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Multilevel Reading as an Epistemological Model of Islam-Science Integration: A Critical Study of Nidhal Guessoum

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Abstract:
This article aims to examine and analyze Nidhal Guessoum's concept of multilevel reading as an epistemological model of Islam-science integration. Specifically, it investigates the epistemological foundations, methodological structure, and logical consistency of Guessoum's approach in reconciling revelation and scientific rationality. Employing qualitative library research, this study uses epistemological, hermeneutical, and philosophy of science approaches to critically evaluate Guessoum's thought. The findings show that multilevel reading represents an attempt to establish a dialogical relationship between religion and science without reducing one into the other. Guessoum rejects both scientism and literalism by proposing contextual and layered interpretations of religious texts. This approach enables a more flexible interaction between Qur'anic interpretation and contemporary scientific developments. However, the study also finds that the model still faces several methodological challenges, particularly regarding interpretive ambiguity and epistemological consistency. Despite these limitations, Guessoum's framework contributes significantly to the development of contemporary Islamic epistemology by offering a more contextual, critical, and integrative paradigm of Islam-science relations. Therefore, multilevel reading can be regarded as an important alternative model in contemporary discussions on religion and science.

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Keywords: *Multilevel Reading; Islam-Science Integration; Epistemology; Hermeneutics; Nidhal Guessoum.*

Abstrak:

Artikel ini mengkaji konsep *multilevel reading* Nidhal Guessoum sebagai model epistemologis integrasi Islam dan sains. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis fondasi epistemologis, struktur metodologis, dan konsistensi logis pendekatan Guessoum dalam mempertemukan wahyu dan rasionalitas ilmiah. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan pendekatan epistemologi, hermeneutika, dan filsafat ilmu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *multilevel reading* merupakan upaya membangun hubungan dialogis antara agama dan sains tanpa mereduksi salah satunya. Guessoum menolak saintisme maupun literalisme tekstual melalui pembacaan kontekstual dan bertingkat terhadap teks keagamaan. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan interaksi yang lebih fleksibel antara interpretasi Al-Qur'an dan perkembangan sains kontemporer. Namun demikian, penelitian ini juga menemukan beberapa tantangan metodologis, terutama terkait ambiguitas interpretasi dan konsistensi epistemologis. Meskipun memiliki keterbatasan, pendekatan Guessoum memberikan kontribusi penting bagi pengembangan epistemologi Islam kontemporer melalui paradigma integrasi yang lebih kritis, kontekstual, dan dialogis. Oleh karena itu, *multilevel reading* dapat dipandang sebagai salah satu model alternatif dalam diskursus agama dan sains kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Multilevel Reading; Integrasi Islam dan Sains; Epistemologi; Hermeneutika; Nidhal Guessoum.*

Introduction

The discourse on the integration of Islam and science has regained significant attention within contemporary philosophy of science. The increasing complexity of modern scientific development has generated the need for an epistemological paradigm capable of bridging scientific rationality and religious values.[1] In the Muslim world, debates concerning the relationship between revelation and science no longer revolve merely around compatibility, but also involve methodological foundations and epistemological validity of integration itself. Several contemporary Muslim scholars have attempted to formulate

[1] Faisal Amir Toedien and Eva Dewi, "Integration of Religion and Science in Nidhal Guessoum's Thought: An Epistemological Analysis and Its Implications for Islamic Education," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies*, November 2025, 347–70, https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v10i2.14954.Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Religion in the Postmodern Thought," *Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 2024): 67–81, https://doi.org/10.21111/jios.v2i1.41.

integrative models that critically engage both scientism and textual literalism.[2] Among these scholars, Nidhal Guessoum proposes the concept of *multilevel reading* as an interpretive framework seeking to reconcile revelation and science epistemologically.

The thought of Nidhal Guessoum emerged as a response to two extreme tendencies in the relationship between religion and science. On the one hand, scientistic approaches position science as the sole source of objective truth. On the other hand, literalistic approaches interpret religious texts rigidly without considering the development of modern scientific knowledge. Guessoum attempts to occupy a middle position by developing a *multilevel reading* of the Qur'an and natural reality.[3] This approach emphasizes the distinction between the metaphysical message of revelation and scientific interpretations that remain dynamic and revisable.[4] Consequently, integration is not understood as the subordination of one domain to another, but rather as a dialogical relationship in which both complement each other.

