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The central argument of Wael Hallaq's *The Impossible State* is that "discursive negotiation" (p. 168) between East and West would not only contribute to global peace but also generate a new and authentic approach to alleviating the ills of modernity. For the discursive negotiation—which must be protracted and procedural to succeed—each side will have to submit to a paradigm shift: Muslims must forgo the goal of achieving an Islamic state, because Islam, as moral order, is incompatible with a political construct, and the West will have to agree to a "reformation of [its] modern moralities" (p. 169). Muslims will thus be rid of the crisis that has engulfed their modern history, and the West will reinvest itself with ethical human agency.

An epistemological double helix is constructed to forward the two concurrent claims. Both sides will have to first concede the paradigmatic definitions forwarded by Hallaq—both of themselves and of the opposing side—and then embrace a structural shift in these essential paradigms. But synchronization between the two claims is achieved only at the expense of eschewing history, so that the book engages in an abstract—as opposed to theoretical—argument. For a thesis designed to create a working dialogue in the political present, this failure proves fatal.

The book's opening salvo rules out any past, present, or future for an Islamic state. According to Hallaq, such a state has never existed, and there is no likelihood of it ever existing in the future. The modern state, born in the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment as its midwife, is essentially and historically Western, and cannot be replicated outside of the West (p. 99). The validity of this thesis is assumed by a reference to the works of Carl Schmitt (pp. 7–9, 12). Having thus defined the state as singularly and essentially Western to his satisfaction, Hallaq moves on to claim that all modern experiments with an Islamic state are doomed to fail. Here he brings an example from history, the Islamic Republic of Iran, "where the state apparatus has subordinated and disfigured Sharī'a norms of governance, leading to the failure of both Islamic governance and the modern state as political projects" (p. 2). To Islamists, Hallaq preaches that the political conundrum that engulfs modern Islamic history cannot be resolved by mimicking the West, and this includes the commitment to a state-centered organization of administration and governance. As a political desideratum, the state is itself a colonial legacy and must be discarded.

Hallaq's readers would be remiss, however, to attribute the failure of Islamist politics to the dearth of desirable modern or humanist values, such as rule of law and respect for basic human rights, including the right to dissent. All of those he argues, are found in tremendous abundance in the true Sharī'a, which was in effect before colonialism disrupted organic social and political norms through cultural penetration (p. 34). Rather, the culprits are the deficiencies in the modern paradigmatic state and the abnegation of morality that is germane to the type of political community it fosters. In fact, the crisis of modern Islam is no more than "the lack of an auspicious moral environment that can meet the minimal standards and expectations" of "Islamic governance" (p. 40). Muslims today suffer from "a certain measure of dissonance between their moral and cultural aspirations, and the moral realities of a modern world in which they must live, but had no part in shaping" (p. 3). While the Enlightenment and the onset of modernity heralded a new era in Western history, in the Islamic world they put a stop to dynamism and social change.

To set up his argument, Hallaq has had to render the West and Islamic world comparable, an end that is achieved only by reducing each to a paradigm, the state in the Western instance and the Sharī'a in the Islamic one. An important ancillary of the modern state-centered society is the primacy of the political, and that is why all attempts to graft the modern state apparatus in Sharī'a-minded societies fail. In the West, we are told, "the relegation of the moral imperative to a secondary status and its being largely divorced from science, economics, law, and much else has been at the core of the modern project" (p. 5), while the "defining emblem" of the paradigm of Islamic governance is the Sharī'a, which "represented and is constituted by a moral law" and "always strove toward the realization of this moral end, sometimes failing but most often succeeding, which is precisely what made it a paradigm" (pp. 10–11, 96–97). As a moral order that eschews the political, Hallaq's Sharī'a cannot promote state formation. The Western paradigm, essentially political, defines its modern history, while the Islamic one, fundamentally moral, captures the true essence of Islam from its beginnings to the present.

The pitfall in Hallaq's paradigmatic scheme, however, is that his Western paradigm is a historical process, whereas the paradigm on the Islamic side is a medieval relic, one that had characterized Islamic society in earlier times and effectively emasculates it in modern times. The woolly premises Hallaq has conjured up to justify an abstract discussion of historical processes is exemplified in his explanation for the rise of the Sharī'a: "[T]he Community, the common social world, organically produced its own legal experts, persons who were qualified to fulfill a variety of legal functions that, in totality made up the Islamic legal system" (p. 52). Having made the Sharī'a into an organic growth in the medieval period, Hallaq is ready to declare it

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a fitting match against the Enlightenment (p. 13): The Enlightenment, which came to be through the confluence of economic, social, and political change, is pitted against a Sharī'a that has salient presence and enjoys "organic" origins. The author is mindful of this fundamental disequilibrium, though perhaps not of the severity of the damage it inflicts on his thesis. In a curt, emphatic tone, he claims, without offering either argument or evidence, that Muslims live in the modern world and are therefore ipso facto a part of modernity (p. xi).

