

SPIRITUAL DISORDER IN MODERN TERRORISM:

On Barry Cooper's *New Political Religions*

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Barry Cooper's *New Political Religions, or An Analysis of Modern Terrorism* (University of Missouri Press , 2004) is one of the more important achievements of North American political science in recent years. In a relatively slim volume running to fewer than 200 pages, Cooper has made impressive headway toward at least four important objectives:

- 1) illuminate the motivating inner core of terrorist action, principally by employing Eric Voegelin's analysis of pneumopathology;
- 2) extend Voegelin's analysis of ideologically motivated political activism from modern mass movements to the rather different phenomena associated with small cell terrorist organizations;
- 3) distinguish those elements of Islamist terrorism that are peculiarly Islamic from those that are common to spiritually disordered activism per se;
- 4) analyze the motivating wellsprings of modern terrorism in a manner suggesting implications for both political policy and counterterrorist tactics.

In my view, Cooper has authored the single most penetrating analysis of religiously-motivated terrorism yet published, far surpassing some of the most widely read works on the subject in terms of discernment, theoretical precision, and practical applicability. At the same time, he has

broken new theoretical ground by showing that modern terrorism can be brought into the set of political phenomena made intelligible by Voegelin's analysis of spiritual disorder.

Acknowledging my admiration for this work at the outset, it nevertheless seems far better to use this panel session to raise questions about the book than to sing its praises. Given that Cooper's volume is the first sustained attempt to apply Voegelin's analysis (which is itself quite complex) to the intricate and variegated phenomena associated with modern terrorism, it is hardly a knock on the book to say that one comes away from it with questions about what the author maintains--or with reservations about what he seems to maintain. Since we are fortunate to have Barry Cooper here in the flesh to correct our misreadings and to elaborate on what he has written, I wish to use this opportunity to:

- 1) raise a couple of general questions about his intentions and approach in writing the book, probing into two aspects that seem like possible shortcomings;
- 2) attempt to draw him out on his leanings regarding three "balance points" (intricate issues on which it seems his account seeks to strike a balance, but regarding which the upshot of his account may not be entirely clear).

I will close with a brief assessment of the book's key virtues and points of superiority over alternative treatments of religiously inspired terrorism.

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Cooper's *New Political Religions* is a book that has much to teach, and I say that both as one who learned much from it directly and who also found it exceedingly effective when

employed in a university classroom. However, two readings and a subsequent scanning leave me unclear as to Cooper's intended audience and occasionally uncertain of the advisability of his pedagogical approach. Before giving vent to my questions, I should note the possibility that Cooper may have undertaken this project simply (or at least principally) to enhance his own understanding of a set of important problems. That is always a perfectly valid motive for a scholar, and if Cooper had no particular intention to influence this or that group, then I shall turn out to have pursued a non-issue. However, my sense is that Cooper was indeed intent upon influencing a wider audience, and that his principal target may have been scholars who specialize in terrorism (perhaps more specifically in religiously-inspired terrorism) but who are unacquainted with Voegelin's analysis of spiritual disorder¹ [1] .

If that was Cooper's principal target for influence, it would have been well chosen. When delving into the literature on terrorism, one finds quite quickly that certain names appear repeatedly in notes and bibliographical entries, and that the cluster of influential analysts becomes even more compact and distinct when moving from terrorism studies in general to work addressing religiously inspired terrorism in particular.² [2] Although I have a long way to go before I will be comfortable summarizing this literature, I'm quite comfortable noting that it shows precious little evidence of a solid grounding in political theory and philosophy, and no

1 [1] At the risk of belaboring the obvious, I should note my awareness that Cooper's intentions were surely several in number, and that he presumably had several audiences in mind when organizing the book. Portions of it seem directed not so much to terrorism experts but to other political theorists, or students of Voegelin's work, or those interested in Islamic studies, etc.

2 [2] Some of these write mainly for academic outlets, whereas others contribute principally to publications by RAND or ones such as *Jane's Intelligence Review*. Nevertheless, certain names appear with conspicuous frequency, including Bruce Hoffman, David C. Rappoport, Mark Juergensmeyer, Magnus Ranstorp and Jessica Stern.

discernable indications of influence from Voegelin's studies in the history of political pneumopathology. Needless to say, an attempt on Cooper's part to augment this literature (which has significant impact on policy as well as scholarship) would be an entirely worthwhile enterprise³ [3] .

