

***Whither Muslim Scholarship? A Reply to Jamal Mimouni Regarding Faith and Reason***

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I find it revealing that a Huxley from Arab lands drafted a response to my criticism of the creed (A'qida in Arabic) held by few of the Muslim protégés of the Templeton foundation and others. Indeed, the response came from someone who was not even mentioned in the brief article that appeared in the *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* (SERRC) almost two years ago in 2014. Moreover, the response that appeared on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 2016, on the SERRC website is not based on my original 2014 SERRC article contribution, but on a much longer version of the paper that I posted on my website *Faith and Reason*, and that the author fails to reference in his response for reasons that he alone may be able to explain; A similar article appeared on *The Muslim500* of 2014-2015, and it is omitted, and it too does not appear in the footnotes and references of the reply.<sup>1</sup> It just reflects the type of scholarship adhered to and the lack of intellectual integrity.

Nowhere in my 2014 SERRC article do I mention or cite Frithjof Schuon and Sheldon Glashow, just to name a couple of examples; without proper referencing, the response to my article is but a journalistic piece. For someone who teaches and supervises students at the university level, the author of the response ought to know that proper literature survey and proper referencing are the backbone of the process of dissemination of research results: how can he commit such a fundamental error, and then proceed to comment on an article that is not available to the reader: that should be left to the author of the reply to address. The reply, in general, is but a piece of mediocre journalism that we know the author of the reply is capable of.

Let me move forward and address the comments made in the response to my long article on *Faith and Reason*. I will systematically respond to the comments following the sequence they appeared in the reply.<sup>2</sup> I have made the deliberate choice to cite western authors only as far as the various topics addressed in my response are concerned, because I have assumed a western readership of the SERRC journal; numerous references are available to us in Arabic when it comes to the Islamic history of the Mu'tazila school of thought.

**On the “Neo-Mu'tazilite” Charge**

What the author of the reply does not seem to grasp is already in the title; it is all contained in the first part of the title, namely “Faith and Reason”. Anyone familiar with the Islamic literature would know that some scholars have emphasized the faith component and favoured it, and some have focussed on reason and favoured it, and both

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<sup>1</sup> Abdelhaq M. Hamza, “Faith and Reason: Islam and Modern Science.” *The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims*, 2014/15, 232-237. <http://themuslim500.com/2014-issues-of-the-day/faith-and-reason-islam-and-modern-science>

<sup>2</sup> Jamal Mimouni, SERRC, March 4, 2016, <http://social-epistemology.com/2016/03/04/faith-and-reason-the-re-emergence-of-neo-mutazilite-thought-in-the-discourse-of-modern-muslim-scientists-jamal-mimouni/>

groups have not excluded the complementary component, respectively. In my long article, I cited a number of academic references that clearly describe the position of the *Mu'tazila* on subjects like revelation and miracles, and I will urge the reader to consult my paper (check *Faith and Reason*). For a brief introduction to the *Mu'tazila*, I suggest the paper entitled "The Rise of Islamic Rationalism" by Muhammed Kamal.<sup>3</sup> For thorough and academic studies of the *Mu'tazila* thought by western writers, I suggest consulting the work of Joseph Van Ess<sup>4,5</sup> (and references therein), the work of Daniel Gimaret,<sup>6</sup> Michael E. Marmura,<sup>7</sup> and Harry Wolfson<sup>8</sup> to name just a few very strong contributors to this fascinating field of research.

I will leave it to the author of the reply to identify the common denominator between the *Mu'tazila* as a school of thought and the people listed in my paper in its long version; may be a hint will suffice: Reason before Revelation/Faith. The example of Nidhal Guessoum is flagrant, and if the extensive list of references with gory details in "Faith and Reason" were not sufficient in this case, then I would not know what could be. The other example is Ziaudin Sardar, who belongs to a group of people who not only believe that reason precedes revelation, the same way Guessoum does, but also wants to be done with the Islamic ritual, including the daily prayers and fasting, as he clearly stated in his conversation with Jim Al-Khalili at a recent meeting organized by The British Humanist Association.<sup>9</sup>

Now, if one reads carefully, one would find out that I used the adjective Neo-*Mu'tazilite* in my paper, and it is the author of the reply who has introduced a spectrum of adjectives including "devout Muslim, acknowledged agnostic or even atheist";<sup>10</sup> There is absolutely no evidence in the literature that would allow anyone to label any of those I listed as devout Muslims, agnostics or atheists, and I stand to be corrected. Moreover, the heart of my criticism is on the rational ideology that they all champion, which is their common denominator with the *Mu'tazilites*: the rest is academic.

