

HONORIS CAPSTONE THESIS

The Fundamentals of Fundamentalism

A Deconstruction

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Abstract: The Fundamentals of Fundamentalism (A Deconstruction)

Department of Mideast and North African Studies, Honor's Capstone Thesis

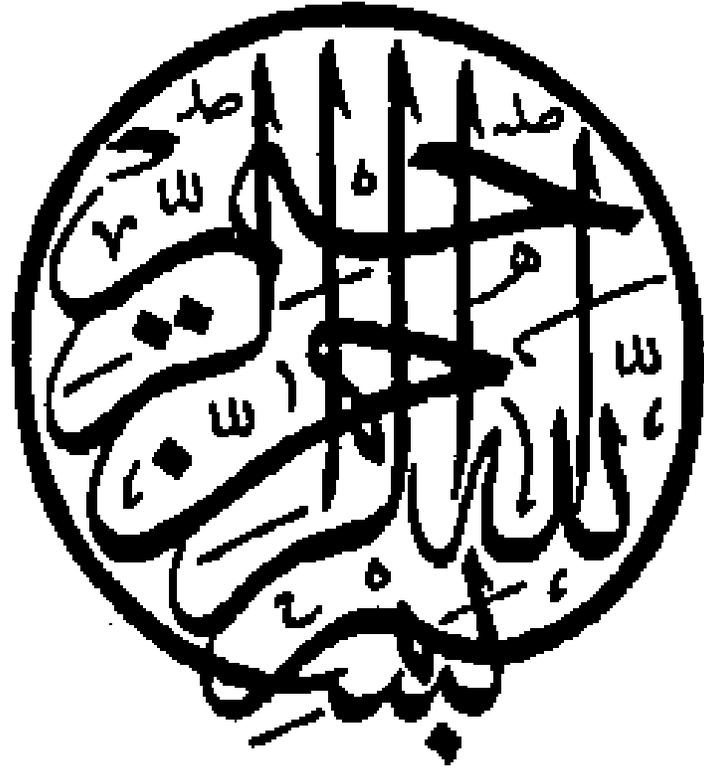
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This work attempts to radically redefine religious fundamentalism and its relation to modernity; this process unfolds in three stages. First, we demonstrate the incoherence of the standard characterizations in light of a number of factual trends. We explore the various ways intellectuals have attempted to refine and adapt the standard definition in order to accommodate these facts, and the ways in which these attempts ultimately fail.

The second stage is a semantic deconstruction of the term. We posit that essential problems with the standard definition arose as a result of inappropriately drawing normative conclusions from descriptive claims, paired with an unjustifiably narrow definition of who constitutes as a fundamentalist. Moreover, we analyze how the term "religious fundamentalism" is typically used in a political fashion. Finally, we demonstrate that the typical definition of religious fundamentalism is more properly understood as a characterization of mass-movements, more generally.

Our conclusions are as follows: all ideologies are fundamentalist, in nature. Religious fundamentalism is *not* opposed to modernity. In fact, secularism and religious fundamentalism are simply competing interpretations of modernism. Accordingly, modernization will necessarily be accompanied by an *increase* in religious fundamentalism. Therefore, we must rethink what it means to combat extremism and the value of modernization.



In the Name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction: Contemporary Failures in the Project of Modernity... 1
- II. Struggle & Adaptation... 3
- III. Excursus: Modernity... 4
- IV. Fundamentally Modern... 7
- V. At Last, Definition... 10
- VI. No Stone Left Unturned... 13
- VII. Conclusions... 17
- VIII. References... 19

Contemporary Failures in the Project of Modernity

Historically speaking, religious fundamentalism and modernity developed contemporaneously; as the world grew more modern, we have seen a rise in fundamentalist groups. The typical explanation of this relationship is that fundamentalism is an antagonistic response to modernity on the part of minority groups who feel threatened by the encroachment of the "modern world" and its values. This narrative has been largely shaped by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' *Fundamentalism Project*, spearheaded by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. The research of this project, which involved a host of authors from all over the world, was primarily undertaken between 1987 and 1995; six years after the conclusion of the project, in the wake of the September 11th attacks, rather than rethinking the paradigms set up by this project, its conclusions were further affirmed and propagated by everyone from politicians,¹ to intellectuals, to the media; there was even a booming market for Muslims² or people of "Islamic" origin³ who wanted to support this narrative and argue for liberalizing Islam and the "Muslim World."⁴

The results have been disastrous. In our subsequent attempts to liberalize the Middle East, our actions have instead fostered radicalism throughout the region;⁵ through destabilizing Iraq, America has empowered its professed enemies in Iran, and the *salafi* regime in Saudi Arabia (both of whom were checked, in a sense, by the policies of Saddam Hussein). Simultaneously, we have betrayed our own professed values domestically, undermining our own rights and freedoms in the name of security, bankrupting our own government to (re)build states in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶

¹ In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, President G.W. Bush repeatedly insisted that the terrorists hate America for its freedom. Others, such as Bernard Lewis (for instance, in his 2002, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*) suggested that the origin of terrorism is in *ressentiment* of the West paired with a sort of Napoleon complex in the part of the Islamists. This thesis would increasingly frame the post-9/11 narrative on terrorism.

² For instance Fatima Mernissi's 2002 *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*.

³ For instance, Brigitte Gabriel or Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Probably the most exemplary of this sort of work was Tariq Ali's 2002 *Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads, and Modernity*. While putting up a front of criticism to "the West," and Western Imperialism, he spends the bulk of the book advocating that Muslims *voluntarily adopt* the very ideologies and institutions America was trying to forcibly impose on them.

Similarly, while calling for respect for the Islamic tradition, he defines that tradition exclusively in terms of fringe views, ultimately advocating that Muslims adopt a modified version of Wahabism.

