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Integration of Revelation and Science in the Context of *Al-Tafsir Al-'Ilmiy*: An Overview

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Abstract

The integration of revelation and science through the approach of *al-tafsir al-'ilmiy* has emerged as a significant topic in contemporary Islamic intellectual discourse. This approach seeks to connect Qur'anic verses with scientific discoveries as an effort to demonstrate the alignment between revealed texts and contemporary scientific knowledge. However, this approach raises various questions, including concerns about the potential imposition on Qur'anic verses to conform to the relative nature of modern scientific findings. This study aims to analyze the *al-tafsir al-ilmiy* approach in understanding Qur'anic verses related to scientific phenomena and to evaluate the limitations and challenges faced by this method. Employing a qualitative approach, the study finds that while scientific exegesis can enrich the understanding of Qur'anic verses, it is also subject to several limitations. These arise from the evolving and dynamic nature of modern scientific discoveries compared to the absolute and immutable truth of revelation. The study underscores the importance of preserving the integrity of revelation from deviant and misleading interpretations when integrating revelation and science. Hence, *al-tafsir al-ilmiy* approach serves as a means to enrich interpretative discourse, but it requires meticulous and cautious methodologies to avoid speculative interpretations.

Keywords: *Al-Tafsir Al-'Ilmiy*, Scientific Exegesis, Revelation, Science

Introduction

The Qur'an, as divine revelation, serves as the primary source of Islamic legislation and guidance in both worldly and spiritual aspects of life. This sacred text also contains verses that allude to the realities of nature and the universe, which have frequently been explored by exegetes to elucidate the Qur'an's messages. Among the approaches gaining traction in recent decades is *al-tafsir al-'ilmiy*, a method that has generally demonstrated harmony

between revelation and science, showcasing that the Qur'an has long addressed truths about natural phenomena, even though these truths are often only realized by humans with modern technological advancements.

Islamic intellectual history has long recorded Muslim scholars' engagement with science, including major contributions by figures such as Ibn Sina and al-Biruni, who enriched scientific knowledge across various fields. However, the rapid development of modern science has opened new debates on how Qur'anic interpretation can continue to interact with scientific discoveries. While the *al-tafsir al-'ilmiy* approach has garnered positive reception among contemporary Muslim societies, it also raises several concerns. For instance, there is the potential for scientific findings to be forcefully linked to Qur'anic verses, even when such connections are tenuous. This practice risks compromising the sanctity of the Qur'anic text. For example, can temporary and constantly evolving scientific discoveries serve as a basis for interpreting the eternal and immutable revelation? Additionally, this approach has faced criticism from some scholars who argue that it may obscure the metaphysical and spiritual meanings of the Qur'an, which should be understood in their moral and spiritual contexts.
This article critically examines the concept of *al-tafsir al-'ilmiy* and its relationship with modern scientific discoveries. It explores the extent to which this approach can enhance Muslims' understanding of the Qur'an while respecting the boundaries and distinctions between revelation and science.

This study is significant not only for contributing to the debate on the integration of revelation and science but also for enriching the methodology of Qur'anic interpretation in the modern context. In an era where science increasingly dominates intellectual and social discourse, the scientific exegesis approach offers an opportunity to link Qur'anic understanding with scientific advancements. However, this approach must be scrutinized to ensure it does not lead to excessive or misleading interpretations. Therefore, this study aims to provide a balanced perspective on the relationship between revelation and science, helping Muslims navigate the interaction between religion and science in the contemporary world.

Revelation (Al-Wahy)
From a linguistic perspective, the term *al-wahy* encompasses several meanings, including *al-isyarah al-sari'ah* (swift indication), *al-kitabah* (writing), *al-maktub* (something written), *al-risalah* (message), *al-ilham* (inspiration), *al-i'lam al-khafi* (hidden communication), and *al-kalam al-khafi al-sari'* (concealed and swift speech) (Al-Raghib, 2011; Thoha, 2010).

