



ISLAM AND THE NATURAL LAW

Montague Brown*

It is well known that Islam preserved and advanced culture, philosophy, and science in the medieval world. The creation of beautiful art, architecture, and poetry, the digestion and interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy, breakthroughs in mathematics, advances in medicine: all these occurred in the first few centuries of Islam. However, the Islamic world did not participate in the explosion of science and the development of democracy beginning in the Renaissance. Since the Middle Ages the dominant move has been away from a focus on faith and reason as partners in the quest for understanding of the world and our place in it, to a focus on faith alone, with the faith being understood ultimately as following Shari'a, the timeless law derived from the Qur'an and the Hadith and interpreted by the authorities.¹ The notion of a natural law accessible to all and the freedom of conscience so essential to democracy seem to be missing. Is natural law ethics, with its notion of universal moral principles accessible to all through free acts of will, compatible with Islam?

This is an enormously complex problem, and much can be said on both sides. In the first section of this paper I will lay out a basic articulation of the natural law. In the second, I will speak briefly about the historical place of reason and natural law in Islamic culture. In the third, I will examine how faith and reason are similarly and differently related in Islam and Christianity. Finally, in the fourth section, I will point out where I think there is room in Islam for an acceptance of natural law morality which, with its insistence on universal

¹ The two main kinds of Islam, Sunni and Shi'a, both follow first and foremost the Qur'an but differ on certain points and the source of authority. The split occurred after the third caliph Uthman was murdered in 656 CE, and Ali, the nephew and son-in-law of Muhammad who married his daughter Fatima, succeeded. The Shi'a is the party of Ali. See Bernard Lewis and Buntzie Ellis Churchill, *Islam: The Religion and the People* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Wharton School Publishing, 2009), 61-62. Sunni Islam intends to follow the Sunna, "the precept and practice of the Prophet and of the early leaders of Islam, as recorded by tradition" (Lewis, *Islam*, 219). Lewis notes that Sunni Islam, which includes about 85% of all Muslims, "is more concerned with correct practice than with correct belief" (Lewis, *Islam*, 219). Shi'a Islam began as "a legitimist group supporting the claims of Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, to succeed him as head of the Muslim community" (Lewis, *Islam*, 215). The only nation in which the Shi'a is the ruling majority is Iran. The Shi'a have as leaders Imams who claim to be descendants of Ali and Fatima.



moral norms and freedom of conscience, could allow for the growth of democracy and a free society within Muslim culture.

Let us begin by sketching out what I mean by natural law. First of all, this is an ethical doctrine, not a physical one having to do with the way the material universe is ordered. Thus, while the laws of physics cannot be broken, the moral law is easily broken but should not be. Thus it is a law of obligation, not of legal or empirical fact.² As I use the term here, it is quite broad, including, in addition to traditional figures such as Cicero and Thomas Aquinas, the virtue ethics of Plato and Aristotle and the deontological ethics articulated by Immanuel Kant.³ Morality includes both the core intelligibility of ethical obligation, which is self-evident and open to all rational persons, and the manner of its instantiation in our actions (the realm of the virtues). Both are obviously essential. The key point is that the notion of ethical obligation incumbent on all people is not merely a matter of revealed doctrine but can be and, on some level, is known by those who do not accept revelation. The first principle of the natural law is itself an obligation: do good and avoid evil. Some actions or choices should be done and others should not be. Such a principle is self-evident, for it would be a contradiction to hold that it would be good to violate what is good. The content of the moral law, as to what should or should not be done, is given in a handful of basic or ultimate goods that are also self-evident. Cicero presents these as life, procreation or family,⁴ knowledge, friendship, quest for excellence, and beauty.⁵ Thomas Aquinas in his

² Anver Emon, in his book *Islamic Natural Theories Theories*, argues that natural law as it is found among Islamic jurists is empirically based. Since God created the world, we can read from the world the way things are and ought to be. "Because the empirical world is infused with a divine, purposeful, deliberate good, our reasoned conclusions about the empirical good are infused with normative content streaming from the divine creative will. In other words, the 'is' becomes the 'ought.'" Anver M. Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21-22. This is rather close to the natural law position developed by some Stoic philosophers, but it is not the position of Christian natural law as found in Thomas Aquinas and developed by John Finnis. For the Christian tradition, practical reason (moral judgment) has its own first principles which are not derived from an empirical study of nature. It does not follow that, because things are in such and such a way, we ought to act in such and such a way. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1-2.94.2, and John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), Ch. 3-5.

³ For a discussion of this matter, see my *Quest for Moral Foundations: An Introduction to Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), Chapter 6.

⁴ Procreation for rational beings implies family, for we know that the good of bringing new life into the world includes upbringing, education, and community life (minimally father, mother, and child.)



central treatment mentions four: life, procreation, knowledge, and friendship.⁶ John Finnis in *Natural law and Natural Rights* lists seven: life, knowledge, beauty, play, friendship, practical reasonableness, and religion.⁷ A key feature of the natural law position is that one should never intend the violation of a basic good. This is enshrined in Plato's *Apology* and *Crito*: one should never do what one knows to be wrong, even for the sake of some greater good, or even if one has been wronged.⁸ Aristotle, known more for his virtue ethics, insists that some actions are wrong in themselves—intrinsically wrong—such as killing, stealing, and committing adultery.⁹ The moral absolutes are negatives: most succinctly, never choose directly or intentionally against a basic good. The positive obligation to bring good to the world is stronger in its origin (since one only knows evil by knowing good), but less absolute: in short, one is to bring good to the world, but there are many ways to do this; and normally not doing good to someone is less wrong than intentionally harming that person.

Thomas's treatment of killing in self-defense puts this prohibition against intending evil in a clear and memorable form.¹⁰ There are some situations, Thomas notes, in which an act has two effects, one good and one evil. The most obvious, perhaps, is killing in self-defense: the good effect is preserving one's life; the bad effect is taking the other person's life. When can such an act be done? Thomas says that such an act is permissible when one intends only the good effect and not the evil effect (for one is to choose good and reject evil). To show as clearly as possible that one does not intend the bad effect of killing the other, but merely accepts it as an unintended (though foreseen) side-effect, one should use the least force possible when protecting one's own life. Knowingly to use more force than necessary is to intend harm. Notice that Thomas does not say that one may kill the attacker because he is evil, or because killing the attacker will lead to a greater good: rather he says that one should never choose to kill. This principle of natural law appears to be violated by jihad interpreted as permitting violence against unbelievers and acted upon by terrorists. Actions intended against life, family, truth, or community are always and everywhere wrong. A good end does not justify an evil means, for one should never choose evil.

