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The Human Being as the Mystery of *Kun fa Kān*: An Engagement with Shoaib Ahmed Malik's *Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm*

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Abstract

The theory of evolution has supposedly displaced human beings from their lofty positions as unique special creatures and placed them within a process of evolution where they are nothing more than a species that has evolved from primitive ones and will be eclipsed by more superior ones. In this article, I engage with Shoaib Malik's book *Islam and Evolution* using a plain sense reading of Islamic scripture. In particular I interrogate Malik's quadripartite division of Muslim attitude towards evolution (creationist, human exceptionalist, Adamic exceptionalist and no exceptions) to see whether they stand up to scrutiny against a plain sense understanding of the Islamic sources. I single out 'human exceptionalism' as the optimum view that fits a plain sense reading of scripture as well as one that has the potential to pacify Muslim concerns about evolution. I conclude by posing some questions for Malik to deliberate on.

Keywords: Theistic evolution, Human exceptionalism, Plain sense reading, pedagogy

Tū rāze kun fa kān hay – apnī ānkhōn par 'ayān hōjā
Khudī kā rāzdān hōjā – khudā kā tarjumān hōjā (Muhammad Iqbal)

You are the mystery of *kun fa kān*¹ – become aware of who you are
Be the keeper of the secrets of the Self – be God's spokesperson

Introduction

In his philosophical novel, the 12th century Muslim philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl (*Abubacer* in Latin) (d.1185) describes how his main character, Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān (Alive the son of Awake) was spontaneously born from the earth out of fermented clay.² He writes,

Our forefathers, of blessed memory, tell of a certain equatorial island, lying off the coast of India, where human beings come in being without father or mother. [...] In a pocket of earth on that island, over the years, a mass of clay worked until hot and cold, damp and dry were blended in just the proper way, their strengths perfectly balanced. This fermented mass of clay was quite large ... more suited ... for becoming human gametes. The midmost part was the best proportioned and bore the most perfect equivalence to the makeup of a man.³

Ibn Ṭufayl proceeds to describe how this mass divided into cells and eventually became the recipient of God's spirit in a "virtually indissoluble" sense. "For it should be clear that this spirit emanates continuously from God – glory be to Him."⁴

Ibn Ṭufayl's understanding, despite being a work of fiction, is not too far removed from a Qur'ānic anthropology of human creation where the Qur'ān mentions that all life started with water (*mā'*)⁵ including humans who also had earth (*turāb*)⁶ in their composition to

form an extract of clay (*sulāla min tīn*).⁷ This clay became sticky (*tīn lāzib*),⁸ dark and dry (*ṣalṣāl min ham'in masnūn*).⁹ It hardened like baked pottery (*ṣalṣāl ka al-fakhhār*).¹⁰ God breathed His spirit in to the android formed out of this process which then became a full moral human being.¹¹ In this manner, God produced humans from the earth like plants.¹² The question of human origin and destiny is as old as humans themselves. Evolution as a plausible theory to explain human origin is a late contender. However, since its suggestion as a reasonable narrative of human descent, it has gained traction throughout the world.¹³ This article forms a part of a special issue where contributors are tasked to engage with Dr Shoaib Ahmed Malik's award-winning opus *Islam and Evolution: al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm*.¹⁴ I am to participate in this discussion from the perspective of a Sunnī Muslim theologian. The structure of the article is as follows.

For the benefit of readers who would want to peruse this article independently of Malik's book or other articles in this special collection, I commence by producing a summary of his quadripartite division of contemporary Muslim attitudes towards evolution: "creationism", "human exceptionalism", "Adamic exceptionalism", and "no exceptions".¹⁵ I then proceed to discuss my positionality by way of providing three principles which for me are axiomatic. A critical examination of Malik's four Muslim attitudes toward evolution ensues.¹⁶ I furnish further arguments for the primacy of the 'human exceptionalism' view, which I believe strikes a delicate balance between scriptural truth and scientific facts. I do this by taking a plain sense reading of scripture as well as a holistic scriptural understanding of human supremacy over all other creations. The utility of Malik's four categorisations is demonstrated by mapping them against Muslim concerns and anxieties about evolution. My conclusion in this article is that whilst I agree with Malik's metaphysical proposition, a plain sense reading of scripture coupled with what is necessarily known from the religion (*ma'lūm min al-dīn bi al-ḍarūra*) leads me to disagree with his hermeneutical conclusion.¹⁷ I argue that a plain sense reading of scripture would exclude a "no exceptionalism" and an "Adamic exceptionalism" reading of evolution. A "creationist" approach would be myopic to established scientific facts. I finally posit some questions for Malik to deliberate on.

