

Idea of Harmonizing Al-Quran and Science

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ABSTRACT

Al-Quran is a universal book of truth and guidance for all mankind. The Quran is a complete book and its content covers all disciplines of knowledge including scientific knowledge. There are almost 2000 verses related to science in the Quran despite the fact that Quran is not a book of science. In understanding Quranic verses related to science, there are two different views; one which supports and one opposes. In this regard, by using the literature review or library study, this article will discuss the pertaining ideas or reasons for the supporting and opposite ideas on this issue and then attempt to harmonize both perspectives. Consequently, this paper will take a middle stands between both views.

KEYWORDS: Al-Quran, Science, Bucaillism, Scientism.

INTRODUCTION

There are many Quranic verses that are directly related to facts about nature, which are commonly discussed in scientific researches that are based on careful study of the structures and functions of nature. In this light, scientific research is taught by the Quran to human. This could be seen clearly in several Quranic verses, where Allah says:

Say: "Behold all that is in the heavens and on earth"; but neither Signs nor Warners profit those who believe not(Surah Yunus 10: 101)

However, there are groups who assert that the study of Quranic exegesis in the context of scientific facts should not be allowed. These groups also have their own arguments to support their views. Therefore, the writer feels the need to express both arguments from the opposing and supporting parties. This discussion will begin by presenting the examples of the scientific exegesis of Quranic verses.

SCIENTIFIC EXEGESIS OF QURANIC VERSE

Before presenting scholars views about the scientific interpretation of the Quran, this paper will discuss the examples of scientific verses taken from the Quran. Inherently, the Holy book of Quran was revealed by God through Prophet Muhammad SAW almost 1400 years ago. Astonishingly, it contains some signs or information that are often associated with modern science discipline. During its revelation, these scientific knowledge were still unknown and these knowledge were only scientifically discovered as humans' progress and developed through these years. Due to the limited nature of this paper, the writer will only discuss on few examples of these phenomenon.

Origin of Creation Heaven and Earth

In regards to the creation of heaven and earth, Allah SWT says:

"Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before We clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?" (al-Anbiya' 21: 30)

In this verse, Allah insists that the celestial beings are comprised of all of the universe such as stars like the sun, natural satellites like the moon and planets like earth. All of these come from a single combination before splitting up and placed in their current location in space.

The creation of heaven and earth originated from one particular combination, and this generally agreed by the mufassirin or scholars of tafsir. This is also supported and agreed by scholars such as [2, 3]. The only difference is on how the process occurred as well as the next processes, this process may be concluded as follows):

- a. Both heaven and earth came from a single cohesive before being separated by Allah SWT. With that, Allah positions the sky as well as the earth.
- b. The skies were combined and then divided into seven separate layers, so too was the earth.
- c. The heaven and earth were combined and then Allah separated them; sky is where rain falls from and while earth is for cultivation and planting of crops.

Meanwhile, according to [4, 22], heaven and earth separation is due to air pressure. According to scientific facts, the universe exists because due to specific creation process. Its creation begins from gas and dusts (dukhaan) which lead the formation of galaxy system, star system and various other systems including the earth. This stage of development has not yet completed as it continues to happen and probably will continue until the afterlife.

In astronomical research, there are numbers of theories put forward that are related to the original creation of heaven and earth. Consequently, in discussing of al-Quran and science, verse 30 of surah al-Anbiya' is often associated with the Big Bang theory because there are similarities in term of its basic principle. According to the Big Bang theory, the universe is the result of an explosion and at the end of the world. All single things in universe will return to a same centre called black hole. Based on the verse interpretation and also scientific theory above, it is clear that there is similarity in understanding about the formation of heaven and earth. However, the Big Bang theory is not a scientific law accepted by all astronomers. It is approved by the majority as it has the evidence and admissible proof. Thus, the writer suggests the need for being caution and careful in the interpretation of verse 30 surah al-Anbiya' as we need to provide explanation on the Big Bang theory by explaining the position of this theory.

