

The last section of *The Quran Beheld* contains elementary-level biographical notes on nineteen “Imams of Introduction”—a meaningless phrase, which indicates a lack of true appreciation of their stature and contributions.

If the purpose of translating the untranslatable Qurʾān is to provide a conduit to its message to those who do not have direct access to the Book that is held to be the actual Divine speech by one fourth of humanity, then *The Quran Beheld* fails miserably. The most obvious features of this “translation” are its convoluted syntax, unfaithfulness to the original, and misunderstood interpretations of the classical scholars inserted into the “translation” without indicating that these are not part of the text of the Qurʾān.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL
Center for Islamic Sciences



Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: *On Justice and the Nature of Man* Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015. ix+67 pp. ISBN 978 967 0149 721.

This slim book of about 60 tightly argued pages by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas makes a clear case for the new and special creation of man (both as spiritual *insān* and physical *bashar*) on the basis of what has been revealed in the Holy Qurʾān (especially verses 4:58 and 23:12-14) pertaining to the nature of man and his primal ethico-moral, axio-teleological vocation or overriding calling as Allah’s vicegerent (*khalifa*) on earth. In doing so, al-Attas says that he is responding to, “the greatest challenge to our true identity as man, i.e. as *insān*, posed by the evolutionist and positivist theory of man, i.e. as *Homo sapiens*, set within the framework of anthropology and the worldview of naturalism—a theory taught as if it were a fact in the schools and universities of the world.” (p v).

He refutes the claim of evolutionists that man is merely a physical being by nature belonging to the animal kingdom and thus not a special creation but simply a new biological species that is genetically and genealogically continuous with earlier anthropoids, emerging from some vague, ill-defined common ancestor through a process of natural selection and random mutation. In contrast, he argues for man as “a new and special creation” and that, “man is created as a merging of the physical and the spiritual natures into a single being at once as *bashar* and *insān*...that man’s true and real nature is spiritual, an articulate soul, to which state of being he will be returned on the Day of Judgement after his determined term of probation on earth.” (p v).

Moreover, man is a new and special creation *not only* in his *insāniyyah* aspect as a spiritual articulate soul but also in his *bashariyya* aspect as a physical, biological being, for he is, “clearly different in kind from animals and belongs to a separate kingdom of his own as God’s vicegerent i.e. *khalīfa* on earth placed over and above the Three Kingdoms of Nature; that the coming of man on earth is to accomplish God’s purpose for man.” (p vi). Thus, man is his own Kingdom of Creation; he is unique and the only one of his kind.

In this revealed cosmological framework of the new creation (*khalq jadīd*) or the renewal of creation (*tajdīd al-khalq*)-which pertains not only to man but also to the world as a whole-then what the naturalists and positivists (i.e., most modern scientists) see as unguided evolution by random natural causes and effects in the development of life on earth is but, “the unfolding of events in succession on a principle of order, including that of the forms of life on it, [it] is the unfolding of God’s plan preparatory to the coming of man. Everything, including the alternate process of extinction and continuance of the forms of life on earth, is a new creation according to the principle of God’s Renewal of Creation. Man is a new creation, but he is also a special one.” (p. vi).

What modern scientists, committed as they were, consciously or unconsciously, to naturalism and positivism, see as unguided macro- and micro-evolution is but a divinely ordained and hence *ordered and orderly* (*amrī*) process of ongoing creation and recreation at both the micro- and macro-level of cosmic existence; i.e., both macro-renewal and micro-renewal of creation happen at every moment of animate and inanimate being.

In an Islamic theological framework of direct divine command and action (*kun fa yakūn*), what is viewed in modern science as “natural” evolution is but in reality divine creation undergoing a successive process of both micro- and macro-renewal. It is not only that everything is created anew by God at every successive instance or instantiation of its being, but that it is also special, in the sense that it fits into a role, a place, a term and an end already divinely specified (*takhṣīṣ*) or selected (*ikhṭiyār, irādah*), and thus designed, appointed (*taqdīr*) for, and imposed (*taskhīr*) on it, except that man is understood to be a particularly special creation, for “*Verily, His affair, when He wills a thing, is only that He says unto it, ‘Be!’ and it becomes.*” (Q 36:82).

