

Responses and Intellectual Criticism from Contemporary Muslims Regarding the Idea of the Islamisation of Science

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Abstrak

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Islamisasi ilmu pengetahuan merupakan salah satu wacana penting dalam pemikiran Islam kontemporer yang muncul sebagai respons terhadap perkembangan ilmu pengetahuan modern dan asumsi sekular yang menyertainya. Gagasan ini berkembang melalui pemikiran Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas dan Ismail Raji al-Faruqi dengan penekanan yang berbeda, terutama pada pembentukan worldview Islam, penyaringan konsep, serta integrasi tradisi intelektual Islam dengan disiplin modern. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis respons dan kritik intelektual Muslim kontemporer terhadap gagasan Islamisasi ilmu pengetahuan serta melihat arah perkembangan wacana tersebut dalam menghadapi modernitas. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan jenis studi kepustakaan dan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis. Data diperoleh dari karya intelektual Muslim dan berbagai sumber akademik yang relevan, kemudian dianalisis melalui reduksi, kategorisasi, interpretasi, dan sintesis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya respons yang beragam, mulai dari penerimaan, kritik, hingga rekonstruksi. Abdus Salam menekankan universalitas ilmu dan penguatan ekosistem riset, Fazlur Rahman menekankan kreativitas intelektual dan tanggung jawab etis, Muhsin Mahdi menyoroti universalitas metode ilmiah, sedangkan Abdolkarim Soroush menekankan dinamika pemahaman keagamaan. Temuan ini memperlihatkan bahwa perdebatan tersebut tetap relevan bagi pengembangan ilmu yang berorientasi nilai dalam konteks pendidikan Islam.

ABSTRACT

Keyword:
The Islamisation of
Science; Intellectual
Criticism; Islamic
Epistemology;
Modern Science;
Islamic Thought

The Islamisation of science is an important discourse in contemporary Islamic thought that emerged as a response to the development of modern science and its secular assumptions. The idea was developed through the works of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, with different emphases on the formation of an Islamic worldview, conceptual purification, and the integration of Islamic intellectual traditions with modern disciplines. This study aims to analyse the responses and criticisms of contemporary Muslim intellectuals toward the Islamisation of science and to examine the development of this discourse in addressing modernity. The study employs a qualitative library research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were obtained from the intellectual works of Muslim thinkers and academic sources, then analysed through reduction, categorisation, interpretation, and synthesis. The findings reveal responses ranging from acceptance and criticism to reconstruction. Abdus Salam emphasises the universality of science and the strengthening of research ecosystems, Fazlur Rahman stresses intellectual creativity and ethical responsibility, Muhsin Mahdi highlights the universality of scientific methods, while Abdolkarim Soroush emphasises the dynamic nature of religious understanding.



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INTRODUCTION

The Islamisation of science is one of the key themes in contemporary Islamic thought. It emerged in response to the dominance of the modern scientific paradigm, which tends to be secular in orientation. The idea developed from criticism by several Muslim thinkers of modern science, which is considered not to be entirely detached from the worldview and values underlying its development (Hafid, 2021). Consequently, Muslim thinkers have sought to redefine the relationship between religion and science so that the two can coexist harmoniously in the development of an Islamic civilisation grounded in the values of *tawhid*.

In terminological terms, the Islamisation of knowledge can be understood as an effort to provide Islamic values as a foundation for various academic disciplines that have developed in human life. This concept aims not merely to integrate Islamic teachings into modern science but also to critically examine the assumptions, concepts, methods, and objectives underlying science as developed within the modern Western tradition. Knowledge is thus expected to address not only material and rational dimensions but also to guide humanity towards moral and spiritual goals in accordance with Islamic teachings.

In this regard, a distinction needs to be made between knowledge and science. Knowledge refers broadly to information, understanding, or awareness acquired through experience, observation, learning, and other processes. Science, on the other hand, refers to knowledge that has been systematically organised through specific methods and whose claims can be subjected to systematic examination and testing (Nasrullah, 2025). Accordingly, every form of science constitutes knowledge, but not all knowledge can be categorised as science. Based on this distinction, the Islamisation of science can be understood as an effort to provide an Islamic orientation and value framework for scientific knowledge and academic disciplines so that their development remains aligned with the purposes of human life according to Islamic teachings.

