
HUMAN EVOLUTION

RECONCILIATION OF SCIENCE AND ISLAM

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Abstract

Darwin's theory of Evolution states universal descent from a common ancestor for life. The evolution of humans from simple creatures has been debated among religious scholars and scientists. Some consider it a challenge to God's creation. Muslim scholars have four different opinions about this theory. One group states that the Quran and Science have no contradiction regarding Evolution. The other three groups declare this theory a danger to their religious beliefs and reject it. In this article, almost all the verses in the Quran about human creation are mentioned and a few from each group are explained with authentic grammar and a dictionary to see whether these is a contradiction between them or misunderstanding the original language. By comparing modern science and the text of the Holy Quran, we conclude that the Quran and Science have the same point of view on human creation. The dispute is due to a misunderstanding of the truths in the Quran, lack of valuable scholars, language issues, and being extremist in religious views. Hence, it is concluded that the Quran does not face any difficulty with evolution and there is no contradiction between modern science and Islam. Islam is a scientific religion so Muslim scholars should work to explain the text of the Quran in words of growing science.

Keywords: Quran, human, evolution, science, Islam

1. Introduction

Evolutionary theory has been one of the major conflicts between Science and religion for a long time because it impacts social concepts of what it means to be human [1]. Some scholars claim that evolutionary biology greatly challenges religious concepts and is a major reason for modern man to reject the Creator [2]. People belonging to different religions, including Muslims, have a lot of misconceptions regarding evolution of and religion due to different interpretations of their religious texts. Some regard Evolution as a danger because it lessens the place and dignity of man. Others claim the Quranic verses explain the same idea as evolutionary theory [3]. There are two clear-cut ideologies about the creation of the Universe: one is theism, and the other is

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naturalism. According to theism, the Universe, and all creations within it, belong to a monotheistic God and God is managing this whole system presently. In contrast to theism, naturalism says that there is no supernatural force; only natural forces and laws control the world. The concept of Spirit and its relation with transcendence has no basis [4].

Theists themselves have different ideas about evolution. Muslim scholars have four types of opinions about human evolution. One group of Islamic scholars states that the Theory of evolution lacks authenticity due to gaps in the fossil record and deficiency of other pieces of evidence. They believe that even if Evolution is valid, it only describes little variations in creatures but not the huge changes which lead to the appearance of new species. They explain that the verses of the Quran are describing the resemblance between Adam and Jesus despite no human father [5]. The second group describes the instant creation of man. They believe that evolutionary theory applies to all creatures except humans because humans are the caliph of Allah Almighty [6]. The third group declares that Science and religion differ in their language and goals. Religion only talks about the purpose of life, ethics, personal status prior to death, and divinity. The Quran is only for the guidance of humans, deductions of scientific issues from the Holy Quran are not suitable. Both of them should deal within their domains and should not intermix them [7]. Finally, a fourth group of Muslims believes that Quranic verses infer man's evolution. People are not deeply studying the holy Quran to truly understand it because they think that Science and Quran are opposed. God created all creations with his power but through a gradual process [8].

This article aims to resolve the dispute of man's evolution between Science and religion by discussing scientific facts and explaining Quranic verses deeply in an advanced manner with authentic Arabic text grammar. All of this is just with help of verses of the Quran in comparison with strong scientific evidence, not imposing someone's idea. Islam is always in favour of accepting true science. So what is right and what should be accepted among a large number of concepts is the main purpose.

2. Human evolution according to Science

The concept of gradually changing species over a long time was present in ancient Greek philosophy, who described new creatures being formed from pre-existing ones. Up to the 18th century, most biologists relied on the concept of essentialism where every species had unchangeable essential characteristics. In the 19th century, Charles Darwin and others proposed a modern Theory of evolution, based on natural selection, and insisted on single common descent, spreading life like a branching tree. Darwin's work concluded that individuals struggle for existence where those who survive and reproduce will transmit their favourable attributes and variations to their offspring. Those with unfavourable attributes are incapable of reproducing [9]. Darwin proposed that the millions of species present today, including humans, have a common ancestor. Species

become distinct due to accumulating small changes in traits in descendants due to natural selection. Over time, these favourable qualities result in the emergence of new species. Evolutionary theory was greatly supported due to the discovery of Mendel's laws of inheritance (1865), Hugo de Vries's phenomenon of mutation (1900), and the structure of DNA by Francis and Crick (1953). As a result, Neo-Darwinism refined Darwin's idea [10]. J.B.S. Haldane explained the evolutionary concepts of Molecular biology by explaining the gradual evolution of matter from molecules to cells [11]. Another hypothesis of controlled panspermia was proposed by Crick. Hoyle and Wickramasingh also proposed that microorganisms accidentally come on Earth from the Cosmos. Regardless of these ideas, the concept that complex life evolved from simple forms remained the best explanation [12].

