

## A LOOK BACK

*Judith E. Tucker*

### EXCERPT FROM “STUDYING MY MOVEMENT: SOCIAL SCIENCE WITHOUT CYNICISM”

We continue celebrating the fortieth volume of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* with an excerpt from an article of yore recommended by a former *IJMES* editor.

Historian Leila Fawaz succeeded Peter von Sivers as editor in 1990. “I remember that the contents of the journal changed slightly . . . in that I tried to bring in more humanities/arts types of publications to the more social science offerings of the preceding period,” writes Fawaz from Tufts University, where she directs the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies. “Also, I tried to have a young scholar published in every issue or about, and to increase the number of international contributors.”

In her opening editorial of volume 22, issue 1, Fawaz lamented the “excessive specialization” that discourages cross-disciplinary reading and generates complaints about “boring” articles. Fawaz linked this problem to Middle East studies as a whole, because researchers were “still a long way from being pathfinders in the world of scholarship generally.” Her prescription for the journal: “more analytical contributions, more comparative contributions, and more exciting and readable ones.”

Five years later in issue 4 of volume 26, Fawaz wrote in her farewell note that she had found it difficult to construct thematic issues and to publish comparative research, which “proved to be an area much talked about but rarely practiced, judging by the pool of articles sent to *IJMES*.” She worried, too, about their “disproportionate” emphasis on contemporary history and politics “to the detriment of research on earlier times.” Yet Fawaz took heart from the “number and quality” of young people in the field. Because *IJMES* enlisted several reviewers for each article, peer review “helped integrate the community of Middle East scholars,” who learned from each other and joined in the development of the field. That was her fun as editor, “the opportunity to stay on top of current research.”

Among the younger scholars she encouraged were Juan R. I. Cole and Elizabeth Thompson. Their articles top her list of memorable submissions, as do two essays from a new commentary section “for articles that seemed more reflective than data based.” (In much shorter form, that idea has resurfaced in the current *Quick Studies Pensée*.) Here follow citations for these favorites, as well as an excerpt from the commentary by El-Affendi, a philosopher at the University of Khartoum.

- Juan R. I. Cole, “Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought in the 19th Century,” *IJMES* 24 (1992): 1–26. [www.jstor.org/stable/163759](http://www.jstor.org/stable/163759)

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- Elizabeth Thompson, "Ottoman Political Reform in the Provinces: The Damascus Advisory Council in 1844–45," *IJMES* 25 (1993): 457–75. [www.jstor.org/stable/163955](http://www.jstor.org/stable/163955)
- Abdelwahab El-Affendi, "Studying My Movement: Social Science without Cynicism," *IJMES* 23 (1991): 83–94. [www.jstor.org/stable/163933](http://www.jstor.org/stable/163933)
- Albert Hourani, "How Should We Write the History of the Middle East?" *IJMES* 23 (1991): 125–36. [www.jstor.org/stable/164233](http://www.jstor.org/stable/164233)

*Abdelwahab El-Affendi*

## STUDYING MY MOVEMENT: SOCIAL SCIENCE WITHOUT CYNICISM

While I was working on my Ph.D. thesis on Ikhwan in the Sudan,<sup>1</sup> a Sudanese colleague of mine working in a related area used to joke that we have all become “Orientalists.” There was a certain sense of irony—and truth—in this “accusation.” Our endeavor was either the negation and supersession of Orientalism, or its final triumph. For here we are, fiery Islamic militants, squatting meekly and dutifully at the feet of our Orientalist sheikhs, hoping to drink at their hands the cup of knowledge on which we had simultaneously turned our backs. Is this conceding defeat or starting an invasion?

In a sense, what we were doing was not new. The love-hate relationship between modern Islamists<sup>2</sup> and Orientalists goes as far back as Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his most illustrious disciple, Muhammad Abduh. Afghani was keen to justify himself to Ernest Renan and the French Orientalist community to the extent of recasting his ideas in new and controversial terms. His “Answer to Renan,” published in 1883, provoked serious controversy through the manner in which he tried to speak to Renan as intellectual to intellectual.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, there were no new concessions offered here by Afghani, apart from the inherited self-contradictions that classical Islamic philosophy acquired from its incomplete assimilation of ancient Greek philosophy. Yet at play here was also the feeling, which the classical Muslim philosophers also had, of special affinity between the elites of different cultures, who understand the relativity of ideas and feel themselves privileged in this knowledge that brings them closer to each other and to the truth.