Discussions on the Islamisation of science developed intensively during the second half of the twentieth century and have remained relevant in contemporary Islamic intellectual discourse. Among the influential figures associated with the development of this idea are Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. Although both sought to respond to the challenges posed by modern knowledge, they developed approaches with different emphases. Al-Attas emphasised the formation of an Islamic worldview as an epistemological foundation and the purification of scientific concepts, whereas al-Faruqi emphasised the integration of the Islamic intellectual heritage with modern academic disciplines.

The difference between the two approaches primarily concerns their respective points of emphasis. Al-Attas placed greater emphasis on epistemological questions through the formation of an Islamic worldview and the refinement of concepts derived from modern knowledge. Al-Faruqi, in contrast, focused more strongly on the systematic integration of the Islamic intellectual tradition with modern academic disciplines (Tolchah, 2008).

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi defines the Islamisation of knowledge as an effort to reorganise modern knowledge so that it is consistent with the Islamic worldview. This process involves redefining concepts, organising data, re-examining arguments, evaluating conclusions, and adjusting the objectives of knowledge so that they support the vision and mission of Islam. According to al-Faruqi, one of the fundamental causes of the crisis experienced by the Muslim community is the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge. Integration is consequently required to bring these two domains together within the framework of *tawhid*.

Meanwhile, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas views the Islamisation of knowledge as a process of liberating knowledge from elements and interpretations derived from a secular

worldview. In his view, the crisis of modern knowledge is rooted in the loss of *adab* and the dominance of a worldview that separates spiritual dimensions from the realities of human life. Islamisation, therefore, does not merely involve incorporating Islamic values into scientific knowledge but also requires the critical examination and removal of concepts that conflict with the Islamic worldview. In this way, science can contribute more fully to the formation of human beings who possess *adab* and pursue knowledge in accordance with ethical and spiritual purposes (Hasanah et al., 2024).

Based on this discussion, the Islamisation of science can be understood as an intellectual endeavour to reconstruct the relationship between knowledge, science, and the Islamic worldview. Its concern extends beyond material and technological progress to include *tawhid*, morality, *adab*, and human welfare. The discourse thus provides an important framework for examining the challenges posed by modern science while encouraging a more integrated relationship between religious knowledge and scientific inquiry in contemporary Muslim societies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research. A descriptive-analytical method was used to examine the perspectives, responses, and intellectual critiques of contemporary Muslim thinkers regarding the discourse on the Islamisation of science (Abdalla et al., 2026). The data sources were categorised into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consisted of intellectual works by Muslim thinkers that directly address the concept of the Islamisation of knowledge, including the works of its original proponents and those of contemporary Muslim intellectuals who have responded to or criticised the concept. Secondary sources consisted of books and academic journal articles discussing the historical development of the Islamisation of knowledge, Islamic epistemology, the relationship between Islam and science, and intellectual debates surrounding modern science.

Data were collected through documentation. The process began with a literature search using keywords related to the Islamisation of science, Islamic epistemology, critiques of modern science, and the intellectual thought of contemporary Muslim thinkers. The identified sources were then selected based on their relevance, academic credibility, and alignment with the research focus. Relevant sections of each source were subsequently documented, classified, and grouped according to the themes discussed. These themes included arguments supporting the Islamisation of science, critiques of its concepts and implementation, and alternative proposals put forward by contemporary Muslim intellectuals.

The collected data were analysed using content analysis with a descriptive-analytical approach. The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, data reduction involved selecting and focusing on information directly relevant to the research objectives. Second, data categorisation involved grouping the views of the selected thinkers into specific themes. Third, data interpretation involved examining the arguments of each thinker to identify similarities, differences, and emerging trends in their intellectual positions. Fourth, conclusion drawing involved synthesising the responses and intellectual critiques of contemporary Muslim thinkers and tracing the development of the discourse on the Islamisation of science (Mujahidin, 2023).