Regarding the broader tradition, he provides plenty of (decontextualized) ammunition for non-Muslims to use in attacking the legitimacy of the religion; a non-Muslim, persuaded by Dr. Ali's claims, would likely be substantially *less* inclined to learn more about Islam, or to view it with respect. Exacerbating these severe faults, the author never really resolves the issues he claims the work is designed to explore (specifically, answering why it is that so many Muslims sympathize with the terrorists and reject neo-liberalism)— despite the 400-page length of the book!

⁴ Thereby, reducing fundamentalism, it was held.

⁵ This dynamic has been well laid out in Michael Scheuer's *Imperial Hubris*.

⁶ In his, *The Agony of Power*, Jean Baudrillard summarized it as follows:

Even in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions, as democracy spreads in the Middle East, Islamist groups have been the primary political beneficiaries. And yet, from our current vantage point, more than a decade after the September 11th attacks, and quarter century from the outset of the Fundamentalism Project, it is astonishing how little their essential view has been meaningfully or prominently challenged. Instead, the majority of research on fundamentalism has been, and continues to be, aimed at expanding on and refining their conclusions.

Such reforms were necessitated by a couple of glaring paradoxes which seemed to render the standard narrative incoherent. In the first place, if religious fundamentalism were truly antagonistic to, and incompatible with, modernity, as the world grew increasingly modern, we would expect to see a decrease in fundamentalism worldwide.⁷

We have seen the opposite: despite the rise of democracy, the unchallenged dominance of capitalism, the ubiquity of secular states, etc. fundamentalist movements are increasing in number, are increasingly "mainstream" worldwide, and are exercising unprecedented influence on the modern political system.

And more striking than the resurgence of religious fundamentalism is *where this resurgence is taking place*. If religious fundamentalism is, in fact, a hostile response to modernity, then the "heart" of the problem should be at the peripheries of the "modern world," i.e. in "developing nations."⁸ Instead, fundamentalism is just as prevalent in America and Europe as in Africa or the Mideast. Indeed, the fundamentalist influence on contemporary American politics would be difficult to overstate.

"Every extension of hegemony is also an extension of terror. Let's be clear: beyond spectacular terrorism, terror should be seen as an infiltration, an internal convulsion, a form of power fighting itself... September 11-style terrorism has no truly objective causes or consequences— but it does have more profound ones. It is not a political event; it is a symbolic event.... We know that terrorism will not overthrow the world order. Its impact is much more subtle: a viral and elusive form that it shares with world power... All global culture is cannibalized by terror, by the discourse of terror. All information and media gravitate around it... Terror is like a rumor: self-prophesying, self-realizing. Once it moves to the other side, and grows more violent than violence, it becomes an autonomous form without origin—like Evil itself. It is irrepressible as well, because every form of "vigilance" aggravates the specter of terror.

It is the paradox of every principle of precaution, and this principle has now been raised to the level of a global governing strategy. Security is quietly taking hold as a 'white terror' draining the system of its Western values: freedom, democracy, human rights. It is the diabolical trap laid by the terrorists, forcing democracies to sabotage themselves 'progressively.'"

p. 94- 7

⁷ In his October 2001 article, "The West Has Won: Radical Islam Can't Beat Democracy and Capitalism; We're Still at the End of History," Francis Fukuyama continued to insist that modern social and economic systems would inevitably render religious fundamentalism obsolete. Therein, he affirmed the narrative that fundamentalism was a phenomenon of "regressive" populations who felt threatened by modernity.

⁸ Indeed, Marty et al. claim explicitly that fundamentalism arises in those regions wherein religion is the ideological basis or socio-cultural context of society (*Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 814). This empirical claim simply does not seem reconcilable with "the facts."

And even in these "peripheral zones," the primary fundamentalist intellectuals who inspire these movements are from modern and affluent societies. Even restricting ourselves exclusively to Sunni Islamic fundamentalism, consider that Osama bin Laden came from an *extremely* wealthy Saudi Arabian⁹ family with close personal ties to Saudi Royal Family and the Bush family. Anwar al-Awlaki was born in America and educated here. His family was also wealthy and powerful: his father was a Fulbright Scholar who went on to become Yemen's Agriculture Minister. He was killed along with Samir Kahn, a Pakistani American who spent virtually his whole life in New York and North Carolina, until he was 24 years old (at which time he went to live in Yemen); he went on to be the editor and publisher of (and a frequent contributor to) Al-Qaeda's online English-language *Inspire* magazine. Sayiid Qutb has claimed that his own views were radicalized as a result of his education in America.¹⁰ In short, the heart of religious fundamentalism seems to be the "Modern World;" this picture would be even starker were we to consider other Islamic sects or other religions.

Struggle & Adaptation

A number of concessions were made to explain these phenomena. In the first place, while insisting upon the fundamentalists' rejection of modernity, it is simultaneously asserted that, nevertheless, fundamentalists are perfectly content with exploiting modern tools and infrastructure to promote their ideology.¹¹ Bruce Lawrence¹² goes on to insist that it is incoherent to talk about pre-modern religious fundamentalism— absent contemporary communication systems, weakened church authority, and increased civil liberties, fundamentalist movements would have been impossible.¹³

Karen Armstrong would concede that fundamentalism is not a phenomena restricted to religion.

⁹ Saudi Arabia itself is a prime example of this trend (as an analog to America): it is one of the wealthiest nations in the region, one of the most cooperative with the West and with global capitalism, and it is also one of the chief exporters of Islamic fundamentalism, and one of the chief supporters and financiers of conservative Islamist movements. Domestically, their legal system is characterized by draconian laws and state repression of dissidents and minority groups; socio-economically, there is a virtual caste system based on nationality/race.

¹⁰ In fact, upon returning to Egypt he authored a polemical essay, "The America I Have Seen," wherein he explains his disappointment with, and eventual rejection of, Western values.

¹¹ This claim is also part of Marty et al.'s definition of fundamentalism; it is argued that fundamentalism is characterized by envy and resentment of the modern world, paired with a shrewd use of its technologies and resources (*Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 827).

