

Islamic Jihad and Western Faith

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Islamic states and jihadists who attack and murder Westerners and other disbelievers are motivated to do so by their religion, Islam. Everyone paying attention knows this (including those who pretend not to).

From the 1983 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut, to the 1989 fatwa on British author Salman Rushdie, to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, to the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, to the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, to the 2000 bombing of the USS *Cole*, to the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, to the 2004 bombings of commuter trains in Madrid, to the 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, to the 2005 bombings in the London Underground, to the 2009 massacre at Fort Hood, to the 2012 murders at the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, to the 2013 bombings at the Boston Marathon, to the 2013 butchering of a British soldier in London, to the 2014 beheading of a woman in Oklahoma, to the 2015 massacre of cartoonists and journalists at *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris—all of these and countless additional atrocities have been committed by Muslims who accept the tenets of Islam as true and take the religion seriously.

“Fight and kill the disbelievers wherever you find them,” the Koran orders (9:5). “When you meet the unbelievers in fight, smite at their necks” (47:4). “Fight them until all opposition ends and all submit to Allah” (8:39). “Those who annoy Allah and His Messenger . . . whenever they are found, they shall be seized and slain” (33:57–61). “To him who fighteth in the cause of Allah—whether he is slain or gets victory—soon shall We give him a reward of great value” (4:74). What

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of the “unbelievers,” the “transgressors,” the “disobedient”? What will be their divine fate? “They will enter the Fire of Hell,” where “it will be said to them: ‘This is the reality which you rejected as false!’” (83:12–17). And on and on. Islamic scripture is saturated with such commandments and promises. Consequently and unsurprisingly, Islamic states, Muslim groups, and individual Muslims who take their religion seriously are committed to converting or killing unbelievers until all submit to Allah.

That is the widely known (yet oft-evaded) problem. What is the solution?

At the political level, the solution is for Western nations, especially the United States, to name the enemy—Islamic regimes that sponsor terrorism, especially those in Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the jihadist groups they support, such as al Qaeda and Islamic State; eliminate them using the full capabilities of our militaries, including nuclear weapons if necessary; announce to the world that any and all regimes, groups, and individuals who continue sponsoring or engaging in jihad will likewise be eliminated; and follow through on that promise. (I and others have written extensively in *The Objective Standard* about why this is the correct political approach. See, for example, “The Jihad Against America and How to End It” [TOS 2014–15] and “‘No Substitute for Victory’: The Defeat of Islamic Totalitarianism” [TOS Winter 2006].)

But, as everyone paying attention also knows, neither the U.S. government nor any Western governments will eliminate those regimes and groups anytime soon. So we who care about life, liberty, and happiness must do *more* than demand that our governments do what they should do. We must also engage in activism at deeper philosophic levels, specifically at the levels of morality and epistemology (the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and means of knowledge).

At the moral level, we must reject and condemn the morality that forbids Western nations from taking the correct political action: the morality of altruism, the notion that self-sacrifice is moral, that we should love our enemies, turn the other cheek, and generally sacrifice ourselves and our loved ones for the “sake” of others, including savages. On the positive side, we must embrace and advocate the morality that *mandates* correct political action: the morality of rational egoism, the truth that self-interest is moral, that we should pursue and not sacrifice our life-serving values, and that, when attacked, we should defend ourselves by any means necessary. (I and others have discussed this morality in conjunction with politics at length in *TOS* as well. See, for example, “The Creed of Sacrifice vs. The Land of Liberty” [TOS Fall 2009] and “‘Just War Theory’ vs. American Self-Defense” [TOS Spring 2006].)

My focus in this essay is the *epistemological* aspect of the battle. The theme at hand is that if Westerners want to degrade and eventually destroy Muslims' motivation to murder in the name of Allah, we must strike at the *root* of Islam.

What is the root of Islam? What fundamentally gives rise to this murderous myth?

Of course, the basic *content* of Islam is the scripture in the Koran, which consists of (alleged) revelations that came from Allah through an angel to Muhammad; and the Hadith, which are Muhammad's teachings, sayings, and practices as reported by others.

But the *content* of Islam is just words in books. It is not the fundamental aspect of the religion. The deeper aspect—the aspect that *animates* the content in believers—is the *method* by which Muslims accept the content as “true.”

