

CONFRONTING TERROR:

REASSERTING ETHICAL RESOLVE OVER POLITICAL REALISM

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The historical role of religion as the fundamental ethical ordering agent in reality compels today's world to consider this role in deciphering how to cope with essentially the same basic issue: the ordering of reality into two distinct spheres of good and evil, whereby human civilization may combat not only the terror of anomy, but the anomic effects of terrorism. Thus, in confronting Islamic fundamentalist terrorism with Christian just war tradition, a truly common and productive discourse is possible only when it focuses on the most relevant and meaningful aspect of each tradition: ethics. To achieve this, international relations must be approached by Western policymakers with a perspective that reasserts morality over political realism.

The role of war theory, as extrapolated from religious ethics in moderating warring tendencies between competing cultures, has profound implications on the relevance of religious tradition in both the justification of war and cultural statecraft. By separating the ethical dimension of religious tradition from international relations, especially in terms of war policy, we create by default a *de facto* anomy of seemingly amoral foreign policy. Thus, to reach agreements on values and conduct, or to establish a resolute moral justification for war, we must carry forward a "conversation between traditions" that is rooted in their relevant ethical traditions. Without this emphasis, we risk having a conversation that ignores, denies, or undermines the relevant connections to the cultural communities that are essential for humanity.

A most impelling case in point concerns the perplexing reality that major civilizations hold contrasting, competing, and even in principle, contradictory conceptions or "visions" of peace. Further elucidating this "Problem with Peace," as the distinguished Professor of Social and Political Ethics Jean Bethke Elshtain poses it in her book *Just War Against Terror*, is Elshtain's contention that "Peace is construed as the elimination of all those who pose an immediate or hypothetical threat" (125). As Elshtain asserts, "All too often people cry, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace, or when the call for peace is dubious or destructive in its means and its proclaimed

end. For that reason alone, [different versions of] peace [need] to be examined” (Elshtain 125).

Elshtain presents three contrasting visions of peace: “the conqueror, the just warrior, and the pacifist” (125). In an effort to treat the contemporary concern of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, it is imperative to consider all three visions as they encompass the dominant cultures of thought commonly deployed in response to such perceived threats. Furthermore, the strains of ideologically-driven politics and the resulting philosophy of international-relations brokers present an even greater diversity of thought on the matter at hand. For my analysis here, it is properly expedient to focus on the conceptions of peace that constitute contradictions in principle, which punctuate the conflict between modern Western Civilization and the Islamic fundamentalists’ chief export: terrorism. As Elshtain explains, “For the conqueror, justice is beside the point . . . This kind of peace seeks a world in which adversarial politics as we know it—Augustine’s conflicting human wills—has disappeared” (126). Elshtain continues, “Interested only in total domination, the conqueror can never rest. There is always opposition somewhere that must be quashed” (126). I would contend (and will elaborate later) that this description is proximate to the conception of peace held by fundamentalist Muslims. In contrast, for the just warrior, or as Elshtain writes, the “just war advocate...[the] demands of justice may require that peace be suspended temporarily in order to prevent or to rectify a grievous harm” (126). The forces of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism are actively pursuing and actuating grievous harm upon the West (e.g., the September 11 attacks). Thus the advocates of just war, myself included, view the Christian conceptions of retributive and distributive justice, as contained in just war tradition, to be priority predicates in the effort to confront fundamentalist terror on “just” grounds, and henceforth to carry forward a productive discourse between these competing notions of peaceful order on the basis of their ethical principles as rooted in their respective religious traditions. Therefore, the perplexity of peace as supported by Elshtain provides the postulate from which I will build the subsequent framework of my analysis on ethical praxis.

Throughout history and across the world, people have turned to the authority of religion in seeking ethical praxis. Religious values, as subjective bases for moral reasoning, have guided societies through the establishment of normative ethical standards. As the noted scientist Edward O. Wilson pointed out in his essay “Back

from Chaos," "The millennium-old rules sacralized by religion seemed to work . . . daily matters of life and death require moral decisiveness" (151). These standards, bequeathed to successive generations in the form of dominant cultural traditions, can aid greatly in defining and understanding the shared and divided borders of civilized world cultures. In attempting to discern the relevant differences that exist between civilized cultures, it is essential to understand the religiously-rooted values and constructs from which cultural traditions were forged, and the historical experiences that have punctuated their subsequent re-shaping. Lending further credence to this idea and providing the framework for my analysis, the renowned sociologist of religion Peter Berger, in his essay "Religion and World Construction," essentially argues that all religion is a product of human socio-evolution necessitated by the unique demands of human anthropology. Berger's idea of religion as a social construct and necessary ordering agent of human existence highlights the pivotal role religion has played in functional statecraft. Berger writes, "The dichotomization of reality into sacred and profane spheres, however related, is intrinsic to the religious enterprise" (26). The author continues, "The sacred cosmos, which transcends and includes man in its ordering of reality, thus provides man's ultimate shield against the terror of anomy" (Berger 26). Historically, the major world religions have established ethical traditions to address these concerns. Such traditions are still relevant to the conduct of war and statecraft because the different contemporary perspectives of these cultures lay collectively constructed in different historical experiences and principally by the influence of their own normative traditions on religion, war, and statecraft. Thus, with respect to my analysis here, the practical considerations of actual statecraft or world building are essentially those of war and peace.