Malik's Taxonomy of Muslim Attitudes Towards Evolution

As a heuristic device, Malik classified contemporary Muslim attitudes toward evolution into four categories: "creationism", "human exceptionalism", "Adamic exceptionalism" and the "no exceptions" camps. The sole underlying common denominator for such a classification is common ancestry as out of all the concerns that Muslims have about evolution, the question of Adam's place in this process is at the fore.¹⁸ Creationists believe that God created all creations in their full form as we see them today. Random chance and evolution have no place in God's scheme.¹⁹ The "no exceptions" camp believe that all of creation including Adam and his progeny share a lineage and history and are biologically connected through the process of evolution. For them Adam was a literary figure, a metaphor for humanity and Adam's creation in the Garden of Eden a moral truth (and not historical) and a pious myth.²⁰

The "human exceptionalists" allow for non-human evolution but exclude humans from this process. They argue that evolution reached the point where it was the time for humans to come on to the scene. Right at that moment, God inserted the human being fully formed into the process. This human species is biologically, anatomically, physiologically, and genetically indistinguishable from the would be evolved species if God allowed the

evolution process to arrive at its logical conclusion. The believer knows that the human came into existence as a result of God's interjection through their understanding of scripture. The non-believer in God is myopic to this divine intervention and thought that the evolutionary process running its course brought about humans.²¹ This is also the view that I advocate.

Finally, "Adamic exceptionalism" is the view that all of creation—including some humans—with the exception of Adam and Eve could have been a part of the evolutionary process.²² Advocates of this camp believe that Adam and Eve were not the first humans and some of Adam's offspring may have married and bred with non-Adamic humans. These four categories can be summed up using one umbrella concept "theistic evolution" as opposed to "materialistic evolution". And Malik has done us all a favour by vindicating theistic evolution from the charges of blasphemy (*kufir*).²³

Axiomatic Principles

My position on "human exceptionalism" can only be understood in light of the following three axiomatic points, which for me, cannot be comprised in this discussion. They are: (1) an understanding of the epistemic goal²⁴ of the Qur'ān, (2) a plain sense approach to the scripture, and (3) an acceptance of the scientific facts of evolution.

A fundamental point of the Muslim creed is the belief that the Qur'ān is the unadulterated actual Word of God revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad through the angel Gabriel in a span of twenty-three years. No Muslim can claim their membership to the Islamic faith without accepting this axiom. Its epistemic goal is to provide a blueprint for the salvation of mankind. It neither makes any claims about the scientific accuracy of its content, nor should it be read as a science textbook. Verses of the Qur'ān which happen to correspond with scientific facts are no more than a happy coincidence. The scientific compatibility of these verses is secondary to their primary epistemic goals. For example, the description in the Qur'ān of human development in the mother's womb serves a greater purpose than to describe biological facts. The *telos* is revealed in the final portion of the verse where the Qur'ān reinforces the message that the God who is capable of creating humans *ex nihilo*, nurturing them from a seedling to a fledgling human babe is also capable to resurrect them from death. The verse reads,

We *first* created humanity from an extract of clay. Thereafter *born*, We placed him as a drop of semen in the stable environments *of the womb*. The drop of semen turned to a blood-like clot; and, from the blood-like clot, We made the fleshy lump into bones and covered them with flesh; then We produce from it another created being. Blessed is God, the best Creator. After all that, you will die, and on Judgment Day you will be resurrected.²⁵

A further epistemic point that one needs to keep in mind when reading the Qur'ān is that Muslims believe that, through this Writ, God communicated to humans how to live a God-conscious good life. This communication is not through direct inspiration into the minds and hearts of people but through the medium of language: Arabic precisely.

The Qur'ān is written in Arabic. It first and foremost addresses its immediate recipient: the Arabs of Arabia. It needed to make sense to them to make an impact and flourish. A plain sense reading of the Qur'ān would have been the primary vehicle to convey this meaning (unless there are strong rational reasons to move away from this meaning).²⁶

Thus, elaborate descriptions of paradise with lush gardens and flowing rivers hit the right spot with the Arabs as they conjure up the image of a cool oasis in the middle of a heart-singeing barren desert.²⁷ The descriptions of the heavens as a canopy, the mountains as tent-pins, the earth as a carpet-spread and the features of a crooked camel resonated with the Bedouin Arabs as it was their world that the Qur'ān was describing.²⁸

Based on the above principles, it is imperative to accept a plain sense meaning of the creation of Adam and Eve mentioned in the Qur'ān.²⁹ Accordingly, the creation of Adam is actual. He was a real person and not an allegory or metaphor for humanity. He is also the first human being and the seed of all humans to come. The over-astounding use of nouns and verbs as well as adjectives and adverbs employed in the Qur'ān to talk about Adam and Eve deny the possibility of a religious fable. Adam and Eve were created parentless, and they roamed the Earth. They were real people and the first human beings.

