

## Religious perspectives on the science of Human Origins - Dr. Mustansir Mir, Ph.D

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Mustansir Mir: 00:18 My name is Mustansir Mir. I'm a Muslim. I teach Islamic Studies at Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio. Title of my talk is Human Origins, Islamic Perspective. In the contemporary conversation between science and religion, the two partners to the conversation, science and religion are not equal. The science that lays down the terms of the conversation defines the issues, determines what constitutes admissible evidence and names the referee. As for religion, it finds itself in a defensive position, in order to equip itself as an honorable conversationalist. It sometimes tries to provide answers to the questions raised by science, sometimes tries to redefine those questions and sometimes challenges science's right, or competency to ask some of those questions, thus vision to make room for an independent religious discourse. Where does Islam stand in this scenario in reference to the subject of human origins? And to the question, what does it mean to be human? (01:48) I will make three points. One, Islam regards revelation and reason as compliments. Instead of limiting the role of reason, Islam limits the role of revelation. For revelation deals only with those few areas of inquiry, with which in Islam's view, human reason either cannot grapple or cannot grapple adequately. After identifying such areas, revelation leaves human reason free to act. In the realm of science therefore, the subjects on which revelation is silent, are for science to explore and investigate. One such subject is that of human origins. Basically, Islamic revelation has nothing to say on the matter. I say basically, because there are a few verses in the Quran, the Islamic scripture, which do seem to have a bidding on the subject. The verses, for example, we say that God made man from earth, or from clay, but such verses are not meant to furnish a scientific account of human origins. (03:12) At the most, they can be interpreted to mean that human beings have an earthly constitution. The trust of such verses of the Quran is quite different, and this brings me to my second point. So point two, the few Quranic statements that appear to talk about human origins are in fact intended to inculcate a certain attitude in the Quran's addressees, namely the attitude of submission to God. And the word Islam, by the way, means submission. The statements, [inaudible 00:03:50] character, are

meant to put human beings in their place, so to speak, by telling them that cognizance of their origins will make them realize that it does not behoove them to become arrogant denials of their creator God. One Quranic verse reads, [foreign language 00:00:04:09], have you denied the one who created you from earth? The reference to the lowly, earthly origins of human beings does not mean that the Quran has a low estimate of the human being. (04:26) According to the Quran, Adam, the first human being received homage from angels. But the greatness of human beings is potential. They can and ought to achieve greatness, greatness through right effort, but they may fail miserably to, their ultimate fate being in their own hands. The issues of human world, human uniqueness and especially of human destiny are ultimately philosophical issues on which science, [inaudible 00:05:01] science, science as science cannot probably pronounce any judgment, even though scientific data may be used to assist in making such a judgment. Science after all has its limitations. And one crucial question that needs to be clarified in the conversation between science and religion is, does scientific inquiry or activity have any limitations at all? Is there a point where science, without realizing it, seizes to be science and starts to encroach upon areas where it does not legitimately belong? Three. Like Judaism, Islam does not have a history of a conflict between religion and science. The Quran encourages, in fact, sanctifies study of nature, the proper area of scientific inquiry and calls nature a repository of science. (06:05) Now a sign is something that points to something beyond itself. To say that natural phenomena are signs is to say that they are not an end in themselves, but lead to a reality, a higher order reality beyond themselves. So instead of repudiating scientific activity, the Quran, let us say Islamic religion sets itself the task of interpreting the results of that activity. The interpretation consists in placing those results within a framework of religious and modern meaning. Such interpretation requires knowledge, intelligence, and patience. Knowledge of both religion and science so as to lend credibility, or plausibility to the interpretation. Intelligence, to figure out the relations between the different types of data to be interpreted. And patience to work through difficulties or problematic areas encountered in the process of interpretation. I may add that one or two other aspects of this subject have been discussed in slightly more elaborately on the website of human origins, Smithsonian website.

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