One of the underappreciated features of the ideology behind modern Islamic terrorism is its affinity in form and spirit to the radical Western ideologies that produced the terrors of Hitlerian Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union, to mention only the most egregious Western cases. 20th-century philosopher Eric Voegelin gave perhaps the most penetrating analysis of modern Western radicalism (both “left” and “right”) ever offered, exposing its fundamental inner dynamics and examining parallel phenomena in Western and even pre-Western history going all the way back to ancient Egypt. (I have adopted the term “radical” as a descriptor of these varying phenomena to indicate their common drive for total transformation of the human situation. See the discussion on terminology, below.) Voegelin’s comparative analysis of the relevant historical material is highly illuminating, and a systematic treatment of radical Islamist ideology in light of Voegelin’s findings may prove equally enlightening. I mean in this paper to lay the groundwork for such a treatment. Specifically, the plan here is to show how the formal and dynamic features of today’s radical Islamism parallel those of Western radicalism as Voegelin limned it, first surveying the common forms and then, following Voegelin’s empirical method, going deeper to the parallel experiences that have motivated and shaped
the formal constructions. Thereafter I will indicate the critical differences between Western and Islamic radicalism and what may account for them.

There are, of course, important differences of both form and substance within Western and Islamic radical domains. Recognizing and accounting for all these differences are obviously imperative for achieving a fine-grained understanding of the movements and the challenges they pose for us. But the fact of common forms and experiences suggests that the fundamental problems involved are not culture-bound or unique to particular times and circumstances but stem from basic human tendencies and common reactions to constant or at least recurring dynamics of the human condition. Understanding these common human factors should help a great deal in handling the proliferating variations on the themes.

The “formal” part of the various radicalisms is typically what we mean by “ideology.” But as Voegelin stressed, we can never hope to understand modern ideological movements if we keep to the level of abstract ideas [[cite]]. Something much more inward and energetic happens in the formation of, adherence to, and application of rigid ideologies than bad conceptualizations and logical missteps. It’s not as if Hitler became a mass murderer because he failed to solve some intellectual puzzle. In fact, the prevailing conception of an ideology as a set or system of ideas is itself entirely inadequate, if “ideas” are taken to mean abstract concepts. The form of ideology is something more subtle than that. Dostoevsky captured the nature of ideology more adequately in his Demons (sometimes translated The Possessed). In the forward to a recent translation of that book, Richard Pevear explains that the “demons” indicated in the title are, as Dostoevsky intended them, “ideas, that legion
of isms that came to Russia from the West: idealism, rationalism, empiricism, materialism, utilitarianism, positivism, socialism, anarchism, nihilism, and, underlying them all, atheism” (Demons, xvii). These isms weren’t to Dostoevsky merely conceptual systems but something more like symbolic outgrowths of existential distortions. Some inward obsession ate at the insides of the creators of ideologies making them see the world reductively, through the narrow prism of the obsession. (See Demons, xvii-xviii.) So, to the rationalist, everything that counts is logic; to the utilitarian, everything is instrumental; to the Marxist, everything is economics; to the Nazi, everything is race. What causes these obsessions is a difficult question, but the first step to understanding ideology is to grasp the intimate connection between its external form and the inner states that give rise to and sustain it and to see that the “ideas” involved are not mere concepts or logical postulates but something much more vivid and emotionally compelling, less what a person thinks than something that seizes his thoughts and leaves him, as it were, transfixed, so that he forgets, or tries to forget, other human concerns.

**Words and Ideas**

We must, then, understand the ideologue to understand the ideology. But the place to start studying the ideologue is to scrutinize his ideological formulations, his words. We can’t know what the maker of an ideology is thinking until we consider what he says. This indeed is true for understanding human thought and action in general, and it will therefore be critical for us, if we are to grasp the context in which he operates and which sparks and facilitates his action, to consider not only the violent Muslim ideologue’s words but those also of other interested parties, actors
and observers alike. In his *Hitler and the Germans* Voegelin indicates the basic empirical procedure for studying political phenomena, and I will apply his method in working over the problem of radical Islam. The essential elements of the method, which he takes to be the method of Aristotle (see NSP & SPG), are: (1) survey the political situation, and especially what people are saying about it; (2) critically examine prevailing clichés and develop more adequate terminology for comprehending the scene; (3) penetrate to and elucidate the deeper dynamics underlying the surface phenomena [[cite H&G]].

What people say about the political situation, both actors and observers, is centrally important for understanding political events because their words reveal their thoughts about the state of things, what facts are most relevant, what the facts mean, and what should be done in response to them. People’s actions and judgments hinge on their interpretations of their circumstances, not only of immediate circumstances but of the general state of the world—of history, the human condition, and the structure of reality itself, human and otherwise. For instance, it makes a great deal of difference practically, in peoples motives, actions, and reactions, whether they think successes and failures are a result of divine intention or impersonal natural processes or human choice or some combination of these. Religious, scientific, moral, and utilitarian assumptions are often decisive. All these assumptions and perceptions reveal themselves in the way people talk about things, and the opinions expressed indicate the substantive motives of behavior.

Critical analysis of a specific political situation involves first of all putting conventional wisdom about it to the test, and more particularly conventional
categorizations, or in other words the common clichés used in popular conversation, media, and above all in elite discourse. The point of getting the right words, it bears emphasis, is to get beyond words to the matter itself, to see the reality in question squarely and sharply. A friend of mine at West Point, an army major who’s been in the field and faced the terrorists directly, warned me against falling into merely semantic disputes in my analysis. He complained that many of the articles written on Islamist terrorism and ideology seemed little better than competitions over whose preferred formulations would prevail in the academic and policy literature. Indeed, too often academic “studies” have degenerated into popularity contests to make a name for the authors. It is good to remind ourselves that, contra the so-called linguistic philosophers, the most valuable words have reference not only to other words but to empirical reality and that the best linguistic symbols are the ones that help us see what’s really going on rather than what we just imagine, or would like to imagine, is happening. The aim of our investigation, if we want to be scientific, must be to get beneath the words and beneath the competing interpretations as much as possible to the deeper forces driving events, to not merely talk about them but to see them.

Let’s begin our analysis, then, with a criticism of clichés about contemporary Islamic terrorism and what’s behind it:

_Causes of terror_

- Socio-economic, personal, or political conditions or Western policies “caused” the attitudes and behaviors of the terrorists. This is incoherent. No doubt the Treaty of Versailles and Germany’s economic crisis after World War I were
important preconditions of the Nazis’ ascendancy, but not every nation in economic travail has responded to their problems by calculated holocausts and campaigns for world domination. Again, Hitler’s failure to make a career in painting may well have made him bitter, but most frustrated artists don’t resort to genocide to vent their unhappiness. Similarly, no U.S. policy or even a single U.S. action, however misguided or unjust, explains 9/11. The explanation must be found in the terrorists themselves. Knowing the circumstances of such acts is essential for understanding what they were responding to, but the circumstances in themselves tell nothing of why they responded as they did.

Naming the enemy

-“Fundamentalists.” The modern terrorists acting in the name of Islam are often called this. The term is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it is very imprecise. Users of the term usually have some loose sense of what they’re talking about, but much too loose for the word to be of much analytical and practical value. Associated notions of literalism, puritanism, rigidity, hostility to “modern” values and developments, and the like are also ill defined, inadequately elaborated and the relations between them rarely considered, much less spelled out. Second, the term in both popular and elite discourse is almost always used with great condescension, and the feeling of absolute superiority as against those under the label prevents the humble self-awareness that enables dispassionate consideration. To Western secular elites, “fundamentalism” and devout religion are frequently conflated. Anyone passionately dedicated to religious faith and practice is for them suspect, presumptively inclined to intolerance, hatred, persecution, and violence, always
inches away from imposing a new Inquisition if only his coreligionists had the
numbers to pull it off. This ironically, with respect to Muslims, encourages the very
tendency to conflate Islam and Islamist radicals the elites claim to deplore.
Similarly, religious reverence for past events, old traditions, old teachings is seen as
unsophisticated and backward, or at least “backward-looking”. Devotion to
fundamentals of the faith as established long ago is necessarily reactionary;
religious folk, if they insist on being religious, should get over the past and get
“modern,” meaning preoccupied with what preoccupies progressive, secular elites.
No distinction is made between conservatism or concern for fundamentals and
primitivism. The very idea of truth, to today’s prestige Western intellectuals, is
suspect, to say nothing of religious truth or the moral truths religions like Islam and
Christianity affirm. Truth claims, in their minds, are inherently tyrannical, and
asserters of truth in general are taken to be a species of fundamentalist. Religious
elites typically deploy “fundamentalist” with the same condescending mood as the
secularists, though of course appreciating the value of religion. Both secular and
religious elites breezily assume their own sophistication and fail to take seriously
those pinned with the fundamentalist label, either for what they say or for their very
real and very human struggles and concerns.