The key here is the belief in some universal language and also a universal forum on which communication between the two elites can take place. The assumptions behind this position have been accepted by successive generations of Islamists. Implicit even in the criticism of, and anger at, the Orientalist assertions about Islam is the assumption that what the Orientalists say counts. Orientalist theses are “scientific” statements with claims to universal validity. The Muslims’ image within this body of scholarship is, therefore, *the* Muslim image for the world.

This assumption is also accepted by non-Islamist criticisms of Orientalism, like Edward Said’s monumental treatment of the discipline. Said’s critique accepts as a working assumption the claims of Orientalist—and Western—representations of Islam to universal validity. Otherwise, his criticisms of them lose much of their force and meaning. For to show that Western representations of the Orient are parochial and partisan is no criticism unless we accept that they should be otherwise. If they are Western representations, for Western people, what business is it of ours how they are shaped? After all, Said does not take issue with Buddhist or, for that matter, Christian perceptions of Islam.

This problem applies also to the media. Islamists and pro-Third World activists are outraged by the coverage their constituencies get from Western media. Again, these very criticisms are an admission of the universal status of Western media. Few people get

upset if an Indonesian paper criticizes them, or even if Japanese television does. But if *The Times* (U.K.), the *Washington Post*, or NBC is disparaging, then that is cause for concern. This is, in a sense, a function of the power of these media and their capacity to influence important audiences. But it is also a function of the prestige and image of “objectivity” these media organizations have laboriously built over the years. Foreign readers of the British press make a clear distinction between *The Sun*, that unashamedly parochial and partisan newspaper, and *The Times* (U.K.), that epitome of respectability and “objectivity” (dented though its image had become in the Murdoch era), or (even more so) the BBC, the “objective” “world” medium par excellence.

So when we came to Western universities to study “ourselves,” it was not just because these universities had better libraries and research facilities, or even better qualified teachers. It was, rather, because Western universities and scholarship have acquired a prestige that venerable Islamic institutions like al-Azhar in Cairo or the Islamic University in Medina have not yet managed to acquire. It was also in recognition of the fact that Western scholarship has become the perceived apex of human endeavor in most fields, and it is within it that one must prove himself. Even apparently devastating critiques like Said’s could create no more than a ripple in this vast sea of accumulated achievements. To achieve its impact, Said’s work has to place itself firmly within the field it purports to criticize, and his work has been peacefully and comfortably accommodated within Western scholarship, where it is now being taught and studied as a complement to classical Orientalist works and not as a work that superseded them. . . .

. . . Did we then, when we came here, hope to fare any better? Is there a choice between perpetual marginalization outside the traditions of Western scholarship and virtual absorption within them? Could we make our voice heard within this towering hall, and if we did, will it die within the noise because it would not be different, or would it only be a minor note within an imposing symphony the conductor of which lies beyond our reach?

There were additional challenges posed by my peculiar case as an Islamist engaged in studying the very movement within which I grew and the general aims of which I still vehemently support. First, it is no secret that Western scholarship in the fields of Orientalism and “area studies” has not shied away from acting as the handmaiden of imperialist designs of control and hegemony over the people they “studied.” . . . It is not inconceivable, therefore, that my contribution to Western scholarship in this specific area could end up strengthening the instruments of control and manipulation deployed by Western imperialist interests bent on containing the Islamic revival I so much cherish and hope to advance. This could be the more devastating given that my particular status as a privileged observer puts me in a position to extract from the situation more information than many traditional Western scholars, since I use the same tools but enjoy better access to the facts and—I hope—a deeper understanding of the background and the inner dimensions of the phenomena under study. . . .

I must confess, though, that this was the least of my worries when I embarked on this work. The movement I proceeded to study is probably one of the most open in the world. Its self-critical attitude made its study one of the easiest as far as source material was concerned. I could have constructed a reasonably satisfactory study using published sources alone, without recourse even to interviews, let alone privileged information. In fact, the leaders of the movement (with minor exceptions) fully cooperated in the study,

and their attitude was that the more the world knew about them, the better. They believed it was ignorance of their actions and motivation in the West that was the major handicap, and not vice versa. Thus, neither I nor my colleagues were too concerned about giving out “secrets,” but were more concerned about achieving a fuller understanding of the movement’s history and its actual situation. I nevertheless have, as a matter of principle, refrained from using any privileged information acquired for purposes other than this study. . . .

