
Constructing the Space of Testimony: Tariq Ramadan's Copernican Revolution

Political Theory
39(5) 600–629
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DOI: 10.1177/0090591711413546
<http://ptx.sagepub.com>



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Abstract

How do we conceptualize distinctions between religious–political territories in the contemporary world when old categories—such as Islam and the West, or *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*—precipitate misunderstandings and conflicts? In this essay, I consider Tariq Ramadan's argument that Muslims must enact an intellectual transformation along the lines of Kant's Copernican revolution and thence create concepts—such as the space of testimony (*dar al-shahada*)—to facilitate interreligious dialogue, cooperation, and respectful contestation. The essay aims to illuminate the nature of Ramadan's political theory and dispel the claim that he is a Muslim Martin Luther; to imagine the contours of a future political-intellectual movement that integrates elements of the European Enlightenment and the Arab Nahda; and to envision how Muslim and non-Muslim political theorists may combat political Manichaeism without denying the reality and importance of contending ethical visions and political identities.

Keywords

Enlightenment, ijihad, Islam, Kant, Nahda, Ramadan, space of testimony

Orient and Occident are chalk-lines drawn before us to fool our timidity.

Nietzsche

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How do we, global citizens today, draw the lines between religious–political territories and communities? Consider, for example, the terms Islam and the West, or the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and the abode of war (*dar al-harb*). These binaries have some purchase, for there are ways that Iran and Turkey have more in common than France and England, insofar as the former are Muslim-majority countries and the latter are not. At the same time, Iran’s political order based on *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the legal scholar) differs profoundly from Turkey’s parliamentary representative democracy, just as England’s model of religious multiculturalism differs from the French practice of *laïcité*.¹ Furthermore, each of these countries is plied by difference—for example, between Shias and Sunnis, Catholics and Protestants, and religious minorities—and is constantly changing through births, deaths, conversions, immigrations, emigrations, and sensational or subtle events that change perceptions and evaluations of identities. As Roxanne Euben notes, crude religious–political binaries paper over divisions within communities, historical debts between them, and the extent of contemporary cross-pollination.² At its worst, religious–political Manichaeism channels political thinking in a direction that legitimates cosmic war between the forces of good (us) and the forces of evil (them).³ One of the most pressing questions of contemporary political theory—and politics—is how to discover or create more nuanced concepts to facilitate mutually beneficial pluralism.

A key figure in this global conversation is Tariq Ramadan (b. 1962). Ramadan is important for the same reason that he courts controversy: he straddles multiple universes of reference. Ramadan is a student of the Nahda, the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth-century Arab cultural movement that includes several of the most famous Islamic modernists and reformers, including Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad ‘Abduh, Muhammad Rashid Rida, Muhammad Iqbal, and Hassan al-Banna. In an early book, *Aux Sources Du Renouveau Musulman: D’Al-Afghani à Hassan Al-Banna, Un Siècle De Réformisme Islamique*, Ramadan spells out his debt to this tradition, and in his more recent books—including *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*—Ramadan self-consciously advances this tradition into the twenty-first century.⁴ Ramadan is also a careful reader of several of the most important thinkers in European philosophy, including Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Albert Camus. Early in his career, Ramadan contributed to a volume on *La Tolérance ou la Liberté?: Les Leçons de Voltaire et de Condorcet*,⁵ and his most recent book—*The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism*—draws extensively on authors, texts, and ideas from multiple philosophical, spiritual, and religious traditions.⁶ Barbara Metcalf notes that Muslims around the world are contributing to the formation

of an “Islamic English” that “seems neither equivalent to other Muslim languages nor familiar in English.”⁷ Taking up her insight, I argue that Ramadan’s philosophical significance is that he treats the “Islamic” and “Western” universes of reference as porous and pliable entities that can be combined to forge new political vocabularies. Ramadan’s critics—including Paul Berman, Caroline Fourest, and Christopher Gardner—argue that Ramadan simply repackages the message of the Muslim Brotherhood for Europeans and Americans eager to converse with “moderate” Muslims;⁸ and Ramadan’s Islamist critics such as Taha Jaber Al-Alwani and Ahmad Ar-Rawi contend, conversely, that Ramadan denies the legitimacy of *shari’a* and seeks to arouse “needless religious sedition.”⁹ Yet I will argue that Ramadan’s political and philosophical syncretism, as well as the power and coherence of his arguments, introduce a salutary contribution to contemporary debates over how to reconceptualize the global religious–political imaginary.¹⁰

In this essay, I focus on Ramadan’s answer to the question of how to draw lines, or construct concepts, for contemporary global politics. The first part addresses Ramadan’s methodological reflections on how Muslims may exercise theoretical creativity in the realm of social affairs (*al-mu’amalat*). Here, I focus on his interpretation of the proper lessons of the life of the Prophet, the Islamic schools of law, and the Nahda. Ramadan’s thesis, in a nutshell, is that Islamic sources teach Muslims to exercise *ijtihad*—interpreted as “autonomous critical rationality”—to transform the spatio-temporal milieu in which they live. In the second part, I show how Ramadan exercises *ijtihad* to construct the concept of the space of testimony. Classical definitions of the *dar al-Islam* describe an “abode” governed by Islamic law. Yet no place in the world clearly fits that definition, according to Ramadan, and thus Muslim thinkers need to conceptualize a space where Muslims are free to say the *shahada* (the profession of faith), practice and respect the commands of the religion, participate politically, and educate others about Islam’s message. Thus Ramadan creates the concept of the space of testimony to describe a place where Muslims are free to believe in, practice, and invite others to Islam, and, ironically, this description sometimes applies better to non-Muslim-majority societies than to Muslim-majority societies. Ramadan’s call for a renewal of Islamic political thought, as well as the concrete example of the space of testimony, illustrates one way to improve the prospects of peaceful religious coexistence.

The first ambition of this essay is to clarify the nature of Ramadan’s political theory. An early article on Ramadan described him as a “Muslim Martin Luther” and this appellation reappears on his book jackets and throughout the secondary literature on his work.¹¹ There is a precedent for this term:

Muhammad Iqbal spoke favorably of Luther as “the enemy of despotism in religion” who liberated “European humanity from the heavy fetters of Popedom and absolutism” and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani may have viewed himself as the Muslim Martin Luther.¹² Several contemporary Muslim reformers, such as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na‘im, also explicitly call for an Islamic reformation to liberate Muslims from sclerotic ways of thinking and acting.¹³ Yet it is extremely problematic to label a Muslim political thinker—especially one who appeals to political liberals—as a Muslim Martin Luther.¹⁴ One reason is that Luther himself was “one of the most intolerant of men,” in John Rawls’s terms, who contributed to the development of European reasonable pluralism only by accident.¹⁵ Additionally, the Protestant Reformation splintered the church at the cost of decimating the European economy, political structure, culture, and populace—including the death of approximately 20 percent of the population of the Holy Roman Empire during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648).¹⁶ To call Ramadan a Muslim Martin Luther, then, reinforces the worst fears of Ramadan’s critics that he intends to lead a religious war against European civilization. This gloss also fails to explain key aspects of Ramadan’s project—particularly its vindications of theoretical creativity and political pluralism.