Through this methodological approach, the study seeks not only to describe the diverse perspectives that have emerged but also to critically examine the foundations of the arguments and the direction of contemporary Muslim intellectual discourse on the Islamisation of science. This approach enables the study to present the development of the discourse systematically while

highlighting the similarities, differences, and critical positions that have shaped contemporary debates.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that the discourse on the Islamisation of science emerged as a response to the modern scientific paradigm, particularly its secular and materialistic tendencies. The idea was developed prominently by al-Attas and al-Faruqi through their efforts to reconnect scientific knowledge with the Islamic worldview. As the discussion developed, however, the Islamisation of science attracted responses and criticism from a number of contemporary Muslim intellectuals. Their concerns extend beyond the question of whether science should be Islamised to more fundamental issues involving epistemology, the relationship between revelation and reason, the role of values in scientific inquiry, and the practical possibility of reconstructing modern science.

These responses have produced different positions. Some thinkers accept aspects of the Islamisation project, while others reject particular assumptions behind it or propose alternative ways of relating Islam to modern knowledge. The debate has consequently moved beyond the initial attempt to provide an Islamic foundation for science. It now includes wider questions concerning worldview, methodology, values, the production of knowledge, and the purpose of scientific activity.

Reactions and Criticisms from Muslim Intellectuals Regarding the Islamisation of Science

The idea of the Islamisation of knowledge has developed not only as an intellectual project among Muslim scholars but also as a subject of sustained debate. The differences between Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas illustrate the complexity of the issue. Their approaches differ in how they understand science, how they identify concepts considered incompatible with the Islamic worldview, and how Islamisation might be implemented within modern academic disciplines.

Al-Faruqi's approach offers a relatively systematic framework for reconnecting the Islamic intellectual tradition with modern academic disciplines. It does not simply encourage Muslims to accept modern science as it is, but calls for its evaluation and reconstruction within an Islamic value framework. At the same time, such an approach raises questions about whether restructuring academic disciplines is sufficient if the deeper epistemological assumptions of modern knowledge remain unchanged. Islamisation, in this sense, cannot be reduced to the addition of Islamic concepts or values to an existing body of scientific knowledge. It also requires examination of the assumptions on which that knowledge has been constructed.

Al-Attas places greater emphasis on worldview. For him, changes in knowledge should not be limited to its content or methodology, because the concepts used to understand reality also determine how knowledge is produced and interpreted. From this standpoint, the problem with modern knowledge is not simply the division between religious and secular knowledge. It also concerns the presence of concepts that may not be compatible with the Islamic understanding of reality.

The two approaches thus make related but distinct contributions. Al-Faruqi gives greater attention to the integration and reconstruction of academic disciplines, whereas al-Attas focuses more strongly on worldview and epistemological foundations. Their ideas should not be treated as identical, even though both respond to the same broad concern: the relationship between Islam and modern knowledge.

Through such integration, education is not directed solely towards pragmatic objectives such as career development and economic advancement. It is also expected to contribute to the realisation of Islamic values within social, cultural, and human civilisation (Tolchah, 2008). Knowledge consequently has a broader function, extending beyond the acquisition of skills to the pursuit of purposes considered consistent with Islamic teachings.

Al-Attas, meanwhile, identifies secularisation as one of the major challenges confronting Muslim societies. The problem, in his view, is not simply the lack of scientific knowledge but the influence of secular assumptions on the way reality is understood. The Islamisation of knowledge is consequently presented as a process of freeing knowledge from elements of thought that conflict with the Islamic worldview (Rilliandi Arindra Putawa, 2024).

He also maintains that modern science cannot be considered completely neutral because scientific knowledge develops within particular historical, cultural, and philosophical settings. From the Islamic position advanced by al-Attas, the Islamisation process involves identifying and removing concepts that are inconsistent with the Islamic worldview while strengthening *tawhid* as a foundation for knowledge.

The Islamisation of science has nevertheless received substantial criticism. One major issue concerns the relationship between science, values, and worldview. Supporters of Islamisation argue that science cannot be completely separated from the assumptions and values that influence its production and use. Critics, however, question whether these assumptions require science itself to be reconstructed according to a particular religious framework.

Ziauddin Sardar, for example, criticised al-Faruqi's approach by questioning whether modern science could simply be incorporated into an Islamic framework through the reconstruction of established academic disciplines. Such criticism points to a broader problem: changing the structure or terminology of a discipline does not necessarily alter the assumptions that govern its production of knowledge.