And yet, while this would be a laudable end, I wonder if the book is as conducive to it as it could be. On one hand, Cooper has evidently taken pains to become conversant in the literature on terrorism, and to acquaint himself not only with the general approaches of leading writers, but also with a wide array of technical details associated with the field of terrorist problems. (Cooper's concluding chapter on "Counternetwar" is particularly impressive in this regard.) The book is admirably free of the particular strain of condescension one sometimes sees when political philosophers address those engaged in narrower, more technical studies. If Cooper was intent upon leavening this literature by drawing upon his background in philosophical matters and Voegelin's analysis of spiritual disorder, he did not attempt to do so without rolling up his sleeves and learning what he might learn from those whom he might teach.

On the other hand, Cooper sometimes presupposes in his readers what I think he should be teaching, which means either that I'm wrong about his target audience or that his teaching strategy occasionally goes astray. I suspect that the former possibility is more likely, but will provide an example that may lend some plausibility to the latter. In the course of Cooper's second chapter (which develops critical concepts for his analysis), he offers a strikingly powerful account of the inherent futility of terrorist violence and of its propensity to become continuous or

³ [3] Although the primary source of the perspective Cooper wishes to introduce to terrorism studies is the work of Voegelin, that is not the only source. Hannah Arendt's work is also an important tributary.

perpetual despite this very futility. Drawing upon Hannah Arendt's distinction between properly political action and actions of the human as *homo faber*, Cooper succeeds in showing that terrorist violence is a mode of fabrication. Regarding fabrication as understood by Arendt, Cooper observes that,

First, fabrication is inherently violent. Making something consists in working upon material that has already been removed from nature. This removal can be effected only by violence—as by killing a life in cutting down a tree to provide wood. Second, the work of making something is always guided by a model or pattern that precedes the thing made, the work after which it is constructed. The "idea" is prior to the material thing. Third, "the process making is itself entirely determined by the categories of means and end." The process ends with the product, and the product, the end, justifies the means. So far as the instrumental use of violence is concerned, the table justifies the violence done to the tree that turns it into material at hand (Cooper, *New Political Religions*, 384 [4]).

The ensuing section becomes increasingly intricate and demanding philosophically, with Cooper introducing a couple of paradoxes and bringing both Lessing and Kant into play. In doing so while making a point of profound importance, he consigns much of his audience to the sidelines, effectively addressing only those already initiated to the philosophical mysteries.

To briefly indicate Cooper's profound point and to show how he conveys it, we can consider the following section:

◆[T]errorism is a mode of fabrication, the application of violence to human material in order to create a desired product. But because human beings have the capacity to begin, to initiate what never has been before, to act and to reveal in their actions a new meaning and a new story, there is no product. As a result, every so-called product is temporary and, in the context of violent making, nothing more than the pretext for further violence. (39)

4 [4] The source for the quotation within this excerpt appears to be Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 153ff.

Immediately following this passage, Cooper notes--in a transitional sentence introducing a new issue--that the mode of consciousness seeking to treat human beings in the mode of fabrication makes a "categorical error." That is exactly correct and very important, in my view, but quite unlikely to be grasped by readers lacking relatively extensive theoretical training. This is partly because the allusions to Arendt's thought are left as mere allusions, and partly because the unspoken premises enabling Cooper to diagnose a "categorical error" are left largely unspoken. To treat them explicitly, I believe that Cooper's conclusion depends upon the following points:

- the terrorist uses violence both to frighten a recalcitrant populace into accepting his demands and to fabricate a perfect future from the materials of the degraded present
- fabrication presupposes material that is malleable, lacking individuation, agency, or a given nature that would resist alteration; however, humans are endowed with each of these characteristics
- moreover, the given nature of human beings is "crooked timber," to use Kant's term, and hence categorically unsuited to fabrication of any "straight" or perfect future
- hence all terrorist attempts to alter human beings or their mode of association are fated to failure, which is also to say that those resolved to accomplish such an alteration must continue their futile attempts endlessly.

