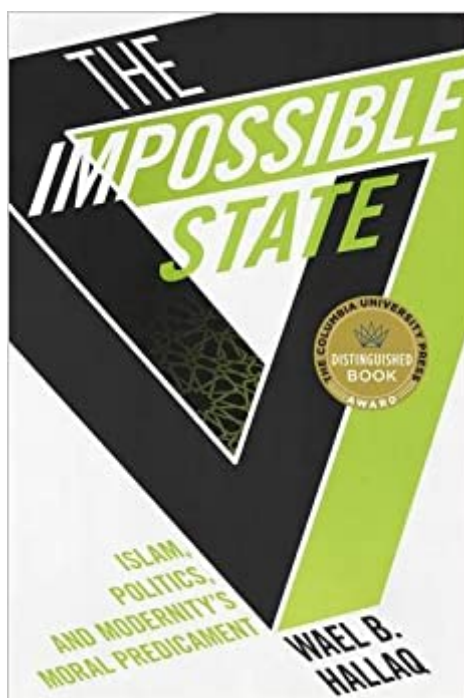


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The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, And Modernity's Moral Predicament



Synopsis

Wael B. Hallaq boldly argues that the "Islamic state," judged by any standard definition of what the modern state represents, is both impossible and inherently self-contradictory. Comparing the legal, political, moral, and constitutional histories of premodern Islam and Euro-America, he finds the adoption and practice of the modern state to be highly problematic for modern Muslims. He also critiques more expansively modernity's moral predicament, which renders impossible any project resting solely on ethical foundations. The modern state not only suffers from serious legal, political, and constitutional issues, Hallaq argues, but also, by its very nature, fashions a subject inconsistent with what it means to be, or to live as, a Muslim. By Islamic standards, the state's technologies of the self are severely lacking in moral substance, and today's Islamic state, as Hallaq shows, has done little to advance an acceptable form of genuine Shari'a governance. The Islamists' constitutional battles in Egypt and Pakistan, the Islamic legal and political failures of the Iranian Revolution, and similar disappointments underscore this fact. Nevertheless, the state remains the favored template of the Islamists and the ulama (Muslim clergymen). Providing Muslims with a path toward realizing the good life, Hallaq turns to the rich moral resources of Islamic history. Along the way, he proves political and other "crises of Islam" are not unique to the Islamic world nor to the Muslim religion. These crises are integral to the modern condition of both East and West, and by acknowledging these parallels, Muslims can engage more productively with their Western counterparts.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press; Reprint edition (September 16, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 023116257X

ISBN-13: 978-0231162579

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #124,435 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > Law #97 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > History #100 in Books > History > World > Religious > Islam

Customer Reviews

This is a bracing, erudite, and compelling account of the moral, political, and structural features of Islamic governance and the modern state, as well as of the multiple incongruities that hamper any attempt to establish one in terms of the other. Wael Hallaq delivers a welcome rejoinder to much of the dogmatic bluster swirling around the subject of shari'a and the Islamic state. At the same time, he brings into sharp focus the often overlooked resources for reconceptualizing 'the modern project' from within both Islamic and Euro-American traditions of moral and political thought. The historical, theoretical, and political richness of this account makes *The Impossible State* a new standard against which any claims about the possibility of establishing Islamic governance in the contemporary world must now be evaluated. (Roxanne L. Euben, Wellesley College)

A provocative and wide-ranging rumination by one of the leading scholars of Islamic law, this book poses tough questions to champions and critics of shari'a alike. Wael Hallaq makes a powerful argument for the relevance of shari'a as a moral discourse while remaining critical of its compatibility with the modern state. *The Impossible State* is bound to elicit debate among scholars of Islam, moral philosophy, and modernity across the Western and non-Western divide. (Saba Mahmood, author of *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*)

It is an important contribution to understanding the role and potential of the shari'a in the modern world. (Mark D. Welton *Middle East Journal*)

A philosophical and rhetorical tour de force. (Choice)

A refreshing take on the modern state and Islamic governance. (Middle East Media and Book Reviews)

This book brings a detailed and impassioned exploration of key debates in Islamic law and governance into sustained conversation with canonical texts in Western political and legal theory.... *The Impossible State* makes an important theoretical contribution. (Iza Hussin *Perspectives on Politics*)

An important, bold, and courageous intervention that stands out not just in contemporary debates on the Shari'ah in the West and the Muslim world, but in all modern writing about the subject. (American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences)

Wael Hallaq skillfully navigates through the dominant philosophical and sociological arguments.... The book is a must read for anyone even remotely dealing with conceptualisations of modernity, the state and Islamic governance. (Political Studies Review)

An important book by a well recognized scholar on an extremely important and difficult topic. (Religious Studies Review)

In the light of the ongoing events in the Arab world today... it is difficult to imagine a more relevant and timely contribution. (Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations)

Wael B. Hallaq boldly argues that the "Islamic state," judged by any standard definition of what the modern state represents, is both impossible and inherently self-contradictory. Comparing the legal, political, moral, and constitutional histories of premodern Islam and Euro-America, he finds the

adoption and the practices of the modern state to be highly problematic for modern Muslims. By Islamic standards, the state's technologies of the self are severely lacking in moral substance, and today's Islamic state, as Hallaq shows, has done little to advance an acceptable form of genuine Shari'a governance. The Islamists' constitutional battles in Egypt and Pakistan, the Islamic legal and political failures of the Iranian Revolution, and other similar disappointments underscore this fact. Hallaq then turns to the rich moral resources of Islamic history to prove that political and other "crises of Islam" are integral to the modern condition of both the East and the West, and by acknowledging these parallels, Muslims can engage more productively with their Western counterparts.

Still Reading it but so far it is a very well written and informative book about both the Modern state and the Islamic state.

The book is a brief comparison of the role of Sharia in a state versus the state's rationale for existence.

A challenging book. Well worth the read, and an excellent critique of modernity from an Islamic perspective.

Thus is a great book and explains the difference between Shariah and the modern and why they are incompatible. They are incompatible because the modern state lacks moral foundations needed for Islamic governance. There are a few issues in the final chapter which I have criticised. For a comprehensive review, visit my blog ([islamnext dot com](http://islamnext.com)) and where you can find my review in the politics section.

Scary

This is a book that takes courage to understand because it challenges all that we take for granted. For those who have a sense of discomfort this books will articulate your predicament. For those who feel the modern world is their oyster

A very interesting analysis on the western concept of State and the flaws on its applicability to the political realities of the Middle East

This contention of this book has enormous implications plus describing concepts and their implications for nations with large Muslim populations and Western nations. The author is Wael B. Hallaq is a scholar of Islamic law and Islamic intellectual history. He is currently the Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University. Obviously the editor of his book was too intimidated to suggest any changes to Hallaq's writing style which is so abstract and esoteric that one has to ponder almost every sentence to grasp its meaning. After a while, one's mind becomes numb and one questions whether continuing is worth the effort.

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