How do Muslims “know” that Allah exists, that Muhammad is His prophet, that His will is the moral law, that Islamic scripture conveys His will, that everyone must obey it, and that those who refuse to submit must be killed? What “justifies” Muslims' acceptance of these ideas?

There is no evidence in support of such ideas. There are no observable facts that give rise to them and make them true. There are only books and people who *say* the ideas are true. And, obviously, mere assertions don't make them true.

By what *means*, then, do Muslims accept the content of Islam as true? They accept it by means of *faith*.

Faith (in the relevant sense of the term here) is acceptance of ideas that are unsupported by or in contradiction to evidence. If you accept ideas as true based on evidence, you are accepting them by means of reason, not faith. We have the two different concepts—reason and faith—so that we can differentiate between these two different ways of accepting ideas. Reason denotes acceptance on the *basis* of evidence; faith denotes acceptance in the *absence* of evidence.

To flesh out the difference between these two approaches—and to show why it matters vitally with respect to the jihad against the West—let's first consider briefly how reason works; then we'll turn to faith.

Reason operates by means of perceptual observation, conceptual integration, and logic. In using reason, we perceive things, such as roses, people, rocks, dogs—and we observe their qualities and actions, such as redness, speaking, life, death. We mentally integrate our observations into concepts, such as “person,” “rock,” “dog,” “speak”—and we integrate our concepts into increasingly abstract concepts, such as “life,” “inanimate,” “mortal,” “elucidate.” We further integrate our concepts into propositions and generalizations, such as “rocks are inanimate” and “animals are mortal”—and into principles, such as “living beings must take certain

actions in order to remain alive” and “people need freedom in order to live and prosper.” By enabling us to mentally integrate our perceptions into abstractions, reason enables us to acquire, retain, and use a vast network of observation-based conceptual knowledge—from the principles of physics to those of biology to those of morality to those of psychology.

Of course, human beings are fallible; we can err in our thinking. So, along the way, in order to correct any misconceptions or errors we might make, we must check our thinking for correspondence to reality. We must check our ideas for consistency with the network of our observation-based knowledge and, ultimately, with the basic laws of nature: the laws of identity and causality.

The *law of identity* is the self-evident truth that everything is something specific; everything has properties that make it what it is; everything has a nature: A thing is what it is. A rose is a rose; a woman is a woman; Islam is Islam. The *law of causality* is the law of identity applied to action: A thing can act only in accordance with its nature. A rose can bloom, it cannot speak; a woman can become an engineer, she cannot become a pillar of salt; Islam can support theocracy, it cannot support a free society. Insofar as our thinking is in accordance with the laws of identity and causality, our thinking is in accordance with reality; insofar as it is not, it is not. Our method for checking our ideas for correspondence to these laws is *logic*, the method of non-contradictory identification.

The basic law of logic is the *law of non-contradiction*, which is the law of identity in negative form: A thing cannot simultaneously be what it is and what it is not. A rose cannot simultaneously be a non-rose. The law of non-contradiction is the basic principle of rational thinking. Because a contradiction cannot exist in nature—because things are what they are—if a contradiction exists in our thinking, then our thinking is mistaken and in need of correction. If we think that a woman turned into a pillar of salt or that Islam is a religion of peace, then we need to correct our thinking.¹

Reason also enables us to use our previously acquired knowledge to engage in imagination and fantasy. For instance, we can imagine a unicorn, a wizard, a talking snake, or the like. We can even fabricate intricate stories about such things (*Harry Potter* comes to mind). Importantly, however, all such fantasy is created with concepts and knowledge ultimately derived from perceptual reality. We form the idea of “unicorn” by mentally integrating “horse” and “single horn”—concepts formed previously on the basis of observation. We form the idea of “wizard” by integrating “man” and “magic,” the latter concept having been formed by

integrating the “law of causality” and the concept of “break” or “violate”—ideas and concepts ultimately derived from observable facts.

But the fact that fantasy is created using concepts derived from reality does not mean that the resulting ideas—whether wizards, talking snakes, or Whomping Willows—have referents in reality apart from fantasy. Rather, it means that, in addition to enabling us to form ideas that correspond to reality, reason enables us to combine concepts into ideas that have no referents beyond fantasy—and even into ideas that *contradict* reality. Hence an important truth: Although engaging in fantasy is essential to the creation and enjoyment of certain genres in fiction, film, and other art forms, distinguishing between fantasy and reality is equally essential to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Fortunately, reason enables us to make this distinction, to know the importance of making it, and to form concepts for identifying the state of mind of an adult who is unable to make the distinction (e.g., schizophrenic) or unwilling to do so (dishonest).

