New Frontiers in Islam and Evolution

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SHĪʿĪ READINGS OF HUMAN EVOLUTION: ṬABĀṬABĀʾĪ TO ḤAYDARĪ

by Karim Gabor Kocsenda

Abstract. Within the context of Islamic discourse about evolution, this is the first study that focuses exclusively on the views of Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī (b. 1957), a prominent Shīʿī thinker of the contemporary period. Ḥaydarī develops his views from Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (1904–1981), the author of the seminal exegesis *The Balance in Interpreting the Qurʾān* (*Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*). Ṭabāṭabāʾī is very hesitant about accepting whether the Qurʾān can be read to indicate evolution and ultimately refuses it because of a lack of scientific evidence in his eyes. However, Ḥaydarī challenges the hesitation in Ṭabāṭabāʾī's hermeneutics while nonetheless agreeing with him on the lack of hard scientific proof for macroevolution. Instead, Ḥaydarī proposes a novel, theological reading of evolution understood in a nonscientific sense. The article examines Ḥaydarī's views on evolution, his creationist conclusions, his suggestion of multiple "Adams" in human and Prophetic origins, and his attempt to link evolution of consciousness with the Shīʿī belief in the Parousia of the Mahdī. His unique reading of scripture marks him as being radically different to any of the currently available opinions in the discourse of Islam and evolution.

Keywords: Adam; evolution and Islam; exegesis; Islamic theology; Mahdi; Qurʾān; Shīʿī thought; Tafsir

Introduction

The literature on Islam and evolution in the English language has been growing steadily in recent decades (Guessoum 2016). Most of the work has

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Table 1. Summary of interpretive choices regarding human macroevolution

Position	Are nonhumans the product of evolution?	Are humans the product of evolution?	Is Adam a product of evolution?
Creationism	No	No	No
Human exceptionalism	Yes	No	No
Adamic exceptionalism	Yes	Yes	No
No exceptions	Yes	Yes	Yes

been focused around cataloguing the views of authoritative figures (e.g., Kaya 2012; Arjomand 2020), while some constructive work has also been done (e.g., Jalajel 2009, 2018). An attempt at both a descriptive survey with constructive conclusions is Malik (2021), wherein a useful four-tier classification of Muslim perspectives on evolution was suggested. This is summarized in Table 1.

With a focus on common ancestry, the positions are articulated as follows: Creationism, understood as the direct creation of every single species without common ancestry, is in direct opposition to the "no exceptions" camp, which believes in everything that evolution has to offer. In between these two positions are camps that accept common ancestry but with caveats. Human exceptionalism is the position that every biological entity is a product of evolution except for the human race. Adamic exceptionalism is the thesis that only Adam and Eve were miraculous creations, but there could have been other human beings created through evolutionary processes that coexisted with them. Adam's descendants could have intermarried with these co-/pre-Adamic human beings, thus fostering a lineage that traces back to Adam and Eve but also the rest of the history of life. This classification will be helpful when articulating the positions of the thinkers mentioned in this article.

As surveyed in the literature, most of the work done on Islam and evolution, at least in the English language, is focused on Sunnī perspectives. It therefore marginalizes other voices such as Shīʿī ones. Seyyed Hossein Nasr is an exception and a prominent voice that represents a Shīʿī perspective in the English literature. Through the lens of Neoplatonism, Nasr argues for creationism (Nasr 2006). Aside from Nasr, there has a been a steady growth of publications dealing with Shīʿī opinions on evolution, including the Lamarckism of Mohammad Taqī Anṣārī Kāshānī (d. 1902), the creationism of Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981), and the outright evolutionism of Yadallah Saḥābī (d. 2002), among others (Arjomand 2020; Daneshgar 2020). However, there are many other Shīʿī voices that have yet to studied.

This is the first article in English to focus exclusively on the Shīʾī scholar, Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī (b. 1957). A provocative and widely read thinker, Ḥaydarī has gained a massive following online for his willingness to discuss difficult topics in Islamic thought and to engage in thoughtful self-criticism of the Shīʿī theological school, which he represents as an absolute authority for the laity (*marjiʿ*). Educated in Najaf and later in Qom under some of the most prominent Shīʿī theologians of his age, Kamāl Ḥaydarī belongs to the lineage of the celebrated theologian and exegete Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī through the latter's students Javādī Amolī (b. 1933) and Ḥasan Ḥasanzadeh Amolī (d. 2021).[1]

Ḥaydarī offers a unique proposal that has not been acknowledged nor analyzed in the current Islam and evolution discourse. His proposal is exceptional in several ways. First, it builds upon the work of the preeminent Shīʿī exegete of the modern period, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, the author of *The Balance in Interpretation of Qur'ān* (*Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*), which remains a widely regarded exegesis in the Shīʿī tradition to this day (Jawādī Āmolī 2012; Harīsī 2012). Ḥaydarī consistently speaks in terms of a critical conversation with Ṭabāṭabāʾī's readings, as we shall see (Ḥaydarī 2018a, 2018b, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g). Ṭabāṭabāʾī appears to have accepted macroevolutionary readings of the Qurʾān *in principle* but ended up rejecting it due to not being convinced by the certainty of the science of evolution, as well as the hermeneutic difficulties involved in reading various Qurʾānic verses in line with the theory.[2]

Ḥaydarī, as we shall see, does not accept macroevolution because of scientific doubts. He is a strict creationist even when he speaks of multiple Adams, an idea that is found in Shīʿī narrations.[3] Although he makes much of his interpretive differences with Ṭabāṭabāʾī, he finally takes an identical position to his forbearer due to his scientific doubts about macroevolution. However, Ḥaydarī is inconsistent in his understanding of the current science, as we will note. He applies "evolution" frequently to the idea of human intellectual and ethical progress and relates it to the Parousia of the twelfth Imām, al-Mahdī. The hermeneutical or exegetical differences between the two scholars will be of great benefit to the discussants in the Islam and evolution discourse as well as intellectual historians exploring the impact of the natural sciences upon Islamic thought.

The structure of this article is as follows. I will first highlight my working methodology and the sources I have used for my analysis. Following this, since Ṭabāṭabāʾī's ideas on evolution play an essential role in the formulation of Ḥaydarī's position, we shall first briefly review Ṭabāṭabāʾī's ideas as discussed in his exegesis. Once his ideas are established, we will then review Ḥaydarī's understanding of evolution and how he attempts to reconcile Islam and Shīʿī beliefs with the theory of evolution.

One important caveat needs to be mentioned. Ḥaydarī has been accused of plagiarism—including from the work of Ṭabāṭabāʾī—on several counts

in a number of his published works (ʿAjamī n.d.). Due to lack of evidence in my own study, my conclusions do not directly support ʿAjamī's conclusions.

