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## *George Anastaplo on Non-Western Thought*

"An Introduction to Confucian Thought." *The Great Ideas Today* (1984), 125-70. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1984. Cited in the text as *CT*.

"An Introduction to Hindu Thought: The *Bhagavad Gita*." *The Great Ideas Today* (1985), 259-85. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1985. Cited in the text as *HT*.

"An Introduction to Mesopotamian Thought: The *Gilgamesh* Epic." *The Great Ideas Today* (1986), 289-313. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1986. Cited in the text as *MT*.

"An Introduction to Islamic Thought: The Koran." *The Great Ideas Today* (1989), 235-82. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1989. Cited in the text as *IT*.

"An Introduction to Buddhist Thought." *The Great Ideas Today* (1992), 218-47. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1992. Cited in the text as *BT*.

"An Introduction to North American Indian Thought." *The Great Ideas Today* (1993), 253-86. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1993. Cited in the text as *NAIT*.

**G**eorge Anastaplo has written introductions to six non-European traditions of thought. His studies are based on his reading of some representative texts of those traditions: Confucian thought as expressed in *the Analects*, Hindu thought as expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Mesopotamian thought as expressed in the *Gilgamesh* epic, Islamic thought as expressed in the Koran, Buddhist thought as expressed in literature connected with Siddhartha Gautama, and North American Indian thought as expressed in some myths, legends, and stories of the North American Indians. Although he tries to understand each tradition in its own terms, his assessments

manifest seven themes that run throughout all of his writing.

1. The European tradition that began in ancient Greece is superior to other traditions of thought, Anastaplo believes, because in ancient Greece (particularly among the Socratic philosophers) one finds the first full expression of nature, natural right, philosophy, prudence, science, and natural religion.

2. The idea of nature was discovered by the Greeks when they recognized that there was a rational order in the universe and in human life as part of the universe, a rational order that is universal and unchanging and therefore distinguishable from the conventional or customary order of particular human groups. Prior to the discovery of nature, human beings looked to the ancestral customs of their society as the authoritative and even divine guides to life. The politics, art, science, and religion of the Western world all show the influence of the Greek discovery of nature. Since nature is universal, there are intimations of nature in every tradition of human thought, but only those traditions influenced by Greece show a fully explicit, self-conscious awareness of nature as distinguished from custom or convention.

3. From the idea of nature, the Greeks derived the idea of natural right, because in human nature they discerned natural desires and capacities that set norms of good and bad, just and unjust. Natural right or justice is that which conforms to human nature and is therefore universal, whereas conventional right or justice is that which has been established by human contrivance in particular societies.

4. The discovery of nature presupposes philosophy or science as a life devoted to inquiry for its own sake in which ancestral beliefs and customs are not authoritative. Distinguishing between opinion and truth, the philosopher refuses to accept common opinions that have not been rationally demonstrated. For the philosopher or scientist, reason is superior to the ancestral

5. With the philosophic awareness of how the universal and unchangeable order of nature differs from the particular and changeable order of custom, there also arose (particularly in Aristotle's writings) an awareness of the need for prudence or practical wisdom

in judging the variable circumstances of action in the light of an invariable nature. What is naturally best for any particular society will vary according to the character of that society, so that a prudent man must judge what is practicable and what is not for the people of his society. The prudent man judges how best to approximate the dictates of nature within the historical conditions in which he finds himself.

6. Modern natural science is unique to Western thought because it is rooted ultimately in the Greek discovery of nature and of philosophy as the study of nature. Insofar as people in non-Western cultures recognize the accomplishments of modern science in comprehending and controlling nature through human reason, they concede the superiority of Greek thought.

7. Ancestral customs were traditionally regarded as divinely sanctioned, so that religious beliefs confirmed the unquestionable authority of the ancestral. Consequently, the philosophic or scientific appeal to nature as a rational order comprehensible to human reason challenged the authority of religious belief. There seemed to be an irreconcilable conflict between reason and revelation. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, however, the theology of the Biblical religions-Judaism, Christianity, and Islam-can be interpreted as supporting a natural religion in which the dictates of God reflect the dictates of nature. The natural philosopher inquires into the causal order of the whole. The natural theologian inquires into the First Cause.

On each of these points, Anastaplo shows the influence of Leo Strauss, who was Anastaplo's teacher at the University of Chicago. Perhaps the best statement of Strauss's understanding of the discovery of nature in ancient Greece is the third chapter of his *Natural Right and History*- "The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right." In that chapter, and elsewhere in Strauss's writings, one can see that although Strauss was a proponent of natural right, he took seriously the many objections to that idea. One must wonder, therefore, whether Anastaplo's defense of natural right in his remarks on non-Western thought can stand up to those objections.

The most common objection to natural right appeals to the fact

of cultural and historical diversity. There appears to be such radical disagreement between human beings in different cultures and in different historical periods about what is good and bad, just and unjust, that there is not enough moral universality to warrant the idea of natural right. If Anastaplo is correct, the very idea of nature, which is presupposed by the idea of natural right, is not found outside the Western tradition. Can Anastaplo account for the diversity displayed in non-Western traditions in a way that sustains the idea of natural right?

The proponent of natural right could claim that disagreement about the principles of justice does not show there are no natural principles of justice, because it only shows that most notions of justice in human history are erroneous. The principles of natural right have always existed, it could be said, but they were not properly understood until the discovery of natural right by the ancient Greeks. If this is Anastaplo's position, can he defend himself against the charge that he is claiming universal validity for the prejudices of Western culture as shaped by Greek philosophy?

It might be argued, however, that the general principles of justice in the Western tradition are in fact universally accepted. In every society, it would 'seem to be agreed that justice means not hurting your fellow citizens, or helping them, or serving the common good. Laws that promote the common good are just, and laws that subvert the common good are unjust. If so, one would then have to ask, what is meant by the "common good?" Is its meaning specified by customs or laws that are conventional rather than natural? Is there a common good by nature? Or is the so-called common good actually the good of whatever group happens to rule in any particular society?

The common good of a society cannot be natural, it appears, if the identity of every society as distinguished from other societies is conventional rather than natural. Even if it is natural for human beings to live in communities, that they live in one community rather than another seems to arise from the accidents of cultural history that are not by nature. Does this mean that justice defined as the common good is not a matter of natural right because the common good depends on history rather than nature?

If we are looking for what is good or right by nature because it satisfies human desires that are natural rather than conventional, an obvious possibility is pleasure. Everywhere and always, it seems, human beings desire pleasure. Ancestral customs commonly forbid or confine the pursuit of pleasure, so if we do not identify the good with the ancestral, we might identify the good with the pleasant. Does the search for natural right lead us to some form of hedonism? If not, what ground is there in human nature for a natural human good beyond pleasure?

Philosophical hedonists such as Epicurus have said that the most pleasurable life is the life of philosophy. Is philosophy the highest human life by nature? Philosophy is possible only in complex civilizations where the arts and sciences have reached a high level of refinement. Philosophy thus appears to arise not by natural necessity but by human learning. The natural condition of human beings in primitive societies does not permit philosophy. Indeed, if Anastaplo is correct in claiming that philosophy has only emerged in ancient Greece and in those societies influenced by Greece, it would seem that philosophy depends on a rare combination of human achievements that does not happen spontaneously by nature. Or would Anastaplo say that the conditions in ancient Greece allowed the full expression of a desire to understand that is natural to all human beings in some manner everywhere? Does the actualization of human nature depend on a certain kind of civilized social life? Must nature be nurtured?

