NATURAL THEOLOGY IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: IS THERE A COMMON CORE?

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Doğa bilgisi ve bilimleri ile temel dinî inançlar arasında olumlu bir ilişkinin varlığının, felsefî bir yorumla dile getirilmesinden ibaret, rasyonel bir teoloji anlayışı olarak belirtilebilecek olan "doğal teoloji"nin (veya "tabîi kelâm"ın), hem bilim ve din, hem de Hıristiyanlık ve İslam arasında olumlu bir diyalog için köprü vazifesi görebilecek alanlardan birisi olabileceği varsayımı, bu çalışmanın arkasındaki düşünsel nedeni ve çalışma içinde savunulan tezi oluşturmaktadır.

İnsan aklının, dünya ile ilgili gözlemlerine dayalı olarak, Tanrı hakkında bilgiye erişme çabası olarak da tanımlanan doğal teoloji, bazılarına göre, modern dönemlerde din felsefesi olarak anlaşılmaya başlanmıştır. Hıristiyanlıkta o, St. Thomas'ın "vahyî" ve "tabîi" teolojileri biribirinden ayırmasıyla gün yüzüne çıkmış; özellikle John Locke'dan sonra, 17. ve 18. Yüzyıllarda yaygın bir teoloji ve din felsefesi akımı haline gelmiştir. Batı'da bir süre gözden düşen doğal teoloji, son zamanlarda yeni savunucular bulmaya başlamıştır.

İslamda,başlı başına bir doğal teoloji disiplini veya akımı olmamışsa da, doğaya bakarak teolojik deliller çıkarma anlamında genel ve kendine özgü bir doğal teoloji etkinliği, kelamın içinde her zaman var olmuştur. Doğal teoloji terimi, İslam ile ilişkilendirildiğinde bu genel anlamı ile kullanılmaktadır. İslamda ve teolojisinde Gazali gibi Müslümanların büyük etkisini taşıyan St.Thomas'dan sonra gelişme gösteren Hıristiyanlıktaki doğal teoloji çalışmaları arasında, Tanrı'nın varlığının

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delilleri, Tanrı'nın belli başlı sıfatları ve Tanrı-âlem-insan ilişkisi gibi konularda ortak bir özün bulunduğu görülmektedir.

The relationship between science and religion in our present time of late twentieth century is reminiscent of their relationship in the late eighteenth century. Science and religion now display an appearance of being a candidate for more amicable and more constructive interaction than in the past ever. The realization of this, however, needs very careful and well-informed inter-disciplinary studies between science and theology. If there is a need for a constructive dialogue between science and theology, "The arena for their interaction is natural theology."[1] In addition to this, if there is also a need for a dialogue among diverse religions, for instance, between Christianity and Islam, one of the most important and common areas of dialogue and interaction is, again, natural theology. For this reason, we will argue in this article that natural theology is important both for a constructive dialogue between science and religion, and for the same sort of dialogue between Christianity and Islam. (I should mention in the beginning that, I will talk about natural theology in general, and will not go into a very significant but slightly different issue of how to revise and revive the classical natural theology in this article.)

The Definition of Natural Theology

The term "theology" comes from the "Greek *theos* ("God") and logos ("discourse" or "reason").[2] It is not found in the New Testament; on the other hand, *gnosis* (knowledge) is frequently used. Perhaps because of the problem of gnostic heresy, Christian writers from the time of Origen onwards adopted the term *theologia* to refer to the gift of insight into the divine being.[3] Theology is a term which has had a number of meanings at different times in history. "In the English-speaking world today, it would now widely be taken to refer to the rational account given of Christian faith".[4]

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[1] John Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation: The Search for Understanding* (London: SPCK, 1988), p. 2.
[2] William L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 574.
[3] Alan Richardson, and John Bowdan, eds., *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 567.
[4] **Ibid.**, p. 566.

In the dictionaries of theology, "natural theology" is shortly defined as "Knowledge about God based on human reason"[5] or "knowledge about God and the divine order which man's reason can acquire without the aid of revelation."[6] According to a broader definition, it is "The understanding of the nature and existence of GOD and of the duty, freedom, and immortality of man, which is held in Western thought to be obtainable through rational reflection on the world, taking account of human thought and experience."[7] One of the most appropriate and useful definition is this: "Natural theology may be defined as the search for the knowledge of God by the exercise of reason and the inspection of the world."[8]