As for the neo-modernist critique, I will leave it to the author of the reply to go and consult the works of Malek Bennabi whom I cited several times in my paper that he

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammed Kamal, "Mu'tazilah: The Rise of Islamic Rationalism," *Australian Rationalist*, (Autumn 2003): Number 62, 27-34.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Van Ess, "Mu'tazila", *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, translated by Jane Marie Todd, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Gimaret, "La doctrine d'al-Ash'ari," *Patrimoine Islam* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Michael E. Marmura, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, State University Press of New York, Albany, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 1976.

[https://archive.org/stream/ThePhilosophyOfKalam/ThePhilosophyOfTheKalam-Wolfson\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/ThePhilosophyOfKalam/ThePhilosophyOfTheKalam-Wolfson_djvu.txt)

<sup>9</sup> "Back to the Enlightenment?" Jim Al-Khalili and Ziaudin Sardar, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015. <https://humanism.org.uk/civi/?page=CiviCRM&q=civicrm/event/info&page=CiviCRM&id=141&snippet=2> (pay attention after the 10 minute mark in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwoDBWVUIEc>).

<sup>10</sup> In paragraph 3 of the reply: "But there are several problems with this characterization that are worth pointing out. First, lumping together people representing a whole spectrum of views and persuasions, from the devoutly Muslim to the acknowledged agnostic or even atheist is faulty methodologically wise to say the least."

omitted, but took the full liberty to comment on. Malek Bennabi has dedicated two chapters in *Vocation de l'Islam*: one on reformists and another on modernists (the references are available in the long paper).

The author of the reply goes on to write: "Guessoum's views of the Koranic story of Adam are bold but are not in my view beyond the Ijtihad (effort of interpretation) ..." as if Guessoum and the author of the reply were authorities in theology, exegesis, philosophy and of course science. There is no problem with investing one's effort to acquire knowledge; in fact it is recommended. The problem arises when someone with a limited background in science starts acting as an authority in fields like theology, exegesis and philosophy. There is a very serious problem with what these authors consider scholarship; it is not one's ability to write a column in a newspaper that enables scholarship. And the argument from authority does not work in this case.

The author of the reply goes on to suggest that Guessoum made the case for a Roshdian approach to the dialog between Science and Religion; what he ought to know is that the Roshdian approach is a Greek Aristotelian<sup>11</sup> approach that has been refuted by people including Newton, and I cite Newton because he is a towering figure in physics. On an aesthetic note, one has to wonder how the figure of Ibn Rushd (Averoes) is the only Muslim philosopher figure that appears in Raphael's painting "The School of Athens",<sup>12</sup> when some towering figures of Islamic philosophy like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Farabi, for example, don't appear: something to ponder upon, the Roshdian/Aristotelian approach may be the key (Ibn Rosh is portrayed in Pythagoras' group).

### **On the Crisis of Modern Physics**

I am also sad and sorry to read that the author of the reply to my criticism suggests that the task of responding to my essay may be deemed unnecessary since it has not been published in a scholarly review; May I suggest that the author puts his own scientific track record online so we can judge his scholarship not only in the field of Islam and Science but also in his own field of physics, that way a fair comparison can be established, and the reader can decide on firm grounds between the arguments put forth in the original article and those in the response.

The long version of my article was originally submitted to *Zygon* as indicated in the SERRC article, a science and religion journal with an editorial advisory board primarily made up of people associated with the Templeton Foundation, and who at one point or another received substantial funding from the foundation; I will spare the details of my

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<sup>11</sup> Catarina Belo in "Ibn Rushd on God's Decree and Determination (Al-Qada' wa-l-Qadar)" *Al-Qantar* (AQ), XXVII 2, julio-diciembre de 2006, pp. 245-264, ISSN 0211-3589, writes: "This article is based on Ibn Rushd's chapter on God's qada' wa-qadar, which addresses the question of predestination, as illustrative of a rationalistic approach that introduces philosophical views into an age-old religious debate. My aim is to present Ibn Rushd's argument, which has unmistakable Aristotelian overtones; therefore, the harmonization of religion and philosophy implicit in his argument is one of the points I would like to explore in this paper."