Methodology

Since Ḥaydarī's work is primarily in the form of oral lessons, which are later transcribed and often edited into books, his latest comments on evolution are taken from his ongoing series of reflections on the place of women in Islamic law. Discussions on the differences between men and women led Ḥaydarī to give critical commentary upon human origins and therefore the theory of evolution. His exploration spans seven sessions, each totaling just under an hour. They have been transcribed (albeit with significant spelling errors) and are available on his official website. The details of these talks and my references to them herein are summarized in Table 2. As Ḥaydarī also touched upon this subject in passing in the summer of 2017 and later in 2019, these will be catalogued as well. The long talks from 2018 are available in transcription. Therefore, I will not be referring to video timestamps since my primary sources were these online transcripts. Timestamps, however, will be used to reference points appearing in the short clips mentioned at the beginning and end of Table 2.

Human Evolution in the Mīzān

To begin, it is important to note that the context for Ṭabāṭabāʾī's words in *Mizān* was a religious debate with his contemporary, pro-evolutionary Islamic modernist Yadallah Saḥābī (d. 2002) (Arjomand 2020, 90). This sort of debate is not new, and the first refutations of evolutionary theories in the Persianate world date back to the 1880s, and later included partial accommodations such as those of Mohammad Reza Isfahani (d. 1943), as well as complete defenses by Enāyatullāh Dastghaib Shirāzī (d. 1928) and others (Arjomand 2020, 65–90).

Arjomand summarizes Saḥābī's methodology and views as a desire to interpret the Qurʾān in line with the "truths" of evolution. Saḥābī argues that the Qurʾān uses two terms that are thought to be synonymous but are in fact not: *ādam* and *insān*. The former is used to refer exclusively to Adam, the Prophet, whereas the latter refers to the entire human species. Likewise, the terms *insān* and *bashar* have different meanings. The former is reserved for humankind after a rational evolutionary leap, while the latter refers to humankind throughout its evolutionary history. Saḥābī quotes the verse Q 3:59 which states, "The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam; He created him from sand, then said to him: 'Be'. And he was." To argue that this means that they both had mothers, meaning Adam had a mother and so he was born from previous human beings. Then God preferentially chose Adam, as mentioned in Q 3:33, by granting him the

Table 2. Summary of Ḥaydarī's talks and short clips wherein he focuses exclusively on Islam and evolution

Talk title	Talk number	Date	Duration (M:S)	In-text citation
Who is Darwin and the basis for his Theory of Evolution? *Man huwa Dārwin wa aṣl Nazariyyatahu fī al-Taṭawwur*	N/a	July 25, 2017	14:00	(Ḥaydarī 2017a) or Ḥaydarī (2017a)
Darwin the Gnostic! *Al-ʿĀrif Bi-ʾLlah Dārwin*	N/a	September 3, 2017	11:07	(Ḥaydarī 2017b) or Ḥaydarī (2017b)
Darwin believes that the Creator is the one who placed life in the cell *Dārwin yaʿtaqidu anna al-Khāliq huwa man awjada al-ḥayāt fī al-khaliyya*	N/a	September 5, 2017	2:54	(Ḥaydarī 2017c) or Ḥaydarī (2017c)
Women's Jurisprudence (*fiqh al-marʾa*) (132): The Stance Vis-à-vis Darwinian Evolution (*al-mawqif īzāʾ nazariyyat al-taṭawwur al-dārwīnīyya*) 1	1	2018/12/04	43:58	(Ḥaydarī 2018a) or Ḥaydarī (2018a)
Women's Jurisprudence (*fiqh al-marʾa*) (133): The Stance Vis-à-vis Darwinian Evolution (*al-mawqif īzāʾ nazariyyat al-taṭawwur al-dārwīnīyya*) 2	2	December 5, 2018	47:58	(Ḥaydarī 2018b) or Ḥaydarī (2018b)
Women's Jurisprudence (*fiqh al-marʾa*) (134) The Stance Vis-à-vis Darwinian Evolution (*al-mawqif īzāʾ nazariyyat al-taṭawwur al-dārwīnīyya*) 3	3	December 8, 2018	48:41	(Ḥaydarī 2018c) or Ḥaydarī (2018c)
Women's Jurisprudence (*fiqh al-marʾa*) (135) The Stance Vis-à-vis Darwinian Evolution (*al-mawqif īzāʾ nazariyyat al-taṭawwur al-dārwīnīyya*) 4	4	December 9, 2018	46:26	(Ḥaydarī 2018d) or Ḥaydarī (2018d)

(*Continued*)

Table 2. (Continued)

Talk title	Talk number	Date	Duration (M:S)	In-text citation
Women's Jurisprudence (*fiqh al-marʾa*) (136) The Stance Vis-à-vis Darwinian Evolution (*al-mawqif īzāʾ naẓariyyat al-taṭawwur al-dārwīnīyya*) 5	5	December 10, 2018	50:33	(Ḥaydarī 2018e) or Ḥaydarī (2018e)
Women's Jurisprudence (*fiqh al-marʾa*) (137) The Stance Vis-à-vis Darwinian Evolution (*al-mawqif īzāʾ naẓariyyat al-taṭawwur al-dārwīnīyya*) 6	6	December11, 2018	48:14	(Ḥaydarī 2018f) or Ḥaydarī (2018f)
Women's Jurisprudence (*fiqh al-marʾa*) (138) The Stance Vis-à-vis Darwinian Evolution (*al-mawqif īzāʾ naẓariyyat al-taṭawwur al-dārwīnīyya*) 7	7	December 12, 2018	53:43	(Ḥaydarī 2018g) or Ḥaydarī (2018g)
Critique of Darwin's Theory of Evolution *Naqd-e Naẓariyyat-e Takāmol-e Dārwin*	N/a	October 1, 2019	2:20	(Ḥaydarī 2019a) or Ḥaydarī (2019a)

intellect and making him into the rational type of human being we find today. This marked a turning point from irrational proto humans to humankind with a sense of duty and responsibility (Arjomand 2020, 88–89).

Ṭabāṭabāʾī implicitly addresses Saḥābī's views in two places in *Mīzān*, volumes 4 and 21. However, given the prevalence of these ideas in his Iranian and Arabic intellectual milieu (Daneshgar 2018; Daneshgar 2020; Qidwai 2019), this is likely also a response to other authors and exegetes who accepted similar views. Ṭabāṭabāʾī's words in the fourth volume are strongly antievolutionary, while several comments in the 21st volume appear to flirt with the idea of possible evolutionary readings. However, these are then, respectively, rebutted in turn. We will examine comments from the two volumes separately.

Ṭabāṭabāʾī's Comments in Mīzān Volume 4

Our author is here commenting on Qurʾān (4:1), which states:

> Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women; and fear God by whom you demand one of another, and [reverence] the wombs [that bore you]; surely God ever watches over you.