Whilst my scriptural hermeneutics leads me to believe in an actual Adam and Eve and that the origins of humanity started with them as the only ancestors of humanity (monogenesis), I also accept the scientific data on evolution. The scientific evidence for evolution from disparate fields of study such as abiogenesis, genetics, palaeontology, fossil records, population dynamics etc., are overwhelming to disregard it or explain it away as pseudoscience. For me, then, the scriptural narrative and scientific data is at loggerheads. To reject the scientific evidence for the sake of scripture is to reject obvious established facts which make one look naïve. To reject the scripture for the sake of empirical data is a no-go area as I have made a commitment to be a believing Muslim who holds everything in Muslim scripture to be true. The only escape out of this bottleneck is to believe in the scientific evidence for evolution (which does not contradict scripture) but make an exception for human beings to be excluded from this process (human exceptionalism). All of this happens with the belief that God is the originator of all creation, whether through an evolutionary process or spontaneous creation; “He is the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner.”³⁰

An Analysis of Malik's Four Categories

A perusal of the number of people who fall into each of Malik's four camps immediately yields some interesting results. Starting from the camp which has the most advocates to the least, it seems that the “creationist” camp takes pride of place. This is telling that the majority of Muslims still do not believe in evolution. In second place comes the polar opposite “no exceptions” camp. Advocates of this position believe that all of creation including Adam and his offspring are biologically connected to each other. Creation sprouted from a common ancestor and diversified like the fronds of a bush plant. Most Muslims advocating this position have some form of scientific background. The most interesting are the two camps in between: “human exceptionalism” and “Adamic exceptionalism”. Malik's “list of thinkers table”³¹ show that very few people subscribe to these views, which reveal that they have not taken root in Muslim communities yet. “Adamic exceptionalism” has only one champion, David Solomon Jalajel.

Advocates from these two camps—“human exceptionalism” and “Adamic exceptionalism”—are the real “theistic evolutionists” since they need to do the most hermeneutical work. On the one hand is their conviction of the truth of the scientific evidence, on the other is their belief in the truth of the historical narrative of Adam's creation. Squaring these two contradictory resources requires serious theological acumen.

Whilst all four camps are not without benefits by accepting any one of these views we run into some form of theological or scientific conundrum. If we accept the “creationist” view, we would be compelled to reject the scientific evidence. This then raises questions for the compatibility of science and Islam. It also sends the message that the Muslim community believe that the entire scientific community are colluding on a world-wide conspiracy. For some creationists like Sayyed Hossein Nasr and Osman Bakr, the philosophical presuppositions of the science behind evolution are problematic. They attack these presuppositions by using alternative ideas from the philosophy of science. Malik has recently demonstrated why such an approach is not conducive to an intelligent discussion on Islam and evolution.³² Others from the “creationist” camp are closely related to the “scientific miracle” movement.³³ Indeed, its advocates such as Harun Yahya and Zakir Naik have argued the truth of the Qur’ān by demonstrating that it possess scientific facts which did not exist in the time of Muhammad.³⁴ The only explanation that can be given is that this is a proof of the miraculous nature of the Qur’ān. It is then not surprising that some Muslim creationists like Muzaffar Iqbal draw upon the American Intelligent Design movement as a serious scientific contender to Darwinian evolution.³⁵ Malik calls the use of the Intelligent Design argument in this debate as the ‘scientific miracle in the Qur’ān 2.0.’³⁶

In stark contrast to the “creationist” camp is the “no exceptions camp”. Advocates of this camp place too much faith in science and use it as a yardstick to interpret scripture. This camp comes close to the historical theological school of the rationalist Mu’tazilites. The Mu’tazilites believed in *sola scripta* and argued for the hermeneutical primacy of reason. In the instance where there is a contradiction between scripture and reason, the former either needs to be explained in such a way that it succumbed to the latter or is to be rejected as anomalous.³⁷ Adam, in the “no exceptions” camp is not a historical figure, but a literary person personifying all of mankind. If the “creationists” were protagonists of scientific miracles in the Qur’ān, the “no exceptions” camp are supporters of the scientification of miracles in the Qur’ān. Verses describing phenomena that defy the laws of physics were interpreted to conform to a rational and less fantastical explanation.³⁸ In this they have precedence in the veritable Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) who interpreted the Qur’ānic miracle stories as allegorical.³⁹

The “human exceptionalist” camp advocate a balanced blend of scientific facts and scriptural truths. It is based on an anthropology which is faithful to scripture and responsive to science. Its most famous advocate today is the American Muslim theologian Yasir Qadhi alongside his co-author Nazir Khan. Damian Howard notes that a number of Francophone Muslims also held this view as early as 1999.⁴⁰ Qadhi and Nazir write,

