# A Study of Islam WJEC Year 2 A level Knowledge Organiser: Theme 2B: Significant historical developments in religious thought - Islam and science

## Key concepts

- Science suggests a 'big bang' or other event led to the origin of the universe, and life on earth developed in stages known as evolution. There was no need for a 'first cause' or God. Islamic teachings.
- The 'Scientific approach' is based on rational observation, experimentation and deduction. The Islamic approach is sometimes characterised by unquestioning acceptance of revealed truth through the Qur'an. The compatibility between these two different perspectives is debated.

- Muslims believe that God is all-powerful, exists beyond time and was the power that created the universe. It cannot be explained simply by a series of events as according to some scientists.
- There are some variations within Muslim opinion. Some see the 'big bang' as compatible with verses in the Qur'an which refer to the origin of the universe with the planets being drawn together then split asunder.
- Other theories have been made, including the steady state theory and the expanding and oscillating universe theory. Some Muslims, such as Ibn Arabi, have referred to the universe as being in an endless cycle of expansion and contraction with God as a 'necessary existent' or power required for this to take place.

- The Qur'an is thought of as a book, but it is sometimes referred to as God's revelation which existed with God throughout eternity and was revealed in book form to Muhammad, known as Qur'an al-Tadwini. The same knowledge is present in the laws and beauty of nature, known as Qur'an al-Takwini.
- Some criticise religions, including Islam, for relying on superstition or unproven knowledge. However, in the period known as the Islamic Golden Age under the 'Abbasids, Science was valued and in the opinion of Professor Jim Al-Khalili, scientific method, based on objective, rational interpretation, was formed. Ibn Sina/ Avicenna wrote a Canon on Medicine and others translated Greek texts which later influenced the enlightenment in Europe.
- Fossil evidence led Darwin to suggest the theory of evolution. Some Muslims accept this as compatible with the 'stages' of creation referred to in the Qur'an, whereas others reject it as incompatible with revealed text that God created each species on a separate day.

## Key quotes

'This [the Islamic Golden Age], for me, is the moment that Science, itself is summoned into existence and becomes a discipline in its own right.' (Jim al-Khalili)
'In Islam the inseparable link between man and nature, and also between the sciences of nature and religion, is to be found in the Quran itself, the Divine Book which is the Logos or the Word of God. It is both the recorded Quran and the Quran of creation.' (Seyyed Hossain Nasr)
'Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder?' (The Qur'an Sura 21:30, Yusuf Ali)
'Seeing that it is He that has created you in diverse stages?' (The Qur'an Sura 71:14- 17, Yusuf Ali)
'It started out from the minerals and progressed, in an ingenious, gradual manner, to plants and animals. ... The last stage of plants, such as palms and vines, is connected with the first stage of animals.' (Ibn Khaldun)
'In learning science and technology afresh from the West, Muslims would be recovering their own past achievements and fulfilling the in junctions of the Qur'an to explore all manner of knowledge within Allah's creation.' (David Waines)

## Key words

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| Alaq | Qadr | Qur'an al-Takwini | Qur'an al-Tadwini |
| Vizier | Caliph | | |

## Issues for analysis and evaluation

***Key questions, arguments, and debates***

1. The effectiveness of Islamic responses to the challenges of scientific views about the origins of the universe.
   Some responded by regarding science as a threat and affirmed a literal interpretation of the revealed Qur'an. Others sought to find common ground shared by science and Islam. The historical novel Hayy ibn Yaqzan tried to show how beliefs about both God and creation could be rationally deduced.
2. Whether Islam is compatible with science.
   Many famous scientists are Muslims; Islam has supported observation and enquiry. However, Muslims do not question anything in revealed text which has led some to restrict their scientific enquiries.