¹² *Defenders of God*, p. 41-2

¹³ There is an extent to which this is true; however, the genealogies of modernity and fundamentalism date back much earlier, and are more closely intertwined than Lawrence is willing to acknowledge. There could not have been fundamentalism without modernity, but neither could the modern world have come about without proto-fundamentalist movements. This claim is demonstrated, at length, in my "A Brief History of Modernity."

She would go on to argue that Darwinism, Marxism, and Freudianism all reduce the human experience to a single set of interactions (adaptation, struggle & survival of the fittest, the dialectical struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the struggle and collaboration between the ego, superego, and id).¹⁴ However, it is simultaneously held that other formulations of fundamentalism are essentially non-threatening (and in some cases, integral) to the modern world. *Religious* fundamentalism is perceived as being uniquely hostile to modernity insofar as secularism is perceived as its heart. In that same work, however, she acknowledges that the initial (and often, the most vicious) fundamentalist revolt is typically *not* against unbelievers or secularists, but against a group's co-religionists.¹⁵ This remains true; consider: the overwhelming majority of victims of Islamic terrorism are, in fact, other Muslims (typically, these acts are perpetrated by Sunni Muslims against members of minority sects, such as Shiites, Alawites, Druze or Ba'hai).¹⁶

Moreover, there is (and always has been) a symbiosis between religious fundamentalism and secularism: each justifies the other. And this was true from the very origin of the concepts.¹⁷ In fact, the very idea of a religious sphere is, itself, a secular distinction.¹⁸ Therefore, insofar as secularism is the essence of modernity, it seems as though modernity and religious fundamentalism are mutually dependent. And so we have arrived at an impasse; it seems as though we must gain a better understanding of what modernity *is* in order to understand the relationship between it and fundamentalism.

Excursus: Modernity

Just as with fundamentalism, defining the phenomena to which "modernity" refers is complex. The most straightforward method may be to define modernity temporally. However, it is difficult to pin down exactly *when* the modern world begins.

¹⁴ *The Battle for God*, p. 168

¹⁵ *The Battle for God*, p. 148

¹⁶ For instance, a 2009 report on victims of Al-Qaeda attacks confirmed that the organization killed Muslims at 8 times the rate they killed non-Muslims. See "Deadly Vanguard: A Study Of al-Qaida's Violence Against Muslims," conducted by the CTC (Combating Terrorism Center) at West Point.

¹⁷ Again, I would refer the reader to my, "A Brief History of Modernity."

¹⁸ Traditionally, there were no strict lines between "secular" fields such as history, science, philosophy, etc. vs. "religious" disciplines such as theology, exegesis, and mysticism. In tribal cultures, the priest was also the medicine man, the councilor, the wise man, etc. In the Islamic "Classical" period, the leading intellectuals were polymaths, simultaneously making great strides in mathematics, medicine, physics, theology, and philosophy. These findings were viewed as interrelated and mutually-enhancing.

In his excellent *Formations of the Secular*, Talal Asad presents a genealogy of the secular, secularism, and secularization— explaining the processes by which these fields (the secular and the religious) came to be separated from, and eventually opposed to, one another. Commiserate with Gillespie's theory, Asad claims that the origins of this transformation were theological in nature (initially).

Depending on how one understands the term, one could consider the modern world to begin with the Reconquista, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the end of the World Wars, the Collapse of the Soviet Union, September 11th, etc. By this sort of definition, while we may authentically speak of a traditional heritage or of a cultural memory, *there is nothing beyond the domain of modernity*. When we speak of the modern world, geographically, we are simply speaking of the world. In this regard, the interpretation gets the right answer for the wrong reason; we are still missing the essence of the issue—the reason we have trouble pinning a start date for modernity is because we still do not know what modernity *is*.

One could define modernity in terms of some kind of progress, instead; for instance, "modernity" could be narrowly understood as an acceptance of scientific/technological advances. By this definition, however, it is difficult to understand the apparent tension which developed between "modernity" and the "Muslim world." Relative to the history of Christianity in Europe, Islamic societies have been much more embracing of science, technology, and free-thought. The Qur'an frequently cites the universe itself as an *eikon* to God's Reality¹⁹ and encourages its readers to use *observation* and *reason* in pursuit of God's Truth²⁰ (as opposed to the Christian emphasis on faith in the unseen). Muslim intellectuals believed that through exploring the material universe and its laws, they could better understand its Creator, God—and better fulfill mankind's purpose as God's vicegerent on Earth.

And so we have already run into an apparent contradiction: should we accept this narrow definition of modernity, it seems as though Islam was its progenitor. Muslim thinkers introduced the West to its current numerical system, the concept of zero, a number of infrastructure innovations; they revolutionized the fields of physics, mathematics, medicine, psychology, philosophy and theology—synthesizing, developing, and integrating ideas from all previous times and cultures into their own. It was Islamic scholars who preserved and advanced ancient Greek thought; it was from the Muslim world the West "recovered" its heritage. And not only was modernity "born" in Islamic societies, but it was achieved in the West largely through the conquest, enslavement, and colonization of the Muslim world, and continues to rely on its resources, especially oil, in order to sustain itself. By the aforementioned definitions of modernity, the apparent tension between it and Islam seems inexplicable. It seems equally inexplicable that there ever came to be a distinction between the Modern World and the Islamic World.²¹

¹⁹ Ex. Qur'an 6: 95- 99, 21: 30- 33

²⁰ibid 12: 108 -109, 25: 43- 44,

²¹ In *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong attempts to address this problem; in explaining why a good deal of Africa, the Levant, the Mideast, and Persia has gone, what she would describe as, "the fundamentalist route" she draws a contrast in the modernizing process in the those regions vs. in the West.

Moreover, any such Hegelian model of modernity would have to also be able to account for the resurgence of fundamentalism in the West. The account seems to fail on both counts.