Philosophy is the attempt to understand nature by human reason alone. Is it possible, however, that a divine revelation grasped by religious faith could give a deeper insight into the nature of nature than is possible by philosophic reason alone? In particular, some scholars have argued that the Biblical doctrine of the creation of the world "out of nothing" by God reveals the radical contingency of nature as the product of God's will. Was this possibility conceived by the ancient Greek philosophers? If they did, how did they defend the idea of nature as a self-contained order against the thought that nature was radically contingent and thus dependent on some supernatural power? If they did not consider the possibility of nature's

radical contingency as created by God, does this theological doctrine as accepted by faith deepen our understanding of nature beyond what was possible for the Socratic philosophers without Biblical revelation?

Biblical religion might support a teleological view of nature as having ends or purposes. If nature is the product of a just and providential Creator, then we might look to nature as a source of norms for human life. In this way, as Thomas Aquinas argued, Biblical faith would support the idea of natural right or natural law. This would suggest, however, that the idea of natural right cannot rest on natural reason alone insofar as it requires faith in the supernatural.

If by natural reason alone we cannot see nature as created by a providential God and thus as serving God's purposes, can we sustain a teleological view of nature that does not depend on religious belief? Has modern science refuted any conception of natural teleology by showing that the causal mechanisms of nature do not display rational purposefulness? If the idea of natural right assumes that human beings are endowed by nature with ends or purposes, so that we can judge as good whatever conforms to those natural ends, it would seem that natural right requires natural teleology. Can this be defended without invoking religious faith or contradicting modern science? Or should we concede that natural right as resting on natural teleology is at best a salutary myth to escape the nihilistic conclusions of modern scientific materialism? Deciding whether or not modern natural science can support natural right is important for Anastaplo's argument, because he claims that the achievements of modern science in understanding nature confirm the superiority of Western thought as founded on the Greek idea of nature.

Modern science could subvert natural right not only by denying natural teleology but also by affirming the fact-value distinction. It is often said that modern science requires a value-free understanding of nature that explains natural facts without inferring moral values. Natural science, it seems, can tell us what is the case in nature but not what *ought* to be. If this is so, then must the idea of natural right contradict modern science in the attempt to find some notion

of right in nature?

All of these questions require that we ponder the idea of nature. Anastaplo agrees with Strauss that the idea of nature as the intelligible order of the whole was first explicitly formulated by the ancient Greek philosophers, which then became the central theme of Western thought. We must wonder, however, why this idea of nature seems to be peculiar to the Western world. Is there any conception of nature in non-Western traditions? If not, as Anastaplo argues, does that show the superiority of Western thought as a consequence of the Greek discovery of nature? Or should we rather say that the absence of nature in non-Western traditions shows that this idea was more an invention than a discovery of the Greeks, and therefore the illusory character of this idea as a Western prejudice becomes clear when we see that people in non-Western cultures have done well without such an idea?

I will consider these questions as I examine Anastaplo's studies of non-Western thought. I will take up those studies not in the order in which they were written, but according to their order in the evolution of human civilization. Anastaplo sees the North American Indians as manifesting the primitive way of life of the earliest human ancestors. By contrast, he sees Muhammad as the most modern of the great religious founders. So to follow the historical sequence that Anastaplo sees in his material, I will begin with his study of the North American Indians. Then, following the chronological order of the texts, I will turn to his studies of the Mesopotamian, Buddhist, Confucian, and Hindu traditions. I will conclude with his study of Muhammad.

#### North American Indian Thought

Anastaplo believes that studying the North American Indians allows us to investigate "both the power and the limitations of primitive thought" (*NAIT*, 283). Living as hunter-gatherers, the American Indians north of the Rio Grande seemed to have preserved the prehistoric way of life that existed prior to the emergence of urban civilization as based on agriculture in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, India, and China (*NAIT*, 263, 276-79, 281). They manifest

the primordial condition of human existence.

Although Anastaplo criticizes the Europeans for not recognizing the merits of the Indian way of life and for the brutality of their treatment of the Indians, he concludes that the European way of life is ultimately superior to the Indian way of life. European civilization is superior because it allowed for the full awareness of nature, which brought with it the life of the mind (as expressed in philosophy and science) and a thoughtful morality (as expressed in political community). Fundamental to Anastaplo's argument is the implicit claim that European civilization permitted the fullest development of natural human potentialities that were left undeveloped in the primitive life of hunter-gatherers. From this point of view, the European way of life is "more natural," because it is more fully human, than the American Indian way of life.

Anastaplo begins his account of the North American Indians with some of their common stories and legends. For example, the Snohomish say that originally the Creator made the world with a sky so low that the tall people bumped their heads against it (*NAIT*, 254). Eventually, the wise men of the various tribes decided that everyone should use giant poles to push against the sky, and consequently the sky was pushed up to where it is now.

In such stories, Anastaplo sees a vital and often childlike imagination at work that explains the world as shaped by particular acts of will in the past. "The colors and shapes of animals, their behavior (for example, how the Coyote runs), the ways trees and other vegetation are, and what the terrain is like—all of these can be traced back to particular humanlike events" (*NAIT*, 270). Such stories rely more on magic than on science.

Anastaplo also discerns in these stories "a lively concern for the sacred, the beautiful (including the erotic), the healthy, and the common good" (*NAIT*, 267). This concern for morality suggests some awareness of the limits of nature. And certainly the Indians are aware of nature in stories that report the distinctive characteristics of plants and animals. This awareness justifies the common assumption that the Indians lived "close to nature."

Still, Anastaplo observes, "one may wonder how close to nature



a people can be who do not really know what nature is" (*NAIT*, 268). The Indians had a practical grasp of nature, based on particular observations, but they had no theoretical understanding of nature based on universal regularities. The Indian approach to nature was not scientific. For Anastaplo, this confirms his belief that science is "ultimately Greek in origin," because science is "a Greek way of talking about nature" (*NAIT*, 269).

One element of the Greek understanding of nature that supports science is the idea that "there need be no beginning or end to the movements and combinations of matter and their consequences" (*NAIT*, 269), and thus the fundamental order of the material universe is eternal. By contrast, many Indian stories explain natural patterns as contingent outcomes of particular historical events. So, for example, death is said to be not part of the necessary order of things but a product of some choice or deed in the past. Things are the way they are not because they had to be that way, but because they just happened to turn out that way as a result of particular events in the past. Indian stories rely more on the accidents of history than the necessities of nature.

The importance of history for the Indians is part of their reverence for the ancestral, which is probably characteristic of all prehistoric ways of life (*NAIT*, 281). The worship of the dead is the oldest religious belief of the human race, and thus the proper burial of the dead is the oldest religious ceremony. This primitive reliance on the ancestral customs of one's tribe as the authoritative guide to thought and action closes off any appeal to, or even full awareness of, the universal standards of nature.

For the American Indians, and perhaps for all prehistoric peoples, ancestral customs support a way of life in which the highest pursuits are war and hunting (*NAIT*, 274-77). War and warlike activities are celebrated in Indian stories as the only proper expression of manhood. Even the most brutal acts of war, such as scalping, are often spoken of as heroic deeds. Anastaplo shares the common abhorrence of such atrocious practices expressed by the European settlers in America, and he regards these practices as showing the defects not only of the American Indians but also of any way of life

that gives too much importance to war and fighting.