<sup>12</sup> "The School of Athens" by Raphael, 1509-1511.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_School\\_of\\_Athens#/media/File:Sanzio\\_01.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_School_of_Athens#/media/File:Sanzio_01.jpg)

exchange with *Zygon*. The article was eventually posted on my website *Faith and Reason*, and the response article never refers to it or to the shorter version that appeared on *The Muslim500*.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the lack of scholarship is critically visible in the footnotes of the response; indeed, the author lists seventeen footnotes with absolutely no proper referencing to sources; the footnotes are but comments similar to those one regularly sees in reactions to Huffington Post-like articles. In contrast, the paper on *Faith and Reason*<sup>13</sup> that is the subject of the response has seventy-nine references, and the present reply has fifty-two references, which goes to show how much work was invested in writing the original article and this reply. Let me restate the fact that one of the most important components of scholarship is the proper referencing of sources: credit has to be given where and when it is due: something the author of the reply should contemplate practicing.

I am glad that the author of the reply doesn't have any say when it comes to deciding whether plasma physics is a legitimate physics subject. I am sure that he is aware that more than 90% of matter exists in the plasma state. World-class academic institutions like MIT and Oxford must be wasting their money on Plasma Sciences, if we were to listen to the author of the reply; fields like fluid dynamics, one of the oldest fields in physics, should also be dismissed. The fields of fluid dynamics and plasma physics have played fundamental roles in our understanding of the universe: roles that seem to have gone over the head of the author of the response.

From Quark-Gluon Plasmas to Hawking radiation,<sup>14</sup> plasma physics and fluid dynamics have played and continue to play fundamental roles when it comes to unveiling important physical mechanisms at play in the universe. The reaction of the author of the response reminds me of a quote from Lao Tzu: "To know that you do not know is the best. To think you know when you do not is a disease. Recognizing this disease is to be free of it." I am not sure if it is ignorance or the illusion of knowledge<sup>15</sup> that has lead the author of the reply to disregard the fields of plasma physics and fluid dynamics as fundamental pillars in the house of physics.

One should be able to familiarize oneself, if one possesses the required and necessary intellectual potential of course, with the works of Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar<sup>16</sup> and Hans Alfvén<sup>17</sup> as a start, and by the way both were Nobel Prize winners who conducted some fundamental work in plasma physics. To belittle any area of physics is but an act of idiocy<sup>18</sup> that reflects a deep lack of knowledge and wisdom. The dismissal of plasma physics, in an assertive way, is an entirely irrelevant argument against the points raised in the original document: the author of the response commits the famous *argumentum ad*

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<sup>13</sup> Abdelhaq M. Hamza, "Faith and Reason: The Re-emergence of Neo-Mu'tazilite thought in the Discourse of Muslim Scientists" posted on September 28, 2014. <http://a.hamzas.org>.

<sup>14</sup> William G. Unruh, "Analog Gravity and Black Holes." *Physics in Canada*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April-June 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Hawking: "The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge."

<sup>16</sup> Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subrahmanyan\\_Chandrasekhar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subrahmanyan_Chandrasekhar).

<sup>17</sup> Hannes Alfvén: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannes\\_Alfvén](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannes_Alfvén).

<sup>18</sup> Merriam-Webster <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/idiotic>

*lapidem* fallacy, and I advise him to look it up so he does not make the same mistake again, or so I hope.