One of the more important practical consequences of the indiscriminate and
condescending use of “fundamentalism” in the present context of Islamic terrorism
is that it makes it very difficult to distinguish friend from enemy. If fundamentalism
means devotion to fundamentals of the faith as originally understood, then most
serious Muslims, as most serious Christians and Jews, are fundamentalists. If we want to disaggregate the enemy from Muslims at large, we have to get clear on this.

- “Salafism” is an inadequate descriptor of radical Islam for [[partly]] the same reasons “fundamentalism” is. (See Euben Readings, 19-23, on dist b/t Islamism and Salafism.)

Who then are we talking about when we speak of terrorist ideologues like bin Laden? We must first distinguish between ordinary practicing Muslims and Islamists, the latter of whom are much, much more preoccupied with politics than the former. Indeed, “Islamism” is as often used but a synonym for Islamic thought and practice in its political dimension, as politically concerned Muslims variously understand it. But politically concerned Muslims understand Islam's political side very differently. At the more radical end of the spectrum, Islam is fundamentally a political enterprise. This vision of the faith is sometimes called “political Islam,” meaning politicized Islam, Islam not as a religion in the traditional sense but as a political project. For most Muslims, even the politically engaged, the political is only one of several dimensions of Islam, and not the most important of them. There are varieties of Islamism, then, not all of them radical, much less violent. [[ ]] Husein in his textbook Global Islamic Politics helpfully classified the varieties as “traditional,” “modernist,” and “revolutionary.” [[Elab.]] [[See Habeck.]] And there is considerable variety within each of these categories [[see Liberal Islam]].

Not all those called “Islamists,” then, are violent revolutionaries, [[though there is a good case for using “Islamism” more restrictively, which we’ll consider shortly]]. Nor is the willingness to employ, support, or condone violence an
adequate discriminator (contra Joe Lieberman): first, violence is justifiable in
certain circumstances, and we need to show why it’s not in the current case; second,
we need to get at the ideology behind the violence, which can’t be reduced to an
ideology of violence—the violence is motivated by more than mere bloodlust,
though bloodlust cannot be discounted as an additional psychic dynamic, and one
that may be a natural culmination of revolutionary ideology. Core of Islamism and
its fundamental error—see Euben, Readings, 11-12.

What, then, should we call those terrorizing today in the name of Islam?
Three things about them seem most critical to understand: first, and most
obviously, their proclivity to violence; second, their brand of religiosity; and third,
their ideological orientation. The term “fundamentalist,” in addition to the problems
mentioned above, does not indicate the ideological dimension of the problem. The
leaders of the terrorist movement do not adhere to Islam as traditionally
understood, and the model of the pristine original Islam to which they look back is
put in the service of quite modern [[goals]]. “Islamofascist” has been employed in
some quarters to capture the totalitarian character of the movement and suggests
its affinity to radical Western movements, but “fascist” is too narrow to serve either
purpose. [[Elab?]] Husein’s “revolutionary Islamist” seems the most precise
moniker: the “-ism” suggests the ideological component; the “revolutionary”
distinguishes those arguing for violent world-transformation from those seeking
harmony or at least peaceful coexistence with non-Muslim persons and nations.
More important than settling on a final label is to avoid using misleading names. I
will myself use variations of “revolutionary Islamism” and “radical Islam” as primary
labels. As noted previously, Islamic radicals are not necessarily violent, but in general they embrace a revolutionary ideology that seeks radical transformation of the world and lends itself to violence.

One further distinction must be made: between the ideological leadership and the foot soldiers, whose motives for joining in may be highly variable. The motives may be generally categorized, however, as either soteriological or instrumental—seeking salvation/escape from circumstances felt to be unbearable through “magic,” first willing and then trying to effect fundamental transformation of humanity and the human condition; or using the movement as a vehicle to pursue non-ideological goals (money, social status, what have you. It may be very difficult to determine what portion of joiners to the revolution are soteriologically motivated. For one thing, those wishing to be saved from bad economic circumstances or the stifling and degrading effects of tyranny may in many cases, strictly speaking, be economically or merely politically rather than ideologically motivated but may still buy into the hope of magical world-transformation. Such joiners are moved by a need for greater meaning or fulfillment rather than greed or status-seeking and may embrace the project of forcing a vaguely conceived Islamic system on the world despite lacking a full-blown ideology; that is, they may mean to join a cause rather than merely exploit an opportunity for personal gain.

It is critical to understand what the attraction of radical Islam is to joiners of the cause. The only way to understand the revolutionaries is to understand why they are drawn to these efforts, and the only way to defeat revolutionary Islamism
ultimately is to render it unattractive by exposing its inhumanity and inner rottenness.

*Characterizing Western-Islamic Relations*

- “Islamic world.” Objections to this term are sometimes made on the basis that there are many varieties of Muslims religiously, culturally, in terms of their political attitudes and views of society, and so on. It is true both that Muslims are a very diverse group and that this fact is often not realized by ordinary Westerners. But phrases like “Islamic world” and “Islamic civilization” remain indispensable for the same reasons that “the West” and “Western civilization” are. Germans, English, French, and Americans have very significant differences culturally, politically, and otherwise, but they have some things in common that set them apart from the non-Western world (or at least did set them apart before Western influence spread across the world). So with Muslim peoples, who have at least these things in common: sacred writings (Koran and hadith), authoritative traditions (sunna), the “five pillars” of faith (the profession of faith that Allah is the one God, and Muhammad is his prophet; prayers; fasting; almsgiving; and pilgrimage to Mecca), adherence to higher law standard for ethics and politics. Non-Muslims, too, and nominally religious or merely cultural Muslims living in predominantly Muslim territories, are shaped by the way of life formed by these practices and beliefs. To the point: understanding the essential features of Islam and the Islamic world is critical both for upholding the reasonableness of general Islamic faith and practice and for distinguishing them from the ways of the radicals. The project of
disaggregation requires having something definite against which to measure revolutionary Islamism.

- “Clash of civilizations.” Samuel P. Huntington’s mid-1990s thesis in an article and book under that title and his use of the phrase in connection with Islamic civilization’s relation to the rest of the modern world sparked tremendous controversy among scholars and policy specialists, considerably more than was warranted. Huntington’s thesis is that in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, the bi-polar, ideological world order created by U.S.-Soviet conflict has reconfigured along civilizational lines. Old cultural identities that had been suppressed by Western and Communist hegemonies are reasserting themselves, and prominently among these are Islamic identities. Critics called Huntington’s analysis reductive, simplistic, essentialist, and the like and claimed that he had conflated militant Muslims and Muslims in general, in the process encouraging a dangerously conflict-oriented understanding of the world scene. There is no space here to weigh the evidence for and against the specific charges, but one of the central points of Huntington’s thesis seems to have gotten lost in the melee: that given the reassertions of cultural identity, the fact of which cannot plausibly be denied, the West should be careful to avoid civilizational conflict. Initial plans of revolutionary Islamists to spark such a conflict preceded Huntington’s writings on the subject, in some cases by decades, and Huntington’s warning can be turned into a provocation only by considerable distortion of what he actually said. [[Fn Bin Laden correctly understands Huntington’s thesis (al-Qaeda Reader, 28).]]
It is in fact of primary importance in the actual conflict between Islamist terrorists and that part of the world opposed to their project (most of it) to grapple with the question of civilizational identity and the meaning of “civilization.” For civilization is precisely what must be preserved against the terrorists, who are profoundly uncivilized, and it is imperative that we see very clearly the nature of the Islamic civilization they seek to overturn so that it can be preserved or, to the extent it has been weakened, restored and improved. But recognizing civilized Islam requires a prior recognition of what it means to be civilized, an adequate idea of civilization. We will take up this theme again in the conclusion.

- “Imperialism.” A primary Islamist grievance, among traditionalists and modernists as well as revolutionaries, is the perceived tyranny and humiliation foisted on them in modern times by the West, which they conceive as “imperialist.” Muslim territories, of course, labored under no mere metaphorical imperial control in the post-World War I period and have been confronted before and since the hard (as opposed to soft or informal) imperial period by a political, economic, and cultural power and dynamism in the West with which they haven’t been in a position to compete or entirely resist. Yet the terrorists’ framing of the current conflict in terms of resistance to Western imperialism, a framework accepted by not a few leftist Western intellectuals, obscures as much as it clarifies. To begin with, the paradigm implies a moral equivalence of all reactions against hegemonic power and influence, but ordinary common sense morality and any more theoretical ethical understanding worth its salt recognize that it’s possible to respond unjustly even to injustices. It is implied, too, that most or all actions and influences of great
powers must be unjust, when on even cursory observation any clear-headed person can see that people in power can behave nobly toward their weaker neighbors, as a wealthy and well-connected friend to a poor and disadvantaged one. As Aristotle said, each thing is what it is and not something else. But it’s not characteristic of radicals to be careful about moral distinctions.

The most important point here is the one observed above about the causes of terrorism. The mere fact of imperialism, hard or soft, tells us nothing about the nature of radical Islamist reaction to it. Moreover, without a more differentiated sense of the nature of Western hegemony as it stands today, we cannot even learn anything about what it is exactly the radicals are reacting against. Finally, it is by no means clear that imperialism is the only, or even the primary, thing they’re reacting against. At the very least, that it is cannot be taken for granted.

