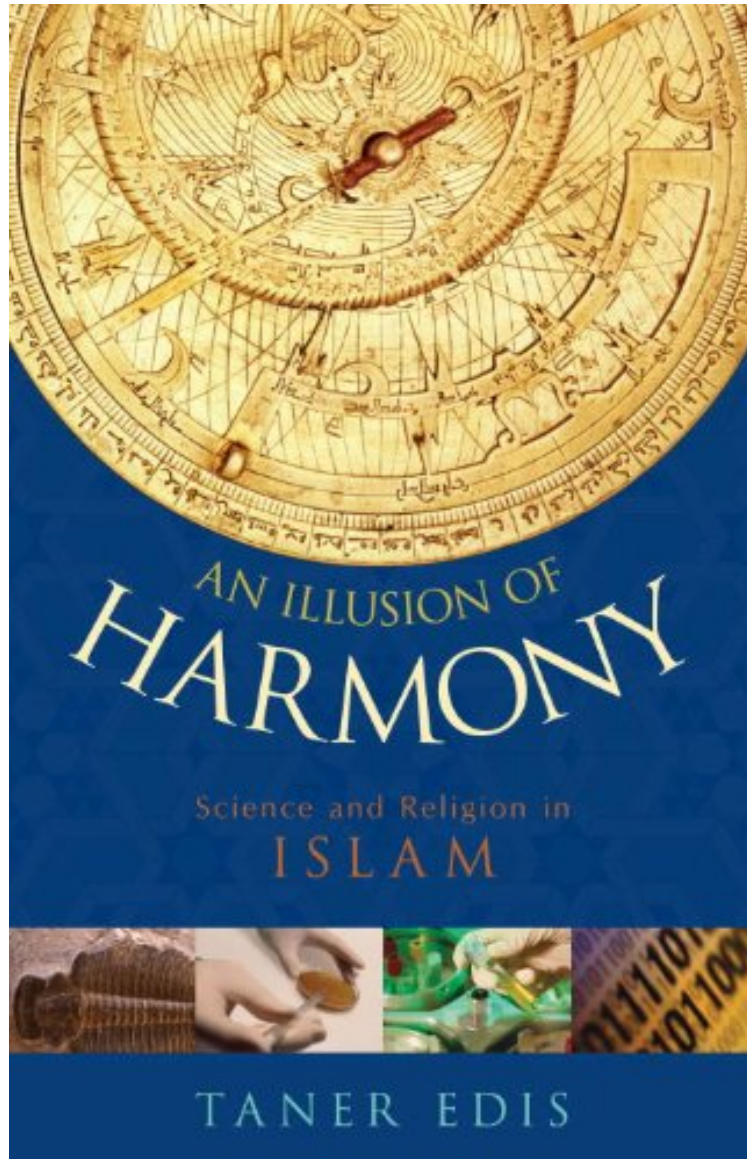


[Free] An Illusion of Harmony: Science And Religion in Islam

## An Illusion of Harmony: Science And Religion in Islam

*Taner Edis*

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**Taner Edis : An Illusion of Harmony: Science And Religion in Islam** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Illusion of Harmony: Science And Religion in Islam:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Are all obstacles to science religious?By AymanThis explicitly non-Muslim author examines the attempts contemporary Muslims are making in scientific fields. While these attempts have similarities to Western religious communities' attempts at science, the continued strength of Muslims' attachment to their religious texts and the limitations those Muslims have placed on scientific inquiry of those Muslims who