One may address these problems by defining modernity in a merely descriptive fashion. For instance, while modernity *does* include the aforementioned openness to advances in science and technology, it also seems to entail openness to democratic and secular forms of government, as well as multinational corporations. Modern culture is defined by individualism, relativism, positivism and materialism. These aspects of modernity seem to be frequently conflated and interchanged with the others; if these features are, in fact, inherent to modernity, they are more ambiguously reconcilable with the Islamic worldview. Another important feature of this view is that it highlights the modernity's multifarious composition. However, being merely descriptive, this approach falls short of defining the *nature* of modernity.

On this point, probably the best theory is to be found in Michael Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity*.

She describes this process in the West as liberating and empowering, characterized by independence and innovation. In contrast, she described the process of modernization in these other areas as being characterized by dependence, imitation, coercion.

While this is true, it overlooks a few important points. For instance, the modernizing process began in the West as a process of imitation and farce, no less than in the Mideast: in the first place, there was the pantomime of Rome which was taken up by German and Frankish tribes united under Charlemagne, then in the Renaissance, and emulation of Ancient Greece. In both cases, the transplants were "alien," rather than the evolution of some living, innate tradition.

The real difference was that these reforms in the West were implemented piecemeal, and over the course of centuries. At each stage, care was taken to incorporate the new into the old. When the catholic church came, they consecrated tribal leaders, existing holy sites— they turned mythic heroes into saints, they Christianized pagan rituals and holy days. The church was converted to such an extent that by the time the west was "rescued" from the barbarians, it could no longer even be integrated into the Roman Empire, nor the Catholic Church with the Imperial Church. The case of neo-classicism was the same in the Renaissance. Both of these cases, which form the foundation of Western thought, were imitative rather than innovative in nature (see "A Brief History of Modernity").

This slower progression allowed the respective reforms to "feel" more natural, even when they were spread by the sword and by coercion (which they often were, just like in the Mideast). In these other regions, yes, the reforms were typically imposed at gunpoint by colonizers or dictators— but the real problem was the "all at once" nature of the change. In a matter of decades (at best), they were expected to undergo a series of changes which unfolded over centuries in the West. That is, there was no time for the ideologies to come to feel natural or to be grown organically. Modern institutions were simply superimposed sloppily on top of existing social context.

Granted, this metaphysical cataclysm was exacerbated by the more literal cataclysm of massive debt, concessions, exploitation, oppression by modern powers & their local stooges—but overall, the dichotomy misses the essence of the difference of these modernizing processes, and affirms a number of false narratives. After all, the Holy Roman Empire, the Reformation and the Enlightenment were all established at the point of the sword, as well.

His work attempts to redefine modernity, its origins and its nature, in terms of a theological struggle, internal to Christianity, which dates back to the religion's foundation. Over the course of this examination, he provides an alternate account of what it *means* to be modern:²²

"To define oneself as modern is to define one's being in terms of time.... To be modern means to be "new," to be unprecedented in the flow of time...ultimately, not even a form of being, but a form of becoming. To understand oneself as new is to understand oneself as self-originating, as free and creative in a radical sense, not merely as determined by tradition or governed by fate or providence. To be modern is to be self-liberating, self-making, and thus not merely to be in history or tradition, but to make history. To be modern consequently means not merely to define oneself in terms of time, but to define time in terms of one's being (as historicity), to understand time as the product of human freedom and interaction in the natural world."

Fundamentally Modern

But of course, it is immediately obvious by this definition that religious fundamentalists not only exploit modern tools and infrastructure, but *are*, themselves, modern.²³

²² *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, p. 2

²³ Marty et al. (*Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 819) claim that fundamentalist movements seize upon historical moments, which they match to texts and traditions, in order to affirm their mission (its importance and ultimate triumph).

The problem, of course, is that modernists seize upon the same sort of justifications. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* is a prime example, typical of Enlightenment-era thought, which viewed the progression from paganism, to monotheism, to rationalism as inevitable. Enlightenment era thinkers would come to interpret rationalism within the framework of the Christian messianic ideal; the result was an essentially evangelical form of rationalism, complete with a mythical Golden Age (Greco-Roman antiquity), followed by a fall from grace (the fall of Rome, followed by the Dark Ages) — there was hope for the redemption and perfectibility of man, rendering conversion an imperative. There was even the belief that Reason would save us from our societal problems and eventually usher an age of universal peace and prosperity. Out of this hope developed the need to destroy "false religions," which, within this framework, came to mean religion itself.

In the immediate aftermath of the Great Depression and the World Wars, and under the Cold War shadow of nuclear apocalypse, the entire modern project was called into question: it had seemed as though we had realized its goals at a cost which rendered our victory hollow. However, with the collapse of fascist states and the Soviet Union, paired with the subsequent economic transformations in Asia and Latin America. The modern project was reinvigorated—it seemed as though far from being obsolete, the modern project was on the verge of being realized.

This creates a problem for the common assertion that the aim of the fundamentalists is to assert or defend *tradition*. Even those fundamentalists who explicitly reject contemporary values are a product of the very culture they condemn. Their opposition to modernity is sincere; but insofar as they define themselves as traditionalists, their position is farcical: they are nostalgic for a time they have never known, for a culture they have never experienced (and often know very little about), and for a mindset they could never truly internalize. Religious fundamentalists are modern, unequivocally: they have modern concerns, they employ modern concepts and utilize modern tools to work towards modern ends within the context of modern institutions; they are essentially *post-modernists*, not *pre-modernists* (their own delusions notwithstanding).

The Fundamentalism Project grants this concession as well, claiming fundamentalists have a "closer affinity to modernism than traditionalism."²⁴ They go on to argue that what the fundamentalists *really* want is to reap the benefits of modernity without realigning their values.²⁵ Of course, this position is incoherent. Firstly because, *qua* modern people, their values are *intrinsically* modern. Insofar as they reject these values, than what they want is not to *avoid* the realignment of values, but precisely *to create a shift in valence*. Fundamentalism is, *inherently*, a realignment of values. Even insofar as the fundamentalists are attempting to restore some perceived ideal past state, the very *idea* of revivalism *presupposes* a lack of continuity: living, vibrant, and authentic traditions are not in need of revival.²⁶ Similarly, *what fundamentalists are revolting against is precisely the popular religious tradition*, which they view as having been corrupted or compromised by the majority of their coreligionists. Therefore, the claim that fundamentalists strive to avoid realigning their values is incommiserate with their modern nature, and with the nature of fundamentalism itself.

