ISLAM & THE THEORY/FACT OF EVOLUTION

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SYNOPSIS

- Current Muslim responses to evolution
- Evolution is a “Muslim theory”
- Reconciling Islam & evolutionary ideas
- Answers to common misconceptions
- Religious writings on evolution
- Examples of science opposed by mistaken interpretation of scripture
CURRENT MUSLIM RESPONSES TO EVOLUTION

1. Reject all of biological evolution (Harun Yahya)
2. Accept all of biological evolution except human evolution (many Muslim theologians)
3. Accept all of biological evolution (many Muslim biologists + some theologians)

- Many people go from 1 -> 2 -> 3: where are you?
- Are we part of the web of life, or a special case?
Prof. Ehab Abouheif

- DNA Backbone
- Adenine
- Thymine
- Guanine
- Cytosine

Evolutionary tree highlighting:
- Squid
- Fruit flies
- Humans
miraculous birth has a direct consequence on his historical lineage – he is not attributed to the family of any man but rather called “the son of Mary” – but his membership in the broader human family is not in the least way compromised.

**Fig. 15.1**

(fig 15.1: Imaginary phylogenetic trees representing three of the many possible relationships between Adam, his descendants and *Homo neanderthalis* that are compatible with a literal reading of the account of Adam’s special creation and his status as father of all living humans as understood by classical Islamic scholars from the apparent meaning of the Qur’ān and Sunnah.

A. Adam arrives in a world populated by at least one other member of the genus *Homo* – *Homo neanderthalis* – but no populations of beings that could be classified as *Homo sapiens*. All members of *Homo sapiens* are descendants of Adam.

B. Adam arrives in a world populated by earlier species of the genus *Homo*, but not by the modern species *Homo sapiens* and *Homo neanderthalis*. As his descendants spread throughout the Earth, they diversify into *Homo sapiens* and *Homo neanderthalis*, with all members of both species belonging to his historical lineage.
EVIDENCE FOR EVOLUTION (INC. HUMAN)

- Palaeontology (the fossil record)
- Geographical distribution
- Comparative anatomy
- Molecular biology (genetics, DNA, etc.)
- Embryology
- Taxonomy
- We have 46 chromosomes, chimps have 48
  - Human chromosome #2 is a fusion of two chimp chromosomes
- There is scientific ijma’ (consensus) on the theory/fact of evolution
EVOLUTION IS A "MUSLIM THEORY"

“... the Mohammedan theory of the evolution of man from lower forms, or his gradual development to his present condition in the long lapse of time.”

*History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* by John William Draper, 1811-1882
Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, p. 188
“Sometimes, not without surprise, we meet with ideas which we flatter ourselves have originated in our own times. Thus our modern doctrines of evolution and development were taught in their schools. In fact, they carried them much farther than we are disposed to do, extending them even to inorganic or mineral things.”

Draper (19th century), p. 118
EARLY MUSLIM SCIENTISTS

- Al-Jahiz (9th century, 776-869) & the “Struggle for Existence”
  - Influence of environment on animal survival in his magnum opus, *Kitab al-Hayawan* (Book of Animals)
  - Came up with a crude Lamarckism, that was later replaced by Darwinian evolution
  - Understood eco-systems
  - Understood natural selection
  - Understood adaptation
    (Rebecca Stott, *Darwin’s Ghosts*, Chapter 3)
PRECURSORY IDEAS TO EVOLUTION

- Ibn Miskawayh & the Brethren of Purity *(Ikhwan al-Safa’)*

(Persia, 10\textsuperscript{th} century)

- Worlds:
  
  Mineral → Plant → Animal → (Monkey) → Human

*Source: Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, famous 20\textsuperscript{th}-century Hadith scholar*
Ibn Khaldun (14th Century, d. 1408)

“One should then look at the world of creation. It started out from the minerals and progressed, in an ingenious, gradual manner, to plants and animals. The last stage of minerals is connected with the first stage of plants, such as herbs and seedless plants. The last stage of plants, such as palms and vines, is connected with the first stage of animals, such as snails and shellfish which have only the power of touch. The word 'connection' with regard to these created things means that the last stage of each group is fully prepared to become the first stage of the next group ...
“... The animal world then widens, its species become numerous, and, in a gradual process of creation, it finally leads to man, who is able to think and to reflect. The higher stage of man is reached from the world of the monkeys, in which both sagacity and perception are found, but which has not reached the stage of actual reflection and thinking. At this point we come to the first stage of man. This is as far as our (physical) observation extends.”

Low in the earth
I lived in realms of ore and stone;
And then I smiled in many-tinted flowers;
Then roving with the wild and wandering hours,
O’er earth and air and ocean’s zone,
   In a new birth,
   I dived and flew,
   And crept and ran,
And all the secret of my essence drew
Within a form that brought them all to view –
   And lo, a Man!
RUMI (CONT’D)

And then my goal,
Beyond the clouds, beyond the sky,
In realms where none may change or die –
In angel form; and then away
Beyond the bounds of night and day,
And Life and Death, unseen or seen,
Where all that is hath ever been,
As One and Whole.