He was, as the Holy Qur’ān says, wrought by God Himself directly with His own two hands (Q 38:75), and thus he was honored (*takrīm, tafḍīl*) above all Creation and made prepared with all the required physical and spiritual faculties and qualities to consciously and willingly seal his Covenant (*mithāq*) with God and receive the Trust (*amānah*) offered to him by God, even though all creation drew back from assuming that immense Trust out of overwhelming fear of betraying it. He was taught by God himself the names or natures of all things (*asmā’ al-ashyā’ kullahā*), and therefore divinely endowed with the intellecto-moral capacity required to fulfill that Trust and honor that Covenant.

“And He imbued the soul with the consciousness of its evil and its piety.” (Q 91:8).

The main thrust of al-Attas’s critique of evolution here is therefore a *moral theological* one founded on what God has revealed about the essentially ethico-moral and thus spiritual nature of man, and hence his intellecto-moral vocation on earth to live out his term of probation in honoring his *mithāq* with God, and by extension, with the rest of creation entrusted to his stewardship by the Creator of all creation. “And the servants of the Merciful are they who tread on the earth in humility.” (Q 25:63).

In this metaphysico-theological framework of direct divine design, measure and selection (*taqdīr, taṣwīr*), and direct command and action (*fa‘ālan li mā yurīd*), by which all creatures are created and made perfect (*itqān, ihsān*), what is called natural law or the laws of nature is but in reality (*ḥi al-haqīqah*), “God’s customary manner of acting in creation, i.e. *sunnat Allāh*, in accordance with his Knowledge, Power and Will, and the requirements of the qualities of perfection inherent in His names *al-Ḥakīm* (the Wise) and *al-‘Adl* (the Just) apportioning to each created thing its proper measure, i.e. its *qadar*. The created thing’s proper measure is its nature and determines it[s] place in the order of being and existence.... The order of nature is not only related to the physical, material, sensible and changing things, but to the whole of God’s creation including spiritual things other than God. Nature in the universal sense is *al-ṭabī‘ah*, in the sense in which it means the original constitution of man, it is *al-ḥiṭrah*.” (p 20).

Here, the modern, positivist conception of ‘nature’ as some self-contained and self-empowered material force in the world “causing from within itself all phenomena of the physical universe together with all its parts” is clearly rejected because such a conception of ‘nature’ implicates “denial of God and belief in the eternity of the world, or the coexistence or even the identification of nature with God.” (p 20). This amounts to what is in effect a secular, atheistic theology of the deification of nature, a creedal or philosophical position that is scientifically, metaphysically and theologically untenable.

There is, in reality (*ḥaqīqatan*), no such thing as evolution by natural selection and random mutation bringing about increasingly complex transformations in the physical and biological world, but only divine choice, design, measure and selection expressed through direct divine command and action, the effects (*āthār*) of which are manifested to and experienced by us as a continuous, spatio-temporal, largely orderly flow of happenings, occurrences and eventuations (*mazāhir, ḥawādith, waqā‘i*) in the world of sense and sensible experience (*‘ālam al-shahādah*), which orderly flow we describe in terms of laws of nature.

Though essentially a moral theological critique, it does have both logical and empirical implications for how we view the interrelations between geological time (so-called ‘deep time’), biological time and historical time (i.e. physical

time), and spiritual time. Hence, his is here also a *historical* critique, for *if* Ādam *‘alayhi al-salām*, was and still is the very first man, the first *insān and bashar*, a new and special creation wrought by God with His own two hands, and the first prophet sent down to live out a term of probation on earth charged with a great, weighty moral mission of honoring the Covenant (*mithāq*) and fulfilling the Trust (*amānah*), then he has also to be a relatively recent historical individual and person, not some vague, mythic, legendary figure lost untraceable in the deep far recesses of countless aeons of pre-historical epochs, way beyond the reach of any conceivable, meaningful human remembrance and appreciation, or worse still, in the almost unimaginable abysses of the geological ‘deep time’ posited by geologists and dogmatically accepted by evolutionary biologists from among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The larger middle portion of his book is thus devoted to a broad revisiting and reconstruction of prophetic chronological history (*tārīkh ‘uṣūr al-nubuwwah*), from Muḥammad the final prophet, *ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wassalam*, to Īsā, *‘alayh al-salām*, and thence to all the major prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān until we arrive at the first man and first prophet, Ādam *‘alayhi al-salām*. Here, al-Attas invokes historical and archaeological support for his thesis from the works and discoveries of historians of ancient history, comparative history of civilizations, biblical history, Assyriologists and Egyptologists, as well as works in Islamic prophetic history and the science of genealogy (*‘ilm al-nasab*). (pp. vi-ix, 49-57).