Some objections to the Islamisation of science are also associated with an instrumental understanding of science. From this position, science is regarded primarily as a means of understanding and managing reality. Scientific knowledge can consequently be used by people from different religious and cultural backgrounds without requiring changes to its epistemological structure. Muslims, according to this argument, can benefit from modern science while maintaining Islamic teachings in their personal and social lives. The primary concern should then be how science is used rather than whether science itself needs to be Islamised.

Another criticism concerns the possibility of superficial Islamisation. Efforts that merely attach the label 'Islamic' to a discipline without examining its epistemological foundations may change terminology without changing the underlying framework. From this standpoint, genuine engagement between Islam and modern science requires more than symbolic adaptation. It requires serious consideration of the assumptions, methods, and purposes that shape the production of knowledge.

Several Muslim intellectuals have contributed to this critical discussion, including Fazlur Rahman, Abdus Salam, Muhsin Mahdi, Bassam Tibi, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Pervez Hoodbhoy. Their positions are not identical, but they share concerns about approaches that attempt to Islamise modern academic disciplines without sufficiently addressing the deeper intellectual questions involved.

Fazlur Rahman, for instance, placed greater emphasis on developing a creative Islamic intellectual tradition than on Islamising existing academic disciplines. Abdolkarim Soroush similarly distinguished between religion and human understanding of religion. For Soroush,

religion is absolute because it originates from divine revelation, whereas religious understanding is produced by human beings and is consequently dynamic and open to revision as knowledge and social conditions change (Nata, 2019). His position shifts attention from the formal Islamisation of scientific disciplines towards the continuing development of human understanding.

Despite these criticisms, the discourse on the Islamisation of science remains important in contemporary Islamic thought. The debate between its proponents and critics reflects a continuing effort to determine how religion and science should relate to one another. The issue is consequently broader than whether science should be given an Islamic label. It concerns how Muslims understand knowledge, how scientific activity should be directed, and what values should guide its application.

The Islamisation of science can thus be read as an intellectual effort to reconsider the direction of modern scientific development and its relationship with Islamic values. Its continuing relevance lies precisely in the questions it raises about knowledge, morality, human welfare, and the purposes served by scientific progress.

Abdus Salam's Criticism of and Response to the Islamisation of Science

Abdus Salam was one of the most influential Muslim scientists of the twentieth century. Born in Pakistan on 29 January 1926, he became a leading theoretical physicist and received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1979 for his contribution to the development of electroweak theory. He was the first Muslim scientist to receive a Nobel Prize in the sciences. Beyond his scientific achievements, Salam was strongly concerned with education and the development of scientific research in developing countries, particularly in Muslim societies (Amril Hotma Ida Br. Simamora, 2024).

After completing his early education in Pakistan, Salam continued his studies at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. He later obtained a doctorate in theoretical physics and developed an international academic career, including at Imperial College London and the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, Italy. His scientific work resulted in numerous publications and made a major contribution to modern theoretical physics.

Salam's understanding of the relationship between religion and science differed from that of proponents of the Islamisation of science such as al-Faruqi and al-Attas. He did not see religious belief and scientific activity as contradictory. On the contrary, he regarded his faith as a source of inspiration for reflecting on the order of the universe. Islam, in his understanding, encourages human beings to observe, investigate, and reflect on natural phenomena as part of their effort to understand the creation of Allah.

His position, however, did not lead him to support the formal Islamisation of modern scientific disciplines. Salam questioned attempts to attach a specifically religious identity to science (Nur Ikhlas, 2025). For him, science is universal because it is based on methods and principles that can be employed by people regardless of their religious, cultural, or national background. The laws of nature do not change according to the identity of the scientist who studies them.

Salam's criticism was also connected to his explanation of the scientific decline of Muslim societies. He did not consider modern science itself to be the principal cause of this decline. Instead, he pointed to weaknesses in research culture, inadequate institutional support, and insufficient investment in scientific development. The revival of Muslim civilisation, in his view,

required stronger education systems, research institutions, and academic freedom (Mas'udah, 2018).