But there is another, more fundamental sense in which “knowledge is power.” To contribute to the current body of presumed universal knowledge you have first to “fit in,” master texts, conventions, and procedures, and with them ingest the prejudices and assumptions that lay at the basis of modern learning. Thus, if you work with the assumption that Islam was somehow invented by Muhammad and proceeded to investigate how this was possible, nobody will demand proof for this assumption. However, if your working assumption implied in any way the acceptance of the truth of Muhammad’s claims, the guard dogs of tradition will tear you to pieces, will incessantly ask for proofs and arguments, and will never be satisfied by any. . . .

There is therefore a danger that one’s very intervention on the field could result in automatic self-annihilation, with one ending up as a mere cog in the oppressive wheel that churns out “knowledge” in a manner destined to perpetuate the dominant power structures. Thus, not only do you treat yourself as an inert object without a history, but even *act* as one. Edward Said has complained that Arab scholars did no more than reproduce the dominant Orientalist dogmas in their work.<sup>5</sup> However, Said’s suggested alternative to Orientalism is not valid for me either. As mentioned earlier, Said’s conception of “the new order” he envisages lies firmly (and self-consciously) within the Western framework. . . . Said’s true stance was revealed by that consummate acid test, his attitude towards the row surrounding Salman Rushdie’s novel, *Satanic Verses*. Here Said was reduced to no more than a sympathetic “Orientalist” who could “understand,” but never share, the fury and anguish felt by Muslims with regard to what this novel symbolized and sought to achieve. “Representing” the Muslims, Said could ask (in their name), “Why . . . must a member of our culture join the legions of Orientalists in Orientalising Islam so radically and unfairly?”<sup>8</sup> Yet he distances himself from the feeling and the people. Another “radical” anti-Orientalist, Ali Mazrui, goes a step further, trying to “translate” Rushdie’s crime for the Western mind by coining the phrase “cultural treason,”<sup>9</sup> yet he still resides in that ground where Muslim sentiments are described, analyzed, dissected, but still remain alien. This type of knowledge is more deadly, because it is less clouded by perverted ideologies, and it is therefore more useful for those seeking control of the “alien” forces of Islam.

Said indeed recognizes the possibility of what he calls “antithetical knowledge” from within Western tradition.<sup>10</sup> This category is defined by him as “the kind of knowledge produced by people who quite consciously consider themselves to be writing in opposition to the prevailing orthodoxy.” Three main groups fitting this category are identified: one is of young scholars who have not yet been absorbed by the establishment and are relatively free from the prejudices of their elders; another, of established scholars who either challenge the establishment from a radical stance or possess more depth and insight than the average practitioner; and, finally, a third, antiwar and anti-imperialist militant groups who are not scholars, but have achieved insight into Islam in spite of

their antipathy to it because that antipathy is tempered by “an even stronger feeling about what imperialism is like.”<sup>11</sup>

However, my work (and that of other groups not mentioned by Said, like the Association of American Muslim Social Scientists, and the Washington-based International Institute of Islamic Thought) cannot be classified within any of these categories, and there seems to be no place for us in the brave new world charted by Said. I must emphasize, though, that Said’s critique, and similar views produced by others, represent a positive advance from where I stand. Just as rationalism and the Enlightenment brought Europeans closer to Islam by demolishing the walls of blind prejudice surrounding the West, so the more enlightened radicals and more objective “Orientalists” find themselves closer to the Muslims and to understanding Islam and its history. However, this only leads them to stand halfway. Having lost their original faith but not attained to a new one, they advocate an agnostic pluralism: let us all drop our claim to the Truth and accept the multiplicity of “truths”; let us camp here, over these multiple “planes of activity and praxis,” which are “not one topography commanded by a geographical and historical vision.”<sup>12</sup>

As a methodological attitude, this stance is irreproachable. As a philosophical stance, it gives me no satisfaction. I have not traveled all this distance just to camp on the terrain of uncertainty and agnosticism. I must move on in search of the paradise I have left behind, and map the road that would lead all to that coveted abode. . . . My problem—and that of Said et al.—is that, though we accept and choose to live in this world, we recognize that, as it stands we have no place in it. We have either—like the Rushdies and Naipauls—to get out of our skins, to deprecate and abuse ourselves in acts of cultural suicide, or we have—like Said—to be content to tell the world about its errors, but never dare speak to it about Truth.