In this essay, I prefer to focus on Ramadan’s exhortation, in *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, for Muslims to cultivate a creative political-intellectual mindset:

Our sources help us in this if we can only try hard to reappropriate for ourselves the universality of the message of Islam, along with its vast horizon. This reappropriation should be of a depth that will enable it to produce a true “intellectual revolution” in the sense intended by Kant when he spoke of the “Copernican revolution.”¹⁷

May we speak of Ramadan as a Muslim Immanuel Kant?¹⁸ Well, no, if we mean to imply that Ramadan seeks to secularize Islam in the same way that Kant purportedly secularizes Christianity. Nor may we say that Ramadan builds his political theory upon pure practical reason, advocates a rationalistic metaphysics of morals, or embraces any particular doctrine employed by Kant scholars to determine who is in or out of the Kantian tradition. Yet Ramadan thinks that “scholars have always imported and exported ideas . . . that promote the cross-fertilization of civilizations,” and that Muslim scholars may import Kant’s idea of a Copernican revolution to envision the political and philosophical task before them.¹⁹ Furthermore, Ramadan’s political theory as a whole amalgamates (among other sources) Arabic concepts—such

as *ijtihad*, *tajdid*, and *islah*—and ones associated with Kant’s philosophy, such as autonomy, critique, and universal morality.²⁰ Ramadan begins *The Quest for Meaning*, for example, by addressing Kant’s three great questions in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?), and he appeals to Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* to develop an idea of the “ethics of liberation.”²¹ Ramadan, to be sure, does *not* advocate Kant’s practical philosophy. But Ramadan seems to agree with Judith Butler that the Kantian legacy may contribute to a critique of religious and secular presumptions.²² To the charge that his rhetoric differs, but his message is identical to that of, say, his grandfather Hassan al-Banna or Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Ramadan replies, “languages convey and transmit sensibilities; they have and *are* particular sensibilities.”²³ By expressing a critical sensibility, Ramadan both situates himself within and stretches the borders of a Kantian tradition.

The second ambition of this essay is to contribute to contemporary discussions about the future of the Enlightenment. In a recent essay entitled “The Trafficking with *Tanwir* (Enlightenment),” Mona Abaza points out that the Egyptian government publicly proclaims itself in favor of European-style Enlightenment at the same time as it reinvents barbaric practices from the Middle Ages. The epigraph of Abaza’s essay, taken from a famous passage in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, indicates her assessment of this state of affairs: “the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster.”²⁴ Let us acknowledge valid criticisms that have been leveled at the Enlightenment: it is a capacious, and perhaps too capacious, term to capture the variety of intellectual movements of eighteenth-century Europe and the United States; its partisans often fail to live up to its ideals of honoring human dignity and equality; and key terms of the Enlightenment (such as tolerance) may need to be rethought for contemporary circumstances. Yet the Enlightenment remains, for better or worse, a point of orientation for progressive political thinkers and actors.²⁵ Rather than abandon the Enlightenment as a political and intellectual source, I think, we should view its main contribution to contemporary life, in Foucault’s words, as a “philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.”²⁶ From this perspective, progressive political thinkers and actors may draw strength and ideas from the Enlightenment while remaining alert to the dangers and possibilities residing within the present. A benefit of this approach is that it lays the groundwork for a *future* Enlightenment that includes a much broader range of religious diversity than was imagined by perhaps any early-modern thinker. By drawing upon the ideas of Kant, Voltaire, Condorcet, and other European philosophers, Ramadan speaks intelligibly to many contemporary political

theorists working in the tradition(s) of the Enlightenment.²⁷ Ramadan also, however, enfold his political theory with Islamic sources that challenge Euro-American ideas and practices. Once again, Ramadan's project bothers many Enlightenment and Islamic thinkers who want to keep their traditions pure. Yet if the Enlightenment ethos demands that *everything* must submit to critique, then self-identified partisans of this tradition need to expose themselves to the criticisms of their fellow citizens.²⁸ Ramadan shows one way that the Enlightenment tradition may transform and renew itself for deeply pluralistic, interconnected, twenty-first-century societies.²⁹

The final aim of this essay is political, namely, to envision a world in which diverse faiths may interact agonistically, respectfully, and fruitfully. Cartography is a political activity par excellence. Cartography draws lines between communities, provides normative terms to describe those communities, and shapes political perceptions and evaluations. In the twentieth century, several powerful theoreticians contributed to an architecture of enmity.³⁰ Samuel Huntington, for instance, posited a clash of civilizations between the West and the rest, while Sayyid Qutb maintained that *dar al-Islam* requires the establishment of an Islamic state with *shari'a* as the authority—otherwise, the space is *dar al-harb*.³¹ In this discursive arena of crude and antagonistic distinctions, we need new cosmopolitan visions, in Roxanne Euben's words, "to develop conceptual tools capable not only of recognizing but theorizing new identities, interstitial public spaces, and deterritorialized cultures."³² Many political theorists and actors wonder *how* to construct such conceptual tools and *what* they look like today. In this essay, I contend that Ramadan may help teach us the art of cartography.

Tariq Ramadan's Copernican Revolution

Kant's Copernican revolution is a monumental event in modern philosophy and nearly all subsequent Euro-American philosophers work "in Kant's wake."³³ Kant's epochal claim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that "we can cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them."³⁴ The first implication of Kant's Copernican revolution is that we do not have to accept concepts or principles on trust. For metaphysical realists, the truth is something that human beings receive from God, the world of ideas, or experience. Kant's new way of thinking posits suspicion towards any inherited notions, including the existence of God, the freedom of the will, or the immortality of the soul. The critical ethos, in the first instance, analyzes, or tears apart, traditional theories and practices. The second implication of Kant's Copernican revolution is that *we* produce the conceptual lenses through

which we perceive the sensible world and—he argues at greater length in the *Critique of Practical Reason*—orient ourselves practically. Kant redirects philosophy's focus from uncovering, discovering, or revealing the truth to constructing, producing, or making what we know.³⁵ Although philosophers since Plato have invented concepts, they often declared that they had discovered these concepts in Revelation, the realm of ideas, nature, or custom. Kant's Copernican revolution forthrightly announces that *we* provide the categories and principles that make possible experience and moral action. After Kant, philosophers have felt empowered to challenge conservative ways of thinking and acting in order to create new theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, the Copernican revolution has political consequences, for the practice of critique only flourishes in a culture of free and public debate.³⁶ Kant's Copernican revolution, in sum, has critical, constructive, philosophical, and political facets.

Ramadan believes that Muslim scholars have indigenous resources to face the challenge of living in tune with their time.³⁷ The West does not have a monopoly on understanding modernity, and Muslim intellectuals should be free to conceptualize the modern condition in their own terms.³⁸ Thus, Ramadan does not argue that Muslims need to endorse Kant's Copernican revolution as he presents in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, nor that Muslims need to proceed through an Enlightenment (or a Renaissance, or a Reformation, or a Second Vatican Council), nor that Muslim reformers need to modernize Islam using Western models and criteria in general. At the same time, Ramadan's "principle of integration" holds that Muslims may freely incorporate Euro-American ideas and accomplishments—as long as they are good, just, and humane—into their own lives and ways of thinking.³⁹ "Philosophy shapes the critical consciousness and the critical mind"—thus, Muslims may appropriate and benefit from the insights of European philosophers such as Kant, retaining the right, of course, to recast ideas to serve their own ends.⁴⁰ We may present in summary fashion several features of Ramadan's Copernican revolution: it criticizes *taqlid*, the blind imitation of one's (legal) predecessors; it cultivates the exercise of autonomous critical rationality in the sphere of social relations; it invites *'ulama* (religious scholars) to become a proposing force who transform the world rather than merely adapt to it; and it promotes the formation of global citizens "confident in their values, defenders of pluralism in their common society, and respectful of the identities of others."⁴¹ Ramadan's Copernican revolution thus parallels and diverges from Kant's.⁴²