... [T]here is nothing in Islamic scripture that explicitly negates the concept of abiogenesis, genetic mutation and diversification, natural selection, the existence of hominid species, or a common ancestor for all biological life on earth, excluding only the descendants of Adam.⁴¹

The advocates of this camp have three main questions to contend with: divine deception and the need for divine insertion of humans in the evolutionary process; limitation to the amount of genetic variation in Adam’s progeny due to interbreeding and the question of incest.⁴² Qadhi, Khan and Malik already provide answers to the deception question as well as the genetic bottleneck problem.⁴³ A further answer is provided by me in the next

section. Incest need not be seen as amoral as morality and immoral actions are predicated on scripture. All scholars mention that for a short amount of time interbreeding was permissible and then prohibited.

Finally, by accepting the “Adamic exceptionalism” view, we solve the genetic bottleneck problem as well as the problem of incest,⁴⁴ but at the cost of stripping off Adam as the father of humanity and the first human. However, some scholars have argued that the genetic bottleneck actually does not get solved for how many children would Adam and Eve need to have, who then interbreed with non-Adamic humans in order to get out of this bottleneck? One scientist mentioned that forty thousand or less synchronously reproducing individuals were required which suggests a population of 15,000 people. The bottleneck would take three centuries to replace all non-humans with pure Adamic offspring.⁴⁵

Jalajel argues that the story of Adam’s creation is a story of faith, it has nothing to do with the biological origins of the genus *Homo* or the species *Homo sapiens*. To collapse the two into each other is to extend beyond what the two disciplines allow as well as what Islamic theology allows.⁴⁶ Jalajel writes,

All the evidence for hominid evolution, up to and including the evolution of *Homo sapiens* in a direct line of descent, is empirical, and there is nothing in Islamic scriptures that confirms or contradicts the existence of those hominids. Consequently, it is not a matter of religious belief to accept or reject the scientific account of hominid evolution up to and including organisms which are taxonomically *Homo sapiens*.⁴⁷

Whilst Jalajel argues for a theological suspension of view (*tawaqquf*), which enable several possibilities, it seems that the scientific evidence for hominid evolution functions as a preponderate cause (*murajjih*) for Jalajel to lean towards an Adamic exceptionalism position.⁴⁸ This reading suggests that Adam and Eve came down to earth and found other human beings who came into existence through evolutionary descent. Their children married these non-Adamic humans and from them humanity further spread far and wide. In this way Adam was not the first human being and all or some of humanity share their origin and common ancestry with all of creation. In other words, according to Jalajel, whilst Adam is the universal ancestor for all human beings, he is not necessarily the exclusive ancestor for all.⁴⁹

Whilst the “Adamic exceptionalism” view is a novel idea in that one can accept the scientific view of human evolution without it being theologically problematic, I feel that the entire theory is premised on the problematic foundation that Islamic scripture is silent on the origin of humans. I would retort that this is Jalajel’s reading of these sources and not necessarily *the* reading of the sources as understood by the majority of scholars. Verses related to humanity being created from one soul,⁵⁰ and from one couple,⁵¹ have been understood by all classical Muslim scholars as one lineage going back to a single starting point: Adam and Eve. They do not entertain the idea that some lineages may have moved sideways to bypass Adam and Eve and have their origins in non-Adamic ancestors. Even if one was able to employ their hermeneutic to arrive at this idea, but short of them spelling it out, it will not be correct for us to attribute these ideas to them. This fact that Adam is the first human being and the father of humanity is also found in the Prophetic hadith related to the hereafter where people will approach Adam and say to

him, ‘You are the father of humanity’.⁵² Adam being the father of humanity and the first human being is such common knowledge that it can be classed as ‘what is necessarily known from the religion’ (*ma lūm min al-dīn bi al-ḍarūra*), and any movement away from this understanding requires explicit textual evidence and cannot be based on *argumentum ex silentio*.

The argument from silence is problematic because there may be a hundred and one things that we were not told about, should we exercise *tawaqquf* in all of these and accept that there is a possibility that they may have happened? For example, whilst we know that both Adam and Eve eventually wore clothes in paradise, there is no mention of whether they wore clothes on earth. An argument from silence will suggest that both possibilities are valid. Malik previously understood Jalajel to be an advocate of the “creationist” camp,⁵³ however he retracted his statement in a later article.⁵⁴ Nidhal Guessoum still believes that Jalajel is a creationist.⁵⁵ My analysis has led me to conclude that Jalajel stops short of the “no exceptions” camp.

