

BOOK REVIEW

Exegeses Of A Qur'anic Verse In the Light of the Critical Realism of the Monotheistic Law of Unity of Knowledge (Tawhid)

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Abstract:

This book review critically examines *Exegeses of a Qur'anic Verse in the Light of the Critical Realism of the Monotheistic Law of Unity of Knowledge (Tawhid)*, which reinterprets Qur'an 36:36 through the framework of Tawhidi epistemology and critical realism. The review evaluates the author's critique of conventional exoteric (*ẓāhir*) exegesis and the proposed integration of exoteric and esoteric (*bāṭin*) interpretation using ta'wīl. While classical commentaries primarily understand the verse as referring to complementary pairs in creation, the book argues that it embodies a universal epistemological principle of complementarity, interaction, and evolutionary learning governing the unity of knowledge. This review finds that the book makes an original contribution by linking Qur'anic hermeneutics with systems thinking, philosophy of science, and socio-economic inquiry, thereby extending the relevance of Tawhid beyond theology into interdisciplinary scholarship. Although several historical claims regarding traditional exegetical schools require greater nuance, the work successfully demonstrates the potential of Tawhidi epistemology as an integrative framework for contemporary Islamic thought and for addressing complex global challenges through a unified moral-material worldview.

Keywords: Qur'an 36:36; Tawhid; Unity of Knowledge; Critical Realism; Ta'wīl; Islamic Philosophy of Science.

Introduction

The Qur'an has long been recognized as a primary source of ethical, theological, and epistemological guidance, providing principles that extend beyond ritual devotion to encompass scientific inquiry, social organization, and civilizational development. Classical *tafsīr* has made significant contributions to understanding the linguistic and historical dimensions of Qur'anic revelation. However, many contemporary scholars argue that traditional exegesis often emphasizes the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) meaning of verses

while paying comparatively less attention to their esoteric (bāṭin) and methodological implications for contemporary knowledge systems (Nasr, Dagli, Lumbard, & Rustom, 2015; Rahman, 1982). This interpretive tendency has limited broader engagement between Qur'anic epistemology and the interdisciplinary challenges of the modern world.

Among the verses that invite multidimensional reflection is Qur'an 36:36, which proclaims that Allah created all things in complementary pairs, including realities that remain unknown to humanity. Classical commentators generally interpret this verse as referring to biological reproduction, cosmological order, and the diversity of creation (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 2003). While these interpretations remain foundational, they leave considerable scope for exploring the verse's wider ontological and epistemological significance, particularly regarding the interconnectedness of creation, knowledge, and systemic harmony.

The book under review advances this broader perspective by interpreting Qur'an 36:36 through the framework of the Monotheistic Law of Unity of Knowledge (Tawhīd), developed within the philosophy of critical realism. Building upon Choudhury's Tawhidi methodology, the book argues that the Qur'an should be understood as a comprehensive epistemological foundation that integrates moral values, scientific reasoning, and socio-economic systems into a unified process of continuous learning (Choudhury, 2018, 2023). From this standpoint, the verse transcends a purely descriptive account of paired creation and becomes a conceptual foundation for understanding complementarities, interactive causation, and evolutionary learning within the universal order.

This review critically evaluates the book's principal arguments, examining how it extends conventional Qur'anic exegesis from descriptive interpretation toward an integrative Tawhidi philosophy of science grounded in critical realism. Particular attention is given to the author's critique of exoteric hermeneutics, the proposed synthesis of exoteric and esoteric interpretation through ta'wīl, and the implications of this framework for Islamic philosophy of science, socio-economic thought, and contemporary knowledge integration.

