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On Bigliardi's Islam and the Quest for Modern Science
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An independent discussion of Bigliardi's book *Islam and the Quest for Modern Science* (2014) might be relevant to this debate.

Since the 1930s, an idea has taken root in the Islamic world that Islam is not "just a religion" but is a "system of life" (a system for organizing all individual and collective aspects of human life). This idea goes much further than the elaborate categorization, undertaken mainly during the 8th to 10th century period, of human actions into various categories of permitted and forbidden behavior. The "system of life" practically emphasizes collective behavior and policies. A significant body of literature focuses on Islamic political and economic systems. The work—in the same spirit on developing Islamic principles to guide scientific research—started in the later half of the 20th century. The number of scholars engaged in this work is relatively small. But the work is attracting attention and we can notice serious discussions emerging about how scientific work should be conducted, including the acquisition, interpretation, analysis, and application of scientific knowledge.

Bigliardi's *Islam and the Quest for Modern Science* provides an excellent, up to date overview of this work. He has interviewed six of the major (or the most popularly acclaimed) contemporary investigators of the relation between Islam and science. One of Bigliardi's interlocutors is not a scientist by training, but has written prolifically on the relation between Islam and science. The remaining five interlocutors are academic scientists (one geologist, four physicists/astrophysicists). The book contains the interviews verbatim along with the background information about the interlocutors and the questions that they were asked. A chapter entitled "Afterthoughts" is a masterly document in itself. The chapter summarizes the interlocutor views and meticulously compares and analyzes them. In the process, this chapter, goes beyond the questions asked and the answers given, and discusses the science-faith interaction and contributes a number of original ideas.

Having goals similar to Bigliardi's book, Leif Stenberg published *The Islamization of Science* in 1996. Its core consisted of the interviews of four Muslim writers who had become known for their efforts to harmonize science and Islam. These efforts were quite different and did not influence each other. In writing the foreword to Bigliardi's book in 2014, Stenberg returns to, and summarizes, his background and conclusions from 1996. The foreword makes clear that the work reported in Stenberg's book, while having wide popular appeal, did not have a deep impact on the thinking of most of the scientists interviewed by Bigliardi. Bigliardi used an excellent set of questions to sample the spectrum of Muslim views about science. The divergence of answers would not be surprising if they came from general thinkers, but coming from practicing scientists it certainly is. The interplay of rational, scientific thinking and faith (and faith with a tinge of mysticism) is quite revealing.

Take, for example, the question of miracles. The scientists interviewed explain them quite differently: (1) Miracles are acceptable in their literal description. They might be

controlled by a different set of laws. (2) They are very low probability events that occur extremely rarely, perhaps only once in the universe's lifetime. (Incidentally, another scientist says that this kind of explanation results from a "confusion of scale"—the extremely low-probability events are a feature of the quantum world, and cannot occur in the macro-scale world.) (3) Miracles are cited in religious texts figuratively, and are not intended to be true events in a literal sense. (4) A miracle constitutes a "spiritual experience".

Among interesting individual opinions, we also see: (1) Unease about some parts of quantum mechanics because of their being inconsistent with religious beliefs, and need expressed to rework those parts. (2) Scientific causality being useful only for chronologically ordering events and not being true causality, i.e., furnishing the reason of why events occur as they do. (3) Acceptance of evolution but rejection of the random mutation mechanism—since it would be too slow to explain the present life—in favor of God-guided mutation. (Most other interlocutors accept evolution without such reservations.)

A view shared by most interlocutors is the role Islam plays in the application of science. Specifically, Islamic edicts imply that science should be applied responsibly, avoiding waste, harm to life, and environmental destruction. A number of Muslim scientists take the secularist view that scientific work and the scientist's faith are independent and entirely separate. (After all, the work of the scientists of the 8th-13th century "Islamic Golden Age" can be deemed, arguably, scientific research undertaken freely of any supra-scientific restraints.) Bigliardi does not interview any "secularist" scientists for the book, but he discusses their views in detail. Nevertheless, as the book shows, the subject of "Islam and science" remains of deep concern to the majority of Muslims as well as to a large number of Muslim scientists.

Compared to the four scholars interviewed by Stenberg, the six scholars interviewed by Bigliardi (at least four among these) have quite different views. While each interlocutor has different individual opinions, there remains commonality within each of the two sets of scholars. The evolution of thought that has occurred in the last three decades about the relation of Islam and science seems, to some extent, generational. This point is treated in Bigliardi's book. Overall, Bigliardi does a superb job of reporting and analyzing the latest developments and trends in the thinking about Islam and science.

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