disregard religious texts in the course of scientific inquiry have retarded true scientific progress in predominantly Muslim countries. I believe Muslims can benefit from reading this book, and I agree with many of the points Dr. Edis makes. At the end of the review I'll in sha Allah suggest some different emphases I'd place. I personally think the main reason for the phenomena Dr. Edis criticizes is the place of Muslim countries on the periphery of the world economic system. Dr. Edis mentions this as a worthy line of inquiry, but, and I can't blame him, restricts himself to "a narrower set of questions concerning Muslim thinking about science and religion." This topic is interesting in-and-of itself, but the fact that it took place for the most part in Europe caused Muslims to argue that "friction between science and religion is an artifact of the authoritarian church structure of medieval Christianity." (p. 25) Muslims point to scientific advances in Muslim-ruled lands in the "golden-age" of Islam to claim that Islam and science are compatible. While this can be useful propaganda for nationalistic narratives, Dr. Edis writes: And the main problem with such myths is that they obscure the radical differences between modern and medieval science. Medieval Muslims may have enjoyed the most advanced knowledge about nature in their time, but they did not do science in the modern sense. The most noticeable difference is, naturally, how religion pervades the medieval Muslim conception of reality; other areas of knowledge were never independent of religion to begin with. Concepts like God, divine purpose, design, and morality were integral to the whole enterprise of acquiring and interpreting knowledge, whether it was in medicine or astronomy. (pp. 46-7) In other words, real science is not taking place if there's a possibility for God jalla jalaalu to intervene. Most Muslim philosophers and orthodox thinkers advocated varieties of occasionalism, the belief that "God creates the world anew and decides the motion of its constituent atoms in each moment." (p. 51) The important thing the author wants Muslims who want modern science to understand is that it is: new and different, that it has significant discontinuities with medieval thinking of all sorts. Europeans stumbled upon modern science by a series of accidents; it was not an inevitable outgrowth of their past religious culture. They got lucky. So instead of reclaiming past glories, Muslims can think of claiming a part in a scientific enterprise open to all comers. (p. 57) Of course, some Muslims, pointing to the shrinking space for religion in European countries, might not think Europeans were so lucky, and Dr. Edis mentions this in the concluding chapter. Also, I think students of world-systems theory may question if scientific enterprise is "open to all comers." Chapter 3, "Finding Science in the Quran", criticizes Muslims who attempt to reconcile passages of the Quran with scientific findings. Most of the discussion concerns the movement identifying with Said Nursi in the author's native country of Turkey. Said Nursi's followers put even more emphasis on showing how scientific discoveries were anticipated in the Quran. If a book revealed fourteen centuries ago not only made no scientific mistakes but also contained knowledge not discovered until recently, then it clearly must have a divine author. (p. 93) Similar developments took place in other Muslim countries. Muslims especially gravitated to Westerners such as Maurice Bucaille and Keith L. Moore who published books and papers comparing passages in the Quran to the conclusions of contemporary science. Dr. Edis writes "It does not take much medical knowledge to see that Bucaille and Moore's procedure consists of reading modern medical details into some very vague and general statements in the Quran. Moreover, they overlook much more plausible ways of understanding these statements." (p. 96) Regarding the phrase in the Quran "seven heavens", Dr. Edis argues that "religious texts preserve fragments of ancient cosmologies rather than prophesy modern scientific developments." (p. 99) I have three comments related to this issue: If a "Westerner" says something we Muslims believe we can turn into propaganda, we should be really cautious and make sure that "Westerner" is authoritative. Let us avoid what Egyptians call 'uqdat al-khawaaga.' I've never heard of an American becoming a Muslim because of the "scientific miracle" of the Quran. In fact, personal relationships, and ultimately God's guidance and grace, are really the only things I've heard Muslim reverts/converts talk about. It's not easy to combine knowledge of Quran interpretation and leading edge science. The more sophisticated discussions of "embryology" in the Qur'an rely on Arabic lexicographies, hadith literature and exegesis, not simply Yusuf Ali's translation of the Quran into English. And I don't expect leading physicists and medical researchers to spend years on these topics. Similarly, I would hardly expect or encourage a Muslim religious scholar to take years to learn theoretical physics. So, those who claim that the Quran describes physical reality and hence is Divine and those who claim that the Quran's description of physical reality is inaccurate and hence is of human origin are both likely overstepping their areas of expertise. Also, both camps would need to be intellectual historians to determine how prevalent the ideas were in southwest Asia at the time of revelation of Quran. So I am in general agreement with Dr. Edis that we Muslims should drop this type of apologetic. At the same time, I read in the 16th chapter of the Quran (Yusuf Ali's translation): 16:5 And cattle He has created for you (men): from them ye derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) ye eat. 16:6 And ye have a sense of pride and beauty in them as ye drive them home in the evening, and as ye lead them forth to pasture in the morning. 16:7 And they carry your heavy loads to lands that ye could not (otherwise) reach except with souls distressed: for your Lord is indeed Most Kind, Most Merciful, 16:8 And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for show; and He has created (other) things of which ye have no knowledge. I then think about small boys on foot in Nigeria with thin sticks driving along herds of cows. Should not we humans be grateful to God jall jalaalu for allowing use of creatures much more powerful physically than us? Now I know that archaeologists can trace the domestication of these animals, and I know that if you know what you're doing, you can reproduce the training of animals. So you don't need God to explain