It should be pointed out that the word "natural" here does not necessarily mean "empirical" or "scientific." Rather, "The word 'natural' in this connection reflects the ancient Stoic and Platonic conceptions of the natural as the rational; natural theology is rational reflection on the question of divine existence."[9] For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as philosophical theology, as well. Stephen Evans writes, for instance, that the "attempt to determine the truth of theism without assuming the standpoint of a particular religion we shall term *natural theology*, or philosophical theology."[10] Some writers even sees it in conjunction with the philosophy of religion. According to Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "In the modern period, natural theology has come to be understood primarily as philosophy of religion dealing with such topics as proofs for the existence of God, the rationality of religious belief, religious experience, and the relationship between religion and morality."[11]

The aim of a discipline may be considered to be one the important elements of its definition. Having looked at from this perspective, it is seen that the aim of natural theology "is to offer a rational presentation of faith; in the words of Anselm (11th cent.), it is *fides quaerns intellectum* (faith seeking understanding)."[12]

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[5] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Dictionary of Judaism and Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 111.

[6] Richardson, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, p. 393.

[7] David A. Pailin, "Natural Theology," in *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, ed. By John R. Hinnels, (London: Allen Lane, 1984), p. 228.

[8] Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, p. 2.

[9] Richardson, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, p. 393.

[10] C. Stephen Evans, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith*, (Illinois, and Liecester: InterVarsity Press, 198200), p. 38.

[11] Cohn-Sherbok, *A Dictionary of Judaism and Christianity*, p. 112.

[12] Cohn-Sherbok, *Op.cit.*

When it comes to theology in Islam, it is shortly called *Kalam*. The term *Kalam*, which literally means "speech" or "word," is used in Arabic translations of the works of Greek philosophers as a rendering of the term *logos* in its various senses of "word," "reason," and "argument." In addition to this, the term *Kalam*, without any qualification, was applied to a particular system of thought which arose in Islam prior to the rise of philosophy.[13] A detailed discussion of the fundamental principles of Islam led Muslim scholars in the second and third/eight and ninth centuries of *Hijrah* to philosophical reasoning on the nature and attributes of God and His relation to human beings and the universe. As a result, a new science of Muslim scholasticism called '*Ilm al-Kalam* came into being.[14] The aims of the *Kalam*, which soon became a highly sophisticated dialectical system, were the defence of the faith by rational arguments, the stilling of believers' doubts, and the strengthening of their belief."[15]

It is quite difficult to give an adequate definition or even description of natural theology in Islamic thought. The reason is that there is not a specific discipline, movement or concept of natural theology in Islamic theological thought comparable to the one in Christianity. Indeed, in Christianity, one can find natural theology as an independent discipline or an outstanding intellectual movement or at least as a clear and distinct concept which may easily be defined and understood by many. Whereas in Islam, natural theology has never been a separate discipline, movement, or even a technical term. But this does not, of course, mean that there is not any comparable counterpart of the studies of natural theology in Islam.It should be indicated at the beginning,however,that when, we use an expression like natural theology in Islam,the term 'natural theology.'here is used as a general expression referring to more or less comparable studies in Islam rather than as a technical term as in Christianity.

Although it is not separated and independent from revealed theology, it may be said that there is a more specific natural theology in Islamic thought having its own characteristics particularly in relation to the Qur'anic revelation and to the revealed theology. It is often pursued within the conceptual framework of the revealed theology, namely, *Kalam*. The reason for this can be the nature of revealed scripture, the Qur'an, which involves lots of verses regarding God's signs in nature,

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[13] Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 1-2.

[14] A.K.M. Ayyub Ali, "Maturidism," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. By M.M. Sharif, vol. I., (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, 1963), p. 259.

[15] C. E. Bosworth, "Kalam," in *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, ed. By John R. Hinnels, (London: Allen Lane, 1984), p. 178.

and encourages reflection and contemplation upon them. But it is not impossible to consider the natural (and rational) arguments and understandings independently of revealed ones in the *Kalam* books, and to make a comparison with the natural theology in Christianity. This will probably be clearer when we see the history of the development of natural theology in both traditions.

The Historical Outlook of Natural Theology

In the early centuries of the Christian Church, a variety of attitudes to natural theology emerged. Tertullian (2nd-3rd cent.) was highly critical of a philosophical approach to the Christian faith. 'What has Athens to do with Jeruselam?' he asked. Augustine (4th-5the cent.), on the other hand, maintained that the Platonists were proto-Christians; none the less, he criticized the arrogance of philosophers and stressed that reason must be supported by faith.[16]