Although Guessoum's approach has become influential in contemporary Islam-science discourse, most previous studies remain descriptive and thematic in nature. Existing scholarship generally focuses on the compatibility between Islam and science, critiques of *i'jāz 'ilmī*, or the relevance of hermeneutics in interpreting religious texts.[5] However, the epistemological and methodological dimensions of *multilevel reading* have not been sufficiently examined within the framework of philosophy of science. In fact, the central problem of integration concerns not only how religion and science can coexist, but also how the validity

[2] Shoaib Ahmed Malik, *Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 2021), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429345753.

[3] Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 301–6.

[4] Nidhal Guessoum, "Islam and Science: The Next Phase of Debates," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 50, no. 4 (December 2015): 854–76, https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12213; David Solomon Jalajel and Shoaib Ahmed Malik, "The Role of Classical Sunnī Theology in Islam and Science: Responding to Nidhal Guessoum," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 60, no. 1 (June 2025): 31–57, https://doi.org/10.16995/zygon.16545.

[5] Mahendra Utama Cahya Nidzom, Muhammad Faqih; Amroin, Herlina Yunita; and Ramadhan, "Nidhal Guessoum's Method of Scientific Interpretation: An Analytical Study on Al-Ayah Al-Kauniyyah and Its Relevance to the Contemporary Urban Muslim Society," *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 30, no. 2 (2025): 245–68, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v30i2.11299.

of knowledge derived from both domains can be coherently justified.[6] Therefore, a more critical analysis of the epistemological assumptions and logical consistency underlying Guessoum's approach is necessary.

From the perspective of philosophy of science, the integration of Islam and science requires clear ontological and epistemological foundations in order to avoid methodological syncretism and scientific reductionism.[7] The relationship among revelation, reason, and empirical experience must be formulated systematically to produce a coherent model of knowledge. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasizes the Islamization of Knowledge through the Worldview of Islam and the concept of Adab[8], while Seyyed Hossein Nasr advocates a sacred science grounded in traditional metaphysics that reconnects scientific inquiry with spiritual and cosmological principles.[9] In contrast, Ziauddin Sardar proposes an Islamic science based on Islamic values and civilizational renewal while critically challenging the secular assumptions of modern science.[10] Although these thinkers share the view scientific knowledge should remain rooted in religious and ethical foundations, Guessoum offers a distinctive approach by preserving the methodological rigor of modern science while integrating revelation through a contextual and multilevel hermeneutical framework. Consequently, his epistemological model provides a dialogical framework that reconciles scientific rationality with the metaphysical commitments of Islam, making it highly relevant to contemporary discussions on religion and science.

Previous studies have examined Nidhal Guessoum's thought from various perspectives. Makiah analyzes Guessoum's effort to reconcile Islam and science[11], while Rofiq and Hasbi focus on his responses to contemporary scientific

[6] Laura Rediehs, "The Quaker Experiential Integration of Science and Religion," *Theology and Science* 20, no. 2 (April 2022): 138–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2022.2051247.

[7] Khairudin Aljunied, "Osman Bakar and and Epistemological Renewal in the Muslim World," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)* 27, no. 1 (June 2022): 3–7, https://doi.org/10.31436/shajarah.v27i1.1388.

[8] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 127–48; Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam an Exposition of The Fundamental Elements of The Worlview of Islam*, edisi ke-1 (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), 1–38.

[9] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 130–152.

[10] Ziauddin Sardar, *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1985), 86–103.

[11] Zulpa Makiah, "Rekonsiliasi Islam Dan Sains Dalam Perspektif Nidhal Guessoum," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 19, no. 1 (July 2021): 61, https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v19i1.4150.

Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies (JIOS)
Vol. 4, No 1 (2026): 115-137
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issues presented in Islam's Quantum Question.[12] Other studies discuss Guessoum's scientific interpretation of the Qur'an and his critique of *i'jāz 'ilmī*[13], whereas comparative research has examined his ideas alongside those of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.[14] However, these studies primarily emphasize reconciliation, scientific exegesis, or comparative analysis, leaving the epistemological foundations, methodological structure, and logical consistency of Guessoum's concept of multilevel reading insufficiently explored from the perspective of philosophy of science. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by reconstructing multilevel reading as an epistemological model of Islam–science integration.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this article aims to examine and analyze the epistemological and methodological foundations of Islam-science integration in the thought of Nidhal Guessoum.[15] The primary focus of this study is the concept of *multilevel reading* as an interpretive model connecting revelation and scientific rationality. This research employs the approaches of philosophy of science and hermeneutics to evaluate the epistemological structure, underlying assumptions, and logical consistency of Guessoum's framework. Accordingly, this article is not merely descriptive, but also analytical and evaluative. This study is expected to contribute to the development of integrative epistemology within contemporary Islamic thought.[16]

