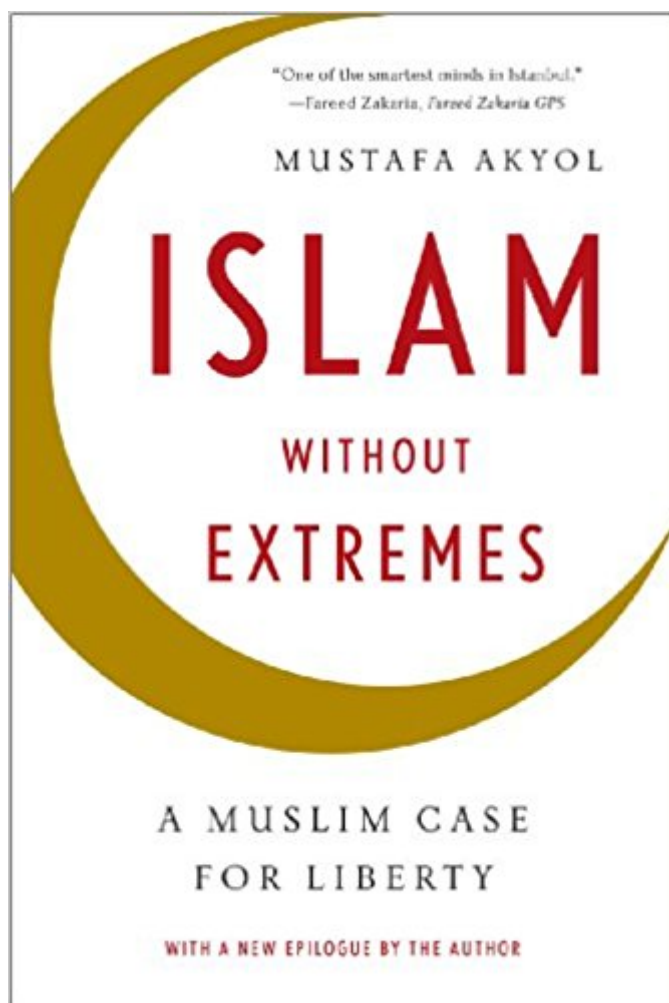


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# Islam Without Extremes: A Muslim Case For Liberty



## Synopsis

“A delightfully original take on the prospects for liberal democracy in the broader Islamic Middle East.” —Matthew Kaminski, Wall Street Journal As the Arab Spring threatens to give way to authoritarianism in Egypt and reports from Afghanistan detail widespread violence against U.S. troops and women, news from the Muslim world raises the question: Is Islam incompatible with freedom? In *Islam without Extremes*, Turkish columnist Mustafa Akyol answers this question by revealing the little-understood roots of political Islam, which originally included both rationalist, flexible strains and more dogmatic, rigid ones. Though the rigid traditionalists won out, Akyol points to a flourishing of liberalism in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the unique “Islam liberal synthesis” in present-day Turkey. As he powerfully asserts, only by accepting a secular state can Islamic societies thrive. *Islam without Extremes* offers a desperately needed intellectual basis for the reconcilability of Islam and liberty.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Akyol is doing important work that should have an impact well beyond his native Turkey.” —Doug Bandow, American Spectator  
“Starred Review. Informative at every turn.” —Kirkus Reviews

Beyond the two extremes that haunted the Muslim world, secular authoritarianism versus Islamic authoritarianism, there is a third, and promising,

way:Â Â Islamic liberalism. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I am in the middle of the book right now - but I had to share this. This is way better than 'Destiny Disrupted'. Must read for all Muslims! Promise to come back and update this review after I complete the book....OK, finished the book and as promised have come back to update my review. Although 'Destiny Disrupted' is a much detailed account of Islamic history, Akyol's account provides a historical perspective on what led to Islam's decline, stagnation and ultimately extremism and despotism. I strongly suggest all Muslims to read this to better understand themselves, their roots and traditions they take for granted. And for someone curious about where extremism took its ugly roots in Islam, this book provides a detailed explanation. Further, it dares to provide a solution to the problem of extremism.