Again, I believe that each of these points is entirely valid and of the highest significance. Yet, many of the readers whom Cooper might wish to influence are unlikely to grasp them based upon his presentation. They are clear enough for those who have worked through the classic problems of philosophical anthropology, or who have engaged in theoretically-guided historical analysis of analogous ideological attempts to construct a "master race" or "socialist man." But for the average student of international affairs they may well remain opaque, as indeed they did even for my best students.⁵ [5]

⁵ [5] This is not the only instance in which Cooper might have made much more of a point than he does. In the course of his illuminating treatment of the Islamist firebrand Sayyid Qutb, Cooper doesn't seem to fully utilize an opportunity to impress upon his audience a point of the highest theoretical and practical importance. Toward the end of his account of Qutb, Cooper writes:

My second reservation about Cooper's approach is somewhat related to the first, and since it too has more to do with his presentation than with the substance of what he presents, I'm again concerned that I may be picking nits. In any case, there are certain points in the book

The basic structure of Qutb's position is, in short, a conventional ideological conceit: the experience of revolution is supposed to bring about a new reality that exists only in the imagination of the revolutionary. To use the conceptual terminology introduced above in chapter 2, the pneumopathological nature of the animating emotions would not be obvious until the damage was done. It may be, therefore, that preemptive violence, which has its own risks and consequences, the only way to extinguish the pathos of Qutb's murderous eschatological heroism. (127)

This is a point of potentially explosive importance for readers who are unversed in the history and analysis of spiritual disorder, yet Cooper does not explain it in a way that could show its full force to the uninitiated. The key point within the point is one first made by Voegelin in his analysis of Karl Marx in his *History of Political Ideas*. Voegelin noted that Marx's anticipation of a future free from conflict and scarcity bears a clear resemblance to the anticipations medieval millenarians, but with one exceedingly important difference that makes Marx far more dangerous than any radical sectarian reformer. Medieval millenarians sought first to change hearts and only then to change the world. By means of their preaching, they sought to surround themselves with an "elect," a circle of purified persons whose changed hearts would in turn permit them to transform the world and bring it to its final phase. Conversely, because Marx's "historical materialism" holds that "consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness," he depends upon the life experiences involved in revolutionary activity itself to accomplish the metanoia that will bring "socialist man" and the final phase of history into existence.

In pragmatic terms, the crucial difference between these related disorders is easy to understand. Human nature being what it is, the *metanoia* never actually arises in either case. Medieval millenarians generally came to bad ends and were malign forces in the world, but they did relatively little damage; lacking an elect of any special purity or effectiveness, their transformational projects fell flat when hitting the hard wall of worldly reality. By contrast, Marx's project could only become evident *after* revolutions failed to produce socialist men free of self-interest, and hence millions died as a result of his eschatological activism. The implication for policy is obvious once this core idea is unpacked a bit, and Cooper it quite right to note that preemptive violence against violent extremists of the ilk of Qutb must be considered. My only quibble here is that I don't think the point was unpacked in a way permitting it or its implication to be grasped adequately by many readers.

where it seems that Cooper has slipped into what we might call "argumentative impatience," offering mere assertions for points that really require argumentation and evidence.

Due to constraints of space and time, I'll limit myself to a single example. The first has to do with Cooper's frequent assertions that terrorists are well aware of the futility and moral illegitimacy of their actions. Despite the frequency with which this point appears, Cooper offers very little in the way of argumentation or evidence for it. The point is far from inconsequential, as it seems to be a necessary condition for validating a central proposition of the book (perhaps *the* central proposition), namely, that certain terrorists are spiritually diseased. We can view the centrality of the proposition from two different angles. In practical terms, Cooper needs the point that terrorists are aware of the futility of their actions because it supports the diagnosis that they are spiritually diseased against the alternative possibility that they are merely misguided in tactical or strategic matters. And, in ethical terms, Cooper needs the point that terrorists are aware of the moral illegitimacy of their actions because his pneumopathology thesis holds that they are not merely morally obtuse but "morally insane." To cite a couple of instances:

The curious twilight form of existence, where members of a terrorist group both know and refuse to acknowledge what they know perfectly well, is enacted by both leaders and followers. (26)

The reality that terrorists carefully avoid facing is that killing the innocent is inherently illegitimate. Moreover, terrorists are sufficiently aware of this truth or of this ethical reality that they go to great efforts to deny it. (40)

Passages that assert this basic point--or which are premised upon it--can be found at many points in the book, but these two examples will suffice for present purposes, as they touch upon the related but distinct issues of terrorist self-awareness regarding tactical and ethical matters.