Moreover, not only do fundamentalists, just as much as modernists, seek to sweep away the religious tradition, *they often do so in pursuit of the same ends*. Gillespie describes a dual *telos* of the modern project as follows:

1. To maximize human freedom
2. To make man both master and possessor of nature

Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* is probably the most well-known modern example of this psychology, but it is ubiquitous: modernists, scientists, materialists commonly depict religion as an antiquated worldview whose extinction is inevitable. I would refer the reader to the work of Richard Dawkins or Sam Harris as prominent examples of this sentiment.

²⁴ *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 827

²⁵ Lawrence would make a similar claim, arguing that fundamentalists were not opposed to modernity, but to *modernism*: the fundamentalists want the benefits of the modern world, but without a reorientation of valence (*Defenders of God*, p. 27).

²⁶ Accordingly, the result of such efforts is often a pantomime or farce of the tradition in question.

Of course, religious fundamentalists typically *affirm* these values as the ends towards which they are striving, as well. Qutb defined the essence of Islam as freedom from oppression and exploitation by submitting all creation and agency to the authority of God. He goes on to redefine what progress means— specifically, a mastery over our bestial urges and rebellious egoism.²⁷ In this sense, a number of contemporary social models would be viewed as *regressions*, not evolutions. He similarly redefines the nature of freedom, which includes a freedom from illusions and false authorities— arguing that only through the *sharia* can mankind institute and preserve *true* freedom and *true* progress.²⁸ Even on the issue of gender relationships, Qutb holds that contemporary indifference to gender fails to respect women *qua* women; that is, the best way to respect the dignity of men or women is to *affirm* gender roles.

In short, to claim fundamentalists oppose modern values is to miss the heart of fundamentalist challenge. Fundamentalists and secularists are in agreement, in terms of their general aspirations. The fundamentalist claim is that secular (i.e. materialist and/or rational) methods are neither the only nor the best means of realizing these goals.²⁹ Accordingly, there is a difference on what the final product of these pursuits should look like (that is, on which social models best represent the fulfillment of these shared values).³⁰ Therefore, insofar as modernism is *essentially* understood in terms of Gillespie's dual ideals, it seems as though religious fundamentalism is a *variation of modernism*, not its antithesis; and the *essential* difference between the secularists and fundamentalists is not one of *values*, but of *methods*.

²⁷ This is a nice analog to point 2, above.

²⁸ This is a recurrent theme which runs throughout his works, but as an example, see *Milestones*, Chapter 7 ("Islam is the Real Civilization").

²⁹ Accordingly, through reading a host of fundamentalist literature, one is left with the conviction that far from feeling *envy* towards the secularist, religious fundamentalists express feelings of *disdain* and *condescension* towards them; sometimes, *pity*. These are sentiments of *superiority*, not *inferiority*. Overall, their position is more closely analogous to Nietzsche's sentiments towards the prevalence and persistence of Christianity than any feelings of *jealousy*.

³⁰ In his *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, fundamentalist C.F. Henry implores his coreligionists to build coalitions with their modernist Christian counterparts, with people of other faiths, and even with secularists towards the end of combating social evils (which he defines as poverty, war, human/civil rights violations, oppression, and alcohol/substance abuse, p. 78)— so long as they are permitted to evangelize to those being helped within these coalitions.

It is his position that the essential flaw with humanism is that it relies upon a false conception of mankind. While humanity is not inherently *bad*, independent of Christ's redemption and grace (and insofar as the humanists only seek to address *material* needs and problems), all social endeavors aimed at lifting mankind out of misery will be doomed to failure and may even make things worse (despite their laudable intentions).

That being said, the author laments that the humanists are primary (and near-exclusive) force driving the effort to address social evils. While the humanists have allies in some liberal Christian circles, fundamentalists have largely disengaged— at times, they have even appeared sympathetic to the "wrong side" of these struggles. This, he holds, is unacceptable and out of keeping with the Christian message and imperatives.

This explains the apparent tension between secularism and fundamentalism: they are *competing* interpretations of the *same* worldview (modernism).³¹

And so, if we return to our initial formulation of religious fundamentalism as, "an antagonistic response to modernity on the part of minority groups who feel threatened by the encroachment of the 'modern world' and its values," we see that this definition is wrong *on virtually every level*: Fundamentalism is *not* antagonistic to modernity; it is a phenomena whose origin lies in the heart of modernity, not at the periphery; and the ideal is not to preserve values, but to reform them.

At Last, Definition

One could attempt to salvage the traditional view of the fundamentalist by abandoning attempts to *define fundamentalism*, and instead attempt to *describe the typical fundamentalist*. Some uncontroversial features of the "typical" fundamentalist as described by Marty et al., Lawrence, Armstrong, and a host of other experts, include:

- Fundamentalists tend to be socially conservative
- They tend to lean politically "right"
- They tend to read the Scriptures in an overly literal fashion
- They tend to emphasize strict orthodoxy and orthopraxy
- They trend towards exclusionism and confrontation
- They dispense with the religious tradition on the grounds that it has been corrupted
- And so, the intent of their movement is to get back to the *essence* of their faith.

The central fallacy with such a description is that it is inappropriately narrow. It would be easy to construct an alternative version of the fundamentalist who is virtually the opposite of this and is equally ubiquitous in contemporary societies:

³¹ As a helpful analog, communism was not an opposite worldview to capitalism; rather, they were competing variations on the same essential worldview (materialism). The communist nations were not fighting for "higher" or immaterial ends/ values, but for control of capital, the means of production (resources & labor), recognition in the U.N., etc. They believed, just as much as the capitalists, that *these* were the ends worth pursuing, that *these* were the fulfillment of their ideologies. Thereby, they granted the capitalists a concession far more significant than any resource, or satellite state: they conceded *reality* to the capitalists. Modern ostensibly communist states, such as China, are successful precisely because, on the geopolitical stage, they "play the game" without the delusions and pretenses of their idealistic predecessors.