In short, reason—the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by our senses—is our means of knowing or discovering what is true, what is false, and what is fantasy.²

Faith is another matter. Faith is alleged to be a means of gaining knowledge or arriving at truth *apart* from perceptual evidence or even in *contradiction* to known facts.

For instance, a person who accepts ideas by means of faith can “know” that a woman can turn into a pillar of salt, that Islam is a religion of peace, that the Earth is only six thousand years old, or that seventy-two virgins await those who die fighting for Allah—even though (a) no evidence supports such ideas and (b) they contradict known facts.

Whereas reason is our means of grasping truth by observing reality with our senses and integrating our perceptions into concepts, generalizations, and principles—faith is supposedly a means of grasping truth by non-sensory, non-rational means.

“Faith,” according to the Bible, “is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”³ As Rabbi Abraham Heschel puts it, faith is a way of grasping truths that are “beyond our rational discerning,” beyond what “either reason or perception is able to grasp.”⁴

Well, if faith does not operate by means of sensory perception, how exactly does it work? When we use reason, we receive data from external reality via our sensory apparatuses: We see by means of our eyes, hear by means of our ears, taste by means of our tongue, and so on. When someone “knows” by means of faith,

what is the apparatus that receives the data? Islamic scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains: “Faith is belief in things which you do not see with your eyes but you understand with your spiritual sense.”⁵

What is your “spiritual sense”? It is alleged to be an extra, non-physical sense—as in “extrasensory perception” or ESP—a sense that functions by means of *no* physical apparatus. What use is this “spiritual sense”? What purpose does it serve that our physical senses and reason do not? What kind of information does it provide? It is alleged to tell us what is true and false in regard to crucially important matters, such as whether God exists, which scripture is true, what God says is moral, and what He commands us to do.

A biblical example of the kind of thing a person might “understand” by means of this “spiritual sense” is the commandment God issued to Abraham: “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.”⁶ That order, of course, does not make any rational sense. Why should a man kill his beloved son? But pointing out that an “understanding” received by the “spiritual sense” doesn’t make rational sense misses the whole point of faith.

The fact that the “spiritual sense” may deliver “truths” or “commandments” that don’t make sense from a rational, reality-oriented perspective is, according to the faithful, irrelevant. “Where the act of faith takes place,” Rabbi Heschel explains, “is beyond all reasons.” Faith pertains not to the truth of perceptual reality, but to “the truth of an invisible reality,” a reality “man’s physical sense does not capture, yet the ‘spiritual soul’ in him perceives.”⁷

How is this claim by religionists to a spiritual sense that enables them to perceive an invisible reality beyond reason any more justified than claims by psychics to mystical powers that enable them to see the future? It is no more justified. It is essentially the same kind of thing: “Just as clairvoyants may see the future” by means of their mystical powers, Rabbi Heschel explains, so too people of faith can grasp “the presence of God” and the imperative “to obey His rules and commandments” by way of *their* “spiritual sense.”⁸

Now that we have a more fleshed-out idea of what faith is and how it supposedly works, let us ask a pressing question: What *reason* is there to accept faith as a means of knowledge? *Why* should people accept the idea that truth can be grasped by non-sensory, non-rational means? Saint Thomas Aquinas replies: “[Men] ought to believe matters of faith, not because of human reasoning, but because of the divine authority.” And why should people accept “the divine authority”? More to the point: Why should people accept the existence of a “divine being” in the first

place? Aquinas answers: “In order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty, it was necessary for divine truths to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them, as it were, by God Himself who cannot lie.”⁹

If all of this seems utterly baseless, dizzyingly circular, and unabashedly irrational, theologian John Calvin assures us that such baselessness, circularity, and irrationality are indeed at the heart of the matter. Summing it all up, Calvin writes:

Our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose word it is. . . . Our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments, or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit. . . . God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted.¹⁰

Let that sink in.

Such are the explanations of what faith is, how it works, and why we should accept it as a means of knowledge. That’s the theory, so to speak.

Now, what does this alleged means of knowledge mean in practice?