Based on these definitions, *al-wahy* linguistically signifies a form of communication that is concealed, not known to others, swift, and specific to its intended recipient. When referring to the descent of revelation, it implies a descent from a higher place. This, however, is metaphorical (*majaz*) to signify the exalted and noble status of the Qur'an.

Terminologically, *wahy* refers to everything that Allah SWT conveys secretly to His prophets and messengers, such as the Qur'an and the hadith. In this context, *wahy* holds a broader and more general meaning than the Qur'an. This is because the Qur'an is Allah's revelation specifically sent down to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). However, not all revelation is the Qur'an. For example, hadith is also a form of revelation, as are the scriptures revealed to previous prophets.

Revelation may take the form of a compiled book or other forms that are less known, such as *suhuf*. Unlike the *suhuf*, whose names are not obligatory for every legally responsible (*mukallaf*) individual to know, it is obligatory to recognize the names of the divine books. These include the Torah revealed to Prophet Musa (PBUH), the *Injil* revealed to Prophet Isa (PBUH), the *Zabur* revealed to Prophet Dawud (PBUH), and the Qur'an, the final book revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). For the purposes of this study, the term *wahy* or revelation refers specifically to the Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Science

From an etymological perspective, the term *science* originates from the Latin word *scientia*, which means *knowledge* (Faruqi, 1991). In Arabic, science is synonymous with *'ilm* (knowledge) or *ma'rifah* (awareness). Thus, linguistically, science is defined as the acquisition of knowledge (Al-Raghib, 2011). Based on this definition, the scope of scientific knowledge is not limited solely to pure or natural sciences as often understood by Western scientists.

From a terminological standpoint, science or *'ilm* (knowledge) is understood as the acquisition or awareness of knowledge encompassing knowledge about God, humanity, and nature. This is categorized into divine sciences, human sciences, and natural sciences (Jusoh & Muhammad, 2007).

However, from Western perspective, science was initially understood as the study of the natural characteristics of humans within a specific external context, focusing on human behaviors (nature) resulting from their interactions with the environment. This understanding excluded the inner workings of the human mind. This implies that science is perceived as a limited body of knowledge, confined to studying natural phenomena and human behavior from physical and external dimensions only, overlooking the internal aspects such as emotions and spirituality that significantly influence behavior. These inner dimensions cannot be observed through human sensory perception. This reductionist understanding of science has become dominant among scholars and society (Othman, 2009).

An example of such a definition is provided by Baharom et. al. (2015), who describes science as a systematic and organized body of knowledge that can be tested or verified for its truthfulness, as well as a branch of knowledge grounded purely in facts and realities (e.g., physics, chemistry, biology). Similarly, Zain (1987) defines science as the systematic, logical, and objective analysis of phenomena using specific methodologies designed to establish a credible body of knowledge.

In the classification of traditional Islamic knowledge, the concept of modern science can be equated with the term *natural sciences* (*al-tabii*). This is because the term *science* in the taxonomy of Islamic intellectual tradition encompasses a broader meaning. Within natural sciences, there are seven main fields. The first is physics, which involves the study of optics, time, space, and motion. The second is meteorology, which focuses on the scientific study of atmospheric conditions, particularly weather and its forecasting. The third is mineralogy, which examines minerals, the natural elements that constitute the solid parts of the universe. The fourth field is zoology, which explores animals, including their classification, structure, physiology, and history. The fifth is geology, which studies Earth, including its composition, formation, and history. The sixth is botany, which investigates the structure, growth, reproduction, metabolism, development, diseases, ecology, and evolution of plants. Finally,

paleontology is the scientific study of life forms that existed on Earth before or during the early Holocene Epoch, approximately 11,700 years ago (Noor & Mokhtar, 2021).