He recognizes, however, that the brutalities committed by the Europeans against the Indians were far worse than those of the Indians. He concedes this even while affirming the superiority of the Europeans in their principles: "the principles of the Europeans were in critical respects superior to those of the Indians. But, by and large, the Indians were probably more conscientious in living up to their principles than the Europeans were in living up to theirs" (*NAIT*, 276).

The superiority of European principles is evident in the superiority of European civilization as founded on technology and agriculture. Yet even more important is the European tradition of the life of the mind—philosophy or science—as the highest life. With the discovery of nature as the rational order of the whole, the life devoted to understanding nature can be seen as the fully human life, which also makes possible ethics as a thoughtful morality. In contrast to the unexamined authority of ancestral customs among the American Indians and other primitive peoples, the life of the mind, founded on a grasp of nature as transcending custom, requires that one question the customary beliefs and practices of one's own group. Anastaplo sees no evidence among the American Indians of any such recognition of the life of the mind.

Again, however, Anastaplo concedes that the superiority of European civilization is more a matter of principle than of practice. Most Europeans do not live, or even recognize the claims of, the philosophic or scientific life as the life of the mind devoted to the study of nature. Nonetheless, he argues that since one becomes fully human only in pursuing the life of the mind, the European way of life, which permits the life of the mind, is ultimately more desirable than the Indian way of life, which does not permit such a life (*NAIT*, 278).

The persuasiveness of Anastaplo's assessment of North American Indian thought, and of other non-Western traditions of thought as well, depends upon whether one accepts his view of nature and of philosophy or science as the study of nature. One presupposition of his view of nature, as already indicated, is that "there need be no

beginning or end to the movements and combinations of matter and their consequences" (*NAIT*, 269). In his assessment of Buddhism, he asserts explicitly that philosophy presupposes the eternity of the universe (*BT*, 238). But he also raises as a question whether it matters whether the world is eternal (*BT*, 247). It surely does matter whether the world is eternal or not if, as Anastaplo claims in his writing on the Koran, the philosophic inquiry into nature is ultimately directed to the question: What is the First Cause (*IT*, 237)?

If nature emerges as an effect of an absolute First Cause, then nature is not eternal, and the order of nature depends on particular events, or perhaps some one event, of divine creation. Although the American Indians seem not to have developed any notion of an absolute creation of nature out of nothing, which may be unique to Biblical religion, their reliance on particular events or acts of will in history to explain nature intimates the radical historical contingency of nature. On what grounds does Anastaplo reject this possibility? To assert that nature is eternal and thus had no beginning in time seems to beg the question. In speaking of the eternity of nature as a "presupposition" of philosophy, does Anastaplo mean to imply that philosophy, or at least philosophy as derived from Plato and Aristotle-must take this as a starting point that cannot be demonstrated? If so, how is this compatible with his claim that philosophy accepts nothing that has not been rationally demonstrated? Does this suggest that the religious conception of nature as a product of historically contingent events-of which the Biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is the most radical expression-poses the most fundamental challenge to the Greek philosophic conception of nature?

The inclination to explain nature *as* the product of particular historical events does seem, as Anastaplo argues, to foreclose scientific explanation, because science would seem to presuppose an intrinsic regularity in nature that is not historically contingent. Insofar as Plato and Aristotle presuppose the unbroken regularity of nature, one can understand Anastaplo's claim that science is "a Greek *way* of talking about nature" (*NAIT*, 269). Yet he fails to answer those scholars in the history of science who argue that the

Biblical doctrine of the creation of the world by a rational Creator provided the necessary intellectual background for the emergence of modern science.<sup>2</sup> Since this doctrine is shared by Islam, we will return to this issue in considering Anastaplo's assessment of Mohammed and the Koran.

Anastaplo's study of the North American Indians introduces all the major themes that arise in his studies of other non-Western traditions-nature, philosophy, science, prudence, and natural right. It also introduces a minor theme that appears in his other studies although he does not emphasize it-the problem of the male. Much of what Anastaplo finds troubling about the American Indian practices in war and fighting-such as scalping-appeared necessary to the Indians as providing "proper fulfillment of the male" (*NAIT*, 276). Is the male, especially the young male on the verge of manhood, naturally inclined to aggressiveness? Must every society devise ways of channeling and thus civilizing this male aggressiveness? Anastaplo's writings provide evidence that by nature it is generally harder for men than for women to control their predatory aggressiveness and accept their social responsibilities. Although cultures can magnify or moderate such gender differences, the problem of how best to control the destructiveness of young males is universal. Much of what Anastaplo sees in the diverse religious traditions of the non-Western world manifests various ways of managing the complementary polarity in human nature between male and female. The relationship between male and female is particularly prominent in Anastaplo's interpretation of the *Gilgamesh* epic.

#### Mesopotamian Thought

Anastaplo begins his study of the *Gilgamesh* epic, a Babylonian poem from around 2000 B.C., by quoting the following summary taken from a scholarly source (*MT*, 289-90):

The poem tells the adventures of Gilgamesh, who begins as a harsh ruler, has a terrific battle with a primitive figure [Enkidu] and then becomes his staunch friend, loses this friend, tries

vainly to regain him, and finally confers with his shade in the land of the dead. The poem, like most primitive epics, is probably pieced together from a good many stories originally independent. One of the most interesting sections is the Babylonian tale of the Flood (Tablet XI), which is a remarkable parallel to the story of Noah's Flood in Genesis. The final section, which describes the world after death, is a literal translation from a Sumerian poem.

Anastaplo believes that fundamentally the poem is about how Gilgamesh faces up to eros (associated with the female element) and death (associated with the male element). "The female is again and again presented *in* this story as the source of critical instruction and help. This may point up the importance of the erotic as life-serving. Are women particularly life-giving and hence death-averting? Does not the male element in this story tend to be identified more with death and destruction?" (*MT*, 297)

In contrast to brute animals, only human beings can know erotic yearning or awareness of mortality, because both require a uniquely human capacity for reflecting on the meaning of life and death (*MT*, 295). The story of Gilgamesh has a universal appeal because its depiction of how a man faces his eroticism and mortality evokes unfathomable mysteries for all human beings. In becoming reconciled to the erotic, Gilgamesh must learn to control his self-indulgent sexuality and to comprehend the life-affirming activities of women and family life. In becoming reconciled to death, he must learn to accept the inevitability of death and to contribute to those social and political institutions that might live on after his death. Learning such lessons seems more difficult for men than for women. Men must endure heroic ordeals to learn what women have always known by common sense.

Moreover, what a man like Gilgamesh can be made to learn is limited, because he is not philosophical. For Anastaplo, Gilgamesh's lack of understanding is indicated by his reconciliation to death (*MT*, 293, 295-96). His final acceptance of death *shows* a hopelessness or even desperation that one would not see in someone like Socrates

with a philosophic understanding of the nature of death. If death is like a dreamless sleep—a cessation of consciousness that we can experience without feeling any pain or regret—then for those who can reflect philosophically on their experience, death should not matter. The inevitability of death should only deepen the erotic joy in life for those who truly understand the way things are.