It is clear that the structure of Cooper's argument requires this basic point in its tactical and ethical aspects, but not clear that he substantiates it adequately for those unprepared to accept it on its face. When noting the pneumopathological tendencies of specific individuals, Cooper sometimes notes that they seem otherwise intelligent and competent, as if to suggest that when they engage in violent but futile action or incitement, they *must* know better. But this is not terribly satisfying. History offers an abundance of cases in which generally successful people fall prey to particular strategic blind spots, or in which more-or-less upstanding characters slip into ignominy due to a single strain of moral incapacity. Similarly, Cooper sometimes seems to presume that certain patterns of action can be taken to *imply* that agents are aware of the futility of what they are doing, as when terrorists engage in an action that will purportedly install them as leaders of a new order--but do so while taking care to avoid detection by police from the old order. Again, this is not terribly satisfying, as we know that inconsistencies and hedging of various sorts are quite common among ordinary people, and that activists of various stripes can be actuated by extremely robust self-confidence while also being stalked continually by self doubt. Cooper tries to make a dramatic point--that terrorists are engaged in murderous but pointlessly ineffective acts while knowing full well that the acts are pointless--yet his arguments and evidence seem insufficiently substantial to support it. He may be convinced that these terrorists know better in their heart of hearts, and that their actions in the presence of such knowledge constitutes a type of spiritual disorder. And he may have convinced me of this as well. But the business of diagnosing spiritual disorders in others on the basis of written accounts is an inherently dubious one for most general readers in terrorist studies, both because it deals with spiritual matters and also because it does so in a judgmental manner inconsistent with the tolerant ethos of academic circles in liberal societies. Skepticism comes with the territory for

one doing what Cooper is doing, and I think the book would have been more effective if he had worked more patiently to persuade readers who require some persuading if they are to follow his line of analysis.

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Although my readings of the book have left me uncertain about Cooper's intended audience and occasionally surprised that he has not pressed his points more exhaustively, these reservations are more than counterbalanced by admiration for by the sheer number of important matters he addresses and by his willingness to tackle even the most intricate problems. To be clear about my meaning when mentioning "intricate problems," I mean problems that are so nuanced and multi-layered that they cannot be resolved in a simple and straightforward way. When such problems appear in the course of an investigation, an analyst's only choice is to skirt them or to explore their complexities and offer an account that is appropriately ambivalent or even multi-valent. Cooper, to his credit, clearly takes the latter tack at every important juncture. That his written treatment of such problems is not always as clear-cut as a reader might wish reflects only on the reader and on the nature of the problems at hand; such an outcome reflects no shortcoming in the author. Nevertheless, a reader might still reasonably wish to draw out the author just a bit when left with a seemingly ambivalent treatment, and that is what I hope to do here in relation to three issues:

1) *To what degree are we dealing with something new when confronting contemporary, religiously inspired terrorism?* This question is taken up quite frequently in current treatments of terrorism, but in almost every instance the time frame is much more narrow than what Cooper is prepared to consider. Similarly, current accounts almost always treat terrorism itself in a much

narrower way, with a primary emphasis on tactics and techniques, whereas Cooper is willing to consider underlying motivations in a way that opens many more possible lines of continuity to movements from the past.

