

WEIGHING THE WORD
.
REASONING THE QUR'ĀN AS REVELATION

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا

Behold, We shall cast upon thee a weighty word

QUR'ĀN 73: 5

WEIGHING THE WORD



Reasoning the Qur'ān as Revelation

by

Peter Samsel



THE MATHESON TRUST
For the Study of Comparative Religion

© Peter Samsel, 2016

This first edition published by
The Matheson Trust
PO Box 336
56 Gloucester Road
London SW7 4UB, UK
www.themathesontrust.org

ISBN: 978 1 908092 14 4

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior written permission of the Publisher.*

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library.

Typeset by the publishers in Baskerville 10 Pro

Cover: Iskandar (Alexander) with the seven sages.
Detail from a 15th c. manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsah*.
© The British Library Board, Or. 6810, f.214.

Arabic calligraphies by Hasan Kan'an (Arts College),
courtesy of www.FREEISLAMICCALLIGRAPHY.com,
© The Prince Ghazi Trust for Qur'anic Thought.

Contents

Introduction	xi
1. The Qur’ān and Secularity	1
A. The Problem of the Modern	
1. A Precommitment to Immanent Closure	1
2. Reason and the Incoherence of Immanent Closure	4
3. Meaning and the Incoherence of Immanent Closure	7
4. Three Traces of Transcendence	12
B. The Problem of the Historian	
1. The Smuggled Anti-Supernaturalism of Empiricism	15
2. The Incoherence of Secular Objectivity	17
3. The Tenuousness of Secular Historical Judgment	20
4. The Judgment of the Qur’ān on the Secular Historian	23
2. The Qur’ān and its Context	29
A. Social Considerations	
1. Codification and Preservation	29
2. Lack of Cultural Precedent	37
3. Decisiveness of Social Impact	38
4. Generation of Virtue and Sanctity	39
5. Generation of Beauty of Forms.	41
B. Doctrinal Considerations	
1. Doctrinal Self-Evidence	43
2. Universality of Vision	45
3. Completeness of Discourse	46
4. Coordination with Classical Philosophic Theism.	47

5. Correlation with Modern Science?	49
3. The Qur'ān and the Messenger	51
A. The Distinctiveness of the Qur'ān	
1. Distinctiveness of Voice	51
2. Stylometric Analysis	52
3. Distinctiveness of Personality	55
4. Distinctiveness of Past Knowledge	56
5. Distinctiveness of Future Knowledge	57
B. The Position of the Messenger	
1. Prophetic Character	59
2. Lack of Prophetic Motivation	60
3. Lack of Prophetic Capability.	61
4. Possibility of External Instruction	63
4. The Qur'ān and its Auditors	65
A. Positive Judgments upon the Qur'ān	
1. Excellence of Language (Arabic)	65
2. Linguistic Richness	67
3. Interpenetration and Simultaneity	69
4. Persuasion and Argument	72
5. Experience of Presence	74
B. Negative Judgments upon the Qur'ān	
1. Question of Quality (in Translation)	76
2. Question of Textual Coherence	78
3. Question of Scriptural Borrowing	81
4. Receptiveness of the Reader	85
5. Conclusion	89
General Index	103

For James Cutsinger

Introduction

The most important and indeed most obvious question that may be asked regarding the Qur'ān is that addressing its ostensibly revelatory character. Simply put, is it the word of God, as it claims to be, or not? For the Islamic community, taken in the fullness of its course and span, the answer has seemed perfectly, indeed blindingly, self-evident. For those in the West, whether past or present, whether Christian or secular modern, the answer has, until quite recently, also seemed perfectly self-evident. These answers have, needless to say, been not merely distinct but oppositional. None of this is particularly surprising. Quite generally, the matter of the acceptance or rejection of a claimed revelation frequently and naturally polarizes between those within a given faith community who naturally and dispositionally accept the ostensible revelation and those outside of it, particularly those of a rival “faith community”—whether religious or secular—who in their turn naturally and dispositionally reject the claimed revelation. Historical experience teaches that those inside and outside of such a faith community are rarely unpersuaded from their respectively normative views just as they are rarely persuasive to one another's. All of these observations are particularly true with respect to the normative judgments regarding the Qur'ān to be found in Islam and the West. In one respect, relatively little has shifted in outlook in the nearly thirteen centuries since the earliest Christian polemic against Islam. As Richard Fletcher has sagely observed in this regard, “Attitudes laid down like rocks