- They tend to be socially progressive
- They tend to lean politically "left"
- They tend to read the Scriptures as being almost entirely metaphorical
- They tend to focus on one's intentions as the most important aspect of religious life
- They trend towards ecumenicism and tolerance
- They dispense with the religious tradition on the grounds that it has become "antiquated" and no longer fits with contemporary societies
- They de-emphasize dogma and rules in favor of following the *spirit* of the Revelations.

Although both of these groups have the same (revisionary) relationship to their religious traditions, and share the same motivation for their reforms³² (to get to the "core" of the faith), only the former are typically considered to be fundamentalists. It is our position that this distinction is difficult to defend, as the traits in which they differ seem to be *non-essential*, while the traits they hold in common seem to present necessary and sufficient conditions to define the term in question.

Upon eliminating this false distinction, we see that the overwhelming majority of contemporary religion is fundamentalist in nature.³³ It will be our claim that religious fundamentalism is inextricably linked to modernity³⁴ in that fundamentalism simply *is* modern religion.³⁵ *Religious* fundamentalism will be redefined as follows:

³² The primary difference between these two groups is in the *object* of their reforms *vis a vis* their social context: should society be reformed in order to bring it into harmony with religion? Or should religion be reformed in order to bring it into harmony with society?

This difference is inadequate to separate one group as fundamentalists (to the exclusion of the other) because it seems to miss the heart of what fundamentalism *means* (i.e. the *reason* for the reforms). In fact, it seems as though defining the former group as fundamentalists has been largely political sophistry on the part of "modernists:" attempting to discredit a rival by affixing on them a label that has negative connotations.

³³ For instance, modern theologians dispense not only with religious traditions, but with the Scriptures as well, preferring to derive their positions almost exclusively from their own reasoning and the precedent of other philosophers; *mutatis mutandis*, mystics can easily be classified as fundamentalists as well. These points are explored at length in my "And the Truth Shall Set You Free: the Divine Mandate Anti-Theory of Ethics," and "Deus ex Anima: Towards a 'Properly Religious' Aesthetic."

³⁴ To his credit, Lawrence cedes the point that religious fundamentalism seems to be an aspect of modernity. He even highlights, at length, ways in which the modernists have much in common with fundamentalists. But then he fails to carry these claims to their logical conclusion, instead maintaining the common view that modernism and fundamentalism are necessarily opposed.

³⁵ While it is beyond our purview to provide and defend a definition of modernity here, it may be helpful to claim that the specific link between fundamentalism and modernity is a nihilistic disposition towards tradition. I intend to develop this claim more fully in my forthcoming, "The War on Context: Islam, Modernity, and Terror."

df. Religious Fundamentalism

The intentional dispensing with a religious tradition for the sake of emphasizing what are perceived to be the most essential aspects of the faith in question.

The further differences between progressive, conservative, philosophical, and mystical incarnations of religious fundamentalism can be better understood as alternative *framings*.³⁶ And bearing in mind that fundamentalism is *not* a phenomenon restricted to religion, we are also in a position to redefine fundamentalism more generally:³⁷

df. Fundamentalism

The employment of a narrow set of principles as ontological and phenomenological hermeneutic devices (≈ as a means of interpreting reality and the human experience).

By this definition, we see that *virtually all ideologies are fundamentalist, in nature*. The appeal of our definitions over others is that they are simple, non-partisan (i.e. universal), and the definitions correspond cleanly with the meaning of the words which comprise the terms in question. Moreover, in addition to being able to answer all of the objections raised against the conventional definition, we can also accommodate a number of other trends which are entirely inexplicable within the framework of the standard narrative. For instance, while further steps are needed to elucidate the connections between fundamentalism and extremism, our theory is perfectly compatible with the following facts about terrorism:

1. The majority of successful terrorist incidences in America were committed by native-born, white males.
2. Even when terrorist attacks are committed by immigrants or minorities, overwhelmingly the terrorist is not a *new* immigrant, but someone who has spent most or all of their lives in America; that is, they are *homegrown* terrorists. Insofar as they are minorities, they are typically *not* from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.³⁸

³⁶ For elaboration, I would refer the reader to the work of George Lakoff. His recent, *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics*, would be an excellent starting point. Also, Richard Nisbett's *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently—and Why*.

³⁷ Hitherto, for the sake of simplicity, we have employed the term "fundamentalism" in the conventional way (as a shorthand for "religious fundamentalism"). Henceforth, however, we will distinguish the terms more carefully.

³⁸ Claims 1 and 2 are demonstrated at length in my, "Reverse Profiling: the Terrorist Threat of White America," based primarily upon F.B.I. statistics from 1980- 2010. A further question remains as to why the public perception is virtually the opposite of these claims, and that question has been analyzed in my "Doubling Down on Double Standards: the White Man, the Man, and the Fear of the Other," wherein I present a series of case studies contrasting media portrayals of comparable cases of terrorist acts committed by whites vs. those committed by Muslims.

3. Outside the West, terrorist acts are usually committed by people who are better educated, more affluent, and who otherwise have better prospects than the general population.³⁹
4. There is a complex and symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media, the industrio-military complex, and modern social structures.⁴⁰

The origin of the confusion about the relationship between modernity and fundamentalism is obvious: the first group who self-identified as fundamentalists defined themselves in opposition to self-described modernists⁴¹— and so it came to be understood that modernism was *inherently* opposed to fundamentalism. In philosophy circles, this sort of fallacy is labeled, "is implies ought;" it arises from inappropriately deriving normative conclusions from descriptive claims. Scholars were led into this fallacy by the fundamentalists themselves, who often failed (and continue to fail) to understand their own relationship to modernity and tradition, just as much as those who studied them.