The Middle Ages saw the first great flowering of natural theology.[17] In the twelfth century the long-standing tradition of learning began to acquire an increasingly self-conscious method, and the terms of the relationship between 'natural' and 'revealed' knowledge became a discussion of central and lasting importance.[18] Pre-eminent among natural theologians was Thomas Aquinas (12th cent.), who systematized Christian theology along Aristotelian lines.[19] He formulated the distinction between natural and revealed theology clearly and authoritatively, as over against the older Augustinian view that there is no 'unaided' knowledge of God. On the Thomist view, reason can assure us that God is and can infer by analogy certain truths about him; but only divine revelation could acquaint us with the truths of revealed theology, e.g. the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, etc."[20] Although Thomas Aquinas distinguished between truths of faith and truths of reason, the two elements work together in his writings, and according to his theory.[21] Especially since John Locke (1632-1704), some theologians have seen natural theology as the only acceptable foundation of theological understanding.[22] The program reached the status of a movement in the 17th and 18th centuries. The most rigorous proponent of the doctrine was

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[16] Cohn-Sherbok, *A Dictionary of Judaism and Christianity*, p. 112.
[17] Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, p. 8.
[18] Richardson, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, p. 567.
[19] Cohn-Sherbok, *Ibid.*, p. 112.
[20] Richardson, *Ibid.*, p. 393.
[21] Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p. 574.
[22] Pailin, *Ibid.*, p. 229.

William Paley, whose book, *Natural Theology*, 1794, had considerable influence on Christian natural theology.[23]

There have been, of course, those who would deny the possibility of such knowledge.[24] From the eighteenth century onward, natural theology, especially the traditional proofs of the divine existence, has been subjected to severe criticism by Hume, Kant, and some evolutionary naturalists.[25] Those who would deny the possibility and desirability of natural theology are by no means all of an atheist or agnostic persuasion. Natural theology has long been criticized from the other side by theologians who believe that it is incompatible with a doctrine of revelation. Karl Barh, in particular, the leading proponent of this point of view in this century, has criticized natural theology as an illegitimate attempt on the part of man to grasp the knowledge of God.[26]

F. R. Tennant and other Modernists theologians constantly urged the relevance of Natural Theology to the coherence of Christian belief. "In spite of their best efforts, the subject was largely disregarded within the Christian Churches. At the beginning of the 1960s Ninnian Smart described Natural Theology as the 'the sick man of Europe' and lamented that many theologians seemed unconcerned about this."[27] However, there seems to be a revival of interest in natural theology recently. "It is thus noteworthy that in the 1990s a new interest in Natural Theology has come to the fore among a number of scientists and philosophers of religion. . . . The reason for this interest is that there appears to be a surprising correlation between what scientists have discovered about the universe and what the theistic religions have historically claimed."[28] Although most theologians would nowadays hesitate to speak of 'proofs' of God's existence, many would claim that natural theology provides a cumulative argument in support of theism.[29] Some scholars like J. Polkinghorne and T.F. Torrance even defend now that "natural theology is an essential study, not just an optional extra for those so inclined."[30]

It seems almost necessary to start to the history of natural theology in Islam with the Qur'an, the revealed scripture of Islam. Because, as Mehmet Aydin says, "it seems that the verses which want the

[23] Reese, *Ibid.*, p. 380.
[24] Polkinghorne, *Ibid.*, p. 2.
[25] Richardson, *Ibid.*, p. 393.
[26] Polkinghorne, *Ibid.*, p. 2; Richardson, Ibid., p. 393.
[27] Paul Badham, *The Contemporary Challenge of Modernist Theology* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), p. 61.
[28] Badham, *Op.cit.*
[29] Richardson, *Ibid.*, p. 393.
[30] Polkinghorne, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

human beings to look at and reflect upon their selves, their biological nature, the happenings in the earth and the heavens, and the historical events would form almost one third of the Qur'an. . . . It is obvious that these verses suggest the ideas of order, purpose, providence, etc."[31] Having mentioned that, one can say that the first and most comparable movement of natural theology in Islam may be found in the Mu'tazilite Kalam. "As a matter of fact, it was the Mu'tazilites who laid the foundation of this new science and made lasting contributions for its development. They started their movement by adopting a rational attitude in respect of some theological questions, but when they reached the height of their power, they adopted an aggressive attitude towards their opponents. The orthodox Muslims opposed the Mu'tazilite movement from the very beginning and tried to refute their doctrines by the traditional method."[32] Thus, in one sense, "Muslim theology known as *Kalam* began as a reaction against the rationalistic school of the Mu'tazilites, and only gradually developed into a complete science."[33]

Later on, conflicting ideas and antagonistic attitudes created chaos and confusion in Muslim thought and shook the foundation of old ideas and traditional beliefs. The need for reconciliation and solving the crisis by adopting a middle course and a tolerant attitude was keenly felt. At this critical period of the history a Muslim theology appeared, in three parts of the Muslim world, three eminent scholars: al-Maturidi in Central Asia, al-Ash'ari in Iraq, and al-Tahawi in Egypt. They all endeavoured to reconcile conflicting ideas and settle the theological problems of the time by adopting a system that would satisfy reason and conform to the general tenets of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. They exercised profound and lasting influence on the subsequent development of Muslim philosophy and theology.[34] Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the two main schools of *Kalam* were the Ash'ari and the Maturidi schools.[35]

In the earlier centuries the theologians, following the lead of abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, tried to use logic, the instroment of their enemies, in order to defend the truths of revelation. From the fourth/tenth century

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[31] Mehmet S. Aydin, *Din Felsefesi* [*Philosophy of Religion*, in Türkish], (Ankara: Selcuk Yayinlari, 1992), p. 63.