In regard to this issue, according to [28], Muslim ummah may still accept this theory because it at least similar to the description from the Quran. The most important thing is that we must assure and believe that the one who create the explosion is Allah SWT, as it did not happen by itself unless there is a supreme being behind the creation.

Planets Circulations on Their Own Axis

The circulations of planets on their orbits have been described repeatedly in several different expressions verses. The circulations of sun and moon on their orbits are discussed as follows:

“It is He Who created the Night and the Day, and the sun and the moon: all (the celestial bodies) swim along, each in its rounded course” (al-Anbiya' 21: 33)

“It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the Moon, nor can the Night outstrip the Day: Each (just) swims along in (its own) orbit (according to Law)” (Yaasin 36: 40)

Both the above verses state that the sun and moon circulate on their own axis (falak) respectively. From the Arabic etymology of the term, falak originally means any round or circle thing. Therefore, the place where the planet is circulating is called falak because of its rounded shape. Furthermore, based on the study of astronomy, the planets' orbits and axes are nearly round. In this regard, the concept of falak in the Quran is consistent to what the modern science called as orbit.

In the meantime, according to [11], the term kulluin the second verse above shows that orbit circulation happen among planets as well as stars and satellites like the sun and moon alone.

In surah Ibrahim verse 33, the Quran says that the circulation of the sun and moon will continue without interruption or stopping until the Day of Judgment. Allah says:

“And He hath made subject to you the sun and the moon, both diligently pursuing their courses; and the night and the day hath He (also) made subject to you“

Based on the above verse, according to [9] in Tafsir al-Jalalain, circulation occurs on the orbit. Furthermore, according to [13], in verse 88 of surah al-Naml(27), Allah is figuratively talking about the circulation of earth as follows:

“Thou seest the mountains and thinkest them firmly fixed: but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away”

According to [13], the term marra al-sahab (passing cloud) means that the cloud movement is caused by wind. It does not move on its own. It is similar to the movement of hill or mountain where they did not move on their own. Instead, the movement of mountains are due to the circulation of the earth.

Wind as Pollinating Agent

Allah SWT says in surah al-Hijr 15: 22:

“And We send the fecundating winds, then cause the rain to descend from the sky, therewith providing you with water (in abundance).”

In the above verse, Allah clearly explains the functions of wind. Firstly, as rain pollinating agent and second as a seed dispersal agent. In this light, fertilization is a process produced by the male reproductive organ (anther) to the female reproductive organ (stigma) that aims to produce fruit. Consequently, the wind moves the male pollen to the female pollen for pollination produce.

As pollen transfers can be completed by any agent of pollination, there are some modifications to the structure of the flower itself. Pollination by wind usually occurs in flower which less brightly colored petal and it was hard to attract any insect. These flower's pollen is also very light and dry. These factors make it easier for the pollen to move to the flower stigma even in conditions of light wind. This flower also does not contain sweet nectar, and the pollens produced are light. Their features differ from the flower pollinated by insects, which have bright attractive color and sweet nectar honey. The pollens are also sticky so that they were easily attached to the body of insects sucking the nectars [24]. The role of wind in pollination process was only been discovered by researchers in the 18th century, although it is already mentioned in the Quran since over 1400 years ago.

The Role of Mountain for the Stability of the Earth

The creation of mountain has been said in the Quran as much as forty-nine times using the terms *jibal* or *rawasia*. The role of mountain as pillar or stabilizer is mentioned in many verses, among them are:

“He set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and He scattered through it beasts of all kinds”(Luqman 31: 10)

“And We have set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with them, and We have made therein broad highways (between mountains) for them to pass through: that they may receive Guidance”(al-Anbiya` 21: 31)

The verses above generally talking about the functions of mountain as the pillar and stabilizer to the position of earth. According to [11], the term *al-rawasi* in the above verses was taken from the word *al-rasi* which means something impaled into earth. Literally, in [11]view shows that the Quran implicitly describe that a mountain is an object rooted into the earth. It is consistent with the geology research, which found that the mountain is actually rooted to the earth surface.