long ago continue to shape their moral environment for many centuries thereafter. There is a geology of human relationships which it is unwise to neglect.”¹

Nevertheless, while the rise of secular modernity has certainly complicated the orientation of the West with regard to the question of the Qur’ān,² there has also been, more recently, a reevaluation, if not quite a rapprochement, within Christianity itself. In this latter regard, three touchstones of particular note may be mentioned: First, the pontifical declaration *Nostra Aetate (On the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)*³ of Pope Paul VI; second, the many positive statements and interactions of Pope John Paul II with respect to Islam and Muslims over the course of his pontificate;⁴ third and most recently, the *Common Word* initiative, launched initially as an open letter signed by a large, representative body of Muslim scholars and religious authorities addressing Christian leaders worldwide, which has grown to become the most significant and successful platform for Muslim-Christian interreligious dialogue in history.⁵

In any weighing of judgment with regard to a claimed revelation such as the Qur’ān, it is never the case that disinterested reasoned argument is the sole consideration; rather, factors related to identity, will and sentiment also contribute. Sound arguments may be given, but none will be persuasive to all individuals. For a faith community, the putting forth of such arguments is nevertheless a necessary exercise, and perhaps for three reasons: a) to comfort the faithful; b) to possibly persuade those neutral; and c) to not unnecessarily cede argumentative ground to those in opposition. The impartial consideration of such arguments may well also be considered a necessary exercise for those opposed, if for nothing else as a potential corrective to possible misunderstandings or misjudgments. This aside, however, one may also simply try to approach the question as dispassionately as possible—however imperfectly this may

be achieved—and in view of what considerations may be brought to bear, evaluate what judgment, however personal and tentative, may be made.

The present monograph, which is aligned most closely with this final, dispassionate mode of engagement, is an exercise in what might be termed “exploratory apologetics”. It is an attempt, no doubt particular and incomplete, to discover, sort through and posit what considerations and arguments may be brought to bear in respect of the Qur’ān’s revelatory status. Many of the considerations presented are well known—at least by those who take an interest in such matters—while some are quite recent, even cutting-edge, and a few are, to our knowledge, original, either in conception or application, to the question at hand. Our aim in this is at once comprehensive and modest: we have not included every possible argument—some will no doubt have escaped our attention; others we have considered weak or problematic; still others are of note and value, but of a detailed technical nature beyond the scope of a presentation such as this. Further, we have, in the interest of space, merely surveyed many of the considerations presented, quoting liberally from relevant sources and noting additional resources for the reader where applicable. For a certain type of Muslim reader, challenged in faith by the worldview of secular modernity, the considerations presented may well be found to serve as a help and support. For a non-Muslim reader—whether secular, Christian, Jew or other—these same considerations may well demonstrate that the question of the Qur’ān’s revelatory status is, at the very least, to be regarded as a serious one.

At this point, a mild suggestion may be in order. Ideally, the present monograph should never have been written nor needed to have been written, as the material it covers should have been addressed well before and by more able individuals. By way of contrast, Western Christianity—both Catholic and Protestant—has a developed apologetical tradition for the ra-

tional defense of its faith. This is, with a handful of noteworthy exceptions,⁶ largely not the case with contemporary Islam. As Shabbir Akhtar has observed:

Unlike their Christian rivals, Muslims have not produced a philosophical defense of the rationality of Islamic theism in the modern world. Christianity has developed continuous and distinguished philosophical and apologetic traditions; Christians have always responded to the rational pressures of secularism in order to reconcile traditional faith with hostile skeptical secularism.⁷