‘Allamah Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*
THE QUR'ANIC ACCOUNT

- Adam was created from earth and water
- God breathed His Spirit into Adam’s body
- God taught Adam “all the Names”
  - (the angels did not know them)
- God taught eloquent speech to Man
- Adam was a “Perfect Man”
- No “young earth” teaching
THE QUR’ANIC ACCOUNT - REVISITED

- Adam was created from earth and water
  - Life evolved from earth and water
  - Modern science asks: Did life begin from clay? (Roberts, Reiss & Monger, Advanced Biology, p. 761)

- God breathed His Spirit into Adam’s body
  - Ibn ‘Arabi: intellectual and spiritual faculties reached full maturity in humanity
  - cf. Polkinghorne: human self-awareness is the greatest moment of history

- God taught Adam “all (His) Names”
  - Adam was the first human: the creation receptive to receiving full Divine knowledge
OBSESSION 1: MIRACULOUS ADAM

With God, Jesus is like Adam:
He created him from dust, then said
To him, “Be!” - and he was!

_Qur’an_

Answer:
The Qur’an affirms a gradual, natural process for the (virgin) birth of Christ, so why not a natural process for Adam?
OBJECTION 2: HUMBLE ORIGINS

Surely, the greatest men and women such as Abraham, Moses, Mary, Jesus & Muhammad (pbuh) could not have had common ancestors with apes?

Answer:

The Qur’an repeatedly points to our humble origins, from “despised drops of water” (ma’ mahin)
OBSESSION 3: THE FALL

In the Qur’anic story, after Adam and Eve ate from the Forbidden Tree, they were expelled from the Garden and sent down to Earth.

Answer:

The Qur’anic Jannah refers to both heavenly and earthly gardens. Some of the early commentators believed that Adam’s garden was earthly. E.g. Tabari & Ibn Kathir refer to this difference of opinion.

Evolution implies that the “Garden of Eden” was on earth, not in Paradise.
OBJECTION 4: THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION LEADS TO ATHEISM, DOESN’T IT?

Answer:

Err ... No, it doesn’t (necessarily): >99% of US scientists accept human evolution, 40% of US scientists believe in God.

**Science** tells us **how** we were created.

**Revelation** tells us **why** we were created.
Many Young Muslims Have Lost Their Faith After Studying Science

- Evolution theory is basic biology (GCSE & A-level)
- Thousands of young Muslims have become atheist or agnostic after studying biology, and being told that the Qur’an contradicts modern science
- Many of them have been helped to rediscover their faith by reconciling biology with the Qur’an
- I know some of them personally!
- On the other hand, there are Muslim university students in the UK who walk out of their biology lectures!
Post-darwin Muslim scholars who accepted evolution theory fully or partially

- Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, Hadith scholar
- Allamah Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, poet & philosopher
- Prof. Fazlur Rahman
- Dr. Israr Ahmad, published posthumously
- Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi
- Sheikh Nadim al-Jisr
- Sheikh Hasan al-Jisr
- Sheikh Dr. Abd al-Sabur Shahin
- Etc.
PARTIAL LIST OF MUSLIM SCIENTISTS WHO ACCEPT EVOLUTION

- Prof. Nidhal Guessoum (UAE), author of *Islam’s Quantum Question*
- Dr. T. Shanavas (USA), author of *Islam & Evolution*
- Prof. Fatimah Jackson (USA)
- Prof. Ehab Abouheif (USA)
- Dr. Salman Hameed (USA)
- Prof. Ziauddin Sardar (UK)
ISLAMIC TRADITION ON ADAM (PBUH)

- Muhammad al-Baqir, “Before the Adam who is our father, a million Adams or more had passed from existence.” [Ruh al-Ma’ani of Alusi]

- Ja’far al-Sadiq, “Perhaps you think that God never created a human being other than yourselves. Nay, but God created a million Adams and you are the last of those Adams.” [Ruh al-Ma’ani of Alusi]

- Ibn ‘Arabi, “Allah created 100,000 Adams ...”