The term *rawasi* is also said to be derived from verb *arsa* means “tying to the ship anchor”. This indirectly explains about the wisdom of using the term *rawasi* (mountain) in the Quran, where a mountain seems to be float, similar to the state of anchoring ship. The similarity between these two could be seen through the fact that an anchored ship depends on its anchor for the tying. Meanwhile, a mountain floats by its roots which is embedded into the solid mantle layer below the earth crust.

From the explanation above, the word *rawasi* is an expression of an Arabic term which is suitable and compatible with the reality of modern science. The rationale behind this in discussing about the elements of scientific Quran implicitly could be seen in its continuation from the language aspect, as being described.

Quran describes that the mountains as pillars of the earth, thus, indicating their role to balance the position of the earth. A pillar means a wood pierced into the ground to hold the tent rope. The rationale of the mountain as pillar because of the similarity in term of function and position, which are:

- i. The pillar is pierced deep into the ground like a mountain that stand on the earth with its root.
- ii. The pillar holding a tent while a mountain acts as the bones holding the tissues. These tissues represent the state at the bottom of the mountain.

The function and position of mountain being strongly rooted into the ground were first discovered in the mid of 19th century, which is about 13th centuries after it was mentioned in the Quran.

These are few examples of the scientific interpretation in the Quran.

OPPOSING VIEWS

In the discipline of *ilm tafsir*, the interpretation based on science fact is discussed in the chapter *al-Tafsir al-Ilmi* which includes interpretation describing the scientific in the Quran as well as a form of interpretation that comes with various kind of knowledge and philosophical opinions. After discussing about the scientific interpretation of Quranic verses, we should know about the views of scholars or thinkers who oppose to this kind of interpretation.

Rasyid Ridha (1354H) in *Tafsir al-Manar* expressed his disagreement of those who interpret the Quran according to such *tafsir* (interpretation). In his interpretation, he criticized the interpretation of [11] who accepted mathematic, natural science and all other modern sciences.

Mahmud Syaltut[16] also believes that the scientific interpretation could cause undesirable and inappropriate understanding of Quranic verses as scientific theories are not fixed and changes over time.

In [14] believes that the Quran should be understood just as it was understood by the Arabs when the Quran was first revealed. Rejecting this method of scientific interpretation, in [14] refers to the group of Companions (*Sahabah*) and *tabiin* and their followers. For [14], these people were the people who understood the Quran the most and also the knowledge therein. However, none of them had related the Quran specifically with the natural science, logic, mathematic and others. In response to [14], view above, it should not be understood that the Arabs just take the Quran literally as they do understand the Quran based on their knowledge at that time. From what had been stated by [14], in relation to the *salaf al-saleh*, this is something we certainly need to acknowledge. On the other hand, he did not deny the possibility of the Quran could be also associated with science. In this light, the *salaf al-saleh* did not refer to science because they were not experts in that field. Their field is more focusing to the Quran as a source to correct source for the *aqeedah*, human ethic and as a source to strengthen the relationship between man and his Creator.

Meanwhile, in [30] assumed that Quran interpretation based on scientific fact was wrong and dangerous ideology to the faith of Muslims *ummah* due to following reasons:

The Different Sources and Positions of NasQuran

Nas al-Quran is *qat'i al-dilalah* (could not be debatable). This means that any reality mentioned in the Quran cannot be disputed. Therefore, the truth of Quran could not be proven unless something on par or equivalent with it. The human knowledge (either fact or science theory) is not equivalent with the nas Quran. Moreover, nas Quran itself is absolutely authentic and on external fact should not be used to determine the truth.

Prone to the Changes

Scientific theories and facts are not totally absolute as they could be changed when new facts are discovered. While scientific theories are indeed strong hypothesis, in the future, other stronger hypotheses might emerge. In other word, the scientific theories are prone to being changed or cancelled. Thus, it relies to the assumption based on detailed observation which can be change as it is not the absolute truth.