livestock. But gratefulness to God is still what I think about when hearing these passages. Chapter 4 is Dr. Edis's review of Muslims' responses to the biological theory of evolution. I've long ago become fearful of the popularity of the writings attributed to Harun Yahya on this topic. My main concern is that American Muslims who have grown up with this poor science will learn in their 2nd biology class in college that we adults were giving them incorrect information, and then they will assume that the other things we teach them are incorrect as well. So this chapter is in general a detailed case study of one important theory in the model of the issues raised in chapter 3. One particularly upsetting phenomenon is the exchange between North American and Muslim creationists. One interesting remark in this chapter concerns the Egyptian author Abdul Sabbur Chahine, who "wrote a book arguing that Adam was preceded by other prehuman creatures who had evolved to reach a human shape, trying to reconcile science and religion by adopting a new interpretation of the relevant verses in the Quran. His work led to a huge public outcry and charges of apostasy." (p. 142) A more serious point Dr. Edis makes in this chapter is how contemporary Muslims use the concept of fitra or fitrah, combined with snippets of pseudo-biology, to support fiqh positions. "... [S]ince nature embodies a moral order, violating natural boundaries in matters of sexuality is also a moral perversion. By reaffirming creation in the face of fluidity and variation inherent in modern biological understandings of life, [Harun] Yahya defends social boundaries inscribed into nature." [p. 146] Chapter 5, "Redeeming the Human Sciences," notes the paucity of productive social science research coming from people promoting "Islamic" orientations. Of interest is the use of critique-of-power postmodernism in the works of Michel Foucault and Edward Said by proponents of "Islamization" of the social sciences without applying postmodernist irony to the religious sciences. I personally am very much in agreement with the critique-of-power postmodernist strain, and I have used Edward Said extensively in my college papers (sadly, unpublished). Furthermore, I believe that important movements among historians such as Afrocentrism and world-systems theory have made important contributions. But the strengths of these movements in historical research are as a counter-balance to Eurocentrism and an emphasis on the voices and actions of non-Europeans. Islamizationists have yet to show how the use of religious texts adds to historical and sociological studies. Dr. Edis in chapters 6-7, "A Liberal Faith?" and "Science at Arm's Length", backs up from the details of the attitudes of contemporary Muslims towards science and tries to imagine potential developments: In the West, science and religion conflicted, cooperated, and generally muddled through to get to a point where even when they disagree today, respectable people do not make a great fuss about it. It might appear that the Muslim world could take a painless shortcut-adopt a liberal position that shies away from interfering with science. But this is not so easy. The very awareness by Muslims of how science and Christianity have developed together changes the Muslim response. [p. 225] This is a point that I wish the neoconservatives and others who want to "reform" the Muslims would grasp. Aside from the Heisenberg uncertainty principle in Dr. Edis's quote above, and of course non-Muslims' observations of Muslims impacts the situation as well, the processes in Europe occurred over five centuries and more. Most Muslim nations have only been aware of "science" for between 100 and 200 years. And how committed is the United States to science when it conflicts with its religion/ideology of neoliberalism, in the light of the climate change issue, for example? One day I'm planning to write a piece describing religion, particularly Islam, in science fiction. The authors I intend to profile are Kim Stanley Robinson, Frank Herbert, David Brin and Orson Scott Card. One of the themes I intend to explore is scientist as policy maker and ruler. Robinson, in the Mars and Capitol trilogies, particularly emphasizes the suitability of scientists' involvement in policy. While I think Robinson exaggerates the heroism of some of his characters, in particular the protagonist of the Capitol trilogy, who climbs mountains, befriends the homeless, eschews housing with camping equipment in the park, plays spy, studies Emerson and Thoreau, advances science and advocates successfully for climate change amelioration and prevention policies, considering the tremendous ecological challenges we humans face, we need different policy perspectives than the current economic elites who dominate in both the developed and undeveloped countries. For this reason alone, we Muslims need to create room for scientists to do their work. The other problem I think Dr. Edis's book illustrates (although he does not specifically mention this) is the substitution among some Muslims of rhetorical beauty or cohesion for what I would call "reality." I was eating lunch one day at a Pakistani restaurant in Indianapolis, IN which had the satellite channel al-Jazeera on. A panel was discussing the United States's army's uncovering of mass graves in Iraq in 2003. The panelists were discussing the United States's motives for discussing the mass graves and analyzing media coverage. Yet nobody talked about the fact that thousands of people were killed so quickly or extra-judiciously such that they could not even be buried properly. A similar situation exists in Muslims' lack of reaction to the crisis in Dar Fur. We're more worried about concepts such as colonialism and fairness and bias than the murder of hundreds of thousands, rape as a war tactic, scorched-earth policies and millions of refugees in Sudan and Chad. I think a healthier attitude towards science would lead, in the United States and predominantly Muslim countries, towards more humane policies. Hardcover: 265 pages Publisher: Prometheus Books (February 27, 2007) Language: English ISBN-10: 1591024498 ISBN-13: 978-1591024491 Product Dimensions: 9 x 6.1 x 0.9 inches Related Resources Link to an interview with Abdul Sabbur Chahine. Link to an article refuting Abdul Sabbur Chahine's views. The source Dr. Edis used for this topic is pp. 262-4 in Raymond William Baker's *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Another article: [...] My quick glance at these documents seemed to indicate that Abdul Sabbur did not

