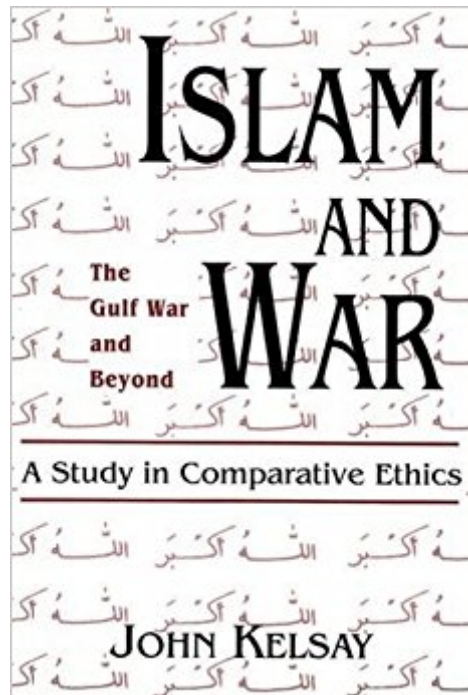The book was found

Islam And War: A Study In Comparative Ethics

Synopsis

This book explores questions regarding the justice of war and addresses the lack of comparative perspectives on the ethics of war, particularly with respect to Islam. John Kelsay begins with the war in the Persian Gulf, focusing on the role of Islamic symbols in the rhetoric of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. He provides an overview of the Islamic tradition in regards to war and peace, and then focuses on the notion of religion as a just cause for war.

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Customer Reviews

John Kelsay is Richard L. Rubenstein Professor of Religion and Bristol Distinguished Professor of Ethics at Florida State University. He is the author of Just War and Jihad, Islam and War: A Study in Comparative Ethics, and Arguing the Just War in Islam.

John KelsayÃ¢Â Â™s 1993 attempt at a "comparative ethics of just warÃ¢Â Â• between the Ã¢Â ÂœWestÃ¢Â Â• (often confounded with Christianity) and Islam ends where it begins, as a sort of soft Orientalism, a 90s version of Islamophobia lite. A phobia which in 2016Ã¢Â Â™s USAÃ¢Â Â"characterized by brutal attacks on Ã¢Â ÂœMuslim-lookingÃ¢Â Â• individuals, the burning of mosques, the removal of airplane passengers overheard speaking Arabic, and the election of Donald TrumpÃ¢Â Â"one might feel a certain nostalgia for. On the other hand, this book counts among the early interventions that primed the pump of the neo-orientalist, Islamophobia industry in academia, the popular press, television networks, and Evangelical radio stations throughout the United States since the first Iraq War. As an early, and well-written, exemplar of the

trend, it is worth a read. As scholarship on Islam, it is not. The very title Islam and War: The Gulf War & Beyond undermines its purported aim to set out an Islamic ethics of war. In starting not with the promised exposition of Islamic views on war (when it might be deemed necessary or how it might be fought) but rather with a discussion of Saddam Hussein's desperate invocation of "Islamic symbols" while under international attack, it immediately associates Islam with a widely despised military ruler. That Hussein was notoriously secular, that apparently no one in the Muslim world thought to come to his aid, and that Muslims everywhere mocked his sudden grasping for a religious cause, do not seem to matter for Kelsay. Moreover, he proceeds to end where he began, with George Bush's vision of a "New World Order" of non-aggression and cooperation, "a world of open borders, open trade, and most importantly, open minds" (112). The layers of ironies may be lost on Kelsay, but they will not be on the mildly aware reader. Kelsay builds up Islam up as a menacing Other via three moves common to colonialist, racist, and warmonger alike, followed by a fourth, particular to anti-Islamic Orientalism. First move. Set up a monolithic us and them, here Islam and "the West." Now, the counterpart of Islam is Christianity, and the figure chosen to stand for "Western" just war theory is Paul Ramsey, a Princeton Christian ethicist; but the reader is perhaps not supposed to notice the elisions. Second move. Make sure the "Other" is irredeemably savage and threatening except perhaps via "our" tutelage or subjugation. In this book, it is achieved by choosing extreme spokesmen and silencing all others. Third move. Set up a "clash" between "ways of life," and, importantly, together with the impossibility of dialogue. Fourth move. Keep the Muslims outside of the Abrahamic family that they so stubbornly claim. Otherwise, they may become "us" through the innumerable ties of genealogical, religious and historical connections. The following comments about specific parts of the book will all fit one or more of these four moves. Kelsay assumes, without discussion, a monolithic "Western" theory of just war, but cites two Christian ethicists (one Catholic, one Protestant) as its spokespersons. He gives us no reason to believe that Murray or Ramsey represent what the "West" thinks about the ethics of war or that they in anyway relate to the wars being waged at the time of the book's writing. Why not Augustine, often credited as the pioneer of "just war" and whose aim was to encourage Christians to engage in war? Turning to Islam, he similarly picks representatives in a rather peculiar way. As foremost authority for what "Islamic ethics of war" we are given an eighth century scholar, al-Shaybani, who wrote under the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, at about the hight of an Islamic