Well, if people can know by means of faith that God exists, what He wills to be true, that His will is the moral law, and what He commands people to do, then they can know literally *anything* to be true. If a person’s “spiritual sense” tells him that God says he should love his neighbor, then he knows he should love his neighbor. If it tells him that God says he should love his enemies, then he knows he should love them. If it tells him that God says he should turn the other cheek if someone strikes him, then he knows what to do when that happens. If it tells him that God says to kill his son, then he knows he must do so. If it later tells him that God says not to kill his son, then he knows he should not. If it tells him that God says he should convert or kill unbelievers, then he knows he should convert or kill unbelievers. If it tells him that God says the Koran is the word of God and that if he fails to believe and obey every word of it he will burn in hell, then he knows that to be true. And so on.

You see the breadth and depth of the problem.

Either faith is a means of knowledge, or it is not. If it *is* a means of knowledge, then it is a means of *knowledge*. If faith is a means of divining *truth*, then whatever anyone divines by means of faith is *by that fact true*. If faith is a means of knowledge, then the tenets of Islam—which are “known” by means of faith—are *true*, in which

case Muslims *should* convert or kill infidels. By what standard can an advocate of faith say otherwise?

Contrary to the tired bromide, “if there is no God, anything goes,” the fact is that if faith is a means of knowledge, anything goes.

Fortunately for the West (and for everyone on Earth who wants to live and prosper), faith is *not* a means of knowledge, and most Westerners—including most nominally religious Westerners—know this, at least on some level.

Unfortunately for the West, few Westerners acknowledge this fact fully and openly, and even fewer are willing to shout it from the rooftops. This must change.

And it can.

Why do so few Westerners profess to have “extrasensory perception” or a “spiritual sense” or access to the truth of an “invisible reality beyond reason”? Why do so few Westerners teach their children that “hoping” for something to be true “assures” that it is? What do most Westerners think and say about the few who *do* claim to have ESP or “psychic powers”—or who *do* teach their children that hope begets knowledge?

Exactly.

The vast majority of Westerners do not treat faith as a means of knowledge in their daily lives because they do not genuinely regard it as a means of knowledge. And thank goodness they don't. The problem is that few Westerners have put much thought into the actual nature of faith and the practical consequences of people treating it as a means of knowledge; thus, few understand that by failing to explicitly *reject* the idea that faith is a means of knowledge, they are, by default, lending credence to the absurd idea that it is—and thus spiritually supporting those who actually treat it as though it is.

Which brings us to the essence of the problem: To lend credence to the notion that faith is a means of knowledge is to support and encourage Islamic regimes and jihadist groups at the most fundamental level possible: the epistemological level. It is to say to them, in effect: “Whatever our disagreements, your method of arriving at truth and knowledge is correct.” Well, if their method is correct, how can the content they “know” by means of it be incorrect? It can't be. Westerners desperately need to grasp this fact along with its logical, psychological, and political implications.

Why are so many people and governments in the Muslim world hell-bent on killing infidels? Because they feel *certain* about the truth of their scripture and the rightness of their cause. Why do they feel certain about these? Because they have faith in them and because they accept faith as a means of knowledge. And why—

in the 21st century, with satellites orbiting overhead, smartphones in practically every pocket, countless diseases eradicated, cancer on the run, frackers extracting petroleum from three miles beneath the Earth's surface, thrill seekers skydiving from the stratosphere for fun, and countless other validations of the fact that reason is man's means of knowledge—why does practically everyone in the Muslim world still accept faith as a means of knowledge?

Might a substantial part of the answer be that practically everyone in the *West*—the part of the world that is supposed to be rational, enlightened, exemplary—either pays lip service to the idea that faith is a means of knowledge or, at the very least, refrains from openly repudiating and ridiculing the literally senseless idea? Might people and governments across the globe—including in the Muslim world—feel a tad uncomfortable and perhaps even embarrassed about embracing faith if Westerners regularly pointed out the absurdity of claims to a “spiritual sense” or “extrasensory perception” and routinely mocked those who pretend to have such mystical powers? How might the less-religious, more-rational people in the Muslim world react if versions of the following message regularly streamed from individuals, educational organizations, and think tanks in the West:

People of the Muslim world: The notion that faith—acceptance of ideas in support of which there is no evidence—is a means of knowledge is the fundamental problem wreaking havoc on your lives. Acceptance of faith as a means of knowledge is what enables you to believe that an invisible and all-powerful madman in the sky commands you to engage in mass murder and all manner of other barbarity here on Earth in order to prove your virtue and devotion to him and thus gain rewards in an alleged afterlife. In reality, however, your only means of knowledge is *reason*, the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by your senses; your only life is this one, here on Earth; and Allah does not exist.