What the above analysis revealed is that there are benefits as well as problems with accepting any one of these positions. The differences arise from how much importance one is willing to accord to scripture and science. The table (1) below demonstrates this more clearly.

Position	Attitude towards scripture	Attitude towards science	Benefit of the position	Problems with the position
Creationism	Strong scripture	Weak science	A stronger commitment to scripture. Religiously the safest position.	The belief that scientists in the world are involved in mass conspiracy. Resorting to pseudo-scientific theories such as the ID movement. Incorrect use of discipline (philosophy of science) to respond to evolution.
Human exceptionalism	Strong scripture	Strong science	A balanced approach to scripture and science. Provides a religiously plausible explanation for a scientific phenomenon.	Runs into scientific problems such as reduction of gene pool through incest. The charge of a deceptive God.
Adamic exceptionalism	Weak scripture	Strong science	Bypasses the problem of genetic reduction.	Goes against the majority of the ummah in arguing that Adam is not the first

			Theological <i>tawaqquf</i> is a helpful hermeneutical device to demarcate the limits and horizons of scripture.	human being. Even against those who advocate theological <i>tawaqquf</i> . If taken to its logical conclusion, the position advocates that all humans including the Prophet Muhammad evolved from simple organisms and share common ancestry with the rest of creation.
No exceptions	Weakest scripture	Strong science	Comes closest to mainstream understanding of evolution.	Opens scripture to all forms of hermeneutical gymnastics. Veers close to scientism.

Table 1: An analysis of Malik's four classifications.

Further Evidence for Human Exceptionalism

I believe that human exceptionalism comes closest to a scriptural understanding of human origin. It is their special nature that warranted them to be separately created, independent of all other creatures. The distinguishing features are not obvious to scientists who only focus on the biological aspects of the human being. The human being is an exceptional creature because it is an amalgamation of the sacred and the profane: the biological, metaphysical, spiritual and theological dimensions. Below I mention a few more reasons why I believe in human exceptionalism to the evolutionary process.

In the epigraph to this article, I quoted the philosopher-poet Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938).

You are the mystery of *kun fa fakān* – become aware of who you are
Be the keeper of the secrets of the Self – be God's spokesperson⁵⁶

By the mystery of *kun fa fakān*, Iqbal is referring to the Qur'anic references describing how God brings about creation through his word "Be". One such example from the Qur'ān will suffice. "Whenever We wish something to happen, We say, "Be", and Becomes."⁵⁷ Iqbal says that the human is a mystery because the father of humanity: Adam came into existence through the twin force of God's command ('Be!') and His intimate involvement. This involved God creating Adam with his own hands—without modality. The use of the first person singular (*khalaqtu biyadayya*) in the verse denotes closeness, importance and care.⁵⁸ The human being/Adam also possess a piece of the divine (again in non-anthropomorphic terms) when God breathed His spirit in to Adam.⁵⁹ Self-awareness, consciousness and self-worth is a consequence of divine in-breathing (*become aware of who you are*). Thus, rather than viewing human exceptionalism as a sign of a deceptive God, a more theologically robust view which is in concordance with human teleology is that the creation of a special and mysteriously crafted human being carefully

curated to be interjected right at the correct juncture of the evolutionary process needed to happen to distinguish between amoral hominids and moral human beings.⁶⁰

God has made humans His vicegerent (*khalīfa*)⁶¹ and humanity have offered, to their detriment, to carry the Trust (*amanā*).⁶² Only human beings are entrusted with revelation and prophethood (be God's spokesperson). But most importantly, the Prophet Muhammad is the specimen of the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*). His lineage is as pure as his spirit. It is not befitting that there is a possibility that he shares his lineage with other hominid primates.

A Pedagogical Use of Malik's Quadripartite Categorisations: Deflecting Muslim Trepidation of Evolution

A perusal of the literature on Muslim reception of evolution reveals the following to be the primary causes for its rejection.⁶³ A mapping of Malik's four categories against these concerns will assist in ascertaining which one of these four is the best fit to address the community's anxiety towards evolution.