For Salam, the history of Islamic civilisation provides an important example. Scientific development flourished when Muslim societies provided intellectual, political, and social support for scholarship and research. When these traditions weakened and scientific activity was no longer prioritised, scientific development also declined. His emphasis was consequently placed on rebuilding an environment in which scientific research and innovation could develop.

This position does not mean that Salam separated religion entirely from science. He regarded religion as providing moral and spiritual guidance, while science offers a rational and systematic means of investigating the natural world. These two domains can coexist without requiring science to be divided into Islamic and non-Islamic categories.

Salam's response to the Islamisation of science can consequently be understood as a criticism of attempts to impose a religious identity on scientific disciplines. His greater concern was the development of scientific institutions, improvement of education, expansion of research capacity, and creation of conditions that would allow Muslim societies to participate actively in modern scientific development.

Fazlur Rahman's Criticism of and Response to the Islamisation of Science

Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988) was one of the most influential modern Muslim intellectuals in contemporary Islamic thought. His work addressed Qur'anic interpretation, Islamic education, and the reform of Islamic legal thought. He was born on 21 September 1919 in Hazara, in the north-western region of British India, now Pakistan (Kurnia, 2021). His father, Maulana Shihab al-Din, was a traditional scholar who had graduated from Dar al-'Ulum Deoband (Hibatullah & Luthfi, 2021).

Rahman received his formal education at the University of the Punjab and later pursued doctoral studies at the University of Oxford, where he specialised in Islamic philosophy, particularly the thought of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (Maulana et al., 2026). He became known as a neo-modernist Muslim thinker who sought to develop ways of understanding Islam that could respond to modern conditions while remaining grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah. One of his best-known contributions is the 'double movement' method, which moves from the historical circumstances of revelation towards general moral principles and then returns to the contemporary context in order to formulate their ethical application (Putra, 2025).

Rahman's criticism of the Islamisation of science can be seen clearly in his article *Islamisation of Knowledge: A Response*. He argues that the problem does not lie in knowledge itself but in the way knowledge is used. As he puts it, "It is not the 'ilm that is bad, it is the misuse or abuse of it that is bad" (Rahman, 1988). This position shifts the focus away from the nature of modern knowledge towards the moral responsibility of those who produce and use it.

For Rahman, the crisis associated with modernity is consequently more ethical than epistemological. Modern science becomes problematic when its products are used without adequate moral responsibility. The solution is not necessarily to reconstruct scientific disciplines but to develop people who are capable of using knowledge responsibly within an Islamic moral framework.

Rahman was therefore critical of approaches that treated modern scientific disciplines as objects that needed to be Islamised. Such approaches, in his view, could be based on the assumption that modern science is inherently secular and must first be transformed before

Muslims can use it. He instead placed greater emphasis on developing Muslim intellectuals who could engage creatively with modern knowledge while remaining committed to Qur'anic values.

In this regard, Rahman stated, "My plea, therefore, is that we create thinkers, those who have the capacity to think constructively and positively" (Rahman, 1988). The statement captures an important aspect of his approach. Intellectual renewal, for him, depends less on constructing formal programmes of Islamisation and more on producing thinkers who can engage critically and creatively with the challenges of their time.

Rahman did not, however, completely reject the term 'Islamisation'. In *Islam and Modernity*, he argues that "it is the upholders of Islamic learning who have to bear the primary responsibility of Islamizing secular knowledge by their creative intellectual effort" (Rahman, 1982). His use of the term differs from the programmes associated with al-Faruqi and al-Attas. Islamisation, in Rahman's formulation, is primarily a creative intellectual effort rather than the simple transfer of Qur'anic verses into modern scientific theories or the renaming of academic disciplines as 'Islamic'.

This distinction becomes clearer in his criticism of writings organised around themes such as "Islam and this" or "Islam and that". Rahman considered many such works defensive rather than constructive (Rahman, 1982). He also argued that attempts to demonstrate that every modern idea already exists within Islam can become "essentially marred by an apologetic attitude" (Rahman, 1982). For him, a productive engagement with modern knowledge requires Muslims to develop new intellectual formulations rather than merely search for Islamic equivalents of existing concepts.