For example, Colonel Russell Howard from the United States Military Academy understands "New Terrorism" in contradistinction to the politically motivated, commando-style terrorism of the Baader-Mainhof gang or of Abu Nidal of the Fatah National Council. "New Terrorism" is associated with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, and is said to be novel in six ways: it is more violent; better financed; undertaken by terrorists who are transnational and dissociated from particular states; who are better trained in the arts of war and the black arts; whose organizations are more difficult to penetrate; and who possibly have access to weapons of mass destruction.⁶ [6] Cooper is also interested in distinguishing between what he terms "traditional" and "modern" terrorists, and between the politically motivated terrorists of the 1970s and the religiously motivated ones of the early 21st century. However, since Cooper is prepared to move beyond *what* terrorists do to consider *why* they do it, his time frame in considering precursors extends back to include the Thugs, Assassins and Zealots of prior centuries, and permits him to note that "contemporary religious terrorists have followed a pattern remarkably close to that initially made by several spiritual movements of the late medieval and Christian West" (14).

Cooper's book shows that he well aware of current conventions for distinguishing "new" terrorists from those of earlier periods, but also that he is not entirely persuaded of the adequacy of these conventions. He is prepared to follow them as far as they go, as in the case of Bruce

6 [6] Russell D. Howard, "Understanding Al Qaeda's Application of the New Terrorism--The Key to Victory in the Current Campaign," in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment* (Guilford , Connecticut : McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004, 75-85), 75-76.

Hoffman's analysis (55-56), but seems to suggest that they do not go far enough due to an insufficiently inclusive methodology. Thus, following a summary of Hoffman's distinctions, Cooper contends that "an arguably more adequate way to understand the logic of religious terrorism is to consider it as a second reality" (56). From this perspective, Cooper seems less impressed than his more conventional counterparts with the purportedly novel aspects of so-called "new terrorism." For example, conventional analysts tend to regard "traditional" terrorists as having been more concerned with terrorism as a performance for a public audience other than the victims themselves; they wanted "a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening and not a lot of people dead,^{7 [7]} " whereas the terrorists of September 11, 2001 clearly wanted a lot of people dead. However, utilizing the perspective and conceptual tools he draws from Voegelin and Arendt, Cooper notes that traditional and "new" terrorism both involve performance aspects. Traditional terrorists were typically performing for a television audience, and "new" terrorists perform for this audience as well; "the difference is that the performance of the religiously motivated terrorist is conducted on an imaginative ♦'cosmic' stage, a stage with an imaginary world-transcendent dimension, as well as upon the mundane stage of the commonsense world, the world of the first reality" (56).

On balance, Cooper's unconventional approach to terrorism seems to leave him relatively underwhelmed by the purportedly novel aspects of "new terrorism," and more inclined to find fundamental continuities not only with terrorists of earlier decades, but with ideologists and religious sectarians of earlier centuries. Thus, Cooper writes,

^{7 [7]} This oft-quoted remark is attributed to Brian Jenkins and quoted in Cooper, *New Political Religions*, 31.

The change from what we have loosely called traditional terrorist acts, the propaganda of the deed where the object is to terrify a large number of onlookers by killing a few, to the suicidal mass murders of September 11, 2001, clearly indicates a change in operational style. But only the style has changed. The substance remains: a pneumopathological consciousness projects a second reality and acts murderously within first reality by killing a lot of otherwise innocent people. (50)

There is not much doubt that Cooper regards the killings perpetrated by ideological activists and medieval sectarians as likewise having been undertaken within closely comparable second realities, however immanentist they may *formally* have been in ideological cases or however apocalyptic sectarian ones. Yet Cooper is not unprepared to acknowledge certain aspects of contemporary terrorism as notably different from prior forms, so it makes sense to ask: What--if anything--does he regard as significantly new in terrorism? Are the changes witnessed within terrorism in recent decades substantial or merely stylistic? Does Cooper see spiritually significant differences or merely formal ones distinguishing contemporary terrorist acts from acts undertaken in the service of ideological movements? What--if any--are the important differences between religiously motivated terrorists of the present day and radical sectarians of prior eras?

2) *To what degree is Islamist terrorism traceable to elements of Islam?* Cooper offers a careful analysis of many historical and doctrinal issues that have a bearing on this question, but I don't know that he ever addresses it in a straightforward way. I don't much blame him for this, since it may be perilous (in several senses) to approach the matter so baldly, and also since it may be impossible to address the question without recourse to so many nuances and qualifiers that one's answer could never be judged "straightforward." Still, it can't hurt to ask.