To delve in the academic scholarly approach to the crisis physics is experiencing, one is urged to consult the seminars and workshops organized by academicians such as the most recent meeting held in Munich<sup>19</sup> organized by the philosopher of Science Richard Dawid,<sup>20</sup> the author of *String Theory and the Scientific Method*, published by Cambridge Press,<sup>21</sup> and which brought physicists and philosophers to the discussion table. I highly recommend going through all the lectures, something pseudo-scientists may skip for lack of scholarship and interest in the details; some lectures are technical and some others not. For extensive comments on the whole meeting, I suggest consulting the philosopher and biologist Massimo Pigliucci's blog site *Plato's Footnote*<sup>22,23</sup> or for that matter the physicist Sabine Hossenfelder's contributions,<sup>24,25</sup> both were invited to contribute to the meeting in Munich (see reference above). The lecture by Carlo Rovelli<sup>26</sup> is particularly interesting because it unveils some of the fundamental problems with String Theory. Most of the technical papers, for those who are genuinely interested in fundamental science, and have the will and potential to go through the details, can easily be found in the archive.<sup>27</sup>

I must emphasize that patience alone is not sufficient to decipher the complexity of some of the issues raised in the fundamental way we conduct science, and it is important to revive the demarcation criteria that differentiate between scientists and pseudo-scientists, between science and pseudo-science. Again, I think that the essay by Dorothy Bishop, a professor of Development Neuropsychology at Oxford University, on "How to become a celebrity scientific expert",<sup>28</sup> provides excellent guidelines and captures the essence of the demarcation of scientists from pseudo-scientists and armchair scientists. And since the author of the reply mentioned Lakatos in his footnote (18) without reference, I will

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<sup>19</sup> "Why Trust a Theory? Reconsidering Scientific Methodology in Light of Modern Physics", Munich Center of Mathematical Philosophy, Arnold Sommerfeld Center for Theoretical Physics, 7-9 December, 2015. <http://www.whyltrustatheory2015.philosophie.uni-muenchen.de/program/index.html>

<sup>20</sup> Richard Dawid: <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/richard.dawid/>

<sup>21</sup> Richard Dawid, *String Theory and the Scientific Method*, Cambridge University Press, 2013. <http://www.cambridge.org/de/academic/subjects/physics/history-philosophy-and-foundations-physics/string-theory-and-scientific-method?format=HB>

<sup>22</sup> Why Trust a Theory, parts I, II and III, <https://platofootnote.wordpress.com/2015/12/08/why-trust-a-theory-part-i/>

<sup>23</sup> Massimo Pigliucci, <http://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Doctoral-Programs/Philosophy/Faculty-Bios/Massimo-Pigliucci>

<sup>24</sup> Sabine Hossenfelder: <http://www.nordita.org/people/index.php?variant=single&u=sabineh>

<sup>25</sup> Sabine Hossenfelder, "Why trust a Theory? Physicists and Philosophers Debate the Scientific Method", *Forbes*, December 10, 2015. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/startwithabang/2015/12/10/why-trust-a-theory-physicists-and-philosophers-debate-the-scientific-method/#1c32faef3234>

<sup>26</sup> Carlo Rovelli's Lecture <https://videonline.edu.lmu.de/en/node/7477>

<sup>27</sup> Cornell University Archive <http://arxiv.org>

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Bishop, "How to become a celebrity scientist," September 12, 2011. <http://deevybee.blogspot.ca/2011/09/how-to-become-celebrity-scientific.html>

quote Imre Lakatos on the demarcation problem just to make a point on academic expectations:<sup>29</sup>

The problem of demarcation between science and pseudoscience has grave implications also for the institutionalization of criticism. Copernicus's theory was banned by the Catholic Church in 1616 because it was said to be pseudoscientific ... The new liberal establishment of the west also exercises the right to deny freedom of speech to what it regards as pseudoscience, as we have seen in the case of the debate concerning race and intelligence. All these judgements were inevitably based on some sort of demarcation criterion. This is why the problem of demarcation between science and pseudoscience is not a pseudo-problem of armchair philosophers: it has grave ethical and political implications.

Lakatos could have easily added armchair scientists to the list, and he would have been absolutely right. The author of the reply should also take the time and consult the exchange between Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend;<sup>30</sup> the philosophy of science is not cast in stone, and this is clearly not the place for me to elaborate on the subject.

On the other hand if one is interested in a professional journalistic approach to the crisis physics faces, one is urged to read science journalists like John Horgan, who once attended the science and religion journalism workshop organized in Cambridge, UK, by the Templeton Foundation, and who seems to have distanced himself at some point from the Templeton Foundation,<sup>31,32</sup> but his article that appeared on *Edge* (see reference below) seems to end with an advice to the Foundation:

First, the foundation should state clearly that it is not committed to any particular conclusion of the science-religion dialogue, and that one possible conclusion is that religion—at least in its traditional, supernatural manifestations—is not compatible with science. To demonstrate its open-mindedness, the foundation should award the Templeton Prize to an opponent of religion, such as Steven Weinberg or Richard Dawkins. At the very least, the foundation should post this essay on its Web site.

