

# **The Mythmaking of Divine Violence: Revisiting Benjamin's Critique in an Age of Apocryphal Caliphates**

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## **Abstract**

This essay examines the common identification of violence by taking Walter Benjamin's critique as a keystone to understanding how it is used as a device for abstracting its casual nexus of social and political indignities. From the modern Muslim perspectives of Ali *Shariati* and Ayatollah *Mutahhari*, an attempt at uncoupling mythic from divine violence is made where the later, without the guarantees and protection of the totalizing juridical systems of the former, is experienced as a politics of tribulation. At today's critical historical juncture of self-declared caliphates, mythic excesses point to a breaking out of the abstraction spell and a return to the "scalar" qualities of Islam. When effective, divine violence inheres with a potent quality of orientation that can be an effective mode in resisting the ideological edifices that sustain state repression, including those proclaimed as being Islamic.

**Keywords:** Violence, Walter Benjamin, Islamism, Jurisprudence, Abstraction, Evil, Caliphate.

## **I. Introduction**

This essay examines the common identification of violence by taking Walter Benjamin's critique as a keystone to understanding how it is used as a device for abstracting its casual nexus of social and political indignities. From the modern Muslim perspectives of Ali *Shariati* and Ayatollah *Mutahhari*, an attempt at uncoupling mythic from divine violence is made where the later,

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At today's critical historical juncture of self-declared caliphates, mythic excesses point to a breaking out of the abstraction spell and a return to the "scalar" qualities of Islam. When effective, divine violence inheres with a potent quality of orientation that can be an effective mode in resisting the ideological edifices that sustain state repression, including those proclaimed as being Islamic.

This article deals mainly with the myth of religious violence which is part of the conventional wisdom of the societies that are not familiar with transhistorical and transcultural role of religion in many other societies. Part II suggests a particular pattern of movement, i.e. from vectorial motives to scalar moods, the reasons to choose this pattern are describes as follows: (1) to recover the general moods of religion, in our case Islam, that by their extended purposes, are subject to political confiscation, and (2) to see how these motivations come to have teeth in the violence that juridical orders wield. The subject matter of part III is the detection of the juridical trace of violence, also examining the Walter Benjamin's meditation on the subject in his *Critique on Violence*. Annihilation of the force of divine violence according to the thoughts of Ali Shariati, the prominent Shi'a scholar, is examined in part IV to reach the conclusion that Muslims must actively resist the neo-feudal investiture in religious corporatism that says we should be content with life's so-called simplicities. The rest of the present essay, including parts V and VI, consider the phenomenon of Ur-fascism to prove that while Islamic terror is treated as contemptible, the systemic violence that sustains the former category, directed at a much larger sample size and having a much greater impact, goes largely ignored. The analytical approach of the essay leads to the conclusion that to condemn violence outright would be a mistake, as an ideological operation that plays into the hands of the partisans of "humanitarian intervention" or the strategically ambiguous order of the "international community." Whether or not it is motivated by resentment, revenge, or rage, forming the kind of alloyed violence that re-poses the law, should impact how we integrate violence into a "pure" vehicle beyond cause-and-effect calculations

## **II. The Scalar and the Vectorial**

Symbols, images, and attitudes provide a basic genetic coding in religion in the manner that timbre, pitch, meter provide that of music. These "scalar qualities"

of religious dispositions, based on expressive dynamics, Clifford Geertz puts forth as dynamic indicators for their utility. The extreme diffuseness and variability of religious symbols and their affective powers translate into complex organizations directed toward teleological ends. By combining, tonal scintillas shed their scalar quality for a vectorial directionality in motives that “gravitate toward certain, usually temporary, consummations,” in contrast to moods that “vary only as to intensity: they go nowhere.”<sup>1</sup> What is made to be meaningful, from incipient moods to emanate motivations, explains much of how symbol differentiae organize. Retroactively, they can be traversed in reverse order, from vectorial motives to scalar moods. We choose this particular pattern of movement in this paper for two reasons: (1) to recover the general moods of religion, in our case Islam, that by their extended purposes, are subject to political confiscation, and (2) to see how these motivations come to have teeth in the violence that juridical orders wield. Walter Benjamin is a crucial reference for our purposes, particularly for his essay *Zur Kritik der Gewalt* or *On the Critique of Violence* (1921)<sup>2</sup> that, despite its cryptic style, is emphatic when positioning violence as the foundation of law. Activating the critical dialectical challenges of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin, in his critique, sees part of this foundation gaining verticality in the wrestling of antinomical relations, those he explains as sublimated expressions of social contradictions.