base his claims on biologists' studies, but rather exegesis. More later if I get a chance to review this material. The interview did say Abdul Sabbur was found innocent of the charges brought against him. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Fair Assessment By Book Shark

**An Illusion of Harmony: Science and Religion in Islam** by Taner Edis

An Illusion of Harmony by Taner Edis is a well-written even-handed book about the level of harmony that exists between science and religion. The author covers the diverse range of Muslim thinking about science and Islam. It focuses on the overall reluctance of Muslims to allow science into their societies for fear that it may threaten their faith. The book is composed of the following seven chapters: 1. To Seek Knowledge in China, 2. A Usable Past, 3. Finding Science in the Quran, 4. Created Nature, 5. Redeeming the Human Sciences, 6. A Liberal Faith?, 7. Science at Arm's Length.

**Positives:**

1. Taner Edis is an excellent author who takes a pleasant, respectful tone throughout.
2. The author gives you exactly what you expect from the title of the book.
3. I have limited knowledge about the Muslim faith so I welcomed the knowledge.
4. Interesting facts about the lack of scientific productivity in the Muslim world.
5. Some interesting perceptions are debunked.
6. Interesting history of the "golden age."
7. Fascinating dilemma of science versus religion. There are many examples that apply to the United States as well.
8. Great explanation of the "Science-in-the-Quran" arguments.
9. Interesting history about the aggressive creationism and ID movements.
10. The embrace of "other ways of knowing."

**Negatives:**

1. Focused too much on the nation of Turkey. I realize that the author has Turkish blood and as with most writers you will tend to write about what you are most comfortable with but I was disappointed with the lack of diverse examples. A few examples such as the Malaysian astronaut but few and far between.
2. Lack of illustrations and charts.
3. Lack of conviction behind some statements. I understand that many of the topics covered in this book are subjective but I felt that the author was too politically correct.
4. Not the most quotable book.

In summary, "An Illusion of Harmony" is an interesting view of the level of conflict between science and religion in Islam. The book stays focused on the topic and concludes with a somewhat surprising conclusion. This book meets the expectations that I had. Though not as rewarding as his "Science and Nonbelief" book, I still feel strongly enough to endorse it if you are interested in this topic.