- “Orientalism.” Closely related to the reductive use of “imperialism” is what the late Edward Said presented as “Orientalism,” the alleged Western tendency to think and speak of people of the “East” in general, and the domains of Islam in particular, stereotypically, indiscriminately, and inhumanely: those Muslims are all the same, they all have these characteristics, they are those people over there and Westerners don’t care to know them for what they are, with all their human particularities. Ironically, in making his case Said radically essentialized the West. Westerners have otherized Muslims in a variety of ways, but all Westerners are guilty of dehumanizing and rhetorically oppressing the Muslims of the world (he thought they oppressed in their actions, too) and that the West was uniquely guilty of this kind of attitude and talk in the modern age by virtue of its hegemonic status.
Conversely, Muslims and Easterners were on his account relatively guiltless of stereotyping and dehumanizing Westerners, or in any case their wrongs against the West in this regard paled in comparison to Western wrongs. In fact, Said’s thesis has done more than a little to stoke the Islamist sense of grievance against the West. The leaders of Islamist global terrorism are themselves reverse-Orientalists, or Occidentalists, in the extreme: “the West” (no distinctions are made among the parts of the West) has no redeeming qualities, is simply anti-Islamic, etc. In the balance, Western observers, though as subject to inattention, prejudice, and intellectual sloppiness as the rest of mankind, have done a better job than their Islamist enemies of learning about the “Other” than the Other has of learning about them. The larger point of this paper, of course, is that the level of differentiation in Western analyses of the terrorist phenomenon, to say nothing of the Islamic world, is grossly inadequate, but the project of understanding is not helped by pretending the West is uniquely blinkered in its view of the world. There is plenty of blinking on all sides.

At stake in this discussion is not only how we understand Western-Islamic relations but how the Western and Islamic worlds understand each other and themselves. The revolutionary Islamists’ theoretical (as opposed to merely practical) objectives in relation to the Islamic world are to establish its definition of Islam as authoritative and convince Muslims at large that the West poses an existential threat to Islam. Successful resistance to these radicals will require careful consideration among Westerners and Muslims alike about what “the West” and “Islam” really are, what they could be, and what they should be. The terrorists
must not be allowed to set the terms of the debate, and their portrayals of Islam and the West must not be allowed to stand without effective rhetorical opposition. Right now, the West is winning the war of bullets and, more tenuously, the key political battles, but it is losing the war of ideas in that portion the Muslim world susceptible to falling under the spell of revolutionary Islamist propaganda.

The foregoing survey of the current rhetorical situation is, of course, incomplete, but it is perhaps enough to clear away some of the most debilitating clichés.

*Further obstacles to understanding*

Western intellectuals find themselves today under the sway of two contradictory movements, relativism and political correctness. One cannot coherently be relativist and a moralist at the same time, and political correctness in its essence is a kind of moralism. Only under this dual influence could intellectual elites dismiss moral judgments about foreigners while simultaneously subjecting the West and Western foreign policies to bitter critique. This confused attitude has spread widely in the wider educated Western populations. One relevant consequence of this development is that educated Westerners are excessively hesitant to make judgments about foreign religious phenomena. There is even resistance to admitting the religious character of revolutionary Islamism and a wish to explain it away by falling back on economic or other categories, despite the constant explicit assertions by radical Islamists of their religious motivations.

But it is possible to judge religion without prejudice or malignant intolerance. Specifically, it is reasonable to judge religion by its human effects.
variety of religion that can produce great Muslims like al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun, for instance, is self-evidently healthier than one that leads to sawing off a living reporter’s head on film for the edification of a world Internet viewing audience. It is not arrogant to recognize the difference, and doing so is both practically and theoretically absolutely necessary if we want to effectively counter the revolutionary Islamist scourge.

Refusing to acknowledge the genuinely Islamic background to radical Islam will not do, either. It is nothing against the dignity or truth of Islam to admit that the radicals draw from Islamic assumptions any more than it undermines Christianity to acknowledge that Christian abortion clinic bombers are motivated by Christian teachings. For the sake of understanding, the borrowing from genuine religion has to be acknowledged as much as the more fundamental departures from it because perversions of one religion will be different from those of another.

**Form**

The way is now open to move to the heart of our subject. The larger aim here, again, is to get a more adequate sense of radical Islam by considering what it has in common in form and spirit with Western radicalism and then how it differs. Now we begin our comparison. Voegelin addresses the Western radical movements primarily in four places: in his *Political Religions; New Science of Politics; Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*; and in his most concrete and extended analysis of a particular movement, *Hitler and the Germans*. The form of Western radicalism, Voegelin determined, is in fact shared by all of the major distinctly modern intellectual movements. Nazism, fascism, and Communism are only extreme
variants of the general tendency. The form of Western radical thought, Voegelin said, derives from the Christian conception of history as Augustine sketched it in his *City of God*. Christian revelation in Augustine’s account indicates that human history is going somewhere, it has a final destination. The cyclical dynamic of history recognized by Plato and Aristotle—the endless rise and fall of regimes—remains operative, but there will be a meaningful culmination of history in a world beyond this world where those who have loved God over themselves will find eternal happiness and those who loved themselves to the neglect or rejection of God will be left to the radical independence from God they demanded and find themselves correspondingly alienated from all good because God, the source of all good things, has left them to their miserable selves. Beyond these general features, however, history as Augustine conceived it is utterly mysterious: the details of the end-states, being beyond this world, cannot be known, nor can the precise process by which we will arrive there. After Christianity, Westerners could never look at history the same as before, and modern intellectuals retained the idea of an end of history where the good guys, if you will, find ultimate fulfillment, and the bad guys are consigned to oblivion, destroyed or perhaps merely barred from the blessings coming to those on the “right side” of history.

But moderns—in essence, those unsatisfied with the old Aristotelian-Christian tradition—increasingly tried to escape the unsettling mystery of faith by positing a clearly defined end of history in *this* world, to be effected by a knowable world-immanent process, preferably directed by intelligent human effort. The psychological need for certainty and control was overriding; reliance on a largely
Inscrutable God for direction was increasingly abandoned until, for most Western intellectuals, belief in God, or at least the idea that God might be socially relevant, was thought to be an obstacle to human development. (See SPG.) In its mild version, the modern vision of history took the form of progressivism, the idea that man can increasingly conquer or even eliminate the perennial human problems (selfishness, injustice, war, material privation, and so on) through smart planning and continual refinement of social, political, and economic systems. Progressives, Voegelin observes, tend to emphasize the process of history without feeling a need for great clarity about the end-state; it is enough for them that things are always getting “better and better”. In its more radical versions, the modern idea of history took the form of utopianism and/or revolutionary activism. Utopians tend to have definite ideas about the end but lack clarity about the process of getting there, while revolutionary activists tend to posit both a clearly defined destination and a definite process leading to it, and they intend to hurry history along to its utopian conclusion by force. (See NSP 186.) The Hitlers and Lenins of recent times, of course, fall into this last category.

The bin Ladens of today clearly fit the pattern as well, with the notable and important difference that they’ve brought God back into the process. In this sense today’s revolutionary Muslim activists resemble the apocalyptics of the high Middle Ages more than they do Nazis and Communists [[cite]]. We’ll consider the significance of that difference later. For now, pause to reflect on the common element of a move to achieve a triumphant end of history by political means.

Mawdudi, the influential 20th-century Islamist writer and founder of the radical
Pakistani group Jama’at-i-Islami, put the revolutionary Islamist project most starkly: "In reality Islam is a revolutionary ideology and programme which seeks to alter the social order of whole world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals" (Jihad in Islam, 5). “Islam wishes,” he goes on, “to destroy all states governments anywhere on the face of the earth which are opposed to the ideology and programme of Islam regardless of the country or the Nation which rules.” The very “purposes of Islam” as Mawdudi presents it, “is to set up a state on the basis of its own ideology and programme” (6). So, for Mawdudi, the purpose of Islam is political. Islam is a political program. He describes “all the Prophets of God”—Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and of course Muhammad—as “Revolutionary Leaders” (15), and says that the Muslim umma (community) exists in order to “destroy the hegemony of an un-Islamic system and establish in its place the rule of that social and cultural order which regulates life” according to sharia law (17–18). The end of the umma, which he describes as [the welfare of humanity], is only achievable on the establishment of an Islamic state and government (19) that supports and cultivates the Islamic way of life [[cite]]. This development is so crucial to the preservation and growth of Islam, Mawdudi insists, that one cannot be a true Muslim unless he actively opposes every other kind of state and seeks to live under an Islamic one (20–21). The utopianism of Mawdudi’s project is most clearly indicated in his suggestion that the ultimate aim of this political movement is “that evil...should be wiped out” (10), that “these men who propagate religion” have a “duty to wipe out oppression, mischief, strife, immorality, high handedness and unlawful exploitation from the world” (18).
That Islam is a political program for establishing an earthly paradise is by no means obvious from the Qur'an, the hadith (sayings of the Prophet and his Companions), or the sunna (practices of the same). In fact, one of the surahs (Qur'anic verses) Mawdudi cites in support of his case tells against the project: “We shall confer dignity in the Eternal world upon those who do not seek to establish their might in the world and do not wish to create strife. Success in the world Hereafter awaits those who are God-fearing” (28:83). The surah rather clearly indicates an otherworldly rather than this-worldly end. But Mawdudi is not interested in entertaining competing interpretations. To him the Qur’an is perfectly “clear and definite” on these questions, and clearly and definitely support his project (see 20-21).