In part, this distinction is due to particular circumstances within each faith: Western Christianity has known the doctrinal and existential threat of secular modernity longer and more intimately than any other tradition—having nurtured its mortal enemy in its own bosom—and has been forced to respond accordingly. Islam, comparatively sheltered from this same threat for a longer period, has ever had the example of the Qur’ān before it, which has been quite capable, even at this late hour, of arguing for itself without the need of human apologetical intervention. Nevertheless, the historical situation has altered for Muslims, and apologetics has perhaps become necessary in a way that was largely not historically required by the Islamic community. However, from what we have seen, it would appear that most would-be Muslim apologists are hardly even aware of Christian apologetical sources, from which they could learn much. Certainly, the bulk of Christian philosophical apologetics—most notably in the context of classical theism—may be taken up whole cloth and applied, often with better justification, in defense of specifically Qur’ānic teachings. Such application is particularly pertinent with respect to specifically secular challenges to faith typical of the contemporary situation. The attentive reader will note that the first section of the monograph is an exercise in just this type of engagement.

Our foremost concern in the present work has not been for

the Qur'ān *per se* so much as for the Qur'ān as a particular instance and evidence of the reality of the transcendent. Muslim readers may quite obviously have an interest in the considerations we present upon the Qur'ān in the specific context of their Islamic faith. We would also suggest that, in the contemporary context, readers of other faith traditions may also have a vested, if possibly conflicted, interest in the Qur'ān as conceivably revelatory. The Qur'ān has, at the very least, the appearance of a major irruption of the transcendent into the human domain. Any such irruption—whether the revelation on Mt. Sinai, the birth of Christ, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, or others further afield—is, we would argue, sufficiently rare and precious as to be of intrinsic interest, even if falling outside of the fold of one's own faith. Particularly in an era when religious traditions are challenged in their very root convictions as perhaps never before, a significant indication of the presence and action of the transcendent, even from another tradition, may serve indirectly as a bulwark of one's own faith, even as a consolation. In this regard, the words of Pope Pius XII have a certain pertinence: “How consoling it is for me to know that, all over the world, millions of people, five times a day, bow down before God.”⁸

Peter Samsel

Notes to Introduction

1. Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 159.
2. Sometimes in surprising ways: see, for instance, Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2009).
3. <http://tinyurl.com/vati-nostra>. [PUBLISHER'S NOTE: All referenced URLs have been verified upon the date of publication.]
4. <http://tinyurl.com/usccb-muslims>.
5. www.acommonword.com.
6. See, for instance, Shabbir Akhtar, *The Qur'an and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2008); also Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'zamī, *The History of the Qur'ānic Text, from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester, UK: UK Islamic Academy, 2003); also www.islamic-awareness.org.
7. Shabbir Akhtar, *The Qur'an and the Secular Mind*, pp. 337–8.
8. William Stoddart, *What Do the Religions Say about Each Other?* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008), p. 12.

The Qur'ān and Secularity

1·A The Problem of the Modern

1. A. 1 A Precommitment to Immanent Closure

In considering the status of the Qur'ān from within the context of secular modernity, one of the first requirements is to examine the often implicit assumptions of that context that in turn inform such a consideration. As Arthur O. Lovejoy has more generally observed:

There are, first, implicit or incompletely explicit *assumptions*, or more or less *unconscious mental habits*, operating in the thought of an individual or a generation. It is the beliefs which are so much a matter of course that they are rather tacitly presupposed than formally expressed and argued for, the ways of thinking which seem so natural and inevitable that they are not scrutinized with the eye of logical self-consciousness, that often are most decisive of the character of a philosopher's doctrine, and still oftener of the dominant intellectual tendencies of an age.¹