The erotic affirmation of life, which is associated with the female element of human nature, is most fully expressed in the life of the mind as lived by philosophic friends (*MT*, 310-11). The Mesopotamians, however, allowed their pursuit of the erotic to be diverted into an extreme devotion to sexuality—as is evident, for example, in their institution of temple-harlotry (*MT*, 293-94, 308-9). Just as scalping among the American Indians shows their poor management of male aggressiveness, temple-harlotry among the Mesopotamians shows their poor management of male sexuality. In both cases, the fundamental difficulty is civilizing the natural desires of men, and thus these divergent ways of life are responding to a problem created by nature itself.

Nature shapes the traditions of a people not only through natural human desires but also through the natural features of the physical environment. Anastaplo speculates on the possibility that the harshness and unpredictability of climactic conditions in the Mesopotamian region may have shaped manners and customs in ways that are reflected in Mesopotamian poetry and religion (*MT*, 307-308). If this kind of explanation were true, then cultural diversity across regions of the world would show not the absence of natural standards, as is commonly assumed by cultural relativists, but human responses to the variability of natural conditions. This would confirm Aristotle's claim that what is naturally right changes to conform to the changeable conditions of life.<sup>3</sup> This natural variability in human social behavior can be studied scientifically through behavioral ecology—the biological study of how human beings and other animals adapt flexibly to the variable circumstances of their social and physical environment.<sup>4</sup>

If the differing circumstances of life can explain, at least in part, why one people promotes the appetite for warlike rivalry, while

another people promotes the appetite for sexual gratification, there might also be special circumstances in which a people would want to suppress all appetites. If so, then one must wonder what kind of circumstances would explain the popular appeal of Buddhism, with its celebration of radical self-abnegation.

### Buddhist Thought

Siddhartha Gautama, who came to be recognized as the Buddha (the Enlightened One) and as the founder of the Buddhist movement, was born into a royal family in the sixth century B.C. in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. He was raised as a prince in luxury and sheltered from suffering. At age 29, he left the palace grounds in a chariot to see more of the world. On successive trips, he saw an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a monk in yellow robes. From the first three sights, he learned of the inevitability of suffering and death. In the serenity of the monk, he saw the only escape from the pain of life. Deciding to leave the palace, as well as his wife and child, he renounced all worldly pleasures in becoming a wandering ascetic. Yet when his asceticism drove him near to death from starvation, he decided to pursue a life of contemplative self-control that would be a middle way between the life of pleasure and the life of asceticism. He gave institutional form to his way of life by establishing a monastic order. The primary texts of Buddhist thought consist of stories about Gautama and his teachings.

Gautama's fundamental teaching is that life is suffering, and the only escape from suffering is through a selfless denial of the desires or passions that make one vulnerable to suffering. "At the core of the Buddhist position," Anastaplo believes, is the denial of any considerable goodness of human life on earth (or of any life anywhere?), so long as *life* does mean change, disintegration, and death (and, perhaps also, the awareness of those gloomy prospects for others as well)" (*BT*, 230). Against this teaching, Anastaplo argues that it is unnatural because it denies the natural grasp of the goodness of existence. Thus, Buddhism has no proper understanding of nature.

It is true, of course, as Gautama saw, that there is much pain and disappointment in life, and death is inevitable. But sensible people

do not have to infer from this that happiness in life is impossible. As Aristotle said, human beings by nature find a sweetness in existence that inclines them to affirm life despite the misery that life often brings them.' This natural sense leads both Socratic philosophy and Biblical religion to affirm the goodness of life on earth. The asceticism of Christianity is not as extreme as that of Buddhism. "The Buddhist's fundamental problem is with life itself, while the Christian's is with life in one's earthly body, something which should be easier to deal with than any thorough repudiation of existence itself" (*BT*, 243).

Gautama appeals to some elements of the human soul while neglecting others. He promotes gentleness and compassion, perhaps in reaction to the violence and exploitation that he saw in his society, but he denies the spiritedness necessary for justice and courage (*BT*, 234). Gautama thus seems to have had, at best, only a partial grasp of the natural whole.

Anastaplo argues that Gautama's belief in reincarnation made it impossible for him to properly understand nature. The common acceptance of reincarnation in the Hindu society of his time may have created a hopelessness from which Gautama's teaching of self-annihilation may have provided the only escape. But Anastaplo sees no good reason why any thoughtful person has to believe in reincarnation. His arguments against reincarnation are not completely clear, however. "Is it significant that routine reincarnations rarely occur to us in the West as something to be taken seriously? We can suspect why so many could come to believe in it, if it is *not so*. But can we understand how so many who have heard again and again of reincarnation could fail to take it at all seriously, if it is so?" (*BT*, 236) Although Socrates does seem to take reincarnation seriously in Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo*, Anastaplo claims, without much explanation, that these Platonic references to reincarnation are only "tentative stories which are enlisted in the service of philosophy" (*BT*, 245). Anastaplo also observes that "the doctrine of reincarnations does not keep many (most?) of the faithful from taking death much as we do in the West" (*BT*, 246).

The implausibility of reincarnation and related doctrines leads



Anastaplo to wonder whether Gautama taught some things that he did not himself believe. He might have had a esoteric teaching that he concealed from most people because he thought they would not understand it properly. If Gautama did have a secret teaching, Anastaplo suspects it was his view of the abyss-of the radical groundlessness of nature-that anticipated Friedrich Nietzsche and modern nihilism (*BT*, 237-39). If Gautama believed that nothing endures, everything is in flux, and so there can be no permanent ground in nature for human purpose, because nature is indifferent to human concerns, then Gautama would be part of a nihilistic tradition of thought that stretches from ancient Gnosticism to modern existentialism and postmodernism.'

Nihilism is the radical alternative to Anastaplo's naturalism. While Anastaplo assumes that human happiness comes from fulfilling the natural desires and capacities of the human soul in conformity with the order of nature as a whole, the nihilist asserts that human yearnings for meaning and purpose find no satisfaction in nature. For Anastaplo the fullest human life comes from the discovery of nature's norms as understood by the human mind. For the nihilist the fullest human life comes from the creation of meaning out of a meaningless nature as imposed by the human will, Anastaplo's appeal to natural right presupposes a teleological conception of nature, such that human beings are by nature endowed with ends *or* purposes, and the human good is the satisfaction of those natural ends or purposes. Nihilism makes natural right impossible by denying natural teleology. Consequently, Anastaplo is sympathetic to religious traditions-such as those rooted in the Bible-that can be interpreted as supporting a teleological view of nature, while he is deeply suspicious of those religious traditions-such as Buddhism-that deny the purposefulness of nature.

### **Hindu Thought**

The *Bhagavad Gita*, a religious poem composed around 300 B.C., is a small part of a massive collection of Sanskrit texts that are fundamental for Hindu thought. Two great ruling families, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, are fighting one another for political

dominance. Arjuna, one of the Pandava brothers, is about to lead a great battle against the Kauravas, but he doubts the justice of the war. Krishna, his charioteer, convinces him to fight by instructing him in spiritual wisdom. Krishna eventually reveals himself as Vishnu, the divine Lord of the Universe. The most famous part of the poem is when Arjuna is granted a wondrous Vision of the god as the supreme monotheistic deity. As read by Anastaplo, the paramount theological teaching of the *Gita* is that the god is the source of all that exists, and the paramount moral teaching is that one should do one's duty as determined by the social circumstances of one's birth.

