that the religious and state institutions were practically separated in most of the societies, although ideally the Muslims believed in their unification. Lapidus calls this separation as “neither clear-cut nor complete” (p. 816), as Muslim states were legitimized through religious symbols and were supposed to perform duties towards religion. Similarly, religious associations were involved in political matters dealing at the same time with religious issues. Although Lapidus has not studied the relationship between religion and politics in much detail, his occasional brief remarks can stimulate further research and investigation.

Lapidus synthesizes the information available on Muslim history into an original analysis and the overall thought is well-knit and integrated. The author also tries his best to draw a complete picture of the story and to unravel all possible factors underlying the historical events. While reading the book, the reader gets the impression of dealing with the discipline of World History as the book covers almost all times and spaces of Muslim history and civilization.

The book prompts the beginner to learn more about the different periods and regions of the Muslim societies. The work can also prove to be a valuable asset for the students of Muslim history. On the other hand, this is a very perceptive analytical and synthesized overview of the Muslim civilization which draws the attention of the readers to the most exciting and stimulating questions pertaining to Muslim history.

Rafia Riaz


The idea that biological evolution is intrinsically opposed to any form of religion, especially the Abrahamic faiths, is a commonly held notion amongst laymen and academics of both religious and irreligious backgrounds alike. However, Nadeem Haque in the third and final volume of the innovative From Microbits to Everything series sets to put an end to the debate between Darwinism and creationism and attempts to find a middle way between the two seemingly contradictory philosophies. By presenting a new mechanism
for the evolution of life that fits in with the model of the universe being proposed in the first two books of the series coauthored by M. Muslim, a clear unification of physics and biology is achieved—at least in theory.

The thesis of the book is divided into two portions, the first of which deals with an understanding (i.e. reinterpretation) of the creation and evolution of all life forms as is mentioned in the Qur’ān. The second portion of the thesis describes a new mechanism for the evolution of life that is assumed to go hand in hand with both the Qur’ānic perspective of the universe and Haque’s and Muslim’s perspective of the structure and constituents of the universe in both the micro and macro scale proposed in Volumes 1 and 2. Though the book may show a glimpse of the reality of the mechanisms underlying the natural world, it fails to empirically prove both portions of its thesis. New discoveries may eventually lend evidence to the claims present in the book. Despite this, the need for Islamic scholarship to tackle the theory of biological evolution as is understood by modern biology is highlighted by the overwhelming lack of acceptance amongst Muslims worldwide; the denial of the traditional understanding of the mechanisms driving biological evolution found in *From Microbits to Everything: Beyond Darwinism and Creationism* being evidence of this.

Haque presents a new mechanism for biological evolution that has its pivot in the revised physics of Volumes 1 and 2. The main emphasis that Haque makes with regards to the forces underlying the evolutionary changes that organisms go through is that it is “purely internal mechanisms for being the driving force of evolution, in terms of generational change in the genome due to structural and network changes in its components” (pp. 40–41). The actual mechanism which is proposed by the author is called “motion based programming” which involves the subtle changes in the genome of organisms that affect their phenotypes. According to Haque, the changes do not happen randomly, but rather through a divinely controlled process which involves a very interesting process called quasi-equilibrium. This quasi-equilibrium is defined as being the state in which a structure is stable, and then subsequently reaches a threshold as a result of the internal motion of the elements constituting the structure, or even the position of the structure itself, after which the structure reaches a new state (p. 33). The example (but more appropriately the analogy) of a book on a shelf is given where it falls off the shelf after being in a seemingly stable state. Indeed, others like Michael J. Denton have reached similar conclusions regarding the possibility of evolution being a directed phenomenon and even concludes that

> it is premature to reject out of hand the possibility that during the course of
evolution specific preprogrammed genetic rearrangements have occurred at specific times.¹

Though this process may seem like just another way of looking at how genetic mutations occur, Haque strays from conventional evolutionary biology in that he asserts that no natural selection is involved by these “programmed” mutations. Instead, “everything follows pathways that are governed by quasi-equilibrium,” including both living and non-living systems (p. 35). What this means from an evolutionary perspective is that organisms do not change in response to the environment because of selective pressures that make the best adapted organisms within a population have more offspring, and hence a larger portion of the population with the best adapted traits through generations, but instead, a generation of organisms are programmed via motion based programming due to “inbuilt pathways” to exhibit phenotypic changes that are best suited to the environment. Those from the population that “are not in sync die out” (p. 35). Though this process is described as being “natural and automatic,” it is asserted by the author that it is a divinely sustained process (p. 34).