To be a modern, as opposed to simply inhabiting modernity, is, first and foremost, to accept, whether reflectively or reflexively, the worldview of modernism, a worldview characterized most significantly by the rejection of the transcendent. Charles Taylor, who has termed such a worldview the “closed immanent frame”, has traced in considerable detail the histori-

cal process of secularization that has led to a state such that “it [was] virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable.”² The acceptance of immanent closure, such that it appears obvious, natural or given, is based not so much upon careful argumentation as upon a general narrative or set of narratives. As Taylor has noted:

The narrative dimension is extremely important, because the force of [the immanent frame] comes less from the supposed detail of the argument (that science refutes religion, or that Christianity is incompatible with human rights), and much more from the general form of the narratives, to the effect that there was once a time when religion could flourish, but that this time is past. The plausibility structures of faith have collapsed, once and for all, irreversibly.... And the same kind of supposition is widespread today, now in favor of atheism, or materialism, relegating all forms of religion to an earlier era. In a certain sense, the original arguments on which this narrative rests cease to matter, so powerful is the sense created in certain milieux, that these old views just *can't* be options for us.³

Commenting specifically on the dominance of a particularly constrictive or closed sense of the immanent frame within Western academia, he has further noted:

In general, we have here what Wittgenstein calls a “picture”, a background to our thinking, within whose terms it is carried on, but which is often largely unformulated, and to which we can frequently, just for this reason, imagine no alternative. As he once famously put it, “a picture held us captive.”... Our predicament in the modern West is, therefore, not only characterized by what I have called the immanent frame, which we all more or less share... It also consists of more specific pictures, the immanent frame as “spun” in ways of openness and closure, which are often dominant in certain milieux. This local dominance obviously strengthens their

hold as pictures. The spin of closure which is hegemonic in the Academy is a case in point.⁴

Edward Feser, in reviewing the philosophic objections to scientism, has noted similarly:

Now if scientism faces such grave difficulties, why are so many intelligent people drawn to it? The answer—to paraphrase a remark made by Wittgenstein in another context—is that “a picture holds them captive.” Hypnotized by the unparalleled predictive and technological successes of modern science, they infer that scientism must be true, and that anything that follows from scientism—however fantastic or even seemingly incoherent—must also be true.⁵

For modern historians of religion, already in many instances doubly committed on a personal level to immanent closure, first as moderns and then again as academicians, there is yet another formal and methodological commitment to immanent closure in their work as historians. An early articulation of such a stance is that of Ernst Troeltsch, who asserted that modern historians should take a “purely scientific attitude to historical fact”,⁶ and who, in the third of his three principles of critical history, asserted that “The sole task of history in its specifically theoretical aspect is to explain every movement, process, state, and nexus of things by reference to the web of its causal relations.”⁷ A more recent asseveration of such a methodological commitment may be found in the work of Van Harvey. Although far more often assumed than stated or defended explicitly, such a “critical historical” approach takes as given that the admittance of the transcendent is out of bounds in any proper historical description.⁸

Western scholarship on the Qur'ān has been very much in line with this general attitude, as William A. Graham has noted:

... non-Muslim Qur'ān study has tended towards acceptance of, or acquiescence in, an Enlightenment naturalism or

materialism with respect to what it recognizes as “real.” It has, in the main, isolated the intellectual and rational from the poetic and the religious and worked on the assumption that the former deal with what is “really real”, by which is meant the phenomenal world of sense data. This excludes *a priori* the possibility of a numinous or transcendent dimension as a “given” in the “real” world.⁹

For most secular historians, such a precommitment seems not only natural but wholly justified, any alternative to which would take one at once outside of the domains of objectivity and rationality. There are, unfortunately, a number of problems implicit in such a stance, to be explored further below.

