Islamization, Ethics and Values in Science and Technology

By
Islamic Values and Ethics in Engineering Sciences Research Group (IVEES-RG)
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

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IIUM Press
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MUSLIM CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHYSICS

Abdi O. Shuriye
&
Waleed Faris

Introduction to Physics

In this chapter physics has been described as one of the oldest academic disciplines; which is transformed to be significant and influential. Advances in its understanding have translated into new technologies especially associated with electronics, machine developments, etc. Some of the major contributions of early Muslim scientist have been mentioned in the chapter, so that the reader may reflect on their level of intellect despite the limitation and un-sophistication of technology during their era.

As such, Physics can be regarded as one of the sciences among the fundamental four, namely, biology, chemistry, mathematics, and of course, physics itself. Though some consider it to be primarily a field that wraps the applications of mathematics, it has evolved into a distinctive field of its own, gaining the attention of many scientist around the world. According to Owadally, there is a natural philosophy in Islamic Science known as tabi‘iyat which includes the life sciences and the earth sciences that is inclusive of physics. He further asserts that: “Muslims classified these as the mathematical sciences. The principles of natural philosophy were in a treatise called famn al-sama al-tabi’ (section dealing with what is heard concerning natural philosophy) ... Nearly every Muslim philosopher had devoted a section of their writing to physics. In traditional doctrines, physics is an application of metaphysics. The principles of physics are to be found in metaphysics.”

Seyyed Hossein Nasr adds that the study of physics (tabi‘iyat) in the Islamic world, more than any other science, followed the teachings of Aristotle in its basic outlines. Most of the problems posed by Muslim philosophers and scientists in this field were set within the frame work of doctrines of form and matter, potentiality and actuality, the four causes, and teleology. Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes physics in medieval times as a study that includes the study of all things that change, or, in Aristotelian terminology, the study of all things in the world of generation and corruption. According to him:

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190 Mohammad Yasin Owadally, The Muslim Scientists, (Kuala Lumpur : A. S. Nordeen, 2003), 38
191 Ibid