merely individuals who had accepted -- in some basic, minimal sense -- the idea

of Islam (i.e., they are Muslim), and belief – that is, the condition of being Mu'min or actually having some knowledge and insight concerning the nature of Islam – had not, yet, entered their hearts. 116

What is appropriate for a Mu'min is not necessarily appropriate for a Muslim. Moreover, what is appropriate for a Muhsin is not necessarily appropriate for either a Muslim or Mu'min.

When one mixes all of the foregoing considerations in with the aforementioned Quranic injunction that there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen (or religion), as well as with the fact that eleven-twelfths of the Qur'an place greater emphasis on qualities of character than to specific possibilities concerning this or that transgression, then anyone who comes away from the Qur'an with a desire to reduce Islam and the Qur'an down to a set of legal prescriptions concerning certain kinds of behavior has not understood the Qur'an. Furthermore, such people compound their mistake by going about trying to find ways to impose their ignorance on other people.

One could agree with Dr. Harris that there are some Muslims who have a very literal understanding concerning the contents of the Qur'an. However, none of this has anything to do with the actual meaning of the Qur'an, and, therefore, to speak about the literal meaning of the Qur'an is to introduce a red herring into the discussion.

Chapter Six

Maajid Nawaz responds to Dr. Harris's foregoing comments (see the previous chapter) concerning the issue of the literal meaning of the Qur'an by talking about different methodological ways of engaging the textual content of the Qur'an. For example, he mentions how Muslim history has been characterized by two different methodological approaches to the Qur'an – that of the Mu'tazila and the Ash'ari schools of thought which differ, among other things, on whether, or not, the Qur'an is the eternal Word of God.

Those who were persuaded by the methodology and arguments of the Mu'tazila believed that the Qur'an is not necessarily eternal. On the other hand, those individuals who were persuaded by the methodology and arguments of the Ash'ari maintained that the Qur'an was the eternal Word of God.

Nawaz goes on to point out that such perspectives gained conceptual ascendancy or faded to the fringes of the discussion as a result of who was in power. Thus, at one point in time, the ideas of the Mu'tazilites gave expression to the preferred position of many Muslims, and, then, political and social changes occurred that replaced the Mu'tazilite perspective with the ideas of the Ash'ari school of thought.

While Nawaz is right that the sort of understanding that a person derives from the Qur'an is a function of the kind of methodology he or she uses to engage the Qur'an, he is completely wrong when he claims that "... no approach to a text is without method." In fact, the Sufis have taught that if one wishes to have the opportunity, God willing, to be opened to different dimensions of the Qur'an, then, one must leave oneself and all methodology behind. 118

Truth concerning the Qur'an does not come through methodology. Instead, from the Sufi perspective, truth can only be realized when God takes one by the hand and opens one up to this or that dimension of the truth.

Nawaz has taken a post-modernist hermeneutical stance that gives emphasis to the way in which methodology filters, colors, and shapes understanding. However, Sufi masters maintain that such an approach will lead to nothing but distortion concerning the nature of the Qur'an.

If one seeks to know whether the Qur'an is the eternal Word of God, then, ask God, and, then, God might, or might not, teach one accordingly. However, neither the Mu'tazilites nor the Ash'ari school of thought is the appropriate medium through which to have the foregoing question addressed.

According to Nawaz: "... these matters are constantly evolving. I'd argue that no doctrine on earth has ever been or will ever be immutable

because of course doctrines are constructs – the work of human beings.”

Nawaz is right when he states that human constructs are constantly changing in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, he is totally wrong when -- by arguing that human constructs are constantly changing – he, thereby, seeks to give the impression that Islam is a function of the doctrines that are introduced by this or that human being.

The Qur’an is guidance from God. Nawaz, however, is indicating that Quranic guidance is merely a matter of what human beings make of it.

If what Nawaz claims were the case, then, the Qur’an wouldn’t be Divine guidance. Instead, it would merely be a form of misguidance that was filtered through the desires, assumptions, biases, interests, ignorance, and limits of this or that individual.

People such as Dr. Harris, of course, are of the opinion that Nawaz is correct when the latter claims that so-called sacred texts are nothing more than human constructs. However, neither Dr. Harris nor Maajid Nawaz can demonstrate that their assumptions concerning the nature of the Qur’an are correct, and, in fact, all they get from the Qur’an is to see their own reflection looking back at them.

Dr. Harris argues that: “In the twenty-first century, the [religious] moderate’s commitment to scientific rationality, human rights, gender equality,

and every other modern value – values that, as you (Maajid Nawaz) say, are potentially universal for human beings – comes from the past thousand years of human progress, much of which was accomplished in spite of religion, not because of it. ... The truth is that most of our modern values are antithetical to the specific teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”

The best way of describing what is going on with the foregoing argument is to refer to an old adage of computer science: ‘Garbage in, Garbage out.’ Since the beginning of time, there has existed in every human being a potential for understanding the importance of qualities such as: Rationality, human rights, gender equality, and a host of constructive moral and character traits.

Despite being a neuroscientist, Dr. Harris does not know how or when life, consciousness, intelligence, memory, language, creativity, talent, morality, or reasoning came into being. One can plausibly argue that evolution did not create such capabilities (i.e., there is no tenable evolutionary account for the emergence of such capabilities), and human beings (either individually or collectively) did not invent those capabilities ... so, how did they arise?

Neither science nor religion can explain the process through which such capabilities originated. One can choose to go with some theory that is rooted in either science or religion (or a combination of the two), or, perhaps, one might

choose to go with some alternative kind of philosophical worldview, but the answers are, presently, unavailable to human beings. 121

Nonetheless, for thousands of years, human beings have had all the necessary capabilities to be able to rigorously engage issues of morality involving, among other things, matters of gender equality, human rights, and rationality. There is considerable evidence to indicate that some people successfully negotiated their way through the moral pitfalls (the Abel-types) while other individuals were not as successful with respect to such endeavors (the Cain-types).

As the Cain-types demonstrate, human beings are vulnerable to an array of forces – both within and without -- that are capable of undermining, distorting, and interfering with the process of coming to realize the inherent potential for understanding the nature of truth that exists within human beings. At the same time, Abel-types have demonstrated that through the assistance of authentic revelation, prophets, spiritual guides, as well as a sincere search for the truth by an individual, human beings are capable of realizing ways that resonate with the foregoing inherent potential and, thereby, help to induce human beings to actively seek to realize that potential.

Contrary to what Dr. Harris tries to claim, none of the foregoing is antithetical to the teachings of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all). Furthermore, when properly understood, such

understandings are not antithetical to the teachings of the actual books of revelation -- or Divine guidance -- that were given to the foregoing individuals. 122

If one wishes to better understand the foregoing issues, one should not waste time with theologians. One needs to actively investigate the teachings of the authentic mystics concerning such matters.

Toward the latter part of the *End of Faith*, Sam Harris explores some of what the Buddhist spiritual tradition has to offer. Buddhism is something that Dr. Harris appears to believe constitutes a far better alternative than does religion, and, yet, Buddhism is a religion because it is a process of seeking to realize the truth concerning the nature of reality and the way in which human spiritual potential fits into that reality.

Buddhists might not give emphasis to the idea of God. Nonetheless, no matter which form of that spiritual tradition one pursues, they are all very clear that there is a truth concerning the nature of reality and human potential that, with appropriate effort and assistance, can be realized.

If an individual doesn't feel comfortable with the idea of God, then choosing to proceed in that manner is a person's prerogative for which they must assume responsibility with respect to its ramifications - for better or worse. But, irrespective of whether human beings like it not,

reality does exist, and such reality gives expression to the truth of things.

The first part of the Shahadah – that is, the first pillar of Islam is: There is no god but Allah. The Sufi mystics pursue the foregoing proclamation to its logical conclusion and assert that there is no reality but Divinity.

The Sufis also indicate that the process of realizing the presence of such reality – to whatever degree this is possible -- is beyond language. In fact, the nature of reality is beyond all linguistic description, and one (but only one) very important dimension of the Sufi mystical path involves having to overcome the traps that are present in various linguistic and conceptual understandings concerning the nature of reality and human potential.

As a scientist and a follower – to some extent – of certain Buddhist practices, Dr. Harris obviously believes there are truths to be discovered concerning the nature of reality. Unfortunately, he appears to be caught up in a variety of linguistic and conceptual cul-de-sacs when he seeks to claim that Islam has nothing to do with the truth concerning the nature of reality or human potential despite the fact, as previously indicated, that the first pillar of Islam – namely, bearing witness to the truth that there is no reality but Divinity -- is – despite the presence of certain linguistic differences -- not all that different from what Dr. Harris professes to believe.

Reality exists. Realizing truths concerning the nature of such reality is possible given the right kind of guidance, methods, effort, and good fortune. 124

Furthermore, reality and the truth are worthy of respect and veneration. In other words, reality and truth give expression to the realm of the sacred.

Unfortunately, Dr. Harris appears to be less interested in determining the nature of truth about various dimensions of reality and much more interested in trying to denigrate others by means of an array of problematic assumptions, biases, speculations, misunderstandings, and erroneous forms of thinking that protect such ignorance from becoming contaminated with actual facts. How is the latter approach so different from those religious fundamentalists – such as the Taliban or ISIS – who claim that it is their way or the highway when it comes to the issue of seeking truth concerning the nature of reality?

Dr. Harris goes on to argue that religious moderates: “... seem unwilling to grapple with the fact that all scriptures contain an extraordinary amount of stupidity and barbarism that can always be rediscovered and made holy anew by fundamentalists – and there’s no principle of moderation internal to the faith that prevents this. These fundamentalist readings are, almost by definition, more complete and consistent – and, therefore, more honest.”

People from other faith traditions can address the foregoing comments from their own perspectives. What follows comes from the heart and soul of a Muslim. 125

I don't find any amount - extraordinary or otherwise - of stupidity and barbarism in the Qur'an. I do find a great deal that is worthy of considerable reflection.

I do not feel that the Qur'an is calling on me to tell other people how to live their lives. I do feel that the Qur'an addresses me with the offer of considerable guidance concerning how to go about living my life.

The Qur'an provides an array of levels and modalities of guidance. God has given me the capacity and opportunity to choose how to go about putting such levels and modalities of understanding into practice, and I alone am responsible for the choices that I make in this regard.

If I choose to try to respond to a situation through compassion, patience, and forgiveness rather than in some other way, I am following the guidance of the Qur'an. If I choose to try to engage certain life circumstances through humility, generosity, and gratitude, rather than in some other fashion, I am following the guidance of the Qur'an.

If I choose to try to live life in accordance with qualities of honesty, tolerance, and love rather than

in accordance with the antithesis of such qualities, then I am following the guidance of the Qur'an. If I choose to try to seek to understand the Qur'an through reflection, meditation, contemplation, and insight rather than restricting myself to various much more limited possibilities, then, I am following the guidance of the Qur'an. 126

Attesting to the Oneness of Reality, observing daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, giving charity, going on pilgrimage, engaging in the remembrance of God, and seeking to acquire an array of constructive character traits, while avoiding giving expression to an array of problematic character traits, are principles, values, and practices that apply to all Muslims, and by attempting to do such activities as best I can, I am following the guidance of the Qur'an. Moreover, if I choose to regard some facets of the Qur'an as being more appropriate to the circumstances that prevailed during the times of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) while regarding other features of the Qur'an as being more appropriate for the times in which I live, then, I also am following the guidance of the Qur'an because I am attempting to exercise, God willing, discernment in order to find the most harmonious, peaceful, constructive way to provide all people with the opportunity to seek and realize the truth concerning the nature of reality and human potential.

All of the foregoing considerations demonstrate that Dr. Harris is completely wrong when he claims that: "...there's no principle of moderation internal to the faith that prevents" fundamentalists from carrying the day. Furthermore, Dr. Harris is also totally incorrect when he tries to assert that: "... fundamentalist readings are, almost by definition, more complete and consistent – and, therefore, more honest." 127

Dr. Harris does not state what he means when he argues that "almost by definition" what fundamentalists do somehow gives expression to more complete, consistent, and, therefore, honest readings of the Qur'an than what anyone else does. Just what definition is he alluding to and what justifies such a definition?

What are the criteria for determining what constitutes "consistency" and "completeness"? What justifies using such criteria?