Voegelin found that such projects of inducing an end of history and making a heaven on earth historically took on more definite characteristics. In his analysis of parallel phenomena to modern developments, Voegelin found the pattern of historical speculation among Western radicals first clearly laid out in the late medieval period by the Christian mystic Joachim of Fiore. Joachim’s theory of history was specifically a variant of Trinitarian speculation. With the Trinity on the brain, fundamental realities seemed to come in threes. He claimed to have discovered through mystic insight that history itself has three phases, the ages of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The first age was from Creation to the birth of Christ, the age of the layman or the simple man of faith; the second age was that of the contemplative priest; the third age, of the spiritually perfect monk, was final and would endure. (Joachim himself, unsurprisingly, was a monk.) Each age
was or would be inaugurated by a prophet, who saw what was coming, and a
leader—a Christ-like savior—who actually took humanity to the next level. The last
leader would usher in a permanent “Third Realm” of a “brotherhood of autonomous
persons” (Voegelin’s phrase) where no institutional authorities would be needed
because each man lived by the spirit alone. Joachim himself, with all due modesty,
took the role of prophet of the last age, and immediately a group of Franciscans took
their own St. Francis of Assisi, to the latter’s great mortification, to be the great
leader Joachim foretold [[cite]].

The complex of symbols involved in Joachim’s speculative scheme would
powerfully shape the historical-political imaginations of later Western intellectuals
long after Joachim himself was forgotten. For our purposes the most interesting
cases in point are the visions of Hitler and Lenin. Hitler presented himself as both
prophet and leader of the Third Reich in which human beings would finally reach
fulfillment through the triumph of the Aryan race. Marx had been Lenin’s prophet,
of course, but it was up to Lenin to make Marx’s dream come true and instigate the
process that would end in a post-political world where, as Marx put it, a man could
“hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after
dinner [as he wished] without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic”
(Tucker 1972:124). [[Name the 3 stages.]] In both cases, sinister forces seemed at
work to thwart or delay the glorious event, and these had to be overcome. To put it
bluntly, anyone standing in the path of progress had to be removed. In Hitler’s case
it was the unaccountably successful Jews—we know how he dealt with that
problem. For Marx and Lenin, the old capitalist system had to be destroyed—and,
naturally, the capitalists who ran it. The logic of history, since God wasn't running it anymore and since history seemed to need a little help completing its “inevitable” course, indicated premeditated violence and radical destruction of the old order as a historical necessity: it seemed the various human obstacles would not go quietly.

The same symbols and the same logic captured the minds of leading radical Sunni Islamists like Mawdudi and 20th-century Egyptian intellectual Sayyid Qutb. They, too, seem to hold a tripartite conception of Islamic history (the history that counts for them), with an age of pure, true religion under the guidance of Muhammed and the “rightly guided Caliphs [successors to the Prophet]” (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali); an age of ignorance and corruption resembling that in Arabia before the rise of Islam, which the Qur’an styled “Jahiliyya” (Mawdudi used the term in this way, and Qutb made the concept of Jahiliyya central to his theory); and a final age of Muslim brotherhood where true Islam is triumphant in the world and Muslims, having rediscovered the true meaning of revelation, are enlightened and morally restored. Shi’ites generally have understood Islamic history in terms of an age of relative purity beginning under the Prophet and ending with the loss of worthy successors to lead the faithful; an age of waiting for the appearance of the “Hidden Imam” or Leader; and a last age of perfection ushered in when the missing Imam reappears. Traditionally, the Shia vision of history did not coincide with a revolutionary thought and action because the timing of the Imam’s reappearance was solely in God’s hands and could not be hastened by human effort. But this changed dramatically with Komeini and the Iranian Revolution of the late 1970s when Komeini and supporters rejected traditional Shia quietism in favor of seizing
control of history to put it on the right path. Particular differences aside, however, Mawdudi and Qutb’s general vision of history is fully representative of revolutionary Islamists, Sunni and Shia alike: a Golden Age, an age of backsliding and humiliation, and a final age of righteous triumph and fulfillment to be precipitated by militant political action.

Mawdudi and Qutb each of whom called for a Lenin-style “vanguard” who, seizing on the newly received or rather (in their minds) rediscovered message they conveyed, would initiate the revolution that would establish once and for all a worldwide caliphate [[explain in fn]] under God’s law as they understood it. Here is Qutb’s statement on the subject in his seminal book *Milestones*, which has been a primary inspiration for such self-appointed leaders of the movement as Osama bin Laden:

How is it possible to start the task of reviving Islam? It is necessary that there should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of Jahiliyyah [the morally and spiritually blind, corrupt current condition of man]... It is necessary that this vanguard should know the landmarks and the milestones of the road toward this goal so that they may recognize the starting place, the nature, the responsibilities and the ultimate purpose of this long journey. Not only this, but they ought to be aware of their position as opposed to this Jahiliyyah, which has struck its stakes throughout the earth... I have written *Milestones* for this vanguard, which I consider to be a waiting reality about to be materialized (*Milestones*, 12).
Qutb in fact didn’t leave the matter to chance but, like Lenin, created an actual vanguard, with himself as its leader. While in prison in Egypt for alleged conspiratorial activity with the notorious Muslim Brothers, Qutb handpicked a fellow inmate “to be his heir to the spiritual leadership of the [vanguard] apparatus” he was developing (Musallam 168). After his execution by the Nasser regime (his *Milestones* was the key piece of evidence on which he was convicted and sentenced, ibid., 170), “vanguard families” established themselves in Egyptian prisons to carry on the legacy, taking the writings of Qutb and Mawdudi (among others) as a guide (ibid., 164-65).

Like Hitler, Marx, and Lenin, Mawdudi and Qutb had their devils to destroy, in general the currently dominant political, economic, and ideological systems—of the Western colonial and quasi-colonial powers and of the corrupt and falsely named Islamic states persecuting and oppressing the true believers....... 

The larger common features of these radical formations, then, are the idea of an ideal end of history to be achieved in the here and now by human, and specifically political, means; the claim to know this end in some sense and the process by which it will happen; and the appointment of some one or few to spearhead the movement. The notion that the end-state will involve an emergent brotherhood of mankind, or at least of that part of mankind thought to count, seems persistent through the competing versions. But many other specific characteristics seem to hold across the variations as well, some implied in the larger features and some probably related but not obviously implicated. Voegelin mentions among
them the radicals’ intemperate condemnations of selected social evils and groups; blaming all social ills on the government or other leading groups and recommending a new government or system as the solution to all problems; propagandizing to convince prospects of the vanguard’s exclusive insight into history’s meaning and show the nefariousness of scapegoats and critics; self-identifying as an “elect” of brothers far above the level of ordinary mankind; prohibiting questioning, debate, or theoretical probing of movement doctrine; rejecting all compromise with outsiders, resisters, or doubters; purging adherents of the old order and then anyone who hesitates to yield to the demands of the new way (as interpreted, of course, by the leadership); all culminating in endless struggle and total war. The ecumenical nature of these characteristics is evident in the fact that this list could be derived from any of the movements; you cannot tell reading it whether the subject was the Nazis, the Bolsheviks, the radical Islamists, or some other radical group. In fact, Voegelin drew the list from Richard Hooker’s analysis of the radical 16th-century Puritans.

Qutb’s example is instructive here. The world’s problems stemmed, he claimed, from the corruption of pure Islam, and Islam had been corrupted specifically by the influence non-Muslim ideas and practices. The first generation of Muslims, he says, “drank solely from this spring [of the Qur’an]... In later times it happened that other sources mingled with it. Other sources used by later generations included Greek philosophy and logic, ancient Persian legends and their ideas, Jewish scriptures and traditions, Christian theology, and, in addition to these, fragments of other religions and civilizations” (M, 17). Apparently, it is impossible
that anyone not a Muslim could have anything to offer humanity or recognize any truths of significance. The non-Muslim world is, simply, Jahiliyyah, and any Muslim worthy of the name “would immediately cut himself off from Jahiliyyah” (19). The separation must be complete: it is necessary, until we become immune to them, that “we should remove ourselves from all the influences of the Jahiliyyah” (20). “Jahili society,” Qutb insists, “is not worthy to be compromised with” (21).