1. A. 2 Reason and the Incoherence of Immanent Closure

The most foundational issue regarding immanent closure, one that is at once obvious and yet strangely unnoticed, is its fundamental incoherence. Less severely, one may note its fundamental incompleteness, particularly with regard to the following broadly intractable issues: a) the bare fact of existence, particularly in light of temporal creation as indicated in astrophysical cosmology; b) the precise and elegant ordering of existence, both in terms of the physical laws as well as the values of the physical constants; c) the origin of life, which is a prior to any evolutionary explanation; d) the origin and nature of consciousness, which escapes a strict physicalism altogether; e) the coordination between the deep structure of natural order and the abstract ordering of our minds, as is singularly evident in such domains as mathematical physics.

Its incompleteness aside, its incoherence may be traced along a number of lines, including accounting under a strict physicalism, most typically taken as entailed under immanent

closure, for such fundamental requirements as consciousness, subjectivity, unified personhood, free will, intentionality, reason, morality, meaning and value.¹⁰ Such requirements are necessary for the articulation of any worldview, including that of immanent closure. As John Searle has noted:

There is exactly one overriding question in contemporary philosophy... How do we fit in?... How can we square this self-conception of ourselves as mindful, meaning-creating, free, rational, etc., agents with a universe that consists entirely of mindless, meaningless, unfree, nonrational, brute physical particles?¹¹

With regard to consciousness, necessarily entailed in all of the other requirements above, certain philosophers of mind have noted the profound disjunction between physical objects and states and the immediate experience of consciousness and mentation:

- 1) There is a raw qualitative feel or a “what it is like” to have a mental state such as a pain.
- 2) At least many mental states have intentionality—*ofness* or *aboutness*—directed towards an object.
- 3) Mental states are inner, private and immediate to the subject having them.
- 4) Mental states require a subjective ontology—namely, mental states are necessarily owned by the first person sentient subjects who have them.
- 5) Mental states fail to have crucial features (e.g., spatial extension, location) that characterize physical states and, in general, cannot be described using physical language.¹²

Such a disjunction becomes even more pronounced upon consideration of reason, in whose name the worldview of immanent closure so typically takes its stand. Ironically, it is precisely the general unaccountability of reason under immanent closure that provides one of the clearest indications

of the fundamental incoherence of this worldview. As a broad summary of the issue, J. P. Moreland, in review of a recent work of Thomas Nagel, has commented:

But there are several problems Nagel mentions with the naturalist attempt to account for the faculty of reason itself:

- 1) Reason isn't just pragmatically useful; indeed, it is self-refuting and circular to assert that it is.
- 2) Reason isn't a contingent, local, perspectivalist feature of our evolved nature. It has universal applicability. Evolution produces local, contingent dispositions, not universal, necessary ones.
- 3) Reason is intrinsically normative.
- 4) Reason takes us beyond appearances to the hidden, intelligible structure of the world.
- 5) In contrast to the senses, which put us in contact with objects via causal chains, reason is not mediated by mechanisms that could be selected by evolutionary processes; rather, reason puts us in immediate, direct contact with the rational order.
- 6) Reason is active and involves agency (for example, it isn't Sphekish [deterministic or preprogrammed]); sensation is passive.¹³

Each one of these considerations works to undermine any reduction of reason to a strictly naturalist conception consistent with the closed immanent frame. Taken in concert, they strongly indicate the radical insufficiency of any such project. To the contrary, reason bears every appearance of being, as it were, a “supernaturally natural” function within man that is, in itself, one of the clearest evidences tying man inextricably to the transcendent.

This incoherence of reason on a naturalist conception may be philosophically formalized, three examples of which are Victor Reppert and Alvin Plantinga's epistemic argument from reason,¹⁴ Angus Menuge and J. P. Moreland's ontological

argument from reason,¹⁵ and James Ross and Edward Feser's argument for the necessary immateriality of reason.¹⁶ The general lesson that may be drawn from all of these arguments is that the statement and defense of the naturalist worldview of immanent closure is articulated on the basis of human rationality, but this same rationality cannot be grounded within that worldview, thus undermining its very foundations.

