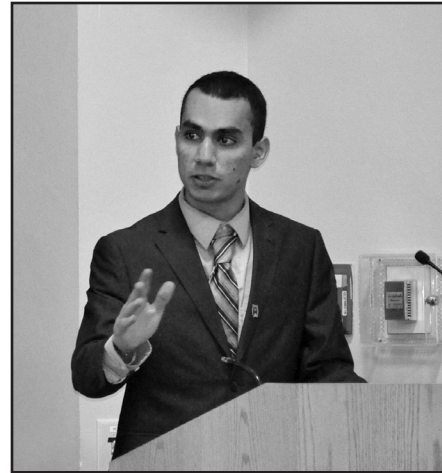


Who's Actually Being "Gross and Racist"?

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Faisal Saeed Al Mutar

I will assume that you watched or at least heard about the debate between actor Ben Affleck and Pulitzer Prize-winning author and New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof versus comedian Bill Maher and best-selling author Sam Harris on the October 3, 2014, episode of HBO's Real Time with Bill Maher. [Video clip here: <https://goo.gl/PmAj3A>]

The subject of the rather heated discussion was whether Maher and Harris could criticize the religion of Islam without being "gross and racist" toward Muslims, something Affleck and Kristof said was essentially impossible.

I am an Iraqi refugee best known for my human rights activism as well as my opposition to Islamic extremism. I am glad that criticism of orthodox interpretations of Islam has come to mainstream media – it is a subject on which I have spoken out since I came to the United States.

Unlike any of the "experts" who appeared on the show's panel that day, I not only have the knowledge to speak about the topic but also the experience of having lived in three Muslim dominated countries viewed by the West as poster-children for moderate Islam: Iraq, Lebanon, and Malaysia. Malaysia was specifically mentioned by Kristof during the segment; he referred to it as the poster child of moderation. Then Kristof offered this inadvertently chilling observation: "What about Indonesia? Only 16% [of Indonesian Muslims responding to a poll] favor death for apostasy.

Only?

Let's see: Indonesia has about 250 million people, of whom just over 87% are Muslim. That's 217.5 million people. Sixteen % of *them* – okay, *only* 34,872,000 Indonesians – favor the death penalty for apostasy.

Only (rounding up very slightly) *thirty-five million people*.

Nothing to worry about, then.

There is no difference between attacking Islam for its flaws and attacking Christianity for its problems, which many secularists, especially on the Left, seem to champion.

Here are some clear reasons why Islam needs to be examined, not excused.

In Muslim-dominated countries, you can be lawfully executed for blasphemy and apostasy. According to Reuters, atheists and other religious skeptics are subject to execution in at least thirteen nations: Afghanistan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Islam is also slowing the acceptance of homosexuality. Let's look at the Pew Research Global Attitudes Project's 2013 report, *The Global Divide on Homosexuality*, which asked the following question of citizens in each country: "Should society accept homosexuality?" In Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, more than 60% responded "yes" (Canada, 80%; United Kingdom, 77%; United States, 60%). But in the Islamic world, those answer-



Left to right: Ben Affleck, Bill Maher and Sam Harris on HBO's *Real Time With Bill Maher*, October 3, 2014.

ing “no” were in the clear majority: Lebanon, 80%; Turkey, 78% (despite having a secular government); Egypt, 95%; Jordan, 97%; Indonesia, 93%; and Pakistan, 87%.

In October of 2014, the World Economic Forum distributed its annual Global Gender Gap Report, a review of how well 134 countries have succeeded in closing gaps between women and men in four areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival. Among the eighteen lowest-ranked countries, sixteen are Islam-dominated: Qatar (117); Nigeria (118); Algeria (119); Jordan (120); Oman (122); Iran (123); Syria (124); Egypt (125); Turkey (126); Morocco (127); Benin (128); Saudi Arabia (129); Mali (131); Pakistan (132); Chad (133); and Yemen (134).

In a 2010 report dealing with the status of women around the world, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

(DESA) measured the number of girls of primary-school age enrolled in school compared to

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boys. The seven countries with the largest gaps are without exception Islamic countries. In Chad, 22% more boys than girls were enrolled; in Yemen, 20%; in Pakistan, 16%; in Guinea-Bissau, 16%; in Mali, 14%; in Iraq, 13%; and in Niger, 13%.

The same report compared adult literacy rates between women and men. Of the twenty-eight countries with the worst literacy gap for women, twenty of them were Islamic. Of the seven countries with the largest literacy gaps, five were Islamic: Yemen, 36%; Mozambique, 30%; Guinea Bissau, 29%; Niger, 28%; and Pakistan, 27%.

Finally, Islamic states fare poorly regarding the percentage of women participating in the adult labor force. Of twenty-seven countries in which women accounted for less than one third of the total adult labor force, twenty-two were Islamic states, with the

United Arab Emirates (15%) and Saudi Arabia and Qatar (16% each) scoring worst.

These are just basic statistics pertaining to human rights issues in Islamic countries.

In Islam-dominated countries, there is little to no freedom of religion or speech, widespread support for religious law, rising intolerance for homosexuals, and deep inequalities in the status of women. This is not coincidence; it directly reflects mainstream interpretations of orthodox Islam. So why is it when we hear millions of Muslims clamoring for more of such policies that Western liberals seem not to hear it, but those same liberals are quick to shout down anyone who is white and critical of Islam?