A huge misconception that chimps are our ancestors has become popular among laypersons. Chimps are not forefathers of human beings. They are our genealogical cousins, not progenitors. We have a common ancestral node, the genetic split became sharpened between us. Humans are one side of multiple diverging parallel evolutionary pathways [13]. According to Science, the ancestors of modern man included Australopithecines. They were present about 2 million years ago. Near that time *Homo habilis* were present and they started to make stone instruments. Then *Homo erectus* evolves around 500,000 years ago. They discovered fire and the use of tools. Their brain size was a little smaller about 1000 cm³ as compared to the modern man having a brain of about 1450 cm³. Then *Homo neanderthalensis* appeared. They have a larger brain of about 1400-1600 cm³ than modern man and were able to make paintings, defend territory, grow flowers, diverse instruments, and have emotional perceptions, but they lacked logical thinking. Then Cro-Magnon man evolved. They created art, engaged in logical thinking, were aggressive, and had tall strong bodies. They had excellent physical and intellectual abilities. In the end, present-day people appeared on earth about 40,000 years ago based on the fossil record [14].

Despite gaps in the fossil record, evolution has such strong evidence that it cannot be denied [15]. Most scientists who deny evolution do so due to their religious beliefs.

3. Human creation according to Quran

The creation of humans is discussed in different verses of the Quran in disparate ways. Categorically we can divide them into the following three groups:

- verses of the Quran that describe human creation from clay or dust (Quran 6:2, 7:12, 17:61, 23:12, 32:7, 37:11, 38:71, 38:76, 3:59, 18:37, 22:5, 30:20, 35:11, 40:67, 55:14, 15:26, 15:28, 15:33 and 20:55);
- verses of the Quran that describe human creation from water, sperm-drop, or congealed blood (Quran 18:37, 22:5, 35:11, 40:67, 23:14, 75:38, 96:2, 32:8, 25:54, 77:20, 86:6, 75:37, 16:4, 36:77, 76:2 and 80:19);

- verses of the Quran that describe human creation from a single soul or his creation by the Hands of God are (Quran 4:1, 7:189, 39:6, 36:71, and 38:75).

4. Study purpose

Our goal here is to see if there is any difference between the Holy Quran and Science regarding the creation of humans. The Holy Quran and Science should track one another or they should remain in their separate spheres for religious, social, and scientific betterment. We will use a descriptive method to solve the issue of evolution by discussing and comparing science and verses of the Quran grammatically with their meanings to see whether they have the same or different points of view.

5. Comparison and discussion

As mentioned in ‘Islam’s Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science’ book by Nidhal Guessoum, the major reasons for opposing evolution by Muslims are: ignorance, lack of scholars, language differences, misinterpretation of religious texts and no study of the ‘Philosophy of Science’ as a subject in Muslim countries. Guessoum interpreted Creation and Evolution-related verses of the Quran with authentic meanings and grammar of key words to describe that there is no real difference between them in evolution. We continue that study here.

“Do the nonbelievers realize that the Heavens and the Earth were once one piece before we divided them and created everything alive from water? Will they then not believe?” (Quran 21:30)

In this verse, everything is created from water; humans are not exempt. Moreover, Science also gives the same data in its language in form of the Big Bang Theory [16]. In this regard, the most important discovery by J.B.S Haldane states that life was initiated by the synthesis of organic molecules through a phototrophic pathway. He described that when UV light reacted on the mixture of water, carbon dioxide and ammonia, a great diversity of organic substances including sugars were made which later built up proteins. Furthermore, these substances suspended in water, joined and were enclosed in an oily film to form protocells. The whole sea acted as a laboratory for the formation of these first lifeforms [17]. In 1938 another scientist, A.I. Oparin, described the same mechanism. Today this theory continues to be foundational regarding the origin of life [18]. So, it is clear that there is no difference in the origin of life in the Quran and modern science.

In some verses of the Quran it is mentioned that Allah created all humans from a single soul, as below: “Fear your Lord, O people, for He made you from a single soul, from which He made its mate, and from which He made countless men and women. And dread Allah, through whom you make requests to one another, as well as the wombs. Undoubtedly, Allah is constantly over you as an

observer.” (Quran 4:1) This verse also states the unity of life in the beginning even at a metaphysical level.