Thus, when I decide to relate my history to the “world,” I have first to reduce myself to the level of this world, to embody its prejudices, its ignorance of my language, my history, my feelings, my faith. The process is similar to communication with very young children: you have to make a fool of yourself, so to speak, in order to make sense. Or like a visit to the prisoners in Plato’s cave: one must explain in the language of shadows what it is to experience the light. I have to alienate myself completely from all I stand for, and then, painstakingly reconstruct myself for myself and the “world,” using only the pieces allowed in the game, and then hope to look something like what I really am. The exercise is not a trivial one, and as Said (and before him Renan<sup>14</sup>) remarked, the alienation may prove to be permanent.

Participation in the dominant Western metropolitan culture is not as easy as it seems. In this marketplace, even if the commodity you are offering is your own intimate knowledge of your own self, it may not get you very far. It is not, as Said revealed, that the “Oriental” has to be represented because he was found unable to represent himself. He is represented because he cannot represent himself *to the Western agent*. Even if the whole of Iran comes over to Washington to “represent” itself, that would not obviate the need for a “Tehran correspondent,” who is indispensable to “make sense” of what Iran is all about. The statements of Iranian officials are not “listened to,” but “interpreted.” To qualify as a correspondent you do not have to be yourself, but to abandon yourself, to put yourself in someone else’s place, to try to understand things from his point of view.

The question at bottom is not how do I want to be represented in the West, but why do I want to be in the first place? It is, in the end, a matter of choice; we choose to be part of this “world.” But then again it is not. What else could we do? . . .

But to what extent is one “allowed” to be oneself and participate in the dominant culture of our time? One thing we are clear about: we are not here to beg for a place, nor to beseech UNESCO to list our culture on the register of endangered species and ask to be protected from competition. We represent a culture that claims its place on merit, and defiantly poses as the guardian of Truth and right. It faces the dominant culture as a challenger and an equal and ultimately hopes to win in the contest.

But how are such claims to be interpreted in this age of pluralism (or polytheism, to use Weber’s characterization<sup>15</sup>), where everyone is free to worship the god of his choice, and no one is entitled to ask which is the True God. We Abrahamites want to turn our face away from this multiplicity of gods who may all be false gods, but can certainly not all be true. But what are we doing in the pantheon, then? How can we preach our one True God at the festival that is content to celebrate polytheism?

Well, by doing just that: preaching, making our stance perfectly clear. Our problem with “pluralism,” though, is that its tolerance comes to an end when its basis is questioned. You are all right around the place if you are a polytheist with a different god, but if you reject all gods and want out, then you have a problem. We are all for pluralism and the self-critical attitude underlying it. I certainly took great care to present my study in such a self-critical mode. This was not solely because that was the only way I could hope to obtain a Ph.D. from a Western university. It was also because I accept, on principle, Popper’s “evolutionary” conception of knowledge, which treats the acquisition of knowledge as the constant adaptive modification of inborn responses.<sup>16</sup> Self-criticism, according to this view, is the ladder up which one climbs to higher levels of being. Learning from one’s mistakes is the key to this process. And I accept that I have benefited immensely from adopting a self-critical attitude, continuously subjecting my prejudices and preconceptions to rigorous questioning. The exercise was certainly worthwhile, and I feel myself a better person for having subjected myself to its rigors.

I want, moreover, to claim that this was a development *in Islam*, and not a personal shift. Our generation of Muslim activists have progressed *within* our Islamic faith, and not outside or against it; and that is what makes our endeavor so significant. We have abandoned nothing of our faith or commitment to Islam, but we have achieved higher levels of self-criticism, which could enable us to contribute positively to the universal human endeavor, and be part of it. But we are part of it as *Muslims*. Again, this is a criticism of Said and his school, including Laroui and others. And it is a criticism aimed at the central thesis of this school. For Said, the “Orient” is largely a fiction conjured up by Orientalist practitioners to suit their diverse hegemonic designs. . . . According to his view, then, the solution for the problem is to recognize the essential unity of the world and its history. The implicit teleological assumption is that the world is becoming one, and that Orientals should become one with their Western masters, or at least become dissidents within the international Western-dominated system.