How can any understanding of the Qur'an that ignores the injunction that there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen or religion be considered to be consistent, complete, or honest? How can any understanding of the Qur'an that marginalizes – if not ignores -- qualities such as compassion, nobility, honesty, humility, generosity, tolerance, love, forgiveness, justice, kindness, charitableness, and so on (all of which are mentioned on numerous occasions in the Qur'an) -- be considered to be consistent, complete, or honest?

Dr. Harris's whole approach to the Qur'an seems to be immersed in arbitrariness. He has a Classics Illustrated sort of understanding of Islam that is missing all of the richness, nuances, subtleties, complexities, and details of the original text on which his comic book version is problematically based. 128

Dr. Harris continues on with his analysis by saying: "... every moderate seems to believe that his interpretation and selective reading of scripture is more accurate than God's literal words." First of all, the Qur'an is not to be interpreted, but, instead, one must wait for insight concerning any given situation to manifest itself in one's understanding, and this is one of the reasons why one should not be too quick to assume that a superficial reading of the Qur'an is the best way to proceed.

Secondly, concepts such as: Patience, love, compassion, charitableness, forgiveness, tolerance, humility, peace, equanimity, and kindness are all given positive forms of expression through the words of the Qur'an. Moreover, concepts such as: Impatience, enmity, greed, selfishness, injustice, arrogance, intolerance, and hardness of heart are given negative forms of expression through the words of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an contains many parables that address both of the foregoing sorts of constructive and destructive potentials in human nature. How are the foregoing concepts - whether of a negative

or constructive kind -- any less literal than are the sorts of things to which Dr. Harris is alluding?

Dr. Harris argues: "Presumably, God could have written these books any way He wanted. And if He wanted them to be understood in the spirit of twenty-first-century secular rationality, He could have left out all those bits about stoning people to death for adultery or witchcraft. It really isn't hard to write a book that prohibits sexual slavery -- you just put in a few lines like: "Don't take sex slaves" and "When you fight a war and take prisoners, as you inevitably will, don't rape any of them."

God put in more than a few lines in the Qur'an concerning the treatment of other people ... irrespective of whether, or not, these other individuals are slaves or non-slaves, Muslim or non-Muslim. Considerations involving: Equanimity, fairness, justice, compassion, not mistreating or abusing those who are under one's care, not transgressing limits, and the freeing of slaves are all mentioned quite a few times in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an is a book of guidance directed toward assisting human beings during the process of making choices with respect to the living of life. If people choose to ignore that guidance, or do not properly take that guidance into consideration, or are not interested in trying to acquire insight into the nature of that guidance, then, how is any of this God's fault?

The Qur'an itself is a test. The test is whether, or not, a person will permit herself or himself to

become open to the guidance that flows through the Qur'an.

Both those who are misguided as well as those who are guided make reference to the Qur'an. Only one of those two groups operates in accordance with what the Qur'an has to offer, and, unfortunately, Dr. Harris seems to be only interested in what the misguided have to say about the Qur'an.

The decisions that were made during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) were apropos to those times and circumstances. However, the Prophet used to discourage people from coming to him and reporting their sins, and, instead, he encouraged them to repent to God for whatever sins they might have committed.

In addition, he used to discourage people from asking him specific questions about the appropriateness of this or that kind of behavior. He instructed them that unless he said something to them, then, they should leave him alone concerning issues that he, himself, did not raise.

Finally, the Prophet told people to destroy the compilations they had made concerning what he said and did. He didn't want there to be any confusion between the words of God and the words of the Prophet.

On the relatively few occasions when some form of punishment was handed out during the times of the Prophet, this was usually because the

person who had transgressed, in some way, against other human beings within the community (e.g., theft, murder, adultery) insisted on, or agreed with, receiving the prescribed punishments because they believed that by doing so, the slate would be wiped clean in the eyes of God. 131

Currently, we don't live in a time when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is with us in any physical form. Moreover, there is no one in the Muslim world who can serve a Prophetic role, and, therefore, there is no one who can justify trying to impose on the rest of the Muslim world any particular style of: Government, social arrangement, legal system, punishment, or manner of using the Qur'an to compel people to pursue life in one way rather than another [and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was never interested in exercising some form of authoritarian control over what people did or didn't do].

The foregoing comments do not mean that anything and everything is permissible. Individuals - at least those who seek to be Muslim -- must still try to become open to the guidance of the Qur'an.

Nonetheless, there is nothing in the process of becoming open to the teachings of the Qur'an that indicates that a Muslim must show deference to the opinions (fatwas) of fundamentalists and extremists when the latter stray from Islam in the way in which the latter individuals appear to be inclined to do. Fundamentalists and extremists will cite passages from the Qur'an in an attempt to try

to justify what they do, but the hearts of such people are closed to the actual teachings of the Qur'an. 132

Dr Harris asserts that: "...the most straightforward reading of scripture suggests that Allah advises jihadists to take sex slaves from among the conquered, decapitate their enemies, and so forth." The foregoing statement indicates that Dr. Harris has either not read the entire Qur'an, or that he has done so in far too cursory and superficial a manner, or that he misunderstands what the Qur'an says in a manner that is strikingly similar to the people he is criticizing.

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) rode triumphantly into Mecca following many years of brutality that had been committed by the Quraish and their allies against Muslims, the Prophet did not behead anyone nor did he take any slaves. Instead, he: Indicated that on this day he found no fault with the people of Mecca, proceeded to appoint someone from among the Meccans to serve as an administrator for the area, and then returned to Medina.

Furthermore, following the siege of a community by Muslims, one of the members of the tribe that had been besieged poisoned the Prophet and at least one of the people with him. Although the Prophet survived the poisoning, another individual was not so fortunate.

When the woman who had committed the act of poisoning was brought before him, the Prophet did not behead her or make her a sex slave. Instead, he forgave her and set her free, indicating, as he did so, that the woman was only acting to defend the honor of her people. 133

By proceeding in the foregoing manner, the Prophet was acting in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an. However, when the members of the Islamic State behave in the way do, they are ignoring the guidance of the Qur'an as well as the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Dr. Harris wants to argue that when it comes to religious scripture, such texts are very specific in what they demand of adherents. In other words, he wants to claim that such texts are not open to interpretation.

According to Dr. Harris, "You can't say, for instance, that Islam recommends eating bacon and drinking alcohol. And even if you could find some way of reading the Qur'an that would permit those things, you can't say that its central message is that a devout Muslim should consume as much bacon and alcohol as humanly possible. No one can say that the central message of Islam is pacifism. ... One simply cannot say that the central message of the Qur'an is respect for women as the moral and political equals of men. To the contrary, one can say that under Islam, the central message is that

women are second-class citizens and the property of the men in their lives.”

Actually, the Qur'an does permit such things as consuming bacon or drinking alcohol under certain circumstances. For instance, if there were a set of circumstances in which one needed to consume bacon or drink alcohol in order to preserve one's life, then such actions would be permitted.

Contrary to what Dr. Harris is trying to argue in the foregoing quote, flexibility is, within limits, one of the central messages of the Qur'an. There are many constructive ways to give expression to the teachings of the Qur'an.

For example, there is not just a single way to be: Loving, honest, compassionate, generous, charitable, grateful, noble, forgiving, tolerant, humble, friendly, and so on. There is not just a single way to observe the five basic pillars of Islam, and there is not just one way to remember God or engage in reflection concerning the nature of the Qur'an.

Dr. Harris is trying to frame things in a way that compels Muslims to act in the ways that he wants to criticize. He wants such acts to be considered to be the literal meaning of Qur'an, and he wants such acts to be considered to be the central message of the Qur'an.

For instance, without justification, Dr. Harris asserts that: "No one can say that the central message of Islam is pacifism." Without itemizing all

of the relevant Quranic passages, nonetheless, one can honestly assert that there are many, many verses in the Qur'an indicating that peaceful solutions to problems are always to be preferred to the way of conflict, and, as well, there are many passages in the Qur'an indicating that one should be inclined to be open to reconciliation, forgiveness, and letting things go.

Are there passages in the Qur'an indicating that Muslims have the right to defend themselves when attacked? Yes, there are, but there also are warnings about not transgressing beyond bounds with respect to such a right.

Moreover, one might want to keep in mind that the Prophet would not permit Muslims to retaliate against their Quraish tormentors for more than 13 years. Physical resistance to the ongoing oppression was only undertaken when Divine permission came (in the form of specific verses of revelation) that permitted the Muslim community to fight back against Quraish aggression.

The foregoing permission to wage war is not open-ended. A clear indication from God (i.e., revelation), the particular nature of circumstances, and the presence of the Prophet are delimiting conditions that govern the foregoing sort of permission ... yet the aforementioned Divine indication, circumstances and a Prophetic presence (at least in a physical sense) are no longer operative.

Given the current absence of the above noted conditions, then, to a large extent, the principles that tend to govern the issue of engaging in physical conflict are those that were in effect prior to the time when Divine permission enabled a Muslim community -- led by the Prophet -- to engage in such physical resistance. There are exceptions to the foregoing principles that give expression to non-violence -- such as those that involve instances of needing to protect oneself or one's family against imminent physical attack -- but, for the most part, there is nothing to indicate that the permission to engage in war-like physical resistance was intended to be extended to all Muslims in perpetuity.

Dr. Harris is also completely wrong when he claims that: "One simply cannot say that the central message of the Qur'an is respect for women as the moral and political equals of men." Actually, one can say this, and there are many verses in the Qur'an indicating as much.

Dr. Harris seems to be confusing the arbitrary systems of Muslim law that have arisen over the centuries with the actual teachings of the Qur'an. While there is one Quranic verse that does allude to a small degree of superiority that men have with respect to women, nevertheless, the precise nature of that superiority is not spelled out, and, more importantly, with a few exceptions, throughout the Qur'an, all of the practices and benefits that are

discussed in the Qur'an apply equally to women and men.

Can both women and men give birth to children? No!

Can both women and men breast-feed babies? No!

Can men put off prayers and fasting during their menstrual cycles? No!

Can both men and women have more than one spouse at a time? No, but the Qur'an indicates that unless a man can treat all of his wives with complete fairness and impartiality, then, he should be content with one wife.

Moreover, nothing in the Qur'an indicates that women are the property of men or that they are second-class citizens. Such views are entirely a function of the legal systems that were dreamed up by men who decided to ignore the teachings of the Qur'an after the Prophet passed away.

Muslim culture does not necessarily reflect the teachings of the Qur'an. Unfortunately, both Muslims and non-Muslims often conflate and confuse the former with the latter.

According to Maajid Nawaz: "to interpret any text, one must have a methodology, and in that methodology there are jurisprudential, linguistic, philosophical, historical, and moral perspectives. Quentin Skinner of the Cambridge School wrote a seminal essay ... that addresses the danger of assuming that there is ever a true reading of texts.

It asks the question, does any piece of writing speak for itself. Or, do we impose certain values and judgments on that text when interpreting it?"

Nawaz doesn't seem to consider the possibility that both of the foregoing alternatives might be true at the same time. In other words, perhaps, a given text does speak for itself, but, simultaneously, some people might be inclined to "impose certain values and judgments on that text."

Suppose I pass a note to someone sitting near to me. The text of the note states: "Would you please hand the salt shaker to me that is near to your plate?"

Let us assume that my only interest is gaining access to the salt. Nonetheless, the person to whom my request is presented might have any number of ideas about the meaning of the text in my message ... such as: I am trying to start a conversation and using the text as my opening ... or, I am making a flirtatious pass, or I am trying to annoy the recipient of the message ... or, I am trying to manipulate the individual in some way ... or the message is a code of some kind that involves something other than salt ... and so on.

The text does speak for itself. It conveys my intention.

The person receiving the message might understand what is going on, or that person might move off in one interpretational direction or another that imposes various ideas and feeling

onto the message that don't accurately reflect the nature of the intention being expressed in textual form. However, if the person near me reaches for the salt and passes it to me, then, the person has correctly understood the meaning of the text even if, at the same time, he or she wonders if there might be some sort of additional subtext to the message. 139

There is a term in hermeneutics that is known as "merging horizons." The process of merging horizons requires a person who is engaging some text to merge horizons with the intentions of the individual who generated the text that is being engaged -- that is, to become one with the intentions being conveyed through the text.