Discussion

Ontological and Epistemological Foundations of Multilevel Reading

The concept of *multilevel reading* in the thought of Nidhal Guessoum is grounded in the ontological assumption that reality consists of two

[12] Nur Rofiq and M. Zidny Nafi Hasbi, "Mendamaikan Tradisi Muslim Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan Modern," *Al-Irfan : Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies* 4, no. 2 (October 2021): 203–16, https://doi.org/10.36835/alirfan.v4i2.5003.

[13] Abdulloh Hanif, "Pembacaan Ilmiah Al-Qur'an: Kritik Nidhal Guessoum Atas Teori I'jaz," *KACA (Karunia Cahaya Allah): Jurnal Dialogis Ilmu Ushuluddin* 12, no. 2 (August 2022): 205–26, https://doi.org/10.36781/kaca.v12i2.265; Nidzom, Muhammad Faqih; Amroin, Herlina Yunita; and Ramadhan, "Nidhal Guessoum's Method of Scientific Interpretation: An Analytical Study on Al-Ayah Al-Kauniyyah and Its Relevance to the Contemporary Urban Muslim Society."

[14] Muhammad Fahmi, Achmad Khudori Soleh, and Lia Cahyati, "The Concept of Religion-Science Integration: A Comparative Study of Naquib Al-Attas and Nidhal Guessoum," *DINIKA: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (December 2024): 151–72, https://doi.org/10.22515/dinika.v9i2.8555.

[15] Guessoum, "Islam and Science: The Next Phase of Debates."

[16] Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (USA: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 122–25.

interconnected dimensions: revelation and nature.[17] Revelation is understood as the source of metaphysical and moral meaning, while nature constitutes the empirical realm accessible through scientific inquiry. Within this framework, Guessoum rejects the absolute dichotomy between religion and science that characterizes the secular modern paradigm. He argues that both originate from the same source of truth, although they are approached through different epistemological methods.[18] Consequently, the relationship between revelation and nature is viewed as coherent rather than conflictual. This perspective constitutes the ontological foundation of Islam–science integration in Guessoum's thought.[19]

Epistemologically, *multilevel reading* is constructed upon the principle that human knowledge is layered and plural rather than singular and monolithic.[20] In Guessoum's view, revelation provides metaphysical and normative orientation, whereas science offers empirical explanations of natural phenomena. These two forms of knowledge cannot be reduced to one another because they operate within distinct domains and methodologies.[21] This approach reflects a form of epistemological pluralism that nevertheless remains grounded in the principle of *tawḥīd*. Accordingly, Guessoum seeks to preserve the authority of revelation without denying the validity of modern scientific methods. His approach also represents an attempt to avoid both scientism and literalist fundamentalism in understanding the relationship between religion and science.[22]

Within the ontological framework of Islam, Guessoum perceives nature not merely as a neutral material object, but also as *āyāt kawniyyah* that reflect divine order and wisdom.[23] This perspective implies that empirical reality possesses spiritual and symbolic dimensions that transcend purely physical

[17] Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*.

[18] Nidhal Guessoum, "Issues and Agendas of Islam and Science," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 47, no. 2 (June 2012), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2012.01261.x; Jalajel and Malik, "The Role of Classical Sunnī Theology in Islam and Science: Responding to Nidhal Guessoum."

[19] Aljunied, "Osman Bakar and and Epistemological Renewal in the Muslim World."

[20] Toedien and Dewi, "Integration of Religion and Science in Nidhal Guessoum's Thought: An Epistemological Analysis and Its Implications for Islamic Education."

[21] Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*.

[22] Mohammad Muslih et al., "Al-Qur'an-Based Paradigm in Science Integration at The Al-Qur'an Science University, Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (March 2024): 3–5, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9459.

[23] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 121–24.

Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies (JIOS)
Vol. 4, No 1 (2026): 115-137
DOI: 10.21111/jios.v4i1.107

explanations. Therefore, science is understood not only as a technical instrument for mastering nature, but also as a means of comprehending divine signs manifested in creation.[24] Such an approach differs significantly from positivistic paradigms that separate empirical facts from metaphysical meaning.[25] In this regard, *multilevel reading* attempts to restore transcendence within modern scientific activity.[26] Consequently, Guessoum's epistemology aligns more closely with integrative paradigms than with purely secularistic models of knowledge.

Nevertheless, Guessoum's epistemological approach maintains a clear distinction between the domains of revelation and science.[27] He rejects the notion that the Qur'an should function as a scientific textbook containing detailed empirical knowledge. His critique of *i'jāz 'ilmī* demonstrates that revelation must not be reduced to a form of temporary scientific legitimation.[28] According to Guessoum, revelation primarily provides ethical and metaphysical guidance, while science operates within the sphere of empirical observation and evolving theoretical constructions. This position reflects a cautious epistemological attitude in relating religion to science.[29] Thus, *multilevel reading* does not advocate total harmonization, but rather a dialogical and proportionate integration between the two domains.

Methodologically, *multilevel reading* also reflects the influence of modern hermeneutics in interpreting religious texts.[30] Guessoum argues that the interpretation of revelation must consider historical, linguistic, and intellectual contexts, including developments in human knowledge. Consequently, textual meaning is not understood as static and fixed, but as open to reinterpretation in accordance with changing scientific and social circumstances.[31] This approach allows for a more adaptive epistemological flexibility in responding to

[24] Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*.

[25] M. Jamil Manilet and Farhan Afif Al Kindi, "Benturan Paradigma: Respons Terhadap Penggeseran Paradigma Islam," *Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 2024): 1–21, https://doi.org/10.21111/jios.v2i1.34.

[26] Ziauddin Sardar, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 75–78.

[27] Fahmi, Soleh, and Cahyati, "The Concept of Religion-Science Integration: A Comparative Study of Naquib Al-Attas and Nidhal Guessoum."

[28] Guessoum, "Islam and Science: The Next Phase of Debates."

[29] Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*.

[30] Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?*

[31] Ali Anhar Syi'bul Huda et al., "Hermeneutika Dalam Ilmu-Ilmu Humaniora Dan Agama: Model, Pengembangan Dan Metode Penelitian," *Al-Fahmu: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 1 (February 2025): 14–26, https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v4i1.239.

contemporary scientific developments. However, such flexibility simultaneously raises important questions concerning the limits of interpretation and the possibility of epistemological relativism. Therefore, Guessoum's approach requires a more systematic methodological framework in order to maintain philosophical coherence and epistemic consistency.[32]

Overall, the ontological and epistemological foundations of *multilevel reading* demonstrate Guessoum's attempt to construct an integrative paradigm that maintains a balance between revelation and scientific rationality.[33] This approach rejects the notion of an absolute conflict between religion and science, while also avoiding a simplistic fusion of the two. From the perspective of philosophy of science, *multilevel reading* may be understood as a dialogical and coherent model of integrative epistemology.[34] Nevertheless, the approach continues to face challenges concerning methodological consistency and the limits of hermeneutical interpretation. For this reason, critical analysis of Guessoum's epistemological structure remains necessary in assessing the validity and sustainability of his model of integration.[35] Thus, *multilevel reading* constitutes an important contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic epistemology.

Hermeneutical Method and Scientific Rationality in Multilevel Reading

The concept of *multilevel reading* in the thought of Nidhal Guessoum originates from the awareness that revelation cannot be understood solely through a literalistic approach.[36] Guessoum argues that the Qur'an contains multiple layers of meaning that enable dialogue with the development of modern science without losing its spiritual and normative dimensions.[37] In this context, hermeneutics functions as a methodological instrument that bridges text, historical context, and contemporary scientific reality. Such an approach

[32] Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*.

[33] Osman Bakar, "The Qur'anic Identity of the Muslim Ummah: Tawhidic Epistemology as Its Foundation and Sustainer," *ICR Journal* 3, no. 3 (April 2012): 438–54, https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v3i3.531.

[34] Mohammad Muslih, "Pemikiran Islam Kontemporer, Antara Mode Pemikiran Dan Model Pembacaan," *TSAQAFAH* 8, no. 2 (November 2012): 347, https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v8i2.28.