Rahman also considered an Islamic worldview to be important for intellectual development. He argued that "An overall world view of Islam has to be first, if provisionally, attempted if various specific fields of intellectual endeavor are to cohere as informed by Islam" (Rahman, 1982). A coherent worldview is thus necessary if different fields of knowledge are to be meaningfully informed by Islam.

At the same time, Rahman warned against becoming overly occupied with methodological schemes. He wrote that "we must not get enamoured over making maps and charts of how to go about creating Islamic knowledge" (Rahman, 1988). Excessive attention to procedural models, in his view, can distract from the more important task of cultivating critical and creative intellectual traditions.

Rahman's position consequently occupies an interesting place in the debate. He did not dismiss the need for an Islamic engagement with knowledge, but he questioned whether that engagement should take the form of a formal Islamisation programme. His emphasis was on intellectual creativity, moral responsibility, a coherent Islamic worldview, and the development of Muslim thinkers capable of engaging modern knowledge constructively.

Muhsin Mahdi's Criticism of and Response to the Islamisation of Science

Muhsin Mahdi (1926–2007) was an Iraqi-born scholar of Islamic philosophy. He received his early education in Iraq before continuing his studies in the United States, where he obtained his doctorate from Harvard University (Musa, 2017). At Harvard, he became known for his work in philology and the history of philosophy, combining close textual analysis with historical research.

Throughout his intellectual career, Mahdi developed a historical-philological approach to Islamic philosophy. He placed particular importance on careful and contextual reading of classical

texts rather than interpreting them primarily through the needs of contemporary normative projects.

His work on the writings of al-Farabi, particularly his editing and interpretation of classical texts, established him as an important scholar in the study of Islamic political philosophy. His research also contributed to placing classical Islamic thought within the wider history of philosophy.

In discussions of the Islamisation of science, Mahdi's position can be associated with the argument that scientific method, scientific truth, and the structure of scientific knowledge cannot be classified according to the religion of the researcher. Sciences such as mathematics and physics operate according to standards of validity that do not change according to religious identity.

From this position, scientific knowledge cannot simply be divided into Islamic and non-Islamic categories. The methods used to establish mathematical or physical claims do not become fundamentally different because they are employed by Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or non-religious researchers. Scientific validity is instead connected to rational argument, methodological consistency, and evidence.

Mahdi also regarded the concept of Islamic science as closely related to the philosophy of religion. He questioned attempts to construct a specifically Islamic philosophy of science by drawing analogies with formulations developed within other religious intellectual traditions. His criticism raises a fundamental question about whether scientific knowledge requires a distinct religious identity or whether religious commitments should instead shape how knowledge is interpreted and used.

Abdolkarim Soroush's Criticism of and Response to the Islamisation of Science

Abdolkarim Soroush is one of Iran's prominent contemporary Muslim intellectuals and is widely known for his contributions to the reform of Islamic thought. Born in Tehran in 1945, he studied pharmacy at the University of Tehran before continuing his studies in the philosophy of science in the United Kingdom.

His academic background, which combines Islamic intellectual traditions with modern philosophical scholarship, influenced his approach to questions concerning religion, science, and religious interpretation (Al Mas'udah, 2018). One of his best-known contributions is the theory of *al-Qabd wa al-Bast*, commonly translated as the contraction and expansion of religious knowledge (Khalim, 2024).

A central element of Soroush's thought is the distinction between religion (*ad-din*) and religious understanding (*al-ma'rifah al-diniyyah*). Religion, in his formulation, refers to divine revelation and is consequently absolute. Human understanding of religion, however, is produced through interpretation. It is influenced by reason, experience, and the social, cultural, and economic conditions in which people live, as well as by developments in scientific knowledge (Faiq Ainurrofiq, 2022).

Religious understanding is thus relative and capable of change. Soroush considers it problematic when a particular human interpretation is treated as identical to religion itself. Such an identification can turn an interpretation into an unquestionable truth, even though it remains the product of human understanding.

This distinction forms an important basis for Soroush's criticism of the Islamisation of science. He questions the assumption that scientific knowledge must first be given an Islamic label in order to become acceptable to Muslims. Scientific knowledge, in his view, is a human intellectual activity that develops continuously and remains open to revision.