The contemporary discourse about military action in response to international terrorism is essentially a product of the ongoing political debate concerning the relevance of religion to the practice of statecraft. The Enlightenment idea of an objective and universal system of ethics that exists independent of specific religious and cultural institutions has remained elusive. Yet, the underlying notion of the state as an entity that can and must transcend religious-cultural traditions has in turn fostered the dominant perspective for Western politico-philosophical morality. This perspective has emerged in a complex socio-political milieu in which policymakers

influence the nature of international relations by relying almost wholly on political interests and ideologies when addressing the questions of war and peace.

The major implication for my analysis is that holy wars or wars for religion confound this notion of mutually exclusive state and religious roles as assumed by Western policymakers (to this end, it is important to note that the thrust of my treatment of Western foreign-policy makers focuses on the United States and our principal allies and does not aim to treat the politicking of a particular administration, as this would exceed the scope of this paper). In turn, the reality of holy war in modern Western civilization contradicts the very principles by which Western secular governments govern and defend Western values. Hence, my concern that Western politics, being so inclined against religion in theory, may in practice fail to recognize the potent religious dimension of politics and conflict. Thus, the importance of fundamental ethical values as derived from religious institutions existing in a given culture demand consultation, especially when such values define normative restraints on the resort to war and the conduct of war. The tenuous relationship between the objectives of war and the objectives of peace oblige further clarification within their etiological constructs. The failure to directly engage the religious dimensions of world politics and conflict have already contributed to the recent conflicts involving Muslim society and terrorism, the outcomes of which will undoubtedly shape the future of all significant socio-religious institutions and traditions.

Essentially, my concerns here are rooted in the communitarian-liberal dispute over the basis of ethics. This dispute is a religious and philosophical debate over the basis of ethics in which the communitarian understanding argues that ethical conceptions are as the noted Professor of Religion James Turner Johnson explains, "rooted in particular cultural experience over history" (*Holy War Idea* 6), whereas the liberal position forwards the Enlightenment notion that ethical values are conceived universally, and transcend cultural differences. More specifically, this framework is derived from the work of philosophy Professor Alasdair MacIntyre who, as Johnson points out, "has been central in launching and carrying forward [the debate] . . . about how to conceive rational enquiry about ethics, [and] also about the implications of doing so" (*Holy War Idea* 7). MacIntyre argues that conceptions of ethics arise from cultural and historical experiences. According to Johnson, MacIntyre asserts his position this way: "What the Enlightenment for the most part made us blind to and what we now need to recover is. . . a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a

tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated" (*Holy War Idea* 7). If, as Johnson posits, rational enquiry about ethics, when rooted in tradition, suggests that universal dialogue across traditional divides is ineffectual, then one must look to a non-culture-bound rationality as the source of all ethical value. This position, one of modern default via rational analysis, is theoretically tangible; however, as I will illustrate further, history suggests that the presumption of this perspective in policymaking is conducive to an implicit failure in ethical resolve.

The Enlightenment attempt to raise dialogue to a higher, universal language that rises above the idolatry of religion and resides in a shared rationality does, as MacIntyre argues and Johnson writes, "end up being about nothing in particular and thus does not serve well the connections to historical community that are necessary to humanity" (*Holy War Idea* 8). Therefore, my concern here turns to the relevance and effect of the present and future dialogue between what may shape up to be the principal players in Samuel P. Huntington's idea of "The Clash of Civilizations," the secularist West and what Daniel Philpott calls "radical Islamic revivalism." If Berger's thesis is correct and religion has provided the necessary ethical ordering agents in human civilization, then how has the secularism of religion in the West affected this ethical ordering? The undeniable brilliance of the Enlightenment has revolutionized human civilization in numerous ways, most of which are arguably vast improvements. However, the Enlightenment, as Wilson says, "stumbled" when it came to the question of systematizing a universal basis for moral reasoning. In an attempt to rise above the rational limits of religious idolatry, the Enlightenment discourse has led to the paradoxical situation in which well-intentioned state polities may have in effect "thrown the baby out with the bath water." In this sense, I would suggest that the baby represents ethics and the bath water represents the aforementioned rational limits that many rightly see in the traditions of religious idolatry. The real problem, then, lies in Berger's thesis. I would argue that if Berger's framework is correct, what do we sacrifice when we separate church and state in this context? I believe the answer for now appears to be, at least in systematic terms, our ethical traditions, which, absent a universal secular replacement, leads to the erosion of morality. The extreme implications of such erosion may be found in the muck of post-modernism. I think the necessary ordering agent of religion that remains relevant in contemporary society is largely that of ethics. In this sense, ethics will, at

least until the fulfillment of the Enlightenment promise of an objective basis for moral reasoning, remain the province of religion.