He states in interpretation (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 4:135–37):

> The outward purport of what is meant by the 'single soul' is Adam (peace be upon him), and by 'its mate,' his spouse, and they are the two parents of the present lineage of humanity, of which we are a part…
> As for what some interpreters have stated that the single soul and its mate refer generally to the masculine and feminine genders of humanity from whom people generally descend, this involves a non-literal reading (*yuʾawwal al-maʿnā*) to state, 'He created each one of you from a human father and mother, without there being any difference between you, O mankind…
> However, this is clearly a corrupt reading… [this] verse in [chapter 4] speaks from the context of affirming the unity of each human being in reality, [meaning] that despite their great numbers—males and females—they come from a single origin…
> The outward purport of the verse is that the present lineage of humankind begins from Adam and his mate without anyone else having a share in this [parentage] apart from them, since He said, 'from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women,' and He did not say, 'from the pair of them *and from others*.'

Ṭabāṭabāʾī then addresses the question of whether Adam mentioned in this verse is the individual (*shakhsī*) Adam or the species (*nawʿī*) of Adamic or human being. This "species of Adamic being" is the one that was created from the earth and then reproduced into our current form of humankind. Ṭabāṭabāʾī states that this may have been read out of, "We created you [pl.], then We shaped you [pl.], then We said to the angels: 'Bow yourselves to Adam'" (Q 7:11) in the sense that the verse first addressed plural pronouns (which is not evident in the English translation as the English language lacks plural pronouns in the second person) and then went on to speak to a singular Adam as if this noun, Adam, referred to the very same plurality that preceded it. Ṭabāṭabāʾī argues that (Q 7:27) clarifies this confusion when it states, "O children of Adam! Let not Satan tempt you as he brought your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their garments to show them their shameful parts." He summarizes:

> The verse, as you can see, refuses to name humankind 'Adam' from one perspective, and yet also term them the children of Adam from another. Likewise, it refuses to assign creation to sand (*turbah*) from one perspective, and to a clot of blood (*nutfah*) from another. (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 4:143)

Ṭabāṭabāʾī here also refutes the idea that we can divide humankind's creation from sand mentioned in (Q 3:59) from their creation from a clot of blood mentioned in (23:12–14). He then argues that human macroevolu-

tion is unsupported by scientific fact and observation, relegating it to the position of mere hypothesis (*farḍiyya*) (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 4:144).

Ṭabāṭabāʾī's Comments in Mīzān Volume 21

In this volume, Ṭabāṭabāʾī appears to be keener to entertain alternative readings even if he finally opts for a conservative one and rejects them in turn. He also addresses Saḥābī's evolutionary arguments with reference to the creation of Jesus (Arjomand 2020, 91). Ṭabāṭabāʾī argues that the verses of the Qurʾān are literal in affirming that the human beings around today all descend from a specific man and woman. The Qurʾān names the man Adam. The two do not descend from a mother and father, but are rather created from sand (*turāb*), clay (*ṭīn*) or dry clay (*ṣalṣāl*) or the earth (*al-arḍ*), as the various expressions of the Qurʾān state. He continues (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 21:255–56):

> This is what the verses express in their outward acceptable import, even though it is not an explicit proof that does not admit for a non-literal reading (*taʾwīl*); nor is it from the necessary articles of faith. However, we may consider it a necessary article to believe that all of present humanity is related to Adam by descent as stated by the Qurʾān. Nonetheless, does this 'Adam' denote
>
> i. the species of 'Adam' (*Ādam nawʿī*), meaning human nature in a general sense as it is present in all people;
> ii. or a specific number of individuals that were the ancestors of the human species who were the fathers and mothers of present-day humanity;
> iii. or does it denote a single (*fard*) human being who is concretely one (*shakhṣ*)?
>
> Regarding the [second and third] interpretations, is he
>
> a. an individual of the human species that was born from another species, such as the ape for example, by inter-species (macro) evolution which brings forth the most perfect from the perfected, and the perfected from the deficient;
> b. or is he a single human being who has become perfected through the perfection of his faculty of intellect, born from a pair of human beings who were not likewise perfect in intellect.
>
> [In these cases] he would be the progenitor of the human species that is intellectually capable of being held morally accountable, and [he would be the] the first to have split off from a species that is not likewise capable. Thus human beings today are a perfected form of humanity who descend from the first perfect man called Adam, and they are a form that divided off from another species of human that is deficient and incapable of intellection, all the way back through a series of animal species ending in the most simple animal in faculties and the lowest in perfection.[4]

The quotation clearly refers to Saḥābī's evolutionary reading.

Ṭabāṭabāʾī goes on to mention another reading which states that Adam and his mate were created form the earth directly without being born from parents. He says none of these readings are necessarily implied by the Qurʾān (*fa laysa shayyun min hadhihi al-ṣuwar ḍarūrīyyan*), such that their rejection would imply religious disbelief. Nonetheless, he argues that the outward purport (*ẓāhir*) of the Qurʾān indicates this last suggestion—the direct creation of Adam (and Eve)—most clearly. The evolutionary reading is therefore something superimposed upon the plain sense of the text. He continues (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 21:256):

> Nonetheless, the verses do not tell us of the mechanism of his creation from the earth nor whether any supernatural causes or influences were involved in this. Did his creation take place instantaneously and immediately without a temporal unfolding, such that the body made from clay turned into a normal body possessed of a human spirit? Or, did he become a complete and perfect human being over the ages, in which he developed from one state of readiness to another, and shifted from one form to another, until he was completely prepared [for] the point at which the spirit was breathed into him? In sum, [the Qurʾān does not tell us whether] a number of causes and conditions were at play like in the case of the creation of the human embryo in the womb.[5]

However, Ṭabāṭabāʾī makes an apparent turnaround from these accommodationist musings. He argues that there is another verse that shifts the reading in favor of a direct rather than sequential creation of Adam: "The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam; He created him from sand, then said to him: 'Be'. And he was" (Q 3:59).[6] This verse was revealed as a response to the Christians, says Ṭabāṭabāʾī, who argued that since Jesus was created without a father, his father was therefore God Himself. The Qurʾān counters that the unique appearance of Jesus has a predecessor in Adam who was created directly from the earth and not born of the union of a man and woman. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:257) argues that if we read Adam's creation as linking back to the earth in some long causal chain, then there is no uniqueness for Adam in this, since all human beings are created from the earth in terms of causation, as the Qurʾān affirms. For example:

> Lo, thy Lord said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to create a human being out of clay (Q 38:71); and,
>
> He Who has made everything which He has created most excellent: He began the creation of man from clay (Q 32:7).

Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:257) declares:

> If all verse [3:59] intended to say about [Jesus'] creation was that he was created initially, like all clots in the womb, from sand, then its meaning

> would be, 'the attribute of Jesus, who had no father, is like Adam's since they, along with all people, are originally created from the earth.' It is clear that there is nothing unique for Adam in this regard such that he should be used as an analogy for Jesus, and this leads to a corruption of the outward purport of the verse both in itself, and in its purpose as a response to the Christians.

Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:257) here as in the fourth volume of his work refuses a metaphorical reading of Adam as "the Adamic species" rather than the individual because it is not allowed by (Q 3:59) and other verses such as:

> O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and created form it its own mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women (Q 4:1).

Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:257) argues that if the single soul mentioned in the verse referred to an entire species, it would be meaningless to speak of a mate for it, as this word is only applied to given individuals not to classes of things. One may also quote the Qurʾānic verses that speak of God entering Adam and his mate into paradisal gardens, and verses which mention that the two of them disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree to demonstrate that the reading of "Adam" as a species is incorrect. These verses clearly refer to individual agents, not a species, argues Ṭabāṭabāʾī.[7] He adds that understanding Adam as a species is founded upon a belief in an eternal earth inhabited from perpetuity, and this is utterly rejected by logic. He states in this regard (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 21:257):

> The basis for the belief that 'Adam' refers to an entire species (*aṣl al-qawl bi-Ādam al-nawʿī*) is founded on a belief in a pre-eternal earth (*qidam al-ʾarḍ*), [pre-eternal] species, including humans, as well as the fact that their numbers are infinite (*anna afrādahu ghayr mutanāhiya*) in both temporal directions [i.e. past and future]. However, the foundations of science deny [such a possibility] outright.

Even so, Ṭabāṭabāʾī's acceptance of scientific fact as having a bearing upon how we interpret verses is demonstrated by his hesitant ruminations on the possibility of a macroevolutionary interpretation of Adamic origins. We have seen that he rejects this idea because of the lack of scientific evidence available to him, and the contorted reading of various verses which it would require.[8] Because of this lack of hard evidence, Ṭabāṭabāʾī relegates belief in the theory of human macroevolution to the level of intuition (*ḥads*) that is ultimately uncertain (*ghayr yaqīnī*) (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 21:259).[9] He does, however, accept intraspecies (micro) evolution, for which he believes there is sufficient scientific proof in terms of fossils and so on, doing so in highly philosophical language. He states that this intraspecies evolution from less perfect to more perfect forms is merely proof for (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 21:258) "the development of matter in its perfection

so that it can accept the various forms of life; thus [matter] has developed in its ability to manifest the more perfect form of life after having manifested the less perfect, and the noble form after the ignoble."[10]

Ṭabāṭabāʾī then offers another possible Qurʾānic proof for Adamic origins from a prior species, or from a less developed form that become intelligent and capable of bearing moral responsibility, as mentioned earlier. This verse states: "God preferentially chose (*iṣṭafā*ʾ) Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham and the House of Imran above all beings (*al-ʿālamīn*)" (Q 3:33). He mentions that the Arabic term *iṣṭafā*ʾ means to preferentially choose the finest from something, and it is only possible in the case of a group of things.[11] Such a preferential choice of Adam must mean that others existed besides him over whom he was chosen. These must have been the proto humans who were unpossessed of intellect. Adam was chosen from among them and gifted with the gift of intellect that was passed down through his offspring, while the others were to eventually become extinct. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:259) asserts:

> Preferential choice means to take the finest of a thing. This is only possible if there is a group to choose the finest member therefrom, whose is [thus] preferred over the rest. This is just like how God chose Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of ʿImrān from among their people. This necessarily implies that there had to be alongside Adam a group of people (*qawm*) in addition than him, so that he may be preferred from among them above the others. This can only be (*wa laysa illā*) the proto-human (*al-bashar al-awwalī*) who is unpossessed of intellect (*ghayr mujahhaz bi jahāz al-taʿaqqul*). So, He chose Adam from among them and granted him intellect. This caused him to move from the level of their species (*martabatihim*) to the level of humankind (*martabat al-insān*) who is possessed of a complete intellect in comparison to the former. [Humankind] then procreated and multiplied whilst the proto human became extinct.

Nevertheless, Ṭabāṭabāʾī objects to this understanding. He claims that the word *al-ʿālamīn* that is preceded by the definite article "*al*" renders the word of general import. It thus refers to all of humanity until the end of time. Those mentioned by Q 3:33 are chosen not only over their contemporaries, but over all people until the end of time. This is like the verse, "and we have not sent thee [O Prophet] save as a mercy to all worlds of being" (Q 21:107). If we accept that Adam was the first human there is no problem in reading the said verse to mean that he was chosen over all of his offspring, save for the others mentioned in the verse. Moreover, if we take a more restricted interpretation of preference as applying to contemporaries, the verse could imply that Adam was chosen over his immediate offspring who lived contemporaneously with him. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:259) argues that the verse does not indicate that Adam was chosen at the very point of his creation, before the birth of his children.[12]

Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:260) likewise dispenses with the idea that Adam's preference or choice merely involved God granting him the gift of intellect. Being possessed of intellect is a quality that Adam shares with his offspring, and there is no uniqueness for him in this regard. This would entail preferring Adam without something unique to prefer him with. Once again, for the sake of argument, Ṭabāṭabāʾī concedes that his interlocutor wishing to affirm evolution may quote the following verse in his favor:

> We created you, then We shaped you, then We said to the angels: 'Bow yourselves to Adam'; so they bowed themselves, save Iblīs [Satan]—he was not of those that bowed themselves (Q 7:11).

This reading is based upon the fact that the word "then" (*thumma*) indicates a long temporal duration (*tarākhī zamānī*).[13] Thus, mankind existed before Adam but the angels were ordered to prostrate to him alone from among all of them. However, Ṭabāṭabāʾī says, this argument is weak. "Then" may also be used simply as a sequential linguistic connector instead of indicating temporal delay.[14] A final set of verses that Ṭabāṭabāʾī examines from both a pro-evolutionary reading and a restrictive or more literal one is the following:

> He Who has made everything which He has created most excellent: He began the creation of man from clay,
> And made his progeny (*nasl*) from a quintessence (*sulālah*) of lowly fluid;
> Then He shaped him and breathed His spirit in him.
> And He appointed for you hearing, and sight, and hearts; little thanks do you show (Q 32:7–9).

Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:260) explains that the first verse (Q 32:7) speaks of man's initial creation from clay—which is something all individuals of the human species share in—and the third verse (Q 32:9) speaks of shaping man and breathing the spirit into him, or in other words, man's human perfection. Once again, the argument for a pro-evolutionary reading here rests upon the use of the word "then" to indicate that the two are interspersed by a temporal period which is the time at which man was evolving through a number of intermediary species that end in the perfected human being. This is further suggested by the use of the indefinite in "a quintessence (*sulālah*)," which indicates generality and not the specific qualities of a human being as we know him.

The rebuttal to this reading that Ṭabāṭabāʾī offers is once again linguistic. He argues that "then He shaped him" is connected to "began." These verses are concerned with illustrating the appearance of humankind through creation and affirming that God began man's creation—which refers to the creation of Adam—from clay. God then replaced this with creating Adam's offspring from lowly fluid coming from the loins of Adam's offspring. Creation was finally completed, whether in the case of Adam or

his offspring, with God blowing the spirit into them. Ṭabāṭabāʾī says this is a sound meaning clearly understood from the wording of the Qurʾān and it does not involve an allegorical reading of "And [He] made his progeny from a quintessence of lowly fluid" as referring to intermediate forms of mankind that took place between the creation from clay and the blowing of the spirit into them.[15] He also argues that the indefinite use of the word progeny (*nasl*) does not necessarily imply a general import (*al-ʿumūm*) because this is only the case with indefinite terms in the context of negation, not affirmation.[16] He adds (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 21:260) "other verses concerning the creation of man and Adam which are similar to the foregoing have also been used to [affirm evolution]. The response to them is clear from what we have clarified herein, and so there is no need to address them separately and make an unnecessarily lengthy response to them."