[32] A.K.M. Ayyub Ali, "Maturidism," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. By M.M. Sharif, vol. I., (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, 1963), p. 259. Cf. Muhammad Muslehuddin, *Islam, Its Theology and the Greek Philosophy* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1984), pp. 71-77.

[33] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Fakhr al-Din Razi," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. By M.M. Sharif, vol. I., (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, 1963), p. 645.

[34] Ali, *Ibid.*, p. 259.

[35] Bosworth, *Ibid.*, p. 178.

onward, this defence itself became more subtle and systematic, reaching its height in the works of . . . al-Juwaini . . . With Ghazali *Kalam* took a new turn; opposed as it was from the beginning to the school of the philosophers, it now began to employ the syllogistic method, intellectual *('agli)* evidence, and certain theses of the philosophers, thus lying the foundations of the school of philosophical *Kalam* of the later theologians.[36]

It may be indicated here that the role of Ghazali in Islamic theology and the role of Thomas Aquinas in Christian theology seem to be similar in the matter of bringing natural (in the sense of especially rational and philosophical in this context) theology closer to the revealed scriptural theology, and to make them together in a spirit of scriptural, natural and rational unity.

Fakhr al-Din Razi "is the greatest master of this later school of theology, surpassing in many ways even the more illustrous Ghazali. With Imam Fakhr philosophical *Kalam* reaches its zenith of power and perfection; his works became consequently a continious source of influence over the later theologians, whether they were Sunnis . . . or Shi'ahs . . ."[37]

To understand Razi's approach to theology, it is enough to analyse the structure of one of his treatises. One can take as an example perhaps the most famous of his theological works, the *Muhassal*, which became a classical source book on the *Kalam* almost from the moment of its composition. Here, Razi divides theology into four parts *(arkan)*: Preliminaries, Being and its divisions, rational theology *(ilahiyyat)*, and traditional questions *(sam 'iyyat)*. The preliminaries include the principles of logic, the sufficiency of demonstration *(dalil)* to prove the existence of God, and the obligation upon each believer to prove God's existence. The section on being and its divisions considers the questions of being and Non-Being, attributes of being, cause and effect, etc. Rational theology which is interlaced with passages from the Qur'an concerns the necessary being, His attributes and acts and the divine names. Finally, the traditional questions, which are exclusively scriptural, concern prophethood, eschatology, the Imamate, the faith, and other related subjects. "As a whole, therefore, Imam Razi's theology combines the transmitted or traditional elements of revelation *(nagli)* and the intellectual and rational evidence concerning religious and metaphysical

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[36] Nasr, *Ibid.*, pp. 445-46.
[37] Nasr, *Ibid.*, p. 646.

questions (*'agli*) into a science which takes into account the problems of religion while participating in many of the discussions of philosophy."[38]

After Razi, theological thought increased in volume following the way, but its quality is usually held to have declined. "One of the signs of this alleged decline is the lack of originality. Instead of fresh works like those of al-Juwayni and Fakhr-ad-Din ar-Razi, the chief effort of the theologians seems to have gone into the production of commentaries and super-commentaries and glosses on earlier works."[39] Before 1900s, however, signs of the "new dawn" in Islamic theology started to appear with some eminent Muslim theologians who started to produce original and influential books again.[40] During the recent decades, the philosophy of religion also started to be thought in the faculties of Islamic theology in some Muslim countries like Turkey. Thus, Islamic natural theology in the broader context of modern Muslim theology and of the philosophy of religion is seen quite important by many modern Muslim theologians and philosophers of religion now.

We have seen the historical developments of natural theologies in the two religions separately from each other. Now we should also look at the subject if there has been any historical interaction between them, and if there has been any common core or ground shared through the history of these two (natural) theologies.

The Historical Interaction Between the Two Natural Theologies

H. A. Wolfson argues that there was a Christian influence upon three problems of the *Kalam*, the Muslim Theology. For him, these were the problem of freedom of the will, the problem of the divine attributes, and the problem of the eternity of the Qur'an.[41] He concludes that all the evidence that has been marshalled for the Christian influence upon these three problems is "that Muslims were in contact with Christians and that an assertion of free will, like that of the antipredestionists in Islam, was taught by Christians, that a denial of attributes, like that of the Mu'tazilites, can be shown to be the view of John of Damascus or the

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[38] Nasr, *Ibid.*, pp. 646-47; Cf. W.M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962), p. 128.

