

ENGAGING NEW MUSLIM EVOLUTIONISTS Part I

Muzaffar Iqbal

Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Allah be pleased with him, said:

The Messenger of Allah, upon him blessings and peace, said:

“You will most certainly follow the ways of those who came before you, hand span by hand span, arm’s length by arm’s length, so much so that if they entered a lizard’s hole, you would follow them.”

We said, “O Messenger of Allah, [Do you mean] the Jews and the Christians?”

He said, “Who else?”

Bukhārī, al-Iʿtiṣām bi-l-kitāb wa-l-Sunnah

Muslim, K. al-ʿIlm, Itibāʿ sunan al-yahūd wa-l-naṣāra

One hundred and seventy years after the sound and fury surrounding “Darwin’s dangerous idea”, one would expect everything has been said by all sides and there is no further need to write on the subject. Yet, what Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) once said seems to hold true: “Truth, Sir, is a cow that will yield such people no more milk, and so they are gone to milk the bull.”

“Such people” for Samuel Johnson were the skeptics of his time, but in our protean world, “such people” are people of faith who are keeping the Darwin industry afloat.

This time around, the new milking project involves a small group of Muslim evolutionists who are driven by the same old existential necessity that drove the efforts of their precursors in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries: having accepted evolution as received, they need to save their faith from the crushing weight of a Godless universe where life has been evolving on its own for millions of years by inserting the Majestic Hand of Allah Most High in the impregnable schema of evolution. Muslim evolutionists of the previous two centuries invented ingenious ways to do the impossible; they also sought solace in precursorism and brought al-Bīrūnī (d. ca. 1050), al-Jāhiz (d.

868 or 869), even Rūmī (d. 1273) to their aid, claiming they had all proposed evolutionism much before Darwin.

The task of the new converts is, however, harder than their forerunners because now there are battle-hardened guards securing the house of evolution—guards who have already crushed similar Christian attempts to “smuggle God in by the back door”. Nevertheless, this has not deterred the new adherents; here is how a recent attempt tries to open one such back door.

First, there is a clear admission that

in the case of the story of human origins, we have such an explicit narrative, one that is deeply rooted in countless passages throughout the entire Qur’an and numerous Prophetic statements, that there is no choice other than to accept that this is what Allah intended for us to believe. The sheer quantity and diversity of nouns, adjectives, and verbs used simply makes any linguistic re-interpretation (or *ta’wīl*) implausible. Meanwhile, attempts to describe the entire account as symbolic or allegorical (*takhyīl*) may be tempting for some contemporary Muslim scientists, but it leads to logically incoherent theological ramifications and contradicts the Qur’an’s own emphasis that these accounts are literally true narratives (3:62). Developing an epistemologically sound foundation upon which both scriptural and scientific truths work in concert is a far more fruitful endeavor.

And then an attempt is made to install a fancy door in the straight path of the Qur’ānic creation account by verbal gymnastics:

Setting aside debates about their rational plausibility or probability, there is nothing in Islamic scripture that explicitly negates the concepts of abiogenesis, genetic mutation and diversification, natural selection, the existence of hominid species, or a common ancestor for all biological life on earth, excluding only the descendants of Adam. Moreover, one can certainly imagine a scenario wherein hominid species were gradually evolving on earth, and right at the point when evolutionists would predict the emergence of modern humans, God miraculously inserted the children of Adam. Let us suppose that these ‘Adamic species’ are biologically, anatomically, physiologically, and genetically indistinguishable from the would-be species one would have predicted to have emerged based on the preceding population of species in evolutionary history. They appear to occupy the exact same position on the phylogenetic tree.

Proving the non-existence of that for which no evidence of any kind exists is a logical fallacy because proof, logic, reason, thinking, knowledge all pertain to—and deal only with—what exists. Thus, to state that “there is nothing in Islamic scripture that explicitly negates the concepts of abiogenesis, genetic mutation and diversification, natural selection, the existence of hominid

species, or a common ancestor for all biological life on earth” is to ask for proof of a non-existent—which is well-known logical fallacy because the non-existent is nothing and hence it can be proven. The burden of proof rests with the one who makes a positive claim. The positive claim being made here is: “there is nothing in Islamic scripture that explicitly negates”.

Acceptance of evolution, with or without the so-called Adamic exception, rests on sophistry. This position negates First Principles—*taṣdīqāt*—which are self-evident truths and—as Ibn Sīnā tells us—they can only be rejected by the sophist, the perplexed, and the obdurate (*muʿānid*), the last being the most difficult case because such people adhere to no principles and their constant flipping makes it difficult to bring any argument to a logical conclusion; as soon as they see their fallacy, they shift ground. Those who behave in this manner are only interested in believing their own fallacious beliefs.

The absurdity of the ad hoc exceptionalism is self-evident: “there is nothing in Islamic scripture that explicitly negates the concepts of... natural selection ... excluding only the descendants of Adam”, because it is an ad hoc claim for which there exists not an iota of evidence. The Qurʾān not only unambiguously states that Ādam and his partner (*zawj*) were created by Allāh Most High (Q 4:1), it also states that He created the cattle (Q 40:79); He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth; He has made for you from yourselves, mates, and pairs of cattle, thereby multiplying you and there is nothing like unto Him, He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing (Q 42:11). The Qurʾānic creation theme encompasses the entire order of creation: He created the heavens and the earth in truth. He rolls the night up into the day and rolls the day up into the night, and He made the sun and the moon subservient, each revolving a term appointed. Is He not the Mighty, the Forgiving? He created you from a single soul, then made from it its mate, and sent down for you of cattle eight pairs. He creates you in your mothers’ wombs, creation after creation, in threefold darkness. That is God, your Lord; to Him belongs sovereignty. There is no god but He. How, then, are you turned away? (Q 39:5-6)

Most early scholars interpret “sent down for you of cattle eight pairs” in Q 39:6 as “He created for you cattle, in eight pairs”; thus a new-fangled rejection of the opinions of scholars like Saʿīd b. Jubayr (46-95/666-714) and Qatāda b. Dīʿāma (d. 117/735), Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839-923) and Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (600-671/1204-1273) is not difficult to reject.