⁵ See Cicero, *On Moral Obligation*, trans. John Higginbotham (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), Book I, Ch. 4.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (hereafter *ST*), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (Allen, Texas: Christian Classics, 1981), 1.94.2, pp. 1009-10.

⁷ John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Chapters 3-4.

⁸ See Plato, *Apology*, 28b, 29b, 37a; *Crito*, 49a-d.

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *NE*), trans. Hippocrates Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa: Peripatetic Press, 1984), 2.6.1107a9-18, p. 29.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *ST* 2-2.64.7.



One central tenet of natural law ethics stands out as crucial for understanding how community is possible, and that is procreation or the family. The family is the first community. It is, of course, a kind of friendship in addition to being the source of life. This community begins with the marriage covenant—the free mutual commitment of man and woman, those most different from each other within the species—and extends to the incorporation of children if they come. Marriage is the free gift of man to woman and woman to man. Ideally, it is an equal partnership. As Thomas says, the marriage should be between one man and one woman; otherwise, it is a kind of servitude which is unfitting for perfect friendship.¹¹ The family is the seedbed of all free community. The later Plato of the *Laws* says as much, as does Aristotle. Aristotle insists that the kinds of relations in the political community mirror those of the family: the father to the children is like kingship; the father and mother to children like aristocracy; and the siblings living together under rules is like democracy.¹² Aristotle says that the relation between husband and wife is special and the most natural kind of friendship. “The friendship between husband and wife is thought to exist by nature; for men by nature tend to form couples more than to be political, and they do this to the extent that a household is prior and more necessary than a state and that reproduction is more common to animals.”¹³ However, as Aristotle immediately adds, unlike the animals, we form couples for many other reasons—love, comfort, mutual aid, education and upbringing of children, etc.

Let us now consider briefly how natural law and reason, in general, have been historically related in Islamic culture. The question of how faith and reason should be related is not unique to Islam. Any revealed religion (Judaism, Christianity, or Islam) holds that God is prior to creatures and thus that our created capacities and the information we glean from

¹¹ “Friendship consists in equality. So, if it is not lawful for the wife to have several husbands, since this is contrary to the certainty of offspring, it would not be lawful, on the other hand, for a man to have several wives, for the friendship of wife for husband would not be free, but somewhat servile.” Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa contra gentiles*, 5 vols., trans. Anton C. Pegis, James F. Anderson, Vernon J. Bourke, and Charles J. O’Neil (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1955-57), 3.124.4, p. 152. Although family is certainly important in Islam, the relationship between husband and wife is not equal: the husband has rights over his wife (wives) that the wife does not have over the husband. “Women are your fields: go, then, into fields whence you please.” *The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood (London: Penguin, 2006), Sura 2:223, p. 33. “Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have a status above women” (Sura 2:228, p. 33). Men may have up to four wives (Sura 4:3).

¹² Aristotle, *NE* 8.12-14. Although Aristotle actually says that the father’s relationship to wife and children is like aristocracy, his granting of superiority to the wife in some areas implies a kind of joint rule over the children.

¹³ Aristotle, *NE* 8.14.1162a17-19, p. 157.



creatures are not sufficient to explain everything. To say that they are sufficient would be to deny the transcendence and priority of the Creator. Thus, there has been a debate about the role of reason and faith throughout the history of Christianity as well as Islam. Consider Tertullian's famous query about what Athens has to do with Jerusalem, or Ockham's despair of all reason apart from logic to help us understand anything, or the Reformers' deep suspicion of reason.¹⁴ However, the Catholic Christian tradition has always affirmed the goodness of reason. This has not always been true of the Islamic faith, and today the mainstream teaching within the Muslim community rejects this idea.

However, early in the history of Islam, the Mu'tazilites insisted that faith and reason were compatible,¹⁵ that reason could know that God exists and something of God's nature, and that good and evil could be known naturally.¹⁶ Such a position was supported by the Caliphs in the ninth century, even to the point of being imposed, on pain of death, on the people.¹⁷ Al-Kindi was the major philosopher who articulated this Mu'tazilite position, in a

¹⁴ Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, Ch. VII; William of Ockham, *On the Four Books of the Sentences* II, 19, O. Both Luther and Calvin held that the fall (original sin) irreparably corrupted reason so that faith is our only reliable guide.

¹⁵ The Mu'tazilite school was founded by Wasil ibn 'Ata (d. 748). Before the advent of this school, there was a dispute in Islam concerning predestination and free will. The proto-Mu'tazilite party were known as Qadarites. "They stood for the opposite of predestination: man's free will and consequent responsibility for his actions. Man has power (*qadar*) over his own actions." Robert E. Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2010), 15. The other group which could be seen as proto-Ash'arite (a group following al-Ashari which denied the ability of reason to know the world or our obligations), denied free will, putting all things under God's absolute power. "The Jabariyya (determinists; from *jabr*, meaning blind compulsion) embraced the doctrine that divine omnipotence requires absolute determination of man's action's by God" (Reilly, *Closing*, 15). The Qur'an seems to be unclear on which position it favors, with passages supporting each position and some passages seeming to imply both at once: "Had God pleased He would have united you in one community. But He confounds whom He will and gives guidance to whom He pleases. You shall be questioned about all your deeds" (Sura 16:93).

¹⁶ In later iterations, as in the case of Ibn Rushd, these rationalist theologians held that reason had greater authority than revelation.