1. Evolution is only a "theory" and not a fact. This is what early Muslim opponents of evolution like Mawdūdī (d. 1979) opined as is still the prevailing (albeit slowly diminishing) mood amongst Muslims world-wide.⁶⁴ The confusion lies with the use of the word "theory" which has both a vernacular meaning as well as a scientific one. The popular meaning has been used by Muslim proselytists like Zakir Naik to discard evolution as mere conjecture.⁶⁵ However, within the scientific community, a theory is that which has explanatory powers. It is based on facts, data, and interpretation of that data. The theory of evolution is as factual as the theory of relativity or the theory of gravity or the theory of thermodynamics. It is a scientific terminology which is badly used in popular culture.⁶⁶ Education of the basics of evolution and the differences between the popular use of the word 'theory' and its scientific usage will assist in addressing this confusion. Malik tackles this issue in chapter one.⁶⁷
2. Evolution is the holy grail of atheists. They have weaponised the theory of evolution and have used it to render God redundant. Muslim polemicists have also viewed evolution from this anti-religious perspective. For these Muslim polemicists as well as atheists like Dawkins et al., science displaces religion; evolution displaces God.⁶⁸ It is not surprising then that the general Muslim population wants to distance itself from any association with these types of atheistic beliefs. A proper workshop around "theistic evolution" will help in pacifying these concerns.⁶⁹ All four of Malik's categories fall within theistic evolution.
3. Evolution creates problems for free-will. Evolution is the secular version of the religious predetermination (*taqdīr*).⁷⁰ Theistic evolution can respond to this concern.
4. Evolution questions the creative agency of God for explaining the genesis of man specifically and all of creation generally. It ejects (according to people's assumption) God from the being the author of creation.⁷¹ Similar to the above two points, theistic evolution can respond to this criticism.
5. The theory of evolution seemingly contradicts the miraculous creation of the Prophet Adam and his wife Eve as recounted in numerous places in the Qur'ān. Islamic

scripture is very clear that Adam was created in God's image as a full adult human being. For Muslims, reconciling these dissenting ideas leads to an impasse. In such situations religion takes pride of place over science. Three of the four categories—excluding the “no exceptions” camp—are able to address these concerns.⁷²

6. Furthermore, people find it highly repulsive to associate themselves with primate animals. Especially since the Qur'an reminisces the fate of some bygone communities who were transmogrified (*maskh*) in to monkeys and pigs for their sins.⁷³ The thought of sharing common ancestry with animals is too much for them to fathom. Only “human exceptionalism” and “Adamic exceptionalism” can settle these concerns.
7. Evolution dislodges the human from its cosmic pedestal.⁷⁴ It questions the divine purpose behind human creation. Only “human exceptionalism” and “creationism” can settle these concerns.
8. What is the purpose of human beings if we will just evolve into some other advanced androids after a million years? This is a question which I am still grappling with. It is one I pose to Malik to deliberate on.

What the above brief mapping exercise revealed is that the “human exceptionalism” camp and “creationism” camp have the potential to provide adequate responses for all of the foregoing concerns (with the exception of number eight). However, adopting the ‘creationism’ camp is not viable as it is blind to scientific facts, which Sunnī Muslims are required not to disregard.

Conclusion

The theory of evolution has supposedly displaced human beings from their cosmic pedestal of being at the centre of the world to one where they now share their ancestry and genes with other animals, plants and insects. This is all the more aggressively being promoted today through the activism of certain eco-theologians and animal rights campaigners.⁷⁵ In this article, I conducted a detailed study of Malik's quadripartite classification of Muslim attitude towards evolution. I argued that a plain sense reading of scripture will exclude the “no exceptions” and “Adamic exceptions” camps. Adopting the “creationist” camp will force us to exclude scientific facts. This led me to conclude that the best possible way forward by maintaining the integrity of the science as well as not committing textual terrorism was to accept the “human exceptionalism” opinion. I provided further reasons for why I believe “human exceptionalism” is the position that maintains a balance between scripture and science (even though scientists may not accept this position). I conclude this article by positing some questions to Shoaib Malik to reflect on in his response. (1) Has the evolutionary process come to an end with humanity? If not, what does this mean theologically? (2) And more importantly, how would al-Ghazālī answer this question?

¹ *Kun fa kān* literally means, ‘Be! And it is’. It is the expression used by God in the Qur’ān to bring about creation. The relevance of this epigraph will be explained towards the end of this article.

² Ibn Ṭufayl’s work was the inspiration for Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe.

³ Ibn Tufayl, *Ibn Tufayl’s Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Lenn Evan Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 105–6.

⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁵ Q. 21:30, Q. 24:5. The first number in this reference refers to the chapter number (*sūra*) followed by the verse number (*āya*).

⁶ Q. 30:20.

⁷ Q. 23:12.

⁸ Q. 37:11.

⁹ Q. 15:26.

¹⁰ Q. 55:14.

¹¹ Q. 15:29.

¹² Q. 71:18. The Pakistani modernist scholar Javed Ahmad Ghamidi elaborates that the sticky clay is like the yolk of an egg whilst the hardened clay like pottery is similar to the hard shell of an egg. In other words, according to Ghamidi human origin started off in the form of an egg out of the bowels of the Earth. Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, “The Quran and Theory of Evolution - Islam and Evolution,” filmed 24 August 2020, <https://youtu.be/XeXlwowpHSk?si=t34RortRbcvwoAUy>.