If this is the case, then what are the implications for the dialogue on the waging of just war and international relations? The role of war theory as extrapolated from religious ethics in moderating warring tendencies between cultures has profound implications on the relevance of religion in both war practice and cultural statecraft. The secularization of “just war” tradition denies the necessary ethical relevance of religious tradition, thus limiting the efficacy of its resulting foreign policy and the international relations drawn from it. If, as Wilson explains, the matters of life and death require moral decisiveness, do the matters of war and peace require any less? At this point, I want to revisit Berger, who writes, “The dichotomization of reality into sacred and profane spheres, however related, is intrinsic to the religious enterprise” (26). This is analogous to the separation of reality into right and wrong, which, as we have seen, appears to remain the province of religious tradition. Berger continues, “The sacred cosmos, which transcends and includes man in its ordering of reality, thus provides man’s ultimate shield against the terror of anomy” (26). The key here is the word “anomy,” in which the traditional meaning is akin to a state in which there is an erosion or failure of standards and values resulting in social instability. By separating the ethical dimension of religious tradition from international relations, especially in terms of war policy, we create a *de facto* anomy of seemingly amoral policy. The historical role of religion as the fundamental ethical ordering agent in reality compels today’s world to consider this role in deciphering how to cope with essentially the same basic issue: the ordering of reality into two distinct spheres of good and evil, whereby human civilization may combat not only the terror of anomy, but the anomic effects of terrorism.

This argument comes to bear on the modern conception of the state as existing to serve interests and not ideals. The former is, as Johnson writes, “conceived as rationally objective and the latter as inherently particularist . . . [such modern conceptions] are examples of ways of thinking that deny the importance of historical experience and tradition for defining political communities and influencing their behavior” (*Holy War Idea* 9). Johnson continues, “traditions matter, and . . . while conflict between traditions is to be expected, the most complete way to overcome such friction is to take traditions seriously enough to bring them into conversation with each other” (*Holy War Idea* 9). Secularist politics and ideologically motivated

interests lack the necessary ordering agent of humanity: systematized ethics. The morally anomic nature of secularism intrinsically limits the ability of a polity to exercise the moral decisiveness required by matters of war and peace. This fundamental impairment of ethical praxis, as often exhibited in internationalist conventions, often relegates the “just” party in a conflict to moral impotence. We do see that when political interests and moral concerns coexist in a given circumstance, action or intervention may occur and political leaders may cite a moral cause. However, the lack of leadership on morally consistent grounds can logically lead to inaction and humanitarian crises. Even when citing moral injustice as justification, the omnipresent political interests often compel charges of duplicity. Furthermore, the inaction in one case despite a seemingly overt moral justification, even obligation, calls into question the moral authority of those who cite morality in other cases—especially when expedient political motives are transparent.

I would argue that warfare may serve political ends, but only when such ends are tested against preconceived moral justification. Is war, based solely on political interests, right or wrong? Is it right to intervene in cases of genocide? Is it wrong not to? These questions, and countless like them, only matter if we take them seriously; and we will only take them seriously when we understand that there is a difference between right and wrong, between good and evil; and that navigating such courses require moral decisiveness. The over-reliance on political interest in justifying causes for action force policymakers to gray out their moral authority. Regardless of whether there is any truth to the notion that there is no right and wrong, but only relativistic forms of such concepts, the realist paradigm in politics seeks this praxis. On this point I wish to add two observations: First, moral grayness cannot be created without black and white; second, for those who doubt the existence of good and evil, I would refer them to the surviving member of an innocent civilian family that has been murdered by terrorists. I would argue that the assertion of the realist paradigm does not defend moral impotence, or moral injustice; it may however, result in a plague of moral indecisiveness. Indeed, the matters of life and death, peace and war do require moral decisiveness; therefore, we shall consult the relevant religious traditions.