On the topic of the creation of Adam, God gave many statements in Holy Quran as follows: “[Allah] said OIblees, what kept you from grovelling before what I made with My own two hands? Were you conceited back then, or were you already one of the haughty?” (Quran 38:75) This is the verse that a layperson thinks belongs to the instantaneous creation of man. All other things are created through the process but man is created by Hands directly.

This misconception is itself contradicted by another verse of the Quran mentioned below: “Do they not perceive that We have produced for them grazing livestock from what Our hands have formed, and [then] they are their owners?” (Quran 36:71)

In this verse, the word (أَنْعَامًا) doesn't refer only to livestock, it is the mistake of translators, (أَنْعَامًا) means “every blessing of God” even if it is an animal, plant, good health, edible things or even else [Z.H. Chihpa, 'Islam360' version (4.2.1), 2022, <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.islam360&hl=en&gl=US>]. The verse represents that everything in the Universe and the Universe itself is created by the Hands of God. Also needing interpretation is what is meant by ‘Hands of God’. The hands of God are not like the two hands of man, each with five fingers. If we consider the hands of God like our hands then it means that God is confined to a limited body and beyond his hands someone else is present. Hands means something else of God is present, this is clear (التشريك). And Allah Himself says in Quran: “And declare, Praise be to Allah, Who has not taken a son, Who has not had a partner in [His] rule, Who has not needed a guardian out of weakness; and laud Him with [great] glorification.” (Quran 17:111) “Joining other gods with Allah is a sin that Allah does not pardon; but He forgives whom He wants other sins than this: one who adds other gods with Allah, Hath vagrant far, far away (from the right).” (Quran 4:116)

The word (يَدٍ) does not mean hand; it means “the power by which someone does a work”. As men do their work by hand so they are idiomatically translated as hands. But the powers through which we see Allah bless us, are powers of Nature. These are His hands. Powers of nature are nothing without God, these powers are also stable with His order. He brings changes in the universe through these powers so He called these powers, His hands [<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.islam360&hl=en&gl=US>].

Hence it is clear that the creation of man is not different from the creation of other things at this point. Science also describes the same point.

The verse in which the creation of man from clay is discussed below: “And no doubt did We create humans from an extract of clay” (Quran 23:12). Here the word (مَسْئَلَةً) means extracted material from the soil. These are the organic nutrients that are transferred from clay to plants, then from plants through food into man. This extracted material in the form of food is converted into ATP and the formation of gametes, through which the next generation of humans is produced.

This explanation is supported by another verse of the Quran. Allah says: “O People, if you have any doubts about the Resurrection, remember that We made you from dust, next from a sperm-drop, then from a coagulant clot, and lastly from a lump of flesh, both formed and unformed, to demonstrate to you. And We place whom We will in the wombs for a certain period, then We bring you out as a child, and [We develop you] unless you reach your [time of] maturation. And among you is the person who dies [early] and the one who is brought back to the oldest, most senile [age] such that, after [once having] wisdom, he knows nothing. And when the land appears to be arid, when We shower rain upon it, it trembles, swells, and sprouts [things] of every lovely sort.” (Quran 22:5)

In this verse, a step-by-step formation describes how a man is made from clay. Moreover, in this verse, all people are addressed, without any exception including Adam or Jesus. The word used in this verse (خَلَقْنَاكُمْ) grammatically shows that it applies to each human without any exception [<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.islam360&hl=en&gl=US>]. The same mechanism is described by Science where our consumed organic nutrients affects reproduction [19].

Other misconceptions about man’s creation are described next with the description of, who is Adam, what is the soul that was breathed in Adam by Allah and what is the prostration of angels in front of Adam. Allah says in Quran: “And when your Lord stated to the angels, ‘I’ll create a person from clay made from modified black muck. After I have adjusted him and infused My [own] spirit into him, you should bow down to him.’” (Quran 15: 28-29)

The word (بَشَرًا) is used in these verses, but not (أَنَم). The word (بَشَرًا) means “outer physical body” and the word (أَنَم) means “internal light body by which life is possible, at death that body detaches from physical one” [<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.islam360&hl=en&gl=US>]. (الرُّوحُ) is another thing. It is a huge mistake of translators and a layperson that they intermix the meaning of words (أَنَم, بَشَرًا and الرُّوحُ). About (الرُّوحُ) Allah says: “And they inquire you about the Spirit. Say, The Spirit is of my Lord’s Command, and you have only been given a little understanding.” (Quran 17:85)

Spirit is a nice blessing and order of God. Spirit is not present in all humans, it is a special blessing for good persons through which they are in contact with God. It is supported by another verse given below: “[He is] the Exalted beyond [all] degrees, the Owner of the Monarchy; He sends the spirit by His order to warn of the Day of Meeting on whomever He wills among His servants.” (Quran 40:15)

So it’s clear that not every human has this spirit. Those who have no Spirit and do evil deeds God considers them even a lower rank than animals as mentioned in surah in fall verse 22. Angels were ordered to bow down in front of God’s Spirit that is breathed into God-loving persons. Even today, the person in which God breathes His Spirit, angels bow down in front of him, not to every human.