[35] Toedien and Dewi, "Integration of Religion and Science in Nidhal Guessoum's Thought: An Epistemological Analysis and Its Implications for Islamic Education."

[36] Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*.

[37] Toedien and Dewi, "Integration of Religion and Science in Nidhal Guessoum's Thought: An Epistemological Analysis and Its Implications for Islamic Education."

Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies (JIOS)
Vol. 4, No 1 (2026): 115-137
DOI: 10.21111/jios.v4i1.107

demonstrates that the interpretation of revelation remains dynamic and open to the expansion of human knowledge. Consequently, *multilevel reading* is not merely a method of exegesis, but also an integrative epistemological framework connecting religion and science.[38]

Methodologically, *multilevel reading* rejects the claim that the Qur'an is a scientific textbook containing all modern scientific theories in a literal sense.[39] Nidhal Guessoum criticizes the approach of *i'jāz 'ilmī* because it tends to impose scientific legitimacy upon revelation. According to him, such an approach risks producing apologetic interpretations that are vulnerable to shifts in scientific paradigms. Instead, Guessoum emphasizes the distinction between the metaphysical message of revelation and human scientific interpretations, which remain tentative and revisable.[40] Accordingly, the relationship between revelation and science is established through epistemological correspondence rather than literal identification. This perspective reflects a more critical and reflective hermeneutical orientation.[41]

Within the framework of hermeneutics, *multilevel reading* shares similarities with contextual approaches developed in contemporary Islamic thought.[42] This approach places revelation in dialogue with evolving social, historical, and scientific realities. Therefore, the interpretation of cosmological verses is not intended to prove modern scientific theories, but rather to construct a horizon of meaning compatible with the development of human knowledge.[43] Such an approach indicates that revelation and science operate on different epistemological levels while remaining complementary. In this perspective, revelation provides metaphysical and ethical orientation, whereas science

[38] Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?*

[39] Nidhal Guessoum, "The Qur'an, Science, and the (Related) Contemporary Muslim Discourse," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 43, no. 2 (June 2008), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2008.00925.x.

[40] Ahmed Malik, *Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm*.

[41] Balázs M Mezei, "The Sovereignty of Revelation: On Paul Ricœur's Hermeneutics of Revelation," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 51, no. 3 (September 2022): 314–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/00084298211044814.

[42] Alina Isac Alak, "The Islamic Humanist Hermeneutics: Definition, Characteristics, and Relevance," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 34, no. 4 (October 2023): 313–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2023.2282842.

[43] Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First* (London: Routledge, 2020), 95–99, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429274114.

explains the empirical mechanisms of nature.[44] Thus, Guessoum's hermeneutics can be characterized as integrative while avoiding reductionism.

The relationship between hermeneutics and scientific rationality in *multilevel reading* demonstrates Guessoum's attempt to preserve the legitimacy of modern scientific methodology without neglecting the spiritual dimension of religion.[45] In this regard, he accepts fundamental scientific principles such as observation, verification, and falsification within the empirical domain. At the same time, however, he rejects scientistic reductionism that limits reality exclusively to material phenomena.[46] This approach reveals a differentiation of epistemological domains between revelation and science. Science is understood as an instrument for explaining the mechanisms of nature, while revelation provides ontological and ethical meaning to reality.[47] Consequently, integration is constructed through a dialogical rather than subordinative relationship.

Nevertheless, the approach of *multilevel reading* also faces several epistemological criticisms. The excessive flexibility of interpretation may lead to relativism of meaning and ambiguity concerning methodological boundaries between text and interpretation.[48] Some critics argue that Guessoum's approach is overly accommodating toward modern scientific paradigms, thereby risking the weakening of the normative authority of revelation. Furthermore, the separation of domains between religion and science in certain aspects suggests an epistemological distinction that is not entirely integrative.[49] These criticisms indicate that Islam–science integration requires a more systematic methodological foundation. Therefore, a critical evaluation of the hermeneutical

[44] Ahmad Zainor Rozikin and Ihwan Amalih, "Integrasi Agama Dan Sains Perspektif Teori Quantum Nidhal Guessoum," *Multiverse: Open Multidisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 3 (December 2023): 454–64, https://doi.org/10.57251/multiverse.v2i3.1330.

[45] Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge, 2002), 33–38.

[46] Guessoum, "Islam and Science: The Next Phase of Debates."