In this section, I examine how Ramadan presents a case for Muslim critical political thinking. In *Radical Reform*, Ramadan exploits the ambiguity of the term "radical" to explain how he wants to reform Muslim ways of thinking

about themselves, the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (*sunna*), and the natural and social contexts. The word radical—from the Latin word *radix*, “root”—means going to the foundations or sources. In *Radical Reform*, Ramadan provides an etymology of his key terms to show that the notion of reform is indigenous to Islam. Ramadan's call for a revival (*ihya'*) of the religious sciences explicitly evokes Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's work that bears that title.⁴³ The idea that Muslims need a *tajdid*—renewal, rebirth, or regeneration—of their approaches to the Islamic sources alludes to the Prophet's *hadith* that “God will send this [Muslim] Community, every hundred years, someone/some people who will renew [*yujaddidu*] its religion.”⁴⁴ The notion of *islah*—or reform of the human, spiritual, social, or political context—refers to the prophet Shu'ayb's declaration in the Qur'an that “I desire nothing but reform [betterment, purification] (*al-islah*) as far as I am able.”⁴⁵ In sum, Ramadan argues that the “use of the word ‘reform’ is not at all foreign to the classical Islamic tradition”—and that his radicalism is consonant with orthodoxy, fundamentalism, or *salafism* (a desire to emulate the first generation of Muslims, the *salaf*).⁴⁶ The word *radical*, however, also connotes “a departure from what is usual or traditional.”⁴⁷ If radical reform in the first sense of the word means returning to one's sources, the second sense means opening oneself to the world. In Ramadan's new geography of the sources of *usul al-fiqh* (the fundamentals of law and jurisprudence), “the Universe, Nature, and the knowledge related to them” become co-equal sources of normativity with the texts.⁴⁸ Likewise, context scholars (*'ulama al-waqi*)—that is, experts in the natural, social, and humanistic sciences—become equal partners with text scholars (*'ulama an-nusus*) in the effort to enact a radical reform.⁴⁹ For Ramadan, radical reform means going back to the early spirit of Islam in order to gain confidence that Muslims may understand and shape the modern world. To enact a Copernican revolution, then, Ramadan plumbs Islamic sources to inspire Muslims to rethink the fundamental terms of their political discourse. In the following subsections, we see how Ramadan reinterprets pivotal moments in Islam's history to assemble evidence for his thesis.

Before that, though, I wish to address the questions: how original is Ramadan's project, and is it just window-dressing for another agenda? Both questions, I believe, can be answered by reflecting on the nature of political theory. Sheldon Wolin explains that political philosophers, at critical moments in human history, “reconstruct a shattered world of meanings” and “fashion a political cosmos out of political chaos.”⁵⁰ Political philosophers participate in a tradition of discourse that provides a rich armory of concepts, ideas, arguments, models, and practices. Political philosophers also *reconstruct* the

tradition—often simply by shifting emphases between terms—as well as introduce new elements into that armory. Ramadan, then, articulates a distinct vision that draws upon both the Enlightenment and Nahda legacies. Ramadan is not a purely original thinker—as if such a thing could exist—but nor does he treat modern political vocabularies as empty vessels that may be filled with Qur’anic meanings.⁵¹ Ramadan stretches and redefines the meanings of words in Arabic, French, and English—and he produces a syncretic vision that contributes something new to contemporary political discourse. Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab argues that the Nahda intellectuals did not especially strive for originality: “The importance of [their] ideas does not lie primarily in their depth, originality, or consistency, but in their place in the Arab public debates of the time.”⁵² Given the publicity surrounding Ramadan’s exile from the United States from 2004 to 2010, as well as the proliferating media coverage surrounding him and his work, we may be tempted to see a similar dynamic at work in the “Ramadan phenomenon.” Yet this approach misses the way that political thinkers—even if not of the epic variety—can still contribute to the fashioning of a political cosmos. And below, we see how Ramadan invents a category of political space, namely, the space of testimony. Ramadan is not merely a derivative thinker, nor is he an esoteric one—he is, rather, a mediator working between, and contributing to, several traditions.

The Lessons of the Prophet

Ramadan’s intention in *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* is clear from the subtitle: *Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*. Ramadan does not seek to add new facts to the classical biographies of the Prophet; rather, he aspires to draw lessons from the life of Muhammad for contemporary Muslims—of different branches of Islam—who live in different circumstances than seventh-century Arabia.⁵³

The Prophet’s first teaching is that there are aspects of Islamic worship and ritual that Muslims do not doubt. Ramadan recounts the Prophet’s Night Journey in which the Angel Gabriel awoke Muhammad and transported him to Jerusalem, where he met a group of prophets, prayed with them on the Temple site, and then was raised beyond space and time, through the seven heavens, to the Lotus of the Utmost Boundary, where the Prophet received the injunction of the five daily prayers and the Muslim creed that stipulates a belief in God, His angels, His books, and His Messengers. The lesson that Ramadan takes from the Night Journey is that the exceptional circumstances of the Revelation regarding the pillars of faith (*al-iman*) and the duty of

prayer (*al-salat*)—namely, that it occurred beyond Muhammad’s earthly experience—gives it a unique status in Islam. “The Prophet was raised to heaven to receive the teachings that were to become the foundation of Islamic worship and ritual, *al-aqidah* and *al-ibadat*, which require that believers should accept their form as well as their substance.”⁵⁴ Here, then, we may notice a disanalogy between Kant’s and Ramadan’s Copernican revolution—Kant demands the right to criticize *every* belief, including those at the heart of revealed religion, whereas Ramadan holds that Muslims do not put a critical distance between themselves and the core of their faith.⁵⁵ We also see that Ramadan would be willing to join any post-Enlightenment movement only if it honors Muslims’ commitment to religious belief and practice.

The Prophet’s second teaching, however, is that human beings must exercise intelligence and creativity in the sphere of social affairs. The Qur’an states: “He it is who has created for you all that is on earth.”⁵⁶ Ramadan extracts from this “sign” (*ayat*) that the basic principle, in social affairs, is permission. This principle empowers Muslims “to accept and make ours what, within every civilization or culture, does not contradict a clearly stipulated juridical prescription.”⁵⁷ Ramadan, here, challenges *salafi* literalists who equate intellectual creativity with *bid’a* (condemnable innovation): “So long as they remain faithful to principles and respect prohibitions, [human-kind’s] intellectual, scientific, artistic and, more generally, social, economic, and political productions are not innovations, but instead welcome achievements for the welfare of humankind.”⁵⁸

The Prophet’s third teaching is that Muslims may and must distinguish Muhammad’s personal opinions from the Revelations. Hubab ibn al-Mundhir asked the Prophet if the decision to stop at a particular place to prepare for the battle of Badr was God’s or Muhammad’s. The Prophet said that it was his own personal opinion, and upon hearing Hubab’s argument to move closer to the biggest well for strategic expediency, he changed his mind. Ramadan infers the following lesson:

The Messenger’s authority in human affairs was neither autocratic nor unrestricted; he allowed his Companions a substantial role in consultation, and his teaching . . . developed the conditions for acquiring those critical and creative faculties. The Prophet gave his Companions, women and men alike, the means and confidence to be autonomous, to dare to address and contradict him without his ever considering it as lack of respect for his status.⁵⁹

In the nineteenth century, Afghani had argued that Islam suffused a philosophic spirit among the first Muslims “to discuss the general affairs of the world and human necessities.”⁶⁰ Afghani also called upon Muslims to rediscover that lost spirit and become mentally “stimulated by all the events and parts of the world.”⁶¹ Ramadan heeds Afghani’s call for a Muslim philosophic revival and re-presents it in Kantian terminology: the call for the development of “critical and creative faculties” parallels Kant’s account of reason in the three *Critiques*, and the injunction to have the “confidence to be autonomous” resonates with Kant’s motto of Enlightenment: “*Sapere aude!*”⁶² As a Muslim, Ramadan contests Kant’s account of *moral* autonomy: human reason must ultimately submit in matters of faith and practice to the order imposed by Revelation.⁶³ Yet Ramadan shows that Kantian concepts may enrich Islamic political thought and change the contours of both the Kantian legacy and *salafi* reformism.⁶⁴

To support many of the points that we have considered, Ramadan discusses the Prophetic tradition generally regarded as the basis of *ijtihad* in Islam.⁶⁵ The Prophet was about to send Muadh ibn Jabal to serve as a judge in Yemen. The Prophet asked: “According to what will you judge?” Muadh replied: “According to the Book of God.” “And if you find nothing?” “According to the tradition of the Prophet.” “And if you find nothing?” “Then I shall exert myself [*ajtahidu*] to my utmost to formulate my own judgment.” “Praise be to God who guided His Messenger’s messenger to what pleases His Messenger.”⁶⁶ Ramadan explains:

The gradation in Muadh ibn Jabal’s answers contains the essence of the Prophet’s teaching and offered the means for the community to follow him and to remain faithful to him through the ages: the Book of God—the Qur’an—and the whole body of traditions (*ahadith*) of the Prophet . . . were the two fundamental references, and when faced with new situations, the keepers of those teachings were to make use of their critical intelligence, their common sense, and their legal creativity to find new answers that remained faithful to Islamic principles but fit the new context.⁶⁷

This paragraph contains the kernel of Ramadan’s Copernican revolution. Muadh ibn Jabal lived at the same time as the Prophet and was relocating within the Arabian Peninsula but still had to avoid blind imitation of the Prophet. According to Ramadan, *salafi* literalists—as he calls those whom others deem extremists, fundamentalists, rigorists, or puritans—betray the very heart of Islamic ethics and thus demand a revolution—in the strict sense

of a rolling back (*re-volvere*)—to Islam’s creative core. The Prophet demands that Muslims construct concepts, principles, and judgments that honor Islam’s higher objectives (*maqasid*) and concern with the general welfare (*maslaha*). The Prophet teaches Muadh—a judge—and all subsequent legal scholars that their job is not solely to discover, disclose, or find the answers to all their questions in the sources, but that they also must create, construct, or produce new intellectual entities for their communities. Finally, though Ramadan hesitates to allow anyone to practice legal *ijtihad*—for fears that democratizing Islamic legal thought would lead to a downward leveling⁶⁸—he does call for a “general awakening” in which all Muslims contribute, to the best of their respective abilities, to raising the cumulative intelligence of the community.⁶⁹

One concrete lesson that Ramadan takes from the life of the Prophet is the need “to develop solid ties with non-Muslims in the name of kinship or friendship, on the basis of mutual respect and trust, even in perilous situations.”⁷⁰ Muslims need to emulate the Prophet’s behavior when he was in an embattled religious minority—as in Mecca—or when he led a dominant and expanding religious community—as in Medina. According to Sayyid Qutb, the famous verse that states “There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256) was revealed to the Prophet shortly after arriving in Medina from Mecca, but that subsequent revelations taught the principle of “*Jihad bis saif* (striving through fighting), which is to clear the way for striving through preaching.”⁷¹ The task that Ramadan sets himself is to reinterpret the Prophet’s life to draw the proper lessons for contemporary pluralistic societies. His method is to extract the principles from the Prophet’s behavior and argue that their application today—when the supplementary premises needed to arrive at a judgment differ greatly from Muhammad’s time and place—may diverge from a literal replication of the Prophet’s actions. He recounts, for example, the story of the Prophet standing for the procession of a Jew’s funeral and asking: “Was this not a human soul?” Ramadan infers: “The teaching was to remain the same in spite of difficulties, treason, and wars: no one was compelled to convert, differences were respected, and all were to be treated equally.”⁷² Ramadan’s interpretation of the Prophet’s relationship to Jews—that he respected Judaism and Jews and only initiated violence against them for the political purpose of protecting the community—may strain credulity among many Muslims and Jews living through a particularly intense period of antagonism.⁷³ Yet Ramadan thinks that outside of the realm of creed and worship, there are no obvious facts: it all depends upon human interpretation. In the sphere of social affairs, Muslims must be free to focus on the Prophet’s “situations, attitudes, or words” for what they can “teach and convey to us *today*.”⁷⁴

To honor Islam's higher objectives and concern for the public welfare, Muslims must reinterpret the sources to facilitate healthy political pluralism.

The Lessons of the Schools

The second source of Ramadan's Copernican revolution is Islamic legal theory. In *Radical Reform*, Ramadan engages the topics of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the fundamentals of Islamic law (*usul al-fiqh*) for intellectual and pragmatic reasons. Studying the methodology and conclusions of the schools of law is "the best way of devising new paths toward the future."⁷⁵ Islamic scholars ('ulama) are also, in Muhammad Qasim Zaman's words, "custodians of change" who "shape debates on the meaning and place of Islam in public life" and "lead activist movements in pursuit of their ideals."⁷⁶ To sharpen his own thinking, as well as to devise means to reach and impact the global Muslim community, Ramadan draws the following lessons from the history of the legal schools.

First, Muslim scholars need to keep the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition at the center of their thinking. Ramadan identifies Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820) as the originator of this approach and praises him for "laying out a framework, rules, and a methodology of how the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions should be understood and interpreted."⁷⁷ Al-Shafi'i strove to extract, or deduce, laws and rulings from the scriptural sources that could then be applied to the religious, political, and historical environment. Although Ramadan appreciates the exegetical work of the Shafi'i school, he criticizes this school for minimizing or condemning the juridical instruments of consensus (*ijma'*), analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), or *ijtihad*. For Ramadan, a primarily deductive approach restricts the human intellect too greatly and thus needs to be supplemented by those of the other schools.⁷⁸

The next lesson of the schools is that Muslim scholars need to study the context (*al-waqi*) of legal elaboration as well as the Islamic texts. Ramadan focuses on the figure of Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 767), who pioneered the practices of analogical reasoning, *istihsan* (legal preference based on a concern with the public interest), and accommodating local custom (*'urf*) in legal elaboration. He also initiated a practice, with his students, of hypothetical juridical elaboration (*fiqh taqdiri*), that cultivates the imagination of legal scholars. Ramadan applauds the Hanafi practice of induction, that is, identifying the motives and effective causes (*'ilal*) of scholars' opinions to construct a framework that respects the spirit of the texts and provides pragmatic answers to real-world problems. Ramadan's problem, however, is that the

Hanafi school eventually calcified and focused on precedence rather than creative adaptation.⁷⁹

The third lesson of the schools is that Muslim scholars need to widen their thinking and focus on the law's higher objectives (*maqasid al-shari'a*). In *Radical Reform*, Ramadan shows how legal scholars—going back at least to Imam Malik (d. 796)—have sought to formulate a general philosophy of Islamic law that provides a holistic account of the objectives infusing the texts and the context. Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwayni (d. 1085) forged categories and hierarchies to explain the Lawgiver's intent as it could be extracted from the Revelation as a whole as well as the bulk of the juridical rulings.⁸⁰ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) continued this process of identifying the objectives embedded in the legal principle of *maslaha* (public welfare):

What we mean by *maslaha* is preserving the objective (*maqsud*) of the Law (*shar'*) that consists in five ordered things: preserving religion (*din*), life (*nafs*), reason ('*aql*), progeny (*nasl*), and property (*amwal*). What ensures the preservation of those five principles (*usul*) is *maslaha*.⁸¹

For this school, *maslaha* does not permit revisions of belief or worship, but it may orient legal rulings and ethical behavior in the field of interpersonal relations and social affairs. Whenever the texts are silent, legal scholars can ask whether a ruling preserves religion, life, reason, progeny, or property. What preserves those principles is *maslaha*, what contravenes those principles is injurious (*mafsada*). Yet scholars can only determine whether something is *maslaha* by combining a priori textual readings and a posteriori investigations.⁸² The school of objectives liberates *ijtihad* with a view to honoring Islam's ethical spirit rather than its literal commands and prohibitions.

Ramadan doubts, however, that the categories and hierarchies of the school of objectives suffice for present-day circumstances. The world has changed since the time of the medieval jurists and demands a re-reading of the texts and a re-examination of the context. The Hanafi school as well as the school of objectives recognize, in principle, the context as a source, but in practice they almost always prioritize the textual sources and those who interpret them to the book of nature and the scholars who study it. Ramadan demands that some Muslim scholars ('*ulama an-nusus*) dig deeper into the sources to discover the myriad objectives that concern the inner being (e.g., conscience, education, sincerity), ethics (e.g., physical integrity, progeny, neighborhood), and politics (e.g., rule of law, pluralism, cultures).⁸³ This radical reform also presses other Muslim scholars ('*ulama al-waqi*) to master

the natural, social, and humanistic sciences—and collaborate with non-Muslim specialists—to determine how to actualize the objectives of Islamic ethics and jurisprudence. “This is a colossal undertaking that involves reconsidering the old categories established by scholars and unquestioningly accepted by Muslims.”⁸⁴ This process of theory construction, however, embodies the spirit of the Companions as well as the jurists who founded the schools.