The true believers must then, after purifying themselves, overturn the world order, “change the Jahili system at its very roots” (21) and replace it with “a new social, economic and political system” that allows Islam to flourish as God intended (61). Establishment of such a system is necessary for such flourishing to occur, and the need for it justifies, in fact requires, military revolution, since most unbelievers will not allow themselves to be won over by preaching (dawa). Qutb acknowledges the Qur’an’s admonition that “there is no compulsion in religion,” “but when the above-mentioned obstacles and practical difficulties are put in [Islam’s] way, it has no recourse but to remove them by force so that when it is addressed to peoples’ hearts and minds they are free to accept or reject it with an open mind” (63). Qutb does not leave room for doubt about the military component of the revolution. Muslim critics of offensive jihad, who “want to confine Jihad to what today is called ‘defensive war’, ” are confused and afflicted with “defeatist and apologetic mentalities,” pathetically bowing to Western notions of just war when, he claims, the Qur’an clearly indicates a divinely directed progression, based on changing circumstances, from avoidance of conflict with outsiders to total offensive war on all those refusing to accept the oneness of God: “the Muslims were first restrained
from fighting; then they were permitted to fight; then they were commanded to fight against the aggressors; and finally they were commanded to fight against all the polytheists” (57, 64). That the war extends to impure or backsliding Muslims—that is to say, those who pretend to be Muslims but are not really—is clear from the fact that all the so-called Muslim societies have been corrupted and are themselves part of the Jahili order. In effect, Islam, which Qutb identifies as an all-encompassing social system, does not currently exist in the world [[cite]]. Thus, “Muslims” must be purged away along with the rest, “so that the earth may be cleansed of corruption” (64). If this sounds like a prescription for endless warfare, Qutb admits it: “This struggle is not a temporary phase but an eternal state—an eternal state, as truth and falsehood cannot co-exist on this earth” (65). How this can be made to cohere with the goal of a world-wide triumph of Islam, he fails to show.

Qutb is explicit, too, about the taboo on questioning the program or the Qur’an as he interprets it. He starts out promisingly on the subject, saying that the Qur’an is “addressed to ‘the human being’ as a human being,” who he implies is naturally a questioner. Specifically, the Qur’an addresses itself to the “the primary question, the greatest question, the fundamental question [concerning] the Divine and the human, and the relation between them,” or “the question of man’s existence in the universe, his ultimate goal, and his position and relationship to the universe; and the question of the relationship between him and the Creator of the universe.” This is an impressive beginning to his account of the faith. But the Qur’an and the Law it imposes, he goes on to say, answer the question so clearly that, having been exposed to that revelation, there is no need for anyone to pursue the question
further. As Qutb puts it, “one should accept the Shari’ah without any question” (emphasis added; 23, 36). The questing dimension of faith, on his reading, dies with the Qur’an.

As hinted by Mawdudi and Qutb’s call for an Islamic “vanguard,” one further characteristic of revolutionary Islamist ideology linking it to Western intellectual movements is its employment of Western terms and categories. Mawdudi is the clearest case in point. In his essay “Jihad in Islam,” he defines Islam very explicitly as a “revolutionary ideology and programme,” the community of true Muslims as an “International Revolutionary Party,” and jihad as “that revolutionary struggle...which the Islamic Party brings into play to achieve” Islam’s world supremacy (5). The Revolution is a “social revolution” (13) and a “world revolution” (22). The goal is to overthrow the “tyranny” of un-Islamic states and establish a new “system of state rule” (22) that will restore human beings to their natural “equality” (11), so they “enjoy equal status and equal rights” under God’s “natural law” (17). Elsewhere Mawdudi says that the society to be formed will be “the outcome of a ‘contract’” in which they agree to be governed by sharia law (Euben and Zaman, 92).

Note that Mawdudi reaches through Western radical thought to borrow also from the older Western classical and liberal traditions, so the Western influence goes very deep. Islam has a “Revolutionary Creed,” which Mawdudi says is captured in Q 2:21, “O people! Offer worship to that God alone Who created you” (Jihad in Islam, 11), which he interprets politically as meaning no human authority can be legitimate because “Sovereignty belongs to no one except Allah” (ibid., 11-12). He treats question of sovereignty is politically rather than theologically.
Mawdudi in other places speaks of the freedom Islam brings to its adherents. The themes of liberation and freedom are strikingly handled by Qutb in *Milestones*, and his handling suggests something about the mentality of revolutionary Islamism that takes us close to its spiritual core. “Islam,” Qutb says, “establishes a new social, economic and political system, in which the concept of the freedom of man is applied in practice.” He seems to take for granted with Westerners that freedom should be a primary human value. But tellingly, though people are free to accept or reject Islam since, as the Qur’an says, there is no compulsion in Islam, “this freedom does not mean that they can make their desires their gods, or that they can choose to remain in servitude of other human beings” (*Milestones*, 61). Freedom does not include for Qutb the freedom to choose wrongly, either in private moral decision-making or in politics. There is no freedom not to submit to the rule of Islam. This is obviously a notion of freedom very far removed from that of Aristotle, Augustine, or Locke. But it is not so far removed from freedom as conceived by Western radicals. From Rousseau to Marx and beyond, freedom in Western radicalism as for the radical Islamists is restricted to one “choice,” which paradoxically involves abject and absolute submission. This “freedom” is the root of totalitarianism.

[[Freedom and liberation, etc. Mawdudi’s, Qutb’s, and Komeini’s (on K see Kepel). Tendency to understand human problems systemically rather than personally → see Mawdudi in Readings 96.]]
Fascinating as the formal radical parallels are, the more important task is to get down to the spiritual dynamics giving rise to the forms. I use the term “spiritual” here not with any particular religious or philosophical conception of “spirit” and “spiritual things” in mind but only to denote the inward, experiential dimensions of the radicalisms considered here. The realm of inner experience is literally where the ideological action is.

I suggested near the outset that ideology cannot be fruitfully considered apart from these inner states and movements. I want to move now toward a definition of the term more adequate for an understanding of the origins and effects of ideology than current definitions. David E. Ingersoll, Richard K. Matthews, and Andrew Davison, in their textbook *The Philosophic Roots of Modern Ideology: Liberalism, Conservatism, Marxism, Fascism, Nazism, Islamism*, define ideology as an action-oriented “system of ideas” meant to “simplify” complex reality and “justify” the simplified vision, corresponding values and goals, and plans of action (11-14). This is a good beginning: simplifying, justifying, and demanding action are certainly central functions of ideology. But, though useful, the definition doesn’t go deep enough. First, the nature of “ideas,” a problem raised here earlier, is not indicated. What, further, is the basic motive of ideological simplifications? How are these simplifications different from the kind ordinarily done to make sense of the world? Why can ideologues not stand facing the world as it is, with all its complexities? Why do they feel more compelled to activism than non-ideological people? Are ideological justifications different than non-ideological ones, and if so, what accounts for this? The definition gets at the form but not quite at the spirit of
ideology, or to the extent it touches the spirit—the urges for simplification, action, and justification (or it might be better to say rationalization)—it doesn’t indicate the source of such urges. The authors might argue that the deeper motivations are too variable to be folded into the definition, but the parallel forms of radical ideology noticed above raise the possibility that there is a common spirit animating them. If so, this must be included in any adequate definition.

Karl Mannheim in his classic Ideology and Utopia takes things a little deeper in understanding ideology as a product of unconscious drives. In his classic Ideology and Utopia he presents ideologies as theoretical constructions made when “groups...in their thinking become so interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense” of controlling events (40). This gets much closer to the heart of the matter but remains inadequate. Again, the interest or desire involved, as indicated in the parallel forms we’ve surveyed above, doesn’t seem so bound to particular situations as might first appear. Moreover, though unconscious processes and drives are no doubt at work, they don’t seem to account for all the mental activity involved.

Jerrold M. Post in his essay for Origins of Terrorism seems right that the problem with ideologues is not psycho-pathological; that is, ideologues, even the radical and violent ones, are not mentally ill (26). It’s not as if Stalin forgot to take his pills. There is a malignance in the terroristic mind not explicable by ordinary or even extraordinary psychological malfunctions. Moreover, the terror masterminds, as the term “masterminds” suggests, are often extraordinarily cunning, even
brilliant, capable of elaborate visioning, cogent thinking (albeit only within the bounds of the vision), and meticulous planning, so whatever psychological dynamics might be at play, these persons’ imaginative and reasoning capacities remain unimpaired and indeed function at a very high level.

What, then, is happening? Mannheim pushes his analysis beneath the psychological down to the level of the unconscious. He is right that there are factors at play of which the ideologue is not self-aware, and he seems right that the problem goes deeper than psychology in the usual modern sense of the term. But some key early developments in the ideological phenomenon are quite conscious, so that the origins of ideology don’t seem reducible to unconscious processes. Certain very deliberate decisions take place in route to the ideological system-building, justifying, and planning for action, most fundamentally the choice to ignore, in the act of simplification, any parts of reality that, if accounted for, would threaten the scheme’s coherence and credibility. One cannot simplify without knowingly leaving things out, and the system-builder knows very well what he is leaving out. The critical question then becomes, why is he leaving them out, even if it means, as he knows it will, that certain parts of mankind will now have to be written off with them?