empire that stretched from Spain to India. He dismisses contemporary authorities out of hand, in particular the Imams of al-Azhar and Ayatollahs of Iran, because they operate under government pressure, and therefore, can only be deemed "apologists" for their regimes. Why is al-Shaybani not a "mere apologist" of the Abbasid Empire? Why is Ramsey not a "mere apologist" of the American Empire? If they are "classical" periods that he would compare, why choose the 8th century to represent Islam and the 20th to represent Christianity?An interesting omission, with respect to Christian ethics of war, is Augustine. In 300 C.E. Christianity was a minority, often persecuted, religion in the Roman Empire and war was strictly speaking un-Christian and not allowed. By 400 C.E. it had become the official religion of the Empire. Augustine, writing in the middle of that century, tried to distinguish wars in which a Christian can take part in and kill enemies without being considered a murderer. If Kelsay is interested in comparative ethics, why not compare this early Christian "just war" theorist with an early Muslim theorist?From al-Shaybani Kelsay wants us to see the Islamic war ethic as a near "duty" on all Muslims to bring God's peace and order on Earth by expanding Islamic rule, a pax islamica everywhere, forever. That al-Shaybani worked under Abbasid rule, 750 C.E., when the "ethic of empire" was not so much an "Islamic" prerogative as much as it was a universal idée reçue—"that the only way for empire to ensure peace was to defeat its potential rivals, demand tribute from its inferiors"—is taken as irrelevant by Kelsay, not even Greek and Roman history. Or if he would like to compare Medieval periods, why doesn't he juxtapose treuga dei and pax ecclesiae with similar concepts in the Islamic 12th and 13th centuries?When he turns to 20th century Islam, he chooses the extremest of groups, such as Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and Hamas. The latter tuned down its rhetoric and reformed its image as it sought electoral politics, but EIJ is considered one of the most dangerous terrorist groups of recent history, responsible for the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, known to his fans as the "pious president." This irony is also lost on Kelsay together with the oddity of choosing terrorists groups as spokespersons for the mainstream ethics of a religion. If he is concerned with how religious rules conducted wars, why does he not compare the Papal States with some the early Caliphates? If he is concerned with contemporary understanding in Christianity and Islam, why not compare his Princeton scholar with an al-Azhar scholar of similar renown?Throughout these orientalist moves, Kelsay fails to take account of historical, social, economic and geopolitical factors in Christian and Muslim discourses about just war. For example, if Mohamed was born at the height of the Roman Empire in Jerusalem would he have been a political figure telling his followers to "fight back," or would he have been a preacher of

"turn the other cheek," one who martyred himself on the cross? But Kelsay wants us to believe that a missionary expansionism is part of Islam, something laughable to modern Muslims. In a funny twist, the PLO a very secular organization that counts many Christians among its most prominent members is made to speak in Islamist language as if by ventriloquism.Even setting aside the thirteen centuries of history that are ignored, we are left puzzled why Kelsay wants to compare Islam and "West," and not for example, the West and the Middle-east. He assumes that the Middle-east is not secular, despite the fact that nearly every country in the region, besides Iran and Saudi Arabia, are purportedly secular. If we are not to take them at their word, then Kelsay must make an argument why not. These omissions are surprising given his hope that perhaps a universal just war ethics can be approached, if not achieved. Throughout the book, he paints Islamic modernity as necessarily a manipulation of a classical past, a past that Kelsay puts himself in a superior position to interpret than actual Muslim scholars who are either silent or labeled "apologists." This is because the purpose of the book appears to frighten the reader, something that it does quite well.Kelsay is ambivalent about whether he would like to "dialogue" with Muslims, whatever that means--itself ambivalent because at times he calls it "internal." Note, for example, the back and forth he goes through on pages 116-8; first saying dialogue appears impossible, then hinting it is, then again concluding that it may not be. What the arc of the book makes clear, however, is that he does not want his reader to.The book's concluding chapter is telling. Kelsay assumes a privileged position to decide what counts as "West," what counts as "Islam," and what their respective points of view are, without consulting the subjects themselves. When, during an inter-faith dialogue, Prof. Ali declines to make a judgment on the Gulf War on behalf, saying this war appears to have "nothing to do with Islam"—perhaps because he does not want to be a spokesperson for an entire civilization on a specific event, or perhaps because he is tired of having to do so—Kelsay takes him to task for "missing an opportunity to educate" his audience and proceeds to tell us what Ali should have said. Her is an example of one taking himslef as spokesperson for one civilization, while defining the terms on which the other can ever speak for another. Putting words into Ali's mouth, and silencing all other Muslims, he concludes the book with an unavoidable clash between a well intentioned "West" and a stubbornly incorrigible "Islamic East" unable to translate itself or make itself legible.Unfortunately, the moves mentioned above are why any "clash of civilizations" thesis is nearly always self-fulfilling prophecy, and nearly always tragic.