What is the ultimate lesson of Ramadan’s journey through the history of the schools? Andrew March contends that Ramadan increasingly employs Islamic law as a “vanishing mediator” in the transition to a postlegal Islamic ethics. That is to say, Ramadan uses key legal concepts to argue for the dissolution of rigid laws in favor of a more flexible ethical stance.⁸⁵ My concern is that March’s analogy between Ramadan’s project and reform Judaism⁸⁶—or an analogy to post–Second Vatican Council Catholicism⁸⁷—may occlude one of the streams feeding into Ramadan’s thinking. Consider, for example, the word *critique*—one of Kant’s key contributions to the modern philosophical lexicon. The term, or one of its cognates, appears over 150 times in *Radical Reform*. March is right that Ramadan’s texts are acts of persuasion as well as argumentation. Yet Ramadan’s philosophical rhetoric seeks to educate, move, and inspire Muslims and their interlocutors to criticize themselves and others. In his critique of theological-political dogmatism, as well as in his call for intellectual creativity and an appreciation of religious–political pluralism, Ramadan expresses many of the key themes of the Euro-American Enlightenment.

The Lessons of the Nahda

The Nahda forms the backdrop to nearly all twentieth- and twenty-first-century critical Islamic thinking.⁸⁸ Arising in response to the Ottoman Empire’s attempts to modernize, post-Ottoman political struggles, and colonial encounters with Europe, the Nahda thinkers sought to grasp the secrets behind Europe’s apparent progress and adopt them for their own societies. In *Aux Sources du Renouveau Musulman*, Ramadan studies reformers to unearth Islamic resources to construct timely political theories. The pivotal figure of the book may be the Indian-Pakistani poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) who provides “an excellent theoretical synthesis . . . of the most significant themes of contemporary reformist thought.”⁸⁹ At several key points in *Radical Reform*, Ramadan cites Iqbal’s lectures on *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.⁹⁰ As Elisabeth Suzanne Kassab notes, Islamic reformers after the end of official colonialism, as well as the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967, are

acutely aware that the Nahda had limited success and that many of its ideas must be reconceptualized.⁹¹ Now, we consider how Ramadan appropriates and updates Iqbal's interpretation of *ijtihad*: "the principle of movement in the structure of Islam."⁹²

Iqbal's first theme in *Reconstruction* is that Muslim scholars have confined Islam's dynamic outlook on life to "a state of immobility."⁹³ Early jurists, fearing the political consequences of Mu'tazili rationalism, made their legal system as rigorous as possible. The rise of ascetic Sufism drew the best Muslim minds to speculative metaphysics rather than practical politics. The destruction of Baghdad in 1258 contributed to Islamic scholars trying to preserve the core of Islamic jurisprudence in the face of imminent political chaos. Still, Iqbal considers the scholars' decision to close the doors of *ijtihad* as opposing the spirit of Islam and bringing calamities upon the Muslim community. Fortunately, several of the best minds in the history of Islam—including Ibn Taymiyya, Ghazali, and "the great puritan reformer, Mohammad Ibn-i-Abdul Wahab"⁹⁴—have renewed the practice of *ijtihad*. Ramadan takes up Iqbal's commitment "to re-evaluate our intellectual inheritance" to enact a "renaissance of Islam"⁹⁵—even if Ramadan thinks that Wahab's legacy has become a hurdle for reformers.⁹⁶

Iqbal's second theme is that the Law of Islam, fortunately, is capable of evolution. The "ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal."⁹⁷ The Qur'an teaches Muslims these eternal principles as well as a few specific legal rules. But Muslims have to decide for themselves how to interpret and actualize these principles in a "world of perpetual change."⁹⁸

Turning . . . to the groundwork of legal principles in the Qur'an, it is perfectly clear that far from leaving no scope for human thought and legislative activity the intensive breadth of these principles virtually acts as an awakener of human thought. . . . The teaching of the Qur'an that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems.⁹⁹

Iqbal's analysis of the immanent resources of Muslim critique anticipates Ramadan's own work on the fundamentals of jurisprudence. Up to the rise of the 'Abbasid, Iqbal notes, "there was no written law of Islam apart from the Qur'an," implying that the vast bulk of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) was written by human hands and is thus subject to renewal (*tajdid*). In his history of the legal schools, Iqbal argues that the Hanafi school of law possesses "much greater power of creative adaptation than any other school,"¹⁰⁰ that the

inductive approach is at least as valid as the deductive, and that Muslims may renew the investigation of Islam's higher objectives. Many of Iqbal's distinctions—for example, between Islam's immutable norms (*thawabit*) and norms subject to change (*mutaghayyirat*)—reappear in Ramadan's work. When Ramadan states that Iqbal's efforts are “not sufficient when the world's progress is so rapid, when challenges are so complex and globalization is so unsettling,” he honors Iqbal's spirit to renew *ijtihad*.¹⁰¹

Iqbal's third theme is that Muslims do not have to reject an idea or practice just because of its origin. Provocatively, Iqbal states: “It is . . . extremely satisfactory to note that the pressure of new world forces and the political experience of European nations are impressing on the mind of modern Islam the value and possibilities of the idea of *Ijma*.”¹⁰² *Ijma*, or community consensus, is a widely acknowledged source of Islamic law. Traditionally, legal scholars compose the community in question. According to Iqbal, this elitist view was an imposition of the Ummayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphs and an appropriation by power-hungry jurists. Given Islam's dynamic spirit, as well as the pressing problems of modern society, Muslims need to transfer legal interpretation (*ijtihad*) and community authority (*ijma*) from Islamic scholars to legislative assemblies.¹⁰³ For Iqbal, Muslims may freely employ European tools—such as the republican spirit or legislative assemblies—to realize Islam's objectives.

Iqbal tempers his respect for Europe's dynamic spirit, intellectual traditions, and technological advances, however, with a critique of the moral bankruptcy of European secularism.¹⁰⁴ “Primitive Christianity was founded, not as a political or civil unit, but as a monastic order in a profane world.”¹⁰⁵ The poverty of this dualistic vision has revealed itself, first, in the failure of Christianity to sustain the Roman Empire, and, then, in the failure of secular politics to retain a place for morality in European public life. Islam's great contribution to world civilization is the principle of *tawhid* (the doctrine of the unity of God). “The essence of *tawhid* as a working idea is equality, solidarity, and freedom” and the State, “from an Islamic standpoint is an endeavor to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces.” The Church and State are not two sides of the same thing: they are a “single unanalysable reality which is one or the other as your point of view varies.”¹⁰⁶ For Iqbal, it is perplexing that the Nationalist Party in Turkey wants to imitate European-style secularism that maintains a false distinction between Church and State. “Believe me, Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement.”¹⁰⁷ Reconstructing Islamic political thought does *not* mean adapting to European power: it requires, rather, that Muslims use whatever

resources are available to “move forward with self-control and a clear insight into the ultimate aims of Islam as a social policy.”¹⁰⁸

Ramadan, in sum, appropriates several Iqbalian themes: the identification of an intellectual and political crisis among Muslims torn between tradition and modernity, a belief that radical *ijtihad* can lead to Muslim renewal, a deep interest in European philosophy, and a critique of materialism and secularism. Yet Ramadan, in his fashion, silently omits the aspects of Iqbal’s philosophy with which he disagrees—such as Iqbal’s fascination with the Nietzschean idea of an *Übermensch* who can place humanity on a new track.¹⁰⁹ Iqbal was writing before his dream of an independent Pakistan had come into existence, before the Second World War, and before millions of Muslims had moved to or grown up in Europe and North America. Islam’s principle of movement demands that Ramadan address the problems of his own generation.

Constructing the Space of Testimony

One of the great questions confronting Western Muslims, according to Ramadan, is: where are we? Muslims *and* non-Muslims need to reflect upon this for the simple fact that the Muslim population, as well as the number of Islamic organizations, is growing to the point that Islam may already be Europe’s “second” religion.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, given that Western Muslims are at the “heart of the whole system,” their views influence how Muslims around the world view and interact with “the West.”¹¹¹ In *To Be a European Muslim* and *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Ramadan enacts his Copernican revolution to construct a new term for this religious–political landscape.