To summarize then, Ṭabāṭabāʾī takes a pragmatic approach to the problem of finding human macroevolution in the Qurʾān. He does this through several mechanisms. First, he decouples belief in evolution from possible accusations of heresy by holding that Adamic origins are not established with such clarity in the Qurʾān that one cannot possibly make a nonliteral reading of its verses in this regard. Therefore, a nonliteral reading here would not be challenging fundamental and incontrovertible article of faith. Second, Ṭabāṭabāʾī allows for scientific facts to form an essential component of nonliteral readings, however in this case he affirms that there is no pressing need to allegorically read into the story of Adam an evolutionary mechanism *so long as that mechanism is not yet understood as absolute scientific truth*. Third, Ṭabāṭabāʾī's exegetical approach is likewise pragmatic. He relies first and foremost on a plain sense reading of the text and refuses an outright allegorical reading unless external factors, such as hard scientific facts or persuasive hadith narrations would lead him to do so.

It is interesting that Ḥaydarī (2018), who makes much of his difference with Ṭabāṭabāʾī[17] nonetheless appears to follow a very similar approach for the most part, as we shall see. We will examine now how the hallmarks of Ṭabāṭabāʾī's thought play out in turn in Ḥaydarī's explorations, and how the latter expresses his personal beliefs building out of, and at times in contradiction with, Ṭabāṭabāʾī's conclusions.

Ḥaydarī: Evolution and Can We Believe in It?

Ḥaydarī's understanding of evolution is drawn from a number of texts, either written in Arabic or in Arabic translation from another language. He is more topical and provocative than several of his contemporary Shīʿī exegetes. Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya (d. 1979) in *The Unveiling Exegesis of the Noble Qurʾān* (*al-Kāshif fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*) addresses the views of Rashīd Riḍa and Muḥammad ʿAbduh as apparent in the former's

Lighthouse (*Tafsīr al-Manār*). They state that the indefinite nature of "a single soul" mentioned in Q 4:1 should be maintained as such and should not be read as referring to Adam. Likewise, they state that only those addressed by "O Children of Adam" are direct descendants of the Qurʾānic Adam, that is to say, only the original Arab audience of the Qurʾān are definite descendants of Adam. Mughniyya notes that ʿAbduh sought thereby to allow for some indeterminacy regarding Adam's fatherhood with respect to all human beings. Mughniyya responds that the view is without basis because all addresses of the holy book are of universal applicability, otherwise they would not serve as commands and prohibitions to the present audience, and neither would they be relevant in deducing the sacred law in the present age. Thus, if we look at all the relevant verses, we see that the Qurʾān affirms that we all descend from Adam, who was himself directly created from sand. (Mughniyya n.d. 4:242–43). This effectively denies the standard evolutionary reading for human origins.

Another contemporary, ʿAbd al-ʾAʿlā al-Mūsawī al-Sabziwārī (d. 1993), states regarding Q 4:1 (al-Sabziwārī 2010, 7:229):

> The blessed verse indicates that humankind was created from a single soul, and this was the Materia prima for every individual human being. This is a matter that all Divinely-revealed religions agree upon, and which is also affirmed through incontrovertible proofs. Thus, humankind has one origin, which is the reality of humanhood (al-ḥaqīqa al-insāniyya) in which every individual, lineage, tribe, and society are united without any disparity therein. They are all like the parts of one person, alike in their primordial disposition (*fiṭra*), and sharing the same values and pathways for ethical development (*al-sayr al-takāmulī*). By this fact we can deny the theory of evolution which some naturalist philosophers call unto, for humankind is one unique type (nasījun waḥdahu) and it represents a single origin (*aṣl munfarid*) which God has created ex nihlo (*ibtidāʾan*) and directly (*mubāsharatan*) by His All-Holy Self.

In similar vein, the most recent encyclopedic Qurʾān exegesis by Nāṣir Makārim al-Shirāzī (b. 1927) entitled *Al-Amthal* in the Arabic translation (*The Ideal Commentary*, original Persian Title: *Tafsīr Nemūneh*) states in interpretation of Q 4:1 (al- Shīrāzī 2013, 5:8):

> Now let us see what is meant by 'a single soul'. Does it indicate a specific individual? Or a single species, i.e. the species of males? It is undoubtable that the outward purport of this expression refers to a specific individual, a single individual, and it indicates the first human being, termed 'Adam' by the Noble Qurʾān, and who it considers to be the father of humankind. Likewise [the Qurʾān] refers to humankind as the 'children of Adam' in many of [its] verses. So, the assumption that it means a single species is very far from the outward purport of the verses.

Ḥaydarī attempts a more systematic look at the problem. He begins by noting that the idea of evolution as developmental change predates Dar-

win and can be found in Ancient Greek thought (Ḥaydarī 2018). As we shall see, Ḥaydarī uses the term "evolution" loosely; at times he speaks of human macroevolution from a prior species, and at others he refers merely to the evolution, or development, of consciousness within a single species. Regarding the question of human origins in specific, Ḥaydarī (2018) mentions that he has identified three positions:

(1) Man descends from apes.
(2) Man is a unique being that is not descended from apes.
(3) All life forms descend from a common ancestor, and so man has a common ancestor with the ape, though he was not an ape himself.

In the latter regard, he quotes approvingly from Jean Chaline's *Human Evolution (L'Evolution Humaine)* that man and chimpanzee are closely related through a common ancestor, which does not mean that man descended from the chimpanzee but that he is "a cousin" as Ḥaydarī (2018) puts it.

Ḥaydarī argues that there is no inconsistency between believing in evolution and being a theist, claiming that Darwin was an example of a theistic believer in evolution,[18] while Richard Dawkins is the most prominent example of an atheistic proponent of evolution (Ḥaydarī 2018a, 2018b). He says (2018), "It is really pleasing (*laṭīf*) that in his book *The Origin of Species*, [Darwin] states outright that there is a creator. Not in another book, but in that very book!" Ḥaydarī, however, is aware that Darwin was an agnostic by the end of his life (Ḥaydarī 2017b, 0:00–0:36). Interestingly, Ḥaydarī claims in his second talk that Darwin did not believe that man descended from apes and that most religious refusals of evolution are based on this misunderstanding of Darwin.[19] This appears to be an apology for Ḥaydarī's own creationist conclusions that he repeats multiple times, as we shall note.