[47] Dragos Sanda, Luana Smarandoiu, and Costea Munteanu, "The Dialogue between Science and Religion: A Taxonomic Contribution," *Religions* 8, no. 3 (March 2017): 35, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8030035; Husein Aziz, "Epistemology of the Integration of Religion and Science Qur'anic Perspective," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 33, no. 2 (August 2022): 239–64, https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v33i2.2833.

[48] Rüdiger Lohlker and Margareta Wetchy, "Colliding Epistemologies: Reflections on Nidhal Guessoum," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 7, no. 2 (December 2021): 426–46, https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10024; Jalajel and Malik, "The Role of Classical Sunnī Theology in Islam and Science: Responding to Nidhal Guessoum."

[49] Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*.

Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies (JIOS)
Vol. 4, No 1 (2026): 115-137
DOI: 10.21111/jios.v4i1.107

consistency of Guessoum's framework becomes highly important within the context of philosophy of science. [50]

Overall, *multilevel reading* can be understood as an attempt to construct an integrative hermeneutical model connecting revelation and scientific rationality within the framework of contemporary Islamic epistemology.[51] This approach contributes significantly to shifting the discourse of Islam–science integration from apologetic tendencies toward a more critical and reflective epistemological dialogue. Moreover, Guessoum's approach opens new possibilities for the development of contextual interpretive methodologies responsive to modern scientific advancements.[52] Nevertheless, the success of this framework ultimately depends upon its ability to maintain a balance between interpretive flexibility and methodological consistency. Accordingly, *multilevel reading* remains one of the most significant models of integration within contemporary Islamic philosophy of science.[53]

Guessoum's concept of multilevel reading offers an integrative hermeneutical framework that positions revelation and science as complementary yet epistemologically distinct sources of knowledge. By emphasizing contextual interpretation while avoiding both scientific reductionism and scriptural literalism, this approach provides a balanced foundation for contemporary Islam–science integration.

Logical Consistency and Epistemological Critique of *Multilevel Reading*

The concept of *multilevel reading* developed by Nidhal Guessoum fundamentally represents an epistemological effort to avoid conflict between revelation and modern science.[54] Guessoum argues that the Qur'anic text contains multiple layers of meaning that cannot always be reduced to literal scientific explanations. Therefore, cosmological and naturalistic verses should be understood contextually and remain open to scientific developments.[55]

[50] Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*.

[51] Muslih et al., "Al-Qur'an-Based Paradigm in Science Integration at The Al-Qur'an Science University, Indonesia."

[52] Sardar, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures*.

[53] Zainal Abidin Bagir, "Practice and the Agenda of 'Islam and Science,'" *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 47, no. 2 (June 2012): 345–60, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2012.01260.x.

[54] Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*.

[55] Toedien and Dewi, "Integration of Religion and Science in Nidhal Guessoum's Thought: An Epistemological Analysis and Its Implications for Islamic Education."

Epistemologically, this approach reflects a dialogical orientation that attempts to preserve the validity of revelation without rejecting modern scientific methodology. However, the approach also raises philosophical questions regarding the limits of interpretation and the distribution of epistemic authority between scripture and science. This issue becomes the starting point for critiques concerning the logical consistency of *multilevel reading*.[56]

Logically, *multilevel reading* seeks to establish coherence between two sources of knowledge that possess different epistemological characteristics, namely revelation and empirical science.[57] Revelation in the Islamic tradition is regarded as absolute and transcendent, whereas modern science is tentative and falsifiable. In this context, Guessoum attempts to avoid subordinating one domain to the other by distinguishing various levels of meaning within religious texts.[58] Nevertheless, this approach does not fully resolve the epistemological problem concerning the criteria of truth applied when tensions arise between scriptural interpretation and scientific findings. Such criticism indicates that Guessoum's hermeneutical flexibility may lead to interpretive relativism if not constrained by a rigorous methodology.[59]

The epistemological critique of *multilevel reading* is also related to the problem of demarcation between theological exegesis and scientific interpretation. In several instances, Guessoum appears to provide considerable space for modern science in determining possible meanings of scripture.[60] This raises questions concerning the status of revelation as an independent source of knowledge. If textual interpretation becomes excessively dependent on changing scientific paradigms, the epistemological stability of revelation risks being reduced to merely symbolic legitimation.[61] On the other hand, Guessoum firmly

[56] Ephraim Radner, "'I Contain Multitudes': The Divine Basis for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 31, no. 2 (May 2022): 142–59, https://doi.org/10.1177/10638512221084579.