The monotheistic theology of the *Gita* suggests that the polytheism common among the Hindus is defective, because only those people with a full understanding of things can see beyond the evident variety in the world to grasp the deeper unity that is truly divine (*HT*, 268-69). The highest insight for a human being is to see that whatever exists depends on the constant work of the god to prevent everything from falling into chaos (*HT*, 271).

The dutiful work of the god should teach each human being about the importance of doing one's own duty. Each must perform whatever duties are assigned by one's family and social class. Thus the warrior sees that he must kill the enemy because his circumstances give him no choice. To do one's duty, it seems, is to follow the dictates of law or custom for someone in one's social position (*HT*, 269-71).

Although Anastaplo recognizes the importance of customary duties, he thinks the moral teaching of the *Gita* is defective in stressing subordination and piety to the exclusion of virtue, in the traditional Aristotelian sense, as aiming at what is truly good for one rather than just what is customary. He wonders whether the pious dutifulness of the *Gita* reflects and encourages an excessive passivity in the life of India (*HT*, 270-72).

Anastaplo is impressed, however, by the monotheistic theology of the *Gita*, because he believes that the most serious thought about the divine must ultimately be monotheistic. "When, for example, it is determined by a people what is and what is not divine, is not a standard drawn upon which is implicitly monotheistic? And does not

such a standard depend on some awareness of *being* and of the natural?" (*HT*, 282)

Nevertheless, Anastaplo thinks the monotheism of the *Gita* is defective insofar as it denies nature. "To say that the god must keep working to prevent chaos means, in effect, that there is no *nature*" (*HT*, 272); Nature—at least in the Western understanding of the term—is the permanent order of the world, which does not require the constant working of a god. So when translators of the *Gita* use the word "nature," they show that they have not thought through the deepest meaning of the text.

The god in the *Gita* does seem to be guided by a sense of order in deciding how the world should be organized, and this sense of order suggests a tacit appeal to nature. But such a tacit grasp of nature falls short of the deliberate reflection required for genuine philosophy. Strictly speaking, therefore, philosophy—the fully self-conscious examination of nature—does not exist in ancient Hindu thought.

As we have seen already, there is an ambiguity here in Anastaplo's understanding of the relationship between divinity and nature. On the one hand, he believes that the divine is most properly understood as the one ultimate source of all order. On the other hand, he believes that nature is most properly understood as the permanent and self-contained order of the universe, which does not depend on divine effort. His affirmation of nature as the ultimate ground of order seems to contradict his affirmation of divinity as the ultimate ground of order.

### Confucian Thought

Confucius was a Chinese sage who is thought to have died in 479 B.C. Although he probably wrote no books himself, his sayings and teachings were collected and edited by his followers. The major text of Confucian thought is the *Analects*. Confucianism is primarily a system of ethical precepts for the proper organization of society that stresses the importance of filial duties and the mutual obligations between superiors and subordinates. Much of what Confucius teaches, Anastaplo observes, can be found in Aristotle's account of

the moral virtues in the first five books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but there is nothing in the *Analects* to correspond to Aristotle's account of the intellectual virtues in the last five books of the *Ethics* (CT, 150).

Anastaplo sees in the teachings of Confucius a devotion to moral character in everyday life as supported by rituals, family life, and traditional customs. Confucius insists on meticulous conformity to traditional ceremonies-as in burial rituals and other signs of respect for one's ancestors. Such ceremonies enforce moderation and decency. Although Anastaplo recognizes the salutary moral effects of such a teaching, he wonders why Confucius shows so little interest in the origins and purposes of the ritual observances that are so crucial to the Confucian way of life. Confucius says nothing about the supernatural or life after death that would give transcendent meaning to the rituals. In fact, some readers have suspected that Confucius was an atheist (CT, 148-49, 159, 161, 165). Nor does he give any utilitarian explanation of the rituals. It seems that respect for rituals-any rituals-is so important for social order that determining and judging the origins and purposes of the rituals appears dangerous, because such rational examination might cast doubt on the rituals that happen to be established among a people.

Thus, Confucius seems to have no interest in the "big questions"-the creation of the universe, the origin of man, the meaning of life and death. One explanation for this would be that he was such an utterly practical man that such questions seemed useless (at best) or disruptive (at worst) for his project of enforcing good conduct. It might be best-at least for most people-to conform to the decent customs of their ancestors without troubling themselves with questions about the absolute correctness of those customs.

If Confucius was more interested in tradition than in nature, if he had no interest in the ultimate nature of things, then, Anastaplo infers, he was not a philosopher. Insofar as philosophy requires some explicit notion of nature, the absence of the idea of nature in the texts of Confucius and other Chinese thinkers indicates the absence of philosophy in ancient China (CT, 125-28, 131, 138, 142-44, 150-54, 166). If philosophy is the deliberate attempt to under-

stand the nature of the whole, then there can be no philosophy where there *is* not even any conception of the natural whole.

Nevertheless, Anastaplo sees an implicit and tacit understanding of nature in some of the Confucian teachings. The recognition of the importance of family life, for example, reflects some grasp of the familial nature of human beings (CT, 152, 159, 167). More than that, Anastaplo sees in the *Analects* evidence of a philosophic mind in the work of the editor who organized the text as *we* now have it. Beneath the apparently disordered surface of the text, Anastaplo sees an ordered arrangement of the Confucian sayings that intimates philosophic concerns. Moreover, that the first saying of *the Analects* points to the pleasure in learning should alert the careful reader that the editor of this text may have understood the claims of the philosophic life as the highest life (CT, 142-43, 154, 157-58, 169-70).

Another possibility, however, is that Confucius was himself a philosopher who thought deeply about the nature of things, but he chose to conceal his philosophizing because he thought this would only promote nihilistic despair. Anastaplo wonders: "Did he fear, and not without some justification, that if men insist upon raising fundamental questions, they will find themselves looking into an abyss-that they might indeed find answers, but not answers they can live with? Did Confucius glimpse the abyss which Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, found mankind suspended over? But being himself of a different temperament-a more cheerful and practical temperament-Confucius; could 'step back'?" (CT, 151-52)

Anastaplo's speculation about the possibility that Confucius was a Nietzschean philosopher, which resembles his speculation about Gautama's nihilism, indicates a difficulty for Anastaplo's argument. He commonly assumes that any failure to grasp the idea of nature shows an absence of philosophic understanding. But his references to the nihilism of Nietzschean philosophy suggest that one might be a philosopher and yet conclude from one's philosophic inquiries that there is no natural order to things-that ultimately there is only chaotic flux-and therefore all order is created by the human mind *or* will as a artful contrivance necessary for human life.

## Islamic Thought

Muhammad, the founding prophet of Islam, was born in Mecca around 570 and died in Medina in 632. After his prophetic call in about 610, he began to preach what he believed had been revealed to him as the word of God. By the time of his death, he had united most of the Arabian tribes under his leadership. After his death, his separate revelations were collected and organized as the Koran, the holy book of Islam. The Koran consists of verses organized into 114 chapters called suras. The organization of the suras is unclear, except that the longer ones come at the beginning of the book and shorter ones at the end. Although most people who read the Koran in translation find it dull and incoherent, those who know Arabic commonly speak of the captivating power of its poetic style.