¹⁷ "In 827, the Mu'tazilites succeeded in this dispute to the extent of having the teaching of a created Qur'an (Khalq al-Qu'ran) enshrined as a state doctrine by Caliph al-Ma'mun" (Reilly, *Closing*, 35). The Caliph, who ruled from 813-833, supported Greek philosophy and thus the Mu'tazilite position as well as Al-Kindi (801-873), the first Arab philosopher. There was a kind of inquisition, with the ultimate penalty being death (Reilly, *Closing*, 38).



way quite similar to the faith/reason tradition of Catholic Christianity.¹⁸ He was primarily an Aristotelian with a strong bent for the independence of reason as applied to various sciences, but he was also influenced by Neo-Platonic thought. Through this tradition, he absorbed something of the natural law position—that is, ethics based on philosophical insight.¹⁹ At least for a time, there was an alliance between the Mu'tazilite school and Shi'ites. This, however, seems not to have stuck, as we can see in the leaders of Shi'a Islam in Iran, for example.

This transcendence of the Mu'tazilite position was, however, rather short lived, and it became the rule that one was forbidden to trust in reason, again on pain of death.²⁰ This latter position was taken up by the Ash'arite school and became the norm at least in Sunni Islam.²¹ A key difference between the two positions is that the Mu'tazilites considered that the Qur'an is created, and therefore in need of interpretation, whereas the Ash'arites considered the Qur'an to be uncreated, to be the literal word of God. Just as God who is uncreated is not subject to human interpretation (such would be idolatry), so the Qur'an as

¹⁸ As Majid Fakhry notes, "Like Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), al-Kindi believed that reason and faith, philosophy and religion were not irreconcilable, and that a higher 'divine wisdom,' imparted to mankind through revelation, did not contradict philosophy, but rather supplemented or reinforced it." Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: One World, 2009), 36.

¹⁹ "They [Basrian Mu'tazilites] hold . . . that it is readily possible by systematic reflection to derive from these absolute principles a full set of rules such that one can know the ethical value of any act and thus, at least in principle, what is good or best, or right or wrong, to do in any given situation." Richard M. Frank, "Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 11, 1983, 204-23, p. 205.

²⁰ This occurred in 849 under the reign of Caliph Ja'afar al-Mutawakkil. Al-Kindi was driven into exile from Baghdad and received 60 lashes (Reilly, *Closing*, 41). So much was reasoning and interpretation of the Qur'an frowned upon that "*Kalam* (theology) was banned from the curriculum of colleges of law and generally from any institution of learning" (Reilly, *Closing*, 42). This marked what Reilly calls the closing of the Muslim mind, the refusal to reason about the things of faith since only God knows, and only God acts (we are ignorant and determined).

²¹ Al-Ashari (873–935) was a former Mu'tazilite thinker, who turned against his former contention that we could have certain natural knowledge about the world, God, and our place in the world. According to what has been called the classic manual of Islamic law, *Reliance of the Traveler*, "the good is not what reason considers good, nor the bad what reason considers bad. The measure of good and bad, according to this school of thought, is the Sacred Law, not reason." *Reliance of the Traveller*, Revised Edition, trans. Nuh Ha Mim Keller (Beltsville MD: Amana Publishers, 1994), a1.4, p. 3.



uncreated is not subject to interpretation.²² Majid Fakhry notes that it was a unanimous opinion among the Ash'arites "that humans were unable, prior to revelation (*sam'*) solely through the light of natural reason to discriminate between right and wrong, which was the exclusive prerogative of God."²³

These two traditions carried on more or less together for a couple of centuries, with the Ash'arite tradition gradually gaining the upper hand. Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) carried on in the footsteps of al-Kindi; and al-Ghazali spoke against this tradition and was a philosophical proponent of the Ash'arite position, insisting that natural reason cannot aid in elucidating the faith and, in fact, is a danger to the faith.

One thing immediately apparent in this brief history is the close relationship between the political power and religious power in Islam. And this is not surprising since in both the Qur'an and the Hadith, Muhammad is a religious, a military, and a political leader. If, as both Sunni and Shi'ites hold, Muhammad is the shining example of human goodness, then enforcing religious practice by military and political power is acceptable and even required. Of course, there are passages in the Qur'an that seem to suggest a natural law known by reason and hence could serve as a guide for the use of power, as the Mu'tazilites held.²⁴ But even if reason is an acceptable guide, who is to say when and to what degree?²⁵ That is, who is to be the authority? In Catholic Christianity, there is the tradition and the magisterium, but there is no such central recognized authority in Islam. First of all, there is the major split between Sunni Islam, in which the Sunna or sayings and deeds of the prophet, in addition to the Qur'an, are to be held as authoritative, and Shi'a Islam, in which

²² This latter position bears some resemblance to the Protestant position of *sola scriptura*—that the Bible needs no interpretation and that any interpretation violates the sanctity of sacred scripture by making it subject to human judgment.

²³ Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy*, 82. Al-Ashari himself says, "Lying is wrong since He declares it to be wrong . . . and if He were to command it there would be no argument to the contrary." *The Theology of al-Ash'ari*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), sec. 171, quoted in Frank, "Moral Obligation," 210. And according to al-Baqillani, "That God command something entails its being wise and good and correct and that He prohibit it entails its being bad and pointless." *At-Tamhid*, ed. R. McCarthy (Beyrouth: Librairie Orientale, 1957), 185,6f., quoted in Frank, "Moral Obligation," 208.

²⁴ Freedom of conscience, essential for the idea of natural law is suggested in Sura 2:183: "He that does good of his own accord shall be well rewarded." Even the pagan nations seem to have some knowledge of right and wrong: "Nor would your Lord destroy the nations without just cause and due warning. They shall be rewarded according to their deeds" (Sura 6:131).

²⁵ Emon notes that the natural law really only enters into the discussions of the jurists in Islam "where there is no scriptural source text" (Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories*, 21).



the Qur'an and the Imam are authoritative.²⁶ In the Qur'an itself, which all Muslims embrace, some texts contradict others. How does one know which one to follow? Is it abrogation: the idea suggested in the Qur'an itself that later revelations take the place of earlier ones?²⁷ Is it the Hadiths?²⁸ Is it the Caliph (when there was one), or the Imam, or the Ulema (jurists of Sharia)? With no clear authority, and without the authority of reason, it is hard to argue against certain violent interpretations of what is required of Muslims vis-à-vis unbelievers, or to argue in favor of universal human rights. In general, in the Qur'an rights seem to be reserved for Muslims in the first place, and only by extension (if the interpretation of the Qur'an and Shari'a warrants it) to others.²⁹ The ascendant orthodox view has denied the adequacy of reason and the free will of human beings. Islam means submission, and submission means blind obedience.³⁰ But authentic moral action, whether individual or communal, only exists as freely and intelligently chosen.