[57] Arpad Szakolczai, "An Epistemology of Revelation," *Religions* 15, no. 9 (September 2024): 1126, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091126.

[58] Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?*

[59] Ahmed Malik, *Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm*.

[60] Rozikin and Amalih, "Integrasi Agama Dan Sains Perspektif Teori Quantum Nidhal Guessoum."

[61] Fitrotun Taftazani, M. Fafiyadi ;Nafi'ah, "Pendekatan Modernis Terhadap Al-Qur'an: Antara Inovasi Metodologis Dan Problem Epistemologis," *Iqtishaduna: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Hukum Ekonomi Syari'ah* 7, no. 2 (2025): 1882–1900, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24252/iqtishaduna.v7i2.64267.

Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies (JIOS)
Vol. 4, No 1 (2026): 115-137
DOI: 10.21111/jios.v4i1.107

rejects scientism and insists that science cannot reach the metaphysical dimensions of religion. This ambivalence demonstrates an internal tension within the epistemological structure of *multilevel reading*.[62]

From the perspective of philosophy of science, Guessoum's approach may be understood as a form of integrative epistemology that seeks to combine scientific rationality with religious hermeneutics.[63] This approach possesses significant strengths because it opens a space for dialogue between the Islamic intellectual tradition and modern science without falling into the classical conflict paradigm. Moreover, *multilevel reading* offers an alternative to *i'jāz 'ilmī* approaches that tend to be apologetic and pseudo-scientific.[64] Nevertheless, the main problem of this framework lies in the absence of a truly operational methodology capable of determining the limits of interpretation. As a result, the approach risks producing excessively elastic interpretations that are difficult to verify epistemologically. This criticism is essential in evaluating Guessoum's integrative model within the framework of philosophy of science.[65]

The logical consistency of *multilevel reading* may also be analyzed through its relationship to theories of truth in Islamic epistemology.[66] In certain respects, Guessoum appears to employ a coherence approach by adjusting scriptural interpretation to scientific developments. At the same time, however, he maintains elements of correspondence theory by affirming empirical reality as the basis for scientific validation.[67] This duality reflects an attempt at epistemological synthesis, yet it also generates methodological problems concerning the hierarchy of sources of knowledge. The issue becomes even more complex when scientific theories emerge that contradict previous

[62] Nidzom, Muhammad Faqih; Amroin, Herlina Yunita; and Ramadhan, "Nidhal Guessoum's Method of Scientific Interpretation: An Analytical Study on Al-Ayah Al-Kauniyyah and Its Relevance to the Contemporary Urban Muslim Society."

[63] Guessoum, "Islam and Science: The Next Phase of Debates."

[64] Stefano Bigliardi, "The Contemporary Debate on the Harmony between Islam and Science: Emergence and Challenges of a New Generation," *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (April 2014): 167–86, https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2013.782583.

[65] Muslih et al., "Al-Qur'an-Based Paradigm in Science Integration at The Al-Qur'an Science University, Indonesia."

[66] Mohammad Muslih, *Filsafat Ilmu: Kajian Atas Asumsi Dasar, Paradigma, Dan Kerangka Teori Ilmu Pengetahuan* (Yogyakarta: Lesfi, 2021), 88–92.

[67] Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*.

interpretations.[68] Therefore, *multilevel reading* requires a more stable methodological foundation in order to avoid falling into epistemic relativism.

Nevertheless, Guessoum's approach continues to make an important contribution to the development of contemporary integrative epistemology between Islam and science.[69] *Multilevel reading* successfully demonstrates that the relationship between revelation and science does not need to be understood in dichotomous or conflictual terms. Rather, it opens the possibility for a more flexible and contextual epistemological dialogue in understanding reality.[70] However, in order to evolve into a more robust paradigm of integration, this approach must be complemented by a more systematic hermeneutical and epistemological methodology. In this sense, the integration of Islam and science should move beyond conceptual harmonization toward a model of knowledge possessing both philosophical and operational validity.[71] Therefore, epistemological critiques of Guessoum should be viewed not as a rejection, but as an essential step toward refining integrative paradigms in the future.