Very well explained and easy to understand. It came as a surprise to learn how many things Catholics and Muslims have in common. I thought we had more roots with Jews and learn it is with Muslims. It is awesome to learn how so many beliefs doesn't come from the Quran, but were manipulated for political reasons in the past and presented as part of the Quran. Let's hope that with traveling abroad to study, liberalization will find its way in the Middle East and as women are studying they will be a force to shape the government and attain more liberty.

Among the central questions of our time is whether or not democracy -- or, in the larger sense, free societies -- are possible for non-Western cultures. Here in America, many ask if our understanding of "liberty" will translate to other, non-western cultures that do not share our Judeo-Christian legacy. This question is all the more important now, as we observe the fallout from the Arab Spring of 2011. It is not rare to hear someone ask if there is something inherently authoritarian in Islam. Is democracy even worth trying? Should we be concerned, for example, that an Islamist regime will be elected in Egypt, replacing one kind of authoritarianism with another? This excellent book by Mustafa Akyol, apparently written before the Arab Spring, speaks to these questions. It is a useful aide to those of us trying to understand these exciting and challenging times. Akyol first traces the history of Islam, a survey which alone is incredibly helpful to this American reader. Next Akyol points to a problem that should not surprise western Christians or western readers at large: the confusion of tradition/culture with scripture. By separating these two things, he argues, we can see seeds of liberalism within the scripture. Sharia -- which many fear and some for good reason -- is not scripture, and, Akyol reminds us, is written by men. Therefore it can be amended by men. With such

bold statements, one wonders if Akyol is nailing theses to doors. Only he is, apparently, not the first to do so. Others have come before him and, he says, it is worth taking a look at their work... as well as at the historical events that crushed it. Finally looking to his home country, Akyol reports exciting news from Turkey. Thriving new economies, new (and old) means of public and private expression, discussions of freedom of religion. All these Turkish experiences, and others, give us means for optimism for the people of the so-called Middle East. Key to it, Akyol argues, is not to throw away a "backward" religion but instead to embrace it. In fact, Akyol argues, stripping away the religion in Turkey -- just as others have imposed it elsewhere -- has been tried and resulted in disaster. Instead, a marriage of a secular (not "secularist") state and a free people is the recipe for not just the success of the state, the economy, and the nation but also for the faithful and free hearts of the people. I have recommended this book, already, to many. The subject matter is interesting, as I have said, but in addition, Akyol somehow makes this rather intimidating topic into an enjoyable read. This makes *Islam Without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty* a unique and important work.

I liked this book. A book for the laymen; readable, very informative without minutiae. The author provides the reader with a history of the development of Islam from its founding to the present day. He discusses the impact of culture, climate, other religions and of conflict from without and from within; doing so, I think, quite objectively. I liked the discussion about the difficulty of authoritarian efforts to impose progressive ideas and of the difficulty of being progressive under an authoritarian ruler. There were brief progressive moments within the generally conservative (traditionalist) trend leading to the present day, moments that were too brief, but very important to Islam and European Christian progress. All in all, the author hopes for another progressive trend, but he presents a very good unbiased explanation of Islam, the Qur'an, the Hadith, without the fog of doctrinal disputes. A must read, I think, for anyone wanting a better understanding of the religious, political and power issues in the Middle East today.

I found this book to be a fascinating overview of the historical, theological and political development of Islam and the intersection of those perspectives over the past 1,500 years. As an author of a book on ways for Jews and others to view stories in the Torah [Five Books of Moses] of the Old Testament as supportive of openness, tolerance and pluralism ("In Search of Theological Modesty: Biblical Lessons", Resource Publications, 2015 - *In Search of Theological Modesty: Biblical Lessons*), I found Akyol to be a kindred spirit, a "soul brother." He successfully and passionately makes the case for a return to theological school of thought that has been integral to

mainstream Islamic theology at various points in history. As a Westerner, as a Jew, as an intellectual concerned about the dangers of parochial triumphalism, I would say this is a "must-read" for anyone who wants to seriously understand the development of Islam and the paths that are available within that tradition that foster mutual respect for, and understanding, between all peoples.

This is a fascinating book. It provides a helpful history of Islam and allowed me, a non-Muslim, to understand how the religion came to be what it is today. The author also provided numerous examples of how the Qur'an supports political liberalism and the works of religious scholars who took an alternate approach to the world vs what we see most today.

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