John Horgan is also the author of *The End of Science: Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of the Scientific Age*,<sup>33</sup> and I recommend the reading of the interview he

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<sup>29</sup> Imre Lakatos, "Science and Pseudoscience", *Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues*, by Martin Curd and J. A. Cover, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1998, pp 20-26.

<sup>30</sup> Imre Lakatos, Paul Feyerabend, *For and Against Method: Including Lakatos's Lectures on Scientific Method and the Lakatos-Feyerabend Correspondence*, edited and with an Introduction by Matteo Motterlini, The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> John Horgan, "The Templeton Foundation: A Skeptic's Take," *Edge*, May 4, 2006. <https://www.edge.org/conversation/the-templeton-foundation-a-skeptic-39s-take>

<sup>32</sup> John Horgan <http://www.johnhorgan.org/works.htm>

<sup>33</sup> John Horgan, *The End of Science: Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of the Scientific Age*, New York, Basic Books, 2015.

conducted with Carlo Rovelli<sup>34</sup> in *Scientific American*. Another professional science journalist to be read is Jim Baggott.<sup>35</sup>

Now, I do not mind criticism that focuses on ideas, but for the author of the reply to cast shadows of doubt on the person ‘Schuon’ in his eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) footnote is but a ‘low blow’ that only a lack of wisdom and knowledge can explain.

### **On Leapfrogging into Generalizations**

According to the author of the reply, physics has always been in crisis; he cites the struggles with the interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, Black Hole (BH) detection, and the testing of Einstein’s General Relativity (GR). It looks like he did not read the paper by Ellis and Silk<sup>36</sup> that appeared in *Nature*, and if he did, he did not understand the point addresses by the authors. The essence of the crisis does not lie in whether we have detected BHs and gravitational waves or not, whether the Standard Model is the most accomplished physical theory or not; it is agreed upon by all physicists that the Standard Model is full of loopholes (I will cite the neutrino masses as an example), and that GR fails on some scale. The essence of the crisis lies in the Scientific Method with a strong empiricism backbone, and physicists have become aware of the physical limitations of the experimental method. The philosophers have always been aware of this problem.

I find it amusing to read statements like: “Even theoretical physicists endowed with a super ego won’t go that far in leapfrogging”; it only goes to show that the knowledge of the author of such a statement is very likely sought in science vulgarization magazines and public lectures like the Perimeter Institute (PI) public lecture series. What he probably does not know is that the Neil Turok quote, cited in my paper, was given at the opening lecture of a Summer school held at the PI for young graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, the information is readily available on the net. Neil Turok meant to tell the students and postdoctoral fellows, the next generation of theoretical physicists, that physics, as we know it today, faces some tall dead ends. Again, what the author of the reply does not grasp is the fact that the very criticism that was brought up in my paper is criticism that is coming out of the physics community. I am led to believe that the author of the reply and I may be talking and writing about different physics communities living in parallel universes, I suppose.

I should make one final comment on this section, and in particular on the accusation of ‘handpicking of oral statements’. What the author again fails to understand is that the statements of Penrose, Turok and many other physicists, if only he cared to look in the

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<sup>34</sup> John Horgan, “The Philosophy of Guessing Has Harmed Physics, Experts Say, Interview of Carlo Rovelli”, *Scientific American*, August 21, 2014. <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/the-philosophy-of-guessing-has-harmed-physics-expert-says/>

<sup>35</sup> “Beyond Experiment: Why the Scientific Method May Be Old Hat”, *New Scientist*, February 24, 2016. <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2078468-beyond-experiment-why-the-scientific-method-may-be-old-hat/>

<sup>36</sup> George Ellis and Joe Silk, “Scientific Method: Defend the Integrity of Physics”, *Nature*, December 16, 2014. <http://www.nature.com/news/scientific-method-defend-the-integrity-of-physics-1.16535>

literature, go beyond the narrow subcategories suggested by the author of the reply; it is the whole scientific method that is questioned. If more than four decades ago Philip W. Anderson criticized reductionism in his famous paper “More Is Different”,<sup>37</sup> today physicists are faced with the limitations of the experimental method.