Now the question which arises is what is the reality of words (خَلَقَ), (كُنَّ) and at what level due to which reason man is superior to other creations, and why he is the caliph of God on Earth? Science claims that the creation of the Universe took a long period, billions of years. Muslim scholars don't profess that this fact has any contradiction with Quran. But, when Science states that all life evolved throughout millions of years, Muslims show objections. Although for the creation of the Universe and the creation of life, the same word (خَلَقَ) is used. The real meaning of (خَلَقَ) is "to create anything without any Imitation". It doesn't mean "instantaneous creation". Muslims misinterpreted this word due to which objections arose.

Quran states: "While He has created you in stages" (Quran 71:14). Quran has no statement about instantaneous creation. Word (كُنَّ) means "be". God does not create creations like humans. He only orders and that's done. This phenomenon is exactly explained by String theory. This theory describes that when we exit from a three-dimensional world there is no difference between past, present and future. All times revolve around a single tip of an order of an entity that has held in the highest dimension, the final dimension. So the creation in the three-dimensional world which takes millions of years is done in the highest dimension with an order of (كُنَّ) in a timeless moment [20]. The grammar of the word (فَيَكُونُ) shows that it means the order of (كُنَّ فَيَكُونُ) by God is still coming and will continue in future unless His will. The word (Kun) is well explained by the Poet of the East, Sir Dr. Muhammad Iqbal in his notable book 'Bal-e-Jibril': "Maybe this universe is still incomplete, That every moment 'be and done' (كُنَّ فَيَكُونُ) sounds".

Quran says about the creation of man: "Surely we created man in the fittest mould" (Quran 95:4). In this verse the word (أَحْسَنَ) used, the exact meaning is "the fittest" not "the best". It is a mistake of translators, that they intermix words (أَحْسَنَ) and (أَفْضَلَ). (أَحْسَنَ) means the fittest and suitable with the environment while (أَفْضَلَ) means superior in greatness. Man is the caliph of God, and having great value is due to his intellectuality, self-esteem and spirit of God due to good deeds, not on basis of physical creation. The physical creation of humans is the same as other animals and it is the most advance and fittest in the environment. Hence, it's clear that Quran explains the same concept as by theory of Darwin 'survival of the fittest'. There is no contradiction between the Quran and the theory of natural selection. Darwin was not against God's creation. In the last paragraph of his book 'The origin of the species', he mentioned the role of the Creator stated below: "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved" [21].

Moreover, layperson Muslims mostly don't search and think about Quran in detail. They only listen to speeches and proclamations of religious scholars and believe without any verification. It is reported that practically all those who

reject evolution and see Darwin as heretical have never read Darwin's book [22].

6. Conclusions

Science works to trace the hidden secrets of the Universe. According to opinions of majority of Muslims, Islam endorses Science and it commands contemplation. Therefore, the belief that Islam prevents contemplation being conservative religion is completely wrong. Allah Almighty says in the Holy Quran: “[We provided them] concrete proofs and written laws. And We disclosed the message to you so that you could explain to the people what was being sent down to them and they may contemplate about it.” (Quran 16:44)

In Islam, Science is regarded as a tool for expanding one's understanding of God and His process of Creation [8]. With the progress of Science, it becomes necessary to explain religious text in a new format for reconstructing personal beliefs at more authentic understandings. Disputes are created when religious work is not done with progressing speed of Science. It is recommended that interdisciplinary subjects like 'scientific philosophy', 'Science and religion', etc. should be promoted and should consider and read these subjects due to their importance and necessity in all countries. Moreover, the idea that a layperson should not have freedom of thought is discouraged and every person should think and contemplate religious matters himself being a servant of God [23].

As clearly explained in comparison the Quran also describes the same point of view on human creation as Science. According to Quran, Creation is a gradual process not instantaneous. As we all know that Holy books are revealed by God, who knows all secrets and realities. His decree can never be wrong. These disputes are due to our misunderstandings. Muslim scholars should work for building their high calibre of understanding and to eliminate differences. They should discourage to be extremists and be encouraged to be moderate because Islam gives the lesson of moderation. God knows better. May Allah gives us a better understanding of pure religion.

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