At this point, one might be inclined to question the validity of the ethics of one religion versus another. This observation exposes religious ethics as purely subjective bases for moral reasoning. Suffice it to say, the omnipotent nature often taken by the arguments for a common religious ethic are somewhat beyond the scope

of this paper. Furthermore, the religious idolatry commonly associated with these positions has a tendency to turn away those of us who are more inclined to reason. Nevertheless, some people are inclined to do right, some inclined to do wrong, and many inclined to do nothing, with the net effect of moral indecisiveness often being wrong—as extrapolated from Berger’s axiom that human nature without its necessary ordering agent of ethics risks succumbing to the terror of anomy. Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon those who take morality seriously to carry forward what Johnson calls a “conversation between traditions” (*Holy War Idea* 8). The author continues, “conflict between traditions is to be expected. . . the most complete way to overcome such friction is to take traditions seriously enough to bring them into conversation with each other” (*Holy War Idea* 9). To reach agreements on values and behavior or to establish a clear moral justification for war, we must forward the conversation—on international relations—rooted in ethical traditions. Without this emphasis, we risk having a conversation that ignores, denies, or even undermines the relevant connections to the cultural communities that are necessary for humanity. From this conversation, MacIntyre believes that common understanding across traditional divides is ultimately possible. In MacIntyre’s words,

What. . . an individual has to learn is how to test dialectically the theses proposed to him or her by each competing tradition, while also drawing upon these same theses in order to test dialectically those convictions and responses which he or she has brought to the encounter. Such a person has to become involved in the conversation between traditions, learning to use the idiom of each in order to describe and evaluate the other or others by means of it. So each individual will be able to turn his or her own initial incoherences to argumentative advantage by requiring of each tradition that it supply an account of how these incoherences are best to be characterized, explained, and translated. (398)

For “a conversation between traditions” to occur, one must analyze and evaluate the historical evolution each tradition has experienced. To facilitate this process I will explore the evolution of the deontological requirements for causal justification of holy war that reside within Western Civilization’s Judeo-Christian “just war” tradition and Islam’s “*jihad* of the sword” tradition. In the following paragraphs I am indebted to the scholarly work of Professor James Turner Johnson, who has clearly

mapped out the most significant details in his lectures on just war tradition, holy war, and *jihad* ideas in the Lectures on War, Peace, and Violence in Western Religious Thought, given at Rutgers University in the Fall of 2003. Consequently, I will compare the traditions of “just war” and “*jihad* of the sword” in terms of justifying cause(s) necessary for moral resort to force with clarification of the role of religion relative to the sphere of political culture for each tradition.

The Christian holy war idea or the idea of war for and from religion can be traced back to the fourth century and Ambrose Bishop of Milan, as Professor Johnson has explained (Lectures 2003). In an attempt to refute the Christian pacifists, Ambrose laid the groundwork for early just war thought by distinguishing between the use of force for oneself and the use of force to protect and defend those wrongly attacked. Drawing from the requirement of Christian charity, Ambrose argued that Christians had a moral duty to “defend thy neighbor,” and failing to meet this requirement would be morally wrong. Thus, Ambrose provided the first theological rationale for the use of armed force and, in doing so, laid the foundation upon which just war tradition was constructed (Johnson 2003).

In the latter fourth and early fifth centuries, Ambrose’s contemporary Augustine forwarded just war tradition by arguing for the allowance of Christians to engage in warfare in defense of their neighbors of the state. Despite not constructing a coherent body of doctrine on just war (Johnson 2003), he did by virtue of his argument forward the foundational ideas from which such doctrine has grown. Augustine’s work marks the early connection of just war tradition to state authority. The sixth century canonist Gratian defines the primary standards set forth to determine just cause as defense against wrongdoing in progress, punishment of evildoers, and the retaking of wrongly taken properties. The Decretists and the Decretalists, followed by the thirteenth century writings of Thomas Aquinas, held true to Augustine and Gratian’s *Decretum*, thus exhibiting an early medieval consensus of just war thought (Johnson 2003).

Johnson argues that the medieval period punctuates the major shift in just war concept to an emphasis on socio-political order. Medieval theologians accepted the aforementioned foundational ideas of just war theory and contributed to it the notion that sovereign rulers were both right and dutiful in their authority to wage war justly to correct violations of justice. This shift in just war perspective to the state was essentially rooted in the desire to establish a just and peaceful socio-political order

(Lectures 2003). The modern period, Johnson argues, brought two distinct challenges to the developing legacy of the medieval period, which failed to develop consensus on just war applications beyond the scope of the Christian faithful. These challenges were the discovery of the New World and the Reformation. More specifically, both the discovery of the New World and the Reformation forced the examination of just war thought in an attempt to derive how to apply just war thinking to conflicts beyond Christianity. In the mid-sixteenth century, just war theorist Franciscus de Vitoria directly addressed the question of whether and how armed force might be used to advance the Christian religion through forced conversion by rejecting wholesale the idea that offensive force may be justified for religious purposes (Johnson 2003). Vitoria denied the concept of religious justification for offensive holy war and imposed limitations on just war, as defined solely by their appeal to the universality of reason. Subsequently, the post-Reformation period ushered in a full cultural rejection of holy war, which was largely predicated on a sense of revulsion at the sheer brutality of such endeavors. This reaction to war for religion completed the cultural rejection of such practices in the future and made the right to holy war a non-issue for just war tradition (Johnson 2003).