[39] Watt, *Ibid.*, p. 149.

[40] Watt, *Ibid.*, p. 149; Majid Fakhry, *A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), pp. 126-29.

[41] See for the details and different views, Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 58-64.

Fathers in general, and that the Muslim belief in the eternity of the Koran has a resemblance to the Christian belief in the eternity of the Logos."[42]

Now let us see some of the claims that Muslim theology and philosophy influenced Christians thinkers. Hilmi Ziya Ülken argues that St. Thomas used some texts of al-Ghazali's in his *Contra Gentiles* either directly or through the mediation of Raymond Martini. He mentions some particular subjects of influence as follows:

> "Al-Ghazali's arguments in favour of the *creatio ex nihilo*, his proof that God's knowledge comprises particulars, and his justification of the resurrection of the dead were adopted by many scholastics including St. Thomas. . . . St. Thomas' *Summa Theologica* and al-Ghazali's treatise on the place of reason as applied to revelation and theology run parallel in many places in their arguments and conclusions. . . . The questions on which St. Thomas seems to have been deeply influenced by al-Ghazali are the ideas of contingency and necessity as proving the existence of God, divine knowledge, divine simplicity, divine names, and divine attributes, God's speech a *verbum mentis*, the miracles as a testimony to the truth of prophecies, and resurrection of the dead."[43]

St. Thomas was also under the influence of such Muslim philosophers as al-Farabi and ibn Sina even when he criticized them just as al-Ghazali was under their influence on many points even when he offered a criticism of them.[44] For instance, the third of the five ways of St. Thomas was coming from Muslim philosophers. Al-Farabi and, following him, ibn Sina added the third form of the famous cosmological proof of God based on the conceptions of possibility and necessity. It was taken up from ibn Sina by the Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, and from him by St. Thomas Aquinas, and then it passed on to Spinoza and Leibniz. It was this proof that Kant criticized as the model cosmological

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[42] Wolfson, *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[43] (A. Guillaume, *The Legacy of Islam*, London, 1952, p. 274; cited in H.Z. Ülken, "Influence of Muslin Thought on the West," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. By M.M. Sharif, vol. II, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, 1963), p. 1362).
[44] Ülken, *Ibid.*, p. 1376.

proof.[45] William Lane Craig writes about the case of the two versions of the cosmological argument as follows:

> "The *kalam* argument for the beginning of the universe became a subject of heated debate, being opposed by Aquinas, but adopted and supported by Bonaventure. The falsafa argument from necessary and possible being was widely used in various forms and eventually became the key Thomist argument for God's existence. That it was that the cosmological argument came to the Latin-speaking theologians of the West, who receive in our Western culture a credit for originality that they do not fully deserve, since they inherited these arguments from the Arabic theologians and philosophers, whom we tend unfortunately to neglect."[46]

It is argued that particularly al-Ghazali and some other Muslim thinkers' thoughts became quite influential on some very well-known Western philosophers' philosophy of religion. It is maintained, for instance, that Descartes "followed al-Ghazali's derivation of the negative and positive attributes of God from the concept of necessary existence. The distinction made by him ... between the infinite ... and the indefinite ... was exactly the same as given by al-Ghazali and ibn Sina . . . . Exactly like al-Ghazali he begins with describing how in vain he interrogated in his mind every school and every creed for an answer to the problems that disturbed him and finally resolved to discard all authority." Indeed, according to Ülken, there is so much internal evidence in the most remarkable parallel of al-Ghazali's *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* with Descartes' *Discours de la Methode*, that "it becomes impossible to deny its influence on the father of modern philosophy in the West."[47] It is too long to quote here even the very summary of the comparison of the two books page by page. "This most amazing resemblance between the two works makes George Henry Lewis say in his *Biographical History of Philosophy* that 'had any translation of it existed in the days of Descartes, everyone would have cried out against the plagiarism.'"[48] Ülken also

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[45] Ülken, *Ibid,* p. 1371.

[46] William Lane Craig, *The **Kalam** Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 18.

[47] Ülken, *Ibid.*, p. 1382.