This belief may be true if we eliminate Islam. The rest of the “Orient” has been fast dissolving into the new “world culture,” but Islam has resisted this incorporation. . . . In the post-Said era, we know far better. Islam, in us, has accepted and assimilated the valid criticisms voiced by modern thinkers, and now presents our culture strengthened, and not annihilated, by these criticisms. After most of the ancient “Orient” has melted in the heat of rationalism and industrialization (and with it much of our traditional culture), we are still here: the pure metal cleansed and purified, but not caused to evaporate, by the heat. The pure matter of which we are made, and which defines us, is faith. In this age of

infidelity, we keep this abandoned flag flying; we remain the believers, the community of the faithful, the religious community par excellence.

At a time when most non-Western cultures—and, for that matter, most traditional aspects of Western culture, including its religious component—are bowing down—or out—in front of the dominant secular religion of the age, Islam is the only nonsecular culture on the offensive today. And I am not here referring to the rumblings from Tehran and Beirut (which reflect the vitality of Islam in their own way). I am here referring to the vitality and dynamism of Islam as a belief system that has withstood and repulsed the secular onslaught and has now turned on the offensive. Far from being lured by the fever of “redefinitions” that has diluted most traditional belief systems beyond recognition, or sheltering behind the “right” of endangered cultures to be provided with costly museums where they can lead a sheltered if marginalized existence, Islam has exposed itself to the full wrath of the dominant culture by posing as a competitor. Islam is today no longer a movement of liberation for the Muslims, claiming on their behalf the freedom to live according to their traditional ways for the period it takes for them to dissolve into the conquering secular culture. It is, rather, slowly reasserting itself in the same vigorous tone that characterized its emergence on the world stage some fourteen centuries ago: as a message for the deliverance of all mankind. . . .

In religion—at least according to the view we are advancing here—faith and knowledge are also closely intertwined. . . .

. . . For just as faith is at the basis of knowledge, so knowledge is the basis of faith. But there is a sense in which the two are different. I must again appeal to that notorious rebel, Salman Rushdie. In his novel, *Satanic Verses*, one character voices a rationally based moral critique of that epitome of the believing man: Abraham. Commenting on the incident where Abraham is said to have left his wife Hagar and her son Ishmael unattended in the desert, the character says: “Here, in this wilderness, he abandoned her. She asked him, can this be God’s will? He replied, it is. And left, the bastard.” The fictitious character may have had even harsher words for the old patriarch if he had been told of the incident when Abraham announced to one of his sons that God willed the young boy to be slaughtered by his father’s own hands. I remember once having an argument about a related issue with a Marxist friend who asserted categorically that if God came to him and told him to kill his son, he would never do it. I remember also replying to him, “That is why you are not Abraham.”

In what sense, then, is the modern attitude radically different from Abraham’s, and by consequence, from mine? I would say that not only does the modern position lack faith, but it also lacks knowledge. Abraham *knew* God. So the whole assumption on which Rushdie’s critique of him was based was mistaken. Abraham did not abandon his family in the wilderness, but left them in the care of God, and God *did* look after them. Rushdie’s critique is based on erroneous faith (not knowledge), the faith that God did not exist and that God did not instruct Abraham about His will. Here we are faced by a system that has no place for such concepts as “leaving someone in the care of God,” a fact that speaks of the impoverished character of this system, but also of its error. In the incident in question, this erroneous belief was empirically disproved. (At least according to the legend on which Rushdie based his critique.)

But Abraham was also a man of faith.<sup>17</sup> When God asked him to kill his child, he knew this was God’s will, but he did not know that it was good. He *believed* it was. If God had



said to Abraham “pretend to slaughter your son for my sake and I will make you two live great lives and become two of the greatest men on earth,” then their act would have been a trivial, utilitarian, self-seeking form of conduct that would be perfectly understandable to the Rushdies of this world. But it is precisely because Abraham believed and acted on faith that his act is remembered today as unique and inspiring. It was not blind faith, but faith with knowledge, and courage.