When intolerant beliefs are shared by a large percentage of Muslims, many of whom are not white, those Western liberals are silent. Why? I think it is because of racism, specifically the racism of low expectations. We in the West too often hold white Christians to different standards than we hold others, especially people of color.

We demand that white Christians respect liberal values, but we do not demand the same for others.

We are more phobic of being called “racist” or “Islamophobic” than we are concerned about facts.

We are Islamophobic-phobic rather than “defenders of the civil liberties of all people,” as we love to claim.

American liberals have betrayed fellow liberals in Iraq, and in many other countries in the Muslim world, who are fighting for the same rights American liberals claim to value. Instead, time after time, American liberals side with their enemies against fellow liberals in the Islamic world.

American liberals ask white people to acknowledge their privilege. But I am here to challenge American liberals to acknowledge their hypocrisy and their racism that accepts lower expectations and to stand in solidarity with their

liberal brethren in Muslim-dominated countries against the threats posed by radical Islam. I challenge American liberals to do this before there is no one left to stand with in the Muslim world, because they have all been tortured and butchered by the radical Muslims, who (lest we forget) are not a minority there. •

Further Reading

Evans, Robert. “Atheists Face Death in 13 Countries, Global Discrimination: Study” from www.reuters.com (<http://goo.gl/jsFa3B>)

Fisher, Max. “The Seven Countries Where the State Can Execute You for Being Atheist” from www.washingtonpost.com (<http://goo.gl/6mnCyn>)

Goodenough, Patrick. “Statistics Show Women Fare Badly in Muslim Countries, but U.N. Official Says Critics Are ‘Stereotyping’ Islam.” from www.cnsnews.com (<http://goo.gl/sYkyyX>)

Hess, Alexander E. M. “10 Worst Countries for Women .” from www.huffingtonpost.com (<http://goo.gl/ESJCvF>)

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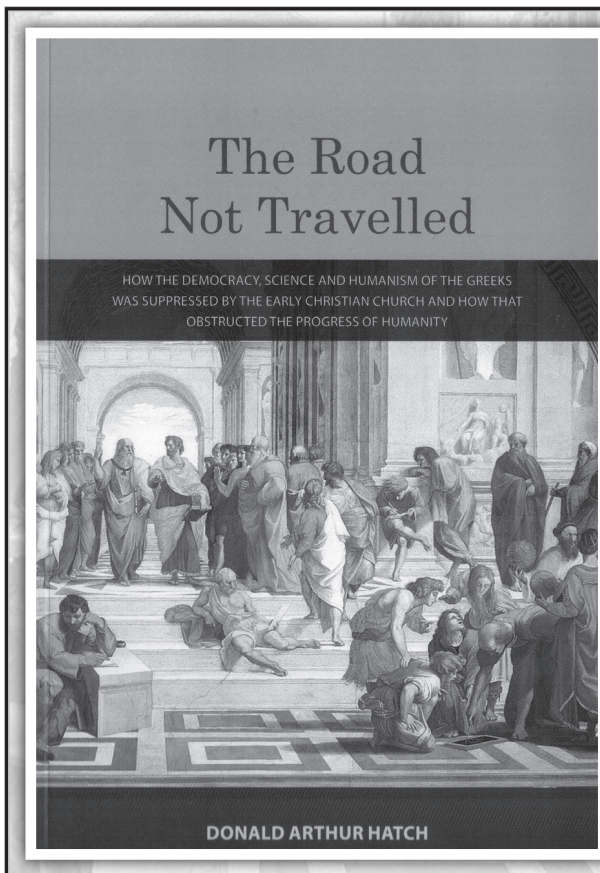
Of course, Sam Harris had some thoughts of his own regarding his appearance on the Bill Maher show with Ben Affleck. In a blog post entitled “Can Liberalism Be Saved From Itself?,” Harris notes that he was “a little thrown by Affleck’s animosity,” and that Affleck was “gunning for me from the start,” even though the two had never met before.

The most controversial thing I said was: “We have to be able to criticize bad ideas, and Islam is the Mother lode of bad ideas.” This statement has been met with countless charges of “bigotry” and “racism” online and in the media. But imagine that the year is 1970, and I said: “Communism is the Mother lode of bad ideas.” How reasonable would it be to attack me as a “racist” or as someone who harbors an irrational hatred of Russians, Ukrainians, Chinese, etc. This is precisely the situation I am in. My criticism of Islam is a criticism of beliefs and their consequences – but my fellow liberals reflexively view it as an expression of intolerance toward people.

We’ve seen *that* kind of misunderstanding before! Sadly, we can expect to see it many more times.

At one point [after the show], Kristof reiterated the claim that Maher and I had failed to acknowledge the existence of all the good Muslims who condemn ISIS, citing the popular hashtag #NotInOurName. In response, I said: “Yes, I agree that all condemnation of ISIS is good. But what do you think would happen if we had burned a copy of the Koran on tonight’s show? There would be riots in scores of countries. Embassies would fall. In response to our mistreating a book, millions of Muslims would take to the streets, and we would spend the rest of our lives fending off credible threats of murder. But when ISIS crucifies people, buries children alive, and rapes and tortures women by the thousands—all in the name of Islam—the response is a few small demonstrations in Europe and a hashtag.” I don’t think I’m being uncharitable when I say that neither Affleck nor Kristof had an intelligent response to this. Nor did they pretend to doubt the truth of what I said.

The blog post in its entirety can be found at <http://goo.gl/ktvhxX>. It is well worth a read. —Ed.



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