When one has exhausted merging with all levels of the text in question, then, one fully understands the perspective of the person who generated the message. If, on the other hand, one fails to do this, then one has failed to grasp the nature of the voice that gave rise to the text. Finally, if one only succeeds in merging with some of the semantic and emotional horizons to which a given text gives expression, then, one has only a partial understanding of what is being engaged.

Now, either Maajid Nawaz believes that the Qur'an gives expression to the intentions of Divinity or he doesn't. Moreover, he either believes that it is possible to merge horizons, to varying degrees of accuracy, with the nature of those intentions or he doesn't.

If there are no Divine intentions associated with the Qur'an, and/or it is not possible to grasp such intentions to varying degrees, then, all of Nawaz's talk about the Qur'an is an exercise in arbitrariness. Irrespective of how many kinds of linguistic, cultural, philosophical, historical, and theological forces that might be at play, Nawaz provides no reliable criteria for establishing what constitutes the truth concerning the meaning of anything ... including one's interpretive effort since thoughts and feeling just become further objects that can be subjected to a process of interpretational engagement that is endless, relativistic, and arbitrarily imposed on the text. 140

The Sufis indicate that one must free oneself from all possible linguistic, cultural, philosophical, historical, and legalistic treatments of a text – e.g., the Qur'an -- and seek to merge horizons with the intentions underlying such a text rather than setting about trying to merge horizons with all the ideas and feelings that have been imposed on that text over the years. Before the truth can be poured into a vessel of understanding (e.g., the heart or the mind), the receiving vessel must be emptied of anything that might interfere with, or contaminate, the quality of what is being poured.

No single verse in the Qur'an can be isolated from the spiritual ecology of the entire Qur'an. Everything bears upon everything else.

When the intentional horizons of the Qur'an have been properly merged to whatever extent one

is capable of achieving at a given time and to whatever extent God permits on such an occasion, then, one engages existence through the lenses of the Qur'an. In other words, an understanding arises within an individual that permits her or him to engage the events of life in a way that is in accordance with, or compatible with, the teachings of the Qur'an, and the more extensively that one is able and permitted to engage the intentions flowing through the Qur'an, the greater is one's God-given insight concerning some existential situation in which one is immersed.

The meaning of the Qur'an can never be exhausted. Moreover, the extent to which one will be able to succeed in merging horizons with the intentions flowing through the Qur'an will always be a function of inherent capacity and God's Grace.

Maajid Nawaz claims that: "... the only truth is that there is no correct way to interpret scripture." In effect, he is saying: "...there is no right answer." And, according to him: "... in the absence of a right answer, pluralism is the only option."

He is right that pluralism is the only option, but he is wrong about why this is the case. Pluralism is important not because there are no right answers but because the truth concerning reality's nature and the relationship of human potential with respect to such reality encompasses a wide set of possibilities that are all -- within certain limits and within certain contexts -- acceptable.

Human capacity is variable. Divine Grace is variable. The degree to which human beings succeed in merging horizons with Divine intentions is variable. 142

One has to respect the fact that God opens up different individuals to the truth concerning Divine intentions in different ways. Consequently, one has to extend various degrees of freedom to people with respect to how they go about seeking to realize the truth concerning Reality and human potential.

Nevertheless, the degrees of freedom that are to be extended to any given individual cannot permit that person to be able to deny, corrupt, or undermine anyone else having that same opportunity to pursue the truth about the nature of reality and human potential. One can neither seek to control others nor permit oneself to be controlled with respect to the issue of pursuing the truth about the nature of reality.

Furthermore, Maajid Nawaz is wrong when he claims that: "... pluralism will lead to secularism, and to democracy, and to human rights." He is wrong because human rights are already present in the plurality of opportunities that are necessary and which enable people to pursue the truth in relation to reality and human potential.

He is also wrong because pluralism does not lead to democracy but, instead, presupposes the condition of sovereignty. If people do not have the opportunity to pursue the truth concerning reality

and human potential, they do not have sovereignty, and if there is no sovereignty, pluralism of opportunity will not be possible, and if there is no such pluralism, democracy just becomes an exercise in which the majority (however it is conceived) become inclined toward authoritarian control over various minorities. 143

What Maajid Nawaz is proposing will lead nowhere but to confusion, relativism, arbitrariness, and conflict. In effect -- and as he readily admits -- he is arguing that there is no such thing as truth, and in such a context, peace and stability are not indications of progress but, instead, give expression to the presence of a deadly stasis that stands in the way of ever being able to discover the truth -- to whatever extent this is possible -- about the nature of reality and human potential.

When discussing the idea of moving "away from viewing religion as a set of legal injunctions," Nawaz does come close to alluding to something that, in certain ways, resonates with the former perspective when he says: "It's no longer a matter of strict legal interpretations, but a spiritual, mystical relationship with God, a journey." Unfortunately, he gets to this point through a superficial, cursory, and problematic interpretation of the Sufi path.

For example, his references to the Sufi path are especially problematic in conjunction with the Mulaamatiyya and the Qalandariyya. Contrary to

what Nawaz asserts, the intention among such Sufi groups was never about any alleged right to sin.

In the case of the Mulaamatiyya, the group's modus operandi was about committing acts that were likely to induce others to subject the person to ridicule or criticism which could be used as a means of disciplining and subduing the ego or nafs of the latter individual since ridicule and criticism are virulent, painful poisons to the ego. On the other hand, in the matter of the Qalandariyya, certain mystical states and pronouncements to which members of that group, by God's leave, sometimes gave expression tended to trouble and disturb certain dimensions of the Muslim community because the sorts of states and pronouncements being alluded to tended to challenge the understandings of many Muslims concerning the nature of reality and what might be possible with respect to how one aligned oneself with such reality.

The Qur'an was never intended to be a legal document. It was always intended to provide guidance for an individual's spiritual, mystical journey toward realizing the presence of Divinity in one's life. In fact, from the Sufi perspective, worship is nothing other than a process of realizing the presence of Divine reality.

Chapter Seven

While expressing some support for Maajid Nawaz's post-modernist, relativistic text-based approach to Islam, Dr. Harris also expresses concern. He argues: "Any position arrived at through this (granted, more appealing and more modern) approach to interpretation seems unstable, because fundamentalism can always rise again. And it will tend to rise again to the degree that anyone feels the impulse to hew closely to the texts. What can you say to a person who thinks: ... It (i.e., the Qur'an) says here that I should hate and fear infidels and take none as friends."

To begin with, no matter what one does or says, there have always been those who will allocate to themselves the right to distort reality in whatever way they see fit. There is nothing that can be done to prevent people from taking liberties with the truth any more than there seems to be anything that can be done to disabuse Dr. Harris with respect to his ignorance concerning such topics as Islam.

Notwithstanding the foregoing sorts of considerations, there are easy ways to respond to the question Dr. Harris raises – namely, what can a person say to someone who "feels the impulse to hew closely to the texts" with respect to the idea, of hating and fearing infidels and not taking them as

friends. For instance, one could say: “O ye who believe. Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity and let not your hatred of any people seduce you to not deal justly with them. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is informed of what you do.” (Surah 5, Verse 8). 146

Many other verses of the Qur’an could be recited in conjunction with the question being raised by Dr. Harris. The point is that Dr. Harris has settled on an overly simplistic, narrow, shallow, distorted approach to both the Qur’an and Islam because doing so seems to serve his purposes.

Apparently, when it comes to religion, in general, or to Islam and Muslims, in particular, Dr. Harris wishes to remain deeply entrenched in his ignorance concerning such matters. If this were not the case, then he would take the moral steps that are necessary to do whatever research he does with a much more open mind as well as commitment to the sort of intellectual rigor that is necessary to arrive at a fair understanding of what Islam entails.

I’m not asking Dr. Harris to believe in Islam. I am asking him to be fair, and he doesn’t seem to be able to accomplish this.

One should also be clear about what an infidel is. This is something that Dr. Harris fails to do.

To begin with, an infidel does not refer to anyone and everyone who is not a Muslim. There

are many forms of spiritual belief that are recognized by, and alluded to, in the Qur'an.

For example, the Qur'an states: "Surely, those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and does good, they have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve." (2:62) Moreover, the Qur'an also indicates that throughout history (up to the time of the Qur'an) there were many prophets (some 120,000) who were sent to assist people spiritually, but only some of those prophets were specifically named in the Qur'an (see Surah 40, Verse 78).

Consequently, one should not be too quick to reject someone as a believer simply because that person follows the teachings of someone who is not mentioned in the Qur'an. Moreover, while there might be certain differences in how such people seek the truth, nonetheless, as the Qur'an points out again and again, human beings are not the ones who have the responsibility for judging such matters, but, rather, God is the One Who will decide things in this regard.

Clearly, therefore, from the perspective of the Qur'an, the canopy under which believers congregate is very wide and is capable of including many different categories of people. Now, Dr. Harris presents an interesting case with respect to the foregoing issue of who is and isn't an infidel, because in many respects he seems to be an

individual who believes in truth and seeks it out ...
although in the case of Islam he doesn't do a very good job of separating out the Islamic wheat from the chaff of those (which includes himself) who do not understand the nature of Islam. 148

Furthermore, given that Dr. Harris wrote a book titled: *The Moral Landscape*, he appears to be someone who wishes to do that which is moral and good. The fact that I disagreed with many – not all – of the arguments in the aforementioned book and wrote about those disagreements in my critique of the foregoing book in my own work: *Epistle to a Sam Harris Nation*, does not mean – irrespective of whether I am right or wrong with respect to my criticisms – that Dr. Harris is not interested in seeking what is good, true, or moral.

In Chapter 7 – ‘Experiments in Consciousness’ – of the *End of Faith*, Dr. Harris talks about spirituality and mysticism. He makes clear that he is using such terms in a non-religious sense, but, for lack of better words, he proceeds to talk about those sorts of possibilities within the context of Buddhism.

While Buddhism is considered not to be God-centric, there is a distinction within Buddhism that I always have found to be intriguing. The distinction involves two terms: ‘jiriki’ and ‘tariki’.

The idea of ‘jiriki’ refers to the dimension of spiritual struggle that is rooted in the efforts of an individual. ‘Tariki’, on the other hand, refers to a

dimension of spiritual assistance that is external to whatever efforts are put forth by an individual.

The Buddhists have their own way of understanding such terms. However, given that none of us – including Buddhists -- knows how to viably account for, in any great detail, the origins of: The universe, life, consciousness, intelligence, language, imagination, reason, creativity, talent, morality, or spirituality, then, it is quite conceivable that the realm of ‘tariki’ (i.e., other help or external help) extends much further than either the Buddhists or Dr. Harris supposes.

There is a story associated with the Buddha that is apropos to the foregoing. The Buddha was reported to have been sitting in the forest with a small group of individuals.

He picked up leaves from the forest floor and indicated to the people present that spiritual truths exist that are more plentiful than the leaves of the forest, but he teaches only those truths that are necessary for liberation from illusion.

Is Dr. Harris an infidel? I don’t know, and, quite frankly, from my perspective that is not really any of my business.

What Dr. Harris believes is up to him, and he is responsible for the choices he makes. I might disagree with him in relation to this or that aspect of what his philosophical, scientific, spiritual, or mystical perspectives might be, but I respect his right to make such choices.

However, what I do find objectionable is that so much of his commentary concerning religion and Islam is rooted in ignorance. Dr. Harris is a highly intelligent person, so when he makes the errors he does with respect to Islam and religion, and, in addition, he seems uninterested in searching for the truth concerning those matters, then, I consider such willful ignorance to be problematic because, among other things, he is whipping up hostility toward Islam and Muslims in a manner that is unwarranted, if not dangerous.

When he proceeds along the sort of path of ignorance that has been demonstrated throughout the pages of this book, I consider him every bit as worrisome as the fundamentalists whom he seeks to disparage. Consequently, I can't think of any reason why I might want to ignore Divine guidance that inclines me toward disliking what such people *do* (and not the person) or refraining from taking such people as friends.