Religious understanding also develops through human intellectual activity. It consequently cannot remain isolated from developments in other fields of knowledge. Scientific developments, social changes, and intellectual debates can influence the way people understand religious questions. Soroush consequently advocates a relationship in which religious thought and other forms of knowledge remain open to dialogue.

Soroush distinguishes two broad approaches among Muslim intellectuals in their engagement with modern knowledge. The first consists of what he calls 'negative revivalists', who seek to protect religion by limiting engagement with non-religious forms of knowledge. The second consists of 'positive revivalists', who remain committed to religious principles while accepting insights and methodologies from outside the religious tradition when these can contribute to a deeper understanding of religion (Muhammad Arfan Ahwadzy, 2025). Soroush associates himself with the latter position.

His theory of *Qabd wa Bast*, or the contraction and expansion of religious knowledge, develops this argument further. Religious knowledge can expand and contract as the broader intellectual and social environment changes (Al Mas'udah, 2018). Revelation itself does not change, but human understanding of revelation develops as people encounter new forms of knowledge and new social circumstances.

The theory has epistemological, anthropological, and cosmological dimensions. Epistemologically, religious understanding is treated as part of human knowledge and is therefore capable of development. Anthropologically, interpretation is influenced by human experience and social conditions. Cosmologically, changing understandings of the universe can also affect the way people interpret religious texts.

Soroush's approach extends to various fields of Islamic scholarship, including *kalam*, *usul al-fiqh*, and *irfan*. These fields are understood as products of human intellectual engagement with revelation rather than revelation itself.

This distinction also provides the basis for Soroush's acceptance of plurality in religious thought. Differences in interpretation are natural because individuals and societies possess different intellectual backgrounds and encounter different historical circumstances. Understanding religion consequently requires attention not only to normative claims but also to historical and contextual factors.

For Soroush, it is important to distinguish between the Qur'an and its interpretation, hadith and its commentaries, and religion and religious thought. Such distinctions make it possible to criticise human interpretations without questioning the sanctity of divine revelation.

Soroush's ideas have nevertheless generated different responses. Supporters regard his approach as an important contribution to the renewal of Islamic thought because it creates space for dialogue between religious knowledge and modern science. Critics, on the other hand, argue that separating religion from religious understanding too sharply may lead to relativism concerning religious truth.

Whatever position one takes in this debate, Soroush's contribution shifts the question from the Islamisation of science towards the reconstruction of human understanding. His central concern is not to transform revelation but to ensure that human interpretations of religion remain capable of responding to changing intellectual and social conditions.

The Relevance of the Islamisation of Science in a Contemporary Context

The debate on the Islamisation of science remains relevant to contemporary discussions about the relationship between science and religion. Historically, the discourse developed partly

in response to the dominance of modern scientific thought and its association with positivist approaches that distinguish empirical facts from normative values.

Al-Faruqi and al-Attas challenge the assumption that scientific knowledge can be completely detached from worldview. In their approaches, knowledge production is connected to ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions that influence how reality is understood and how knowledge is evaluated (Muslih, 2025). The Islamisation of science consequently seeks to reconsider these foundations within an Islamic worldview.

The positions of Fazlur Rahman, Muhsin Mahdi, Abdus Salam, and Abdolkarim Soroush add another dimension to this debate. Although their arguments differ, all four question aspects of the attempt to establish a direct relationship between religious identity and scientific knowledge (Yusdani, 2020). Their contributions show that criticism of Islamisation does not necessarily mean rejecting Islam or religious values. In several cases, the criticism is directed at the method used to relate religious values to scientific activity.

For Mahdi, for example, scientific validity is not determined by the religious identity of the researcher. Logical consistency, rational argument, and empirical verification remain central to scientific inquiry. The laws of nature do not change according to the ideological or religious background of the person investigating them. Science can consequently be understood as a form of knowledge that employs shared methodological standards across different intellectual traditions.

This argument does not necessarily settle the wider question of scientific neutrality. Contemporary discussions in the philosophy of science continue to examine the extent to which scientific inquiry is influenced by assumptions concerning reality, rationality, objectivity, and the interpretation of evidence (Arifin et al., 2023). The debate over Islamisation is relevant to this discussion because it draws attention to questions that lie behind scientific practice rather than focusing only on scientific findings.