Having considered this brief history of the relation between faith and reason in Islam, let us turn to a consideration of how this compares with the relation between faith and reason in the Christian tradition. As one considers the positions of the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites, it seems clear that the former are much closer to the Catholic Christian position than the latter. For the Mu'tazilites think that we are responsible for our actions, which would imply that we are free, and that we can know that some things are forbidden even if God has not said so—such as killing the innocent.

Certainly the Ash'arite position is unacceptable, since its logical conclusion is that God could make it good for us to hate God: in short, because all is dependent on the power of

²⁶ Lewis notes that Imam means "leader of the people" and was a name applied to the caliphs. "Among the Shi'a, it was used more particularly of their own pretenders to the caliphate, and in Shi'a parlance connoted a much more extensive spiritual authority than among the Sunnis" (Lewis, *Islam*, 197).

²⁷ Qur'an, Sura 2:106, 16:101, 25:32-35.

²⁸ There are many collections, some more authoritative than others. "Muslims classify hadiths variously as "sound" (*sahih*), "good" or "approved" (*hasan*), "weak" (*da'if*), and "forged" (*maudu*). Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), 45. Spencer points out that two Hadith collections *Sahih Muslim* and *Sahih Bukhari* are the most authoritative, with the latter most so (Spencer, *Islam Unveiled*, 46).

²⁹ Simply to be an unbeliever is to be subject to rule by believers. "Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them" (Sura 9:73). As Jacques Jomier notes, "There is no equality based on the sole rights of man as man. There is equality only after conversion." Jacques Jomier, *The Bible and the Qur'an* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1964), 80-81.

³⁰ See Sura 2:127, 2:132, 2:205, 6:14.



God and our position is merely to obey even if we do not understand, it is hard to justify asking people to follow Islam.

However, there is an important difference between the Catholic tradition of faith seeking understanding, beginning with Paul and Justin Martyr and continuing through Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas (among many others) and the Mu'tazilite position. For the direction of the Mu'tazilites was to give the priority to reason over faith. That is, they did not really see them as compatible. As Ibn Rushd (Averroes) was to put it, faith is for those of weak intelligence: the real truth is in philosophy.³¹ This position was taken up in the West at the time of Aquinas by the Latin Averroists (such as Siger of Brabant) and later by Enlightenment thinkers and their followers, especially Hegel, for whom religion is a stage on the way to philosophy.³² The traditional Christian position is quite different. There are

³¹ Ibn Rushd distinguishes three levels of interpretation: rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative. Only the philosophers, the élite, arrive at the real knowledge found in demonstration. "In general everything in these [texts] which admits of allegorical interpretation can only be understood by demonstration. The duty of the élite here is to apply such interpretation; while the duty of the masses is to take them in their apparent meaning in both respects, i.e., in concept and judgement, since their natural capacity does not allow more than that. . . . Another class is the people of certain interpretation: these are the demonstrative class, by nature and training, i.e., in the art of philosophy. This interpretation ought not to be expressed to the dialectical class, let alone to the masses." Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise, Determining the Nature of the Connection between Religion and Philosophy*, trans. George F. Hourani in *Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac & Co., 1967), 63. Neither Ibn Sina nor Ibn Rushd spends a lot of time on ethical issues, concentrating on metaphysics and the nature of the human soul. As the universe emanates from the Necessary Being in Plotinian fashion, there is no real room for human freedom and, therefore, for authentic moral activity and responsibility. As Étienne Gilson puts it concerning Ibn Sina, "From the very fact that the Necessary Being is, the Avicennian universe of finite beings necessarily follows and, except that accidents occur owing to the presence of matter, it must necessarily be that which it is. Where there is no free choice in God, there is none in man." Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 216. In Ibn Rushd, who is more Aristotelian, the focus again is on metaphysics and philosophical psychology; the practical component of his thought lies in jurisprudence, commenting on the law, rather than on ethics, *per se*.

³² "God is the absolutely perfect Being and can, therefore, will nothing but Himself, His own will. The nature of His own will, His own nature, is what we here call the Idea of Freedom. Thus we translate the language of religion into that of philosophy." G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 25.



no good reasons to distrust reason, but the free gift of faith goes beyond reason and keeps reason from closing down, thus leaving open the frontiers of inquiry. Either Muslim position, Mu'tazilite or Ash'arite, sees faith and reason as antagonistic in some way. The Ash'arites see reason as a threat to faith; and reason must be judged by faith absolutely, as lacking any ability to know. The Mu'tazilites see reason as above faith and hence as judging faith. The authentic Christian position as presented, for example, in John Paul's *Fides et Ratio*, is that faith and reason are two wings of the human spirit, both necessary to human fulfillment and to the fulfillment of the divine plan set forth in the Father sending the Son to give the Spirit.³³

Here, perhaps, lies the key difference between Islam and Christianity. In Christianity, God makes a covenant with human beings, ultimately the covenant that is Jesus, who is fully human and fully divine. The relationship between God and his people is ultimately one of a family, of a Father with his sons and daughters. Islam accepts the idea of a kind of covenant insofar as it accepts, to a limited degree, the Old and New Testaments, but the relationship between God and us seems more of a master/slave relationship than a familial one.³⁴ Christianity is about understanding God, not as absolutely transcending humanity, but as human: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."³⁵ Of course, the humanity that is meant is unfallen humanity, the humanity of Christ. For a Muslim, however, the greatest error of Christianity is to think of God as human.³⁶ Such a view of God is demeaning and blasphemous. "Islam definitely rejects everything supernatural, any participation through grace in God's own life."³⁷ Islam has no notion of original sin,³⁸ and thus cannot distinguish humanity as we know it (which is clearly flawed), from humanity in itself, in its perfection. We are naturally selfish and ignorant and therefore need to be told what to do, and forced to do it for our own good.³⁹ Perhaps this last "for our own good" is too strong, for our good

³³ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, introductory paragraph.

³⁴ On the matter of God's relation to us, Stephen Ray points to this essential issue in the forward of Jacques Jomier's book comparing the Bible and the Qur'an: "Is he a Father of sons and daughters, as in the Judeo-Christian tradition, or a Master of slaves, as Islam maintains?" Jomier, *The Bible and the Qur'an*, viii.