You cannot know what is true or false by closing your eyes and just believing. Truth does not come from revelation or faith; it comes from observation and logic. Truth is recognition of reality—and *recognition* is a process of reasoning based on sensory observation. If you want to know what is true and false, you must open your eyes, look at reality, and think; you must integrate your observations into concepts, generalizations, and principles that correspond to perceptual reality; you must check your thinking for contradictions; and you must reject any contradictions you find. This is what we in the West do (for the most part); this is how we have figured out all the things we have figured out; this is how we have created all the life-serving values that make our lives great; this why we are so successful, rich, prosperous, and happy.

Reason—if you choose to embrace it—will guide you to make your one-and-only life, this one on Earth, the best it can be. Reason will guide you to use your senses

and your mind to understand how the world works and to choose and pursue values that will make your life wonderful. How will you know which values are in line with virtue and morality? You'll know by means of reason. The only reason human beings need concepts such as "value," "virtue," and "morality" is to name the kinds of things we need in order to live and prosper (values), the kinds of actions we must take in order to gain and keep those things (virtues), and the overarching science concerned with such matters (morality). A reality-oriented morality is not a set of divine commandments from a mythical madman in the sky; it is a set of observation-based principles codifying the factual requirements of human life on Earth. It is a code of rational principles to guide your thinking and actions so that you can live and love your life.

In order to live and prosper, you need food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and the like; you also need meaningful goals, self-esteem, friendships, and romance. These are life-serving values. Reason is your means of knowing this. It is also your means of guiding your actions so that you can gain and keep such values. Reason is man's *fundamental* value, our *supreme* value, the basic value that makes all of our other life-serving values possible.

In order to use reason—in order to observe reality, to integrate your observations, and to act in accordance with your rational judgment—you need to be *free* to do so. If other people or governments force you to act *against* your rational judgment (e.g., make you submit to an imaginary God), or force you to hand over the product of your rational effort (e.g., make you fund jihad against the West), then your reasoning mind becomes useless. Why think if you can't act on your rational conclusions? Why produce if you can't keep or use what you make? This observation-based, secular principle—that in order to act in accordance with your reasoning mind you must be free from physical force—is the principle of individual rights, the basic principle of a morally correct political system. Reason is your means of knowing this.

In order to protect your individual rights—in order to stop other people and governments from forcing you to act against your rational judgment—you need a rights-protecting government, a government that bans the use of physical force from social relationships and uses force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use. You need a government akin to that which the American Founders established, but better: a government that does *one* thing and *only* one thing: outlaws force and thus enables everyone to think and act and live fully as human beings. Anything and everything you can do to move your culture in that direction will improve your lives and the lives of your loved ones. Reason is your means of knowing this.

Reason is also your means of knowing that when people claim to know the "truth" by means of faith, force eventually follows. You can observe the truth of this principle throughout history all across the globe, including right there in the

Middle East and Africa, where religionists have been at war with each other ever since Abrahamic religion began. Why all the war? Because faith begets force.

Observe that each religion and sect claims to “know” by means of faith that God exists, that His will is the moral law, and what He commands everyone to do; each claims that all of the other religions and sects are wrong; none can provide evidence in support of its assertions; and, given their mutual acceptance of faith as a means of knowledge, none can justify demanding evidence from the others, either. By rejecting evidence as the basis of truth and knowledge, each religion and sect has rejected reason. And, as the American philosopher Ayn Rand observed, “when men reject reason, they have no means left for dealing with one another—except brute, physical force.”¹¹

Reason is the only objective means of communication and of understanding among men; when men deal with one another by means of reason, reality is their objective standard and frame of reference. But when men claim to possess supernatural means of knowledge, no persuasion, communication or understanding are possible. Why do we kill wild animals in the jungle? Because no other way of dealing with them is open to us. And that is the state to which [faith] reduces mankind—a state where, in case of disagreement, men have no recourse except to physical violence.¹²

Unfortunately, we in the West do not embrace reason as fully and consistently as we should. Some Westerners still accept—or pretend to accept—faith as a means of knowledge. Some go to church or synagogue, where they pretend or are taught to “know” various religious truths by means of faith. Some claim to know by means of faith that the Bible is the source of moral truth and that everyone should obey its commandments. Some even call for the passage of laws to force everyone to obey religious scripture. But relatively few Westerners genuinely regard faith as a means of knowledge. For the most part, people in the West go by *reason*. This is the key to our success. This is why we are so prosperous and happy.