On the other hand, in [30] view on the harmonization of the Quran and science is not too rigid. According to him, it is not wrong to benefit from scientific law but not from scientific theory [30]. The examples of scientific laws are the process of creation of man, circulation of night and day, seven layers of the sky, circulation of planet in orbit and so on while the examples of scientific theories are phenomenon of heaven and earth creations (in *Surah al-Anbia* verse 21) through process of *rataq* (merge) and *fataq* (split) that related to the Big Bang theory.

Referring to the first argument, it could be understood from [30] view that the matching of meaning or Quranic interpretation with scientific facts seems to show that scientific fact had become the measurement to the truth of Quran.

According to [1], we are not asked at any time to rely our belief to scientific interpretation as it has no permanent guarantee. Moreover, not all interpretation produced by human minds are in accordance with the Quran although the Quran urge mankind to use reasoning to study the environment. A similar view was also presented by [16]. According to him, associating the miracles of Quran by emphasizing the relevancy to the development of science and technology are not compatible with the purpose of revelation of Quran. If once the science might change, the truth of revelation might also change. He insist that any discipline based on relative source should not determine the truth of absolute source.

In [37] also critiqued this association. In his writing, he referred to what had done by [23] in *The Bible, Quran and Science*. According to [37] view, this effort actually had put science on a sacred position and made revelation subjects to Western sciences. In fact, this could be seen as an attempt to verify the status of modern science with the Quran. From other aspect because of the importance of seeking knowledge is emphasized by the Quran, most

Islamic scientists are in awe with the modern science. Consequently, Buccaillism had led to a new stage as the Islamic scientists are going to accept all good and true sciences and also attack those who criticized toward science. In [37] also expressed his concern that the Quran might be put aside like Bible if any science fact could be proven by modern science, or there is a statement from the Quran that contradict with modern science.

Meanwhile, in [35] described this form of interpretation as 'saintism'. It means those interpreters with little knowledge trying to be a judge on the Quran and Sunnah based on revelation and nurnubuwwah. According to him, saintisme is based on modern science in response to materialism which later developed into the materialism appreciation.

From these criticisms and opinions presented above, the clash between "the absolute" (the Quran) and "relative" (science) are the major factors for the relation between the Quran and science among the scholars. Thus, it is argued that this rejection does not mean that they deny the sacredness of Quran but it reflects the attitude of careful and fears to the emergence of great slander toward the Quran. In other words, the enemies of Islam will claim that the Quran is not the absolute, unchanging divine revelation if any changes happen to these science facts. Looking into the positive aspect, all the arguments actually show their love toward the Quran that need to be given attention by Muslims.

SUPPORTING VIEW

The interpretation of Quran is a continuous and ongoing activity by man. It is for the purpose of create better understanding of the revelation. There are several opinions and arguments among those who support the effort in understanding Quranic verses based on science in regard with nature through observation. In this regard, these provide answers for those who criticize the importance and benefit of scientific interpretation.

In [7] had said his opinion to support the interpretation based on science fact as written in his book *Jawahir al-Qur'an*:

"Learn and study the Quran and benefit from the meaning. Hopefully, you will find the knowledge of the past and present, and a bit on its beginning. Study the Quran means trying to investigate in details including the meaning and explanation (Abul Qasem, 1983)"

Even in *IhyaUlum al-Din*, in [7] mentioned about various kind of disciplines that could benefit from the Quran. Furthermore, in [11], an interpretation scholar defended this kind of interpretation and insists that the Quran is filled of various kind of natural phenomena as evidence of knowledgeable and the mighty of Allah SWT. These phenomena are repeated in many verses and surah or chapters. If the discussion and observation are not permissible, Allah will not say about it in the Quran.