As recognized in Roman practice, incorporated into Christianity, and acknowledged by classical just war theologians, Vitoria reasserts the three deontological justifications for armed force: punishment of evildoers; defense against an ongoing wrongdoing; and the recovery of properties wrongfully taken. Vitoria's reshaping of just war tradition is consistent with James Turner Johnson's analysis in his essay "Just Cause Revisited." "His conception of just cause was based in natural law, not in a mix of natural law and Christian moral duty; its central paradigm was not the sovereign acting in God's stead to punish evil . . . but rather the state acting to defend and preserve itself and its rights" ("Just Cause" 11). This reshaped perspective on just war in employing the traditional just causes via natural law for state interests caused an inevitable confounding of just cause theory in practice. Simply stated, both sides of a given conflict now had the ability to make reasonable appeals to just cause.

These cases of what Johnson calls "simultaneous ostensible justice-wars in which there appears to be just cause on both sides" ("Just Cause" 12) were dealt with by Vitoria, and later the canonist Hugo Grotius, by, in effect, not dealing with the contradiction and instead emphasizing new arguments for limits on war conduct or

jus in bello. Furthermore, Grotius advances the argument for preemption as just cause exhibiting a position that as Johnson writes, “reflects the assumption that protection of justice centrally requires protection of the state, an assumption that led to an emphasis on the just cause of defense that is thoroughly modern” (“Just Cause” 13). Responding to concerns about the exploitation of preemption, Grotius develops safeguards to govern against unwarranted offensive applications. In doing so, Johnson argues, Grotius establishes tenets from which the development of international law and the positive law of war have followed (Lectures 2003).

Nineteenth century innovations changed the face of modern warfare. The doctrine of “presumption against war” supports the view that modern warfare is inherently unjust by virtue of its disproportionately destructive nature. This view as forwarded by contemporary Catholic thought provides insight into the perspective that war itself is the evil to be avoided. As a result, international law and treaties have sought to remove all traditional just cause requirements including preemption, leaving only just war in defense of an armed attack (Johnson 2003).

In summation, war for religion in the Western just war tradition has evolved in modern culture from the initial acceptance of holy war to the contemporary and complete rejection of just war in its purest sense of Christian charity. As Johnson writes, “The normative concept of war in Western culture thus developed in correlation with the theological, psychological, and political rejection of war . . . This normative concept provided an essential part of the modern concept of the state by assigning the right to make war to states and limiting the justifications of war to reasons of state” (*Holy War Idea* 13). As a result, the just war tradition as it relates to the socio-political culture of Western civilization can be characterized as changing from the normative idea of distinct spheres to one in which the political community dominates, thus morphing the true just war concept into just ideologies of secular governance without the moral imperative.

The concept of war for religion in the practice of Islam is characterized by the idea of *jihad* of the sword. This concept is based upon the idea of struggle on God’s path. As Johnson describes it, “The classical Islamic jurists treated the justification of war for religious purpose in two different contexts, that of the Muslim community in its external relations with non-Muslim societies and that of the internal order of the Muslim community” (*Holy War Idea* 60). Johnson continues,

In the former context the endemic threat of the *dar al- harb* justified defensive *jihad* and the role of the *dar al-islam* in history justified offensive *jihad*. In the latter context, the jurists focused on the need to maintain peace, order, and conformity within the *dar al- islam*. While in principle they defined the *dar al-islam* as the territory of peace, in practice they recognized various forms of disruption that could justify the use of force: apostasy, dissent, schism, rebellion, highway robbery, and other disturbances of the peace of Islam. (*Holy War Idea* 60)

The *dar al-islam* is the abode of Islam wherein there is an Islamic politico-religious community and the way of God via submission to Islam is practiced. *The dar al-harb* is the abode of war composed of the non-faithful who are not submissive to the rule of Islam. The juristic distinction between offensive and defensive *jihad* is principally that of religious obligation. Offensive *jihad* is the collective duty of the Islamic community to extend the territory of Islam whereas the defensive *jihad* is that of individual duty to be exercised by Muslims. The Sunni or majority tradition of Islamic jurisprudence is, as described by John Kelsay in his book *Islam and War*, "The peace of the world cannot be fully secure unless all people come under the protection of an Islamic state. Thus there always exists an imperative for Muslims: to struggle to extend the boundaries of the territory of Islam . . . to fulfill the trust given to humanity by its creator: to establish peace with justice within a secure political order" (34).

