Islamic Terrorism and the Essentialism Canard

by Richard Butrick (April 2015)

> *It is a term of real rhetorical power. To be accused of essentialism is to be variously, an adherent of an outmoded and dangerous metaphysics, to be anti-scientific, anti-Darwinian, anti-women, racist, nationalist, anti-LGBT, and very probably some kind of political regressive. Like many other terms of that kind, it is almost entirely defined by its opponents and has little generic meaning beyond expressing the disapprobation of those opponents and relegating those who are said to hold those ideas to outer darkness.*
> — John S. Wilkins, *Essentialism in Biology*

According to a very [strange article](#) in *The Nation* by Juan Cole, "How Islamic is the Islamic State?", claiming those who commit acts of terror in the name of Islam are Islamic terrorists is to commit the sin of essentialism (shudder). He argues that the President is right not to fall into the trap of essentialism and besmirch Islam by allowing the juxtaposition of "Islamic" with "terrorism": [more>>>](#)