At the same time, the foregoing sort of dislike and distancing of myself has to be modulated by other guidance that comes through the Qur'an, such as the aforementioned Verse 8 of Surah 5 that warns me about not treating the foregoing sorts of people with injustice. Contrary to what Dr. Harris seems to suppose with respect to Islam, nothing prevents me from joining together guidance from different parts of the Qur'an to arrive at a position of caution concerning the ignorance-based behaviors of people like Dr. Harris while,

simultaneously, remembering that I have an obligation to be equitable toward those same individuals. 151

Now, lest Dr. Harris – or those who idolize him – feel that what I am objecting to is his alleged atheism, let me introduce something from the principles of Islam in general and from the Sufi mystical path in particular. Within every human being exists a resistance to the truth that is seated in the ego or the rebellious self (nafs) – (See Surah 12: Verse 53 ... “Truly the soul commands unto evil.”)

The Qur’an says: “O ye who believe, fight against those infidels close to you.” (Surah 9, Verse 123) The infidels who are closest to us are our own egos or our individual, rebellious selves that are inclined to resist acknowledging the truth in this or that context.

I object to the dimensions of my own being that are resistant to coming to the truth with respect to any given issue. I object equally to the dimensions in others – such as Dr. Harris’ ignorance about various topics – that also are resistant to coming to the truth in relation to this or that issue.

I don’t have to kill Dr. Harris because he is ignorant about certain things any more than I have to kill myself when my own ignorance rears its ugly head. In fact, and as the present book demonstrates, there are many forms of fighting against and attempting to combat ignorance that don’t have to be rooted in physical combat.

The most “violent” thing I ever saw my Sufi teacher do or say (and this is based on enjoying a very close relationship with him for 17 years) was to tell a drunk who was acting in a menacing manner toward my spiritual guide to “buzz off!” The inebriated person buzzed off.

I might add that the foregoing event occurred during a time when the university at which he taught, along with various elements of the surrounding Muslim community, together with representatives of the provincial government and different media outlets were all doing their best to try to destroy him just because he refused to accept the ignorance of such people concerning the nature of Islam. This all took place more than 30 years ago ... long before the present climate of ignorance arose, but those were circumstances that give expression to the long-standing animosity concerning all things Islamic that have existed in the West for quite some time and that have helped to nurture the ignorance of such people as Dr. Harris with respect to Islam.

When my spiritual guide was a young man, he was part of a small group of friends that used to hang out together and go on various adventures in and around their locality in Pakistan. One of members of the group was an atheist.

My teacher told me that they used to engage in good-natured, light-hearted banter concerning issues of belief and unbelief among themselves, but the young man who was an atheist was an accepted

part of the group. One of the funny stories that my spiritual guide related to me about the man had to do with the latter's appearance. 153

The young man possessed a long flowing beard and had the appearance of a holy man. From time to time, as the group of friends was going about its activities, various people in the street would approach the young man asking for spiritual blessings and advice ... something that amused everyone in the group of friends including the young atheist.

Dr. Harris maintains that: "It seems to me that the Qur'an contains two central messages ... The first is the demonization of infidels ... The evil of unbelief is spelled out in the Qur'an on almost every page, and one finds only a few stray lines – for example, 'There is no compulsion in religion' (2:256) with which to offset the general message of intolerance. There is also the doctrine of 'abrogation' under which later – generally less tolerant – verses are believed to supersede earlier ones. My understanding is that 2:256 is nullified in this way."

I find it somewhat ironical that Dr. Harris should spend so much time demonizing people of religion, in general, and Muslims, in particular, and, then, he wants to talk about what he considers to be the manner in which Islam demonizes those who don't believe. I was watching an interview the other day that featured Richard Dawkins, and, on several occasions during the interview, he said

quite emphatically that anyone who didn't acknowledge evolution as a fact was an ignorant person, and I have heard the same sort of words from many other true believers who espouse the theology of evolution despite the fact that such people cannot answer the simplest questions about the origins of life, or the origins of consciousness, memory, intelligence, language, reason, creativity, talent, or morality.

I had such an encounter with a professor of anthropology during a meeting sponsored by the provincial government that was attempting to formulate policies concerning the issue of educational bias. It was during a break in the meeting, and the conversation turned to the issue of evolution.

I raised some questions concerning evolution, and I was not advancing a Creationist position, but, rather, I was talking about the science of evolution. The aforementioned anthropology professor didn't answer any of the questions being asked but, instead, went off on a diatribe that was preoccupied with my intellectual qualifications for being a graduate student given that raising questions about evolution indicated otherwise ... clearly, I was trespassing on sacred, conceptual ground.

Since that time, I have written several books on evolutionary theory (see: *Evolution and the Origin of Life* as well as: *Final Jeopardy: The Reality Problem, Volume I*. Among other things, those

works explore the alleged science of evolutionary theory at the level of chemistry and molecular biology and point out that there are fundamental lacunae in the theory of evolution ... problems that are capable of bringing into question whether the theory of evolution is actually as viable as its advocates try to maintain.

The aforementioned sort of demonization often also goes on toward people who question the Big Bang scenario of cosmology or who find fault with the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics with all its many modalities of supposed weirdness. To be sure, certain truths have been established concerning astronomy and particle physics – as well as biology -- but, nonetheless, the truths that have been discovered often get caught up in interpretive philosophies that tend to stray considerable distances from such truths, just as often happens with respect to various kinds of interpretive philosophies in relation to Islam.

For instance, in the latter case, let's consider the so-called doctrine of "abrogation" mentioned by Dr. Harris in a previous quote. "Abrogation" refers to a methodological doctrine of interpretation which claims that portions of the Qur'an that were revealed at an earlier point in time are nullified by portions of the revelation that were given at a later time, and for those who are unfamiliar with the history of Islam, the Qur'an was revealed piecemeal over a period of approximately twenty-three years.

Nowhere in the Qur'an does one find instructions telling human beings that one should forget about whatever was said previously and just pay attention to what is being said now. To be sure, there are instances in the Qur'an when some previous practice is transitioned to a new form of that practice such as occurred in conjunction with the direction of qibla or prayer when the latter was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca.

However, the foregoing sorts of transitions are quite particular with respect to the nature of the change that is being introduced. There are no blanket changes in the Qur'an that replace everything that was revealed previously by whatever is revealed after the earlier guidance was given.

The doctrine of abrogation is a human construction (as opposed to being a Divinely revealed form of guidance) that entails several errors. Firstly, it is premised on the erroneous belief that the Qur'an requires interpretation.

God either opens one up to understanding some dimension of Quranic meaning or those meanings remain closed to one. The process of interpretation is an attempt to do an end-around with respect to the etiquette of the Qur'an by imposing on the latter the imaginings of a person who is trying to invent his or her own interpretation of what the Qur'an means ... the very antithesis of becoming open to Divine guidance.

The second error entailed by the doctrine of abrogation concerns – as indicated earlier – the scope of what is being changed in any given instance of revelation relative to previous facets of such revelation. What is clearly indicated in the Qur’an as being narrow in scope has been transmuted into something it is not. 157

Unfortunately, many people (and Dr. Harris appears to be one of these individuals) seem to want to engage the Qur’an in terms of a black and white or an either-or sort of orientation that allows no room for different verses of the Qur’an to modulate one another in an indefinitely large, but completely legitimate, number of ways. The principle of abrogation follows a similar line of thinking in which one must accept what comes later at the expense of what came earlier.

The Qur’an must be understood as a whole. Whatever changes are introduced must be understood in the context of the whole.

For example, with respect to the change in qibla, or direction of prayer, from Jerusalem, there were some Muslims who made the change as soon as the corresponding revelation was made known, whereas other Muslims were, for various reasons, reluctant to make the switch immediately. Among other things, the change in qibla was a test of faith, and some people did not fare well with respect to that test.

Does the Qur’an spend a great deal of time emphasizing the difference between the

importance of acting in accordance with the truth rather than aligning oneself with falsity? Yes, it does, but so do science, philosophy, politics, and economics. 158

The annals of science and philosophy give expression to many instances in which people who did not agree with scientific or philosophical orthodoxy were considered to be pursuing falsehood rather than truth. In addition, the history of politics and economics is replete with similar processes during which one group considered themselves to be the proponents of truth while other people were considered to be advocates of falsehood.

Dr. Harris considers himself to be on the side of the angels, so to speak, when it comes to pointing out the problems of religion and the concomitant need to adhere to the tenets of science and rationalistic secularism. On almost every page of some of his books he talks about how, on the one hand, people of religion are misguided while, on the other hand, people of science and secularism are on the right path.

If the Qur'an is correct with respect to its statements concerning the nature of truth and falsity, why shouldn't it castigate those who deny, act contrary to, or stay from the truth? Dr. Harris, of course, doesn't believe that the Qur'an is Divine guidance, so, he spends his time castigating those who don't agree with his ideas about how to differentiate between truth and falsehood.

What is true? What is false?

These are the issues. Most everyone recognizes that a great deal turns on being able to identify what constitutes the truth and what gives expression to the false, but there is considerable disagreement about how to draw up a map that can assist one to successfully navigate an existential terrain that consists of so many dangers with respect to the issues of truth and falsity.

Dr. Harris believes he knows how to draw up such a map, but I find his arguments (and I have read most of his books) to be far from convincing in this respect. Instead, I find the Qur'an as a whole gives a far more coherent, nuanced, rich, and insightful framework through which to engage life than does anything that Dr. Harris has to offer – especially given that Dr. Harris doesn't seem to understand much about the book – namely, the Qur'an – which he is so ready to criticize.

Dr. Harris is concerned about the fate of apostates within the Muslim community. What this or that Muslim community decides to do with respect to someone who is an apostate is beyond my control, but I can say that there is plenty of guidance in the Qur'an indicating how one can put such matters into a workable perspective.

For example, consider the following passage of the Qur'an. "We raise by grades of Mercy whom We will, and over every lord of knowledge, there is one more knowing." (Surah 12, Verse 76).

The first thing to note is that God is the One who either raises someone in grades of Mercy or does not do so. If an individual has done something that deprives him or her of such Mercy, then that sort of set of events (such as transitioning from one who believes in God to someone who does not believe in God) is an occasion for sorrow rather than an occasion that justifies engaging in some sort of murderous rage toward such an unfortunate individual.

Secondly, irrespective of what one knows, there is One Who knows more. Human beings – whether Muslim or non-Muslim -- are, for the most part, ignorant about the many dimensions of truth that exist, and, therefore, human beings should not be so quick to act on the basis of their ignorance.

God knows what is going on with each individual, and human beings do not. God gives people however many opportunities He likes.

The Qur'an states: "We have shown humankind the way, whether they be grateful or disbelieving." (Surah 76, Verse 3). Divinity will deal with those who have turned away from such opportunities in His own way and time.

The Qur'an also indicates: "Surely We have revealed to you the Book with the truth for the sake of human beings; so whoever follows the right way it is for the benefit of that person's soul, and whoever errs, such error is only to the detriment of that person's soul: and you are not a custodian over them." (Surah 39: Verse 41). The Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him) is being directly addressed in the foregoing Quranic passage (and by implication the rest of humanity is also being addressed), and, yet, even he is being told that he does not have custodial responsibilities for what people do with respect to whether, or not, they accept revelation, and, therefore, how much less custodial responsibility does the rest of the Muslim world have for whether or not someone decides to reject Islam after having accepted it? 161

There is a further problem surrounding the idea of killing apostates. More specifically, once that person dies, his or her opportunity to have a change of heart concerning such matters has also been terminated.

The Qur'an says: "O my slaves who have transgressed against their own souls! Do not despair of the Mercy of Allah Who forgives all sins." (Surah 39, Verse 53) If God has indicated that the capacity to forgive all sins belongs to Divinity, what gives anyone the right to deny human beings an opportunity to recant an act of apostasy through seeking the forgiveness of God?

Denying other people the opportunity to undergo a change of heart concerning apostasy is to express a certain kind of despair and disbelief concerning what God has indicated in the Qur'an with respect to the issue of forgiveness. Killing apostates is tantamount to their executioners becoming interlopers with respect to spiritual territory that is far beyond their jurisdiction.

Surah 9, Tauba or Repentance, is the only Surah in the Qur'an that does not begin with: In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. In Verse 80 of that Surah, one finds the following words: "Ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; even if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them; this is because they disbelieve in Allah and His Apostle, and Allah does not guide the transgressing people." 162

On one occasion, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have responded to the foregoing verse by indicating that if God would not forgive such people even if the Prophet prayed for their forgiveness 70 times, then, the Prophet was prepared to pray for those individuals 71 times. There is much food for thought here.