A propos our reading of Benjamin, we posit that antinomies are regulatory archetypes that are impossible to actualize in practice but govern the ground for reason. Such a complete knowledge that its subject struggles and endures to realize never emerges, but our faith and fidelity in its cause drives us in its pursuit. What becomes systematized in its name bears the violence of the retributory pagan/mythic, while what is performed without judgment in its name is what bears the violence of the expiatory monotheistic/divine. Violence is thus of two broad varieties that arises out of an inevitable antinomical struggle. The properties, however, are less dichotomous than they appear and so we must be careful to avoid commonplace understandings that lend little assistance to their classification.

Music is given purport by its presumed antithesis, silence, encompassing both as sound and silence.<sup>3</sup> The pervasiveness of sound reminds us of its

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin (2002) *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926* (Cambridge: Belknap Press).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Thomas Clifton (1976) “The Poetics of Musical Silence,” *The Musical Quarterly*, 62/2 (Apr., 1976), 163-181, Susan Sontag (2002) “The Aesthetics of Solitude,” *Studies of Radical Will* (NY: Picador).

underlying negative, the ground from which it emanates, giving it expression and continuity:

*To focus on the phenomenon of musical silence is analogous to deliberately studying the spaces between trees in a forest: somewhat perverse at first, until one realizes that these spaces contribute to the perceived character of the forest itself, and enable us to speak coherently of 'dense' growth or 'sparse' vegetation. In other words, silence is not nothing. It is not the null set. Silence is experienced both as meaningful and as adhering to the sounding position of the musical object.*<sup>4</sup>

As Clifton indicates, music itself accomplishes the rearrangement or inversion of the initial conceptual hierarchy between sound and silence, a deconstruction at work within music. This pattern is repeated in religion where “evil” is absorbed in the more openly sanctioned “good,” using the later within the former as valves that regulate, direct or control the flow of its meaning and purpose. “Evil” as our referential negative consonant with violence, rather than reflecting the immoral or malevolent, we conceive of with regard to Mulla Sadra’s understanding as an ontological privation, a lack or dearth of being. This view is recovered by Ayatollah Murtazā Mutahharī who speaks of evil as the mistaken identity of non-existence, one that precludes createdness and yet, as its ghostly symptom, is concomitant with creation.<sup>5</sup> Mutahharī draws on an analogy of darkness and light to account for this relationship between appearances (of evil, or *sharr*) and the reality (of good, or *kheir*):

*The example of existence and non-existence is like that of sun and shadow. If we position an object facing the sun, the outline that projects darkness and is deprived of light we refer to as ‘shadow.’ What is this shadow? It is darkness and the darkness is nothing but the absence of light. When we say that the light emanates from the sun, we are not required to ask: From where does the shadow emanate? Nor, what is the source of the darkness? The darkness and the shadow emanate from nothing and have no basis or independent source.*<sup>6</sup>

### III. Juridical Trace of Violence

When we speak of violence, neither good nor bad in itself, we encounter a problem of its negotiated use. Instead of raising a bootless critique of violence

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<sup>4</sup> Clifton, *ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Murtaza Mutahharī (1952) *‘Adl illahī* (Qom: Intishārāt-e Sadrā), Murtaza Mutahharī (1977) *Harakat va zamān dar falsafah islāmī* (Tehran: Intisharat Hikmat), and Murtaza Mutahharī (1979) *Insān va sarnevesht* (Qom: Intishārāt-e Sadrā).