Discussion

The book begins by advancing a central proposition that the substantive meaning of evolutionary learning, as grounded in the Monotheistic Law of Unity of Knowledge (Tawhid), transcends the conventional boundaries of theological discourse and extends to the entirety of existence (everything). Rather than understanding Tawhid merely as a doctrinal affirmation of the Oneness of God, the author develops it into an epistemological and ontological framework through which knowledge evolves continuously via interaction, integration, and complementarities across moral, social, scientific, economic, and ecological domains (Choudhury, 1997, 2018, 2023). In this perspective, evolutionary learning is not interpreted in the Darwinian biological sense, but as a process of continuous conscious learning guided by divine revelation, resulting in the emergence of knowledge that ultimately contributes to planetary wellbeing. Such an interpretation positions the Qur'an not simply as a theological scripture but as a comprehensive methodology for understanding the interconnectedness of reality, thereby aligning Islamic epistemology with contemporary discussions in systems science, sustainability, and critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978; Capra & Luisi, 2014).

To substantiate this argument, the book focuses on Qur'an 36:36, which states: "Exalted is He who created all pairs—from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know." The author first reviews a number of authoritative English translations and commentaries, including those of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Muhammad Asad, Marmaduke Pickthall, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, and Taqiuddin al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan. These translations consistently explain the verse through its apparent (zāhir) meaning, emphasizing God's creation of complementary pairs in vegetation, humanity, and aspects of creation that remain beyond human knowledge (Asad, 2003; Nasr et al., 2015; Yusuf Ali, 2006). While these interpretations accurately preserve the linguistic and theological significance of the verse, the author argues that they remain predominantly descriptive and therefore do not sufficiently uncover the verse's deeper epistemological implications. Consequently, according to the book, much of the existing corpus of tafsīr has concentrated on exoteric explanation while giving comparatively limited attention to the broader methodological

potential contained within the Qur'anic worldview.

The book therefore proposes that the verse should be approached through an integrated methodology combining exoteric (zāhir) interpretation with esoteric (bātin) understanding through ta'wīl. Under this approach, the notion of "pairs" (azwāj) no longer refers solely to biological duality or physical complementarity but represents a universal principle governing interaction, reciprocity, emergence, and continuous learning throughout creation. This interpretation substantially widens the meaning of the verse by incorporating socio-scientific analysis, systems thinking, cybernetic processes, and moral-material integration into its exegetical framework. The author argues that every phenomenon within the universe exists through interactive complementarities that generate new knowledge and higher forms of social organization, reflecting the divine order established by Tawhid. Such an interpretation corresponds closely with systems theory, where complex realities emerge from dynamic interactions among interconnected components rather than isolated entities (Capra & Luisi, 2014). Accordingly, Qur'an 36:36 becomes not merely a statement concerning creation but a methodological foundation for understanding the evolution of knowledge itself.

A significant analytical contribution of the book lies in its criticism that limiting Qur'anic interpretation to exoteric readings has unintentionally constrained the intellectual horizons of Islamic civilization. According to the author, the predominance of literal commentary has narrowed the application of Qur'anic guidance primarily to ritual and legal matters while neglecting its broader implications for philosophy of science, economics, governance, technological innovation, and civilizational development. The consequence, the author argues, is that the Qur'an's immense capacity to function as a universal epistemological framework has remained underutilized. Within the Tawhidi paradigm, however, revelation is understood as continuously interacting with empirical reality through an ongoing process of learning, consultation (shūrā), reflection (tafakkur), and scientific inquiry. Such an understanding resonates with the Qur'anic encouragement to contemplate the signs of God throughout creation (āyāt kawniyyah) (Qur'an 3:190–191), thereby integrating revelation with rational and empirical investigation rather than separating them.

Building upon this critique, the author further argues that the dominance of exoteric interpretation has weakened the development of what he terms the algorithmic intellection of the Muslim intellectual tradition. In the context of the present era of artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and interdisciplinary science, such intellectual limitations become increasingly problematic because contemporary knowledge production relies upon integration across disciplinary boundaries rather than compartmentalized modes of inquiry. The book therefore contends that Tawhidi epistemology offers an alternative paradigm in which knowledge continuously evolves through interactive complementarities guided by divine ethical principles. From this perspective, the Qur'an functions as the supreme criterion of truth (*furqān*), not only in matters of theology but also as the methodological foundation for understanding complex adaptive systems encompassing humanity, society, nature, and the wider universe (Choudhury, 2023). This interpretation further complements the philosophical foundations of critical realism, which similarly emphasizes the existence of deeper generative mechanisms underlying observable empirical phenomena (Bhaskar, 1978).