Post relates a few deeper psychological dynamics involved, as revealed by psychological studies of terrorists. Common characteristics of terrorists’ psychological condition include a radically divided self (between “the good and bad parts,” 27), projection of personal problems onto others, and, most deeply, a “search for identity” (26), including a “need to belong” (33). The intensity of the urge to
affirm themselves and identify with a group giving a sense of greater purpose is so strong that, once a new identity is adopted and the goals and actions deemed necessary to confirm that identity embraced, no doubts about the resulting ideological program are tolerated (33). Here is the prohibition of questioning we saw in Qutb's case. The sense that the personal and group goals must be achieved at any costs leads to a redefining of morality because those standing in the way must be destroyed (34). In all this Post seems to get at fundamental elements of the problem, but he still falls short of identifying the most decisive element in the formation of ideology.

What both Mannheim and Post fail to account for is the element of will involved, and beyond that the quality of this will. Post explicitly denies the voluntary element: he takes "significant issue...with the propositions that terrorists resort to violence as a willful choice and that terrorism as a course of action is an intentional choice selected from a range of perceived alternatives" (italics Post's, 25). They are, he thinks, driven inexorably to violent action by the dynamics just laid out. But as indicated in the ideologue's deliberate ignoring, noted above, of certain facts in the construction of his ideology and in the terrorists' redefining of morality, conscious choice is clearly involved. At the heart of the matter is a disorder not of psychology or even of the unconscious but of will and spirit. Voegelin called it "pneumopathology" (disease of the spirit) to distinguish it from psycho-pathology [[cite]]. As Voegelin explains, the essential core of ideology is willful blindness grounded in a sense of alienation from the world. The spiritual problem, the root of it all, is the alienation, from that part of humanity with which,
for some reason, the ideologue cannot come to terms and from higher reality, if you
will, what Voegelin calls the mysterious “ground of Being” [[cite]]. [[See EV’s
analysis in *Hitler & the Germans* on willful blindness.]] Dostoevsky was right, then,
to understand the various ideological “-isms” as existential distortions, and he
agreed, moreover, with Voegelin’s judgment that the distortions radiate ultimately
from the sense of radical separation from that ground of Being.

There is no getting around the fact that, in the atheist as well as the theistic
versions of radicalism such as revolutionary Islamism, the problem is essentially
religious. The question of God forces itself in. The radical ideologues, at least (we’ll
not consider here the milder kinds of ideologues), are troubled about existence. The
crisis of identity is a crisis about what it all means, why we are here, what is the
source of meaningful existence. The ideologue cannot live with uncertainty about
the question and so tries to answer it once and for all, whether the answer is “God is
dead” or “God is precisely x, y, or z.” The religious answer and concomitant program
of life decided on are meant to keep the uncertainty and anxiety of existence at bay.
Renewed questioning cannot be tolerated, for it would undermine the escape
attempt. But for all the intense efforts to ignore it, the anxiety doesn’t go away. It in
fact intensifies, and all the more the harder it is pushed down, like a balloon pushed
down in water comes rushing back to the surface. More and more desperate
measures have to be taken to keep the anxiety from conscious recognition. More
and more grotesque ideological distortions have to be resorted to, and more and
more extreme behaviors. [[EV cites.]]
The ideologue’s quest, then, is a quest for certainty, a certainty the real world won’t allow. For this reason, Voegelin labels the ideological phenomenon “gnosticism.” Like the ancient Gnostics, modern gnostics claim a secret knowledge of the meaning of reality and history—not merely the structure of reality or what parts of reality count most or the meaning that can be found in that larger reality and in history, but the meaning of the whole. It takes an extraordinary stubbornness to deny, like Nietzsche, the meaning discoverable in reality and history—this is another kind of willful blindness—but to claim knowledge of reality and history as a whole takes even more chutzpa. The ideologue, unlike the poor wretches around him, has figured it all out, or so he tells himself.

Let’s try now, with Voegelin’s help, to unfold the spiritual hallmarks of radicalism shared by Western and Islamist versions. In the grip of the intense feeling of alienation, the ideologue embarks on a quest for certainty to ease the anxiety of The Question. He is conscious, if not of the deeper anxiety and the need for certainty, at least of his alienation from others and of his struggle to overcome the forces oppressing him once and for all. It is remarkable that Western and Islamist radicals have explicitly understood their project as a personal “struggle.” In fact, the radical Islamists have given new meaning to “jihad” that seems identical to that expressed in Hitler’s Mein Kampf (“My Struggle”). The term “jihad” literally means “struggle,” and is agreed by Muslims generally, past and present, to involve a struggle for faith in revelation (to win others to its recognition) and against spiritual and moral corruption. But the nature of the revolutionary Islamist jihad is different.
It is a struggle not for faith but for certainty and against demons of a very different kind than the kind most of us face.

When the initial struggle issues into an ideological system and program, questioning is prohibited, for reasons just mentioned. This leads inevitably to personal and, to the extent a sizable group of people choose to join the struggle, cultural primitivism. This primitivism can be either primarily forward-looking or backward-looking in its view of history—the Western versions have been forward-looking in not looking to old models and thus distinctly modern, indeed hyper-modern; the radical Islamist version is backward-looking in taking their model from four centuries back. The essential thing about primitivism is not its orientation to past or future but its restricted sphere of thought and experience, its lack of cultivation and refinement. I stress that primitivism is not incompatible with modernity. The Nazis and Communists were extreme primitives. Brutes like Stalin and bin Laden are the intellectual type, brutes like the Gestapo and [killer of Pearl] the non-intellectual, but all alike are brutes.

Intellectually the primitivism takes the form of rejection of theory. Hitler said books should be read not for what we can learn from them but for how parts of them might be put in the service of one’s chosen worldview [[cite from H&L]]. Marx said that “the point is not to understand the world but to change it” [[cite]]. Qutb in his Milestones explicitly rejected theory in favor of praxis because the Qur’an, which again is crystal clear in its meaning, has laid all theoretical questions to rest (see Euben and Zaman, 132-33). For ordinary joiners of the cause, primitivism primarily just involves not troubling themselves about the cruelties and murders they will
have to carry out. The intellectuals do this, too, of course, but theoretically as well as in practice. In both intellectual and ordinary cases, the striking feature is the refusal to ask human questions.

One result of ideological primitivism is puritanism. For all their willingness to commit the most grotesque crimes, the ideologues are puritanical in the extreme. This was as true of the Nazis and Soviets as it is for the revolutionary Islamists. One must always “toe the party line” and stay ideologically pure. Not even the slightest deviation can be tolerated. You must not stray from the path of the Fuhrer in thought or deed. Sins against the Communist Party will be punished ruthlessly, send you to the gulag or the grave. If you do not hew strictly to the radical Islamist vision you are not a Muslim, and if you violate sharia, you will lose your hands or be stoned. No exceptions.

This external behavior, it should be remembered, stems from an inward puritanism. The ideologue can never allow himself to deviate from purity or tolerate others doing so lest he fall back into anxiety. Keeping to the program in its minutest particulars is essential to the maintenance of his invented identity, the falseness of which will be exposed if he or his identity group ever fail to play the part. Considerations of mercy must be resisted because then one would have to ask questions about the ideological program and its presuppositions: Are these standards really fair? Am I doing justice to the potentialities and possibilities of human nature? These questions would let the anxiety back in and put the whole project in jeopardy.
The puritanical impulse is closely related to the totalitarian one, but the totalitarian drive is something more than merely puritanical. The totalitarian societies that inevitably result from the rule of radical ideologies spring from totalitarian souls, which themselves emerge from the internal effort to dominate one's feelings and force reality itself into the ideological mold the radical ideologue has made. The will to escape reality becomes the will to power over it. At the innermost core of the radical's soul is a lust for world domination, if not literally then at least in his mind, and this impels him to dominate over others. They must not be allowed to hinder his therapeutic mission [[cite?]]. To escape his unbearable inner wretchedness from the alienation he feels, because his inner state is affected by the world around him, he must will and then try to force the world into submission. If people refuse or hesitate to play the parts he has written for them in his script, because his ideological construct is therapeutically necessary for him, he must eliminate or at least get them out of the way. If, because they have bought into his vision or play along for the sake of self-preservation, they submit, he will from psychological necessity try to keep every human detail in place to prevent anything upsetting his dreamworld solution.

The last end of radical ideology is extreme dehumanization. People have become mere puppets in the ideologue's play, nothing more than instruments, means to his ends. [[Fn on Kant's treating people as ends in themselves rather than means.]] Much as some serial killers have been said to arrange their victims in various ways to "act out" the scenes the killer wishes he had known, the totalitarian安排s his people. [[EV on dehumanization in H&L]]
The totalitarian drive is directly connected with the radical ideologue’s totalizing categorizations of friends and enemies. There are the pure Aryans and the wicked, money-grubbing Jews; the pure champions of equality and human community and the fascists and capitalists (everyone not a Communist is ipso facto a fascist or capitalist); the true Muslims and all the greater and lesser satans. [[See EV on making opponents into satans.]] In fact, if anyone is satanic in the qualitative sense of the word it is the totalitarians. Such inversions of good and bad, true and false are typical of extreme radicals. [[Fn on Orwell’s 1984.]]