<sup>6</sup> Mutahharī, *‘Adl illahī*, 129.

*eo ipso*, its applications become answerable to the judgment of use. Using violence as mediated by practical considerations may fulfill political goals but may compromise religious values, while using violence as mediated by the values of moral virtue may harmonize with eschatological assurances but also may enfeeble a utilitarian analysis. Violence might also serve both or neither, but is imprudent when ruled out entirely or used as a singular means to an end.

The knot of ends and means with violence as its expedient center recalls Walter Benjamin's meditation on the subject in his *Critique on Violence*. In this essay, Benjamin shows how violence is used by state power as a means by which law is instituted and preserved. The crux of Benjamin's analysis lies in the cleft between mythic and divine violence whose relation accords a religious register: "Justice is the principle of all divine end making, power the principle of all mythic lawmaking."<sup>7</sup> Here, God decides the justness of ends by providing a general protocol or "educative power"<sup>8</sup> of moral behavior that can be instructive in a multitude of situations and never one. Tarrying with the static and universally applicable of Kant's "categorical imperative" Benjamin opposes to heterogeneous temporality. Historical situations naturally change and so should imperatives that dwell in a relational orbit. The disadvantage that lies in the freedom implied in God's transmitted generality—that we must decide for ourselves what exactly is just without ever knowing with surety that it is ethical or indeed, just—is lacking the criteria that mythic violence cherishes under the law. We are left with a sovereign sign that resists pathological determinations of meaning that ascribe 'sacrifice', 'heroism' or 'divinity' and so on to violent exploits, and are left to "wrestle with it in solitude."<sup>9</sup>

There is a much deeper significance at play in Benjamin's analysis that I will only mention in cursory fashion, as it exceeds the focus of this paper. Authenticity, Benjamin posits, cannot be mechanically reproduced in that its reproduction lacks "presence in time and space."<sup>10</sup> Though Benjamin elaborates more fully this position in the context of art reproduction effected by technological innovation, he speaks of this feature impacting a broader range of experiences. The standardization of experience represented in the concept persists as a depreciation of ontological presence, dissolving the very authority, or "aura," of an object of experience:

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 248.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin (2007) *Illuminations*, trans., Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books) 220.

*The authority of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter.*<sup>11</sup>

Violence in Benjamin's analysis, no matter the color of its subjective application, is plied by relational inferences. Relations of ethicality, in particular informed by the vectorial motivations of religion, determine a rubric for violence's application. Believers undoubtedly deal with critical events in ways that tend to inflate or deflate textual imperatives. Juridical orders use the Text to promote certain actions in response, ones inextricable, however, from diffuse sociocultural, political, and practical conditions but whose dimensions are often diminished. Here, the failure to adapt is explicit. The renunciation of understanding and evaluation of events that break with pre-existing totalities has become all-too-often a seductive haven for flight for many Muslim legal scholars. Fortunately, insight that imparts to us Islam's general maxims does not require clerical intervention. Bergson captures this devotional maxim in its most spare form: "To create a certain disposition of the soul."<sup>12</sup> The act is dependent on disposition and, so, however instinct and intellect are superimposed onto the self will be a crucial metric for its orientation. According to Bergson, the true spiritual wayfarer breaches the static points of reference that bear the markings of sacerdotal custodianship, reaching into the "supra-intellectual" mystic foundations of religious dispositions, interchangeable with scalar ones. Bergson determines mysticism as the religious disposition's leaven, including its antecedent condition and, if pursued properly, a return that parallels Sadrian yields. With regards to its apogee, he asserts: "In our eyes, the ultimate end of mysticism is the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if it is not God himself."<sup>13</sup>