Islam has transcended Abraham while preserving the essence of his calling. By proclaiming the end of all revelation, it asserts that the individual experience that was Abraham’s is unrepeatably. However, in that *bête noir* of all secularists, the canonical punishments or *hudūd*, it faces the believer every day with the trial that Abraham faced. The Muslim community must daily make that leap of faith that Abraham had to perform only once, and continue to believe, with a heavy heart, that what God had ordered must be good and that the sacrifice will be one day rewarded by being made redundant. It’s a task much harder and more challenging. And it is also much easier, because the promise had been fulfilled twice before. . . .

In this manner, the man of faith could rescue social science from the endemic cynicism that lies at its very basis. It is not for nothing that the prototypes of the modern social scientist (men like Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Ibn Khaldun) managed to shock their contemporaries by trying to disengage the laws of social action from their ethical foundations. By just looking at how men tend to behave under given circumstances and how goals could be pursued most effectively, they hoped to improve our understanding of the actual human condition. But in pursuing this line of analysis, modern social scientists have done an injustice not only to ethics, but also to the truth. The thesis that men are essentially amoral beings engaged purely in the pursuit of egotistic material interests is contradicted by many aspects of the human experience. The observed conduct of humans, even in these impoverished times, points to morality as an essential ingredient of most aspects of social action. And I am not here referring to charity work or heroic exploits of search and rescue in disasters. I mean in areas like the marketplace where men keep their promises in adverse circumstances, not because they reason in philosophical terms about future benefits, but because they think they ought to.

A science that takes amoral man as its starting point is built on a false premise. That is why we hope our perspective is one that is not only ethically superior, but technically superior as well. By presenting and describing the Muslim condition from inside, we are describing this condition as it is, not as some misguided cynics think it ought to be. For now that we have arrived on the scene, much of those painstaking exploits of archaeological reconstruction that seek to determine who we are, what we look like, and what we think have become redundant. A whole “science” that uses as its first premise our absence must now disappear. We are now ready to be both the correspondent and the news, the object and the subject. We can speak for ourselves. . . .

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A book based on this thesis and entitled *Turabi’s Revolution, Islam and Power in the Sudan*, is being published by Grey Seal Books, London, in Autumn 1990. The study was conducted at Reading University, England, under the supervision of Dr. Peter Woodward.

<sup>2</sup>I use this term to refer to modern Muslim activists in general. This is a deliberate attempt to avoid such loaded terms as “fundamentalists,” etc.

<sup>3</sup>See Nekki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (Berkeley, 1968), pp. 84–95.

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<sup>5</sup>Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), pp. 323 ff.

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<sup>8</sup>Edward Said, “Rushdie and the Whale,” *The Observer*. Feb. 26, 1989.

<sup>9</sup>Ali Mazrui, “Moral Dilemmas of Salman Rushdie’s ‘Satanic Verses,’” a lecture delivered at Cornell University on March 1, 1989.

<sup>10</sup>Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (London, 1981), pp. 149 ff.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 149–51.

<sup>12</sup>Said, *Orientalism Reconsidered*, p. 14.

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<sup>14</sup>Renan claimed that “Oriental youth,” by ingesting the “rational method” in Western universities, would find it impossible to continue to believe in their traditional religion, which was “evidently conceived uncritically.” Renan’s remarks quoted in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (London, 1983), p. 121.

<sup>15</sup>Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* (London, 1982), pp. 147 ff.

<sup>16</sup>See Karl Popper, *Unended Quest* (Glasgow, 1982), pp. 44 ff.

<sup>17</sup>I was kindly alerted by an anonymous benefactor to the fact that this passage was reminiscent of Soren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*. Having now remedied my ignorance on the issue by reading Kierkegaard, I disagree with the assessment. I believe the position I am taking here is diametrically opposed to Kierkegaard’s. While he was in essence attempting to justify Abraham for the philistines and shield him from their criticisms by positing such categories as “unintelligibility,” I am holding Abraham as an indictment of philistinism. Far from asserting that Abraham “speaks no human language,” I am here claiming to speak Abraham’s language, to say what he would say if he were with us today.