At certain points, Cooper *seems* to offer a relatively straightforward assessment of the issue, as when he writes: "To put the matter plainly: contemporary Islamists have more in common with members of the Kach Party in Israel or the Christian Identity movement in Idaho

than they do with the broad traditions of Islam" (14). Clear as that may seem at first blush, the "more in common" in this sense doesn't quite imply that Islamists have *nothing* in common with the broad traditions of Islam. Similarly, Cooper observes that,

With respect to Islam, understood in as wide a sense as possible, we should not expect consistency between the pious traditional Muslim who seeks in his or her religion only to learn how to live in accord with God's will, and the fanatic who is clear that he knows God's will and that God's will demands that he attack the Great Satan by flying airplanes into buildings or by other murderous deeds. (74)

This is almost unexceptionable, and yet one can still wonder whether a traditional Muslim seeking to live in accord with God's will might not have different propensities than a traditional Christian or Jew--due to the doctrinal peculiarities of the three religious traditions and the different pragmatic histories of the societies and religious communities formed by them.

In fact, Cooper seems prepared to acknowledge such differences and peculiarities, at least in general terms, and also to acknowledge that they lead to differing propensities in political life--again, in general terms. For example (and a single example should suffice as backing for a restatement of the question), Cooper observes that,

The most obvious characteristic of the early history of the Islamic community was its political success. Unlike Christianity, which penetrated an already existing political order, imperial Rome, Islam combined temporal and spiritual activity in a single act of imperial-religious founding. The victories of the Prophet were understood to be the victories of God. [B]ecause Christianity was not concerned initially with founding a political order, [w]hen Christians have acceded to seats of power, this has not typically been regarded as proof of the truth of Christianity, and the end of any particular earthly city--the sack of Rome in 410 by Alaric, for example--has not typically been understood as a religious catastrophe so much as a political disaster. Not so with Islam. (78-79)

As Cooper goes on to show, there was a very different resonance within Islam when the Mongols destroyed Baghdad and killed the last Abbasid Caliph in 1258. Although the response of the Islamic world was multi-dimensional (involving greater emphasis on a more mystical, less

immanentist interpretation of Islam as well as efforts to convert the conquerors), and though it shared some elements also seen in Jewish and Christian history (such as a stress on a recovery of the original purity of the founding period), the Islamic response also included an emphasis on jihad. Cooper connects this with the writings of Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya and the origins of the ideology of "salafism" or "jihadist salafism," which in turn he identifies as "an important constituent element in the spiritual complex of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 .

Jihadist salafism is, of course, but one (perverted) stream running out of Islam, which has also given rise to sublime manifestations. We should also note--as Cooper does--that Jewish and Christian history show disordered streams as well. However, these caveats do not drain the force from the question: to what degree is Islamist terrorism traceable to elements of Islam? Are its core elements spiritually destabilizing? Are they destabilizing to a greater degree than those of the Jewish or Christian traditions? Certain analysts have been willing--foolishly or not--to speak straightforwardly regarding core frictions, as when Samuel Huntington writes: "The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power.⁸ [8] " We can use similar terms to ask the pressing question: What proportion of the problem of Islamic fundamentalism should we ascribe to Islam?

3) *What proportion of the problem of Islamic fundamentalism should we ascribe to the so-called "root cause" conditions of life in the Islamic world?* This question is obviously related to the preceding one, and since both loom large in Cooper's book, I worry it will appear that I'm

⁸ [8] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York : Simon & Schuster, 1996; Touchstone Books paperback edition, 1997, 217-18.

asking him to re-state his entire analysis. That is not my intention, and of course I am aware that it is an understatement to call this question unwieldy. However, it may not be unfair to ask Cooper to summarize his views regarding the question, since it addresses a problem that figures prominently in the entire book but never quite comes to the fore in a direct way.