People of the Muslim world: We urge you to lose your faith as we in the West have (largely) lost ours. We urge you to hang up your primitive, life-destroying epistemology as we have hung up ours. We urge you to embrace the one and only demonstrably true means of knowledge—reason—as we in the West have done.

We do not want to be at war with you. We want peace. We want to be able to trade with you, to hire you to work for our companies, and to be hired by you to work for yours. We want to be able to benefit from each other’s ideas, innovations, creativity. We want to be able to visit your countries and have you visit ours. We want to live in harmony. But in order to do so, we all have to recognize that faith is not a means of knowledge and that reason is man’s only means of knowledge.

Needless to say, nothing of the sort is streaming from the West—even though many people in the West know much if not all of this to be true (albeit in varying

depths and details). No such message is streaming from the West—even though such a message clearly would help the Muslim world to begin letting go of faith and joining the (semi-)civilized world. No such message is streaming from the West—even though such a message clearly would undermine and ultimately could topple the Islamic regimes and jihadist groups that have killed many thousands of Westerners and aim to kill millions more.

Instead, by failing to explicitly acknowledge and articulate the fact that reason is man's only means of knowledge—by granting legitimacy to the notion that faith is (or might be) a means of knowledge—Westerners have granted and continue granting legitimacy to the absurdity that jihadists have *knowledge* that they should convert or kill infidels. When hundreds of millions of Westerners grant such legitimacy—as hundreds of millions do—it adds up to a lot of spiritual aid. That aid is taking a toll, and we are paying the toll in Western lives.

If Westerners want to diminish and eventually demolish the motives that drive Islamic states and jihadists to kill disbelievers, we must discredit the ideas that motivate them. And in order to discredit those ideas, we must discredit the *means* by which Muslims accept the ideas as true. We must openly, clearly, and forthrightly point out the rationally unarguable fact that faith is *not* a means of knowledge—that man's only means of knowledge is *reason*. And we must ridicule and mock those who claim to have a “spiritual sense” or ESP or any other supernatural powers.

This epistemological aspect of the conflict is not a short-range solution to the problem. It is not a silver bullet. And it is emphatically not the only kind of activism in which Westerners should engage. If we want to end the jihad against the West, we must also demand (or continue demanding) that our respective governments eliminate the Islamic regimes that sponsor it and the jihadist groups that wage it, and we must advocate (or continue advocating) the only moral code that supports and mandates such self-interested military action: the morality of rational egoism. We must wage this war at all three levels: epistemological, moral, and political. Repudiating the nonsense that faith is a means of knowledge is not a sufficient form of activism, but it is a necessary form. It is not the only thing we should do, but it is the most *fundamental*.

Of course, because faith is the foundation not only of Islam but also of Judaism and Christianity, rejecting faith means undermining and discrediting these religions as well. And many Westerners will not (of their own initiative) participate in such activism. Not everyone is willing to face the facts, to integrate his observations, to reject contradictions, and to draw conclusions that might meet with disapproval

from his family, friends, or community. Not everyone is an independent thinker. Many people passively accept or pretend to accept the popular or traditional ideas in their midst, whatever they happen to be, and wouldn't dream of stepping outside of that "comfort zone." But we don't need to reach those people. To make a significant difference in the short run, and to make sweeping changes in the long run, we need only reach an active-minded, independent-thinking minority. History bears this out.

Observe, for example, that many people in 19th-century America continued "just believing" in the "rightness" of slavery while a small minority observed the relevant facts (e.g., black men are men), integrated their ideas (e.g., all men are endowed with the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; so black men have those rights), rejected contradictions (e.g., a man with rights cannot morally be enslaved), and proceeded to communicate these truths to whoever would listen. The majority of Americans did not accept the wrongness of slavery until decades after this active-minded minority began working relentlessly to change the culture one mind at a time. As the abolitionists educated and persuaded those who would listen and think, the movement swelled. Eventually, the cultural milieu shifted, and many of those who had long chosen not to listen and not to think nevertheless began to "agree" that, "yes, slavery is wrong."

