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I chair the Cheryl Frank Memorial Prize Committee, of a panel of judges and Matthew has won this year's prize with his book and I want to congratulate him formally on that as the chair of that committee. It's awarded for the best piece of work in and about critical realism for that year. And the judges were unanimous, and that speaks volumes I think so congratulations.

Now I've been asked to speak about the theoretical side of things and at that level Matthew's project as I understand it is to produce a theologically informed, educational philosophy called Islamic Critical Realism that can both help Muslims meet the extraordinary challenges of our times, and promote a better understanding among non-Muslims of Islam. So that's the sort of theoretical goal.

His method is twofold as I see it: first establishing correlational resonance between the philosophy of critical realism and the tradition of Islamic theological philosophy, a method by the way that has excellent pedigree in the philosophy of Paul Tillich, he pioneered the method of correlation.

And secondly he then wants to deploy critical realism to underlay the four contemporary: interpretation, clarification and deepening of Islamic theory and practice.



Now one of the things I value most about Matthew's book is that he has this superb grasp, I think, of the main rationale for what Alan was talking about at the end there, the philosophy of meta-realism, or the philosophy of meta-reality. And that is it wants to articulate a metatheory that can serve as a basis for intra, inter and extra faith dialogue and understanding and that's its fundamental, or one of its fundamental rationales.

So what meta-realism, as Alan implied, basically does in regard to critical realism is add a transcendental or spiritual infrastructure to the system. What philosophers normally call the absolute ((0:19:51?)) or theologians call God with certain qualifications of course normally.

And it does so, meta-realism does this at the highest level of extraction, you can't go any higher, it's not very concrete at all. And it argues for an open, ultimate order of pure dispositionality and categorical structure that informs the world at the level of the absolute but informs the whole world in which we live without saturating it or exhausting it.

Now the basis for the dialogue I mention is what Roy calls, this is Roy's theory, what he calls the higher truth as distinct from the ordinary truth. The higher truth says there's only one absolute but there are many paths to it, there are many episcopologically relative accounts of it so the absolute both manifests and is accessed differently in different regions geohistory and different periods of geohistory to different people so that gives you a basis for dialogue and mutual understanding. There are many paths, there's only one absolute, we're talking about the same thing but there are many ways of understanding and accessing it.



So on this view meta-realism is not at all in competition with religion or theology and I think that's the way Matthew sees it, and I agree with him. On the contrary it seeks to underlabour for religion and theology and help them to develop and thrive in a manner that's conducive to human flourishing.

Now Matthew can't just deploy the method of correlation in a straightforward way on contemporary Islam because that's significantly in the grip of people who espouse the ordinary truth, radical fundamentalists. And that truth says, "My way is the only way! Your way is rubbish!" and so it's episcopologically absolutist.

And of course there are reasons for that that Matthew goes into in his book I mean this is very largely a reaction against your western domination, colonialism and things like that. But anyhow there it is and so what Matthew does, and I think this is a brilliant move, he deploys the method of correlation recuperatively in relation to Islam's own enlightenment or axial age which occurred or started more than a thousand years ago. So it's an exercise in recuperation and revitalisation.

And that enlightenment, by the way, had a profound understanding of what I'm calling the higher truth so that makes the move even more advantageous.

So this entrains, and there are two things: negatively it entrains critique of today's demi-real forms of Islamic institutions and domination and practices, sorry, as well as the wider social context of domination within which they're embedded. And positively it entrains a programme for the revitalisation and re-enchantment of Islamic practice and belief in the new context.



Matthew of course doesn't claim to resolve all the theoretical problems his work raises and on the face of it there are certain tensions with some of the things in critical realism, for example, one wonders how Islamic critical realists hierarchy of transcendence, how that correlates with Roy's radical anti-elitism, anti-substitutionism. But there are a number of things could be said about that but I've run out of time.

Let me just say there's no requirement that a regional philosophy such as Islamic critical realism should mechanically conform to critical realism. There's only an invitation to reconsider, that's all, there can be no requirement and so what Matthew's done, develop Islamic critical realism with its own regional ontology and episcopology and so on is perfectly proper according to critical realism itself.

And then secondly I'd say that critical realism metatheory for its part can definitely learn from Islam. And here I'd single out for special mention, I think Matthew really singles it out too, the theory of the demi-real. I take Matthew to be saying that there's a profound understanding of demi-reality in all but name within the tradition of Islam and so Islam can be a powerful ally, or potential ally, in our struggle to get rid of demi-reality.

My time is up so on the theoretical side it's an extraordinarily accomplished work I think, potentially a game changing one as Roy says in his endorsement. So over to Priscilla to talk about the more practical side of things.