As mentioned, among the unacceptable reasons for this interpretation is the science is relative while the revelation is absolute. In this case, according to [19], what has written by the interpreter in reference to nature in the Quran is actually merely speculation and what is reachable is limited. Thus, the interpretation about one verse is not absolute and not always being unconsidered as absolute. However, we need to keep in mind that our intention is only to try to understand Quranic verses better and that what we understand at one time is certainly going to change. What is important is that this is towards the perfection of our interpretation. According to [19], scientific facts which used by the author refer to a phenomenon that has already been established. These facts are not likely to be changed again such as the process of rains, pollination, pregnancy and others.

The same view was expressed by [33-34], a local scholar. According to him, the acceptance of modern science is also subject to a degree of legitimacy that is already well-known as the law of science. If the status is just a theory or only hypothesis, then the truth cannot be guaranteed. In this light, authentic information or discovery should be constant and unchanged such as the law of the nature. Thus, these scientific facts can be used for convenient reference and comparison with the Quran and Sunnah. In fact, as scientific theories may change, we should remain with the Quran by choosing theories parallel to the Quran.

In the clash between relative science and the absolute Quran, the scholars who support this actually being moderate in mentioning that although the Quran is a book of guidance, it still does not prevent the existence or possibility of intellectual and scientific knowledge in it. The former of Syeikh al-Azhar, Mustafa al-Maraghi had said:

"We should not bring the verses of Quran toward science to be interpreted but if the outwardly verse meets the actual scientific fact that has been confirmed then surely allowed to be interpreted the Quran with it" (Al-Zahabi:

502)

The same view was expressed by [3, 5]. According to [3], such efforts need to be appreciated. However, it should be done cautiously and matching or interpreting the Quranic verses with science are allowed but not with the variable theory. Meanwhile, a local scholar [2] said that the attitude of trying to make adjustments to the revelation and science without limit need to be avoided.

The interpretation of Quran based on scientific does not show that the fact in the Quran has been changed. The one that is changing is human thoughts, as we progressively developed after much researches and analyses [26-27]. Even though, it roughly looks like there is a change in the interpretation, the actual interpretation of the later does not conflict with the initial interpretation. It is to detail the preliminary [10].

There is no doubt that the achievements of human knowledge are increasingly growing. Thus, in order to understand the Quran contents in relation to nature, life, and human knowledge, in [25] believes that they need to be understood further at an earlier stage. This is because the understanding at initial time of revelation had stopped at the border while understanding at later times is increasing. In this light, during earlier years, Quran was not interpreted in relation to the development of science, but rather for aspects like the duty to pray related with ibadah and absolute truth. This view is consistent with what stated by [6] on the position of Quranicnas in the form of qat'i (which cannot be overstated) and not qat'i (which can still be debated).

According to [6] for Quranicnas or evidences that are not qat'i, we are required to choose one of the meanings indicated by the nas, so that we can adjust and customize it with the absolute truth and confirmed fact through the trial and argument. For example, in the opinion of stating that the earth is round, the evidence had shown it is the truth and could be interpreted as such.

In [34] posited that those who consider that scientific discoveries are not required to prove the truth of the statements declared by the Quran, is a harmful perception for Muslims as it narrows the Quran. Even from historical perspectives, many people are interested in the teachings of Islam due the miracle of Quran either in terms of its language, its literature and its historically and scientifically correct contents. Thus, there is no wrong in enriching the scope of evidence of miracles of the Quran with reference to the fact on how the Quran mentions about scientific facts.

For those who approve the idea, the main implication of this scientific interpretation is that it is an evidence of the miracle of Quran [18, 21, 29, 36]. The evidence that always used in strengthening this kind of interpretation, is mentioned in the Quran:

“Soon will We show them Our signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that it this is the Truth” (Fussilat 41: 53)

According to the Tafsir Pimpinan al-Rahman[20], the above verse contains lot of meanings. Among them is it is directed generally to the people, especially those who are disobedient. Here, it is cautioned that Allah SWT will show them (from time to time in accordance with the development of science and the progress of mankind) the evidences of the power of Allah and His oneness which can be seen everywhere in heaven and earth and the man himself, from the things that are so amazing to generate faith and confidence. In this light, it will be clear to them that what conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad SAW is the absolute truth.