### **On The Science-Religion Relationship**

The title of this section in the reply clearly suggests that there ought to be a mould called Science-Religion, as defined by the Christian Evangelicals I suppose, and that Islam should just follow and slip into it.

Again Gerald Holton’s theory is mentioned but no references are given. It is as if Holton resolved the epistemological problem of science. Here is what Holton, himself, has to say about the limitations of his theory of “themata” (of the eight limitations he lists in his 1975 paper, I have listed a couple below):<sup>38</sup>

Even if this were true, I would not like to think that the themata in a scientific work are its chief reality. Otherwise, work in the history of science would degenerate into descriptivism, and scientific findings would seem to be in par with the tales of the old men on the hills of Albania, to whom today’s story is just about as good or as bad as yesterday’s.

... Moreover, embracing a thema such as atomism in one field of physics occasionally has not prevented the embrace of the opposite thema by the same person for another field of physics ...

The author of the reply then goes on to suggest, “Don’t we say that science is not after absolute truths but only after relative ones that work”, who are the ‘we’ in his sentence? And why would one strive on a path seeking relative truths with no absolute reference, even the traveling salesman has a starting reference point.

We are again left wondering about where the reference is in footnote (13). Ian Barbour is mentioned, but no reference is given, a recurrent pattern that reflects a total absence of scholarship: “He who does not have it, cannot give it”. Mentioning Barbour just strengthens the thesis of my article where I emphasize the fact that Muslims need not seek the blessings of anyone to start any dialogue. In fact, if one were to fine comb the content of Ian Barbour’s book *When Science Meets Religion*,<sup>39</sup> one would find that Islam is never mentioned, not that it needs to, even though the word Religion appears in the title, and the suggest the general not the particular; Barbour mentions Christianity and Judaism, two of the Abrahamic religions, mentions Buddhism and Hinduism, but not

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<sup>37</sup> P. W. Anderson, “More Is Different”, *Science, New Series*, Vol. 177, No. 4047. (Aug. 4, 1972), pp 393-396.

<sup>38</sup> Gerald Holton, 1975, “On the Role of Themata in Scientific Thought,” *Science, New Series*, 188 (4186) 25 April, pp. 328–34.

<sup>39</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, HarperCollins, 2000.

Islam. Barbour's approach to the Science-Religion relationship is that of a Christian, and he deserves to be commended for his life long efforts.

My criticism is directed towards those who have embraced, among the Muslims, a Christian-Science framework and want to forcefully impose it on the Islamic tradition. I have documented extensively my criticism of the ideological position taken by Nidhal Guessoum, the 'protégé par excellence' of the Templeton Foundation; indeed, his position on the board of trustees of the Templeton Foundation has clearly had some impact on the direction the Islam and Modern Science 'debate' has drifted towards.<sup>40</sup> The availability of substantial funding allocated to groups and individuals who subscribe to the Science-Religion framework endorsed by the Templeton Foundation, has completely polarized and biased the discussion that ought to be held in the Muslim world.

Guessoum has clearly not hesitated to establish links with foundations like the Quilliam Foundation led by Maajid Nawaaz, and has been mentored by people like Jean Staune from the University Interdisciplinaire de Paris (UIP) (see reference 25 for details), who has been an integral part of the team that has traveled in the Muslim world delivering lectures on subjects like the Big Bang and evolution theories and their relevance to Islam. One is left wondering why someone like Jean Staune,<sup>41</sup> a Catholic, has been globe trotting the Muslim world, from Morocco to Malaysia, delivering lectures on evolutionary theory as part of a Science and Islam educational program.

When it comes to describing physics as a paradigmatic science, one has to be very specific about whether one is subscribing to Thomas Kuhn's approach to the history of science or to some other philosophers of science or for that matter historians of science in general. If one adopts a Kuhnian approach, one should assume the shortcomings of the approach, and one should therefore consult the works of Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend as start, on the pros and cons of method; in fact, Paul Feyerabend describes the paradigmatic approach as "mob psychology". To classify physics as a paradigmatic science is naïve to say the least.