No Stone Left Unturned

At this point, while we have discredited essence of the Fundamentalism Project's arguments, it may be worthwhile to go a step further. In the conclusion *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Marty et al. list a number of *definitive* attributes of fundamentalist movements. We will close our analysis by briefly deconstructing these one by one, excluding those which have already been addressed here:⁴²

1. **Fundamentalists derive their authority from a Holy Book or a sacred tradition (p. 815)**

Karen Armstrong makes a similar claim. For instance, while commenting on taqlid, she attempts to draw a contrast between the Islamic mindset and the modern mindset as follows:⁴³

"it would be difficult to imagine an attitude more at odds with the thrusting, iconoclastic, spirit of the modern West.

³⁹ This point was demonstrated in Robert Pape's *Dying to Win: the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. The conclusions of this book are the result of his groundbreaking work at the University of Chicago, where he oversaw the creation of the world's first comprehensive database of suicide bombings and suicide bombers.

⁴⁰ I must again refer the reader to my, "The War on Context: Islam, Modernity and Terror," for elaboration on this point.

⁴¹ Of course, both of these groups were Christians, specifically, Presbyterians.

⁴² Again, we will have to pass over these fairly quickly. However, many of the claims made here are justified at length in my, "A Brief History of Modernity."

⁴³ *The Battle for God*, p. 35

The idea of putting a deliberate curb on our reasoning powers is now anathema. As we shall see in the next chapter, modern culture developed only when people began to throw off this type of restraint..."

But of course, not only is it conceivable to rely upon legal precedent in modern societies, it remains the foundation of the American justice system. From local district courts all the way up to the US Supreme Court, judgments must be supported, or at least, be supportable, by previous rulings. To the knowledge of this author, European systems are the same. In fact, in America, there is a resurgence, even among secular-rightists (such as Ron Paul supporters) for an even stricter adherence to the letter of the constitution and the intent of the forefathers.

2. **Fundamentalists view religion as *the* irreducible basis for personal and social identity (p. 815)**

This position is problematic in light of the persistent dynamic of patriotism paired with fundamentalism. In my, "A Brief History of Modernity," I demonstrate that this coupling dates back to the origin of nation states.

And interestingly, when faced with conflicts between the imperatives of the state vs. those of the Scriptures, fundamentalists overwhelmingly choose the former.⁴⁴

3. **In basing their identity on religion, Fundamentalists aspire to establish an identity aloof from history or human reason (p. 815)**

Regarding the fundamentalists supposed desire to divorce their identity from human reason— to hold this view is to recommit the "is implies ought" fallacy. The current tensions between religious fundamentalism, science, and the Intelligentsia are incidental rather than necessary. In fact, the tension arose out of the fundamentalists' unwavering dedication to empiricism and inductive reasoning over theoretical/ deductive approaches. A good deal of current fundamentalist doctrine was born out of the desire to translate religion into science. To this day, religious fundamentalists insist that unbelievers are thinking with polluted reason, based on false (materialist) assumptions.

Regarding independence from historicity, there is a logical tension between this claim, and the previously examined claim of the Project— that fundamentalists seize upon historical moments to justify their movements.

4. **Fundamentalists see the truth as whole, unified, and undifferentiated (p. 818)**

Again, it is hard to see the difference here between secularists and fundamentalists here. According to the former view, science, history, and reason are the only legitimate grounds for knowledge.

⁴⁴ This point is demonstrated at length in my, "Philosophical Reflections on Christ and America: How Would Jesus Vote?"

Modernists, just as much as religious fundamentalists, hold a series of values (rights & prohibitions) as universal and unquestionable, despite the pretense of pluralism. As Alain Badiou phrased it,⁴⁵

"Our suspicions are first aroused when we see that the self-declared apostles of ethics and of the 'right to difference' are clearly *horrified by any vigorously sustained difference*.

For them, African customs are barbaric, Muslims are dreadful, the Chinese are totalitarian, and so on. As a matter of fact, this celebrated 'other' is acceptable only if he is a *good* other—which is to say what, exactly, if not *the same as us*?

Respect for differences, of course! But only on the condition that the different be parliamentary-democratic, pro free-market economics, in favor of freedom of opinion, feminism, the environment...

...It might well be that ethical ideology, detached from religious teachings which at least conferred upon it the fullness of a 'revealed' identity, is simply the final imperative of a conquering civilization: 'Become like me and I will respect your difference.'"

5. Fundamentalists are prone to extremism (p.819)

We will explore in greater depth the ubiquity of violence in asserting modern ideals on point 9. To avoid redundancy, let us focus on how this claim is developed. The authors hold that the purpose of this extremism is partly as resistance, partly to separate their own group from others, and partly to separate the committed from the non-committed. Insofar as this is understood as an attribute of religious fundamentalism, their claim is problematic. In fact, the use of extreme actions as rites of initiation are common practices for street gangs, Marxists, environmental activists, racial groups, etc., absent a religious agenda altogether.

6. Fundamentalists seize upon times of crisis to justify their reforms (p. 820)

This claim is striking if considered unique to fundamentalism. Consider: the Enlightenment was justified under the pretence of avoiding future devastation from religious wars in light of the 30 Years War.

To this day, crises are used to initiate reforms. This dynamic is richly explored in Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*.

7. Fundamentalists mythologize, dramatize, and label their enemies (p. 820)

Again, the problem with this claim is that modernists do the same.

⁴⁵ *Ethics: An Understanding of Evil*, p. 24- 5. Baudrillard makes a similar case in his *The Transparency of Evil*.

We have already examined here that the branding of a group as "fundamentalist" is more political than theoretical. We have also suggested that the spectre of terrorism is similarly used. In the aftermath of World War II, there was the secular witch hunt of the "Red Scare," with all of the caricatures of communists implicit thereto. During World War II, such mythologizing occurred on all sides of the war.