- Ibn ‘Arabi, “At the Ka’bah, I met and spoke to a man who was not from Bani Adam (the descendants of Adam) ...” [Futuhat Makkiyyah]
The Human Being: Animal & Angel

- A basic traditional Muslim belief: the human being is a combination of animal & angel (spirit)
- E.g. Humans may be higher in status than the angels or lower than the animals, according to their actions
- Biology merely deals with the animal side, and our relationship with the animal world
- True religion deals with our spiritual side, and how to nurture our angelic spirits whilst living in the material world e.g. Forgiveness, Love, Mercy.
- “I created Adam with My Two Hands” (Q. 38:75)
  - Refers precisely to the Two Worlds: Material & Spiritual (Ibn ‘Arabi, Fusus al-Hikam)
Sheikh Dr. Abd al-Sabur Shahin – Egypt, Book Analysing the Creation of Humanity
QUR’ANIC VERSES MENTIONING THE CREATION OF AL-BASHAR (A PROMINENT CREATION) OR AL-INSAN (HUMANITY)

- Sheikh Dr. Shahin analysed the 35 verses in order of revelation

**The Meccan verses are as follows:**

**The Medinan verses are as follows:**
وقد سبقت الإشارة إلى مغزى هذه الرحلة، واللغة من ناحية مقومات هذا الخلق، ويبدو أنها بلغت درجة من الكمال في المرحلة الآدمية الحاسمة، حتى تفوق آدم على الملائكة في أول اختيار. لقد كانت ملحمة هامة تلك التي استغرقتها خلق البشر وتسويته وتزويده بالملكات العليا التي أصبح بها (إنسان) تتلاقى فيه كماليات النبوة، فاختارت الله واصطفاه كما قال: {إن الله أصطفى آدم} (السرامق، فصائر آدم نبيًا)، كما قال سبحانه: {ثم أنجباه ربه فتائب عليه} ( وهدى [45] [طه].

فقد استغرقت هذه الملحمة - كما سبق أن قلنا ملايين السنين، ولكنها مرت خلقتا في ظلال، أو في غيب - حتى أن الله للتصبح أن يبنج - فاشترى الإنسان من سلالة البشر، واكتمل الخلق، وجاء آدم!!

ليس غريباً أن نتصور - بناء على هذا - أن آدم جاء مولوداً لأبويين(1)، وأن حواء جاءت كذلك، على الرغم مما سوف يلقى هذا التصور من معارضة تلقائية، ورفض عنيف!! وبلا تفكير!!

إن هذا التصور لا يتصادم في رأينا مع حقيقة خلق الإنسان من طين، ذلك أن الخلق الذي بدأ منذ ملايين السنين بالجسد الطيني - كان هدفه النهائي والطبيعي خلق (آدم)، وكل ما مضى من أحداث بين التأريخين - إن كان قصة تاريخ - إما هو وقائع بناء جسد آدم، وعلقه، وروحه، (1) ذكر الشيخ رضي الله عن النبي يزعم أن آدم آدم، لأنها في مدينتهم المقدسة
“This process took millions of years ... Humanity (insan) emerged from the essence of al-bashar, creation became perfect, and Adam appeared!

“It is not far fetched for us to imagine ... that Adam was born of two parents, as was Eve, even though this concept will meet immediate opposition and violent rejection without thinking!”

FN: Sheikh Rashid Rida mentioned that Hindus believe that Adam had a mother – they have two adjacent, domed shrines in their sacred city of Varanasi (al-Manar 8/308)
We disagree with his interpretations (ta’wil), but these do not exceed the limits.
“What is important and necessary is the belief that God is the creator of the world and of all the species it contains. Beyond this belief, there is no difference between the principle of Creationism and that of Evolution from some original matter created by God from which he made all species, branching them off by way of evolutionary processes in conformity with natural laws that He placed in the universe.”
EXAMPLES OF SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONS ANSWERED WRONGLY BY MISTAKEN INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

- Which was created first, the heavens or the earth? (Sheikh Shanqiti on Q. 2:29)
- Is the earth flat or round? (Imam Suyuti on Q. 88:20)
- Does the earth go round the sun, or vice versa? (Numerous commentaries on Q. 36:38-40)
- Does the moon really cause the solar eclipse? (Ibn Hajar al-’Asqalani in Fath al-Bari, Eclipse Prayer)
- Are we created from men & women’s fluids, or men’s fluids only? (Numerous commentaries on Q. 86:7-8)

Cf. Usama Hasan, Article on Moonsighting & Calculations in the Guardian Online
ADAM (A.S.)’S PARENTS?

- Sheikh Shahin: not far-fetched, based on the Qur’an and the fossil record

- According to evolution, Adam a.s.’s parents would not have been apes, but almost human (hominids, neo-humans, shibh insan)

- This is not a matter of belief (iman/’aqidah), but of tafsir and science!
  - Cf. al-Azhar’s fatwa

- A Muslim’s basic faith and/or chances of salvation are not affected by such disagreement!
A TONGUE-IN-CHEEK COMMENT

Comparing Hallaj, the 10th-century mystic of Baghdad, with Darwin:

*Hallaj said, “I am God”*
*Darwin said, “I was an ape”*
*Each according to his aspiration!*

Akbar of Allahabad, 19th - 20th century
**SOME RECOMMENDED READING**

- Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam’s Quantum Question*, 2010
- Richard Leakey, *The Origin of Humankind*
- Any standard book on Biology, Evolution, Genetics, etc.