³⁵ John 14:9 (NRSV).

³⁶ "God is but one God. God forbid that he should have a son." *The Koran*, Sura 4:172, p. 78. See also Sura 39:3.

³⁷ Jomier, *Bible and Qur'an*, 35.

³⁸ Reilly, *Closing*, 29.

³⁹ "Morality, or what is just, cannot be known for two reasons. One is practical: reason is too corrupted by man's self-interest. . . . The other reason man cannot independently know right from wrong . . . is epistemological: man cannot know what does not exist to be known Since nothing is right or wrong intrinsically, there is nothing to be known in this respect" (Reilly, *Closing*, 68-69).



is unknown to us save by Allah's arbitrary decree; our job is just to submit, not to understand.

The commands of Allah are timeless, abstracted from the particular individuals in historical situations who must work out their salvation in fear and trembling; but for Judaism and Christianity, God is intimately involved in time and history.⁴⁰ Moral choices are free and responsible historical acts. Freedom is unthinkable without intelligibility—that is, the agent's understanding of what is at stake in the choice and what is the right choice and why. The insistence on unquestioning obedience to Shari'a, which is understood to be derived from Allah's inscrutable will, is an insistence on abandoning free will and responsibility: as long as one follows the law as interpreted by the authorities (and not the authority of one's free understanding), one is right.⁴¹ As Al-Ghazali puts it, "No obligations flow from reason but from *Shari'a*."⁴² Reilly speaks of the classical Hanbalite-Ash'arite formula: "*bila kayfa wala tashih* (without inquiring how and without making comparison)."⁴³ The twin foundations of authentic philosophy and theology—wonder and analogy—are forbidden the Muslim.⁴⁴

Although we are mostly concerned with the moral ramifications of the Ash'arite position, which has become the standard in most contemporary Islamic thought, the metaphysical ramifications are also deadly. The Ash'arites adopt what has since been called occasionalism: every act is caused directly by God alone, without the aid of any creature. There are no secondary causes and hence no call for analogy; for no creaturely actions are like one another or like God's actions in some way, for they are all God's action, and God's

⁴⁰ "There is in the Bible a whole religious aspect that has no equivalent in the Qur'an, the historical aspect properly so-called, that of the progressive revelation of God's love for His people" (Jomier, *Bible and Qur'an*, 92).

⁴¹ Reilly notes that by the twelfth century, Islamic legal doctrine had been set (Reilly, *Closing*, 44-45). As M. Montgomery Watt puts it, "the central discipline of Islamic education was not theology but jurisprudence." M. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: University Press Edinburgh, 1962), 76.

⁴² Quoted in Reilly, *Closing*, 69.

⁴³ Reilly, *Closing*, 25.

⁴⁴ Of the proper authorities, Ibn Hanbal writes: "They are not upholders of *qiyas* [analogical reasoning] and *ra'y* [personal opinion], for *qiyas* in religion is worthless, and *ra'y* is the same and worse. The upholders of *ra'y* and *qiyas* in religion are heretical and in error" (quoted in Reilly, *Closing*, 47). On the use of analogy in philosophy, see, for example, the analogy of the shepherd and the sheep, in Book I of Plato's *Republic*, invoked to shed light on authentic rule and the analogy of the sun in Book VI to express the metaphysical structure of reality and the order of human knowing. And of course, Jesus uses analogies to explain the kingdom of heaven and parables to teach us how we are to live.



actions are inscrutable.⁴⁵ The world in its order and beauty does not awaken wonder, for the world is nothing but the action of Allah: that is, there really is no world; the world we seem to see and know is an illusion, a kind of puppet show in the hands of God. This means that there can be no science, for science is about the created structure of the universe. If all depends on the arbitrary will of the God, then there is no order to be known. As Stanley Jaki has noted (and Whitehead before him), it is no accident that modern science grew up in the Christian West.⁴⁶ Nor can there be normative ethics, for there is no freedom, a requirement for making a responsible choice, and there is no stable content of what would constitute a morally good choice. If only God is a cause, then humans are not causes: we have no agency, physical, metaphysical, or moral. In short, we are not free. If all law depends on the arbitrary will of God, then we cannot know what we should do. "God knows, but you know not."⁴⁷ According to the eleventh-century Muslim thinker Ahmad ibn Hazm, who upholds the Ash'arite tradition:

Anyone that says that God would do nothing save what is good according to our understanding and would create nothing that our understanding classes as evil, must be told that he has . . . perversely applied human argument to God. Nothing is good but Allah has made it so, and nothing is evil, but by his doing. Nothing in the world, indeed,

⁴⁵ Al-Ghazali sums up this position well: "Nature is entirely subject to God; incapable of acting by itself, it is an instrument in the hand of the Creator; sun, moon, stars, and the elements are subject to God and can produce nothing of themselves. In a word, nothing in nature can act spontaneously and apart from God." Duncan B. MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory*, quoted in Reilly, *Closing*, 52. "[O]ne says 'I ate and was sated,' even though what the individual ate did not strictly speaking cause him to be sated; rather God simply caused things to happen in their usual sequence by making satiety occur after the act of eating" (al-Kiya, *Usul ad-din*, quoted in Frank, "Moral Obligation," 209). The modern western philosopher Nicolas Malebranche espouses the same position. "All creatures are united to God alone in an immediate union. They depend essentially and directly on Him. Being all alike equally impotent, they cannot be in reciprocal dependence upon one another. . . . God has willed that my arm shall be set in motion at the instant that I will it myself (given the necessary conditions). His will is efficacious, His will is immutable, it alone is the source of my power and faculties." Nicolas Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics*, trans. Morris Ginsberg in *The Philosophy of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (New York: Free Press, 1966), Seventh Dialogue, XIII, p. 302.

⁴⁶ "Jaki explains that it was al-Ghazali, among others, who 'denounced natural laws, the very objective of science, as a blasphemous constraint upon the free will of Allah.'" Quoted in Spencer, *Islam Unveiled*, 127.

⁴⁷ Qur'an, Sura 2:216, p. 32.



