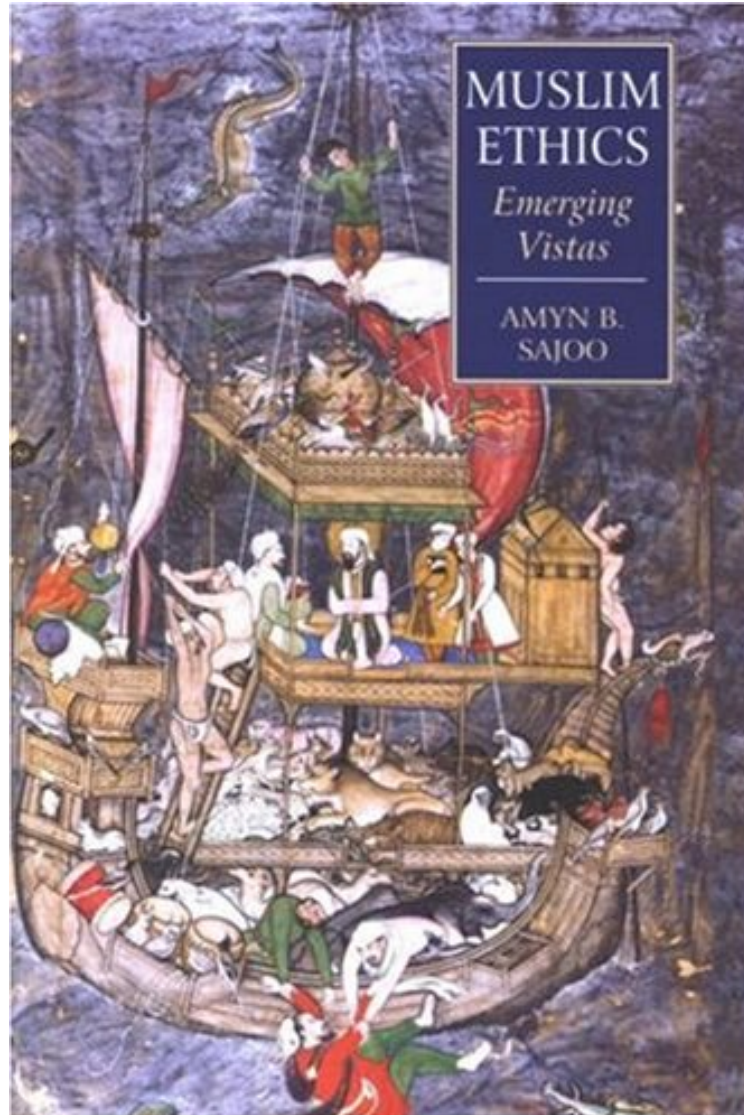


## Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas

*Aryn B. Sajoo*

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**Aryn B. Sajoo : Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Soft-peddled Islamist apologetics By Spencer Case "Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas" was for me a very disappointing book. The title suggests that this book takes up all sorts of new, cutting edge moral issues. The first chapter does, indeed, deal briefly with bioethical issues like abortion and cloning, but there is no real surprising information here, or detailed discussion of differing views within Islam. Islam, predictably, places less emphasis on self-ownership than does the contemporary West, and this makes active

euthanasia somewhat harder to justify. The rest of the book, as I understand it, is basically an extended argument in favor of the idea that the Islamic umma, which fuses together the sacred and the secular (or *din* and *dunya*, for world and religion, in Arabic), is preferable to the liberal secular status quo that exists in West, especially in Europe. Sajoo points out that there have been a lot of philosophers in the West, such as Michael Walzer in his book, *Spheres of Justice*, who have become dissatisfied with the idea that civic society is nothing more than a system of restrictions on harm that make atomic individuals free to pursue the good according to their own conceptions. Instead, society needs a shared conception of the good. This is the communitarian critique of liberalism, and Sajoo appropriates it to push the umma the Islamic community -more accurately translated as nation - as a more "holistic" alternative. Red lights should be flashing at this point. Shouldn't we be suspicious of the combination of religion and state? Sajoo assures us that these worries are misplaced, based on Orientalist bigotry against gentle Islam, which assumes Islam is monolithic and unchanging. In fact, the umma is more about a shared ethical framework than a legal system. But if that is so, why is it in conflict with liberal secularism to begin with? Secularism in the public sphere doesn't preclude a shared ethical framework. Indeed, one might argue that it presupposes a shared commitment to pluralism. This is what John Rawls had in mind with his idea of the "overlapping consensus." Oddly, after criticizing Western secularism, Sajoo downplays differences between her favored alternative and the system she is criticizing. Sajoo writes: "If the point of civic culture is to trump differences of ethnicity, culture, religion, political ideology and what have you, in favor of common citizenship, then pluralism is an inherent objective - whether in the secular Western or Islamic perspective." (Page 75). This statement blithely elides the differences between citizenship in a modern Western nation state, and membership in the umma, a status clearly connected with -perhaps synonymous with - acceptance of the Islamic faith. Laughably, Sajoo claims: "Pluralism is hardwired into the Qur'an, which time and time again proclaims that an inclusive umma is the only legitimate community of the good, and the very idea of 'Islam' encompasses the Judeo-Christian heritage, and that there can be no compulsion in religion." (Page 76). I say laughably for two reasons. First, it comes after Sajoo dismisses the critics of Islam as "essentialists" who insist it the religion unchanging. Whenever anyone criticizes Islam, it becomes a sort of ethereal multicultural vapor that you can't really make any generalizations about. Then Sajoo says that pluralism is "hard-wired" into the Qur'an. I guess you can only "essentialize" in good ways. Second, to describe the umma as pluralistic is laughable. Yes, Jews and Christians were recognized as *dhimmi*s, as protected peoples, but the pluralism does not extend beyond this. Wiccans and atheists need not apply. Even Christians and Jews must pay *jizya* or tribute (a word they prefer you leave un-translated.) So is not a relationship among equals. As far as it goes, it's more honest than Seyyed Hossein Nasr's despicable *The Heart of Islam*, which I have reviewed scathingly elsewhere. Still, I found the author's selectiveness raised questions about intellectual honesty. The book might be of some value for someone interested to know what modern Islamist apologetics looks like. Otherwise, ignore.

Recent political and social events, as well as advances in science and technology, have posed challenges to the traditional Muslim discourse on ethics. In this book, new in paperback, Ayn B. Sajoo examines these challenges and critically analyzes the implications of emerging initiatives in political pluralism and civic culture as well as moves in bio-medicine and environmental conservation. He considers how the contours of public ethics in Islam may be redefined to provide shared conceptions of the good and the practically useful in pluralist societies.

About the Author Ayn B. Sajoo is currently a Visiting Scholar at McGill University. He is also a regular commentator on public affairs in the news media on both sides of the Atlantic. He is the editor of *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives* and the author of *Pluralism in Old Societies and New States*.