What I Think Why Westerners are Joining the Islamic State

Blog Post

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The Islamic State is a Jihadist militant group influenced by the Wahhabi movement. It engages in holy war to establish a caliphate in regions of Iraq, Syria and beyond. For almost two years, news of unheard terror against individuals or whole populations of other creeds have been shocking the world on a daily basis. Sharia law and the often violent reinforcement of moral codes make those terrorists typical representatives of puritan religious extremists. The basis for their actions is not a complex religious or cultural

tradition but a straightforward ideology of puritanism. Puritanism is normally associated with Christian Protestants of the 16th and 17th centuries, but radical Islam, represented by Al-Qaida, the Taliban, Boku Haram or Wahhabism, has also been identified with puritan models of religion.

The problem with puritans is that their minds are tuned to the abstract. Instead of believing in a concrete world offering enjoyments such as women, good food, drink, music, and art, puritans believe only in abstract principles. Therefore, for puritans, all pretty women must be thrown on the pyre and laughing should be forbidden by law. No music, no fun, no real world. Puritans are living in the virtual world of the abstract, which they defend by insisting that "they know." Fanatics all over the world have submitted to this puritan strategy and only a part of them is religious. Puritan principles can also be spelled out as liberty, morality, the future, humanity… The cruelest of all battles and revolutions have always been fought by puritans.

The puritan thinks he has to sacrifice himself for "the principle." Personally, I prefer the hypocrite who is drinking secretly in the bathroom; he is easier to deal with. Puritans are deeply desperate and unhappy people while the hypocrite has merely a bad conscience. Puritans know that what they are doing is impossible but still they persist. This is why they are grim, mean, irritable, distrustful, and sneaky. They hate normal people who appreciate a good glass of wine, good food, fresh air during a walk in the forest, and the smell of women's perfume when they are passing by. In other words: they hate people who have a religion. This is actually the main problem: puritans are atheists. Instead of believing in the real world that God has created and that He wants humans to enjoy it to its fullest, puritans believe in "principles." Once again, I prefer the hypocrite because he at least has a religion and not only principles.

Send those people some pleasure. This is the only thing that can cure them and it definitely will cure them. The problem is that they will never accept it. They are too steeped in the principles of their virtual reality. Pleasure is what the abstract atheist fears most.

Let us now talk about those young Westerners who are flocking to Syria to join the Islamic State. I believe that many of them are suffering from the same symptoms: they have spent the largest part of their lives in a reality that is more virtual than real. They need to discover the tactile world outside the house and feel the "wind on their phizogs," as an Irish paper recently claimed. Being steeped in the puritanism of the internet where women cannot be smelled and touched but only seen and heard on a small screen, the psychological profile of those young people is highly compatible with that of the puritans of the Islamic State. Those young Western people are also atheists: they ignore the religion of life and of the real world. By fleeing into a reality even more virtual than the one they are coming from (the similarity between IS propaganda material and computer games is no coincidence), they hope to be given principles that justify their choice of the virtual over the real, of death over life. The puritans of the Islamic State will not introduce them to the religion of real life. Instead, those Islamic nerds will probably end their lives in the realm of the totally abstract that is, very sadly, as suicide bombers.

The situation is so tragic that Aeschylus, were he alive today, would have enough material to start a second career as a dramatist. What can be done? How can one teach the "religion of life" to puritan atheists who have decided that life must be based on abstract principles? Why is puritanism on the increase? Bombing the Islamic State is no long-term solution. Even fighting poverty does not get to the root of the problem. This is a global disease that does not concern economics and politics in the first place. It not only concerns the Middle East, but the industrialized world as well. It is also useless to refute those principles by searching arguments in the Islamic religion. This problem is related to a core philosophical topic, which is the question of the existence of reality. The new puritanism of the internet generation has brought about the loss of reality. This is a social problem that educators, sociologists and philosophers need to look into. Instead one prefers to talk about a vacuum of ideas, values, ideologies and visions that are believed to drive those young Westerner into the fangs of the Islamic State. This analysis, which traces the phenomenon to a lack of another set of abstract items, is based on an intellectualist, Western scientific tradition that is rather puritan in its own right. It suggests that the Islamic State people are merely in need of new and better principles. This style of analysis is unable to recognize the real

scope of the problem. The existence of the Islamic State is not due to a vacuum of principles (they have more than enough of that) but to a vacuum of reality. Above I suggested – rather provocatively – that the whole constellation amounts to a confrontation of atheism vs. religion. What I mean is that the Islamic State problem is not a matter of social engineering, political debates, and improvement of the world economy. What is at stake is the way in which people experience reality in late modernity; and this is a topic for religion as well as for philosophy.

#Salafists #ISIS #DAESH #Syria

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