One of the more provocative arguments advanced in the book concerns the historical consequences of intellectual fragmentation within the Muslim world. The author attributes part of this fragmentation to excessive reliance upon rigid sectarian approaches (*madhāhib*) that gradually restricted philosophical reasoning and methodological *ijtihād*. Although this assessment is presented in broad terms and would benefit from greater historical nuance, the underlying concern remains intellectually significant. The book suggests that when exoteric interpretation becomes detached from deeper epistemological reflection, Islamic scholarship risks reducing revelation to a collection of static legal formulations rather than recognizing it as a dynamic source of continuous learning and civilizational renewal. In contrast, the Tawhidi worldview presented throughout the book envisions knowledge as an evolutionary process in which revelation, reason, empirical inquiry, and ethical consciousness interact recursively to produce increasingly comprehensive understandings of reality. Consequently, Qur'an 36:36 emerges not simply as an affirmation of divine creation but as a universal epistemological principle explaining the interconnectedness, complementarities, and continuous evolution

of knowledge across all dimensions of existence, thereby offering a compelling contribution to contemporary Islamic philosophy of science and critical realist scholarship (Bhaskar, 1978; Choudhury, 2018; Nasr et al., 2015).

The book proceeds by arguing that one of the greatest intellectual obstacles confronting the contemporary Muslim world is the historical separation between exoteric (ẓāhir) and esoteric (bāṭin) approaches to Qur'anic interpretation. According to the author, this interpretive divide has not merely generated differences in hermeneutical methodology but has also produced long-term consequences for the development of Islamic civilization. The predominance of literal and legalistic readings has gradually confined the Qur'an to a relatively narrow treatment of ritual observance and mu'āmalāt, while its broader epistemological capacity to explain universal phenomena, scientific inquiry, and civilizational development has remained largely unexplored (Choudhury, 2018, 2023). From the perspective advanced in this book, the fragmentation of Islamic intellectual traditions into competing sectarian schools (madhāhib) has further reinforced this narrowing of knowledge by privileging doctrinal boundaries over the continuous pursuit of integrated learning. Although the historical development of Islamic schools of thought was considerably more diverse and intellectually dynamic than the book occasionally suggests (Hallāq, 2009), its central concern remains significant: the absence of an integrative epistemology has weakened the Qur'an's role as a universal source of knowledge capable of addressing both spiritual and worldly realities.

The author further argues that this intellectual fragmentation has contributed to the gradual marginalization of ijtihād, understood as the disciplined process of deriving knowledge through reasoned engagement with the Qur'an and Sunnah. In the book's assessment, the dominance of rigid exoteric approaches has discouraged philosophical inquiry and has frequently separated analytical philosophy, natural sciences, and socio-economic disciplines from Qur'anic epistemology. Consequently, Islamic scholarship has often developed dualistic boundaries between "religious knowledge" and "worldly sciences," despite the Qur'an repeatedly encouraging reflection upon creation (tafakkur), observation (nazar), and rational investigation (ta'aqqul) (Qur'an

3:190–191; 38:29). This critique echoes Fazlur Rahman's (1982) argument that Islamic intellectual decline was associated not with revelation itself but with the gradual closure of creative intellectual reasoning that once characterized the classical Islamic civilization. Likewise, Al-Attas (1995) attributes many contemporary challenges facing Muslim societies to an epistemological crisis arising from the fragmentation of knowledge rather than from deficiencies within the Islamic worldview itself. Within this context, the book's call for renewing Tawhidi epistemology may therefore be understood as an effort to recover the integrative intellectual spirit that historically characterized the Islamic Golden Age.