It is well beyond the scope of this brief review to analyze, discuss and explicate this historical critique part of the book in any informative, meaningful and compelling detail that could flesh out and lend more historico-empirical support to his customary terse argumentation and presentation, but suffice here to present some of his salient conclusions in his own words:

Everything that has come to pass in succession on a principle of order in God’s renewal of Creation has been predetermined by God from eternity. The unfolding of events in the spiritual world that is carried over into the physical world is the working of God’s plan enacted in existential sequence in spiritual and physical space and time. Before the creation of man aeons ago, the Holy Qur’ān tells us that God has already created the physical universe together with all its parts, placing the planet earth within the solar system in order to accomplish His purpose for man. Since the beginning of its creation God caused the earth to evolve over an immeasurable period to make it habitable for man when the proper time comes for him to inhabit it. The whole process of the evolution of the earth and of the creatures that inhabit it before the proper time comes for man [to inhabit it] is the working of God’s plan preparing the earth and its denizens for the coming of man. The proper time comes with the announcement by God to the angels of His decision to create man and to make man His vicegerent on earth. (pages 44-45).

Then after commenting on the import of the various verses in the Holy Qurʾān pertaining to the creation of Ādam through the three stages of (a) physical constitution, (b) biological formation-i.e., the first two *basharī* stages- and then (c) the third stage of the final completion of his creation as spiritual being, as *insān* by God's breathing of something of His spirit (*min rūḥih*) into his body, "so that man is not only something incomplete as *bashar*, but is now complete as *insān* as well," and his subsequent appointment as a vicegerent on earth, al-Attas goes on to say:

Thus Adam is the first *insān* and the progenitor of all *insān*. He is created with a rational soul endowed with wisdom and a sense of justice, taught knowledge of the nature of all things, given the power of articulated speech, and a body complete with motive and perceptive powers. He is certainly not a caveman, he is not *anthropus*, nor is he *Homo*; he is not the result of an evolution involving a process of natural selection in biological development from a common ancestor; he is not a genus, nor a species; he is not *Homo sapiens*. *Homo sapiens* is the term used by anthropologists to denote modern man as a species according to their theory of evolution that denies the truth of a special creation. (pp. 47).

Then, after discussing the chronological succession of the prophets from Ādam, *ʿalayhi al-salām*, to Muḥammad, *ṣallaḷlāhu ʿalayhi wasallam*, easily inferable from Qurʾānic reports of significant events in prophetic history and other relevant verses, al-Attas summarizes his findings thus:

According to our reasoning, taking into consideration what is implied in the Qurʾān that the normal human lifespan is generally less than 100 years, and the evidence derived from the science of genealogy, our estimate of the temporal gap between between Noah before the Flood and Adam extended over about 40 generations covering a period of 1600 years. That is 15 generations over 600 years before the Flood, and 25 generations over 1000 years before that to Adam. We have previously disclosed that the period spanning from our present time to Noah after the Flood, taking the Flood as the terminus, is 5565 years. Thus when this number of years is added to 1600, which is the number of years estimated from before the Flood and before Noah to Adam, we get a total of 7165 years. This total is the number of years spanning from our present time to Adam. We have now given valid evidence to prove the soundness of our assertion that the arrival of Adam on earth was an historic event that took place between 7000 to 8000 years ago....Any possible increase in the number of years in-between Prophets and generations will not effect the two limits of our time-frame of between 7000 and 8000 years of Adam's period on earth. (pp. 56-57).

The gist of his historical critique is that, for Ādam, *ʿalayhi al-salām*, to be intellecto-morally meaningful to Muslims and thus truly appreciated as the

very first man as well as the very first prophet charged with a divinely commanded weighty ethico-moral mission on earth as the place for his living out his term of probation, he has to be: (a) a new and special creation distinct in both degree and kind from the other three kingdoms of nature; indeed, man is the only one of his kind, constituting his own distinct kingdom of “nature” or rather, of human nature (*fiṭrah*), his own exclusive Kingdom of Man; and (b) a historical, well-defined and thus well-recognized individual and personality.