Only a pusillanimous credo allows religious institutions and its representatives to believe in place of its faithful. Rigid moral laws, mechanistically codified dogmas, and other such features combined have become a ubiquitous example of the zealot's faith, drawing out the very familiar result of obscuring the message of religion's original initiates. This is plainly the view of Jürgen Moltmann whose chief concern in *The Crucified God* (1974)

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>12</sup> Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

was to rescue the hope of the resurrection from any confusion with the officially optimistic culture of modern capitalist society. The same could be said regarding Jewish and Muslim prophets, their ethical articulations thrown into the shade by capital's prerogatives, those claims of expediency and fluidity ending in conditions of precariousness and perpetual crisis that the dispossessed suffer. It is easy to see that the ideological corruption of the cross is as present as it is in the crescent or Black Banner (*rāyat al-sawdā'*). When Moltmann declares, "Brotherhood with Christ means the suffering and active participation in the history of God,"<sup>14</sup> he identifies a familiar theme in transforming a shared vulnerability into an affirming virtue, so crucial to the eschatological dimension of liberation theology that we will see in its Islamic manifestation.<sup>15</sup>

#### IV. Divine Violence and the Bitterness of its Succor

A less fatalistic approach would benefit those on the receiving end of mythic violence. One cannot expect to change their situation without acting upon subjectivity and the exercising of greater autonomy.<sup>16</sup> The enemy is not as external as it may appear to the casual observer. This is precisely the point, namely that one must not give in to any of the passive gestures of an observer. The spurious sutures of globalized capital that bind believers to the pomp of techno-consumerism must be exposed so that one can see how they inhibit productive and creative potentials.

When 'Alī states, "Desire is one's most inveterate enemy," he refers to the objects of desire belonging to the *dunyā* that distract us from our ethical missioning, that divert<sup>17</sup> us from our ultimate destination. Here, a historicist nominalist perspective is less helpful than the work of the metaphysician in seeking the reality behind appearances so as to confront the invisible background of systemic violence. How is this to be achieved? At bottom, the faithful must learn to direct the pure, annihilating force of divine violence at the desire reflecting the "force of law." The exercise of personal will is paramount in resisting seductions that alienate their host from the common sense of their religious community bound by the commitment and struggle for justice. They must know that the comforting feeling is a psychological trick that can only be

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Moltmann (1993) *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 338.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Gustavo Gutierrez (1988) *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books) 121-141.

<sup>16</sup> Naturally, the expected *Ar-Ra'd āyah* applies: "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." (Qur'ān, 13: 11).

<sup>17</sup> "Competition in [worldly] increase diverts you." (Qur'ān, 102:1).

undone by an expiating jamming, a type of auto-auditing of the ideological architecture feeding commodity (waste)-desiring fetishism. This directive represents a radical directionality, away from a type of regulating system that is greased today by stifling politico-economic constellations, many of which are declared “Islamic.” All those worthy of imitation demonstrate an understanding of how such a confining reality, fed by this kind of desire, that bores, stupefies, and ultimately pacifies, manifests as a seductive object to be negated through sacrifice and struggle. From Prophets and Imams to the rare everyman-cum-overman, each questioned the dominant interpretations of the world, violently subverting the existing order which subsequently responds with Engels’ “special bodies of armed men,” employing technical prowess and a bravado of mythic proportions.

Who better than 'Alī, who watched in pain as wealth and power changed hands between a coterie of sycophant praetorians, could communicate this pain: *He who doesn't tolerate the bitterness of medicine will have lasting pain.*<sup>18</sup> Pity to those today who are unable to grasp the significance of Shariati's somber statement: “Alī is alone”<sup>19</sup> from which we understand that truth-seeking invites loneliness and isolation while its realizing welcomes suffering and death. A cursory glance at history and its martyrs will reveal this much. The goal of man, as concerns Islam, is submission to God and not the false idols perpetually reconstructed by the world market of capital. In Shariati's words, it is nothing short of turning one's back to today's version of the “opulent mosques and magnificent palaces of the Caliphs of Islam and turning to the lonely, mud house of Fātimah.”<sup>20</sup> To accept the promises of property, tawdry commodities and even family without questioning our political situation, is to capitulate to the ideological partisanship of the market, one that is at once economic and libidinal in its sublimation. Wealth and children, as described in the Qur'ān, are merely the “adornments”<sup>21</sup> of terrestrial transience and cannot foreground the commission of justice that is an eternal exigency. Although 'Alī's medicine may taste bitter, Muslims must actively resist the neo-feudal investiture in religious corporatism that says we should be content with life's so-called simplicities.