1. A. 3 Meaning and the Incoherence of Immanent Closure

If immanent closure may be judged incoherent under a consideration of rationality, it may be similarly judged so under a consideration of meaning, intention, purpose and value. This is hardly a position that need even be philosophically argued for—it is, or should be, self-evident that a world reduced to “atoms and the void” is one necessarily revealed as nihilistic at its very core. As James W. Sire has noted:

The strands of epistemological, metaphysical and ethical nihilism weave together to make a rope long enough and strong enough to hang a whole culture. The name of the rope is Loss of Meaning. We end in a total despair of ever seeing ourselves, the world and others as in any way significant. Nothing has meaning.... We have been thrown up by an impersonal universe. The moment a self-conscious, self-determining being appears on the scene, that person asks the big question: What is the meaning of all this? What is the purpose of the cosmos? But the person's creator—the impersonal forces of bedrock matter—cannot respond. If the cosmos is to have meaning, we must manufacture it for ourselves.... Thus does naturalism lead to nihilism. If we take seriously the implications of the death of God, the disappearance of the transcendent, the closedness of the universe, we end right there. Why, then, aren't most naturalists nihilists? The obvious answer is the best one: Most naturalists do not take their naturalism seriously. They are

inconsistent. They affirm a set of values. They have friends who affirm a similar set. They appear to know and don't ask how they know they know. They seem to be able to choose and don't ask themselves whether their apparent freedom is really caprice or determinism. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living, but for a naturalist he is wrong. For a naturalist it is the examined life that is not worth living.¹⁷

As human beings, we cannot live the supposed "truth" of this condition, which would be as intolerable as the coldest depths of space. The modern, who accepts this "truth" but cannot live it, instead typically lives in a state of self-contradiction or self-deception regarding the catastrophic implications of his worldview, often living off of the husks of meaning and value inherent in a prior worldview now formally rejected. As John F. Haught has forcefully reminded:

If the universe is meaningless, and ethics groundless, then truthfulness demands that one pass through the fires of nihilism before finding a post-religious comfort zone. But sunny naturalists have not yet looked down into the bottom of the abyss they have opened up. Instead they have nestled into the cultural and ethical worlds nurtured for centuries by worshipers of God. Surely naturalism has to have more disturbing implications than sunny naturalists are willing to entertain. If science has in truth dissolved the transcendent ground that formerly upheld nature and morality, then the sober naturalist wins the contest of candor hands down by at least trying to field the full implications of an essentially lifeless world.¹⁸

And further:

... the most rugged version of godlessness demands complete consistency. Go all the way and think the business of atheism through to the bitter end. This means that before you get too comfortable with the godless world you long for, you will be required by the logic of any consistent skepticism

to pass through the disorienting wilderness of nihilism. Do you have the courage to do that? You will have to adopt the tragic heroism of a Sisyphus, or realize that true freedom in the absence of God means that you are the creator of the values you live by. Don't you realize that this will be an intolerable burden from which most people will seek an escape? Are you ready to allow simple logic to lead you to the real truth about the death of God? Before settling into a truly atheistic worldview you will have to experience the Nietzschean madman's sensation of straying through "infinite nothingness." You will be required to summon up an unprecedented degree of courage if you plan to wipe away the whole horizon of transcendence. Are you willing to risk madness? If not, then you are not really an atheist.¹⁹

Under immanent closure, moderns may only live "as if" there were meaning, but to accept such an oblique, incoherent sense of meaning—no matter its ultimate illegitimacy—is necessary if they are to live at all. As Roger Scruton has wryly observed:

To understand the depth of the... "as if" is to understand the condition of the modern soul. We know that we are animals, parts of the natural order, bound by laws which tie us to the material forces which govern everything. We believe that the gods are our invention, and that death is exactly what it seems. Our world has been disenchanted and our illusions destroyed. At the same time we cannot live as though that were the whole truth of our condition. Even modern people are compelled to praise and blame, love and hate, reward and punish. Even modern people—especially modern people—are aware of self, as the centre of their being; and even modern people try to connect to other selves around them. We therefore see others as if they were free beings, animated by a self or soul, and with more than a worldly destiny. If we abandon that perception, then human relations dwindle into a machine-like parody of themselves, the world is voided of love, duty and desire, and only the body remains... Modern science has presented us

with the “as ifness” of human freedom; but it could never equip us to live without the belief in it.²⁰