Taken together, this two-pronged moral theological (or axio-teleological) and historical critique tersely argued for and concisely presented in this small book of only 60 pages is definitely an original and compelling refutation of evolutionary theory from the perspective of the Worldview of Islam that deserves further and deeper critical and constructive study by both Muslims and non-Muslims concerned with coming to grips with all aspects of the creation-evolution controversy and debate.

Muslim evolutionists try very hard to fit the concepts of *insān* and *bashar* into their evolutionary models of human origins, but they do that by doing extreme violence to the semantic field of the terminology of the Qurʾān in which the meanings of *bashar* and *insān* are embedded and thus become well-defined, and by such violence they hijack the two terms to force fit them into evolutionary outlook and so equate them with the evolutionary loaded concepts of *Homo*, *Homo sapiens* and *Anthropos*.

For example, once the term *muʿāmalah* (transaction) is divorced from the ethico-moral semantic field of the Qurʾān, especially as it pertains to trade (*tijārah*), then it can be easily corrupted into ‘finance’ to serve financial capitalism, giving rise to a fiqh of *muʿāmalah* that is simply self-serving *hiyalism* and *ḍarūratism* (legalistic stratagems) to justify and legitimize the various financial “products” concocted by banking CEOs, the true bosses of the financial muftis and the so-called shariʿah boards they serve on.

Actions like these amount to the grave crime of *tahrīf āyāt Allāh* (distorting the signs of God), which is imputting wrong meanings to the words of the Qurʾān by misplacing them out of their contexts, and inasmuch as the crime of *tahrīf* pertains to the world it amounts to changing, i.e., distorting the creation of the Creator (*taghyīr khalq al-khālīq*), leading to widespread corruption in the sea and on the land, and in both the world of nature and the world of culture.

That said, it still remains unavoidable that Muslim evolutionists will soon have to be rigorously engaged, first and foremost, on solid empirical grounds, just as al-Ghazālī himself engaged Aristotelian causality on those very grounds some long thousand years ago. Intellecto-scriptural and metaphysico-theological arguments can then be invoked and articulated to complete that initial but necessarily detailed empirical scientific engagement. This approach is required because neo-darwinian evolution purports to be

an empirical scientific theory backed by irrefutable empirical evidence that is as factually self-evident to its earnest purveyors as the the fact that earth is round and aggressively and systematically promoted by them as such to gullible Muslims and non-Muslims.

Such an empirical argumentative discursive strategy demands contemporary *mutakallims* to be thoroughly familiar with the relevant empirical and mathematical sciences impacting on evolutionary theory as well as with the complex, intricate process of scientific discovery, reasoning and justification by which theoretical propositions are transformed into “factual” statements in the influential science journals, popular science books and best-selling academic textbooks. “*And debate with them with the best debate.*” (Q 16:125).

ADI SETIA

Worldview of Islam Research Academy (WIRA)
Malaysia



Tahseen N. Khan. *The Provenance of Man: A Sunni Apologetic of the Original Creation of Ādam* [‘alayh al-salām]. Chicago: Philasufical Publications, 2023, 154 pp. ISBN 9798218132996

This book by an obviously erudite scholar of Islamic analytical theology (*kalām*), exegesis (*tafsīr*) and rhetorics (*‘ilm al-bayān*) is divided into seven unnumbered chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. Though directed against Muslim evolutionists in general, it especially engages the evolutionist views of the UAE-based Algerian astrophysicist Nidhal Guessoum.

The basic contention of the book is that the affirmation of biological parentage for Ādam by Muslim evolutionists such as Guessoum is irreconcilable with its negation. (p. 5). Whether they realize it or not they are in fact subscribing to the ideology of philosophical naturalism, scientism and positivism when they attempt to construct “a story of human evolution from the Qur’ānic verses that read in total accord with the modern theory.” (pp. 8-10). Such a stance obviously renders the ever-shifting, provisional inductive conclusions of modern science as the final arbiter over what can or cannot be interpreted from the verses of the Qur’ān, bypassing altogether and even doing violence to the established objective canons and principles of Qur’ānic commentary and interpretation (*usūl al-tafsīr*). (pp. 89 ff).

Moreover, Muslim evolutionists like Guessoum have failed “to explain why the methods of science, despite its obvious limitations, should be given this lofty status as the absolute criterion against which the apparent mean-