¹³ See Shoaib Malik, “Is Evolution Even Possible in Islamic Thought?” *Theological Puzzles* (Issue 7). <https://www.theo-puzzles.ac.uk/2022/05/02/malik2/>, 2022. Ḥusayn al-Jisr (1845-1909) was the first Muslim scholar to write an extensive exposition of evolution. Jisr was cautiously optimistic of evolution and argued that if the scientific evidence can ever reach the level of epistemic certainty, the Qur’ān would need to be reinterpreted to accommodate

evolution. Ḥusayn Jisr, *Al-Risāla al-Ḥamīdiyya fī Haqīqat al-Diyāna al-Islāmiyya wa Haqqiyyat al-Sharīʿa*, ed. ʿIsmat Naṣṣār, (Alexandria: Maktabat al-Iskandariyya, 2011).

¹⁴ Shoaib Malik, *Islam and Evolution: al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁵ Ibid., chapter 4, 106-154.

¹⁶ See Ibid., chapter 4, 106-154. For a slightly different categorisation, see Shoaib Malik, “Evolution and Islam - A Brief Review,” *The Muslim 500: The World’s 500 Most Influential Muslims*, ed. Abdallah Schleifer, (Amman: The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 2020, 207–12. <https://themuslim500.com/guest-contributions-2020/evolution-and-islam-a-brief-review/>.

¹⁷ See Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, chapters 9 and 10. Also see David Solomon Jalajel, “Presumptions about God’s Wisdom in Muslim Arguments for and against Evolution,” *Zygon* 57, no. 2 (2022): 467-489, for more on metaphysical considerations.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., 114-121.

²⁰ Ibid., 137-48.

²¹ Ibid., 125-33; Yasir Qadhi and Nazir Khan, “Human Origins – Part 1: Theological Conclusions and Empirical Limitations,” Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research (2021). <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/human-origins-part-1-theological-conclusions-and-empirical-limitations>; Glen Moran, “The final Domino: Yasir Qadhi, Youtube, and Evolution.,” *Zygon* 56, no. 1 (2021): 34-53.

²² Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, 133-36; David Jalajel, “Tawaqquf and Acceptance of Human Evolution,” Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research (2022), <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/tawaqquf-and-acceptance-of-human-evolution>; Shoaib Malik, “Islam and Evolution: The Curious Case of David Solomon Jalajel,” *The Muslim 500* (2020),

<https://themuslim500.com/guest-contributions-2021/islam-and-evolution-the-curious-case-of-david-solomon-jalajel/>.

- ²³ See Shoaib Ahmed Malik and Elvira Kulieva. “Does Belief in Human Evolution Entail *Kufr* (Disbelief)? Evaluating the Concerns of a Muslim Theologian,” *Zygon* 55, no. 3 (2020): 638-662.
- ²⁴ I thank my PhD student Andreas Hamza Tzortzis for introducing me to this technical term from the philosophy of science.
- ²⁵ Q. 23:12-16.
- ²⁶ Ḥusayn Jisr, *Al-Risāla al-Ḥamīdiyya*, 292, 300.
- ²⁷ Q. 88:8-10.
- ²⁸ Q. 88:17-21.
- ²⁹ Q. 2:34, Q. 7:11, 20-1, Q. 15:28-9, Q. 17:61, Q. 38:71-6.
- ³⁰ Q. 59:24.
- ³¹ Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, Table 4.2 p. 113.
- ³² Shoaib Malik, “The Use of Philosophy of Science in the Creationism-Evolution Debate: An Ash‘arī Perspective,” *Theology and Science* (2023): 1-17.
- ³³ See Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, “Does the Qur’an Contain Scientific Miracles? A New Approach on How to Reconcile and Discuss Science in the Qur’an,” August 18, 2013. <https://www.hamzatzortzis.com/does-the-quran-contain-scientific-miracles-a-new-approach/>.
- ³⁴ Ross Solberg, Anne, “The Mahdi Wears Armani: An Analysis of the Harun Yahya Enterprise,” PhD diss., Södertörns högskola, (2013).
- ³⁵ Shoaib Ahmed Malik, Hamza Karamali, and Moamer Yahia Ali Khalayleh, “Does Criticizing Intelligent Design (ID) Undermine Design Discourse in The Qur’ān? A Kalāmīc Response,” *Zygon* 57, no. 2 (2022): 490-513.
- ³⁶ Blogging Theology, “Islam and Evolution with Professor Shoaib Ahmed Malik.” *YouTube Video*, December 9, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmRH80lj9UM>.

³⁷ Khālīd, Detlev, "Some aspects of Neo-Mu'tazilism," *Islamic Studies* 8, no. 4 (1969): 319-347;

Hamza, Abdelhaq M, "Faith and reason: the re-emergence of Neo-Mu'tazilite thought in the discourse of modern Muslim scientists," Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective, 2014.