Anastaplo's great respect for Muhammad and the Koran is evident. While Anastaplo often claims that non-Western texts and authors lack the philosophic understanding that expresses the highest part of the human soul, he suggests that Muhammad was a philosophic prophet, or at least that he came as close as any human being ever has to the union of philosophy and prophecy. Although Anastaplo never explicitly identifies Muhammad as a philosopher, he implicitly invites the reader to draw that conclusion.

This is suggested even by the epigram at the beginning of Anastaplo's paper on Muhammad. It is a quotation from Leo Strauss summarizing the teaching of Moses Maimonides about the rare skills required for a true prophet, which include "(1) a perfect intellect, (2) perfect morals, (3) a perfect power of imagination, (4) the faculty of daring, (5) the faculty of divination, and (6) the faculty of leadership" (*IT*, 235). In the paper from which this quotation is taken, Strauss indicates that Maimonides took this view of prophecy as combining intellectual, moral, and poetic perfection from the Islamic Aristotelians, particularly Avicenna and Alfarabi.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the reference to Strauss's account of Maimonides' teaching about prophecy intimates that Islam and the Koran might manifest, or at least permit, the union of philosophy and revelation (*IT*, 237, 242, 249, 256-57, 261-62, 270-71, 277, 281). This could be so even if

Muhammad's prophetic gifts did not include a "perfect intellect" (*IT*, 264, 271, 276).

If philosophy is the attempt to understand the universe as conforming to the idea of nature—that is, as a rational order governed by intelligible principles that are universal—then Muhammad's religion is philosophic insofar as it supports the idea of nature and is therefore "a kind of natural religion" (*IT*, 282). Anastaplo's remarks suggest that Muhammad's teaching displays at least three features that characterize a natural religion. Muhammad insists on a pure monotheism. He does not rely on miracles. And he appeals to the everyday human experience of natural order as the manifestation of the divine.'

As an alternative to the tribal polytheism that Muhammad found in Arabia, the Koran teaches a "determined monotheism" (*IT*, 238, 266-69). On this point, Muhammad follows the lead of Judaism, which was the first great departure from the polytheism that had previously dominated the world, and Christianity, another offshoot of Judaism. 'Anastaplo often praises Biblical religion as promoting a more sound understanding of things than is the case for other religious traditions (*BT*, 231, 243; *CT*, 156, 166; *HT*, 282, 284; *MT*, 301; *NAIT*, 278), which leads him to praise Muhammad for adopting the best elements of the Bible. More than that, Anastaplo even suggests that Muhammad was more relentless in his monotheism than either Judaism or Christianity. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, in particular, is rejected by Muhammad as obscuring the absolute oneness of God that is the core of true religion. Jesus was a special servant of God, but Jesus was not divine (*IT*, 239, 262-64, 276). God must be one, unchanging, perfect, and consequently intelligible but not anything grasped by the senses. This can be understood by anyone who thinks clearly about what God must be like, Anastaplo explains, as is evident in Plato's correction of the Homeric presentation of the gods (*IT*, 263, 277). Thus, Anastaplo implies that Muhammad's monotheism resembles the Platonic conception of the divine.

Like Plato, Muhammad did not rely on miracles, although he did make use of the miracles associated with Judaism and Christianity in

earlier times (*IT*, 242-47, 256). The only distinctive miracle claimed by Muhammad was the miracle of the Koran as a text of inimitable beauty (*IT*, 270). To demands for miraculous signs to confirm his message, he insisted that the natural order of the universe itself should testify to the truth of his monotheism. He even warned his followers to accept his mortality *as* a human being like themselves, *so* that after his death they should worship not Muhammad but Muhammad's God (*IT*, 255).

Thus, the evidence for Muhammad's religion comes not from irregular breaks in the order of nature but from the regular experience of rational design in nature itself. "Muhammad is very much moved by the wonders of everyday life-by birth and growth, by death, and by the wholeness of things...things make sense: cause and effect, moral as well as physical, govern the universe. Chance is ruled out in the world, as is arbitrariness" (*IT*, 246). *So* firm is Muhammad *in* affirming the unbroken order of cause and effect in nature that he sometimes seems to deny free will (*IT*, 273-74).

One manifestation in Mohammad's teaching of natural causal order is his emphasis on family life and relations between men and women (*IT*, 250-51, 254-55, 278-80). He recognizes sexual desire as *a* powerful inclination that needs to be regulated *to* maintain stable families and to tame potential conflicts between *men*. Although Islam is often criticized by proponents of "women's rights" for promoting male dominance of women, Anastaplo suspects that Muhammad may have gone as far as his circumstances permitted in ameliorating the condition of women. Anastaplo observes, however, that "Islam does seem, to the typical Westerner, to subjugate women to an unnatural rule" (*IT*, 280).

In its monotheistic denial of polytheistic multiplicity, in its refusal to rely on miraculous signs, and in its affirmation of the causal order in everyday experience, Muhammad's conception of the divine, Anastaplo believes, gives poetic or imaginative expression to our rational grasp of the universal order of the whole. Anastaplo calls that a "natural religion," because it promotes a worship of God that conforms to *a* Socratic understanding of nature. The project in Plato's *Republic* for *a* Socratic correction of Homeric polytheism



seems to have been fulfilled—at least partially, in the Koran.

This reading of the Koran does not require that Muhammad fully understood what he was doing. "This does not mean...that a prophet, any more than a poet, need be fully aware of what he is up to. Even if Muhammad 'meant' a physical heaven and a physical hell in his sermons, that may not have been what God truly made manifest through him. Was Muhammad whether prophet or poet, himself aware of what he meant?" (*IT*, 249) If Islam is a natural religion, then any teaching about a physical heaven and a physical hell, which would transcend natural human experience, must be dismissed as a product of confusion. Does this imply that a Socratic philosopher would understand Muhammad's true teaching better than he would himself? If so, then it would seem that there was nothing in Muhammad's natural religion that was not already comprehensible to the Socratic philosopher—that natural religion is simply a poetic presentation of an understanding of nature that a philosopher could acquire by reason without any need for religion. The religious believer might respond by complaining that this too easily dismisses the possibility that religious experience introduces insights that could not be known by reason alone. ,

This possibility is even suggested by Anastaplo when he compares Muhammad to Isaac Newton.

The success of Newton's achievement made his work the basis of modern physical science down to our time. Is this not like Muhammad? Men have been thinking about nature for a very long time; similarly, men have been thinking about God for a very long time. The two inquiries may even be the same quest—into being and the basis of being—but with different standards or evidence relied upon in each case. Muhammad himself records that God had spoken of the flawlessness of heaven in this way: "[Have the unbelievers] not beheld heaven above them, how We have built it, and decked it out fair, and it has no cracks?" (*IT*, 237)

How can the inquiry into nature or "being" be the same as the inquiry into God or "the basis of being?" If nature depends upon

some divine "basis" beyond nature itself, does that mean that philosophy as the study of nature depends on revelation to reveal the supernatural ground of nature? If philosophic reason and prophetic revelation require "different standards or evidence," how can they find any common ground? If the "basis of being" is more fundamental than "being," does that mean that the prophetic knowledge of God is superior to the philosophic knowledge of nature? What exactly does it mean to speak of God as the "basis of being"? Does this mean that nature or "being" is not eternal, because it originated in God as First Cause? Did God create nature *ex nihilo*? If so, is this creation *ex nihilo* comprehensible to philosophic reason? Is there any evidence that the Socratic philosophers pondered such an idea? Or is the idea of creation *ex nihilo* a novel insight introduced by the Bible? Does the novelty of this Biblical idea illustrate the dependence of reason on faith?