Two inversions seem especially telling. The first is the inversion we noted above with Qutb of freedom and slavery. As Plato’s Socrates said of the tyrannical soul (Book 9 of the Republic), while he dominates he is utterly unfree, a slave to the worst of passions, but he thinks of himself as free because he dominates, not seeing that he is totally carried away by his drive to control. He is an abject slave to what Augustine would call the libido dominandi, the lust for domination. He is, as Socrates said, “most tyrant of himself” [[cite]].

The second inversion is that of joy and hate. The revolutionary ideologue is a miserable person. He longs for the happiness that only a sense of greater meaning and purpose can bring, but he can’t have it. His overriding emotion is hatred, hatred of all those things, notably all those people and human systems, he imagines are keeping him from happiness. Above all he hates himself, his own personal condition. He blames others for this condition because blaming himself, or worse, seeing himself as the cause of his sorry state, would be unbearably painful. Since he cannot feel the joy he craves, he replaces it with the rush of intense hate. Giving full
vent to hatred is indeed a kind of rush, even a kind of ecstasy. The ecstasy of mystical union with God, from which he is alienated, is replaced by what ecstasy is available, and the totalitarian soul has a deep well of hate to draw from.

The end of this is predictable. There must be violence, and the more extreme the better. Post noted the tendency among terrorists for violence to become an end in itself (Origins of Terrorism, 35). Voegelin references in his Political Religions a Nazi poem called “Die Tat” which, he says, “illustrates the stages of agitation starting from the excitement of acting to the point of relaxation.” Voegelin continues:

The sense of the deed is not the victory but the deed itself; the pain inflicted upon the enemy is to be resumed to the soul of the perpetrator: “And when you strike, strike at your own heart.” Friends have to be destroyed up to the point of total desolation. By committing the deed, the evil, destructive deed, the actor strikes himself until his own desires and his own will are extinguished. The naked, purposeless deed as well as the act of becoming absorbed and tormenting oneself are acts of mythical self-dissolution and communion with the world up to the point of relaxation in bloodlust: “The deed was good if red blood flows” (69).

Hate is made into a virtue and its expression becomes an act of worship. [[Orwell’s “two minutes of hate.”]]

Osama bin Laden is quite explicit about making hate—the term he uses is “enmity”—a virtue [[Al-Qaeda Reader]]. [[See Cooper on jihadis’ hatred.]] One is reminded in all this of King David’s “perfect hatred” of sin [[cite]], but there is a
crucial difference between David's hatred and the radical kind we are discussing. David's hated, to borrow a phrase from Ghandi, the sin rather than the sinner. Bin Laden and his kindred spirits hate the sinner even more than the sin. This hatred of the sinner, or those imagined to be sinners, is a primarily clue to the quality of the dehumanization involved in revolutionary Islamism.

But driving all the hatred of others and of a world taken to be fundamentally unjust is a hatred of self and, as Voegelin hinted, a longing for self-annihilation. This dynamic may go a long way to explaining the psychology of today's “suicide bombers.” Perhaps the most poignant portrayal of the dynamic in print is Dostoevsky's presentation of the character Kirillov in Demons. Kirillov's ideological account of why he plans to kill himself encapsulates with stunning comprehensiveness the whole ideological phenomenon on the spiritual level of the individual. In a chapter significantly entitled “Someone Else's Sins,” Kirillov argues that the ultimate freedom is the freedom to commit suicide. The power of life or death over oneself, the reasoning goes, is the ultimate control. God himself can't prevent a suicide, and besides, God doesn't exist. Kirillov allegedly doesn't want to kill himself because of any hard circumstances or losses but to perform the ultimate act of freedom.

He wonders why no one sees this truth about freedom, “why people don't dare to kill themselves” (113), but he sees it. In fact, he thinks, he is the first human being ever to see it. Gnostic, secret knowledge. “Man now,” Kirillov concludes, “is not yet the right man. There will be a new man, happy and proud. He for whom it will make no difference whether he lives or does not live, he will be the new man.”
He thinks he has escaped the anxiety of existence by self-imposed indifference and the assertion of absolute control over his life, and he imagines a utopia when man discovers his truth where all, like him, will become Gods. “God is the pain of the fear of death," he says. “He who overcomes pain and fear will himself become God. Then there will be a new life, a new man, everything new...Then history will be divided into two parts: from the gorilla to the destruction of God, and from the destruction of God to [the transformation of the world]” (115). Kirillov divides history into two parts rather than three, but the same claim to have mastered history is here. But if becoming God requires killing yourself, utopia will only arrive when everyone is dead. It will literally be Nowhere as it ever was. There will be no “new life" or “new man."

If Kirillov's blindness to the obvious is peculiar, it is necessary, necessary for his magic works of self- and world- transformation. He prepares not only for his own self-salvation but to become the savior of mankind.

I will proclaim self-will, it is my duty to believe...I will begin, and end, and open the door. And save. Only this one thing will save all men...For three years I have been searching for the attribute of my divinity, and I have found it: the attribute of my divinity is—Self-will! That is all, by which I can show in the main point my insubordination and my new fearsome freedom. For it is very fearsome. I kill myself to show my insubordination and my new fearsome freedom.
The world will be inspired by Kirillov’s awesome freedom when he kills himself. As he writes his message to the world and makes ready to shoot himself, he exclaims to another character in the story, “All that is hid shall be revealed!...I believe! I believe!”

Uniqueness of revolutionary Islamism:
- Cultural background: Dual impact of neo-tribalism and Persian-style bureaucratic patrimonialism (Black, ch. 2). Shame-honor dynamic as a major feature of the psychological conditioning making young men vulnerable to the call of radicalism and jihad. Consider connection between this dynamic and the concept of manliness: not accepting humiliation; ideal of glory (reputation/notoriety for physical prowess and ability to have your way) and domination, intimidation. See Pryce-Jones’s *Closed Circle*. Have to look at factors causing Muslims youths to feel humiliated, but shame-honor dynamic helps explain why they respond to those factors as they do.
- Rise of the West and modernity and anti-Westernization. Need to dist Western from modern—modernity was a product of the West, but that means the West preceded modernity, and certain features of modernity derive from a rejection of the pre-modern West, cannot be said simply to be a logical conclusion of pre-modern Western thought and civ. Features of Western civilization. Nature of modernity. Often said that Islamists don’t necessarily reject modernization so much as Westernization, but of more moderate Islamists it would be more accurate to say
they reject certain features of the *modern* West (rad secularization, libertinism, etc.).

Post-colonialism. Rad Islamism’s modern conception of human agency. (See *Phil Roots of Mod Ideology*, 364-65.) Connect experience of Western dominance with anxiety that leads to gnostic escape through radical revolution. “The Gnostic’s flight from a truly dreadful, confusing, and oppressive state of the world is understandable,” but the “magic” of ideological wish-fulfillment is “not harmless” (MWR 256) and becomes radically destructive when charismatic figures decide they should try to replace the real world with the fantasy world of their fevered imaginations.

[[-Islamist movement and asabiyya: Robust forcefulness of the movement vs. softness of Western “civilized” culture. See Black’s treatment of Khaldun.]]