The *jihad* of collective duty requires not only just cause, but also proper authority. This authority for collective *jihad* came from the caliph in popular Sunni tradition, while in the divergent Shiite tradition such authority extends from the *imam*. This distinction is a point of contention by which both traditions have divided thus permanently disturbing the Islamic order. As Johnson states, "After the fall of the caliphate, and in the absence of centralized religious authority, temporal rulers declared themselves to be *mujahiddin*, leaders of the faithful in holy war . . . The same tendencies continue in the present day" (*Holy War Idea* 64, 65).

The classical Sunni jurists aimed for the establishment of a universal socio-political order by Muslim rule. However, this theoretical frame proved unsuccessful throughout history. The unification and expansion of the *dar al- islam* did not occur as desired. Instead, the *dar al-harb* has remained and even grown, claiming some Muslim territories in the process. Thus, as Johnson writes, "for contemporary

fundamentalists the nature of the *dar al- harb* and the threat posed by it have taken on a theological rather than juristic character, and the opposition between the two 'abodes' is perceived as a battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, as the form this warfare takes, is thus a greatly intensified duty for the faithful" (*Holy War Idea* 68). The threat perceived by the faithful has cultivated a sense of emergency that in the absence of centralized religious authority provides a sense of justification by the duty of individual *jihad* to the *mujahiddin* and their followers. Thus, we see the rise in fundamentalist Islamic terrorism.

In summation, war for religion in the Islamic fundamentalist tradition has maintained a practical concept of value and purpose. The Islamic perspective on Western culture has reinforced the traditional concept of *jihad* of the sword and renewed the resolve of its fractured but faithful followers. The concerns of justification in waging holy war have been inherently intertwined with the political domain in Islamic culture, thus mirroring Johnson's characterization of this relationship in broad terms as, "where the two forms of community are entirely coextensive, no distinction is made between religious and nonreligious causes or purposes of war, and in practice any war engaged in by the community seems holy" (*Holy War Idea* 47).

The argument for comparing both traditions, in an attempt to forward "a conversation between traditions," elucidates the difficulty inherent in seeking common ground or a bridge across the deep cultural divides that delimit major civilizations. For such a "conversation between traditions" to occur, it is incumbent upon those wishing to forward such a conversation to examine the critical differences demarking the traditional agents of justification and censure concerning the use of armed force. To this end, it is clear according to Elshaint, that "[o]ne fundamental feature of Islamic teaching is that an effort to extend the boundaries of the territory of Islam is a *prima facie* case of a just cause" (131). Therefore, it is justified in foundational principle that fundamentalist Muslims may expand the abode of peace (*dar al-Islam*) by waging war against the abode of war (*dar al-harb*). In this sense, fundamentalist terrorists are not aggressing but rather fulfilling as Elshaint describes, "the Qur'anic command to spread Islam as a way of peace . . . [Accordingly] within Islamist fundamentalism, such slaughter can be a noble act" (131). In stark contrast, Christian theology and just war tradition has, as Elshaint explains, "never taken the primacy of territory or earthly sovereignty as a foundational claim or principle. . . .

Not only do such deeds have no justification, but there are ample grounds for condemning them" (132). Thus, as Elshtain asserts, "A limitless war to propagate the faith is never legitimate within the Christian just war tradition" (132). In taking religious tradition seriously, one is compelled to consider this key question asked by Elshtain, "What prophylaxis exists within Islam to curb or limit the waging of war in the name or spreading the house of Islam, given the historic legitimacy and reality of this approach?" (132). This fundamental query and others like it will only be answered when the "conversation between traditions" is effectively engaged.

In a fundamental way the "just war" tradition has evolved into being predicated on what Johnson describes as "the Enlightenment belief in a common human rationality, nowhere fully expressed but in principle accessible to all humanity" (*Holy War Idea* 7). The "jihad of the sword" tradition appears to closely resemble what Johnson describes as being "the perspective of particular value traditions which understand their own ethical norms to apply to all humanity and may read this claim to universal applicability as justifying hegemonic domination of other cultures" (*Holy War Idea* 7). In the case of the aforementioned "radical Islamic revivalism," the latter portion of Johnson's characterization seems particularly apt. Given the gravity of such differences, the idea of finding common discourse may seem daunting. The point here is that a common discourse is possible only when it focuses on the most relevant and meaningful aspects of each tradition: ethics. To achieve this, international relations must be approached by Western policymakers with a perspective that reasserts morality over political realism. By turning back to the religious authority found in "just war" tradition in seeking ethical praxis, the leaders of Western Civilization will be turning toward an enlightened understanding of themselves; a clearer understanding of those we must relate to; a reestablishment of the moral authority in which moral decisiveness is found; and a serious engagement of the issues upon which the civilizations of the West and Islam can be brought into the *real* debate.