The Prophet was not trying to one up Divinity. The Prophet was giving expression to the reality inherent in the following ayat or verse of the Qur'an - namely: "We have not sent you (Muhammad) except as a mercy to all the worlds." (Surah 21, Verse 107).

If the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was prepared to pray on behalf of unbelievers 71 times, why should any Muslim suppose that killing apostates is a good thing? Moreover, since the Qur'an states: "Say Muhammad: If you love Allah, then follow me [i.e., Muhammad], so that God might love you." (Surah 3, Verse 31), then, following the example of the Prophet with respect to, among

other things, praying for the forgiveness of people who are unbelievers would seem to make sense.

Moreover, for those who like to quibble about things, there is no inconsistency between the previously noted Quranic verse indicating that God forgives all sins and the idea being expressed in Surah 9, Verse 80 that God will not forgive those who continue to disbelieve in God and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The key to forgiveness is repentance or tauba ... that is, a person must be willing to acknowledge that he or she committed an error as well as acknowledge that only God can forgive such a mistake.

Ask for forgiveness. Do not despair of the possibility of such forgiveness because God is capable of forgiving all sins.

Nonetheless, know that if one continues on with one's intransigence, then God will not forgive the individual even if the Prophet should seek such forgiveness for the individual 70 times. Then again, perhaps the Prophet's seeking forgiveness for the unbeliever a seventy-first time might result in God extending forgiveness to such individuals.

Settling the issue of apostasy is between a given human being and God. Neither Muslims, nor anyone else, has a moral imperative to jump into the breach and decide, by virtue of their ignorance, that apostates must die.

The last several pages have contained quite a few Quranic references. This has been done for

only one purpose – namely, to show that a central premise in Dr. Harris’s perspective concerning Islam is wrong in fundamental ways. 164

More specifically, Dr. Harris has claimed again and again in his writings that fundamentalists have the most honest reading of the Qur’an. Therefore, anything that so-called moderates have to say about this or that issue (e.g., that Islam is a religion of peace) is just a form of dissembling pretense.

The fact of the matter is there are numerous ways to demonstrate that fundamentalists do not have any understanding or insight concerning the nature of the Qur’an or Islam. The foregoing several pages help to outline just a few of the ways showing how fundamentalists are steeped in ignorance with respect to the Qur’an and Islam.

Given the foregoing considerations, a question arises in conjunction with the activities of Dr. Harris. For example, while Dr. Harris has the right to accept or reject the Qur’an as being a form of Divine guidance, must one assume that he has a concomitant right to distort the truth concerning Islam and the teachings of the Qur’an?

Before Dr. Harris switched career paths and transitioned into a graduate program focusing on neuropsychology, he studied philosophy. Since I also was engaged in the study of philosophy during a year, or so, of my undergraduate days, I have some insight into how it is done.

For instance, one might take some philosopher such as: Kant, Descartes, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Husserl, or Plato, and, then, proceed to critically analyze what such individuals had to say. The first part of critical analysis involves trying to grasp what such people actually believed, and, then, one is in a position to move on to pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of that sort of a perspective. 165

If one hopes to be any good at philosophy, one has to be able to engage a given philosopher in a fair manner. This means trying to merge conceptual horizons with the manner in which any given philosopher orients herself or himself with respect to an array of issues.

If one doesn't understand what a philosopher is saying, then, one is not in a position to tenably criticize the ideas of that individual. Among other things, philosophy involves gaining facility with the process of exploring the problems that surround trying to understand what someone means, as well as learning how to ask the right sorts of questions concerning both what is meant and what is being missed within the context of such meaning.

Given his academic background, I am surprised that Dr. Harris failed so miserably with respect to being able to arrive at an accurate understanding concerning the nature of the Qur'an and Islam. Dr. Harris doesn't have to accept Islam in order to have a fair understanding of at least some of what that spiritual tradition actually involves, any more than

one has to accept the philosophical perspective of individuals such as Wittgenstein, Husserl, or Plato in order to be able to have an unbiased grasp of their respective positions. 166

Unfortunately, in terms of critical analysis, Dr. Harris puts the cart before the horse. That is, he proceeds to criticize Islam before he even has acquired an understanding of it in some minimal fashion.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Dr. Harris left the pastures of philosophy for the rigors of neuropsychology is because he wasn't any good at philosophy. I have read, and critically explored, three of his books, and each of those books gives expression to considerable evidence that he doesn't know how to go about the process of philosophy --- that is, he doesn't know how to give something a fair reading before proceeding with a critical analysis.

Instead, he lets his biases get in the way of coming to understand, among other things, the nature of Islam. He fails to question the assumptions underlying his own position and, as a result, permits those assumptions to filter, color, and distort his understanding of Islam ... in other words, what he does is the mirror image of the fundamentalists, militants, and extremists that he likes to criticize.

The least problematic thing I can say about what Dr. Harris has done in conjunction with Islam is that he exhibits considerable incompetence as a

scholar, philosopher, and advocate of critical analysis. If Project Reason -- the organization that he founded in order to promote science and secularism -- is beset with the foregoing sorts of problems, then, there is nothing very rational about that project.

There is little, if anything, that is rational or reasonable about a process of analysis that gives preference to the pathological ideologies of fundamentalists that are based on a complete misunderstanding of Islam. One wonders why Dr. Harris would be willing to argue so vociferously to defend the views of fundamentalists as constituting the most accurate reading of Islam when there is so much evidence to the contrary.

He claims to be in favor of peace, harmony, honesty, morality, rationality, well-being, fairness, co-operation, and justice. Yet, he identifies the views of fundamentalists -- which are opposed to all of the values that Dr. Harris supports -- as encompassing the most honest reading of Islam rather than indicating that although he doesn't believe in Islam or God, nonetheless, based on a fair reading of its texts and teachings, he has discovered that Islam espouses many of the same values as those which he favors.

Is Dr. Harris really so philosophically incompetent? Or does he have another agenda that involves deliberately distorting the nature of Islam in order to serve his own biases, assumptions, and purposes?



Chapter Eight

After voicing – in a rather ironical manner -- his concerns about the manner in which Islam places so much emphasis on being able to differentiate between what is true and what is false, Dr. Harris introduces what he considers to be a second central message of Islam – namely, the promise of paradise.

He claims that the promise of paradise “devalues life in this world.” He goes on to argue: “Islam teaches that dying in defense of the faith is among the surest ways to paradise – and the only one to reach it directly, bypassing the Day of Judgment.”

Dr. Harris misconstrues all of the foregoing issues. For example, rather than devaluing life in this world, Islam teaches that there is a direct connection between what we do in this life and what will happen in the next life.

In Surah 18, Verse 7, The Qur’an states: “Lo! We have placed all that is on earth as an ornament thereof, that We may try them: which of them is best in conduct.” Elsewhere, the Qur’an indicates: “And surely We shall test you with some fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and crops ...” (Surah 2, Verse 155).

Life entails a series of tests. How we conduct ourselves with respect to those tests is critically

important, and, therefore, contrary to what Dr. Harris claims, what takes place in this life couldn't be more important. 170

Dr. Harris is also mistaken – as are many other fundamentalists – about the connection among: struggling in the way of God, dying, and paradise. To begin with, Islam is not in any need of being defended.

If people struggle in the way of God, then this is for the benefit of their own souls and not to save Islam. As the Qur'an indicates: "And if you turn away, God will exchange you for some other folks, and they will not be the likes of you" (Surah 47, Verse 38), and, consequently, quite independently of what we might do or fail to do, Islam will continue on.

Secondly, merely because someone dies doing what he or she believes to be "in defense of the faith," this does not mean that God accepts such a death as an instance of martyrdom. As a previously mentioned verse of the Qur'an indicates, the events of life are tests to determine which of us is best in conduct.

If one kills innocent people while supposedly trying to defend Islam, then such conduct is qualitatively challenged. Furthermore, if one immerses oneself in practices that abuse, exploit, torture, cheat, oppress, or perpetrate injustices toward other people, then such practices also are qualitatively challenged and do not give expression

to the sorts of activities that might constitute instances of martyrdom.

The Qur'an stipulates: "Those who spend their wealth for increase in self-purification, and have in their minds no favor from anyone for which a reward is expected in return, but only the desire to seek for the Countenance of their Lord Most High." (Surah 92, Verses 18-20) If one wants to be granted paradise in exchange for one's deeds, one is seeking something other than the Countenance of their Lord.

Martyrs are those who are prepared to sacrifice their wealth (which includes their talents, intelligence, property, money, time, character, and life) for nothing other than being brought closer to God. Martyrdom has to do with the quality of one's conduct, and while fundamentalists might be prepared to sacrifice their lives, they do so for the wrong reasons, and they do so in the wrong way.

They have been tested, and they have been found wanting. This is due to problems involving the sincerity of their intentions and due to the defective quality of their conduct.

Fundamentalists are issuing promissory notes to gullible human beings for which the former do not have the wherewithal to honor on the occasion of the death of the latter individuals. God is the Exchequer who distinguishes between the honorable conduct of true martyrs and the counterfeit currency of fundamentalists.

Dr. Harris states: “The belief that a life of eternal pleasure awaits martyrs after death explains why certain people can honestly chant: ‘We love death more than the infidels love life.’ Again, you and I both know that these people aren’t bluffing. They truly believe in martyrdom – as evidenced by the fact that they regularly sacrifice their lives, or watch their children do so, without a qualm.”

Actually, the individuals to whom Dr. Harris refers in the foregoing quote do not believe in martyrdom. Instead, they believe in a delusional system of spiritual bartering in which one supposedly can exchange life for goodies such as sexual favors in the next life.

While it might be true that the foregoing sorts of individuals honestly believe that they love death more than other people love life, it is also true that such people don’t know what they are talking about. If they truly loved death, then, they would follow the advice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ‘to die before you die’ ... that is, die to the desires of one’s ego before one experiences physical death, and, certainly, the idea of enjoying the eternal company of 70 virgins is one of the many desires of the false self.

Delusional narcissists have many false beliefs about the nature of life in which they honestly, if pathologically, believe. Why Dr. Harris should be willing to go along with such nonsense and claim that this is what Islam teaches appears to give

expression to a delusional idea to which Dr. Harris honestly subscribes, but the honesty of his belief has nothing to do with the actual facts concerning Islam. 173

What Dr. Harris is doing in the foregoing is like trying to contend that because some people suffer from a pathological delusion of some kind, then all human beings necessarily suffer from that same delusion. One cannot tenably conclude that because some people who call themselves Muslim are proponents of a given delusional belief system, then this means Islam actively encourages that sort of delusional system ... because this is just not the case.

Dr. Harris concludes his comments concerning the issues of infidels and martyrdom by saying: "On any list of Islamic doctrines in need of reform, I think those relating to infidels and to martyrdom should be at the top of the list." As previously pointed out in the foregoing pages, the manner in which fundamentalists approach the issues of apostates, infidels, and martyrdom is not the way in which Islam engages such matters, and, consequently, there are no Islamic doctrines to be reformed in this respect.

The nature of fundamentalist belief in is not a function of Islam. What fundamentalists believe is a delusional system marked by considerable pathology that is given the label "Islam."

I would agree with Dr. Harris that such individuals constitute "a genuine danger to

civilization.” However, none of this has anything to do with Islam or Islamic doctrine.

When people speak about something called ‘radical Islam’ or ‘militant Islam’ or ‘extremist Islam’, or ‘fundamentalist Islam’ they are using terms that are oxymoronic in character. Radicalism, militancy, extremism, and fundamentalism are not permissible variations of Islamic thought, and by juxtaposing such words next to Islam, one – intentionally or otherwise – is engaging in a distortion concerning the nature of Islam.

Moreover there is a double standard at work with respect to the whole media labeling industry. Why aren’t the American forces who illegally invaded Iraq and Afghanistan referred to as Christian terrorists, or why aren’t the members of the IDF who are occupying, oppressing, and killing Palestinians referred to as Jewish terrorists, or why aren’t atheists like Sam Harris who promote the idea of nuking innocent Muslims referred to as an atheistic terrorist since even the suggestion to wipe out millions of innocent people should be considered an act of terrorism ... especially coming from someone like Sam Harris who gives a great deal of emphasis to what people say in this or that poll.