The processes mentioned by Haque certainly explain some phenomena that are seen throughout the fossil record, such as the relatively quick and sudden changes in the evolutionary history of the morphology of certain animals despite hundreds of thousands to millions of years of stasis. As pointed out by R. A. Kerr, it is indeed a conundrum that if stability is the rule, and if selection tends to freeze organisms against change, then this raises the question of how selection ever transformed organisms so dramatically: “How do you get from funny little Mesozoic mammals to horses and whales? From Archaeopteryx to hummingbirds.”²

Haque’s answer to this is that “We need to gain a new understanding of ‘information’ and couple it with quasi-equilibrium to understand how evolution transpires” (p. 33). In spite of this, the modern understanding of the theory of evolution (ie. Darwinian evolution coupled with Punctuated Equilibrium), which would be best described as the author’s antithesis, is not proven wrong in the book. One of the main reasons why is the fact that no such empirical evidence exists to show that certain organisms have not been subject to change in a manner that contradicts the processes outlined in the

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² Quoted by Michael Denton, ibid., 297.
modern understanding of the theory of evolution. Admittedly, the modern understanding of the theory of evolution does not explain how and why certain mutations cause an organism to exhibit a certain phenotype, but are thought of as being random beneficial mutations. The mechanisms for the purely internal changes in the genome of organisms that are outlined by Haque may be a theistic alternative to randomness and chance that is conventionally thought of to be the reason why everything is the way it is. It should be noted that, contrary to popular belief, there is nothing Islamically wrong with the belief that natural selection is the mechanism by which biological evolution works so long as it is not based on the philosophical assumption that all cause and effect are separate from the divine will and predestination (qadr). In fact, the prominent expert in Islamic law, Nuh Ha Mim Keller, says in one of his letters regarding the topic of biological evolution:

From the point of view of tawhid, Islamic theism, nothing happens “at random,” there is no “autonomous nature,” and anyone who believes in either of these is necessarily beyond the pale of Islam.  

Thus, it is clear that if a Muslim were to accept biological evolution as scientific fact, which is unanimously agreed upon by the scientific community, then Haque’s mechanism for evolution is not the only theologically acceptable theory that explains the process of evolution.

Though Haque’s contention as to how species have diversified and evolved through time is not theoretically in conflict with the traditional understanding of Islam, his idea that the Prophet Adam (peace be on him) is also a direct descendant of other life forms is certainly against what most scholars would consider the orthodox view of Adam’s creation. According to Haque, “God did not suddenly create Adam out of clay. Adam was programmed to arise after billions of years of evolution” (p. 59). The clay or dust that Adam was created from, which are mentioned in the Qur’ân in “7: 12; 17: 61; 18: 37; 22: 5; 30: 20; 35: 11; 40: 67” and elsewhere, are said to be the primary catalyst which helped to form the first basic molecules of life which, through the process of evolution described in the book, gave rise to the vista of different species on Earth after many millions of years eventually leading to man (p. 27). The Prophet Adam (peace be on him) is described as being quite literally “born embryological the same way we were and had a mother and father” (p. 52). This interpretation of Haque seems at first to

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contradict clear cut texts in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth literature about Adam’s special creation such as the verse of the Qur’ān that states, “Verily, the likeness of ‘Īsā (Jesus) before Allah is the likeness of Adam. He created him from dust, then (He) said to him: “Be!”—and he was” (3: 59). It may be implied from this verse that Adam (peace be on him) was a miraculous creation just as the Prophet ‘Īsā (Jesus) (peace be on him) was created miraculously. However, it is asserted by the author that the dust mentioned in the verse talks about the cosmic stardust from which ultimately all planets and life descended. Haque’s argument with regards to how Adam (peace be on him) evolved from earlier life forms seems to be a modern interpretation of Islamic texts that disregards classical Islamic scholarship and consensus.

In all fairness, however, Haque’s argument that all life originated from the direct activity of clay does seem to make sense if taken as an argument by itself and independent of classically held scholarly opinions. Haque’s model is founded upon a mechanism that removes the God-of-the-gaps and one that brings a unified view of physics and biology that applies even to the emergence of humans. The rise of human consciousness is also explained very well within this framework in such a way that it does not contradict the verses of the Qur’ān. This idea seems to fit in neatly with a “Qur’ān-only” interpretation of the Qur’ān itself because of the potential ambiguity in the Qur’ānic texts when read separate from classical exegeses. If one as a Muslim is fine with holding a belief that is not held by the majority of Muslims (i.e. the Sunnī majority, also known as Ahl al-Sunnah wa ’l-Jamā‘ah), then one would hail Haque’s theory of the origin of man as being the long sought after truth of both the Qur’ān and biological evolution. However, according to Keller, who follows the traditional Sunnī creed, believing in Adam (peace be on him) as being created in an evolutionary fashion is unbelief (kafr) no matter if we ascribe the process to Allah or to “nature,” because it negates the truth of Adam’s special creation that Allah has revealed in the Qur’ān.

