Summary and Keywords

The various positions that Muslim scholars have adopted vis-à-vis Darwin’s theory of evolution since its inception in 1859 are here reviewed with an eye on the theological arguments that are embraced, whether explicitly or implicitly. A large spectrum of views and arguments are thus found, ranging from total rejection to total acceptance, including “human exceptionalism” (evolution is applicable to all organisms and animals but not to humans).

The two main theological arguments that are thus extracted from Muslim scholars’ discussions of evolution are: 1) Is God excluded by the evolutionary paradigm or does the term “Creator” acquire a new definition? 2) Does Adam still exist in the human evolution scenario, and how to include his Qur’anic story in the scientific scenario?

Additional, but less crucial issues are sometimes raised in Islamic discussions of evolution: a) Does the extinction of innumerable species during the history of life on earth conflict with the traditional view of God’s creation? b) Is theodicy (“the problem of evil”) exacerbated or explained by evolution? c) Are “species” well-defined and important biological entities in the Islamic worldview? d) Can the randomness that seems inherent in the evolutionary process be reconciled with a divine creation plan?

These questions are here reviewed through the writings and arguments of Muslim scholars, and general conclusions are drawn about why rejectionists find it impossible to address those issues in a manner that is consistent with their religious principles and methods, and why more progressive, less literalistic scholars are able to fold those issues within a less rigid conception of God and the world.

Keywords: Islam and evolution, Darwin, Adam, creation, teleology
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