### **On Oscillating Between Two World Visions**

Any one familiar with professor's Nasr contributions to Islamic philosophy would not make the mistake of describing his lifelong achievements as an attempt to call for a "new holistic epistemology with at its core the perennial philosophy of the Middle Age and before. It is without doubt a highly problematic epistemology".<sup>42</sup> First, we need some solid references about the *Philosophia Perennis*, and again nothing is given, and a vague "Middle Age and before" is all we get. May I suggest the works of Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), René Guénon (1886-1951) and Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) to start with, and of course the work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-), and it will

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<sup>40</sup> Jean Staune and Nidhal Guessoum, "Science and Islam: An Educational Approach", Templeton foundation, 2011-2014. <https://www.templeton.org/what-we-fund/grants/science-and-islam-an-educational-approach>

<sup>41</sup> Jean Staune. [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean\\_Staune#Engagement\\_dans\\_le\\_christianisme](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Staune#Engagement_dans_le_christianisme)

<sup>42</sup> See response article, section: "Insaisissable": Oscillating between Two World Visions, second paragraph.

suffice to read the article by Huston Smith<sup>43</sup> along with the reply by Nasr that were included in Volume XXVIII of the Library of Living philosophers. One ought to know that Seyyed Hossein Nasr's position is not against science in its original meaning 'Scientia' for as long as it preserves the sacred. It would have been very fruitful to bring forth in the reply academic arguments with references that would explain why according to the author of the reply "the perennial philosophy is highly problematic"; a statement like his sounds like an opinion uttered in a coffee shop. The footnote (18) in the response just shows that the author has absolutely no knowledge whatsoever of Metaphysics, a field that is completely rejected by Modern Science; indeed, the author of the response goes on to suggest that any epistemological endeavour ought to be subject to a positivist analysis, again no reference is given, and it seems sufficient to the author of the reply to mention Lakatos on the way. This is absolutely unacceptable as an argument; this is as if the reply were written for one of his local newspapers like *el-Watan*.<sup>44</sup> He clearly has not read Imre Lakatos thoroughly, and if he did, he should have quoted David Hume instead:

If we take in our hand any volume: of divinity, or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames. For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.<sup>45</sup>

In the March 10, 2016 issue of *The Week* magazine online appears an article entitled "Why so many scientists are so ignorant" by Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry that illustrates exactly the point above:<sup>46</sup>

After all, as a group, scientists have an obvious objective interest in experimental science being recognized as the only path to valuable knowledge, and therefore an interest in disdaining other paths to knowledge as less valid. People who listen to scientists opine about philosophy ought to keep that in mind.

And then there's another factor at play. Many, though certainly not all, of the scientists who opine loudest about the uselessness of philosophy are public atheists. The form of atheism they promote is usually known as "eliminative materialism," or the notion that matter is the only thing that exists. This theory is motivated by "scientism," or the notion that the only knowable things are knowable by science. Somewhat paradoxically, these propositions are essentially religious—to dismiss entire swathes of human

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<sup>43</sup> Huston, Smith, Nasr's defense of the Perennial Philosophy, in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume XXVIII, pp. 139-158.

<sup>44</sup> Algerian newspaper to which Mimouni has contributed in the past.

<sup>45</sup> These are famous lines written by David Hume, and which appeared on the final paragraph of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, first published in 1748 (under the title *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*).

<sup>46</sup> Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry, Why so many scientists are so Ignorant, *The Week* magazine, March 10, 2016. why so many scientists are so ignorant

experience and human thought requires a venture of faith. They're also not very smart religion, since they end up simply shouting away inconvenient propositions.

Fundamentalism is not a belief system or a religion, it's a state of mind. There can be fundamentalist religion, fundamentalist atheism, fundamentalist socialism, fundamentalism libertarianism. What all of them have in common is, in David Bentley Hart's words, "a stubborn refusal to think." The fundamentalist is not the one whose ideas are too simple or too crude. He's the one who stubbornly refuses to think through either other ideas, or those ideas themselves.

Sadly, many of our greatest minds give us an example of this state of mind.

When one reads footnote (18)<sup>47</sup> of the reply and contrasts it with what Gobry writes in the quote above, one clearly understands the state of mind of the author of the reply, and why adjectives like *palpable, reproducible, useful* are used, and I will leave the conclusion to the reader.