John Kelsay takes a critical look at Islam and "Just War" in this book, with the intent to (at least) partially exonerate Islam from some of the misguided criticisms and confusions that circulate about it. While this book has rich resources that examine the Islamic tradition and its practices on war, one wonders if Kelsay fully succeeds in his aims. Undoubtedly if you are interested and engaged in the topic of Islam and war, you will appreciate this short work. That said, however, the reader is left wondering: is Islam really so non-violent, or is it inherently radical? Kelsay says that the only time that Muslims can go to war are generally for defensive purposes, and when the religion itself is under threat. But it appears very clear in his text that this has been used in Islamic history as a mere pretext for expansion and even offensive jihad. I must commend this book as at least a first milestone in a subject which needs much more serious academic exploration, but I have to say that there are many questions that remain. In a nutshell - this book is a rich source for Muslim thought about war from the ancient to the modern period, but it does not accomplish the kind of clarity or resolution of what Muslim "Just War" is. Further scholarship and the contribution of Muslim voices will have to achieve this end.

The material is good but the development by Kelsay could have been organized more clearly. But we need to know this stuff.

This is an essential "read" for understanding classic Islamic theory of warfare as it relates to 9-11. Dr. John Kelsay, Chairman of the Department of Religion at Florida State University, an authority on the ethics of religion and war, wrote this book after observing how Saddam Hussein appropriated Muslim theology in his war with Iran and his invasion of Kuwait with the resulting Gulf War. In less than 150 pages, Kelsay makes an unfamilar subject understandable to the average college student. If this title is not on reading lists for Islam and terrorism, the list is plainly inadequate. "The territory of Islam is theoretically the territory of peace and justice....By contrast, the territory of war is the epitome of human heedlessness and internal strife; it also constitutes a continual threat to the security of the territory of Islam....The peace of the world cannot be fully secure unless all people come under the protection of an Islamic state." This is the classic Sunni meaning of "jihad"--the struggle to extend the territory of Islam, whether by the tongue, pen, or warfare. Understanding this doctrine is necessary for Western comprehension of the motivation of militant Muslims in their attacks on both Israel and Western nations. Kelsay discusses the Islamic rules of armed force: just cause, an invitation to become Muslims or pay tribute to the Islamic state, a requirement of right authority in declaring war, and war must be conducted by Islamic values. He demonstrates the

parallels between the western theory of "just war" developed by Christianity and the Muslim philosophy of the ethics of warfare, noting that an understanding of culture and history are essential for proper understanding. Of highest interest to the West, in light of September 11, 2001, is Kelsay's chapter on "Soldiers without portfolio: irregular war in the tradition of Islam." He discusses the status of Islamic rebellion against a legitimate Muslim government and the protection the rebels have under Islamic law. Iran considered the more secular Iraq to be corrupt, an apostasy, forfeiting traditional Moslem protections. This is precisely the problem which faces the more "westernized" Middle Eastern nations such as Egypt and Jordan. Bands of "irregulars" within these countries believe that they must overturn established regimes in order to return justice and true Islamic values to their societies, a "defensive jihad." Palestinians living on the West Bank and Gaza see their activities against Israel as overturning injustice. As a consequence, these "irregulars" have challenged traditional "jihad" and the right of established governments to declare war. Muslim governments which negotiate treaties with "foreign" governments (e.g. Egypt's treaty with Israel) or allow the United States or others to place troops in the Arabian peninsula are "corrupt." The Islamic Jihad's assassination of Egypt's President Sadat, Hamas terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians, and Osama bin Laden's proclamation of "jihad" against the United States become obligations for "proper" Muslims. Because such warfare must be waged against superior forces, Muslim warriors possess "right authority" in using whatever means they have. Classic Sunni Islam theory of war differs from western theory of "just war." Western culture divides people into combatants and noncombatants. For Islam, Kelsay states, "...guilt and innocence had to do with religious and political factors. How does one fit into the scheme of things, as understood from the Muslim point of view?" If women and children are killed in battle, it is not the fault of the Muslim--it is their leaders who are responsible for the death of innocents. Kelsay clearly explains the challenge that the use of terrorism, directed as it is toward non-combatant civilians, presents to modern Muslim scholars and clerics. They must develop theories on the justification and limitation of warfare that reflect reality rather than the pre-modern Islamic society in which the bin Ladens of the world operate. The "irregulars" have stretched the tradition farther than it can go. Despite the pleas of both Westerners and Muslims in western nations to "understand" the militant Muslim position and injunctions to change American foreign policy, in the words of John Kelsay, "...listening, understanding, and accommodating are distinct activities."

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