Others like Nadim al-Jisr allow the scope of the theory of evolution to apply even to humanity given that it is absolutely proven with rational evidence that humans did indeed evolve and also with the aforementioned assumption of

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5 Keller, “Islam and Evolution.”
Additionallly, ‘Abd al-Ḥamid al-Zindānī allows for the embracement of either one of the two mentioned opinions held by Keller and al-Jisr. Dr. Israr Ahmed, another well known Muslim figure who follows the traditional Islamic creed, puts forward a view very similar to Haque’s “in a 2004 lecture on Human Personality and 2 forms of Knowledge as part of televised Round Table with Dr. Israr Ahmed”:

From the interaction of water and clay started the life on this planet. From a single cell to the most evolved Homo sapiens. It might have taken millions of years...but then Allah...selected one Homo sapiens and blew into him the spirit...Now we have a human being.

Because of the inconsistency with how the traditional approach to Islam deals with the creation of Adam (peace be on him) and how modern thinkers like Nadeem Haque approach the subject, a Muslim would definitely feel uncomfortable accepting Adam (peace be on him) as being descended from other life forms as is proposed in the book. A detailed legal opinion and ruling (fatawa) with regards to the theory of evolution applying to humanity is not found abundantly in Islamic literature and as such many different viewpoints are espoused by Muslims scholars.

It is perhaps because of the general confusion amongst Muslim scholars about the theory of evolution that many scholars have rejected the theory outright or have doubted its credibility. For this reason, Haque should have included in his book a detailed chapter explaining what is acceptable for a Muslim following the traditional Sunni creed to believe in with regards in particular to the creation of the Prophet Adam (peace be on him) in the context of evolution. In addition, there should have also been a detailed suggestion of what the purpose of vestigial organs and genes are in the framework of his theory. Without it, a Muslim may read the book and get an incomplete idea of what to believe of the book and what to reject. Instead of providing something to believe in, it provides food for thought; not something so satisfying to an audience of Muslim readers hungry for knowledge!

Besides Haque’s theory laid out in his book, he does a great job in avoiding any and all ad hominem attacks. Unlike many Muslim anti-evolutionists like Adnan Oktar who are particularly hostile to the theory of

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6 See, David Solomon Jalajel, Islam and Biological Evolution (Western Cape: University of the Western Cape, 2009), 162.
7 See, ibid., 153.
evolution, Haque does not attack upholders of Darwinian evolution with an atheistic philosophy purely on the grounds that they are atheists. Instead, Haque attempts to show that his ideas are more logically coherent than those held by believers in Darwinian natural selection. Haque also does a fantastic job of explaining his ideas in a detailed and logical fashion such that one with basic knowledge of biology and chemistry will understand the book quite thoroughly.

The contentions held in the book must certainly be looked at by all Muslim scholars following the traditional Sunni methodologies. For Haque’s book to be taken seriously by the general Muslim public it should first pass the filtration of traditionally educated scholars who are well versed in both scientific and sacred education. If these people of knowledge are not well educated in secular knowledge, then those who are knowledgeable in sacred knowledge will often give misunderstood judgements on issues pertaining to science, hence a dichotomy is created between religion and science. Unfortunately, many Muslim scholars and prominent figures of today are not knowledgeable simultaneously in both areas of study. As a result, many people associate Islam with creationism and unequivocal rejection of biological evolution. Many of the world’s well known Muslim figures like Adnan Oktar and Dr. Tahir ul-Qadri openly promote creationism and denounce biological evolution on the grounds that evolution is a scientifically debunked theory. Haque’s attempt to unite the understanding of biological evolution with a Qur’anic outlook of the universe may be the solution to the problematic situation of Muslims regarding biological evolution. If Haque’s thesis is accepted by a number of well known Muslim scholars, then it is without any doubt that, at least from a Muslim’s perspective, evolution is, in fact, the unifying theory of biology.

Shihab Sarwar


The book fills a void in the study of Middle Eastern politics, in so far as it challenges the dominant rhetoric in the wider Muslim world about the role of the United States and the West in sustaining dictatorships in the Arab world.