Ḥaydarī mentions that he is not opposed to giving primacy to scientific fact in scriptural exegesis so long as we are limiting ourselves to incontrovertible facts. He mentions that evolution in a microevolutionary sense is now established fact. However, since he affirms human uniqueness and denies a common ancestor between man and all other forms of life, he does not feel compelled to read the Qurʾān in line with evolutionary beliefs (Ḥaydarī 2018).

Although Ḥaydarī's words regarding the probative value of scriptural statements vis-à-vis science initially make him appear rather radical, his ignorance of a number of scientific facts renders his conclusions lacking. To begin with, Ḥaydarī refuses belief in a common ancestor for life on earth claiming that there is no concrete proof for this hypothesis (2018g).[20] He also denies that the genes of one species can change into those of another, and questions whether the number of chromosomes can really change be-

yond a minimal, usually harmful mutation. Finally, he affirms that irreducible complexity weighs heavily against the possibility of random mutations, favoring intelligent design as an explanation in this case (Ḥaydarī 2018).[21] Ḥaydarī (2018) states that evolution by random mutations or progressive changes may be true if we understand that it is driven by God. This is a strange affirmation given his doubts regarding chromosomal and broad genetic change. Moreover, his juxtaposition and scant definition of these terms suggests a superficiality to his understanding of evolutionary theory as many scientists seem to agree that natural selection and progressive changes do occur in nature, and that chromosomal numbers have changed significantly over time (Futuyma and Kirkpatrick 2017).

Moreover, Ḥaydarī is loose in his use of the term evolution. He speaks, as we shall see, of the evolution of consciousness stating that the various religious dispensations and sacred laws helped man develop in consciousness, understanding, and awareness, as did man's engagement with the sciences (Ḥaydarī 2018). Although this is an acceptable use of the term "evolution"—meaning something akin to mental development in this context—it is nonetheless different to macroevolution. Regardless, the only thing certain for Ḥaydarī is that the driver of any evolution must be God.

His comments on human macroevolution evince his theism while demonstrating a naivete regarding prevailing scientific explanations of evolution. Ḥaydarī says to an imagined atheist interlocutor (Ḥaydarī 2018):

> [If you ask me] why do [I] insist that humanity began uniquely and separately (*mustaqillan*) from other creatures?… [I respond,] you deny the existence of a creator, so this evolution is driven by who? A wise agent or blind matter. If we deny the creator and intelligent design [(ID)] (*al-taṣmīm al-dhakiyy*) and divine agency, then what drives natural selection? The material laws, isn't that so? Based on this assumption, that this theory [of evolution] does not hold except through denying who? Denying the creator. This is the [materialist version of] the theory I am critiquing at the moment…

Ḥaydarī (2018) challenges his imagined opponent with rhetorical questions, such as why did man advance beyond other creatures, and how do humans keep making such massive leaps in progress while animal do not? He mentions therein a Qurʾānic verse about the subjugation of what is in the heavens and the earth to man (Q 45:13) and the fact that bees always make the same sort of beehive which they are unable to improve upon.

These questions are problematic and demonstrate Ḥaydarī's limited grasp of evolution and he answers these questions based on arguments from intelligent design. Ḥaydarī (2018) mentions that some Muslim thinkers who were influenced by Darwin nonetheless sought to differentiate themselves from him and it would not be farfetched to see this

as his attempt to likewise avoid a materialist reading that denies Adamic or human uniqueness.

Now if Ḥaydarī's views on evolution are lagging and unoriginal, the same cannot be said for his views on identifying the Qurʾānic Adam. It is traditionally understood that the Adam mentioned in the Qurʾān was both the father of humanity and that he was the first Prophet. Ḥaydarī argues that both of these cannot be true at one and the same time according to the words of the Qurʾān itself. Therefore, he prefers to affirm at least two individuals called "Adam": one who is the progenitor of humanity, and another who is the Prophet. Like Ṭabāṭabāʾī, his arguments in this regard are entirely linguistic and scriptural. This novel argument is unpacked in the next section.

Ḥaydarī: The Identity of Adam

We must note from the outset that Ṭabāṭabāʾī does not address the question of the identity of the Qurʾānic Adam; he merely mentions narrations that indicate a multiplicity of Adams who existed before the Qurʾānic figure (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 4:146). This exploration is exclusive to Ḥaydarī. The latter, as we have seen (Ḥaydarī 2018), believes in human uniqueness, meaning that there is something that sets humanity apart from all other life, though he does not mean that only Adam and Eve are unique and that their progeny intermixed with protohumans who otherwise died out, as David Solomon Jalajel suggests (Jalajel 2009, 2018). Interestingly, Ḥaydarī (2018) rejects the religious belief that Adam, the father of humanity, was a perfected human being (*insān kāmil*), like Ṭabāṭabāʾī claimed (Ṭabāṭabāʾī n.d., 21:260), though he does not use this to affirm macroevolution.

Ḥaydarī (2018) begins by taking issue with Ṭabāṭabāʾī's reading of, "The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam; He created him from sand, then said to him: 'Be'. And he was" (Q 3:59). The latter claimed that the verse was the strongest proof for the fact that Adam was the father of humanity, and that he was not the product of a process of evolution as some others claimed. Ḥaydarī does not challenge the second point but questions why this Adam should be understood as the Adam who is the father of humanity, commenting that the verse does not affirm this anywhere.[22] Likewise, he questions why this Adam should be considered identical with the Prophet Adam. Ḥaydarī, provocatively, is suggesting at least two "Adams" can be read out of the various Qurʾānic accounts, and his arguments are entirely scriptural. He quotes the verse, "And He taught Adam the names, all of them; then He presented them unto the angels and said, 'Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak truly'" (Q 2:31). Ḥaydarī states that this verse could not have referred to the same Adam who ate from the forbidden tree, who is mentioned in the following verses:

> And We said, 'Adam, dwell thou, and thy wife, in the Garden, and eat thereof easefully where you desire; but draw not nigh this tree, lest you be evildoers.' Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom and brought them out of that they were in; and We said, 'Get you all down, each of you an enemy of each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time' (Q 2:35–36).

The slip, as explained elsewhere, is following Satan's ruse to eat from the tree (Q 7:19–23).

Ḥaydarī's reasons for refusing to ascribe both events to same Adam is rather strange. He reads the "names" here to refer to the names of God, meaning God's attributes. Ḥaydarī argues that since one of God's names is "the One who misguides" (*al-muḍill*), Adam's (understood as the Prophet), knowledge of God's names would have prevented Satan (*Iblīs*) from being able to misguide him to eat from the tree. Adam would have recognized God's ultimate agency in turning Satan against him and therefore he would have stopped himself short of falling for the ruse and disobeying God's command. Ḥaydarī (2018) also uses a Shīʿī narration that Adam knew 25 letters from the supreme name of God (meaning many but not all of them) to argue that there was another Adam who did not know all the Divine names, only 25 letters from the supreme name, as this narrative suggests. Ḥaydarī therefore affirms that there are two individuals called Adam.