Then and again the lack of scholarship is clearly transparent when we listen to a description of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's work by the mentor of the author of the reply, Nidhal Guessoum, in a lecture given at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in 2009, who describes the work of Nasr as "Very gloomy ..., science is depressing ...".<sup>48</sup> This just goes to say that it is very likely that neither the mentor nor the disciple have read thoroughly the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the first Muslim philosopher to be honoured by the Library of Living Philosophers, and the first Muslim philosopher to deliver the Gifford lectures, and if they did read some of the works of Nasr, they didn't understand the content; that would very likely explains the "gloomy" description. They are both unqualified to comment on the magnum opus work of Nasr, and I highly recommend to both of them reading *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr* by William Chittick<sup>49</sup> where a coherent analysis of Nasr's contribution is presented not a "gloomy" one, as Guessoum and his disciple would have it.

As far as footnote (15) of the reply and of course the text linked to it are concerned, I refer the author of the reply to my discussion above on Ian Barbour's work and its irrelevance or relevance to the Islamic case. As for the footnotes (16) and (17), and since according to the reply I oscillate between states that I am not allowed to be knowledgeable of, I will point to a whole technical meeting held in Paris to discuss the

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<sup>47</sup> "It faces the fundamental problem from the modern point of view that it has not provided a single palpable, reproducible, useful result."

<sup>48</sup> The description of Nasr's contribution by Nidhal Guessoum starts after the 35 minute-mark in the video. <http://media.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/WebMedia/FAR285%20Guessoum.mov>

<sup>49</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, World Wisdom, 2007.

fundamental problems of Inflation in cosmology<sup>50,51</sup> (I have included the video lecture site for those who are genuinely interested in science and in the details where things become interesting), and how serious the divide has become between those who support inflation and those who don't among the cosmologists.

What the author of the reply does not seem to grasp again is the fact that as an active Muslim scientist I do not identify with any of the positions taken by those I have qualified as Neo-Mu'tazilites; I do not put my Muslim faith in a box and subject it to the type of empiricism Modern Science imposes as an epistemological process. I also do not take science as a box and wrap it in a theistic veil; A'qida (creed) is an invariant of the faith that reason cannot transform. My views of Modern Science are very clear: its believed invariants vary, and therefore looking for the Absolute through the eyepiece of modern science reveals nothing. If the author of the reply is confused, it is because he, like his fellow neo-Mu'tazilites, refuses to recognize all that is metaphysical, i.e., all that transcends empiricism. This is very clearly expressed in one of the fundamental tenets of the Islamic creed conveyed by the Caliph Abu Bakr el\_Sidiq: "Praise be to God, Who has made it possible to reach Him only through incapacity, and to acknowledge this incapacity is in itself knowledge".

## **Conclusion**

The common denominator for all the people listed in my paper is their lack of scholarship and a strong lack of scientific activity. They have all converged towards journalism, writing columns in newspapers and popular magazines, what I would describe as the Dorothy Bishop syndrome.<sup>52</sup>

The Internet has become for some a drowning sea of information, but they are kept starving for knowledge. Knowledge is what is left when the Internet is down. Indeed, there are some practices, like proper referencing and crediting the work of others properly, that are disappearing; we have in the reply of Jamal Mimouni an archetype of negligence and a fundamental lack of academic efficiency. The reply is but a piece of journalism, and I am not sure its author realizes to what extent he has failed some of the fundamental academic norms of publication.

I would have been more than delighted to entertain an exchange on fundamental ideas, but the reply focussed on trying to delegitimize my credentials as a theoretical plasma physicist first, and my ability to criticize a field I have been working in for more than three decades.

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<sup>50</sup> The Primordial Universe after Planck, 30<sup>th</sup> Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris Colloquium, December 15-19, 2014. <http://www.iap.fr/col2014/>

<sup>51</sup> "The Primordial Universe after Planck" Video Lectures, 30<sup>th</sup> Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris Colloquium, December 15-19, 2014. <http://webcast.in2p3.fr/videos-6161>

<sup>52</sup> Dorothy Bishop, "How to become a celebrity scientific expert", 2011. <http://deevybee.blogspot.ca/2011/09/how-to-become-celebrity-scientific.html>