Al-Tafsir al-'Ilmiy

Al-tafsir al-'ilmiy is an Arabic term formed from two root words, *al-tafsir* and *al-'ilmiy*. From an epistemological perspective, *tafsir* is derived from the verb *fassara*, which means to explain or clarify (Ibn Manzur, 2012). In terms of terminology, *tafsir* refers to a discipline of knowledge aimed at understanding the Qur'an, explaining its meanings, and extracting all the laws and secrets contained within it (al-Zarkashi, 1988). According to al-Dhahabiy (2000), the science of *tafsir* addresses the matters intended by Allah SWT to the best of human ability, encompassing anything that provides an understanding of the meaning and explains what is intended.

Furthermore, the word *al-'ilmiy* derives from the root word *'ilm*, which means knowledge, science, understanding, and information (Ibn Manzur, 2012). The word *'ilm* is frequently used in the Qur'an and generally refers to knowledge, including both natural sciences and the humanities (Ahmad, 2021).

In the Qur'an, *'ilm* is used either for revealed knowledge or knowledge acquired beyond revelation. This suggests that the term *'ilm* does not merely refer to religious knowledge but encompasses all forms of knowledge, including that of the natural world, social sciences, humanities, and others, which are beneficial to human life (Ahmad, 2021).

Since the word *'ilm* is a comprehensive term that refers to firm belief aligned with reality, its definition from a terminological perspective is difficult to pin down (Al-Jurjaniy, 1985). In other words, *'ilm* encompasses all human knowledge without limiting itself to any one form of knowledge. Consequently, the definition of *'ilm* varies depending on the individual providing the definition, based on their field of study.

Regarding the combination of the terms *al-tafsir* and *al-'ilmiy*, several different definitions have been offered by scholars. This term is relatively new in the discipline of Qur'anic studies and was not used in the early history of *tafsir* studies (al-Syarqawiy, 1972; al-Muhtasib, 1973). In practice, different terms have been used depending on the language. In Arabic, terms such as *tafsir 'ilmiy* or *tafsir 'ilmiy tajribiy* are used, while in English, the term *scientific exegesis* or *scientific interpretation* is applied. However, in most Islamic scholarly works, the term *al-tafsir al-'ilmiy* is the most commonly used (Mohd, Husin & Abdullah, 2016).

According to Al-Dhahabiy (2005), *tafsir 'ilmiy* is an approach to *tafsir* that delves into the scientific terms within the Qur'an, seeking to extract various forms of knowledge and philosophical views from them. Al-Majid (1973) further explains that it is an approach aimed at converting metaphors in the Qur'an into scientific theories and terms, striving to extract various scientific issues and philosophical views from them.

Additionally, Al-Khalidiy (2008), defines *tafsir 'ilmiy* as an interpretation of Qur'anic verses in a manner that aligns with the methods of modern science and provides scientific explanations for the verses of the Qur'an, consistent with modern scientific analysis. Another viewpoint

defines *tafsir ʻilmiy* as uncovering the meanings of Qur'anic verses in order to affirm their truth in relation to theories of knowledge concerning creation (al-Muslih & al-Sawiy, 2008).

Moreover, al-Rumiy (1997) provides his own view on the term. To differentiate it from other schools of *tafsir*, he calls it *tafsir ʻilmiy tajribiy*. According to him, *tafsir ʻilmiy tajribiy* refers to the *ijtihad* (independent scholarly interpretation) of the exegete in revealing and explaining the relationship between the Qur'anic verses of the natural world (*kawniyyah*) and scientific discoveries through experimentation, highlighting the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, which originates from Allah SWT and is applicable across all times and places.

Based on the definitions provided, it can be concluded that *tafsir ʻilmiy* is an approach to Qur'anic exegesis that is oriented towards science, aiming to explain the scientific meanings of the Qur'anic verses, especially those related to the verses on the natural world (*kawniyyah*), in accordance with modern scientific methods and analysis.

As a book revealed as guidance for all mankind, the Qur'an does not provide theories related to the nature of the universe. Instead, it reveals the essence of creation (Hilmi & Zakaria, 2015). This is because a theory is something that remains open to testing, and its results may change over time. However, the truth conveyed by the Qur'an is absolute and eternal, unchallengeable by anyone at any time. In other words, science serves only to support the validity of the truths that have already been stated in the Qur'an.