Muslim fundamentalists are called Islamic terrorists because it is a way of denigrating Islam. Islam doesn’t advocate terrorism of any kind, so, why is the word “Islamic” being linked to the

murderous acts of people who are not following the teachings of Islam.

Muslims don't inform Islam what the latter is about. Rather, Islam informs Muslims – at least those who are willing to open themselves to what is being communicated – concerning the nature of Islam.

Toward the latter part of the book, *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*, Maajid Nawaz, ventures into an extended exploration concerning the meaning of Quranic terms such as (transliterated) “*kamar*” and whether through the use of that word the Qur’an is prohibiting alcohol in general or merely prohibiting the ingestion of wine that is fermented from grapes. At a certain point in the foregoing discussion, Nawaz introduces the idea of *qiyas* which refers to a method used by jurists that relies on the logic of analogies to determine whether one object, condition, or action is sufficiently analogous to some other object, condition, or action to be brought under the same legal umbrella when deciding cases. A little later in the aforementioned discussion, Nawaz talks about what certain *ahadith* (statements and actions of the Prophet) say with respect to the issues being analyzed.

All of the foregoing ideas are being engaged in terms of a legal framework. While the discussion in which Nawaz is engaged is attempting to demonstrate the potential for flexibility that he believes is inherent in a textual analysis of the

relevant literature, I think he generates some problems that substantially confuse matters by proceeding in the manner in which he does. 176

For example, let's begin with the issue of hadith. On a number of occasions, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ordered that all collections of hadith should be destroyed.

When Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), the close friend and companion of the Prophet, heard about what the Prophet had said in conjunction with the destruction of hadith collections, he spent the whole night agonizing over whether or not to destroy his collection of ahadith he had compiled concerning the Prophet, but when morning came, he destroyed his collection.

I understand that individuals might be so attached to the Prophet that they wish to keep a compilation of what he said and did. However, disregarding the Prophet's directive for reasons that have to do only with the individual's own life and are not intended to be imposed on anyone else's life is one thing, while disregarding the Prophet's directive in order to socially, legally, institutionally, educationally, or politically impose some set of sayings or actions of the Prophet on other people is a completely different matter and runs completely contrary to the wishes of the Prophet.

Secondly, the matter of qiyas or analogies that is mentioned by Nawaz is a human construction that is not only being problematically imposed on

the Qur'an, but, as well, is intended to be used for purposes of imposing various understandings concerning such analogical reasoning on a community in general with the claim that such interpretive efforts give expression to the meaning of the Qur'an. Again, if someone wishes to do this with respect to her or his own life, that is one thing, but there is no Quranic authority for doing so with respect to the additional step of imposing such interpretations on other people.

Finally, if a person wishes to engage in an interpretive process with respect to the meanings of the Qur'an, then, even though the Qur'an provides considerable guidance about the importance of learning how to acquire the sort of taqwa, or piety, that is needed to become properly opened to what the Qur'an has to offer rather than imposing one's own ideas and limitations on the Qur'an, then, such an individual proceeds at his or her own spiritual risk. However, when someone wishes to engage in an interpretive process concerning the Qur'an for purposes of imposing such interpretations on other individuals, then the Qur'an really offers no authority for doing so.

According to Maajid Nawaz: "... Islamists do refer to certain plausible scriptural justifications in support of this tenet, which must be addressed. Quranic passages such as "the rule (hukm) is for none but God" and "whomsoever does not rule (yahkum) by what God has revealed, they are

disbelievers” are among the most oft quoted in this regard.”

Commenting on the latter part of the foregoing quotation first, just what is it that God has revealed and who, but God, can determine or make rulings concerning whether or not someone has acted in accordance with what has been revealed? These are topics for the Day of Judgment and should not be left to people’s arbitrary ideas and interpretations concerning the meaning of revelation that are, then, problematically and oppressively imposed on other human beings.

A community’s social space – which gives expression to the ways in which people who live within such a community interact with one another -- should provide everyone with a fair opportunity to try to seek the truth concerning the nature of life as well as to be able to seek the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with existence. The rules governing such community social spaces should be oriented toward protecting and supporting the aforementioned sort of opportunity and nothing more.

I believe the foregoing kind of social arrangement offers people, in general, the best opportunity to pursue the truth free from the impositions of an array of ideological, philosophical, theological, historical, economic, political, and scientific predilections concerning the nature of existence. In addition, I also believe the foregoing kind of social arrangement gives Muslims

the best opportunity of being able to become opened up to the meanings of the Qur'an free from the impositions of fundamentalist, extremist, militant, and radical distortions concerning the nature of Islam. 179

Striving for the truth concerning the nature of truth is an individual responsibility. Providing individuals with the opportunity to seek such truth is a collective, fiduciary duty of care that each of us owes to one another ... indeed, the Golden Rule which indicates that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us is a very good way of summing up such duties of care. (I have written extensively about such issues in: *The Unfinished Revolution, Democracy Lost and Regained, The Pathology of Leadership, Shari'ah: A Muslim's Declaration of Independence, What's Wrong With What's Right*, and *The Moral Landscape: Epistle To A Sam Harris Nation*.)

At one point during Dr. Harris's response to Maajid Nawaz's aforementioned discussion concerning matters of hadith, qiyas, law, and so on, Dr. Harris argues: "...when Muslim armies were stopped at the gates of Vienna in 1683, the world had witnessed a thousand years of jihad – which had spread the faith from Portugal to the Caucasus to India to sub-Saharan Africa. Islam was spread primarily by conquest, not conversation." Contrary to what Dr. Harris indicates in the foregoing quote, whatever might have been spread during the period being discussed, what was being spread was

not Islam, but, instead, consisted of various forms of Muslim cultural, legal institutional, and political forms of control. 180

By way of personal note, I became a Muslim through conversation with a Sufi teacher and not via conquest -- although I will admit that my heart was conquered by what was said to me. In my opinion, if one wishes to follow the real history of Islam -- rather than the history of Muslims -- one needs to look to the authentic, Sufi, spiritual guides who journeyed to many parts of the world across the centuries -- including Canada and America -- and, by the Grace of Allah, provided many people -- both Muslim and non-Muslim -- with an introduction to the essential nature of Islam by virtue of their qualities of character and depth of understanding concerning the Qur'an.

Nonetheless, no human being -- not even the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or the greatest Sufi teachers can spread Islam. God, alone, accomplishes this with respect to whomsoever He pleases ... as the Qur'an indicates: "The one whose breast God has expanded unto Islam enjoys a light from one's Lord." (Surah 39, Verse 22)

Moreover, contrary to the previous contention of Dr. Harris, the spread of such cultural, legal, institutional, and political forms of control did not give expression to jihad. Rather, the spread of the foregoing sorts of ideas and practices gave expression to a desire to conquer people, resources, and territories for the sake of ego,

power, and control, and not for the sake of a spiritual struggle in which the desires of the ego are constrained and subdued. 181

Irrespective of whether or not one engages in physical conflict, if there is no struggle against the ego that is taking place in conjunction with all one's surface actions, then, there is no jihad. There might be conflict and wars, but there is no jihad.

People usurp the term "jihad" as a means of trying to render sacred that which is but a machination of the ego. If people say they are fighting to satisfy the desires of the ego, then, this all sounds so tawdry, but if one says that the nature of one's cause is holy, in some sense, then, going to war seems to be transformed into a sacred act even though the underlying intentions indicate otherwise.

Dr. Harris proceeds to provide an overview of his take on such things as the Crusades, treatment of non-Muslims while under Muslim control, some of the mythology surrounding life in Andalusia, and the issue of Muslim slavery. Once again, his analysis of such matters is neither here nor there because it has nothing to do with Islam.

For instance, consider the last issue – namely, slavery – first. While it is true that, under certain conditions, the Qur'an permitted certain people to be taken as slaves, the Qur'an also indicated that freeing slaves was better for a Muslim.

Moreover, during the time of the Prophet, there was a code of etiquette in place concerning the treatment of slaves. Any Muslim who had a slave was under the obligation of a fiduciary responsibility with respect to the treatment of such individuals in which, among other things, a Muslim who possessed one, or more, slaves, had to feed those individuals with the same food that the Muslim ate, and had to clothe them with the same sort of clothes as the Muslim wore, and had to house them in the same manner as the Muslim was housed, and was required to treat such individuals in a way that was free of abuse – either physical or sexual.

Muslims took on a fiduciary responsibility with respect to whatever slaves became a part of their households. Furthermore, if their faith was sincere, they understood that: "Not a leaf falls, but God knows it" (Surah 6: Verse 59) and, as well: "We shall surely question them, everyone, about what they were doing, (Surah 15, Verses 92-93) and, therefore, everything they did or didn't do with respect to such slaves would come under Divine scrutiny.

Did individuals subsequently arise who called themselves Muslims but departed company with all of the foregoing considerations? Yes, there were, but the Qur'an refers to such people in, among other ways, the following manner: "Have you seen those who take their own caprice to be their god, and Allah sends them astray purposely, and seals

their hearing and their heart, and sets on their sight a covering.” (Surah 45, Verse 23)

The Muslim history that ensued following the time of the Prophet provides ample evidence that many Muslims – especially those who were in power – strayed far from the teachings of the Qur’an and the Prophet with respect to issues such as, among other things, slavery. All manner of barbarism, cruelty, and exploitation, entered into the issue of slavery among various Muslims following the time of the Prophet, but the Qur’an didn’t sanction any of it.

Dr. Harris ends the foregoing sorts of comments with the following comment: “... in the year 2015, horrific footage of infidels and apostates being decapitated has become a popular form of pornography throughout the Muslim world. All these practices, including this ghastly method of murder, find explicit support in scripture.”

I have no doubt that all too many Muslims -- like all too many atheists, Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists – are capable of committing all manner of abominable acts (and if this were not the case, the world would be a very different place than it is). Nonetheless, I would like to raise a question or two concerning the nature of the evidence that supposedly indicates how the horrific footage of infidels and apostates being decapitated “has become a popular form of pornography throughout the Muslim world.”

On what is Dr. Harris basing the foregoing sort of claim? Has he visited hundreds of millions of Muslim households around the world and personally verified his claim that viewing such beheadings is a popular form of entertainment throughout the Muslim world? And, if he has not done this, then who has compiled such data, and why should anyone accept the pronouncements of such unknown “researchers”?

Furthermore, contrary to the claims of Dr. Harris, such practices do not “find explicit support in the scripture.” Unfortunately, however, many fundamentalists -- as well as Dr. Harris, apparently -- have imposed their own imaginings, biases, assumptions, delusions, and arbitrary interpretations onto the Qur’an.

Dr. Harris tries to give the impression that he is dedicated to truth, honesty, morality, facts, reason, justice, fairness, and the like. However, his foregoing comments about the video footage of apostates and infidels being decapitated has become “a popular form of pornography throughout the Muslim world” and that such beheadings find “explicit support in scripture” have nothing to do with facts, honesty, reason, fairness, or the like.

Instead, such comments are intended to disparage a whole class of people – namely, Muslims – through the use of innuendo and factually challenged claims. Furthermore, such

comments appear to be designed to incite hatred toward Islam and Muslims.

I am quite surprised that Maajid Nawaz did not take exception with the foregoing comments of Dr. Harris. I am even more surprised that Harvard University Press that published their book did not appear to appoint a fact-checker to critically examine the comments like the foregoing ones.

If Muslims were as bloodthirsty, irrational, pathological, violent, and delusional as Dr. Harris appears to be trying very hard to depict them to be, then, I would have thought that the 5 million-plus Muslims living in the United States would have slaughtered all their neighbors by now. Indeed, if Dr. Harris were right in his pronouncements about Islam and Muslims, one might have anticipated that the more than 1 billion Muslims who currently occupy planet Earth would have tried to behead everyone with whom they disagreed.

Perhaps, the reason why Muslims have not run amok across the face of the Earth is due to the following several possibilities. (a) They are not – with certain minor exceptions – the would-be terrorists in waiting that Dr. Harris appears to be claiming they are, and, (b) the Qur'an is not the terrorist training manual that Dr. Harris seems to be intent on arguing that it is.