MANNERS IN INTERPRETING THE QURAN

Based on the attempt to rationally understand the natural phenomenon that occurs, the scholars have outlined the conditions and etiquettes that should be possessed and adhered to interpret the Quran. According to [12], some of the etiquettes that must be preserved are:

1. The interpretation should come from the Quran itself. This is because in the Quran some things are called repeatedly at different places. For example, in the first place it is referred in general, but in the second place it is referred in detail.
2. The interpretation should be sought from the verified interpretations and narration of Rasulullah SAW.
3. If the interpretation from the Quran and Hadith was not found, it should be sought from the interpretation of companions; the interpretation related with things that are not likely used ijtihad such as (asbab al-nuzul) and so on.
4. The interpretation should be done in accordance with Arabic language, as the Quran was revealed in Arabic language. This should only be done by people who really study the Arabic language. The interpreter also must not take advantage by distorting the interpretation by finding the meaning that have no meaning to the context of verse.

Besides the four manners above, according to [32], the interpretation of the Quran based on reasoning must also take into consideration of the following things:

1. People who interpret the Quran should not interpret the verses that only Allah SWT knows the meaning such as *ayatmutasyabihaat*.
2. Never interpret according to own perception and feeling.
3. The lack of clear and definite evidences from the Quran and Hadith will cause indecision of the interpreter who cannot decide whether what is interpreted similar to the message intended by Allah SWT.
4. Such interpretation should not be excluded from the rules of logic or nature.

From the explanation of manners above, it is clear that the interpretation of Quran should not be done indiscriminately. Hence, all the interpretations made by those who do not have the knowledge should be guided by a qualified interpreter. Furthermore, those who interpret according to their desires or interpret for the purpose of supporting a particular mazhab or false ideology might lead to bad commentary or interpretation (*al-tafsir al-mazmum*) [8].

According to [17], the interpretation of relevant factors related to nature obtained through the study of science today which combines the understanding of *ma'tsur* (interpretation based on the Quran, saying of the Prophet SAW, companions and successors) and the meaning based on reason and *ijtihad* based on the principle of true knowledge. Its simplicity should be classified in the commendable interpretation (*al-tafsir al-mamduh*).

In addition, in [15] mentioned that both interpretations, *bi al-ma'tsur* (based on the interpretation of Quran and Hadith) or *bi al-ra'yi* (based on human reason) are acceptable as long as they adhere to the rules and conditions of interpretation. Both types of interpretations actually help and complement each other. Thus, we should not stick to the interpretation of *bi al-ma'tsur* simply because it would limit the interpretation. Furthermore, we cannot rely on the interpretation of *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* alone. In [31] stated that in order to know the meaning, the truth, nature and knowledge of Quran, it is necessary to be guided and enlightened by modern knowledge. The current knowledge can actually help broaden the view of certain verse or *ayat*. However, these sciences would be a danger if they become the judge on the truth Quran, rather than to complement the knowledge in the Quran.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above opinions, it could be concluded that basically, the use of *aqal* and *ijtihad* are acceptable in the interpretation of Quranic verses by following the methods and specific conditions or requirements to allow reasoning of the interpretation (*al-tafsir bi al-ra'yi*). According to [12], this is permissible only for the verses related to the disciplines like *balaghah*, *hukm*, and signals from the nature by those who are eligible. Those who contradictory in fact have a good intention to defend the sacredness of Quran and surely, we must be careful and cautious person. For those who agreed to the scientific interpretation must become humble and careful in such interpretation.

It is understandable that in our attempt to understand the Quran based on scientific fact, there are concerns that Quran might be measured according to the scientific criteria. This concern could be seen from the arguments given by the opposing party. Their arguments are acceptable and should be given a concern. However, it is also clear that the arguments from those who attempt to understand the revelation better by associating with study and observation towards nature are permissible. Therefore, it can be concluded that such efforts are permissible as long as we understand and follow the limitation stated by the religion of Islam that need to be respected and recognized.

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