Vol. 3, No. 10, 53-55. <http://wp.me/p1Bfg0-1FM>

³⁸ Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, 311.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁰ Damian Howard, *Being human in Islam: The Impact of the Evolutionary Worldview* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 181, note 307.

⁴¹ Qadhi and Khan, "Human Origins," 12; Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, 128.

⁴² Kenneth W. Kemp, "Science, theology, and monogenesis," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2011), 223.

⁴³ Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, 132.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁴⁵ Kemp, "Science, theology, and monogenesis," 224.

⁴⁶ David Jalajel, "*Tawaqquf* and Acceptance," 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁹ Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, 322.

⁵⁰ Q. 4:1.

⁵¹ Q. 49:13.

⁵² Bukhari, cited in Jalajel, "*Tawaqquf* and Acceptance," 11.

⁵³ Malik, "Evolution and Islam - A Brief Review."

⁵⁴ Malik, Shoaib Ahmed. "Islam and Evolution: The Curious Case of David Solomon Jalajel."

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- ⁵⁵ Nidhal Guessoum, "Islam and Biological Evolution: Exploring Classical Sources and Methodologies by David Solomon Jalajel," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 22 (3) (2011), 476-479.
- ⁵⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *Ṭūlū 'e-Islām* in *Bāng-e-Darā* stanza 163.
- ⁵⁷ Q. 16:40.
- ⁵⁸ Q. 38:45. God also creates animals with his hands as we know from Q. 36:71. However, the meaning being conveyed there is not one of closeness and intimacy but of majesty and power since the second person plural is used and the work is attributed to God's hands (*'amilat aydīna*) and not God himself (*khalqtu biyadayy*).
- ⁵⁹ Q. 15:29.
- ⁶⁰ This idea was mentioned by Shaykh Hamza Karamali at the conference on Pre and Post-Darwinian Perspectives on Islamic Theological Anthropology, University of Nottingham 2023.
- ⁶¹ Q. 2:30.
- ⁶² Q. 33:72.
- ⁶³ For British Muslim attitude towards evolution see, Stephen Jones, Saleema Burney, and Riyaz Timol, *Science Communication, Islam and Muslim Communities: A Research Brief* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2023); Paul Thomas, "The Creation-Evolution Debate: An Islamic Perspective," (PhD diss., King's College London, 2012).
- ⁶⁴ Martin Riexinger, "Responses of South Asian Muslims to the Theory of Evolution," *Die Welt Des Islams* 49, no. 2 (2009): 227-30. See some surveys conducted by Guessoum in Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 273-74. See Glen Moran, "Harun Yahya's Influence in Muslim Minority Contexts: Implications for Research in Britain, Europe, and Beyond." *Zygon* 54, no. 4 (2019): 837-856.

⁶⁵ Zakir Naik, "Theory of Evolution by Dr Zakir Naik." *YouTube Video*. YouTube, May 12, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9IEvxGNo-E>.

⁶⁶ Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, 47-48.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Damian Howard, *Being human in Islam*, 3.

⁶⁹ For brevity, in this section I am including the "no exceptions" camp within "theistic evolution" although I believe that a proper designation for them is "deistic evolution".

⁷⁰ Much is made of the problem of evil and evolutionary waste. However, theodicy is not a unique problem for evolution. It is a problem of human free will. See Malik, *Islam and Evolution*, chapter 8, 237.

⁷¹ Howard, *Being Human*, 3; Sam Berry, "Did Darwin Kill God," in *God for the 21st Century*, ed. Russel Stannard (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000), 39.

⁷² Nidhal Guessoum and Stefano Bigliardi disagree that these are anything but a new trend of Creationism. In their 2023 survey paper on Islam and science, Guessoum and Bigliardi offer limited engagement with Malik's contribution to the field, referencing it indirectly (36). While they highlight various perspectives on the topic, Malik's 2021 opus on evolution, which gained significant attention in academic and popular circles, is conspicuous by its absence and the reason for this omission is unclear. Given the extent of discussions in the field and Malik's significant contributions, such oversights can influence the landscape of current dialogues. See Nidhal Guessoum, and Stefano Bigliardi, "Islam and Science: Past, Present, and Future Debates," in *Cambridge Elements: Islam and the Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). For a more detailed analysis, readers are referred to Malik's 'Islam and Evolution', especially chapter 5, 155–175.

⁷³ Q. 5:60

⁷⁴ Howard, *Being Human*, 20; Malik, *Islam and Science*, 44.

⁷⁵ Dorothy Dean, "'At Home on the Earth': Toward a Theology of Human Non-Exceptionalism," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture* 14, no. 4 (2020).