Even Strauss, in the study of Maimonides' account of prophets quoted by Anastaplo, speaks of Maimonides' claim that "the prophet has command over insights that are not accessible to mere philosophical knowledge." The clearest example of this is the question of whether the world is eternal or created. Aristotle cannot demonstrate that the world is eternal, and thus the teaching of the Biblical prophet that the world was created *ex nihilo* cannot be refuted by the philosopher.<sup>9</sup> The God of the Koran, as the Creator, "is the only One Who can say that something should *be* and *it is*" (IT, 248). Some scholars see in this Biblical teaching of Creation out of nothing a distinction between essence (*what* things are) and existence (*that* things are) that was not available to the human mind prior to the Bible.<sup>10</sup>

For the Platonic philosopher, what is truly real about anything is its essence or intelligible form-what it is. Yet the Biblical distinction between essence and existence suggests that an essence in itself is merely a possible being: knowing what something is gives us no certainty that it had to exist as it is. All things come into being and pass away, with no necessity that any particular being should exist as it is. The only Necessary Being is God, because only God is eternal. Everything else is perishable, and therefore exists not in

itself but in God as Creator.

Augustine expresses this thought in his *Confessions* (book 7, chapter 11), in a passage quoted by Anastaplo:

I considered all the other things that are of a lower order than yourself [God], and I saw that they have not absolute being in themselves, nor are they entirely without being. They are real insofar as they have their being from you, but unreal in the sense that they are not what you are. For it is only that which remains in being without change that truly is (*BT*, 246).

The Islamic philosopher Avicenna developed a similar thought from the Koran's teaching that God alone has eternal existence, and everything else exists only contingently by God's Creation.'

Of course, even if the Socratic philosopher cannot demonstrate that the world is eternal, Anastaplo might respond, neither can the Biblical believer demonstrate that the world is not eternal but dependent on the eternal God. Strauss says that Maimonides and the Islamic philosophers begin from an "un-Platonic presupposition" - "the *fact* of Revelation is established."<sup>12</sup> Anastaplo says that philosophy "presupposes" the eternity of the universe (*BT*, 238). On this fundamental question of whether the world is or is not eternal, which would seem to decide the debate between Socratic philosophy and Biblical religion, are we forced to choose between two competing presuppositions, neither of which can be demonstrated?

#### Hume and Anastaplo

In assuming the eternity of the universe as a necessary presupposition of philosophy, and thus denying the Biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, Anastaplo agrees with David Hume. Indeed, although I see no evidence of Hume's direct influence on Anastaplo, the many points of agreement in their accounts of religion and philosophy are remarkable.<sup>13</sup>

Like Anastaplo, Hume finds the ultimate ground of understanding in nature as the intelligible order of the whole, and he finds the ultimate ground of morality in human nature as expressing a natural moral sense. Like Anastaplo, Hume looks to philosophy-the self-

conscious study of nature-as the highest activity for human beings, although it is fully attainable only by a few. He also believes, with Anastaplo, that the philosopher will die like Socrates with no fear of death and thus with no need for immortality in an afterlife. Like Anastaplo, Hume thinks prudence is required in judging how nature can best be served in the variable circumstances of human history. And like Anastaplo, Hume regards modern science-the methodical study of causal regularity in nature-as one of the great achievements of Western civilization as founded on the Greek study of nature.

As a result of these points of agreement, Anastaplo and Hume also agree that the only true religion-the religion that is not distorted by superstition or fanaticism-is "natural religion." This "natural religion" is distinguished by three features. First, it is relentlessly monotheistic, because it finds divinity in the ordered unity of being or nature. Second, it does not require or permit miracles, because it affirms the order of nature as unbroken causal regularity. Finally, the only attributes of divinity are those that can be inferred by natural reason from ordinary human experience.

In this "natural religion," the natural world is neither created' nor preserved by divine will, because the order of the material universe is assumed to be eternal, and thus God's activity is assumed to be guided by a sense of natural order. Although the eternity of the universe cannot demonstrated, neither can the creation of the universe from nothing be demonstrated. All rational explanations, Anastaplo and Hume suggest, rest on unexplained presuppositions, and ultimately all explanation presupposes the observable order of the world as the final ground of explanation that cannot itself be explained. Since human beings have no experience of the world as coming into being out of nothing, we cannot infer creation *ex nihilo* from our experience, and thus we have no good reason to doubt that the fundamental order of the world must always be as it is.

Hume's religious critics complained that his "natural religion" was not a religion at all, that his theism was the same as atheism, because his insistence on the self-sufficiency of human experience in the natural world denied any appeal to the supernatural. By

denying the reality of miracles and the immortality of the soul, and then affirming the sufficiency of natural human experience for the moral and intellectual life of human beings, it appeared that Hume had left no place for genuine religion. Anastaplo would seem to be exposed to the same criticism.

Anastaplo and Hume seem to agree that human life is good as a natural end in itself and not as a means to some supernatural end. Here they follow the lead of Aristotle in denying that human happiness is a gift of the gods (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1099b8-24). As human beings we must take care of ourselves, and in doing that our only resources are those that come to us as rational animals naturally adapted for living out our lives on the earth. If so, this would deny the fundamental claim of Biblical religion that as human beings we cannot be fully satisfied by *any* earthly good, because, unlike any other animals, we have transcendent longings that point beyond earthly life.

Is religion justified, for Anastaplo and Hume, only as a "noble lie"-as conveying the lessons of nature through poetic imagery to that great multitude of people who cannot grasp those lessons by philosophic understanding? One example of this might be the effectiveness of religious stories and prescriptions about male-female differences in conveying important lessons about the sexual nature of human beings.

### **The Nature of Sex *in* Non-Western Thought**

We have seen how Anastaplo's studies of non-Western thought display seven major themes: (1) the superiority of ancient Greek thought in its grasp of (2) nature, (3) natural right, (4) philosophy, (5) prudence, (6) science, and (7) natural religion. We have also considered some of the criticisms of Anastaplo's position. In summarizing how Anastaplo might respond to those criticisms, we can use one of his minor, but important, themes-the nature of the differences between men and women-to illustrate his response. In developing this theme, we can draw from Anastaplo's essay on "Women and the Law."<sup>4</sup>

Each of the non-Western traditions of thought studied by

Anastaplo recognizes differences between men and women. No religious tradition can ignore the crucial importance of family life for human beings, and family life brings into view the natural differences between men and women. The stability of the family requires taming the male inclination to aggressiveness to serve the female inclination to child-care. (As suggested in Book 5 of Plato's Republic, promoting the absolute equality of male and female would require the abolition of the family.) So although there is great cultural diversity in the handling of male and female roles, there is a recurrent pattern that reflects natural differences. For example, the need to manage the propensity of young males to predatory violence and the need to protect women who are vulnerable to male violence are universal requirements for any stable society.