Interpretation of the Qur'an Based on the Method of al-Tafsīr al-ʻIlmiy

The discussion on the approach of *al-tafsir al-ʻilmiy* has led to disagreements among Islamic scholars. According to Ahmad (2021), there are three groups of scholars regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an based on the method of *al-iʻjaz al-ʻilmiy*, which are the approach of rejection, the approach of wide acceptance, and the moderate approach.

For the first group, it can be said that their rejection is based on the conflict between the absolute nature of the Qur'an and the relative nature of science. They do not aim to deny the miraculous nature of the Qur'an but rather reflect caution and a concern about opening the door for major misinterpretations of the Qur'an.

For the second group, they accept the method of *al-iʻjaz al-ʻilmiy* without imposing any conditions in interpreting the Qur'anic verses. In their view, the Qur'an contains general principles of knowledge, particularly regarding science and the natural world. Therefore, any modern scientific discoveries are linked to the *ayat al-kawniyyah* in the Qur'an. Furthermore, they believe that the primary objective of the revelation of the *ayat al-kawniyyah* in the Qur'an is to discuss the outward reality of these verses. As a result, the wisdom or guidance hidden behind each verse's content is often overlooked.

According to Al-Najjar (2009), this group is known for their extreme interpretation of the Qur'an using scientific theories and perspectives, trying to align religion and the Qur'an with modern developments. As such, their efforts to understand the *ayat al-kawniyyah* in the Qur'an greatly deviate from the Arabic grammar and the directives of Shariah, straying from the apparent and implicit goals of the verses.

Contemporary Islamic scholars heavily influenced by modern developments in interpreting the Qur'an are referred to as proponents of Scientism (Ahmad, 2021). Ali (2000) explains that Scientism is a trend that seeks to explain religious teachings through hypotheses, theories, and discoveries in science. In short, this approach attempts to synthesize science and religion, interpreting religion based on modern scientific facts. Initially, this approach emerged among Christian adherents, particularly Catholic scientists. In the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis, Scientism appeared as an attempt to present Islam as a scientific religion. However, this approach has not succeeded in enhancing the faith of Muslims in their religion nor in attracting the West to Islam.

The third group adopts a moderate and conditional acceptance of the *al-i'jaz al-'ilmiy* method. According to al-Raziy (n.d.), the Qur'an discusses various natural phenomena in many verses as signs of the greatness and power of Allah SWT. The repeated mention of such matters in the Qur'an suggests the necessity to explore and give attention to these phenomena. In this regard, the use of reason and *ijtihād* is permitted in interpreting the Qur'anic verses, provided certain conditions and methods are followed, such as adhering to the rules of *tafsir* based on reason (*bi al-ra'y*).

Several guidelines have been outlined by contemporary Islamic scholars on this matter (Syarifah & Fahimah, 2020; Ahmad, 2021). Among them is al-Najjar (2006 & 2009), who has outlined the following guidelines for the approach of *al-tafsīr al-'ilmiy*:

1. Understanding the Qur'anic text in accordance with the meaning of Arabic words, as well as adhering to the rules of grammar and language style used.
2. Avoiding the alteration of the true meaning of a Qur'anic word to a metaphorical (*majaz*) meaning unless there is strong evidence and necessity, as this approach does not accept the interpretation of Qur'anic verses purely from human reason (*ta'wil*).
3. Understanding the *asbab al-nuzul* (causes of revelation), *nasikh* and *mansukh* (abrogating and abrogated verses), *'am* and *khas* (general and specific terms), *mutlaq* and *muqayyad* (absolute and qualified terms), as well as *mujmal* and *mufassal* (ambiguous and detailed terms) from the Qur'anic verses.
4. Understanding authentic sources for interpreting the Qur'anic verses.
5. Gathering authentic *qira'at* (readings) if they are found in the related Qur'anic verses.
6. Collecting related Qur'anic verses and hadiths to correctly understand the meaning of a verse.
7. Paying attention to the structure and arrangement of Qur'anic verses related to discussions on the natural world without altering the positions of preceding and succeeding verses.
8. Adhering to the well-known method of interpretation: "*al-Ibrah bi 'umum al-lafz la bi khusus al-sabab,*" meaning "The lesson is based on the general wording, not on the specific cause."
9. Not limiting the purpose of Qur'anic verses to only specific scientific facts, as the Qur'an is the speech of Allah SWT, whose knowledge is absolute and perfect, encompassing all forms of knowledge.
10. Avoiding being influenced by overly detailed research methods, such as mathematical formulas or chemistry summaries.
11. Avoiding discussions on matters of the unseen that are beyond human reason.