[48] Ülken, *Ibid.*, pp. 1383-84.

finds a close resemblance between the philosophical ideas of al-Ghazali and Kant; and he explains it as al-Ghazali's influence upon Kant through the philosophy of Leibniz. He compares and contrasts some of their basic ideas as follows:

> "Like al-Ghazali, Kant distinguished between phenomena and noumena . . . Like him, he demonstrates that theoretical reason can analyse only what the senses yield, and that it cannot solve, the basic and more important questions of philosophy and religion, such as the existence of god, the nature of His attributes, the immortality of the soul, and the eternity of the universe. Kant found the key to the solution of these questions in the practical reason of man, while al-Ghazali discovered it in the religious experience of the Prophet and the mystic, which in its turn is to be tested by the moral certitude and moral influence which it exercises upon the soul."[49]

We do not need to give further examples of mutual influences in the limits of this study. Based on the present assertions, one could say that any side needs neither to reject the possibility of any interaction nor to be sad or too proud of it. It is quite normal to be influenced by each other for two group of theologians whose religions have the same divine and historical roots and whose geographical area of living has been near to each other for centuries. In fact, what is important is not to influence or to be influenced, but to influence or to be influenced in right direction, in the true path. If the claims mentioned above regarding the mutual influences are true, then it seems that there has been constructive interaction on two or three main subjects of natural theology: First, the arguments for the existence of God; second, some attributes of God; and finally, the problem of free-will. This means that these two or three subjects of natural theology would form a common ground between these two theologies (although the last one is not among the major subjects of natural theology).

Now we can test, and, if it is possible, develop the conclusion above through some more detailed comparisons based on two classical books related to natural theology, and two contemporary books related to theistic philosophy of religion chosen from each tradition.

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[49] Ülken, *Ibid.*, p. 1385.

The Comparison of Four Books Related to Natural Theology

It seems that one of the most appropriate books which could be considered to be on natural theology in Islamic thought is a book entitled *al-Hikma fi Makhluqat Allah, (The Wisdom in God's Creatures)*, which is ascribed to Ghazali. This book could be compared with William Paley's *Natural Theology*, with an exception that the former employs so many Qur'anic verses in every chapter. Ghazali's book starts with an analogy: an analogy of a house. The world is like a house; and the human beings are like the residents of it. The heavens are like a ceiling and the earth is like a ground in a house. Blue colour of the sky in the day time and the lights of the stars in the evening are suitable for the rest and peace of human beings.[50] Sun, moon, water, air, fire, vegetables, and animals are intricately adapted to their aims; and they all contribute to the needs of human beings. To put it short, in the book the author underlines the functionality of numerous details of nature. Each detail furnishes him with evidence of God's knowledge, his governance or providence, his glory and power, the efficacy of his will, and his wisdom.[51]

Paley's book also starts with an analogy: an analogy of a watch. "But suppose," he argues, "I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that for anything I knew the watch might have always been there." For "when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive . . . that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose . . . . This mechanism being observed . . . the inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker . . ."[52] For Paley, "every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature, . . ."[53] He then starts to show these indication of contrivance and manifestation of design in illustrations drawn particularly from the field of human anatomy and biology and briefly from the field of astronomy. He comes to the conclusion that "Were there no example in the world of contrivance except that of the *eye*, it would be alone sufficient to support the conclusion which we draw from it, as to the necessity of an intelligent Creator."[54] Then he examines some other naturally understandable

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[50] Abu Hamid Ghazali, *al-Hikma fi Mahluqat Allah*, (Beirut: 1987), pp. 84-85.
[51] Ghazali, *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[52] William Paley, *Natural Theology: or the Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (London: J. Bumpus, 1824), pp. 1-2.
[53] Paley, *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[54] Paley, *Ibid.*, p. 40.

attributes of this intelligent Creator. These are such attributes of the Deity as personality ("as distinguished from what is sometimes called nature, sometimes called a principle"), omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternity, self-existence, necessary existence, spirituality, unity and goodness.[55]

As it has been seen, both of the authors use the teleological argument to prove the existence of God; and both of them appeal to the same logical way, the method of analogy; and both of them arrive at the similar attributes of God.

It may be objected, however, that these two books are too outmoded ones and do not make much sense for the present time. In that case, we should also compare two modern and slightly different type of books. Michael Paterson and his friends' book called *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (1991) and a book by Mehmet Aydin called *Din Felsefesi* (*Philosphy of Religion*, 1987, in Turkish).

