Islamic Science: A Missed Subject in Bigliardi’s Monograph?  
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In a similar way as Leif Stenberg has done in his monograph *The Islamization of Science* (1996), Stefano Bigliardi produces his recent work titled *Islam and the Quest for Modern Science* (2014a), including several conversations with some senior Muslim thinkers who have been engaged academically in the debate between science and religion and more specifically the debate between modern science and Islam. Nevertheless, challenging Stenberg, Bigliardi’s work deals with what he calls “New Generation” of academic scientific scholars (Bigliardi 2013). The “New Generation” academics have these five characteristics:

1. All the authors belonging to the “new generation” are natural scientists engaging, or have been engaged, in scientific teaching and/or research at university level.
2. The authors at stake recognize that the scientific method cannot be changed and therefore do not advocate any kind of “Islamization” of science.
3. The “new generation” is open towards the possibility of theistically interpreting biological evolution.
4. The “new generation” distances itself from the “scientific exegesis” of the Qur’an, often deemed unscientific.
5. The “new generation” simply accepts that Islam can be in harmony with science qua religion or at least on a footing of equality with other monotheistic religions. The older generation considered Islam to be in harmony with science by virtue of a privileged relationship (as the exclusive repository of concepts with which science should be reformed or as the only scientifically validated religion.) (Bigliardi 2014b, 60)

I have three points regarding the definition, limitation and rationality of the introduced “New Generation” concept.

**The Definition of “New Generation”**

First, I am in serious doubt that Golshani as one of Bigliardi’s interlocutors would satisfy criteria (2) and (5). Golshani believes that scientific work cannot be separated from metaphysical presuppositions. By metaphysics he means the “department of knowledge that deals with the most basic problems of existence, including such concepts as being, substance, space, time, cause, effect etc.” (Golshani 1997, 2). He clearly opposes the idea of neutral or secular science and instead defines Islamic science as “the study of nature, society and humanity according to the framework of Islamic worldview” (Golshani 2009, 8). Naturalistic or Religious presuppositions come into the scientist’s theorizing of nature especially when she or he deals with boundary problems about the origin and ultimate nature of cosmos. Additionally in his book *The Holy Quran and The Science of Nature* (1986), he emphasizes that Islam not only confirms scientific exploration and investigation of the natural world but also according to Islam it is our duty as Muslims to be active in finding God’s glorious signs through such an investigation. Based on these
points he reaches the conclusion that because we have to choose a metaphysical stand in order to accomplish a serious scientific investigation and theorization, while the naturalistic metaphysics has been shown to lead to deficient problems for humanity and science itself, it seems rational to pursue development of science based on Islamic or theistic metaphysics which has shown its capacity to develop and support science during the “Golden Age” of Islamic civilization (Golshani 2009, 7-43). Thus he defines Islamic science as a science whose metaphysical basis is Islamic. Through changing the metaphysical basis of science our scientific theories will be changed accordingly. The entailment of this idea is that scientific methods which are theory-laden would have to be changed provided our metaphysical basis had changed. This seems to be an inference from Golshani’s ideas, however he himself does not explicitly emphasize such a consequence. I think Golshani won’t disagree with the idea that one day perhaps our scientific methods will have been changed or reformed or renewed because of the changes in our theories that are inevitable regarding the alterations in our metaphysical standpoint. He agrees that “religion can give sense of direction to science” (Golshani 1998, 11). And he also condemns the view that “the only way to cognize the nature is through empirical methods” (Golshani 2009, 23).

Golshani also pushes on the idea that Islam has special emphasis on rationality and scientific investigation. I am not aware of any comparison which he has done between Islam and Christianity or Judaism in order to show this idea, however he clearly initiates his book with the sentence that “[o]ne of the distinctive feature of Islam is its emphasis on knowledge (Golshani 1986, 5). I think the distinctive feature of Islam, as Golshani pervasively states, is that the main sources of Islamic culture (namely the Quran and Hadith) have played a specific role in creation and cultivation of the sciences in the Islamic Golden Age (see for details: Golshani, 2009, 97-123). Therefore, I may conclude that Golshani’s philosophy does not fit with Bigliardi’s criteria (2) and (5).