The problem of “derailment”: Islam not a worldview. (See Enayat on Shariati, 155ff.) Muhammad’s religious experience—heightened sense of God’s Otherness/holiness/oneness, his sovereignty, and his righteous demands. Compare Moses. Problem of derailment and probable forms of derailment from the Islamic faith experience: (1) Vulnerability from the fact that Muhammad is taken to be the sole reliable mediator of Revelation. EV’s discussion of Akhenaton. Hebrew figures and Jesus taken as mediators, but true content of their messages known only through Muhammad. Derailment: For the Leader (Imam), gnosticism and absolutism, perfect knowledge and authority that shouldn’t be questioned (see e.g. of Fatimids and parallel Nizari phenomenon in Black, 45-47, and consider gnostic impulse in Islamic philosophy); for the rest, potential distancing from divine
Presence and inhibition of reason and personal judgment, extreme legalism and closing of the doors of ijtihad. Spokesmen for rad Islamist intellectual vanguard unselfconsciously set themselves up as new Prophets \(\rightarrow\) Gnosticism. (2) Tawhid and the problem of sovereignty. Problem with obsessive focus on a single attribute of God to the neglect of the others. (Allah has 99 names. Very first words of Koran identify God as “the compassionate, the merciful,” first in the Exordium and at the opening of every single surah.) Islamist failure to recognize and sphere for human authority because of loss of the mystery of Revelation and failure to grasp the realities of practical politics \(\rightarrow\) human authorities are needed partly because the meaning of Revelation in general and in the circumstances is disputable (the Islamists are Gnostics \textit{par excellence}) and partly because the higher law can only be fulfilled (imperfectly) through free, rational human instrumentation (i.e., God doesn’t use men like puppets nor tell them exactly what to do in every occasion but leaves them to manage the application of his law and the details of their affairs creatively and reflectively). (3) Sacred history. Duty to succeed \(\rightarrow\) association of military, cultural, political, and economic success or failure with divine favor or displeasure. Difficulty accepting that God might allow good people and true believers to suffer. Consequence that failure tended to be taken as resulting from internal religious backsliding or external nefarious/satanic forces that must be forcefully opposed or both. (4) Sharia. The Way (see Rahman,101), divine guidelines. (\textit{Din} = religion, practice according to the guidelines.) Cf. Prov. 1. Compare \textit{Tao} and Aquinas’ dist’s b/t eternal, divine, and natural law and consider implications for understanding of reason and revelation. Law made for man, not
man for the Law. Sharia product of reflection on Koran and hadith, sunna. Problem of how to read and interpret Koran and hadith. Doctrinal hardening of Sharia into unquestioned judicial decrees and closing the doors of ijtihad. (5) Relation of religion and politics and the danger of “imminentizing the eschaton.” See EV's comments in Ecumenic Age. (6) Attitude toward non-Muslims. No firmly established conception of universal humanity. Hate the sin but love the sinner. (7) Ambiguity about jihad. Jihads of the heart, hand, tongue, and sword, hadith on Muhammad on the lesser and the greater jihad. Compare concept of jihad to Christian concept of vocation (see Black, 101). Ambiguous legacy of the Prophet and the “rightly guided” Caliphs re military jihad. For good sense of theory and practice of jihad as it has developed historically → Rudolph Peters’ Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam and Richard Bonney’s Jihad From Qur'an to bin Laden. Suffice it to say, no clear, generally accepted doctrine emerged on the criteria for waging military jihad beyond the imperative of defending the umma from aggressors. Most critically, no firm ijma (consensus) developed on the q of the precise relation between military jihad and the obligation to spread the faith. Was the unbelief of neighboring peoples or potential rivals for regional supremacy sufficient justification for waging war against them? (See Bonney.) Was preventive war required or at least permissible? Q of whether Islamic powers genuinely cared about fulfilling the requirements of just war or simply, as earthly regimes ruled by questionable men, warred for the usual mundane motives—i.e., whether it was Islam that drove the offensive wars and conquests or factors having nothing to do with Islam per se even if the religion was invoked as cover for the deeds, much as
the rad Islamists of today use Islam (as most of us other than the Islamists think), though for perhaps very different reasons (apocalypse rather than power, pleasure, wealth, or glory). Seems to be more than that. (8) Islam and philosophy. The ambiguous legacy of al-Ghazali—rejecting what's called philosophy while preparing the way to recovering philosophy. Mystic vs. rationalist philosophy. Need for testing mystical truth-claims, for critical philosophy, scrutiny. Danger of derailment into unaccountable gnosticism; or subjectivism when mystery so emphasized as to foreclose discussion of its meaning; or skepticism with the assumption we can't know anything of Being at all.

[[Terminological issues

- Practical value of words ➔ Dev's warning about not getting too hung up on labels or falling into merely semantic disputes. Larger aim to see reality more clearly so as to know how to act, how best to respond. Diagnostics with a view to exercising good practical judgment and making good decisions. Pragmatist approach. Need for qualified generalizations ➔ Aristotle on knowing universals and particulars. Terminological needs of statesmen vs. a soldier.]]

[[What Islamists are saying

Habeck's Knowing the Enemy; Mawdudi; Qutb's Milestones; al-Qaeda writings.]]
Islamist ideology

-Map of the ideology provided by Habeck.

-Analysis of Mawdudi and esp. Qutb.

-Essence of the struggle/jihad: Duty to succeed in creating Islamic utopia of a world governed by sharia. BL makes enmity against infidels and offensive military jihad central to Islam and makes military jihad the primary means of achieving the triumph of Islam (AQ Reader 32-33). See Mawdudi and Qutb on revolutionary Islam. On usurping the role of the Prophet, curiosity that “Qutb” has the connotation in Sufism of “a ‘pole’ or ‘axis’ around which the whole universe rotates” (Rahman, 136). Human means to achieve God’s ends; kingdom to be achieved in this world. Q of God’s part and man’s part in the unfolding of righteousness/virtue and justice.

-Diff’s w/ Western ideologies: Islamic rather than Christian background and theistic rather than atheistic outlook, so that beyond the basic spiritual dynamics extreme Islamism bears more resemblance to the Christian chiliastic movements of the high medieval period. Nonetheless, the Islamist revolutionaries’ project in a sense involves the “murder of God” (NSP 278). See Dostoevsky’s portrayal of Kirrilov in Demons. The transcendent Otherness of God is destroyed, and he is effectively reduced to an intracosmic (albeit perfect) king passing decrees. Functionally God is equivalent to Hobbes’ “mortal god,” his sovereignty and mode of rule exactly on par with Hobbes’ sovereign, ruling by absolute fiat through unambiguous rules and, for those who don’t keep the rules, terror. The original Biblical and Koranic “fear of God” in the sense of loving awe degenerates into terror
of making moral mistakes and a corresponding need to understand oneself as morally perfect. The awe-inspired and humble attitude of Muhammad, despite his role as political (in addition to spiritual) leader, seems indeed far removed from the arrogant and self-arrogating attitude of a Qutb or a bin Laden. Thus, the radical divergence of extreme Islamism from original Islam begins at the very experiential root of their respective formations.

**Larger picture**

Struggle over

1. the meaning of and for the soul of Islam (the meaning of Revelation, how to respond to it, and the spiritual condition and way of life that embracing the right condition produces);
2. the meaning of the struggle (jihad) itself;
3. the right means to conduct it—spiritual disciplines, persuasion (da’wa), social and political organization and endeavors, war;
4. the nature of higher law and justice—tribal justice and the law of retaliation, divine law, natural law, human rights; and
5. the relation between the bearers of Revelation and those who don’t accept it (Western-Islamic relations being the prime concrete case)—forgiveness vs. payback, toleration, human rights, common ground, friendship (see AQ Reader, 25-26).

**Other larger questions**
What does it mean to be civilized? Cultivated common sense. Khaldun, Wali Allah (see Black, ch. 23), Rousseau, EV. Ghazali and Wali Allah on the imperative of balance. Openness and experience of meaning, advanced human cultivation and symbolic and institutional articulation vs. primitivism—closed down, restricted experience and corresponding stunted symbolic and institutional development.

Decline of Islamic high civilization and the problem of religion and politics. What exactly is the relevance of religion and questions of ultimate meaning to political development? Modern assumption that positive political development requires setting aside religious concerns. Case of the American founding era. Dynamic of Islamic history: alleged impiety and revival.

Reconciling Islamic and Western worlds. Contra bin Laden, defining, agreeing on, and promoting a conception of “moderate Islam”—not a moderated, i.e., watered down Islam, of course, but a vision of Islam as a moderating, civilizing force (moderating in the sense of regulating passions and facilitating harmony and good order). Resources within the Islamic tradition to draw on in this project. Aquinas’ suggestion for inter-religious dialogue: agreement on the basic content of natural law; compare Wali Allah. Bodin on common core of religious experience as a basis for religious toleration; compare Akbar (Black ch. 23). Toward consensus on a conception of civilization.

[[Voegelin identifies this refusal to ask questions as lying at the core of ideology, and he identifies it as a distinctively modern problem. In this sense radical...]]
Islam is more like Nazism and Communism than the older radical religions.... The resistance to questioning accounts in large part both for the extreme rigidity of modern radical ideologies and for their tendency to end in violence, indeed often in extreme and grotesque violence. Moreover, those today wishing to counter this violence seem incapable of understanding it because they have ideological problems of their own preventing them from asking the right questions or, not infrequently, deliberately ignoring these questions as irrelevant when conscious of them. We need to look closer, then, at the problem of ideology, its nature, how it develops, and why it causes people under its spell to think and act as they do.]

[[Fn Historical root of intellectual dimension of modern ideology in Kantian conception of consciousness (Mannheim, 66).]]

[-Why ideology should be understood as a distinctively modern phenomenon, despite the element of willful blindness in pre-modern derailments. The blind rage of old was the product of perennial human passions, either raw lust for power, pleasure, wealth, or glory or, on the religious plane, the same drives enhanced by religious motives. The ideologue is not merely swept away by passion but refuses to accept any mystery. See MWR 187ff. Consequences? Does this help explain the peculiar viciousness of the modern variety?

Parallels with radical Western ideologies

- Larger pattern → Re prohibition of questioning, there was a precedent of sorts in the medieval “closing the doors of ijtihad” (see Rahman’s analysis). Islamists like
Qutb ironically opened them again only to close them much more radically once self-appointed leaders of the vanguard (i.e., Qutb and later Zawihiri and bin Laden) rediscovered the “obvious” rules and implications of the Qur’an.

**-The totalitarian impulse.** Arendt’s anatomy of totalitarianism. Totalizing → good guys vs. Satan. Reductive essentializing of the non-Islamic Other (reverse “orientalism” with a vengeance)—Taymiyya, Mawdudi, Qutb. Loss of the individual and destruction of liberty in the name of liberation → jahili social, economic, and political arrangements must be destroyed so individuals can “freely” choose God, but doesn’t this violate the moral freedom of those who think those arrangements just and beneficial? Q. of Islam’s concept of the individual.