By focusing on the paradigmatic, Hallaq hopes to justify his decision to leave out history, and all non-moral considerations, from his deliberations. To the skeptic, he quickly asserts that his claim to the supremacy of the Sharī'a and the good governance that it has supposedly secured for the Islamic world is not undermined by historical infelicities, numerous as they might be. The "paradigmatic status of the Sharī'a," he writes, is "of course" not to claim that when and where in proper use, in the precolonial Islamic world, that is, "it ensured an ideal life" (p. 11 and passim). The Sharī'a remained paradigmatic, "even if not all rulers complied with its norms in the same way or to the same extent" (p. 64). But dismal and complete failure in the translation of the ideal into reality is the sole justification he provides for declaring, at the very outset, that he "will leave out of consideration all modern Islamic experiments with the Sharī'a" (p. 2 and passim). If deviations in the precolonial period are ineffective in disturbing the Sharī'a-induced moral order, why are similar contemporary strayings powerful enough to upset it? Hallaq is silent on this issue, as well he should be, since not a single day of Islamic history could be demonstrated as evidence for his thesis.

Hallaq's condemnation of modern Islamism goes beyond Islamist practice—as in the Islamic Republic of Iran, for example—and also covers Islamist thought. Herein also is the aporia at the fount of his method that undermines the premises he has so painstakingly conjured up. In a particularly cogent argument, perhaps the most powerful in the book, he rejects the segregation of the "ritual" from the "legal" in modern orientalist scholarship on Islamic law, which fails to "appreciate both the legal ramifications of *'ibādāt* and the moral ramifications of those 'strictly legal' provisions of *mu'amalāt*" (pp. 116, 149). As an exemplar of the true Sharī'a, Hallaq parades the famed eleventh-century theologian al-Ghazzālī, who captured the paradigmatically moral essence of the Sharī'a in his "mystical Sharī'ism." Ghazzālī braided law and morality to reveal the full significance of rituals of piety, or "the moral technologies of the self," in Hallaq's borrowed nomenclature.

If Ghazzālī's moral reading of the *'ibādāt* is absent from modern scholarship on the Sharī'a, and that is taken as

evidence of its decimation, it is so only in orientalist (coterminous with "bad" in Hallaq's text) scholarship, authored by Muslims and Westerners alike. A cursory glance at modern Islamist scholarship is sufficient to reveal the fallacy in Hallaq's emphatic dismissal of this important corpus. In his interpretation of the etiquette of worship, *Kitab Sirr al-ṣalāt* (1982), Ayatollah Khomeini, jurist, mystic, and theoretician of the Iranian revolution, refers to the three principal postures of prayer (standing, bowing, and prostrating) as emblematic of the three unities that comprise *tawhīd*—the unities of actions, divine attribute, and divine essence, which reflect the incremental progress of the supplicant on the mystical path. Is Khomeini's any less of a bricolage? It defies logic to claim that the paradigmatic Sharī'a is not upheld in modern Islamist thought.

Hallaq's discussion of the modern paradigmatic state, by contrast, is a name-dropping spree. The author enlists a motley troop of theorists, from Carl Schmitt to Thomas Kuhn, John Gray, Michel Foucault, Leo Strauss, Charles Larmore, and Charles Taylor. Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Francis Bacon, Voltaire, Hobbes, Rousseau, Hume, Spinoza, Hegel, Kant, Vico, Marx, Nietzsche, Bentham, Mill, Kierkegaard, John Rawls, Antonio Gramsci, and many more all make cameo appearances. Although Hallaq cites these thinkers, he does not draw them into a conversation. Rather, bits and pieces from each theorist are strewn together to make possible his claim that reenchantment is in order in the West, or that Ghazzālī (d. 1111) anticipates Foucault. His exhortation to those Western theorists dismayed with the ills of modernity, including "poverty, social disintegration, and the deplorable destruction of the very earth that nourishes humankind" (p. 5), is to look for a moral and egalitarian organization of human society in the true Sharī'a, which, according to him, resonates with the "slim yet resounding voices of the McIntyres, Taylors, and (even liberal) Larmores" (p. 169).

The double helix undergirding *The Impossible State* conflates the abstract with the theoretical, and therein lies the aporia. The paradigm of the state either is a product of Western history or enjoys a ubiquitous presence over and above it. Likewise, the Sharī'a is either that which is upheld by Muslims—how to collate the ethical universe of all Muslims, or even the paradigmatic Muslim left with a question mark—and expounded in scholarship on Islam or it exists in spite of them. To pretend that the paradigms of state and Sharī'a were born, however abstrusely, in a moment outside history—even if as ideals—but determined the very course of that history, and that in another phoenix-inspired moment, they may be coaxed to self-destruct, is to forgo much of the rational, epistemological foundations of modern thought.