*is good or bad in its own essence; but what God has called good is good, and the doer is virtuous; and similarly, what God has called evil is evil and the doer is a sinner.*⁴⁸

This position of the Ash'arites is like that expressed by some late medieval Christian theologians, specifically William of Ockham, who said that God could make it right for us to hate God.⁴⁹ For such a school of Islam, this would mean that Allah could make it right for us to hold that the prophet is evil and to hate Allah. No freedom or intelligibility is possible in such a metaphysical or moral universe. All is arbitrary and hidden from human intelligence. But since we have to live and not destroy ourselves, there must be some order. But the order is bound to be arbitrary and imposed from without. As Reilly points out, "Since nothing is good or proper in itself, this was the only alternative—a kind of complete legal positivism, rooted in scriptural texts and the reports of Muhammad's sayings and doings. Instead of engaging in moral philosophy, one had to discern the *isnad*, or chain of transmission, to authenticate a saying of Muhammad in the Hadith that might apply to a certain situation for moral guidance—in case there was not a clear directive from the Qur'an itself."⁵⁰

If there is a covenantal relationship between God and human beings in Christianity (and there is), then to understand that relationship will involve both wonder and analogical thinking. It is impossible for the human mind to comprehend what it means for Jesus to be fully human and fully divine or what it means for us to share in the divine life. Islam is right in saying that human ideas must be insufficient to explain God: Thomas Aquinas said the same.⁵¹ However, if we are created, then all that we are and have that is good comes from God: the effect reveals something of the cause. We do not judge God, but we judge with God, in a covenantal relationship: "In your light we see light" as Augustine was fond of saying.⁵²

⁴⁸ Quoted in Reilly, *Closing*, 73. In Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks whether the pious is pious because the gods love it, or whether the gods love the pious because it is pious (*Euthyphro* 10a). He holds the latter position on the objectivity of piety; the Ash'arite position holds the former. Christianity insists that it is not an exclusive disjunction: piety (morality in general) is objectively good (understandable by natural reason) and created by God in us in his image—freely and intelligibly. Emon distinguishes "hard natural law" from "soft natural law," relating the former to the Mu'tazalite position that there is an objective moral law (13 and 25), and the latter to the Ash'arite position (voluntarism) that the law depends on the arbitrary will of God (Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories* 24-25).

⁴⁹ William of Ockham, *Questiones super libros Sententiarum* (also known as *Reportatio*) 4.16.

⁵⁰ Reilly, *Closing*, 74.

⁵¹ In the preface to Question 3 of his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas says that we know that God exists but not what God is (Aquinas, *ST* 1.3.preface).

⁵² See, for example, Augustine, *Tractate* 34.4 (John 8:12); the quotation is from Psalm 36:9.



But like the late medieval thought of Ockham and like Enlightenment thought, analogy is forbidden in Islam, that is, insofar as Islam is based on the uncreated word of God as it is found in the Qur'an. Not only does this do away with philosophy, but also with theology: that is, human reason cannot shed any light on the divine, but neither can the divine revelation shed any light on the human. Islam is right that no prime analogate developed by human reason can be adequate to understanding God: God is not an instance of human understanding, for the imperfect cannot comprehend the perfect. Rather, knowing that God exists, we know that all that is human preexists in God, and that God is able to shed light on the human. Ultimately, for Christianity, the prime analogate for understanding the relationship between God and human beings is God as revealed to us. If this revelation of the divine were absolutely transcendent, then there would be nothing for us to learn from it. We could not grow in faith and in living like God for the simple reason that human beings and God are radically distinct, with an unbridgeable gap between them.⁵³ There could be no intelligibility to God's commands: they would be right simply because God commands them. This seems to be the case with Islam. We do not learn who we are from Allah; we simply learn to obey. But the Christian revelation is that God and man are one in Jesus, and that God is love, a Trinity of persons in relation, into which we can enter by grace.

As I mentioned above, there is a direct correlation between the rise of science and Christianity. Because we believe that God has freely created the world of things, we believe that the world is worth studying for its own sake and for the light it might give us into God's creative act. The metaphysics adopted by mainstream Islam insists on the arbitrary nature of God's will. The Ash'arites adopt a species of atomism called later occasionalism.⁵⁴ God is the direct cause of every individual thing or atom and its activity, with no intrinsic order among the atoms. This is an iteration of ancient atomism, in which the arbitrariness

⁵³ This is the impasse to which pagan philosophies ultimately come: although we can know that there must be a God, we do so because we understand that there must be an ultimate cause not explained by the things that are, that is, radically transcending them, as the infinite the finite, and the perfect the imperfect.

⁵⁴ "With hardly a single exception, the Muslim theologians accepted the atomic view of matter, space, and time, and built upon it an elaborate theological edifice over which God presides as absolute sovereign." Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 33-34. This included Mu'tazilite as well as Ash'arite thinkers (Fakhry *History*, 53). Such a metaphysics was really at odds with the Mu'tazilite claim that there was an objective ethics, for if all is in flux, then so is the nature of the world and the nature of the human being in terms of mind and will. Thus, it was an easy move for the Ash'arites to conform their ethics to their metaphysics (or use this metaphysics to support their ethical position). "The Ash'arites, engrossed as they were with God's omnipotence and sovereignty in the world, found in atomism a convenient device for bolstering their theological claims" (Fakhry, *History*, 214).



is due to the lack of any cause behind things—to chance.⁵⁵ Such a theory preceded the authentic philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, in which wonder and analogy attempted to explain the world and our place in it, and returned with the Enlightenment in the thought of David Hume.⁵⁶ Aristotle's thought, in which the later Muslim thinkers Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd were imbued, speaks of causality as extending to all things. Sure enough, there is an ultimate cause, the final cause, but it is known through knowing the need for causality behind the many things we experience. In other words, without secondary causes, we would have no knowledge of any primary cause.⁵⁷

As with science, so it is with morality. Because the Judeo-Christian tradition believes that God has freely created our intelligence and will, it holds that moral action is to be done for its own sake and for the sake of the one who gave us freedom and intelligence and knowledge of what is good. The Christian position on moral action, as in John Paul's *Veritatis Splendor*, is that faith perfects free responsible action.⁵⁸ This is miles away from the Islamic idea of faith replacing free responsible action with blind obedience to Shari'a. As indicated in the Sermon on the Mount, Christian ethics do not contradict natural law; on the contrary, they uphold the law and give us the ability to follow it through divine grace. Ultimately, Christian morality is following a person not a rule. Of course, that person is

⁵⁵ See Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things)*, Book I, ll.990-1035. In the case of Islamic occasionalism, there is a cause behind things, but since it alone is the sole cause of things, all activity is arbitrary, at least to us. God knows what he is doing, but we do not and cannot. The randomness is a result of the randomness of the divine will.