First, Ramadan provides a genealogy to denaturalize the *dar al-Islam*–*dar al-harb* distinction. The terms do not occur in the Qur’an or the Prophetic tradition and thus “do not pertain to the fundamental sources of Islam whose principles are presented for the whole world (*lil-‘alamin*), over all time and beyond any geographical limitation.”¹¹² Islamic scholars, rather, invented the concepts, during the first three centuries of Islam, to formulate a coherent foreign policy given the geopolitical reality of their time. The scholars studied the Prophet’s attitude after the Peace of Hudaibiyya and identified four relevant criteria: the population, the ownership of the land, the nature of the government, and the laws governing the country. From the beginning, there have been ambiguities and tensions between the criteria. The Maliki school argues that Muslims must own the land and be governed by Islamic law for a place to qualify as *dar al-Islam*. The Hanafi school, by contrast, stipulates

that *dar al-Islam* is wherever Muslims are protected and safe to practice their religion. Furthermore, Islamic scholars disagree among themselves on whether a Muslim-majority population suffices to call a place *dar al-Islam*. Ramadan states: to apply old concepts to contemporary reality “as they were thought out more than ten centuries ago appears to be a methodological mistake.”¹¹³ Over the past thousand years, empires have risen and collapsed, Muslims have migrated throughout the world, and everybody has been affected by globalization. There is no good reason why Muslims must blindly follow the juridical categories of a bygone era.¹¹⁴

According to Ramadan, Muslims need to reread the texts and contexts in light of historical developments. Ramadan asks: What elements permit the flourishing of the Muslim personality today?¹¹⁵ Reworking Ghazali’s definition of the objectives of the law, Ramadan identifies five sociopolitical conditions that protect the public welfare: freedom to manifest faith and spirituality; freedom to worship individually and collectively; physical security; freedom to educate others about Islam; and freedom to participate in the social, political, and economic life of one’s community.¹¹⁶ Turning back to the context, Ramadan finds that Western societies, by and large, satisfy the objectives of the law, or, in Euro-American discourse, secure Muslims’ fundamental rights. Western Muslims have the rights to practice Islam (declare their faith, pray, pay the purifying tax, fast, and take the pilgrimage to Mecca), to public education, to found organizations, to autonomous representation, and to appeal to the law.¹¹⁷ Without minimizing the problems that Muslims face in Europe and North America, Ramadan thinks that Western Muslims “are at home and must consider the attainments of these societies as their own.”¹¹⁸

Ramadan considers several possibilities offered by fellow Muslim intellectuals to describe this unique context where Muslims may flourish as religious minorities. Yusuf al-Qaradawi writes a book *On the Law and Jurisprudence of Muslim Minorities* with the subtitle *The Life of Muslims in Other Societies*. Describing Europe or the United States as “other societies,” however, means preserving antiquated notions of necessity (*darura*) and legal exemptions (*rukhas*).¹¹⁹ Certain Shafi’i scholars speak of the Western countries as *dar al-ahd* (abode of treaty) or *dar al-amn* (abode of safety), but these concepts presuppose a matrix where communities in the *dar al-Islam* and the *dar al-harb* sign contracts.¹²⁰ Faysal al-Mawlawi calls the West the *dar al-dawa* (abode of invitation to God), but this implies that Muslims do not have a principled commitment to pluralism but rather aim to convert everyone to Islam.¹²¹ Although these latter possibilities are better than the *dar al-Islam*–*dar al-harb* binary, the weight of the past weighs heavy on the present. Ramadan’s Copernican revolution demands that Muslim political thinkers

overturn old, simple, binary visions of reality and exert themselves to *create* concepts to grasp the distinct possibilities of our time and place.

Thus Ramadan proposes the term “space of testimony” (*dar al-shahada*).¹²² Ramadan translates the Arabic *dar* into English space because it makes no sense, in a world of cell phones, jet planes, and the Internet, to divide the world into two abodes, or houses.¹²³ Space better captures the openness of the global religious–political landscape. The term *shahada*, for Ramadan, has two valences. Every Muslim, to be recognized as such, must pronounce before God and humanity: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is His messenger.” Muslims must also bear testimony in their actions as well as their words. The space of testimony assigns Muslims “the responsibility to remind others of the presence of God and to act in such a way that our presence among them and with them is, in itself, a reminder of the Creator, spirituality, and ethics.”¹²⁴ The space of testimony is a place where Muslims are *free from* government intrusion on their religious beliefs and practices and *free to* teach others about Islam and act politically on Islamic principles. This is a new development in human history and it deserves a new concept: the space of testimony.

Islamists disagree with Ramadan’s contention that Western Muslims should not work to make a literal reading of *shari‘a* the supreme law of the land,¹²⁵ and even Muslims committed to a “middle way” may question whether Muslims should accept the persistence of un-Islamic activities on the grounds that they are not imposed on Muslims.¹²⁶ For Ramadan, though, it is ethically and practically imperative for Muslims to be loyal, active citizens alongside citizens of other faiths in European and North American societies.

And yet it is important to see that the concept of the space of testimony stretches the boundaries of contemporary Kantian political theory, including in the form of Rawls’s political liberalism.¹²⁷ According to Rawls, domestic citizens must forge an “overlapping consensus” on the legitimacy of a democratic constitutional order without necessarily agreeing all the way down on the reasons for that legitimacy. Citizens, speaking on constitutional essentials in a public forum, must sooner or later present “proper political reasons” that are acceptable to reasonable citizens of other faiths.¹²⁸ Ramadan thinks that European and North American Muslims tacitly accept the social contract underwriting the constitutional democratic structure and, unless directly ordered to violate their conscience, must exhibit “absolute faithfulness to agreements, contracts, and treaties that have been explicitly or silently entered into.”¹²⁹ And yet Ramadan thinks that Muslims must refuse the secular demand that faith and practice be confined to the private sphere. “Assertive and confident, [Muslims] have to remind the people around them of God, of

spirituality and, regarding social affairs, to work for values and ethics, justice and solidarity.”¹³⁰ For Ramadan, Islam is not just an abstract belief but an ethics that infuses a Muslim’s whole life. Muslims must be free, individually and collectively, to embody Islam and educate others about its message—even forming, if necessary, what Nancy Fraser calls “subaltern counterpublics” that propose radical alternatives to the majority’s perspective on particular issues.¹³¹ Ramadan thinks that other faiths must have the same rights to practice and express their values—as long as everyone accepts the tacit social contract with its prohibition on doctrinal enforcement—but that the secular conceit of a religiously neutral public sphere must be abandoned.¹³²

“If God had willed, He would have made you one community but things are as they are to test you in what He has given you. So compete with each other in doing good.”¹³³ Ramadan interprets this famous verse of the Qur’an (5:48) to say that God has willed diversity and Muslims should appreciate that the world has hermitages, synagogues, and chapels as well as mosques. In *The Quest for Meaning*, Ramadan emphasizes the common values shared across religious, secular, and indigenous spiritual traditions. Yet Ramadan also thinks that Muslims may *compete* with adherents of other faiths in presenting and acting on ethical principles. Muslims have the right to assert their values in public discussions about drug and alcohol abuse, the disintegration of family and community life, the destruction of the natural environment, and the future of their communities. In *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity*, Ramadan argues that Islam does not share the “tragic consciousness” that permeates European philosophy and Christianity.¹³⁴ “We are indeed dealing with two different universes of reference, two civilizations, and two cultures.”¹³⁵ Ramadan disputes the clashing civilizations thesis, but he also believes that Muslims have a right to criticize, at a profound level, present-day Euro-American values.¹³⁶ The space of testimony, in sum, invites Muslims and non-Muslims to respectfully collaborate and compete with one another in presenting and acting on their ethical visions.¹³⁷

Conclusion

This essay has presented an interpretation and defense of Ramadan’s call for a Copernican revolution in Islamic political thought. Here, I wish to highlight three broader implications for contemporary political theory and practice.