<sup>18</sup> Abd al-Wahid ibn Muhammad Amidi (1993) *Kitab mustatab ghurar al-hikam wa-durar al-kalim* (*Majmu'at al-kalimat al-qisar li-'Ali ibn Abi Talib*) (Qum: Mu'assasa Ali 'l-Bayt), 484.

<sup>19</sup> Ali Shariati (1976) *'Ali tanhā est* (Tehran: *Husayniyah-i Irshād*),

<sup>20</sup> Ali Shariati (n.d.) “Red Shi'ism vs. Black Shi'ism,”

[http://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/ashariati/works/red\\_black\\_shiism.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/ashariati/works/red_black_shiism.php)

<sup>21</sup> “Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life. But the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord for reward and better for [one's] hope.” (Qur'ān, 18:46).

Through the razor of divine violence that severs the mythic law, the idolatrous manifestation of gods, a newfound ontological potency is set in motion. There will always remain compounds of *sharr* and *kheir* that cannot ever be fully extricable, but the task remains to fill the vacuities left by erasing machines of supposition and non-being that inhere with the annihilation of pure existence. Mutahharī refers to this principle in his analysis of the aphorism, *al-balā' lilawā'* ("Tribulations are for God's friends").<sup>22</sup> Quoting from Imām as-sādiq who amplifies the substratal wisdom with the tradition, "Verily God, when He loves a servant of His, drowns him in tribulations,"<sup>23</sup> Mutahharī comments on the pedagogical effects of these tribulations: "Man must face hardships in the world in order to learn how to overcome them; he must face difficulties in order to become experienced and complete."<sup>24</sup> To attempt to move the "evils" of existential *trībulum* into total obsolescence, as opposed to transpositional shift, is impossible as it constitutes a basic condition of mankind, something that cannot be separated from experience. Bliss and woe are bound up in our experiential proximity to the divine, the explicated values providing for further (or lesser) human aptitude. Antinomies are herein fixed expressions of alterity that exist to sow perspicacity in Sadra's world of transforming entities, between vegetative, animal, and imaginative states.

## V. America's Investment in Ur-fascism

While "Islamic" terror is treated as contemptible, the systemic violence that sustains the former category, directed at a much larger sample size and having a much greater impact, goes largely ignored. Sensational spectacles of violence, whether in school shootings or celebrity suicides on the news, conceal much more egregious forms. By creating a noise that drowns out a principled, rational discourse, the architects of nonsense abstract from it its casual sequence. If there is a way out of this deadlock, it is through using exacting violence to destroy the airy edifice that sustains appearances, including the cult of optimism and all pop culture panache. From the severance with this steady inanity, synonymous with a habitus of familiarity, may arise to a new political language that exposes the realities of the abuse of power and reaches into the kind of expiation Benjamin outlines:

*If mythic violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundary, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic*

<sup>22</sup> Mutahharī, *Al-'adl al-illāhī*, 154.

<sup>23</sup> *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 15, part one, p. 55, from *al-Kāfī*.

<sup>24</sup> Mutahhari, *Al-'adl al-illāhī*, 155.

*violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood.*<sup>25</sup>

A worrisome example today is the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). One might assume from Benjamin's analysis that ISIL has the "expiatory" edge, hitting America where it hurts while enacting a pitiless divine violence with conviction. However, the difference between these two entities is merely isomorphic. America's ready sacrifice of its own citizens along with the countless faceless victims lying in the wake of its military-industrial exploits parallels ISIL's own ascendance to power. Both structures, based on moral fables coeval with birth, are backed by extensive juridical orders and the threat of physical violence and intimidation, with strong degrees of imperial drive deeply embedded. ISIL's quick commandeering of oil fields in Syria and Iraq and not-so-hidden alliance with disreputable sheikhs of Persian Gulf stock locate a trysting communion of capitalist greed and excess. With impossible virtue and invisible lust, ISIL compels the credulous into believing in its efficacy and the promise of order, meaning, and purpose, however cruel and opaque to outsiders. ISIL's program, however, is mythic violence par excellence and there is a perfect irony that they now face America's spears, two conspirers, experts in transforming black gold into the gold brick scams of paradise.

Alberto Toscano has mentioned in his analysis of Islamism, as opposed to 'political Islam' proper, the "Ur-fascism" of Bin Laden and his imitators marks a newfangled appropriation and use of legal formations spurned by capitalist profit.<sup>26</sup> Toscano offers Alain Badiou's "obscure subject" as an archetypical qualifier for kitsch Islamists borrowing from Salafist doxa<sup>27</sup>:

*While the reactive or reactionary subject incorporates the form of faithfulness, the obscure subject seems be defined by the twofold movement of laying waste to the immanent production of the new and generating a*

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<sup>25</sup> Benjamin, Selected Writings, 249.

<sup>26</sup> Alberto Toscano, "The Bourgeois and the Islamist, or, The Other Subjects of Politics," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 2, no. 1-2 (2006): 15-38.

<sup>27</sup> "The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers some helpful theoretical insights for considering the development of the Salafist movement. Bourdieu's theoretical framework is centered on fields, which are delimited structures of social relations between hierarchically defined positions. Within these fields, capital, a source of either material or symbolic character, defines the ability of actors to exercise power, while habitus, a set of socialized norms and predispositions, guide their behavior. The dynamics of capital and habitus are set within the structural limitations of the field, which Bourdieu conceptualized in the term doxa, which can be translated into the norms and rules governing the field". Tore Hamming, Politicization of the Salafi Movement: The Emergence and Influence of Political Salafism in Egypt, *INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW*, VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 1, FALL 2013, p. 3.

*transcendent, monolithic novelty, essentially indistinguishable from the most archaic past.*<sup>28</sup>

ISIL's anachronistic polis reanimates the worst excesses of Muslim history and, particularly, those of disgraced caliphs of Umayyad vintage. Their repudiation of novelty puts them squarely in the category of the mythic, radically opposed to any break with those unsavory vanguards warded by violent organs of the Law.

It is equally strange to see in this milieu how easily a *fatwā* can be issued from clerical lieges where the platform for expertise, demonstrative virtuousness and communal agreement, are no longer prerequisites for determining the edicts of Muslim conduct. Whether the phenomenon of literalism, anti-rationalism, and anti-interpretive approaches represents a wider jurisprudential matter of concern in Salafist quarters is a question urged by *fatwā*-buttressed *takfirī* actions. Indeed, recent converts from Europe whose religious zeal, not to mention reason for travel in Syria, is questionable, speak of portentous patterns of thought in *sharī'ah* credo. Though reliance on Textual justification for savagery is certainly nothing new, their level of absolutism is a unique acceleration of Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab's innovative ideology, which features a habit of wanton violence. This very real phenomenon—a newfangled imperialist feat of cultural erasure, perhaps—is of no concern, however, to the advancers of “peace” in Geneva or wherever palaver conferences are sponsored by those who are impossibly self-indulgent, distant in pragmatics, and mired in petty political power struggles that mirror the violent ones on the ground.