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COMMENTARY: "CONFRONTING TERROR"

Ryan Gogol

The war on terrorism confronts us with new challenges in our efforts to promote peace and security around the world. In order to effectively wage such a war, Anthony Vitali, in "Confronting Terror," compels us to consider how we may actually need to adjust our own cultural and political attitudes toward extremist *jihad*. He calls for the West's adoption of a new attitude toward terrorism. Owing to the longstanding church-state separation policy of the West, political leaders find themselves unable to conduct foreign policy on any ethical grounds, as religion is the fundamental source of ethics. Thus he concludes that the West can more effectively counter the evils of terrorism if it adopts a consistent moral resolve, the basis for which might be found in a healthy ethical debate between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic fundamentalist just-war traditions.

I would argue that if applied correctly, moral resolve can function as an effective measure against terrorism, but it is also a dangerous weapon that can become the moral self-righteousness of any given leader or government. Vitali stipulates that it is beyond the scope of his paper to determine the extent to which the

doctrine of church-state separation actually influences the everyday decisions of political leaders. But this stipulation does not bar an examination of how Western leaders have clearly acted with moral decisiveness in mind. President G. W. Bush is a case in point. He has invoked the good-evil distinction by applying it to “the killing of innocent civilians,” the universal evil of which is beyond debate – it is an act to be deemed evil by all sound-minded people, regardless of their culture or religion. Bush’s condemnation of the terrorists and rogue states which support them as “the axis of evil” indeed gained America near universal sympathy and support shortly after the September 11 attacks, thereby weakening the extremist cause. So to Vitali’s credit, moral resolve has worked in undermining terrorist’s claims to holy war.

When resolve turns into self-righteousness, a government can alienate its allies and thereby undermine the coalition against terrorism. Widespread agreement about the ends of counter-terrorism has continued to remain much the same: to find terrorists hiding in every corner of the globe and bring them to justice. However, the means of waging this war, when conceptualized in stark dichotomous terms by a particular leader or government, exclude the opinions of other leaders who may disagree with how the ends of the war are pursued. This observation may be applied to the case of the Iraq War and the more general war on terrorism. The achievement of sustained cooperation among nations fighting terrorism is daunting enough given that any single nation can end up splitting the coalition if it ends up appearing too stubborn and self-serving to the rest of the world. Now to unite most of the world not only under a collective strategy, but also under a set of shared moral principles would truly be an incredible feat. All it takes is a diplomatic crisis to erupt among one or more nations in order to reinforce the views of the realists whom Vitali criticizes, who contend that since it is impossible to satisfy every nation, it is simply not worth trying.

On this note, Vitali shares the view held by other critics of realism, that it is amoral for a country to pursue its own interests and ignore the ethical traditions of particular societies and cultures. But it is important to note that realists can just as well argue that the pursuit of self-interest is in itself a moral act, as it strengthens the position of superpowers in the international system, whose self-interest is to ensure general peace and stability across the globe.

Realists aside, Vitali is reasonable in his call for bringing “the civilizations of West and Islam . . . into *real* debate,” as he thus concludes his work. However, I

cannot emphasize enough that as Westerners, we have to exercise caution in the way we understand Islam, lest our “conversation” with other cultures becomes simply misguided and uninformed. We ought to be aware of how an outsider’s perspective can misinterpret various factional views within Islam and the justifications for them adopted by its followers. Islamic fundamentalists, by definition, simply maintain a strict interpretation of the Koran, as do Christian fundamentalists in their interpretation of the Bible. However, there is no consistent argument in the Koran for the use of violence against civilians to spread Islam, and it would be wrong to interpret extremist *jihad* as comprising any part of the ethical traditions of rational Muslims. Moreover, in so far as Vitali has shown just-war theory to evolve over time in the Judeo-Christian tradition, we should also not, then, assume that Islam is a stagnant religion without recourse to novel interpretations of the Koran. Even among strict interpretations there is evidence for support of holy war as well as for exhortations of peace and religious tolerance.

On both accounts of Vitali’s call for moral resolve in Western foreign policy and a meaningful debate between Western and Islamic traditions, we must exercise the highest degrees of caution, as they can also work against the pursuit of a more principled war on terrorism.