First, political theorists need to attend (better) to the complexity of authors, ideas, texts, and traditions that crosscut traditional borders. Paul Berman—arguably Ramadan’s sharpest critic in Anglophone scholarship—points to similarities between Ramadan and earlier Muslim political authors and concludes:

Ramadan “cannot think for himself. He does not believe in thinking for himself.”¹³⁸ Ramadan’s reply to this criticism, in *What I Believe*, is worth considering: “Of course I quote the same verses as the literalists, but my conclusions are different!”¹³⁹ In this essay, I have shown that Ramadan’s language blends concepts from *both* Islamic and Euro-American political theory and is thus unrecognizable, or threatening, to purists in both traditions. Yet in a world in which our fates are increasingly intertwined, such syncretic visions may offer the best prospects for interreligious dialogue and cooperation.¹⁴⁰

Second, Euro-American political theorists need to reorient their relationship to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment(s). Euro-American graduate programs in political theory or political philosophy often train students by assigning texts from the eighteenth-century movement known as the Enlightenment.¹⁴¹ I agree with Allen W. Wood that Kant’s philosophy represents one of the finest expressions of the ideals of the Enlightenment, or contemporary progressive thinking in general.¹⁴² The question becomes, though, whether, those ideals, in their original form, serve our present needs. Ramadan is willing to rethink the fundamental commitments of the intellectual tradition of the Arab Nahda to confront the unique circumstances of late-modernity. Euro-American political thinkers, including those in the Kantian tradition(s), should reciprocate this process and collaborate on the construction of new political theoretical paradigms that may be shared by a wider array of faiths.

Finally, global citizens today need to accelerate the construction of theoretical lenses to envision new forms of religious–political pluralism. Ramadan’s creation of the concept of the space of testimony, I have argued, illuminates one way to elude the Islam–West, *dar al-islam–dar al-harb* binaries. Yet we need many more concepts to undermine religious and secular dogmatisms and facilitate the formation of realistic utopias that stretch the boundaries of political possibility. Nothing in this essay implies unconditional endorsement of Ramadan’s positions on the economy, the environment, social norms, gender roles, or any other substantive topic of politics. Yet Ramadan’s call for theoretical creativity in the face of contemporary global pluralism may inspire both Muslim and non-Muslim political theorists.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author thanks the Fordham University Dean's Office and the Mellon Foundation for sponsoring the Islam and Secularism seminar at Fordham University and the Fordham University Office of Research for a Faculty Research Grant to complete this article.

Notes

1. On the political actors and systems in the Middle East and Europe, respectively, see Olivier Roy, *The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) and *Secularism Confronts Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
2. Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3, and "The New Manichaeans," *Theory & Event* 5, no. 4 (January 2001).
3. On the imagery of cosmic war among religious activists, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
4. The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire "qui vont mobiliser les énergies intellectuelles des penseurs de la Nahda (la renaissance), de la salafîyya (le retour aux sources) de Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani à Muhammad Iqbal." Tariq Ramadan, *Aux Sources Du Renouveau Musulman: D'Al-Afghani à Hassan Al-Banna, Un Siècle De Réformisme Islamique* (Paris: Bayard éditions/Centurion, 1998), 44-45. See also Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9-10. On the Nahda and its legacy, see Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For Iqbal and other Muslim modernists, "Arab" refers "not to a political entity but to a set of historical and moral ideals . . . attached in the literary imagination to the region it named." Faisal Devji, "The 'Arab' in Global Militancy," in *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, ed. Madawi Al-Rasheed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 296.
5. Tariq Ramadan and Claude-Jean Lenoir, *Tolérance Ou La Liberté?: Les Leçons De Voltaire Et De Condorcet* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1997).
6. Tariq Ramadan, *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism* (New York: Allen Lane, 2010). On the book's "shallowness" and "wooliness," see the reviews by Kenan Malik in *The Independent* (London), August 13, 2010, and John Gray in *The Guardian* (London), August 28, 2010. I agree that the book fails to present a case that all of the world's spiritualities, religions, and philosophies present different paths up the same mountain. This book, though,

- represents just one of several techniques Ramadan has employed to argue for inter- and intra-civilizational dialogue. At the least, the book displays an admirable willingness to view all of the world's intellectual traditions as potential resources for the construction of new paradigms.
7. Barbara Metcalf, *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xvi.
 8. See Paul Berman, *The Flight of the Intellectuals* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2010); Christopher Caldwell, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2009); and Caroline Fourest, *Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan* (New York: Encounter Books, 2008). For a "defense" of Ramadan that highlights his betrayal of "Enlightenment values," see Ian Buruma, *Taming the Gods: Religion and Democracy on Three Continents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 117-25.
 9. Taha Jaber Al-Alwani, "Unacceptable Allegation," *IslamOnline.Net*, April 19, 2005, http://www.islamonline.org/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1209357909774&pagename=Zone-English-Living_Shariah%2FLSELayout (accessed April 10, 2010); Ahmad Ar-Rawi, "An Impotent Call," *IslamOnline.Net*, April 19, 2005, http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1209357913295&pagename=Zone-English-Living_Shariah%2FLSELayout (accessed April 10, 2010).
 10. Other English-speaking Muslim political theorists complicating the Islam–West binary include Akbar Ahmed, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Khaled Abou El Fadl, and Abdolkarim Soroush.
 11. References to Ramadan as a "Muslim Martin Luther" include Paul Donnelly, "The Ban on a Muslim Scholar," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2004; Peter G. Mandaville, "Sufis and Salafis: The Political Discourse of Transnational Islam," in *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 302-25; and John L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford, 2010).
 12. Cited in Michelle Browers and Charles Kurzman, *An Islamic Reformation?* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 3-4.
 13. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).
 14. Andrew F. March, "Reading Tariq Ramadan: Political Liberalism, Islam, and 'Overlapping Consensus,'" *Ethics & International Affairs* 21, no. 4 (December 2007): 399-413.
 15. John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 7, 348.
 16. Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 779-821.

17. Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 53.
18. On the need for Muslim Voltaires, see Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 27-34. On the need for Muslim John Lockes, see Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 67-102.
19. Ramadan, *The Quest for Meaning*, 187, 25, 33, 208.
20. On the amalgamative nature of political theory in general, and Islamic political theory in particular, see Roxanne L. Euben, "Contingent Borders, Syncretic Perspectives: Globalization, Political Theory, and Islamizing Knowledge," *International Studies Review* 4, no. 1 (April 2002): 23-48.
21. Ramadan, *The Quest for Meaning*, 5, 97-98.
22. Judith Butler, "The Sensibility of Critique: Response to Asad and Mahmood," in *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, ed. Talal Asad (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 114.
23. Ramadan, *The Quest for Meaning*, 159. Emphasis in original.
24. Mona Abaza, "The Trafficking with *Tanwir* (Enlightenment)," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 1 (January 2010): 32-46. Other criticisms of Enlightenment triumphalism include Ibrahim Kalin, "Does Islam Need Enlightenment?" *Today's Zaman*, August 27, 2009; Akeel Bilgrami, "Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (March 2006): 381-411; Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (May 2006): 323-47; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
25. Stephen Eric Bronner, *Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 60.
26. Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 312.
27. On Rawls's combination of elements from the sensualist Scottish Enlightenment and the rationalist German Enlightenment—both, however, committed to the ideal of reflective autonomy—see Michael L. Frazer, "John Rawls: Between Two Enlightenments," *Political Theory* 35, no. 6 (December 2007): 756-780.
28. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Axi, 100-1. References to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* cite the first (A) or second (B) edition, then the pages in translation.
29. On a call for Muslims to study the European Enlightenment but avoid its "elements of perversion," see Mona Abul Fadl, "The Enlightenment Revisited: A Review