Dr. Harris appears to be so focused on stirring up hatred and revulsion toward Islam and Muslims that one can't help but wonder if he might be an agent of the CIA or Mossad who had been given the

mission to do exactly what he is doing in order to generate the sort of social discord that could be leveraged by various militaries to carry on with their war-mongering activities in places like – to name but a few -- Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. Moreover, if Dr. Harris is not such an agent, then, he is very foolishly helping to further the militaristic, imperialistic, oppressive, and extremely destructive ends of such agencies. 186

Of course, one doesn't have to entertain the foregoing sorts of possibilities because, quite clearly, Dr. Harris has a vested interest in doing what he is doing. Fermenting anger, misunderstanding, hatred, distrust, and so on in relation to Muslims and Islam has become a very lucrative profession for people such as Dr. Harris.

Many people have jumped onto the anti-terrorism industrial bandwagon and made careers and money out of the tragedies of the lives that were lost on 9/11. Indeed, it was shortly after 9/11 that Sam Harris began to churn out his scurrilous material on religion, Muslims, Islam, and so on in the form of his book: *The End of Faith*.

Unfortunately, he is wrong about so many things. For instance, he is wrong about the events that appeared to motivate him to sit down and write the foregoing work.

Nowhere in his writing does Sam Harris demonstrate, in a defensible manner, that the "official story" concerning 9/11 explains what actually happened to the Twin Towers and Building

7 at the World Trade Center in New York, nor to the Pentagon on 9/11. Instead, without taking the time to carefully determine whether or not the “official story” concerning 9/11 actually holds up under rigorous examination (which it doesn’t) – Dr. Harris blindly accepts the incompetence, if not worse, of other people concerning the events of 9/11 and runs with that because such nonsense can be cited in an attempt to try to justify his agenda of disparaging religion, in general, and especially Muslims and Islam, in particular.

By accepting the “official story” concerning the events of 9/11, Dr. Harris places himself clearly in the camp of conspiracy theorists. In other words, he believes that 19 Muslims conspired with Osama bin Laden to destroy the Twin Towers, Building 7, as well as to inflict considerable death and destruction at the Pentagon, but, unfortunately, a considerable body of facts gets in the way of such a conspiracy theory and indicates that what took place on 9/11 is far more complex than what Dr. Harris supposes to be the case.

Even if Dr. Harris were 100 percent correct concerning his understanding of the events of 9/11, nonetheless, what 19 alleged Muslims plus Osama bin Laden allegedly conspired to do is not an accurate reflection of how the vast majority of the Muslims in the world go about engaging Islam. By seeking to advance his version of the events of 9/11 as a means of indicting the rest of the world’s Muslims, then in the language of the courts, he is

attempting to introduce inflammatory material that has zero probative value when it comes to the vast majority of Muslims. 188

Furthermore, quite independently of 9/11, Dr. Harris is also wrong about Islam in general. He has permitted his religious biases and antipathies to cloud and undermine his judgment concerning his understanding of the Islamic spiritual tradition.

As previously noted, at the heart of Dr. Harris's negative perceptions concerning Islam is the idea that the manner in which extremists, militants, and fundamentalists read the Qur'an constitutes the most honest reading of that book, and, therefore, neither the Qur'an, nor Islam, has anything to offer to be able to counter the understandings of those Muslims who are inclined to wreak havoc upon the world ... and, therefore, when so-called moderate Muslims say anything that runs contrary to the allegedly more "honest" reading of the fundamentalists, then such moderate Muslims are merely being disingenuous and engaged in one, or another, form of dissembling pretense.

However, if Dr. Harris had bothered to give Islam a fair reading instead of an extremely biased one, he would have discovered that Islam actively promotes themes of peace, honesty, harmony, justice, self-restraint, compassion, forgiveness, reason, balance, patience, charitableness, truth, tolerance, love, and so on. Why did Dr. Harris fail to give Islam a fair reading or hearing?

For Dr. Harris to have missed all of the foregoing realities concerning Islam appears to suggest that one of two dynamics (perhaps both) is (are) at work with respect to his diatribes against Islam and Muslims. Either he is a very incompetent researcher, or he actually does know that Islam is something other what he publically describes it to be, but since such inconvenient truths would not serve his biases and antipathies, he apparently decided to run with a distorted version of Islam and Muslims that would enable him to give the impression that his underlying biases and beliefs merely were giving expression to some sort of justifiable outrage rather than constituting something much more sinister.

Even in conjunction with his career as a neuropsychologist he has problems with respect to being able to arrive at the truth of things. Neither he, nor his fellow scientists, have the slightest idea how the events of molecular biology or the physiological and cellular activities that take place in the brain are able to make consciousness, intelligence, memory, imagination, reason, understanding, language, creativity, morality, and/or spirituality possible ... there are many correlational, but almost no causal, statements that can be made with respect to such phenomena.

If neuropsychology is his religion (and I have seen statements to this effect that are associated with Dr. Harris's name), then that religion gives rise to as many unanswered questions concerning

the nature of existence as other religions do. He claims to be a man of science and reason, and, yet, neither science nor reason has been able to resolve any of the critical issues that arise in conjunction with the many unanswered questions that permeate neuropsychology, and, therefore, his perspective is not really superior to the perspective of those religiously inclined individuals that Dr. Harris loves to find fault with and ridicule.

If psychologists are correct (for example, Martha Stout), then approximately 1 in every 25 people who inhabit the world has psychopathic tendencies. Data seem to indicate that such people are found across all racial, ethnic, religious, political, philosophical, and socio-economic strata, as well as occurring in both genders.

Rather than blame Islam and other religions for the world being the way it is, perhaps, Dr. Harris should try to factor in the 4% of the world's population that have psychopathic tendencies and, as a result, have no problem with killing, torturing, oppressing, terrorizing, exploiting, and abusing the people of the world. Psychopaths can call themselves anything they like – Muslims, atheists, Christians, Jews, patriotic soldiers, and so on. However, their activities are rooted in psychopathy and not religion or any other philosophical set of beliefs.

Unfortunately, there are some “normal” individuals who cede their authority to such psychopaths and, as a result, proceed to commit

atrocities while under the influence of psychopathic individuals. In fact, experiments such as those conducted by Stanley Milgram in the early 1960s suggest that as many as two-thirds of the subjects he studied were prepared to inflict what they believed – falsely – would inflict great pain, if not harm, on innocent people simply because such subjects had ceded their moral authority to the people in charge of the experiment.

Military, economic, legal, educational, religious, philosophical, and political institutions around the world exploit the willingness of “normal” people to cede their moral authority to people who have no moral compass. The problems that exist in the world today are far more complex than Dr. Harris’s simplistic and shoddy analyses would have his readers believe (i.e., blame Muslims, Islam, and religion in general), and, in fact, Dr. Harris helps to lend considerable confusion to the issue because he offers cover for the psychopaths of the world who will exploit the sort of hatred that Dr. Harris is fermenting by means of some of his writings ... such as through his contributions to the book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*.

Toward the end of the foregoing book, Dr. Harris claims that: “... the example set by Muhammad himself – which, as you [i.e., Maajid Nawaz] know, offers ample justification for religious violence.” The previous statement is made without citing any evidence that would justify making such a claim.

In addition, the previous quote from Dr. Harris is quite amorphous. For instance, what constitutes the criteria for considering the example of the Prophet to constitute “ample justification for religious violence.” To what sort of “religious violence” is Dr. Harris alluding?

192

When the Prophet and some of his family were placed under siege for several years by the Quraish power structure in Mecca, the situation became so dire that the Prophet had to eat the bark off of trees in order to acquire some sort of sustenance. Is this the sort of “religious violence” to which Dr. Harris is alluding?

After years of persecution during which the Prophet instructed his Companions not to fight back against such oppression, the Prophet escaped to Yathrib (Medina) in order to escape the assassination plots of the Quraish. Is this the sort of “ample justification for religious violence” to which the example of the Prophet gave rise?

During all the years of war in which Muslims resisted the aggression of the Quraish Tribe and their allies toward Muslims and Islam, less than 400 people – and this includes the casualties on both sides -- died during those conflicts. Is Dr. Harris trying to argue that a community that defends itself against armed aggression is committing religious violence?

In relation to the foregoing conflicts, the Prophet never killed anyone personally. He was present during the waging of hostilities) and often

the battle was most intense in his vicinity), but he did not engage in those hostilities.

On one such occasion, a tooth of the Prophet was knocked out by one of the opponents. However, the Prophet did not respond in kind. Is this the sort of example of religious violence on the part of the Prophet to which Dr. Harris is alluding?

If such battles do not constitute the sort of religious violence to which Dr. Harris is alluding, then he should be specific and cite his supporting evidence concerning those matters and not just make vague claims. Where is the “ample justification for religious violence” that Dr. Harris wishes to attribute to the example of the Prophet?

When the Muslims conquered Mecca – and this was done without shedding a drop of anyone’s blood -- everyone in Mecca who had been an opponent of the Muslim community and Islam for years could have been slaughtered, but they weren’t. They were placed in charge of their own affairs and, then, left in peace.

When the woman who poisoned the Prophet and some of his companions (one of whom died) was brought before him, he could have ordered her to be killed. He didn’t do this ... he set her free.

When a Jewish tribe committed treason against the Muslim community with which it previously had been allied, the Prophet could have had them all killed. He didn’t do this, but, instead, he sent them into exile.

On one occasion, the Prophet ordered an attack upon the people who had killed a Muslim emissary that had been sent to those people. Is this the sort of “religious violence” to which Dr. Harris is referring?

Is Dr. Harris trying to argue that a community doesn't have a right to take steps to ensure that the killing of its ambassadors will not be permitted to continue? Is Dr. Harris really trying to argue that there should be an open season on the killing of envoys that come in peace?

When a Muslim woman came to the Prophet wanting to confess her sin of adultery and was seeking punishment for her deed, the Prophet expressed considerable resistance in relation to even listening to her public confession.

He wanted her to confess her sins to God, not him. However, she insisted on doing so and wanted to be put to death for her previous actions.

The Prophet told her that she might be pregnant so she should come back to him when that matter was determined. She was pregnant, and so when she returned to the Prophet, he told her to deliver her baby, and, then, come back to him after she gave birth.

Following the birth of her baby, she returned to the Prophet and said she was ready for her punishment to be carried out. The Prophet indicated that she should suckle the baby for

several years. When that period of nursing came to an end, then she should return to the Prophet.

After she nursed the baby for the requisite time, the woman returned to the Prophet and wanted her punishment to be carried out. She did this because she believed that by accepting the indicated punishment her sin of adultery would be wiped clean in the eyes of God.

The Prophet never wanted to hear her confession in the first place. Things proceeded as they did because of the woman's insistence on going through a certain process of adjudication, and during that process, the Prophet extended considerable mercy to the woman across a number of years.

The woman was not interested in harming anyone else. On the other hand, she was interested in facilitating a punishment of death because she believed that existence had a certain kind of reality to which she subscribed, and the Prophet, reluctantly, honored her wishes concerning the matter.

The Prophet had a responsibility to the woman. However, he also had a responsibility with respect to the rest of the community, and once the woman publically insisted that her wishes concerning the matter be acted upon, the Prophet proceeded in a way that served the interests of the woman, her child, and the community.

Is the foregoing conduct of the Prophet the sort of thing that Dr. Harris has in mind when he claims that the example of the Prophet offers “ample justification for religious violence”? Just what is it – if anything – to which Dr. Harris is alluding via his vague statements?

Aside from being extremely vague in his statements concerning religious violence, Dr. Harris is something of a hypocrite. In his book: *The End of Faith* (see page 129 of the 2005 Norton paperback edition), he advances the idea that nuking millions of innocent Muslims might be a justifiable and reasonable thing to do because Muslims cannot be trusted to be, or remain, moderate given that Islam requires them to be otherwise --- one of Dr. Harris’s many problematic delusions concerning both Muslims and Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never provided an example that offered “ample justification for religious violence.” The reality concerning the nature of the Prophet is quite the opposite from the way in which Dr. Harris is trying to frame things.

