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**Soteriology, Eschatology and Theodicy:  
A Weberian Analysis of Value-commitments in Christianity, Islam  
and Judaism**

Abstract

This paper provides an ideal typical characterization of the value commitments dominant within Islam, Christianity and Judaism in terms of a Weberian analysis of fundamental building blocks of religiosity. I contrast Christian soteriology, grounded in both natural law and original sin, with Islamic eschatology, grounded moral voluntarism and in fitra, the constitution of women and men that leads them naturally to God, with Judaic theodicy, grounded in natural law and the understanding that people have the capacity to act in ways meriting “salvation.” Original sin means that Christian, on her own, has the capacity to be saved. God sacrificed his Son to enable salvation; people are saved, or not, through God's grace (soteriology). In contrast, Muslims believe themselves, with the guidance of God’s revelation, the Qur’an, and the Sunna, the Prophet’s words and exemplary actions as set down in the codified Hadith, capable of acting in ways meriting salvation. In Islam, the orthoprax requirement to act in accordance with God’s decrees, possible but nonetheless difficult to fulfill, results in a judgment of the individual’s merit on the last day that may result in salvation, (eschatology). Moral voluntarism, the belief that God’s actions and expectations define justice, inhibits the need for a theodicy. Whatever God does is a manifestation of justice; in consequence, sufferers must presume that God is acting justly. It is only a notion of natural law, an understanding of justice that persons are capable of knowing independently of revelation, which regulates God’s actions, which forced into

prominence a consideration of why evil may triumph in the world, why the righteous might suffer (theodicy). This in turn suggests that the presumption that people may be unable to act "justly" (original sin) also reduces the importance of theodicy. In Judaism, the combination of natural law and an understanding of the ability of people to follow the law (no original sin), conduces to the centrality of theodicy. God makes a contract with Jews, and they are able to follow it. When they fail to do so, there is no problem of theodicy when they are punished. When, however, they are punished without cause, or in ways they *know* are unjust (natural law), the problem of theodicy is manifest. While there are many resolutions to this problem in Judaism, the most important is to criticize God for failing to act justly. Among those Jews who do not retreat into scripture, this can lead to a Judaism rationalized to the point where God is no longer integral to a Jewish identity.