The issue becomes even more significant when scientific development produces consequences that extend beyond the laboratory. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, climate change, and the global ecological crisis, for example, involve decisions about how scientific knowledge should be used and whose interests it should serve. Scientific activity therefore has an important axiological dimension, particularly when technological and scientific developments affect human welfare, social relations, and the environment (Prista, Dynda, & Muhammad Nashirul Haq, 2025).

Seen from this angle, the Islamisation of science is not simply a debate between those who support an Islamic science and those who defend universal science. The discussion also concerns the relationship between knowledge and values, the limits of scientific authority, and the purposes for which scientific knowledge is developed and applied.

The debate between al-Attas, al-Faruqi, and their critics consequently remains useful for contemporary Islamic intellectual discourse. Al-Attas draws attention to worldview and the conceptual foundations of knowledge; al-Faruqi emphasises the reconstruction and integration of academic disciplines; Rahman stresses intellectual creativity and moral responsibility; Salam highlights scientific development and research capacity; Mahdi emphasises the universal character of scientific method; and Soroush focuses on the changing nature of human religious understanding.

Taken together, these positions show that the Islamisation of science is a much broader discussion than the attempt to attach Islamic terminology to modern academic disciplines. At its core are questions about how knowledge is produced, how reality is understood, how values

influence its use, and what kind of human and social life scientific development should serve. This makes the discourse relevant not only to the history of Islamic thought but also to contemporary debates on science, ethics, technology, and human welfare.

CONCLUSION

The debate on the Islamisation of science reflects a fundamental disagreement over the nature of scientific knowledge and its relationship with religion. Al-Attas and al-Faruqi emphasise that science cannot be separated entirely from worldview and values. From their position, the development of modern science requires critical engagement with its underlying assumptions and a stronger orientation towards Islamic values. Fazlur Rahman, Muhsin Mahdi, Abdus Salam, and Abdolkarim Soroush, however, raise different concerns. They question the need to assign a religious identity to science and place greater emphasis on intellectual creativity, the universality of scientific methods, research and educational development, and the distinction between revelation and human understanding.

The findings also show that the debate cannot be reduced to a simple choice between accepting or rejecting the Islamisation of science. A more important question concerns how religion, values, and scientific knowledge can interact without weakening either the integrity of scientific inquiry or the normative foundations of Islam. The different positions examined in this study suggest that the discourse remains open and continues to develop alongside changes in science, technology, and Muslim intellectual life.

One of the main challenges is translating the idea of Islamisation from an intellectual discourse into a meaningful academic practice. There is a risk of superficial Islamisation when Islamic terminology is added to established disciplines without examining their assumptions, methods, and purposes. At the same time, treating science as completely independent of values may overlook the ethical consequences of scientific development and its application. The challenge, therefore, is to develop a productive relationship between scientific rigour, Islamic values, and the changing needs of society.

The discussion has several implications. Academically, it contributes to the continuing development of Islamic epistemology by bringing different approaches to the relationship between Islam and science into dialogue. For Islamic education, the debate suggests the importance of developing students' critical and creative capacities rather than simply presenting science as either Islamic or non-Islamic. For contemporary scientific and technological development, it also highlights the need to consider ethical responsibility, human welfare, and social consequences alongside scientific achievement.

Future research could examine how these intellectual debates are reflected in contemporary Muslim universities, research institutions, and academic curricula. Empirical studies could also investigate how lecturers, researchers, and students understand the Islamisation of science in practice and whether the ideas proposed by al-Attas, al-Faruqi, Rahman, Salam, Mahdi, and Soroush influence their approaches to knowledge production. Further research may also explore the relevance of this debate to emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, environmental science, and digital technology. Such studies would help move the discussion from primarily conceptual debates towards a more concrete understanding of how Islamic values, scientific inquiry, and ethical responsibility can be brought into meaningful dialogue.

Overall, the continuing debate on the Islamisation of science demonstrates that the relationship between Islam and modern science remains an open intellectual question. Its

significance lies not in establishing a single definitive model, but in encouraging sustained examination of how knowledge is produced, evaluated, and used. This makes the discourse relevant to contemporary efforts to develop scientific knowledge that is intellectually rigorous, ethically responsible, and responsive to human and social needs.

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