7 of 9 people found the following review helpful. An Honest Analysis Of The Relationship of Islam and Science By Clandestine Library For Further Reading

Taner Edis has done the world a huge favor in writing this book on Islam and Science through time. This kind of relationa is really rare to find due to lack of interest or flat out ignorance on the topics. This is an honest book that is objective and Taner (of Turkish descent) does not say more than is needed to make his point. Muslims who read this book will of course be disturbed by some facts of historical Islam, but won't come out offended or feel like the author was aiming to ridicule Islam, because he writes in a calm, objective manner. He's after facts not slander. Islamic creationism and reactions from Islam to science through time are the core focus of the book. Here is a short synopsis of what is contained within the book:

Discussion of Islam in Turkey  
 Historical Islamic Views of Science  
 Different Views of Science from Modern Islam  
 Scientific Progress and Technological Advances in Muslim Countries  
 Speed of Technological Progress and Comparison to Western Scientific Progress  
 Examples of Islamic Creationism and Critiques of Maurice Bucaille, Harun Yahya, and other Islamo-scientific apologetics  
 Islamic View of History and Social Sciences and their Applications  
 Islam's Reaction to the West and Modernization (Resistance and Acceptance)  
 Conservative and Liberal Islamic Views of Science  
 The Author's Personal View of Science and Belief Systems

This book should be read with Bucaille's Book *The Bible, the Qu'ran and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge* and other Islam supporting science books like *The Quran: Unchallengeable Miracle*. For books on the nature of science please read *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (2nd edition), *Theories of Explanation*, and *The Structure of Scientific Theories*. Also check out Taner Edis' *Science and Nonbelief* where he does a respectful analysis of the relationship of science and theistic religion and the religions of atheism and agnosticism. He is very well balanced here and simply does an honest job. He is not as militant or zealous or "fundamentalist" as other "nonbelievers" are with "believers" in terms of criticism. Also here is a good book that I think is well balanced and well researched on the historical and complementary relationship between "religion" and "science": *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction - Islam* has one essay while *Christianity and Greek Theism* has more. It's amazing how the "Conflict Thesis" is the most irrational, hastily generalized, and very popular in popular imagination. However, it was debunked by historians of science the last century as is attested in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopedia* (Garland Reference Library of the Humanities) which has contributions by leading researchers on science and religion. It is also important to consider the numerous contributions Muslims have done for the science in *1001 Inventions: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Civilization*. the Read on. This is an awesome contribution to Islamic literature. Anyone interested in Islamic creationism or history should read this book. It helps understand and identify what difficulties or simplicities future Muslims must face in order to maintain their beliefs in light of the modern knowledge of nature.

Current discussions in the West on the relation of science and religion focus mainly on sciences uneasy relationship with the traditional Judeo-Christian view of life. But a parallel controversy exists in the Muslim world regarding ways to integrate science with Islam. As physicist Taner Edis shows in this fascinating glimpse into contemporary Muslim culture, a good deal of popular writing in Muslim societies attempts to address such perplexing questions as: Is Islam a

"scientific religion"? Were the discoveries of modern science foreshadowed in the Quran? Are intelligent design conjectures more appealing to the Muslim perspective than Darwinian explanations? Edis examines the range of Muslim thinking about science and Islam, from blatantly pseudoscientific fantasies to comparatively sophisticated efforts to "Islamize science." From the world's strongest creationist movements to bizarre science-in-the-Quran apologetics, popular Muslim approaches promote a view of natural science as a mere fact-collecting activity that coexists in near-perfect harmony with literal-minded faith. Since Muslims are keenly aware that science and technology have been the keys to Western success, they are eager to harness technology to achieve a Muslim version of modernity. Yet at the same time, they are reluctant to allow science to become independent of religion and are suspicious of Western secularization. Edis examines all of these conflicting trends, revealing the difficulties facing Muslim societies trying to adapt to the modern technological world. His discussions of both the parallels and the differences between Western and Muslim attempts to harmonize science and religion make for a unique and intriguing contribution to this continuing debate.

About the Author Taner Edis (Kirksville, MO), born and raised in Turkey, is an associate professor of physics at Truman State University and the author of *The Ghost in the Universe: God in Light of Modern Science and Science and Nonbelief*, among other publications.