The mouthful of terms denoting concepts which are said to have not been negated in the Qurʾān include abiogenesis, genetic mutation and diversification, natural selection—none of these have any meaning outside the materialistic evolutionary narrative. Abiogenesis, for instance, refers to life-forms arising on Earth from nonlife some 3.5 billion years ago. Thomas

Huxley (1825–1895), “Darwin’s Bulldog”, who aggressively advocated his theory of evolution, popularized it and since the end of the nineteenth century, the term has been used to refer to self-emergence of living organisms from inert matter. Thus, to claim there is nothing in the Islamic scripture that explicitly negates the concepts of abiogenesis is just a notch short of blasphemy, because even the most elementary level student of the Qurʾān knows that all life forms were created by Allah Most High and that life cannot emerge on earth from nonlife: *Allah who gives life and causes death, and Allah is Seeing of what you do* (Q 3:156); *And indeed, this is We who give life and cause death, and We are the Inheritor* (Q 15:23); *And He is the one who gave you life; then He causes you to die and then will [again] give you life. Indeed, mankind is ungrateful* (Q 22:66); *Indeed, it is We who bring the dead to life and record what they have put forth and what they left behind, and all things We have enumerated in a clear register* (Q 36:12).

Those who would like to accept evolution of everything except humans make an adhoc exception, which is absurd logically and untenable theologically because the cattle were sent down, eight pairs: *He created you from a single soul, then made from it its mate, and sent down for you of cattle eight pairs*.

The eight pairs refers to the male and female of sheep, goats, camel, and oxen which were *sent down*; they did not evolve from a common soup of inorganic molecule. In fact, one opinion cited by the Andalusian exegete Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) states that these pairs were created in Paradise and sent down, just as Iron was sent down. The verb (*anzala*) used in the verse refers to coming down of something from higher to lower plane. Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (46-95/666-714), the leading Qurʾān scholar from the generation of Followers (*ṭābi‘ūn*) stated that *anzala* here is used in the sense of creation (*Tafsīrs* of Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Rāzī, Qurṭubī) and hence belief in their evolution is contrary to the teachings of the Qurʾān.

Muslim evolutionists fail to recognize the enormous implications of their submission to the dictates of modern secularity which has produced false beliefs through absolutization of the epistemic value of scientific claims. Science as the arbitrator of truth negates, by necessity, all that is beyond its reach and hence truncates reality of life to fit its narrow schema which cannot accept the presence of a living Creator, Who has designed, in due proportions, all that exists. He has created each and every living being in its complete form in relation to other beings in existence and everything absolutely depends on Him for existence. These are truth claims of the highest order and they are firmly rooted in the Book that is the alpha and omega of all Muslims. Thus, those who are advocating the acceptance of evolution as a scientific fact pertaining to how life began and continues to exist on this planet are either deluded by the weight of modernity and tyranny of science or simply ignorant of the facts of higher order. In all cases, when such voices become

loud and dwell on the higher plane of influence through their outreach on the social media, they become dangerous influencers propagating un-Qur'ānic delusions.

Verbal gymnastics notwithstanding, claim of modern Muslim evolutionists reduces to a belief system based on the absence of the Creator, for if molecules just happen to align themselves to produce life and that initial life cell just happen to meet other cells in some nabulous space and start multiplying to give rise to more and more complex life forms, then there is nothing left of the Creator we know from the Book, Who *He creates you in your mothers' wombs, creation after creation, in threefold darkness. That is God, your Lord; to Him belongs sovereignty. There is no god but He. How, then, are you turned away? If you do not believe, surely God is beyond need of you. He is not pleased with disbelief for His servants. And if you are grateful, He is pleased therewith for you; and none shall bear the burden of another. Then unto your Lord is your return, and He shall inform you of that which you used to do. Truly He knows what lies within breasts* (Q 39:6).

To accept evolution, one has to set aside not only logic and reason, but also use imagination: “imagine” a scenario wherein hominid species were gradually evolving on earth, and right at the point when evolutionists would predict the emergence of modern humans, God miraculously inserted the children of Adam.” Right at that point! What a trick God played with humanity!

Let us note that this Ādamic (or human) exceptionalism being propagated by Muslim neo-evolutionists is not different from what certain Christian groups have already attempted. Recent Muslim attempts, therefore, do not even produce a new category of theistic evolution; this aping attempt to “Islamize” evolutionism is not different from certain Christian attempts to baptize it.

Yet, no matter how sophisticated the verbal acrobatics become, it is still just that, for “when boiled down to its scientific content...theistic evolution is no different from atheistic evolution, treating only undirected natural processes in the origin and development of life.” Furthermore, such attempts create the same theological problems for Muslim evolutionists as they did for the Christians, because “if God purposefully created life through Darwinian means, then God’s purpose was to make it seem as though life was created without purpose. Within theistic evolution, God is a master of stealth who constantly eludes our best efforts to detect him empirically.”

The custodians of the house of evolution do not admit that their basic claim is a statement of belief; rather, they claim it to be a scientific fact. Yet, it is a claim underwritten by science itself:

Evolution is a scientific explanation of the origin of life.

Science provides true answers based on empirical evidence.

Evolution is a true explanation based on empirical evidence.