- Essay,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (December 1990): 417-435.
30. Michael J. Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xi.
 31. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Cedar Rapids, IA: Mother Mosque Foundation, 1995), 118.
 32. Euben, *Journeys*, 176-77.
 33. Tom Rockmore, *In Kant's Wake: Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006).
 34. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxviii, 111.
 35. Rockmore, *In Kant's Wake*, 43.
 36. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A738/B766, 643.
 37. Ramadan, *Aux Sources*, 22.
 38. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 145-48.
 39. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 5.
 40. Ramadan, *Quest for Meaning*, 125.
 41. Tariq Ramadan, *What I Believe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 130.
 42. There is another fascinating parallel between Kant and Ramadan, to which I can here only allude: a shared antipathy to Plato and Platonism. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant contests the Platonic project of gaining theoretical insight into pure ideas—as well as the elitist morality and politics this conceit legitimates. Ramadan’s defense of pluralistic democracy on Islamic grounds thus opposes the Platonic (elitist, authoritarian, dogmatic) strand running through a wide range of Islamic thinkers, including al-Farabi (who extols the idea of a philosopher-king-imam), Afghani (who some scholars accuse of using Islam for solely political purposes), and Ruhollah Khomeini (whose idea of guardianship is arguably modeled upon the *Republic*). On Plato’s influence on Islamic political philosophy, see Charles E. Butterworth, “Islamic Political Philosophy,” in *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, ed. Mark Bevir (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2010), 713-20.
 43. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 9.
 44. *Ibid.*, 12.
 45. *Ibid.*, 13.
 46. On Ramadan’s commitment to *salafi* reformism, see Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 26-27.
 47. “1 Radical, *Adj.* and *n.*,” in *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50196101> (Accessed August 1, 2010)
 48. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 4.
 49. *Ibid.*, 4.
 50. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9.

51. Berman, *The Flight of the Intellectuals*, 145.
52. Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 47.
53. On Ramadan's supposed failure to recognize the divide between Shias and Sunnis, see Malise Ruthven, "The Islamic Optimist," *The New York Review of Books* 54, no. 13 (August 16, 2007): 61-65.
54. Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73.
55. On the tension between Kant's religious sentiments and the "principle of immanence" at work in his philosophy, see Gordon E. Michalson Jr., *Kant and the Problem of God* (Malden: Blackwell, 1999).
56. Qur'an 2:29. Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), 62.
57. *Ibid.*, 65.
58. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 21.
59. Ramadan, *Footsteps*, 103.
60. Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal Ad-Din "Al-Afghani"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 105.
61. *Ibid.*, 106. On Ramadan's interpretation of Afghani, see Ramadan, *Aux Sources*, 50-93. On Afghani's ambivalent relationship to European philosophy, see Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 93-117, and Margaret Kohn, "Afghani on Empire, Islam, and Civilization," *Political Theory* 37, no. 3 (June 2009): 398-422.
62. On philosophy's contribution to religion, see Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 298-301.
63. Ramadan, *Footsteps*, 73.
64. See, e.g., Ramadan's discussion of Kant's "principle of the autonomy of morals," in *The Quest for Meaning*, 97-98.
65. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, n.d.). Lecture VI, Footnote 7.
66. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 24.
67. Ramadan, *Footsteps*, 199-200.
68. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 23-24. On the dangers of restricting *ijtihad*, see Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 13-14.
69. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 6.
70. Ramadan, *Footsteps*, 76-77.
71. Qutb, *Milestones* 61.
72. Ramadan, *Footsteps*, 90.
73. For a critique of Ramadan's attitude to Jews, see Berman, *The Flight of the Intellectuals*. On the way that religious communities may change their relationship

- to sacred texts through “metaphors, loop-holes, qualifications, redescriptions, silences and creative acts of forgetting,” see Andrew F. March, “The *Flight of the Intellectuals* and Tariq Ramadan,” *Dissent* (June 25, 2010).
74. Ramadan, *Footsteps*, x. Emphasis added.
 75. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 27.
 76. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 190-91.
 77. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 42.
 78. *Ibid.*, 41-48.
 79. *Ibid.*, 49-58.
 80. *Ibid.*, 61-62.
 81. Cited in Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 62.
 82. *Ibid.*, 70.
 83. *Ibid.*, 141-44.
 84. *Ibid.*, 112.
 85. Andrew F. March, “Law as a Vanishing Mediator in the Theological Ethics of Tariq Ramadan,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 10, no. 2 (2011): 177-201.
 86. Andrew F. March, “The Post-Legal Ethics of Tariq Ramadan: Persuasion and Performance in *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*,” *Middle East Law & Governance* 2, no. 2 (2010): 253-73.
 87. Gregory Baum, *The Theology of Tariq Ramadan: A Catholic Perspective* (Toronto: Novalis, 2009), 178.
 88. Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*; Peter G. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2004), 69-82.
 89. Ramadan, *Aux Sources*, 163.
 90. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 3, 28, 300, 323, 326, 356.
 91. Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 5.
 92. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Dubai: Kitab al-Islamiyyah, n.d.). The title of Lecture VI. This is the edition I cite subsequently.
 93. *Ibid.*, 149.
 94. *Ibid.*, 151-52.
 95. *Ibid.*, 153.
 96. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 6.
 97. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 147.
 98. *Ibid.*, 147.
 99. *Ibid.*, 168.
 100. *Ibid.*, 178.
 101. Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 2-3.
 102. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 173.

103. Ibid., 174.
104. John L. Esposito, "Muhammad Iqbal and the Islamic State," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 188.
105. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 155.
106. Ibid., 154.
107. Ibid., 179.
108. Ibid., 163.
109. Esposito, "Iqbal," 181.
110. Shireen Hunter, ed., *Islam, Europe's Second Religion: The New Social, Cultural, and Political Landscape* (Westport: Praeger, 2002).
111. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 76.
112. Ramadan, *European Muslim*, 123.
113. Ibid., 127.
114. Ibid., 129-30.
115. Ibid., 132.
116. Ibid., 132-34.
117. Ibid., 135-37.
118. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 5.
119. Ibid., 53-54.
120. Ramadan, *European Muslim*, 141-42.
121. Ramadan, *European Muslim*, 142-43.
122. On the concept of the space of testimony, see March, "Reading Tariq Ramadan" Mandaville, *Sufis and Salafis*, 318-20; Euben, *Journeys*, 187.
123. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 75.
124. Ibid., 74.
125. See Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi, "The Islamic Law," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 79-106.
126. Tariq Ramadan, *European Muslim*, 139. See also Göran Larsson, "Yusuf Al-Qaradawi and Tariq Ramadan on Secularisation: Differences and Similarities," in *Muslim Societies and the Challenge of Secularization: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Gabriele Marranci (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010): 47-64.
127. Few Kantian political theorists, up to now, have directly engaged Islamic political thought. For an Enlightenment (or Kantian) critique of Rawlsian political liberalism, particularly regarding the issue of confronting the Taliban, see Robert S. Taylor, *Reconstructing Rawls: The Kantian Foundations of Justice as Fairness* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2011).
128. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 462.
129. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 74.

130. Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 145
131. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 8, no. 25/26 (1990): 56-80.
132. See Volker Kaul, "Jürgen Habermas, Tariq Ramadan and Michael Walzer in a Dialogue on Politics and Religion," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36, no. 3-4 (March 2010), 505-516. For a similar critique of the secularist conceit advanced from a nontheistic perspective, see William E. Connolly *Why I am not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
133. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 202.
134. Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2001), 201-18.
135. *Ibid.*, 218.
136. On the possibility that long-standing liberal commitments might change in a thoughtful encounter with Muslims, see Roxanne L. Euben, "Making the World Safe for Compatibility," *Political Theory* 38, no. 3 (June 2010).
137. On the prospects of Ramadan's "evangelical project" transforming Europe, see Marc Lynch, "Veiled Truths," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2010): 138-47.
138. Berman, *Flight*, 241. On Berman's problematic analogies, see Patrick J. Ryan, "Fellow Travelers?" *Commonweal* 137, no. 13 (July 2010): 23-24.
139. Ramadan, *What I Believe*, 3.
140. This is the guiding insight behind much comparative political theory. See Fred Dallmayr, *Comparative Political Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
141. E.g., John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
142. Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

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