Peterson and his friends say that their book "focuses primarily on the most significant issues related to *classical theism*, . . ."[56] They add that "In theism, God is conceived as a spiritual being, transcendent from the world, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. We might call this view *classical theism*. Amid all of their differences, most traditions within three great historical religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - share this basic view of God."[57] They examine such arguments for the existence of God as the ontological argument, the *Kalam* cosmological argument, the Thomistic cosmological argument, two versions of the teleological argument, and the moral argument.[58] They deal with such divine attributes as "Perfect and Worthy of Worship," "Necessary and Self-Existent," "Personal Creater and Sustainer," "All-Powerful, All-Knowing, and Perfectly Good," and "God Eternel - Timeless or Everlasting."[59]

Mehmet Aydın writes that there have been important common points in the philosophical activities carried out in the tradition of the three great "Religion with the Book". For this reason, the adherents of these three religions can understand and benefit from each other to some

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[55] See for the details, Paley, *Ibid.*, pp. 219-287.
[56] Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York, Oxford: Oxfordd University Press, 1991), p. 9.
[57] Peterson, et.al., *Ibid.*, p. 9 see also p. 49.
[58] Peterson, et.al., *Ibid.*, pp. 70-87.
[59] Peterson, et.al., *Ibid.*, pp. 48-63.

extent. For example, the arguments for the existence of God which is the major subject of the philosophy of religion are important for each of the three religions in the same degree.[60] He examines the same arguments, namely, the ontological, the two versions of the cosmological, the teleological, and the moral argument, although the contents and presentations are normally more or less different.[61] When he comes to the chapter on the divine attributes, he deals with such attributes as the divine "Unity," "Eternality-Everlastingness," "Infinity and Changelessness," "Goodness-Justice," "Knowledge," "Power and Will."

Having finished briefly both the historical and contemporary state of natural theology in Christianity and Islam, we can move on to the most central question: Is there a common core or ground between Christian and Muslim natural theologies?

Is There a Common Core or Ground?

As we have seen, in the field of natural theology in Christianity and Islam, there seems to be a common core. The most common core is the existence of God. The arguments for the existence of God would form the most common ground coming out of the most common core, the existence of God.[62]

For both Christian and Muslim theologians used some versions of the teleological and cosmological arguments for the existence of God. Through the history they benefited from the each other's evidences and arguments. Apart from these two shared arguments, Muslim theologians developed and used the *Kalam* cosmological argument from the temporality of the universe; and Christian thinkers developed a Kantian moral argument. But now these two alien arguments, too, have already passed to the opposite side. We can see the *Kalam* Cosmological argument in many books on the philosophy of religion written in English after Craig's well-known book, *The* Kalam *Cosmological Argument*, published in 1979; and we can follow very high level debate on it among Christian philosophers and theologians for two decades. (Unfortunately, no Muslim has contributed to its modern defence yet). On the other hand, we can see some very good books written by Muslim philosophers or theologians concerning the moral argument, for example, in Turkish.[63]

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[60] Mehmet Aydin, *Din Felsefesi*, p. 7.

[61] Aydin, *Ibid.*, pp. 27-109.

[62] If someone wonders the differences, which we do not deal with here, he or she should consider and compare "revealed theology" and its relationship with "natural theology" in each tradition.

[63] See, for example, Mehmet S. Aydin, **Kant'ta ve Çagdas Ingiliz Felsefesinde Tanri-Ahlak Iliskisi** [The Relationship Between God and Morality in Kant and

This shows that both in the past and in the present, various arguments of natural theology for the existence of God in both tradition, particularly the teleological and cosmological arguments, have formed a common ground of mutual, amicable, and constructive interaction. Muslims and Christians both use almost the same arguments for the existence of God.

When we come to the matter of divine attributes in "natural theology", we come across almost the same attributes, perhaps with slight differences in emphasis and interpretation. Repeatedly, Mehmet Aydın, a contemporary Muslim theist philosopher of religion, talks about God in his book on the philosophy of religion, under the sub-titles as "Unity," "Eternality-Everlastingness," "Infinity and Changelessness," "Goodness-Justice," "Knowledge," "Power and Will." Michael Peterson and his friends, contemporary Christian theist philosophers of religion, talks about God in their philosophy of religion book under the sub-titles as "Perfect and Worthy of Worship," "Necessary and Self-Existent," "Personal Creator and Sustainer," "All-Powerful, All-Knowing, and Perfectly Good," and "God Eternal - Timeless or Everlasting." Some words and the setting up in order here are naturally different from each other; but it is not difficult to pair them to see the similarity more closely. Both authors of the books talk about seven or eight similar attributes, which could be brought together: (1) "Eternality-Everlastingness,"/"Eternal-Timeless or Everlasting." (2) "Infinity and Changelessness,"/"Necessary and Self-Existent," (3) "Goodness,"/"Perfectly Good,"; (4) "Justice,"/"Perfect and Worthy of Worship,"; (5) "Knowledge,"/"All-Knowing,"; (6) "Power,"/"All-Powerful,"; (7) "Will,"/"Personal Creator and Sustainer." M. Aydin has one more attribute, actually his first sub-title, (8) "Unity," which Peterson and his friends have not got a similar one. But they might be replaced, at this point, by William Paley, who has a sub-title as "Of the Unity of the Deity.[64]

