

ISLAM AND QUANTUM PHYSICS: FROM SIGNS TO SCIENCE

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Abstract

The symbolic and mental nature of science that had been divulged for the first time by the Qur'an has also been recognized by quantum physics thirteen centuries later, i.e., in the first decades of the twentieth century. Islām and quantum physics are compatible due to a shared phenomenological approach which denies that we can know the substance of anything or that matter has a substance at all. In other words, both entirely depend on signs (āyāt), appearances (phenomena) or symbols that cannot have any substance or corresponding reality as independent, material entities in the external world. It is through the elimination of material substance that human consciousness has gained its pivotal and fundamental position and placed science into its proper place. Although quantum physics does not depend on the unity and oneness of God, such a religious basis can easily be supplied by Islam.

Keywords: *Islam, quantum physics, classical science, signs, consciousness.*

Introduction

What should Muslims do with the secular quantum physics of the West? Should they reject it, if not on practical grounds, at least on philosophical grounds? The answer is a resounding no because according to Islam, scientists fully depend on God's signs (āyāt) both in revelation and nature in order to form concepts, interpretations, models or theories of visible reality. More specifically, the sole purpose or methodology of Islamic science is to relate mental signs to one another. From the perspective of this authentic and unchanging framework, science, in its widest possible scope, not only becomes

a symbolic and mental activity of scientists, but also a religiously informed one. That is why there can be no contradiction between Islam and science. As the religion of reason and science, Islam has been, is and will always be compatible with science, provided it is understood correctly, i.e., in terms of the former.

Thirteen centuries later quantum physics, the most contemporary scientific theory, has also recognized the symbolic and mental nature of science consciously in the West. As Arthur Stanley Eddington¹ states aptly and succinctly: “We have found that where science has progressed the farthest, the mind has but regained from nature that which the mind has put into nature. We have found a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown. We have devised profound theories, one after another, to account for its origin. At last, we have succeeded in reconstructing the creature that made the footprint. And Lo! It is our own².”

As a result of this common and authentic framework of science, both Islam and quantum physics are compatible even on philosophical grounds primarily because they share a phenomenological approach which denies that we can know the substance of anything and that matter has a substance. In other words, Islamic science and quantum physics do not deal directly with ultimate reality, rather they exclusively focus on mental signs, appearances, symbols or shadows of that reality. “The external world of physics has thus become a world of shadows. In removing our illusions we have removed the substance, for indeed we have seen that substance is one of the greatest of our illusions³.”

According to this common, authentic and unchanging framework of science, scientists try to give order to complex signs or

¹ British astronomer, physicist and mathematician.

² I found this quotation in the book, *Quantum Questions : Mystical Writings of World's Greatest Physicists*, ed. Ken Wilber (Boston : Shambala, 2001), p. 74. Einstein also affirms this point: “Science is the attempt to make the chaotic diversity of our sense-experience correspond to a logically uniform system of thought.” See, Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (New York : Wingsw Books, 1954), p. 323.

³ A.S. Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (New York : The Macmillan Company) 1929, p. xiv.