Talk of civics in a work on world affairs means talk of the modernist citizen, and of the identities that being such a citizen entails. With talk of this kind we enter the politico-social dimension to world affairs, and we articulate the three key analytic languages it represents, namely, nationalism, individualism, and collectivism. Each language is based upon an assumption about human nature. More specifically, nationalism articulates the sense that we are (or in this case, “they” are) essentially bad. Individualism articulates the sense that we (that is, we who prioritize reason as an end in itself) are essentially calculating. While collectivism articulates the sense that “we” are essentially good. Taken together, these languages highlight nation making, human rights advocacy, the international attempt to install democracy, the esteem afforded constitutions and contracts, the proliferation of social movements, and the growth of a global civil society.

All three of these principles are Rationalist. They are predicated, therefore, upon individuated individuals. These individuals are alienated individuals, whose skills in objectifying result in them making mental distance from those similarly en-selved. While exhilarating for some, this social distancing can also estrange. Attempts to compensate for the resultant alienation can include, on the one hand, atavistic efforts to reawaken the solidarist feelings that ostensibly predate the whole project, and on the other hand, efforts to cast forward to create the associative feelings that come from sharing a common cause or interest. The former leads to nationalism, and if extreme enough, to fascism. The latter leads to collectivism, and the divers social movements that constitute the global civil society.

Though it is somewhat arbitrary to choose from the world faiths that currently confront us, the following analysis will look at the way Muslims deal with modernist en-selving. More specifically, it will look at how Muslims accommodate a doctrine like that of nationalism, which makes for a different identity than that of the global Islamic umma. How do Muslims accommodate a doctrine like that of human rights, which clearly valorizes the individuated status of the modernist self, endowing that self with moral entitlements rather than communal responsibilities? And how do Muslims accommodate a doctrine like that of collectivism, which is Rationalist and associative rather than sacralist and solidaristic?

The ultimate reference point for any Muslim response must be the Qur’an. For Muslims, this is the literal Word of God (Allah), as voiced by
the archangel Gabriel (God in this case being that indefinable, infinite, eternal, and incomparable Being that is the “Uncaused Cause of All That Exists”) (Asad, 1984, 985 [112/2]). As the Word of God, the Qur’an prescribes all Muslim forms of behavior and belief. It is “divine thought and divine law incarnated in words: it is mysterious sound which has everlasting life and existence . . . [it is] God’s eternal speech” (Smart, 1989, 281). And though God thinks and speaks in the Qur’an in the idiom of ancient Arabia, one would hardly expect Him to do otherwise. It would have made no sense to His Arabic-speaking agent, Muhammad, if He had spoken in contemporary Chinese, despite the fact that it was clearly within His competence to do so. (It would have made even less sense for Him to speak in His own language, whatever this could be said to be.)

The Qur’an consists of 114 chapters (surah), which taken as a whole, provide a fundamental template for all human behavior. The surah are believed to give all the guidance that humanity requires. Once the individual submits to Allah and therefore to His template (the da’wa), the soul can be enlightened, right and wrong can be determined, the bad can be denounced, the good can be exalted, alms can be paid, justice can be done, and a transnational spiritual community can be constructed.

The first surah was revealed, in the seventh century of the Christian era, to a middle-aged male Arab trader of the Quraysh tribe. When he was 40 years old, Muhammad began receiving the word of God. This continued for 23 more years, until just before he died. He was subsequently acclaimed a Prophet by those inspired by what he was reporting. He was also deemed, by those persuaded of the veracity of what was revealed to him, to be the “last and the greatest of God’s message-bearers” (Asad, 1984, 998).

As noted already, the purpose of Islam is to live as the Qur’an prescribes. Many Muslims, however, accept the sunna as a second source of instruction, that is, those teachings of the Prophet apart from those God apparently told him, like the hadith. For most Muslims a third set of instructions is to be found in the sharia (literally, the “path”), namely, the laws made by consensus by religious scholars, in their ongoing attempts to interpret the Prophet’s teachings properly.

In living as a Muslim, truth is paramount. As the God of the Qur’an says: “We have not created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in mere idle play . . . We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it crushes the latter . . .” (Asad, 1984, 489 [21/16, 18]).

In living as a Muslim, justice is also paramount. The Qur’an says that by being just we come “closest to being God-conscious” (Asad, 1984, 143 [5/8]).

The kind of justice the Islamic God requires is uncompromising and highly explicit. In the case of theft, for example, the Islamic God says that the hand of the man or woman who steals should be cut off “. . . as a deterrent” (Asad, 1984, 149 [5/38]). In the case of adultery, the Islamic God says that the “adulteress and the adulterer” (this includes intercourse between the unmarried) should be given a “hundred stripes” before