Ḥaydarī explains that the first is the one who Ibn ʿArabī terms the Adam of the realm of Divine dominion (*malakūt*); also the first emanatory cause (*al-ṣādir al-awwal*) of this particular realm. The second is the Adam of our present realm, which is known as God's visible kingdom (*mulk*). This latter Adam was still "between water and clay" (i.e., not yet brought into being) when the light of the Prophet was created (Ḥaydarī 2018). Of course, neither of these Adams is read to have any role or place in a macroevolution of the human species as Ḥaydarī's analysis is entirely metaphysical.

Ḥaydarī (2018) also takes issue with Ṭabāṭabāʾī's reading of the verses about God's preferential choosing of Adam. As mentioned earlier, Ṭabāṭabāʾī refused to allow the verses to indicate, at least outwardly, that Adam was chosen from a pre-existing set of humans or the like. Instead, he held that being chosen could apply equally to being chosen from among his immediate offspring, who were his contemporaries, or—to take a nontemporally restricted reading—that he was chosen from those who came after him in posteriority. Ḥaydarī counters that it would be meaningless to affirm choice except from a pre-existing class.

Second, Ḥaydarī affirms that Ṭabāṭabāʾī had gotten himself into a "stranglehold" between the outward purport of this verse and his belief in Adam's prophethood. The common understanding affirms that Adam was present before his children, not simultaneously with them, and that Adam was created as an infallible prophet. Ḥaydarī provocatively suggests that if we affirm that Adam was chosen to be a Prophet before being

brought into this world (as Muslims generally affirm; Al-Suyūrī 2008) then he was chosen from people who are contemporaneous with him. We must therefore accept that the Prophet Adam had contemporaries, and this chosen Adam was therefore not Adam "the father of humanity." Or, we must deny that Adam, the father of humanity, was a Prophet. To put it another way, the verse forces us to accept the separation between Adam the father of humanity and Adam the first Prophet, on pain of contradiction (2018g). Again, these arguments do not indicate an interest in affirming evolutionary links between these two Adams, or evolutionary origins for either.

Ḥaydarī, following an earlier Muslim believer in the macroevolution of man—which is a theory he rejects in favor of creationism—nonetheless affirms that there is distinction between the Qurʾānic terms "*bashar*" and "*insān*," which are both commonly rendered in English as "man" or "human." ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn (d. 2010), the authority he cites for this, reads the first term as a proto-human and the latter as present-day man (Elshakry 2013).[23] Ḥaydarī therefore can affirm that one of the individual Adams was a *bashar*, while the other was clearly an *insān*. In this regard, Ḥaydarī appears to hold that Adam, the father of humanity (and presumably also the one who ate from the tree) was a "*bashar*" while Adam, the Prophet was an "*insān*." Ḥaydarī therefore seems to affirm the existence of a proto-*insān* race but holds that they were also divinely created. This affirmation does not indicate any affirmation of macroevolution.

Ḥaydarī's references to macroevolutionary readings of Adamic origins by other Muslims are not adopted (2018c). He mentions Bā Bikr Ḥasan's[24] *The Call of the Ruminants* (*Ādhān al-Anʿām*) and the latter's arguments for human macroevolution (Ḥasan 2007). The first rests upon the verse when the Prophet Noah informs his people that God "created them in degrees." (Q 71:14). This statement must have been intelligible to Noah's audience, says Ḥasan, so they were likely aware of their descent from other forms. This is a radical reading given the fact that the classical exegetes usually read these stages to be referring to the embryo in the womb.[25]

The second argument is from the verse, "Thy Lord is All-sufficient, Merciful. If He will, He could destroy you, and in your place appoint whom He will as your successors, just as He produced you from the posterity of another people" (Q 6:133). For Ḥasan (2018c), this is a clear reference that humanity was brought forth from the posterity of a prior form, though for Ḥayadarī the form was likewise Adamic and created by God. Ḥasan interprets the verb "produced" (*anshaʾa*) in line with its linguistic meaning to "raise up" (*rafaʿa*) rather than "create [*ex nihlo*]" (*khalaqa*); quoting in this regard Ibn Fāris' famous lexicon (Ibn Fāris 1979). While rehearsing these arguments, Ḥaydarī does not intend thereby to affirm macroevolution which he does not believe in. At most, Ḥaydarī is

Table 3. Summary of differences between Ṭabāṭabāʾī and Ḥaydarī

	Ṭabāṭabāʾī	Ḥaydarī
The permissibility of believing in human macroevolution	Permissible, not heresy	Permissible, not heresy
The admissibility of science in affirming human macroevolution	Admissible if certain	Admissible if certain
Is the science behind human macroevolution certain?	No	No
Whether the Qurʾān can be read to indicate humans were a product of evolution	Not on an apparent reading	Yes, but evolution understood in a nonscientific sense.
The idea of multiple Adams	Present, as a theological investigation through the narrative (*ḥadīth*) sciences	Present, but deployed in a metaphysical, emanatory sense and not in a macroevolutionary sense. Also mentions *bashar*/*insān* distinction but makes no firm macroevolutionary reading thereof
Final word on evolution	Creationism (or Adamic Lineal Exceptionalism according to Safdari and Meghji 2021)	Creationism. Claims both Adams (the father of humanity and the first Prophet) are created. Affirms an evolution of consciousness in the Adamic/human species.

affirming that the prior form of Adamic being was irrational, and after the "blowing of the Spirit" it become rational. We will now turn to Ḥaydarī's clear use of the term evolution in other than its biological sense.

Evolution of Consciousness and the Mahdī

Ḥaydarī affirms an evolution of consciousness within the human race over time. He claims that the latter is the reason why each successive prophet of God was endowed with a unique sacred law suited to the evolutionary "level" of his people. For Ḥaydarī, a committed Shīʿī, just as humanity began with an Adam (and its first Prophet was likewise another Adam), humanity must attain its apex under the appropriate final guide: the awaited Mahdī (Ḥaydarī 2018).

In Shīʿī tradition, the Mahdī is the 12th and final Imām or leader of the Muslim community from the progeny of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). He is believed to be immaculate and infallible, and endowed with absolute spiritual and temporal authority. The Shīʿī faithful have been awaiting his Parousia (*ẓuhūr*) since his disappearance

in 873 AD. Ḥaydarī, who appears to take a skeptical attitude to extra-Qurʾānic narrative traditions, pokes fun at contemporary understandings of the Parousia which take the form of awaited cosmic signs of his coming. He says (Ḥaydarī 2018) not only that he agrees with "zero percent" of the prevailing perspective, but he is also at "180-degree odds with it."