8. Fundamentalists set exclusionary boundaries (p. 821)

Modernists also sort people into their "in group," vs. the "out group." This tradition has a long secular precedent. Again, Hegel's *Philosophy of History* demonstrates these tendencies *par excellence*. Later, colonialism would be largely justified through the claim that it was the "white man's burden" to "culture" the "uncivilized." Edward Said critiqued these attitudes in his *Orientalism*.

Again, during the Cold War, the world was divided into "the Free World" and "the Iron Curtain." After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the distinction was between the modern states and "the Third World" (later rephrased as "the Developing World"). In the wake of 9/11, the narrative has increasingly been that we are in the midst of a "Clash of Civilizations," between the West and Islam.

And all of this is ignoring racial segregation which existed within this country as a matter of law until 1954 (*Brown v. the Board of Education*), and persists in many neighborhoods and institutions unofficially.

9. Fundamentalists are seized by missionary zeal (p. 822)

Again, this is not a feature unique to religion. The institution of modernity was achieved as a result of secular crusades, secular inquisitions, and forced conversions.

This pattern continues to present day, wherein democracies and free markets are instituted at gunpoint in the aftermath of Western invasions into "developing nations," and "failed states."

Additionally, there is a wave of militant atheists (Harris, Dawkins, et al.) who aggressively attempt to discredit religion.

10. Fundamentalists want to replace the existing structure with an alternative and comprehensive system (p. 824)

The fact that modernists do not feel a pressing need to do this in the "modern world," is a testament to their previous success in doing so. After all, what were the Reformation, the Enlightenment, or the Napoleonic Wars other than an attempt to do just this? But again, the modernists have not felt content with converting their own territories— they have attempted to impose their model on large swaths of the world.

11. Fundamentalists use ideologies as a weapon against a hostile world (p. 826)

We have previously discussed modernist attempts at spreading democracy & free markets through the sword. However, even the Zionist movement was initially secular, and radically irreligious.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *The Battle for God*, p. 200- 7

12. Fundamentalist movements are guided by charismatic, authoritarian leaders (p. 826)

Again, this is typical of virtually all social movements, including modernist and secular ones. Consider that the Reign of Terror was overseen by Robespierre. Attaturk, Reza Shah, Lenin, and Mao oversaw similar modernizing/ secularizing revolutions in Turkey, Iran, Russia, and China respectively.

13. Fundamentalism is a strategy used by religious people to preserve their sense of identity (p. 835)

We have previously established that the intent of the fundamentalists is not to preserve, but to refashion. And insofar as fundamentalism is used as an identity signifier, this is not a strictly religious phenomenon: all ideologies function in this way.

14. Fundamentalism, as a religious movement, requires a corresponding political movement (p. 837)

The authors augment this work with the further claim that fundamentalist leaders were often supported by colonial powers as a means of controlling local populations (p. 827). A similar view was affirmed by Marsden in his *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. However, religious fundamentalism not *inherently* a political phenomenon. Consider, in the aftermath of the Scopes Trials and the cataclysms (Depressions, World Wars, Cold War, etc.) of the first half of the 20th Century, the fundamentalists had largely withdrawn from social involvement, focusing instead on familial development and cultivating their personal morality. C.F. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* was largely a call to fundamentalists to re-engage with the world and seek to change it on a large scale.

Conclusions

We have explored here how the Enlightenment ideal was, itself, an evangelical interpretation of Greek rationalism. We have seen how the modern world was ushered in through a series of secular inquisitions and crusades.⁴⁷ And despite the global cataclysms which followed, there remains an almost providential confidence in the impending success of the modern project; exacerbated in light of the so called "Arab Spring," despite the dissonance between the narrative and the reality of these uprisings.⁴⁸

Economists anthropomorphize "the Market," as though it were a singular entity with agency (like a deity), discussing what the Market wants to see, what it expects, how it feels, etc.

⁴⁷Demonstrations which are provided in greater detail in my aforementioned, "A Brief History of Modernity."

⁴⁸ This dichotomy is explored and explained in my, "The Arab Spring"TM: All Rights Reserved.

There is an accompanying eschatology, wherein the good (hard-working, ambitious, innovative) are rewarded with wealth and influence, while the evil (dependent, complacent, criminal) are punished with poverty and incarceration. There remains an imperative to open new markets and spread Western values, which have been framed as *universal* rights. Violence and coercion remain the primary methods of spreading and enforcing these values.

And so it seems as though the conclusions of the Fundamentalism Project are subject to the most embarrassing sort of critique: after defining religious fundamentalism in opposition to the modernity, it seems as though their description of fundamentalists would apply equally to modernists as religious ideologues. One may attempt to circumvent this problem by claiming that we should not look these characteristics individually, but collectively. A group is fundamentalist insofar as it meets all (or most) of these criteria. But even here, their description fails to capture the essence of religious fundamentalism; excepting question-begging attributes (such as a feeling of jealousy towards the modern world), their characteristics end up describing mass movements, in general.⁴⁹ Of course, mass movements will be fundamentalist (by our definition) insofar as they are reliant upon ideology, however they certainly need not be *religious*. Conversely, an individual can be a religious fundamentalist without participating in any mass movement.

Between modernity and fundamentalism, it is difficult to assert which of the two is more basic (i.e. which had causal primacy). It will be beyond the purview of this paper to explore that question. However, we can be sure of a few things:

1. The relationship between modernity and fundamentalism is, an always has been, one of synergism, not antagonism.
2. This relationship has a long history, which dates back to their common origin.
3. The two are mutually dependent: there would be no modern world without fundamentalism, nor could fundamentalism flourish in a pre-modern world.
4. Moving forward, as the world grows more modern, fundamentalism will only become more prominent and more prevalent.

Ergo, we must rethink what it *means* to combat fundamentalism; and therefore, the value of modernization, as well.

⁴⁹ In fact, Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* utilizes virtually all of the traits examined here in describing popular uprisings and their adherents.

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