Cooper displays a keen awareness and a deep appreciation for the problems confronted by young men whose days are spent on the "hot filthy, ugly, and chaotic streets of Cairo or Damascus " (19). His account of the tensions and frustrations of pragmatic existence confronted by potential extremists is exceptionally thoughtful, detailed, and, at times, even empathetic. And yet, when engaged in the theoretical work of diagnosing the consciousness of violent extremists, Cooper's account can also seem quite dismissive of the importance of factors such as poverty and unemployment. Noting the "categorical limitation of all 'root cause' arguments," Cooper writes:

There are no "root causes" because every grievance, whether political or personal, is specific. Moreover, the use of terrorism to address a grievance is bound to make matters worse, not better, because if it is successful, and a particular grievance is indeed addressed, the result will be to encourage someone else, with an entirely different grievance, to use terrorism in a quite different context. As Paul Bremmer, former counterterrorism coordinator for the State Department, said: "There's no point in addressing the so-called root causes of bin Laden's despair with us. We are the root causes of his terrorism. He doesn't like America . He doesn't like our society. He doesn't like what we stand for. He doesn't like our values. And short of the United States going out of existence, there's no way to deal with the root cause of his terrorism.' (23-24)

A passage such as this seems quite direct and final, but it doesn't quite settle the issue that I wish to pursue. The passage says more about the unworkability of fighting terrorism by means of ameliorating "root cause" grievances than it does about how such grievances actually figure in the dynamics of consciousness of the budding terrorist. In this sense, Cooper seems prepared to

accord them some importance, though there are limits to this. That is, Cooper recognizes a powerful stimulus toward extremism in the tension arising from the discrepancy between, on one hand, a young man's convictions regarding the spiritual superiority of Islam over the West and, on the other hand, his distress regarding his personal poverty and powerlessness relative to his Western counterparts. In this sense, so-called "root cause" problems should be taken seriously. However, when theoretically considering the etiology of actual instances of terrorist murder or pneumopathological consciousness, Cooper seems inclined to stress that so-called "root cause" problems do not operate as either sufficient or necessary conditions.

We can see that they are not *sufficient* conditions because millions of individuals suffer from poverty and unemployment in the Islamic world but do not murder innocents or lapse into pneumopathological fantasies of attaining paradise thereby. And we can see that so-called "root cause" problems do not operate as *necessary* conditions for terrorism because plenty of actual terrorists simply do not suffer from them. Cooper notes that this is true of the wealthy and privileged bin Laden himself, and also of the September 2001 terrorists, who "were not young, poor, ill-educated, or psychologically damaged" (154).

Yet, looking at the full sentence from which this last quote was drawn, it appears that we cannot quite dismiss "root cause" problems as irrelevant: "Moreover, the profile of the September 2001 terrorists was much different than the typical Hamas recruit: they were not young, poor, ill-educated, or psychologically damaged, as so many of their predecessors seemed to be." So, we must ask: how important are the degraded day-to-day conditions of life for understanding those Hamas recruits? Are "root cause" problems important for understanding the motivations of rank-and-file terrorists, but not their commanders or the ideologists who inspire them? And, allowing that "root cause" problems don't stand scrutiny as necessary conditions when viewed in the context of an aggregated population, are they nevertheless necessary conditions within the consciousness of an individual pneumopath? That is, are they not necessary to produce the tension of consciousness giving rise to pneumopathology, with its dissonance between the conviction of Islam's spiritual superiority and its political and economic inferiority? And finally, to restate the broad question just to be sure that it is left up on the table, what proportion of the

problem of Islamic fundamentalism should we ascribe to the so-called "root cause" conditions of life in the Islamic world?

* * *

In closing, I should note once again that *New Political Religions* is a work of great importance regardless of the necessary and obvious fact that it leaves questions in its wake. It is far more penetrating than any account of religiously motivated terrorism that I have encountered, and has far more theoretical value and explanatory power than merely descriptive works such as Jessica Stern's *Terror in the Name of God*.⁹ [9] Unlike analyses such as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, which only *seem* to take religion and spirituality seriously when considering terrorism in a functionalist manner, Cooper's book penetrates to the interior consciousness of the terrorist in a way that illuminates the actual psychic workings of disordered religiosity. In brief, *New Political Religions* is a remarkable achievement and a leading contribution--perhaps *the* leading contribution--in the effort of science to come to grips with the primary political challenge of our time.

⁹ [9] Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York : Ecco, 2003).