Graham Dunstan Martin has similarly commented:

Naturalism lays waste the world. It robs us of everything without exception. It denies that we perform even our own actions, and claims they are preordained by the purposeless accidents of blind causality, by the chatting up and down of mindless subatomic particles.... Yet we continue to desire to act, to desire to have powers, to believe in good and bad. It is as if we were normal active human beings till, just yesterday, the reductionist cast upon us the malevolent spell of his philosophy. Suddenly, if we believe him, we are paralyzed, helpless to act, victims of his metaphysics, immobilized and helpless like a paraplegic in a wheelchair. Along with our ability to move even a finger, he has filched away also our moral sense, our responsibility, all possibility of a meaning to our lives or even a sense to our words. The reductionist’s world is not mere absence of sense, it is a kind of anti-meaning, a kind of despairing nihilism. It is as if there is, in his materialist universe, only one purpose left, namely to mock and decry all purposes.²¹

That moderns, living under immanent closure, should nonetheless be so resistant to recognizing the consequences of this closure—which resembles nothing so much as a collective failure of imagination—is at once a clear sign of its falsity while at the same time a barrier to its overturning. Nevertheless, such an insight may certainly be attained, in light of which the claims of modernity are revealed as a kind of hollow show. If neither reason nor value can be legitimately laid claim to, then neither can anything dependent upon these priors—a domain encompassing nearly all that is vital to human culture and flourishing. The shibboleths of the age, such as democracy and human rights, prove no exception, but are revealed as ungrounded as the rest. By what reason or value

may democracy, say, be asserted if both reason and value are fatally undermined?

A point that should perhaps be noted is that the appearance of purpose, meaning and value that we broadly and intrinsically seem to have is often taken by moderns as indicative of actual purpose, meaning and value, even in the face of the unavoidable nihilistic implications of immanent closure. The basic, if widespread, confusion is to assume that the mere fact of this appearance is sufficient to maintain the worldview of immanent closure and yet escape the nihilistic abyss. Upon reflection, however, it should be clear that exactly the opposite conclusion is indicated: the appearance of purpose, meaning and value is present precisely because there *is* actual purpose, meaning and value, but this actuality is grounded not in immanent closure, which is intrinsically incapable of sustaining it, but in a reality open to the transcendent domain, wherein it finds its necessary support.

One may broadly consider three possible stances with regard to the status of the closed immanent frame. The first, broadly accepted by most moderns, historians among them, is the normativity of immanent closure and the questionability of transcendence. The second, more generous stance—similar to what Stephen Jay Gould has termed “non-overlapping magisteria”²²—might accept immanent closure and transcendence as distinct domains, if possibly rival “systems of faith”. The third, which may even now be taken as the dominant view of humanity, is the questionability of immanent closure and the normativity of transcendence.

The evidence and arguments touched upon above strongly suggest that it is this third stance that must be taken as correct and that, in consequence, the closed immanent frame stands as a false foreclosure of the reality of transcendence.

1. A. 4 Three Traces of Transcendence

Three additional domains of human experience that may be brought to bear in challenge of immanent closure are: a) cross-cultural historical and contemporary accounts of miracles; b) cross-cultural historical and contemporary accounts of mystical experience; and c) philosophical proofs or arguments for the existence of the God of classical theism. All three of these domains have a direct bearing on the question of the revelatory status of the Qur'ān, which may be understood in terms of the Islamic tradition as at once a miraculous irruption in the world as well as a mystical unveiling of the divine Word. Further, insofar as God's existence may be strongly inferred on philosophical grounds, His revelation to man becomes far more likely, if indeed not to some extent anticipated.