12. Believing that the conditions and laws of the afterlife are different and not governed by the circumstances and rules of this world.
13. Having confidence that the truth of scientific discoveries by researchers is not limited to certain times, as new discoveries and discussions will continue from one generation to the next.
14. Being able to distinguish between evidence from the Qur'anic text itself and evidence from external facts.
15. Understanding that scientific discoveries aligning with specific Qur'anic verses should be seen as efforts to enhance understanding of those verses, not as conclusive and unchangeable truths.
16. Believing that the Qur'anic verses, as understood in their context, align with scientific facts, while also acknowledging the metaphorical meanings contained in them.
17. Understanding that the alignment of scientific discoveries with the Qur'anic verses does not necessarily prove the reality of the natural world's creation, but rather points to the Supreme Power behind it.
18. Not undermining the efforts of earlier scholars in uncovering the meanings of verses related to the natural world, in line with the knowledge of their time.
19. Recognizing the need to distinguish between scientific miracles and scientific interpretation, as scientific miracles aim to demonstrate the grandeur of Qur'anic verses regarding natural phenomena, which predate the advancements of technology and human intelligence. Scientific exegesis, on the other hand, refers to the efforts of Islamic scholars to explain Qur'anic verses in relation to certain fields of knowledge.
20. Strengthening the belief in the authenticity of the guidance found in the Qur'anic verses.
21. Being sincere in any efforts related to the Book of Allah SWT, purifying intentions, and avoiding objectives that deviate from the pure aim.

Integration of Revelation in Science

In the Islamic tradition, revelation is considered the highest source of knowledge, encompassing all aspects of life, including both spiritual and physical dimensions, as well as the world and the hereafter. At the same time, science is recognized as a means to understand the universe and the signs of God's power reflected in nature. According to Bakar (1991), science and revelation can be seen as two distinct but complementary paths of knowledge. Science provides empirical knowledge, limited to physical phenomena, while revelation offers moral guidance and a deeper meaning to existence. This integration is reinforced through the concept of *al-tawhid*, which explains that all forms of knowledge originate from the One God (Rahman, 2012). Therefore, scientific knowledge obtained through empirical observation is viewed as part of the signs of God in His creation. From this perspective, *al-tafsir al-'ilmiy* does not seek to prove the truth of the Qur'an through science but rather aims to demonstrate that scientific discoveries are in harmony with the guidance conveyed in revelation.

Conclusion

From this discussion, it can be concluded that the approach of *al-tafsīr al-'ilmiy* is one method for explaining the meaning of certain Qur'anic verses based on the discoveries of modern science, grounded in the concept of *al-tawhid*. These verses include those related to natural world (*kawniyyat*), the legislation of laws, and health. Muslims should use the intellect bestowed by Allah SWT to benefit from true scientific discoveries in their efforts to understand the Qur'an and strengthen their faith in Allah SWT. In this regard, the role of the

Qur'an as the book of guidance and the final miracle must always be preserved in the best possible way. Therefore, understanding the correct concept and guidelines in conducting *al-tafsīr al-'ilmiy* is crucial so that Islamic scholars do not stray from the true purpose of interpreting the Qur'an and do not force the verses of the Qur'an to conform to scientific theories that are relative in nature. If interpretations based on this approach do not adhere to the proper methods, principles, and conditions, it will create an opportunity for those who are unqualified and lack the authority to interpret the Qur'an.

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