⁵⁶ As mentioned above, there was a theory of occasionalism developed by the Christian enlightenment thinker Malebranche, who reasoned that God is the immediate cause of everything and every activity (a traditional idea of Christian metaphysics), and that this meant that only God was the cause of everything and every activity. This is an identical position to that of the Islamic occasionalist. It remained for David Hume to remove the God hypothesis, and return to the ancient atomism of Democritus and Epicurus in which everything is mere matter in motion, atoms moving arbitrarily through a void. About such a world, nothing intelligible can be said: there can be no intelligible metaphysics, nor authentic ethics (for which intelligent free choice is a prerequisite).

⁵⁷ Ultimately, without revelation, these attempts by Plato and Aristotle (and later disciples) to understand the world lead back to the impassable gulf between the human and the divine. If one is to preserve the human, the human must be in the divine. Every divine explanation is also a human one. This is the good news of the revelation of the covenant. All is created and redeemed in Christ. Without Christ, there was nothing made (John 1).

⁵⁸ John Paul II quotes Augustine on this point: "Once again it is Augustine who admirably sums up this Pauline dialectic of law and grace: 'The law was given that grace might be sought; and grace was given, that the law might be fulfilled.'" Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 23.



morally perfect, and so nothing included under authentic moral rules is to be violated. But ultimately to do the right thing means doing it knowingly, freely, and with love.

What is troubling about radical Islam, as with all ideologies, is that it is based on hatred; that is, the group defines and establishes itself by its enemies.⁵⁹ Thus for the revolutionary Marxist the enemy was the bourgeoisie who must be destroyed. For the Nazi, it was the Jew, or more broadly, those not of the Arian race. For Islam (that is, radical Islam, for I do not believe that Muslims must hate), it is the infidel. Depending on how infidel is understood, this can be the pagans (as distinct from the people of the Book), or it can include Jews and Christians, or it can even include those Muslims who are not authentic (hence Sunnis kill Shi'ites and vice versa).

What makes Christianity, and I would say authentic natural law ethics, different is that we are not to hate our enemies. Plato does not say that we should help our friends and harm our enemies but that we should harm no one.⁶⁰ Christianity goes beyond this to tell us we should love our enemies.⁶¹ Indeed, God loves all human beings, willing all to be saved.⁶² Of course, if Islam denies that there is any human freedom (and hence responsibility) and insists that not all human beings can be saved (but only Muslims), then God must will that some human beings should not be saved. In other words, there is no problem of evil for such an interpretation of Islam, since it is not seen as a problem that God should hate some people and will their destruction. And if God does will so, we would be apostates if we did not destroy those God hates. Bin Laden clearly articulated this thinking: "As to the relationship between Muslims and infidels, this is summarized by the Most High's Word: 'We [Muslims] renounce you [non-Muslims]. Enmity and hate shall forever reign between us—till you believe in God alone' [Qur'an 60:4]. So there is an enmity, evidenced by fierce

⁵⁹ Speaking of the ideological position of radical Islam, such as voiced by Al Qaida, Reilly makes this point on page 186: "The fuel for the permanent war is the same for Islamism as it was for Marxist-Leninism and Nazism; it is hatred. Only the object of hatred changes—from race hatred in Nazism and class hatred in communism to hatred of the infidel in radical Islamism, to include any Muslim who does not conform to its version of Islam." And he quotes Lenin: "We must hate; hatred is the basis of communism" V. I. Lenin, "Defeat of One's Own Government in Imperialist War," 1915, *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1945), vol. 5, 147. More recently, we had the example of Mohammed Morsi, the former president of Egypt and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, in a 2010 video, saying that Egyptians must bring up their children "on hatred for them: for Zionists, for Jews. They must be breast-fed hatred." From *Concord Monitor*, Concord NH, January 16, 2013, Associated Press article by Hamza Hendawi and Sarah El Deeb.

⁶⁰ Plato, *Crito* 49a-c; *Republic* I, 335e.

⁶¹ Matthew 5:43-48.

⁶² 1 Timothy 2:4.



hostility from the heart. . . . If the hate at any time extinguishes from the heart, this is great apostasy! . . . Battle, animosity, and hatred—directed from the Muslim to the infidel—is the foundation of our religion.”⁶³

So are natural law and Islam compatible? Is a free society of Muslims, Jews, Christians, and others possible? Some Muslim leaders say yes, and they can produce texts from the Qur’an and Hadith to support their positions. Unfortunately, many Muslim leaders have said, and continue to say, no. Muhammad as a military and political leader violated the precepts of the natural law: he intentionally stole, lied, and killed. If Muhammad is the perfect human being to be imitated in everything, then stealing, lying and killing are permissible for his followers. Through the years many Muslims have thought that they have failed because they have not followed the Qur’an and the Sunna strictly enough. No compromise with the world is possible. Christianity would agree that the solution is not to compromise with the world: that is, to add a little Enlightenment relativism to the faith in order to live together. The difference is in the message. Islam says there can be no compromise in following Shari’a, which includes the responsibility of jihad, most naturally read as fighting the infidels until they convert.⁶⁴ Christianity says there can be no compromise with love—even one’s enemies must be loved because God is love.⁶⁵ Every human being has rights because every human being is created in the image of God.

As Muslims are human beings and thus have the same Creator and the same access to moral principles, it would seem that there must be some ways in which Islam and the Christian tradition of natural law ethics can be reconciled. I wish to suggest three, one having to do with profession of the Islamic faith, and the other two having to do with self-evidence of reason and freedom.

⁶³ Raymond, Ibrahim, “Osama bin Laden as Robin Hood,” *American Thinker*, September 11, 2008, quoted in Reilly, *Closing*, 187.

