In the last 20 years or so, we have seen the globalization of the conflict between two forces. On the one hand, we have embraced in our daily life modernity (e.g. iPhones), democratization of political life, pluralism and tolerance, religious and ethnic diversity, secularism in governance, and rational scientific approaches to the solutions of a plethora of social issues. On the other hand, we have been increasingly confronted by Islamic religious extremism, jihadism, martyrdom, and militant fanaticism, resulting in suicide bombings.

It is of paramount importance to make a crucial distinction within Islam, between the radicals and the moderates. In many modern countries where Muslims are more than 85% of their populations, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, there is a living harmony between two opposing value systems: secularism, materialism, and individualism on the one hand, and religiosity, collectivism, and even a deeply spiritual life on the other. These modern Muslims are moderate or tend to be moderate, and are strongly opposed to radical Islam.

As much as any religion has developed or produced a community of believers, self-identity and self-help practices for its members, the question of whether any religion helps promote tolerance for other religions remains painfully unanswered. The seminar will discuss other intimately related issues of how radicalism developed, what the best defense against the emergence of religious radicalism is, and what role does education have in the defense against religious extremism.