Building upon this critique, the author contends that the traditional restriction of *mu'āmalāt* to legal and transactional matters has prevented its development into a broader framework for understanding complex socio-scientific systems. The book proposes that economic transactions, governance, ecological sustainability, technological innovation, and social institutions should all be interpreted as interconnected manifestations of the Tawhidi law of unity of knowledge rather than as isolated disciplinary fields. Such an understanding reflects the Qur'anic conception that all creation operates according to divine balance (*mīzān*) and purposeful interconnectedness (Qur'an 55:7–9). Consequently, the study of *mu'āmalāt* should not remain confined to jurisprudential classifications but should evolve into a multidisciplinary inquiry encompassing economics, environmental stewardship, political institutions, and scientific advancement. This interpretation aligns closely with Choudhury's (1997, 2018) formulation of Islamic political economy, where moral values and material systems continuously interact through processes of consultation, integration, and evolutionary learning to generate sustainable human wellbeing.

A further criticism advanced by the book concerns the inability of many traditional commentators to conceptualize *Shari'ah* as an epistemological system grounded in the Monotheistic Law of Unity of Knowledge. Rather than viewing *Shari'ah* solely as a collection of legal rulings, the author argues that it should be understood as a dynamic methodological framework governing the interaction between ethical values, social institutions, scientific knowledge, and human civilization. This perspective substantially broadens the scope of Islamic jurisprudence by emphasizing its

underlying objectives (*maqāsid al-sharī'ah*), namely the realization of justice, welfare, and human flourishing (Kamali, 2008). The book therefore criticizes interpretive traditions that isolate legal reasoning from broader intellectual inquiry, arguing that such approaches have diminished the creative and scientific potential embedded within the Qur'anic worldview. In the contemporary algorithmic age characterized by artificial intelligence, systems modelling, and interdisciplinary research, the author maintains that *Sharī'ah* should be capable of providing ethical direction for increasingly complex socio-scientific realities rather than remaining confined to narrowly legal discourse.

The discussion subsequently turns to the methodological distinction between exoteric exegesis (*tafsīr*) and esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*). According to the book, virtually all major English translations of Qur'an 36:36, including those by Nasr, Asad, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, and al-Hilali and Khan, faithfully convey the literal meaning of the verse while stopping short of exploring its wider philosophical implications (Asad, 2003; Nasr et al., 2015). The author argues that this predominance of *zāhir*-oriented interpretation has limited appreciation of the Qur'an's capacity to function as a comprehensive philosophy of science. Rather than rejecting classical *tafsīr*, however, the book advocates complementing it with *ta'wīl*, enabling the discovery of deeper ontological structures underlying Qur'anic revelation. Such an approach reflects the classical Islamic understanding that the Qur'an contains multiple dimensions of meaning, each appropriate to different levels of intellectual inquiry (Izutsu, 2002). Accordingly, the book presents *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* not as competing methodologies but as mutually reinforcing approaches that together reveal the comprehensive richness of divine revelation.

To justify this methodological expansion, the author draws upon both Qur'anic and Prophetic sources. Qur'an 3:7 distinguishes between verses of established meaning (*muḥkamāt*) and allegorical verses (*mutashābihāt*), while recognizing that those "firmly grounded in knowledge" (*al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilm*) acknowledge the entirety of revelation as originating from God. Although classical exegetes have differed regarding the interpretation of this verse, many have accepted that deeper reflection upon the Qur'an remains a legitimate scholarly endeavour when grounded in sound knowledge and linguistic discipline (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn

Kathīr, 2003). The book further reinforces this argument through the narration attributed to Abdullah ibn Mas'ud stating that every Qur'anic verse possesses both an outward and an inward dimension. Abu Ja'far's commentary emphasizing the necessity of seeking both outward and inward meanings is employed to demonstrate that ta'wīl possesses a recognized place within the broader Islamic exegetical tradition. Although the authenticity and interpretive application of such narrations have been debated among hadith scholars, they nevertheless illustrate a longstanding recognition that Qur'anic meanings cannot always be exhausted through literal explanation alone (Al-Suyūṭī, 1974).