The nihilistic denial of nature would mean that human beings are absolutely malleable in their sexual identity, that differences between male and female are purely conventional or cultural, and therefore there is no limit in nature to the power of custom in shaping sexual behavior. If this were so, it would not be possible, for example, to reasonably consider the question of whether Islam promotes an "unnatural rule" of men over women (*IT*, 280), because there would be no standards of natural right and prudential judgment in determining sexual roles. Anastaplo believes such nihilism is foolish, and its foolishness is suggested by the fact that no enduring tradition of thought has ever adopted this view fully. If Anastaplo is right, even Muhammad was able to see the need to defend women against Arab customs that were unnaturally oppressive.

Anastaplo believes that women's "role in the bearing and rearing of children...will always remain, nature being what she is, the most satisfying life for most women. Perhaps as a consequence, women tend to be "more practical, more sensible, less detached, than men," and thus they "have always 'known better' than to sacrifice intimate associations by losing themselves, as men are more apt to do, in ascetic isolation or in philosophical pursuits."<sup>15</sup> This life-affirming character of the female is recognized in the *Gilgamesh* epic and in other non-Western texts. Moreover, the fanatical self-abnegation of Gautama-and of monastic practices generally-may reflect the

self-destructive inclinations of the male. Similarly, the honor-loving warrior spirit of North American Indian life shows a male propensity that can be useful if properly channeled but dangerous if not.

Non-Western traditions show a recognition of male-female differences based on commonsense human experience that does not require a fully explicit awareness or study of nature. The Greek tradition of philosophic and scientific inquiry into nature, by contrast, permits investigation of the natural causes of sexual differences. "Child-bearing and the hormonal and other physiological differences related to the child-bearing capacity of women," Anastaplo believes, "have profound consequences for the female psyche."<sup>16</sup> Modern natural science, particularly modern biology, can reveal the causal processes that shape sexual differences as well as other facets of human nature."

Although it is commonly assumed that modern science refutes any conception of natural right by denying teleology and affirming the fact-value distinction, this is not necessarily true, at least for the modern biological study of living phenomena. Even if the physical sciences deny any teleological conception of the universe, it can be argued that the life sciences presuppose an immanent teleology in the goal-directed processes of living beings.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the study of the goal-directed phenomena of life must employ functional concepts that implicitly distinguish between good (healthy) and bad (diseased) states of an organism, so that there may be no clear distinction between facts and values. Even David Hume, who is often assumed to have developed the dichotomy between facts and values, argued that moral distinctions manifested a moral sense that was rooted in human nature.<sup>19</sup> Thus, modern natural science can deepen our understanding of what is good and bad for men and women by exploring the causal processes that shape their natural desires and capacities.

Even without modern science, however, Anastaplo believes we could learn about the nature of men and women by studying religious texts such as the Old Testament. Such a text implicitly conveys a grasp of nature, which thus reflects "natural religion," insofar as it is "rooted in the life of this world, at least to the extent

that it reflects traditional experience not only among the ancient Israelites but also around the world."<sup>20</sup>

As we have seen, the Biblical teaching of Creation *ex nihilo*, which is expressed in the Koran as well as the Old Testament, denies the eternity of nature. But this may not make much difference in practice for our appeals to nature as a norm. Even if the nature of men and women arose from some contingent act of Creation by God, that nature is no less real for as long as it exists.

We could say the same thing about the Darwinian teaching that living nature has arisen from a contingent process of evolution. Even if species are not eternally fixed, but have evolved from ancestral species, that does not make them any less real during the time of their existence. That human beings came into existence at all and that they came into existence as the kind of beings they are—male and female—may be contingent outcomes of evolutionary history. But that human beings now exist, and exist with the nature they have, means that we can judge as good whatever conforms to their nature, and as bad whatever does not. As Aristotle says in response to Plato, "the Idea of the Good will not be any more good because it is eternal, seeing that a white thing that lasts for a long time is not whiter than a white thing that lasts for a day."

Something good for us because it serves a natural human need is no less good if our species survives for only a few million years. If a huge meteorite were to collide with the earth tomorrow and kill us all, wouldn't we still have to say it was good while it lasted?

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### Notes

1. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 81-120.

2. For this argument, see Stanley L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1134b17-35a5; *Politics*, 1288b10-89a25.



4. See J.R. Krebs and N.B. Davies, *An Introduction to Behavioural Ecology*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1993); Eric Alden Smith and Bruce Winterhalder, eds., *Evolutionary Ecology and Human Behavior* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992); and Leslie A. Real, ed., *Behavioral Mechanisms in Evolutionary Ecology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

5. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1100b8-1101a22, 1170a13-b19; *Politics* 1278b23-31.

6. The possible connections between Buddhism, Gnosticism, and nihilism are considered in Guy Richard Welbon's *The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1968), which Anastaplo cites. That modern nihilism emerges from the tradition of Gnosticism is argued by Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

7. Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Essays Toward the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors*, trans. by Fred Baumann (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), 81-110.

8. Another indication for Anastaplo that Muhammad's religion is rational and thus natural is the importance of numbers and numerical organization in the Koran. Eighteen seems to be an important number for the Koran (*IT*, 237, 262). Anastaplo also suspects that the arrangement of the 114 suras is significant (*IT*, 241). There are 114 footnotes to Anastaplo's paper on the Koran. The central footnotes refer to the central suras and the central verses of the Koran (*IT*, 270-73). Anastaplo's 58th footnote is the longest of his footnotes.

9. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 85. See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 281-93, 321-22.

10. This has been argued by Etienne Gilson in *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936) and *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952).

11. See Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 74-82.

12. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 106.

13. See David Hume, *Writings on Religion*, edited by Antony

Flew (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1992); and Stephen Miller, "The Death of Hume," *The Wilson Quarterly* 19 (summer 1995): 30-39.

14. This essay appears in Anastaplo's *The American Moralists* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), 349-63, in a section of the book on "Nature and Revelation."

15. Anastaplo, "Women and the Law," 357, 360.

16. *Ibid.*, 356.

17. See Donald Symons, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Doreen Kimura, "Sex Differences in the Brain," *Scientific American* 267 (September 1992), 118-25; and Larry Arnhart, "A Sociobiological Defense of Aristotle's Sexual Politics," *International Political Science Review* 15 (1994), 389-415.

18. See James G. Lennox, "Teleology," in *Keywords in Evolutionary Biology*, ed. by Evelyn Fox Keller and Elisabeth A. Lloyd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Lennox, "Darwin was a Teleologist," *Biology & Philosophy* 8 (1993), 409-21. Anastaplo may be right in claiming that modern scientists tend to ignore the presuppositions of their work, presuppositions that are grounded in our prescientific, commonsense experience, of the nature of things. Yet is not this more likely to be true for the physical sciences than for the biological sciences? Is not the biologist forced to confront the natural purposefulness of living beings? In fact, Anastaplo suggests that the most evident manifestations of nature are biological: birth and death, the growth of plants and animals to maturity, sexuality, family life, and the ranking of animals according to their cognitive capacities. See Anastaplo, *The Artist as Thinker: From Shakespeare to Joyce* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1983), 8, 20-25, 67, 84, 91, 96-98, 112, 122, 127-29, 156, 175, 178, 204, 221, 267, 305, 320, 357-63, 446, 483-85.

19. See Larry Arnhart, "The New Darwinian Naturalism in Political Theory," *American Political Science Review* 89 (June 1995).

20. Anastaplo, "Women and the Law," 354.

21. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096b3-5.