While it is easy to see how groups like ISIL use theological abstraction as a smoke screen for their venality, it is less easy to perceive how its ideology does a violence of far greater consequence than its physical manifestations to the principium of Islam's Message, its universal pedagogical basis supported in Benjamin's reading. It comes as no surprise that the particular understanding of Islam favored by the dogmatist is one of penal law, having no room for God's wishes aside from sacrifice. ISIL is pagan to the core, mythologizing a sacrificial narrative and practice that owes little to ethical monotheism, aside from name. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) forecasted this very configuration:

*A time will come upon my ummah in which the only remaining thing from the Qur'ān is its writing, and the only remaining thing from Islam is its*

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<sup>28</sup>

Ibid., p. 28.

*name. Their mosques, though well established, will be empty of spirituality. The jurists of this time will be the worst under this sky and strife (fitnah) will commence from them and return onto them.*<sup>29</sup>

## **VI. Concluding remarks**

Great is the effort made by law preservers in the hoarding of symbolic resources for formulating authoritative conceptions of the shape of reality. Divine violence complicates their efforts by resisting the sovereign and its guarantees of certainty, instrumentality, and unitariness. It is a performance primarily of endurance and tenacity in facing the certainty of pain and injustice, the elementary expressions of cosmic yearning and passion for God foregrounded in thinkers as diverse as Benjamin and Mutahhari, where eschatological events and messianic principles discover their potency. Less for the purpose of intellectual comprehension, these religious expressions, in Geertz's words, "give a precision to their feeling, a definition to their emotions which enables them, morosely or joyfully, grimly or cavalierly, to endure it."<sup>30</sup>

To condemn violence outright is a mistake, an ideological operation that plays into the hands of the partisans of "humanitarian intervention" or the strategically ambiguous order of the "international community." Whether or not it is motivated by resentment, revenge, or rage, forming the kind of alloyed violence that re-poses the law, should impact how we integrate violence into a "pure" vehicle beyond cause-and-effect calculations. Granted, hatred can be a powerful motivating force of conduct, but typifies the mythic wherewithal of those maintaining domination. The crucial task will then be to properly identify those qualities that are appropriated and reverse engineered by law-preserving machines. Juridical orders promote religion as a static theater wherein we are to play the part of social insects. Indubitably, the substitution of tribulation for positive guarantees—redemption, retribution, favoritism, and so on—features prominently in their efforts. Dynamic religion, by contrast, encourages an earned self, disquieted by the ontological smothering of mythic laws and their makers.

The pedagogical drive of tribulation is two-fold, instilling the mood of injustice and the motive for reform, the former formed within the belly of the later. The real as seat of our theoretical and practicable actions is mobilized through its "evil" inverse, the (non)event we can only perceive as contradiction,

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<sup>29</sup> Allamah Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (2001) *Bihār al-Anwār*, Volume 52, trans., Sayyid Athar Husain S.H. Rizvi (Ja'fari Propagation Centre: Mumbai) 89.

<sup>30</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 104.

but is part and parcel to Bergson's aforementioned "debasement of being," a negative that is ineffable and unknowable. Motion would only exist as a pure concept or Kantian "category," were it not for perceptible contradiction. Between the scalar degrees of existential potency, the opposition of forms indexes positive conditions of humankind and its changing nature, as Mutahhari affirms with ringing dialectical inflection:

*The changeability of the matter of the world and the occurrence of development originates from contradiction (tadādd). If not for contradiction, there would be no variety and evolution. The world would not play a new role in every instant, and new pictures would not take shape upon the pages of the world.*<sup>31</sup>

Opposed to the evolution of potent forms is the collusion of the Ur-inspired fundamentalist and the Western liberal-capitalist. Both conspire to debase the divine scalar in favor of the mythic vectorial, away from the challenging politics of antinomies for the guarantees of a comprehensive discourse for what exists. Seductive though this discourse is, it vitiates any incentive those might have to understand the nature and origin of their privation of being, of potentialities more enlightening and ennobling, so that the possible legitimacy of their demands are kept mutable. It additionally paves the way for the use of force by making it easier for juridical organs to exploit the fears of its subjects and ignore protests to the manner in which it violently responds.

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<sup>31</sup> Mutahhari, 'Adl illahī, 164.