The culmination of the author's argument is that the profound significance of Qur'an 36:36 has remained only partially realized within much of the traditional exegetical literature. Through the methodology of ta'wīl, the concept of "pairs" (azwāj) is interpreted as expressing the universal law of complementarity governing all dimensions of existence. Diversity, interaction, reciprocity, and symbiosis become foundational principles through which knowledge continuously evolves. In this sense, Tawhid functions not only as the theological affirmation of divine unity but also as the ontological foundation of an interconnected world-system characterized by continuous interaction between moral and material realities. This interpretation closely parallels systems thinking and critical realism, both of which emphasize relational causality, emergence, and the existence of deeper generative structures underlying observable phenomena (Bhaskar, 1978; Capra & Luisi, 2014). The book therefore succeeds in repositioning Qur'an 36:36 as more than a statement concerning creation; it becomes a methodological foundation for an Islamic philosophy of science in which revelation, empirical inquiry, ethical reasoning, and socio-economic development are integrated within a single Tawhidi epistemological framework. Although aspects of this ambitious reinterpretation remain open to scholarly debate, particularly concerning its assessment of traditional exegetical heritage, the work nevertheless offers a substantial contribution by demonstrating how the integration of exoteric and esoteric interpretation may revitalize contemporary Islamic scholarship and expand the relevance of the Qur'an for addressing the intellectual, scientific, and civilizational challenges of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

This book review concludes that it offers a significant and original contribution to contemporary Qur'anic studies by reinterpreting Qur'an 36:36 through the framework of the Monotheistic Law of Unity of Knowledge (Tawhid) and critical realism. Moving beyond conventional exoteric (zāhir) interpretations, the author argues that the verse should be understood as a universal epistemological principle that governs complementarity, interaction, and evolutionary learning across all dimensions of existence. Through the integration of exoteric and esoteric (bāṭin) interpretation using ta'wīl, the book presents Tawhid not merely as a theological doctrine but as the ontological and methodological foundation for understanding the interconnected moral-material order of the universe. This perspective substantially broadens the scope of Qur'anic interpretation by linking revelation with philosophy of science, systems thinking, socio-economic development, and planetary wellbeing (Choudhury, 2018, 2023).

One of the principal strengths of the book lies in its ambitious attempt to bridge the historical divide between religious scholarship and contemporary scientific inquiry. By criticizing the predominance of narrowly literal exegesis and advocating an integrated Tawhidi epistemology, the work challenges the fragmentation of knowledge that has often characterized modern intellectual discourse. The book persuasively argues that the Qur'an should function not only as a source of legal and ethical guidance but also as a comprehensive framework for continuous knowledge creation capable of informing economics, governance, environmental sustainability, technology, and broader civilizational development. Although some historical assessments concerning traditional exegetical schools and sectarian developments would benefit from greater nuance and engagement with a wider range of classical scholarship, these limitations do not diminish the originality of the book's central epistemological contribution.

Overall, the book successfully demonstrates that Qur'an 36:36 possesses methodological and philosophical implications that extend far beyond its conventional interpretation concerning the creation of pairs. By conceptualizing Tawhid as the universal law of unity of knowledge governing the interaction of revelation, reason, empirical inquiry, and ethical consciousness, the author provides

an innovative framework for advancing an Islamic philosophy of science grounded in critical realism. Consequently, this work represents an important contribution to interdisciplinary Islamic scholarship and offers valuable insights for future research seeking to integrate Qur'anic epistemology with contemporary challenges in social sciences, economics, environmental studies, and the philosophy of science. Its emphasis on unity, complementarity, and continuous evolutionary learning makes the book a timely and thought-provoking resource for scholars interested in reconnecting Islamic intellectual tradition with the complexities of the twenty-first-century world-system.

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