RESPONSE: Anthony Vitali

In his dialectical response to “Confronting Terror,” *Dialogues* editor Ryan Gogol gets right to the heart of the matter when he asserts that, “in so far as Vitali has shown just-war theory to evolve over time in the Judeo-Christian tradition, we should also not, then, assume that Islam is a stagnant religion without recourse to novel interpretations of the Koran.” I would argue that even a cursory look at mainstream media coverage would compel one to recognize that the so-called “Arab-street” fomenters in fervent support of what Gogol suggests may be restricted to only novel interpretations of Qur’anic dicta—lest we forget the scope and cost of the attacks of September 11 by presuming that it merely represents an interpretation of novel proportion and not the symptom of a larger malady. Gogol’s contention concerning the lack of argumentative consistency he observes in Qur’anic principles for the use of force in spreading the *dar al-islam* (the abode of peace) should not detract from the widespread interpretation that the existence of such a principle does both in theory and practice offer the ethical foundation upon which Islamic fundamentalists have

quite successfully built a large base of terror. Gogol's notion that caution exercised to the highest degree may well trump moral resolve seems fairly rooted in common sense; however, caution when anchored solely in the ebb and flow of pure political realism, without orientation by a resolute ethical compass, stands precariously perched on the precipice of providing a strategy of exculpation for *de facto* moral impotence. In turn, while simultaneously ignoring and consistently failing to effectively confront the evil-doers of terror with a firm ethical posture we eschew any obligation to assert power as exemplary leaders acting in the defense of human dignity on decidedly just grounds. Gogol's admonition that "it would be wrong to interpret extremist *jihad* as comprising any part of the ethical traditions of rational Muslims" begins to elucidate the challenge inherent in confronting Islamic fundamentalists with appeals to the universality of reason, but fails to accurately indict the fundamental ethics of the *jihad* of the sword tradition as the location of the more substantive issue at hand. Furthermore, the Qur'anic exhortations of peace, cited by Gogol, also fail to account for the fact that these exhortations constitute conceptions of peace that are at odds with those who exist outside the *dar al-islam*.

In addition, Gogol suggests that the "call for moral resolve in Western foreign policy and a meaningful debate between Western and Islamic traditions . . . can also work against the pursuit of a more principled war on terrorism." Without elaboration on their specific origin and the cross-cultural viability of such principles, their actual validity and applicability in enabling what Gogol calls, "the pursuit of a more principled war on terrorism" is reminiscent of the type of high purpose sentiment that lacks any real actionable strength. Such well-intentioned rhetoric appears to be rooted in a desire to put cooperation between "allies" in the spirit of internationalism ahead of taking decisive action with moral resolve on behalf of justice for all and in defense of human dignity. This is both unfortunate (in ethical terms) and politically confounding, particularly when such international "allies" fail to take ethical responsibility and have competing political motives (e.g., France's lack of support for the war on terrorism).

I would argue that there is a moral imperative for the West, and most specifically America, to lead the fight against the propagation of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. This moral imperative is predicated on what Jean Bethke Elshtain, in her book *Just War Against Terror* rightly expounds: "The first American foundational principle is moral equality: All human beings are created equal and are

endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights" (26). The critical distinction to be made for application to the current issue is that this concept allows, in principle, the distinction between principle and practice. Thus, America can, as Elshtain writes, "use a founding *principle* to defeat *practices* that violated that principle" (27). As a result, this foundational principle suggests what Elshtain points out, "In a decent polity, our prejudices should be *challenged* rather than *reinforced* by our principles [Thus] the ability of the American polity to use its own *tradition's* commitments to eliminate abhorrent practices tells us [that]. . . . Thinking politically requires looking at both principles and practices and considering how they do, or do not, conform to one another" (28). Fundamentalist Islam fails to make such a critical distinction. Furthermore, as Elshtain asserts, "International bodies have defaulted on the use of coercive force on behalf of justice as an equal regard for all, hence a basic defense of human dignity" (168). Therefore, I would argue that the extension of this principle of moral equality in defense of human dignity and as the fundamental ethic of humanity requires the United States, as the world's superpower, to as Elshtain writes, "deploy coercive force [in their behalf]. . . if they are victims of one of the many horrors attendant upon radical instability [like that which is predominant in fundamentalist Islamic regimes, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan]" (168). This concept of what Elshtain calls, "equal regard [is, indeed] an idea of international justice whose time has come" (168).

Essentially, what this amounts to is the acceptance of a paramount ethical responsibility that is consistent with the fundamental Christian just war ethic, which as Elshtain properly writes, "evaluate[s] all cries for justice and relief from people who are being preyed upon, whether by non-state marauders (such as the Al Qaeda terrorists) or by state-sponsored enforcers [such as the Taliban and Baathist regimes]. . . [as these] ethical considerations are themselves central to our national interests, correctly understood" (170). The author continues, "It is our long-term national interest to foster and sustain an international society of equal regard. . . . Strategic necessity and moral requirements here meet" (170). Our failure to assert this moral imperative and foster a *real* debate across the most pertinent ethical traditions, rooted in religion as they are, will result in a moral default away from what I believe is a decidedly accurate understanding of Christian just war tradition. Such a default would be tantamount to unbalancing the scales of quintessential justice perilously toward evil.