The Limitation of “New Generation”

Second, I think the “New Generation” filter is too narrow to the extent that it excludes the massive debates including several books, conferences and academic papers regarding the subject matter of “Islamic Science,” which have been developed throughout the entire Islamic world. These days in Iran, the subject of “Islamic or Religious Science” is at high stage. As an important instance Ayatollah Jawadi Amoli, a Shia Marja’ (religious reference) and one of the greatest contemporary interpreter of the Qur’an believes that there is no non-Islamic science because the world is the creature of God and the sign of God, so science as inquiring the signs of God could not be non-Islamic (it is noteworthy that the main teaching of Islam according to him would be Theism and obedience of the unique God). He says:

[A]bsolute philosophy makes an annexation of all sciences into theism or atheism since all knowledge is rooted in absolute philosophy and is bound to its prior cause and domain, and no science is non-conditional and indifferent to either being or not being Islamic, just as no knowledge can stand independent in its own judgment as to its theism or atheism, and the nature of every knowledge is construed in the diagram of absolute
philosophy which determines the destination of that knowledge (Jawadi Amoli 2010, 14).

He also argues that:

God’s creation is of kinds, some being natural as mines, trees, and stars, and some mathematical as are numbers, lines, and area, and some are divine as revelation, prophecy, and chastity, and purity etc., and since all beings are created and exist as an act of God, “Allah is the creator of all things,” (Q: 39:62) and science is a term of description and explication of the apparent therefore any science whether of a single idea or concept as knowledge of a tree or a collection of data related in an integrated manner as in medical science, is an explication of God’s actions, and any method, be it empirical and experimental, intuitional or a combination composed of the two is a bestowal out of the many such gifts the benevolent and the compassionate endows: “Taught man what he did not know.” (Q: 96: 5)’(Ibid., 22).

Ayartollah Jawadi’s ideas (for more see also Jawadi 2007) and some other thinkers like Allameh Ja’fari, Mehdi Golshani, Abdoulkarim Soroush and Ali Paya’s thoughts (the two latter philosophers principally disagree with the concept of religious science) about the foundation of Islamic Science has influenced Iranian academia to the extent that make a real “New Generation” of Iranian scholars who write several papers pro or con of the possibility and actuality of such a concept. All these debates are absent in Bigliardi’s monograph.

The Rationality of “New Generation”

My third and last point is related to the rationale of Bigliardi’s definition of “New Generation.” It seems that if (5) is true it is then up to Bigliardi to show us how his monograph can shed specific light on the debate between science and religion which has not yet been explicated by Christian philosophers/scientists who have engaged in this type of debate. As Edis says, “New Generation” reminds us of a disorganized penumbra of some Intelligent Design proponents who do not commit themselves to a creationist bent of ID (Edis 2014, 42). See for example Richard Swinburne’s Is There a God? (2010), in which he extensively uses scientific methodology in order to show the truth of theism or Alvin Plantinga’s evolutionary argument against naturalism (2011, Chapter 10) in which he argues that there is no conflict between science and theism however there is a deep conflict between science and naturalism. According to him while theism supports scientific exploration by providing strong metaphysical basis for science and also is supported by many scientific facts like fine tuning of the physical constants, naturalism deeply conflicts with science. He argues that naturalism together with evolution is a self-defeating thesis, it could not accommodate truth and also belief itself; therefore naturalism could not be a metaphysical basis for science (as a warranted true belief about natural world). I see many similarities between Swinburne’s and Plantinga’s ideas and the introduced “New Generation” of Islamic harmonists. So I can ask Bigliardi, what
would differentiate “New Generation” with such Christian harmonists more than the trivial fact that there are some Muslim harmonists?

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References