The transition in America from a few people recognizing and explaining that slavery is wrong to a culture-wide acceptance of the idea that slavery is wrong didn't happen quickly; it wasn't easy; and a horrifically bloody war was necessary to bring about those most faithfully committed to the wretched practice. But what would have happened if the active-minded minority had never arisen? What would have happened if no one had mustered the independence of mind to recognize and explain the wrongness of this widely accepted, culturally entrenched practice?

Of course, this analogy is not perfect. But its imperfections are instructive, too. Whereas abolishing slavery required passage of a law, rejecting faith does not—anyone can reject faith any time he chooses. And everyone who openly rejects faith and embraces reason thereby advances his culture and the world toward the tipping point, the point of critical mass at which the followers will follow en masse. No legislation is necessary to get there; only observation, integration, and communication are necessary. And every mind we reach gets us closer.

Likewise, whereas the abolitionists' commitment to end slavery required them to contemplate and ultimately enter a costly war, Westerners today do not have to contemplate whether to enter such a war. Having been repeatedly attacked by Islamic states and jihadists, we are *already* at war, and it is costing us a great deal—

especially in Western lives. Our deliberation on the matter consists only in whether we will do what is necessary to *win* the war. On the epistemological front, what is necessary is to recognize the fact that faith is the fundamental and animating aspect of the enemy's philosophy, to repudiate it wholesale, and to reach as many independent thinkers as possible with a clear presentation of the essential facts of the matter. Given their stakes and their context, the abolitionists' deliberation may have been difficult. Ours couldn't be easier.

Ayn Rand famously observed: "The uncontested absurdities of today are the accepted slogans of tomorrow." The converse is also true: The contested absurdities of today are the rejected slogans of tomorrow.

If you have not yet joined the minority of Westerners who are willing to contest the absurdity that faith is a means of knowledge, join us today. If you are already with us, redouble your efforts to reach more minds. To turn another phrase: The future must not belong to those who treat faith as a means of knowledge. The future—if peace is to be a part of it—must belong to those who acknowledge that man's only means of knowledge is reason.

Endnotes

1. As I point out in my book *Loving Life: The Morality of Self Interest and the Facts that Support It* (Glen Allen Press, 2002): "The laws of identity, causality, and non-contradiction are not rationally debatable. To begin with, all arguments presuppose and depend on their validity; any attempt to deny them actually reaffirms them. This phenomenon was first discovered by Aristotle and is called *reaffirmation through denial*. While trying to deny these laws, a person has to be who he is—he can't be someone else—because of the law of identity; he has to act as a human being—he can't act as an eggplant—because of the law of causality; and he has to use words that mean what they mean—he can't use words that mean what they don't—because of the law of non-contradiction. On a more practical level, these laws are why we fuel our cars with gasoline—why we refrigerate certain foods—why we wear warm clothing in winter—why we vaccinate our children—why we string our tennis rackets—why we put wings on airplanes—and why we don't drink Drano. More broadly speaking, the entire history of observation, knowledge, and science is based on the laws of identity, causality, and non-contradiction. Every object, every event, every discovery, and every utterance is an example of their validity. These laws are self-evident, immutable, and absolute."
2. The process by which we acquire and validate conceptual knowledge is far more complex and involved than the brief sketch I've offered here. My purpose here is simply to indicate that reason is our means of doing so and that it operates by means of perceptual observation, conceptual integration, and logic. For an extensive examination of the processes and principles of concept formation, see Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 2nd ed., edited by Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff (New York: Penguin, 1990).
3. Hebrews 11:1.
4. Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man, A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983), p. 117.

5. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran*, p. 91, n. 983.
6. Genesis 22:2.
7. Abraham Heschel, *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976), pp. 87, 167; *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 71.
8. Heschel, *Between God and Man*, pp. 71, 140. Heschel in part quotes from Deuteronomy 26:17–18.
9. Quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 308.
10. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), pp. 32–33.
11. Ayn Rand, “Censorship: Local and Express,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 187.
12. Ayn Rand, “Faith and Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 70.

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