With respect to miracles, the common wisdom is that the uniformity of scientific experience renders these impossible in principle. Under the assumption of immanent closure, this is a perfectly correct view. However, it is this very assumption that is presently open to question. Against such a view it may be noted that miraculous accounts are to be found both across civilizations as well as throughout history. In this respect, their sheer frequency, despite their inherent uncommonness, speaks against any dismissive evaluation. A particularly thorough resource for accounts of miracles across cultures is Kenneth L. Woodward's *The Book of Miracles*.²³ Taken in itself, such a study is open to the charge of a lack of suitably verifiable evidence associated with miraculous accounts. Another particularly thorough resource, one particularly germane to this issue, is Craig S. Keener's two-volume work *Miracles*.²⁴ Keener, although open to miraculous accounts from other religious traditions, is predominantly concerned with tracing and evaluating miracles in the context of Christianity from antiquity to the present day. A particular strength of Keener's work is the careful documentation of numerous contempo-

rary case studies of miracles. Such documentation renders dismissal problematic, which problematizes in turn any blanket assumption regarding the impossibility of such accounts. Keener's work is also valuable for presenting much of the philosophical critique of David Hume's dismissal of miracles, one of the most notable points being its fundamental circularity: "Thus, on the usual reading of Hume, he manages to define away any possibility of a miracle occurring, by defining 'miracle' as a violation of natural law, yet defining 'natural law' as principles that cannot be violated."²⁵ In a specifically Islamic context, *karāmāt* (miracles) are frequently associated with saints or "friends of God". One resource that treats these in some detail is Vincent J. Cornell's *Realm of the Saint*.²⁶

With respect to mysticism, again such accounts and experience are to be found both across civilizations as well as throughout history. A general summary of world mysticism is given in Geoffrey Parrinder's *Mysticism in the World's Religions*.²⁷ A more detailed treatment of world mysticism is Steven T. Katz's edited anthology *Comparative Mysticism*,²⁸ although Katz's constructivist approach to mystical interpretation is best balanced in consideration with Robert K. C. Forman's three edited volumes, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, *The Innate Capacity* and *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*.²⁹ As with the phenomenon of miracles, the phenomenon of mysticism, although comparatively rare, is nevertheless sufficiently common as to be resistant to ready dismissal, yet in its experiential implications it strikes directly at the roots of immanent closure, serving as it were as a chink in the wall of such a closure that nevertheless stands open to transcendence.

With respect to philosophical proofs or arguments for the existence of God, such proofs have satisfied many profound thinkers, but have never satisfied all, not even during earlier ages of faith. It is not in the nature of philosophical arguments, on God or any other topic, to compel universal assent, nor should this be looked for either as a reasonable goal or

as a measure of efficacy or correctness. Nevertheless, the contemporary situation is remarkable in that there have never been so many or so well argued proofs for the existence of God, whether new articulations or defenses of old proofs found problematic, such as the modal formulation or Gödel's formulation of the ontological argument, or new proofs not previously conceived, such as various proofs based upon the nature of mathematics. Further, important arguments undermining the existence of God have been successfully countered, such as the free will defense against the argument from evil, or rendered problematic, such as the scientific issues raised with respect to cosmological fine-tuning or the origin of life, which act as strong pointers in support of the argument from design, quite apart from the Darwinian challenge to the argument from design with respect to living forms themselves. Further, individual arguments may be brought together to form a cumulative philosophic case considerably stronger than any single argument taken in isolation, a cumulative case that may well be judged far more compelling than any similar cumulative case against the existence of God. There is no one source that satisfactorily covers all these various arguments in both breadth and depth, but two good summaries are Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli's "Twenty Arguments for the Existence of God"³⁰ and Alvin Plantinga's "Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments."³¹ A clear and careful articulation of Aquinas' principal arguments—the famous "Five Ways"—may be found in Edward Feser's *Aquinas*,³² while a detailed treatment of more recent arguments is given in Robert J. Spitzer's *New Proofs for the Existence of God*.³³