Yet, Dr. Harris – the peace-loving atheist – appears to believe that proposing the possibility of killing millions of Muslims -- people whom he readily acknowledges are innocent of any wrongdoing -- does not constitute a potential form of extreme and appalling sectarian violence. He wags a finger of condemnation toward the non-existent example of the Prophet with respect to “religious

violence,” while blithely trying to justify his own conceptual inclinations toward committing nuclear atrocities against innocent Muslims. 197

Was Dr. Harris reprimanded for giving voice to such dangerously inflammatory remarks? No! Instead, in 2005, he was given the Pen/Martha Albrand Award for First Nonfiction (although when it comes to Islam, the award should have been given for fiction).

The foregoing situation is merely one small indication of how absurdly and precariously skewed the thinking in America is with respect to Muslims and Islam. Moreover, we have the ignorance of Sam Harris to thank for, at least in part, helping to bring about such an atmosphere of bigotry.

Dr. Harris is hostage to his own ignorance concerning Islam. Unfortunately, he appears to want to induce as many other people as possible also to become hostage to that same ignorance.

Conclusion

What Dr. Harris does with respect to the Qur'an is like someone who picks up a book that is 400-500 pages long, reads a few passages, and, then, proclaims that he understands the rest of the book and how such passages fit into that book. Such a claim is beyond ludicrous, but when it comes to Islam, then distortion, misrepresentation, and derogatory ways of framing issues are accepted forms of expression in all too many parts of the West and, unfortunately, in all too many parts of the Muslim world, as well.

However, apparently not content with limiting himself to the foregoing sorts of conceptual chicanery, Dr. Harris proceeds to give aid and comfort to the fundamentalists, militants, and extremists of the world by trying to argue that those people are the only ones in the Muslim world who got things right when it comes to the Qur'an.

When he proceeds in the foregoing manner, he tries to pass himself off as something of an "expert" when it comes to Islam, and he has identified fundamentalists, militants, and extremists as Muslim "experts" who agree with him concerning the meaning of the Qur'an. Furthermore, Dr. Harris criticizes any Muslim who is unwilling to accept the delusional belief system of such fundamentalists as being disingenuous members of the faithful who are engaging in games of pretense with the rest of the world.

Dr. Harris considers fundamentalists, extremists, and militants to be “experts” on the Qur’an and Islam not because those individuals possess such expertise (which they don’t) but because they are advocates of a belief system that can be used to further Dr. Harris’s agenda to fraudulently misrepresent Islam and disparage Muslims in general. He is like a person who knows little, or nothing, about baseball but, nonetheless, proceeds to appoint himself to be an “official” umpire who, despite his ignorance concerning various matters, has arrogated to himself a counterfeit form of authenticity that he believes (falsely) entitles him to oversee and regulate the game of baseball in any way he sees fit. 200

There is a reason why there are many protections set in place within most societies with respect to trying to prevent fraudulent behavior. A society that permits fraudulent activities to permeate the fabric of its existence is a society that is inviting all manner of discord, violence, destruction, misery, and chaos into its midst.

If Dr. Harris wants to publically promote the idea that there is no God, then, I don’t have a problem with that. Such promotions can be likened to the process of defensive indifference in the game of baseball when the team playing defense permits a base runner to steal second – perhaps even third base -- without making a throw because the game is so far out of reach that what that base runner does, or doesn’t do, is not going to affect the

outcome of the game (e.g., trying to disprove God's existence) one way or the other.

However, when Dr. Harris jumps on the playing field, proclaims that he is a knowledgeable umpire concerning the game of baseball (which in the current context he is not), and, then, proceeds to try to encourage some of the players (e.g., fundamentalists, militants, and extremists) to undermine the on-going game in any way they like because he is going to rule in their favor, and, as well, proceeds (through his books and public appearances) to try to incite the fans (ordinary people) in the stadium to engage in aggressive behaviors (such as using nuclear weapons) in relation to players from the visiting team (e.g., Muslims), then, no fair-minded person would permit Dr. Harris to get away with such self-serving, demagogic-like activities. And, yet, all too many Americans and people in the West in general do not seem to have a problem with, on the one hand, permitting Dr. Harris to try to pass himself off as something he is not -- namely, knowledgeable about Islam -- and, on the other hand, permitting Dr. Harris to help create an incendiary atmosphere of bigotry concerning Muslims while he champions fundamentalists, militants, and extremists as being the true representatives of Islam due to his fraudulent representation of the Qur'an.

What Dr. Harris is doing when he behaves in the foregoing manner is to engage in activities that have a potential for recklessly endangering the

lives of innocent people. He also is exhibiting a callous disregard toward -- and, therefore, negligence concerning -- the acquisition of the sort of skills and insight that are necessary for a person to have to be able to develop any sort of authoritative insight into the nature of the Qur'an and Islam. 202

Dr. Harris claims that he is interested in peace, harmony, cooperation, tolerance and the like. And, yet, when it comes to Islam and Muslims, he does not appear to exhibit the same commitment to, or fervor for, the ideas of peace, harmony, cooperation, and tolerance.

The fact that Dr. Harris appears potentially willing to recklessly endanger innocent lives -- both Muslim and non-Muslims -- by fraudulently promoting a false idea about the nature of Islam seems rather incongruous with some of his stated values. One can't help but wonder what his underlying motives actually are because there seems to be little reason underlying his insistence on maintaining such a jaundiced and factually challenged view of Islam unless his purpose is something other than peace, harmony, cooperation, tolerance, and the like.

The fact that Dr. Harris appears to be willing to identify fundamentalists, extremists, and militants as constituting the only "true" Muslims, while referring to other Muslims as acting out of disingenuous and hypocritical pretense (simply because the latter individuals refuse to accept the

delusional and ignorant ranting of fundamentalists) also causes one to wonder what the actual underlying motives of Dr. Harris are. 203

He claims to be a man of reason, facts, methodology, and so on. However, none of that is in evidence when he claims that fundamentalists, extremists, and militants have the most honest reading of the Qur'an, and, in doing so, he ignores, if not belittles, any evidence that runs contrary to his factually challenged biases.

Sam Harris has got to be one of the most foolish people in the world because, on the one hand, he says he believes in a variety of constructive, rational values, yet, on the other hand, he is trying to tell Muslims that unless they operate in accordance with the beliefs of the extremists, militants, and fundamentalists, then, the Muslim community is being untrue to the principles of Islam. In other words, instead of trying to pull back on the throttle of hostilities, he appears to be pushing forward on that throttle as hard as he can and, in the process, refuses to listen to any Muslim who tries to tell him that he doesn't know what he is talking about when it comes to the nature of Islam.

Sam Harris is insistent (he has been spewing the same argument for ten years now) that if Muslims want to be true to Islam, then, they must be violent, irrational, belligerent, bloodthirsty, intolerant, and so on. One wonders, why Sam Harris doesn't side with those people within the

Muslim community who believe in many of the same constructive values as Sam Harris does – namely, justice, peace, rationality, civility, harmony, tolerance, and so on -- but, instead, he keeps trying to promote fundamentalists, militants, and extremists as being the true heirs of Islam. 204

The foregoing sort of wondering dissipates when one realizes that Dr. Harris's antipathies toward religion are so profound that he will not permit himself to recognize that he has allowed his biases to distort a great deal of what he says and writes with respect to, among other things, Islam. He should be helping Muslims to socially and conceptually isolate the fundamentalists ... that is, to help Muslims put forth a united front which stipulates that the beliefs of the fundamentalists, militants, and so on have nothing to do with Islam.

Unfortunately, rather than approach things in a rational, evidence-based manner, Sam Harris appears to do everything he can to induce people to hate Muslims and Islam. Consequently, when it comes to such issues, Dr. Harris has nothing constructive to say about how to resolve the problems of the world except to advocate that some sort of genocide be committed against Muslims (see page 129 of the 2005 Norton paperback edition of *The End of Faith*) ... something that renders his position completely irrational and profoundly frightening.

When it comes to the Qur'an and Islam, he doesn't seem to care about facts, reason, logic,

understanding, or the like because he is addicted to his own ignorance. And, like any addict, he is willing to sacrifice what is truly valuable in order to be able to keep his blissful addiction to ignorance going.

Moreover, like someone who seeks to distribute (for a price) that to which he or she is addicted, Dr. Harris wants to transform everyone else into the same sort of ignorance junkie that he is with respect to Islam. Unfortunately, there is little room for tolerance in the mind and heart of someone who is so deeply addicted to his or her biases concerning Islam, and, consequently, the future that such ignorance seems focused on bringing about will involve considerable intolerance, oppression, and social dissolution for all concerned – both Muslim and Non-Muslim.

Up until now, I have not said anything about Maajid Nawaz in the context of this conclusion. Let's change that status.

In my opinion, the only reason that someone such as Maajid Nawaz was permitted to participate in a dialogue with Dr. Harris (such as the one that took place in the book upon which they collaborated and which the present book critically engages) is because as far as Islam is concerned, Maajid Nawaz has as little insight into the nature of Islam as does Dr. Harris. Anyone who wishes to argue – as Maajid Nawaz does – that the Qur'an is something of a blank slate and derives its meanings from whatever conceptual frameworks are

imprinted on it by this or that Muslim has almost no real understanding of Islam.

Maajid Nawaz might know a great deal about Muslim history or Muslim culture but Islam is not a function of Muslim history and/or culture. Rather, the spiritual success of a Muslim will depend on the Divine assistance that flows to, and interacts with, the essential capacity of a given individual through, among other possible sources, the Qur'an.

I consider Maajid Nawaz to be someone who became a pawn – unwittingly or otherwise -- in Dr. Harris's propaganda war. Apparently, he failed to understand that he was being used to help advance Dr. Harris's agenda of trying to persuade whoever is foolish enough to listen to Dr. Harris that the Qur'an is a purely human construction that is subject to, among other things, an arbitrary array of post-modern textual analysis that begin and end in the same place ... namely, nowhere.

Maajid Nawaz, most kindly and cooperatively, provides Dr. Harris with exactly what the latter individual seems to desire. More specifically, Maajid Nawaz is someone who has a Muslim name, and he is not only willing to argue that there is nothing Divine in revelation but, even more importantly, that Islam must be reformed from top to bottom ... which is the mirror image of Dr. Harris's inclinations with respect to Islam.

There were many junctures during the dialogue that are recorded in *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* at which Maajid Nawaz should have

taken exception with the ignorance being spewed by Sam Harris concerning the nature of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Unfortunately, for whatever reason, Maajid Nawaz chose not to address those issues but, instead, proceeded to promote his own post-modern, relativistic, arbitrary interpretation of Islam, and in doing so, I believe he did himself, the Qur'an, Islam, Muslims and non-Muslims a great disservice.



Postscript

As I was working on the final edits for this book, the tragedy in Paris, France unfolded ... more than 120 people have been reported to be dead, and scores of people have been critically injured. At the time this book went to press ISIS had claimed responsibility for the attacks, and in doing so, those individuals have committed terrible injustices against innocent people and, as well, those responsible have committed gross transgressions against their own souls.

My heart grieves for the people who were killed and injured during the November 13, 2015 Friday attacks. My heart also grieves for the families and friends who lost loved ones on that day.

Having said the foregoing, I also must say something else. The Paris events, along with: The bombings a few days earlier in Lebanon; the blowing up of a Russian plane over Egypt that was filled with vacationers; the killing of Palestinians by Israelis, and vice versa; the killing of several thousand innocent people in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere by means of drone technology; the tragedies that have been transpiring for more than two decades in Iraq and more than a decade in Afghanistan; the ongoing dissolution of once viable – if troubled -- countries such as Syria and Libya, as well as all too many other senseless tragedies that have occurred in

countries across the face of the Earth ... all of this is due to the ignorance of those who perpetrate violence or who advocate the use of violence to resolve human problems. 210

The foregoing events – each in its own manner -- give expression to the shape of things to come if we continue to double-down on our different forms of ignorance concerning one another and the nature of existence. To liberally paraphrase a saying that is attributed to George Santayana: “Those who fail to overcome their ignorance are doomed to endure the consequences of such failure in the future.”

The world is in the terrible condition it is in today largely because of human ignorance. As long as people like Sam Harris and other fundamentalists (irrespective of the manner in which they are religiously, economically, politically, militaristically, philosophically, corporately, educationally, or institutionally inclined) insist on holding onto their ignorance concerning the events of life, then the prospect for resolving the ongoing crises in which humanity has become entangled seems very unlikely.

Ignorance – whether that of Muslims or non-Muslims -- can never be part of the solution. It will always be at the heart of the problem.