⁶⁴ There is a debate about how to interpret “jihad,” whether it is violent, fighting external enemies (the lesser jihad), or nonviolent, fighting a spiritual battle within (the greater jihad). See the discussion in Spencer, *Islam Unveiled*, 9-20, and 165-66. Both are active within Islam. What cannot be denied is that the Qur’an does seem to support the lesser jihad: “When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly” (Sura 47:4); see also, Sura 2:190-91 and Sura 9:5. Additionally, Muhammad himself fought battles for the faith, and he is the perfect human being to be imitated. “No blame shall be attached to the Prophet for doing what is sanctioned for him by God” (Sura 33:38).

⁶⁵ 1 John 4:8.



In many places the Qur'an claims to embrace the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity, to be the fulfillment of God's revelation.⁶⁶ If this is taken seriously, then all that is in the Old and New Testaments is part of the Islamic faith (leaving aside the divinity of Christ, which Muslims directly reject, although they do not reject the virgin birth of Jesus by Mary). This means that the teaching of the Ten Commandments is part of the Islamic heritage. These provide a systematic expression of the principles of natural law: one should do good and avoid evil; and here are some of the evils that one should never do.⁶⁷ Fr. Jomier says that the Bible that Islam concerns itself with is mostly the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) and the gospel. But there is no reason why the letters of St. Paul should not also be included. And Paul is very clear in his rejection of the principle that a good end justifies an evil means. "And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just."⁶⁸ The gospel alone, however, is a sufficient source, for Jesus explicitly rejects the idea that we should love our friends but hate our enemies.⁶⁹ Unfortunately and not inevitably, it seems to me, Muslims are forbidden to read the Bible, especially in the most orthodox Sunni states such as Saudi Arabia.

Of course, within the Muslim understanding of the relation of Islam to Christianity, there are issues of abrogation, of later more violent commands about how to deal with Jews and Christians supplanting the earlier commands which were more accepting and even honored the people of the Book. And if one takes Shari'a as one's guide, then one follows the law and the authoritative interpretations: and these are not often very favorable to the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁷⁰ However, there is no intrinsic reason why elements of the moral law as indicated in the Bible should not be accepted by the Islamic faith.

Secondly, taking direction from the revelation that reality is freely created, which Muslims accept, there is the possibility of a more authentic metaphysics for Islamic thinkers, one which could underlie a free and responsible people. The occasionalist philosophy adopted by the Ash'arites clearly is not compatible with the possibility of free responsible action. If all is atoms in random motion, each directed by the arbitrary will of Allah, then so are we. And if this is so, we have no reason to trust in reason or to believe that we transcend in any way our material conditions. All is determined by the arbitrary will of Allah. It had been part of the early Islamic philosophical tradition to adopt the metaphysics of Plato and

⁶⁶ For example, Sura 3:2, Sura 3:84, Sura 4:163, and Sura 42:13.

⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas says that all of the Ten Commandments (the moral precepts of the law) belong to the natural law: see *ST* 1-2.100.1.

⁶⁸ Romans 3:8.

⁶⁹ Matthew 5:43-48.

⁷⁰ Jomier says that there is very little of the Biblical tradition in Muslim liturgy, in the daily prayers required (Jomier, *Bible and Qur'an*, 23).



Aristotle.⁷¹ These thinkers allow for something that can be universally known and for the possibility of reality not being merely matter in motion. The latter point provides the real possibility of human souls transcending in some fashion the flux of material particularity, and the former point allows for some principles, such as those of the natural law, that could be true for all. That is, a metaphysics such as this opens possibilities, extending the frontiers of understanding in every sphere. On the contrary, a kind of metaphysics such as adopted by the Ash'arite school carries with it its own self-refutation: for it cannot be correct to adopt such a position if nothing can be known to be correct.

The most direct line of understanding the possibility of freedom of choice (and therefore moral responsibility) is moral obligation itself. Although a bad metaphysics can preclude ethics (as does the notion of all things being material particles moved by the arbitrary will of the creator), metaphysics does not ground morality. Morality has its own first principles, as we have stated above. As Thomas says and so, too, the Mu'tazilites, we only blame and praise people because we think they are free to do or not do what they choose.⁷² Even the radical Muslim must accept this, it would seem. For how can someone convert to Islam without freedom. Or more to the point, why should one so convert? Or why should one be punished for apostasy unless the person chose to reject the faith? It may be that Shari'a contains all that we should do, but unless we choose to follow or not to follow Shari'a, how can we be praised or blamed? Even more basically, how can one be a Muslim unless one proclaims that there is but one God and Muhammad is his prophet? The Ash'arite view on morality—that Allah could make it good for us to hate Allah (the source of all good)—carries with it its own self-refutation: for it is contradictory that one should love and not love (i.e., hate) Allah. Loving Allah is intelligible, and committing oneself to doing so requires freedom, yet morality as blind obedience to Allah undercuts both intelligence and free agency. If there is freedom and an intelligible good to be followed (which seems implied by any personal profession of Islam), then one has access to the natural law, a law that may not (in fact cannot) bind God but one which the faith in a God who is good does not contradict. Recognizing this access could be a starting point in recovering reverence for the human as a gift from God, not as a threat to God's infinite greatness and power.

⁷¹ This is especially true of the philosophers in the Mu'tazilite tradition, such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd.

⁷² "If nothing is within our power, but we are necessarily moved to will, then deliberation, exhortation, precept, and punishment and praise and blame, with which moral philosophy is concerned, are nullified." Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, tr. Jean Oesterle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 6, p. 239. "According to the Basrian Mu'tazilites, all men of sound mind know in an immediate and irreducible intuition that certain acts . . . are morally obligatory (*wajib*), that is, that anyone who omits them deserves blame" (Frank, "Moral Obligation," 205).



* Montague Brown is Professor of Philosophy at Saint Anselm College, Director of the Institute for Saint Anselm Studies, and Editor of *The Saint Anselm Journal*. His areas of interest are medieval philosophy (mainly Augustine and Aquinas), metaphysics, ethics, and the relation between faith and reason. He has published six books as well as numerous articles in his areas of interest. His most recent books are *The Restoration of Reason: The Eclipse and Recovery of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty* (Baker Academic, 2006) and *Freedom, Philosophy, and Faith: The Transformative Role of Judeo-Christian Freedom in Western Thought* (Lexington Books, 2011).