When one looks at lastly to the matter of God's relation to the universe and to the human beings in "natural theology" in the two religious traditions, one can again see a common model of the creation and providence. For both Christians and Muslims, God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe; and God provides what all creatures need. Hence, the natural theologians of both side have been very happy with the scientific theory of Big Bang, claiming that it supports the religious doctrine of the creation of the universe out of nothing in time; and with

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Contemporary English Philosophy, in Turkish] (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1991).
[64] Paley, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

the scientific facts concerning the fine-tuning of the universe, claiming that it supports the religious doctrine of providence.[65]

It seems that it is possible to express the common core or ground in "natural theology" in Christianity and Islam with a common concept, though not exactly religious but more philosophical one: theism. But, then, a last question comes into the mind: Is natural theology enough as a theology for Christianity and Islam? In other words, what is the place and importance of natural theology in these religions?

The Place and Role of Natural Theology

In the view of John Polkinghorne, we can acknowledge that natural theology will not tell us all about God that is humanly accessible. The individual encounter with God, both our own and that of the spiritual masters preserved in the tradition, will surely be of the highest importance. Yet the world is not just a neutral theatre in which these individual revelatory acts take place. Rather, it is itself, if theism is true, the creation of God and so potentially a vehicle also for his self-disclosure.[66] He is right to argue that there is a limit for natural theology, but it should not be dismissed because of its limitation. Its "role is of special relevance today when so many people find it difficult to see theism as a credible and coherent possibility. Natural theology may be for them a necessary starting-point."[67] In the view of Paul Badham, the God of the religious believer is *more* than the 'physically unknowable cause of the Big Bang' being postulated by the cosmological argument, for instance. "But in all case the initial belief in God is the necessary condition for further beliefs about God's character and his mode of self-disclosure."[68] Thus they give a secondary but still very significant place to natural theology in a belief system.

M. Aydın, on the other hand, gives five reasons for the search for the knowledge of God by natural or rational arguments: We can summarize four of them as follows:

(a) First, the statements found in the holy scriptures which many religions have comes in the beginning of the major motivations of looking for an evidence or argument. The Qur'an, for example, writes in a verse: "...: Bring your proof" (Enbiya, 24) and in another: "Produce your proof, if you are truthful" (Neml, 64).

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[65] Badham, *Ibid.*, ch. 5; Cafer S. Yaran, "Scientific Objectivity and Theistic Belief," *In Depth*, 1996.
[66] Polkinghorne, *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[67] Polkinghorne, *Op.cit.*
[68] Badham, *Ibid.*, p. 65.

(b) Second, it is important for a believer to look for evidence to improve his or her faith from being a faith based on the authority of parents or society to an investigated faith of himself or herself.

(c) Third, a believer can sometimes have some personal inner doubts or is faced with some objections coming from sceptical people. In such cases, a person may feel a need to find some evidence and arguments.

(d) Fourth, the consistency of our religious commitments with our knowledge coming from other fields requires looking for evidence. For religious thoughts and knowledge are always in contact with thoughts and knowledge obtained from other fields. A human being cannot live a divided life putting what he knows on the one side, and putting what he believes on the other side. Hence it is important for a human being to reach an intellectual and spiritual way of life which reflects a harmonious unity or wholeness.[69]

Conclusion

As a result, one can say that although there are some structural and historical differences between Christian and Muslim natural theologies, there is much more striking common core and ground between them. The mutual historical interactions and the contents of some contemporary books related to the subjects of naturel theology have shown that the arguments for the existence of God, and most of the attributes of God declared and defended are the most common core between Christian and Muslim natural theologies. As such, natural theology seems to be important for a constructive dialogue both between science and religion and between Christianity and Islam.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that although natural theology is a very important type of theology for both inter-disciplinary and inter-religious dialogue and also for an ideal, harmonious religious thought and life of a person, its importance is still a preliminary, supplementary and relative importance rather than an exclusive and absolute one in its relation to revealed theology in the religion. But it should also be pointed out that this does not put its value down at all.

We would like to finish our article with two important statements about natural theology. John Polkinghorne says in our present time that "natural theology is an essential study, not just an optional extra for those so inclined."[70] And Ibn Rüshd said in the twelfth century that "If the

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Aydin, *Din Felsefesi*, pp. 18-20.
[70] Polkinghorne, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

activity of 'philosophy' is nothing more than study of existing beings and reflection on them as indications of the Artisan, . . and if the Law has encouraged and urged reflection on beings, then it is clear that what this name signifies is either obligatory or recommended by the Law."[71]

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[71] Averroes (Ibn Rüshd) *Fasl al-Maqal* in G. Hourani, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1976) , p. 44.