Ḥaydarī's vision for the coming of the Mahdī is "evolutionary." He claims that mankind has been developing in its understanding, sensibilities, and consciousness since the time of Adam. However, the continued presence of warfare, ignorance, and social disorder prove that we are not yet at the pinnacle of our progression (Ḥaydarī 2018). He states that evolution—in this psychological and ethical sense—is essential for understanding the doctrine of the Mahdī, and so a belief in this form of evolution is not only religiously sanctioned, but obligatory (Ḥaydarī 2018).[26] Although these comments are truly fascinating, in the present series of lectures Ḥaydarī refuses to elaborate further on these theological points. Table 3 offers a recapitulation of the salient points of similarity and difference between Ṭabāṭabāʾī and Ḥaydarī.

Conclusion

This analysis has sought to show the way in which Ḥaydarī and Ṭabāṭabāʾī, two prominent Shīʿī scholars, examined whether human evolution may be compatible with the teachings of the Qurʾān. It also demonstrated their significantly divergent exegetical practices, with a clear conservativism in Ṭabāṭabāʾī that contrasted with the more eclectic readings and adoptions of Ḥaydarī, who nonetheless rejected human macroevolution while affirming multiple Adams. He claimed that the Prophetic Adam was more evolved—in intellect and consciousness—than Adam the father of humanity. The study also sheds light on the continuing disparity between current evolutionary science and the understanding of a widely read contemporary cleric. Whether this is due to the influence of intelligent design among Muslims, or simply a result of limited exposure to technical works remains unclear. Finally, the study reveals an example of how scientific concepts like evolution could be appropriated for religious aims: debating the identity of the Qurʾānic Adam and buttressing a particular understanding of the nature and role of the Mahdī.

Notes

1. See *Ayatollah Sayed Kamal al-Haydari*. (n.d.). Personal website of Kamal Al-Haydari. http://alhaydari.com/en/about/. Accessed August 11, 2021.

2. In principle, Ṭabāṭabāʾī appears to be open to Adamic lineal exceptionalism, which is a position not articulated by Malik, but rather put forward by Safdari and Meghji (2021). This is a position between human and Adamic exceptionalism. It accepts that there may be other human beings who are the product of natural evolutionary processes, but that Adam, Eve, and

their descendants were entirely excluded from the process, and therefore from intermixing with these other humans.

3. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 4:146–47) addresses the question of multiple Adams from a narrative perspective which is beyond the scope of this work. For further insights, see Safdari and Meghji (2021). For how this idea figures in South Asian Sufi literature, *malfūẓāt*, and exegesis, see Alam (2015).

4. It is interesting to note here Ṭabāṭabāʾī's use of language is drawn from a number of fields: he terms Adam perfect, which is a term frequently used in the tradition of Islamic mysticism (*ʿirfān*) to which he belongs. Likewise, the mention of degrees of perfection, both here and in texts quoted form him later, is a classical Neoplatonic and Avicennan trope with which Ṭabāṭabāʾī is intimately familiar.

5. This is referring to the Qurʾānic affirmations and descriptions at Q 39:6 and Q 23:12–14.

6. I have benefited from the translations of Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2002) and Arberry (1964) in preparing these translations of the Qurʾān.

7. This is a central criticism against Saḥābī's position (see Arjomand 2020, 90–92).

8. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:259). He terms macroevolution a theory or hypothesis (*farḍiyya*). Ḥusayn al-Jisr (1845–1909) from the Sunnī tradition argued that macroevolution may, in principle, be acceptable if we read it as theological evolution, that is, driven by God. However, like Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Jisr rejected it based upon the lack of sufficient evidence before him. (Al-Jisr, Ḥ. 1904)

9. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:259). See further Kaukua (2021).

10. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:258). We must not forget that Ṭabāṭabāʾī was a philosopher active in the Peripatetic tradition of Avicenna and Sadrian Metaphysics (see Rizvi and Bdaiwi 2017).

11. For a similar argument, see Kaya (2012).

12. From a theological perspective, restricting Adam's preference to a time after his birth is problematic given that Muslims tend to hold that the prophets are born as such and do not attain prophecy. Rather, it is revelation that is accorded some temporal position in their life (see Al-Suyūrī 2008, 222–23).

13. For an exhaustive treatment of this particle, see Ibn Hishām (2019, 169–72).

14. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:260).

15. Although Ṭabāṭabāʾī does not seem to mention this explicitly, his allegorical version also involves reading the "blowing of the spirit" as granting man his intellect, which is also clearly a non-literal reading.

16. Ṭabāṭabāʾī (n.d., 21:260). This latter point is taken from the science of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) (see Al-Muẓaffar n.d.)

17. He speaks in the sixth of his sessions that his students rebuke him for having "raised" them on Tabatabai's exegesis for 20–30 years only to now disagree with 98% of the work. The amount is clearly exaggerated as we shall see (Ḥaydarī 2018).

18. This is historically incorrect. Darwin left Christianity and would be better termed an agnostic (see Spencer 2009; Quammen 2007).

19. (Ḥaydarī 2018). Ḥaydarī's source for this appears to be: ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Bayn al-ʿIlm wa ʾl-Qurʾān*, which I have been unable to locate. As for the translations of *The Origin of Species*, Ḥaydarī mentions that he makes use of two different ones. Bearing in mind that *The Origin of Species* appeared in six editions in English, we are unable to locate with precision which edition was used in these two Arabic renderings, and therefore whether any significant differences exist between such translations (see Quammen 2007). On the other hand, Darwin in his *Descent of Man* clearly states that man evolved from earlier primates (see Darwin 2004).

20. (Ḥaydarī 2018). Ḥaydarī's statement here is contradicted by standard textbooks on the subject (see, e.g., Futuyma and Kirkpatrick 2017).

21. Talk 5. He quotes here from the Arabic translation of Paul Davies' *The Cosmic Jackpot*.

22. Ḥaydarī is assuming here that the reader knows that he is traditionally held to be the father of humanity as well as the first of God's prophets.

23. On Shāhīn, see Elshakry (2013, 307–308). This is also Saḥābī's position, as outlined previously, and it is not farfetched to assume some form of mutual influence.

24. Bā Bikr Ḥasan is a Sudanese Intellectual and author of a controversial Qurʾānic argument for Darwinian evolution with many strange assertions because of a literal reading of certain

verses. For example, the author makes an exception for ruminants because the Qurʾān states that God "sent down" ruminants (Q 39:6) and that He created them by His own hand (Q 36:71).

25. The Qurʾān states:

We created man of an extraction of clay, then We set him, a drop, in a receptacle secure, then We created of the drop a clot then We created of the clot a tissue then We created of the tissue bones then We garmented the bones in flesh; thereafter We produced him as another creature. So blessed be God, the fairest of creators! (Q 23:12–14).

On reading Q 71:14 as referring to the process described in Q 23:12–14, see, for example, Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (2002, 613).

26. Ḥaydarī (2018) warns of the danger of applying narrations haphazardly to the present context. He argues that when clerics misread narrations, they cause depression and doubt in the faithful. Therefore, it is better to be an agnostic regarding some of narrations and their application to current scientific advancements and social phenomena. From his scant quotations, Ḥaydarī is clearly very selective regarding the narrations he is willing to use, yet he does not offer us any clue herein as to what his standards for acceptance are.

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