Multilevel Reading within the Paradigm of Integrative Epistemology of Islam and Science

The concept of *multilevel reading* in the thought of Nidhal Guessoum may be understood as an attempt to construct an integrative epistemology that brings together revelation, reason, and modern science within a dialogical framework.[72] This approach is based on the assumption that revealed texts and natural reality originate from the same ontological source; therefore, they cannot exist in absolute conflict.[73] Consequently, conflicts between religion and science are viewed as problems of human interpretation, which are historically conditioned and inherently limited. In this context, *multilevel reading* functions as a method

[68] Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*.

[69] John Hedley Brooke, "Reconciling Religious Tradition and Modern Science," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 47, no. 2 (June 2012): 243–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2012.01257.x.

[70] Hugo Viciana et al., "Scientifically Together, Politically Apart?," *Science & Education* 34, no. 5 (October 2025): 3615–38, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-024-00587-z.

[71] Diah Ayu Rahmani, Via Novelia Najmi, and Eva Dewi, "Reconstructing Islamic Epistemology: A Philosophical Analysis of Amin Abdullah's Integrative–Interconnected Paradigm," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Al-Thariqah* 11, no. 1 (May 2026): 169–82, https://doi.org/10.25299/althariqah.2026.vol11(1).27798.

[72] Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*.

[73] Toedien and Dewi, "Integration of Religion and Science in Nidhal Guessoum's Thought: An Epistemological Analysis and Its Implications for Islamic Education."

Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies (JIOS)
Vol. 4, No 1 (2026): 115-137
DOI: 10.21111/jios.v4i1.107

for interpreting religious texts in layered and contextual ways in accordance with scientific developments.[74] Such an approach renders Islam–science integration dynamic and open to epistemological revision.

Within the landscape of contemporary Islamic epistemology, Guessoum's approach occupies a moderate position between the paradigm of Islamization of knowledge and secular-scientific approaches.[75] While Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasizes the Islamization of knowledge through the purification of secular Western concepts, Guessoum prefers a dialogical approach that preserves the methodological structure of modern science.[76] Likewise, unlike Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who stresses traditional metaphysics as the foundation of Islamic science, Guessoum tends to accept the basic structure of modern science insofar as it does not contradict Islamic theological principles. Thus, *multilevel reading* emerges as a more flexible and adaptive model of integration in relation to contemporary scientific developments.[77] This demonstrates an epistemological orientation that is more pragmatic and hermeneutical.

Epistemologically, *multilevel reading* is grounded in the assumption that human knowledge is layered and interpretive in nature. Revelation is regarded as an absolute source of truth, whereas human understanding of revelation is always shaped by historical contexts and the development of scientific knowledge.[78] Therefore, Guessoum rejects literalistic approaches that consider particular interpretations to be final and immutable. Within this framework, modern science is viewed as an important instrument for understanding empirical reality, though not the sole source of truth.[79] This position reflects an attempt to establish a coherent relationship between religious epistemology and scientific epistemology without negating either one. At the same time, it demonstrates the influence of modern hermeneutics on Guessoum's thought.[80]

From the perspective of philosophy of science, Guessoum's approach may be understood as a form of integrative epistemology seeking to avoid both

[74] Ahmed Malik, *Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm*.

[75] Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*.

[76] Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*.

[77] Osman Bakar, "The Philosophical Foundations of Islamic Science," *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 13, no. 1 (2022): 22–27, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v13i1.915.

[78] Guessoum, "Islam and Science: The Next Phase of Debates."

[79] Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?*

[80] Rozikin and Amalih, "Integrasi Agama Dan Sains Perspektif Teori Quantum Nidhal Guessoum."

scientific reductionism and theological dogmatism.[81] He does not regard science as a threat to religion, nor does he treat religion as a simplistic tool for scientific legitimation. Guessoum's critique of *i'jāz 'ilmī* demonstrates his rejection of apologetic attempts to use science as proof of the Qur'an's truth.[82] Instead, he emphasizes the importance of scientific methodology that remains rational and open to revision. In this regard, *multilevel reading* functions as an epistemological strategy for maintaining balance between religious conviction and scientific objectivity.[83] Such an approach reveals a more critical and reflective model of integration.

Nevertheless, Guessoum's approach is not free from epistemological criticism. The flexibility of interpretation within *multilevel reading* may lead to hermeneutical relativism if not accompanied by clear methodological boundaries.[84] Furthermore, the acceptance of the fundamental structure of modern science raises questions regarding the extent to which secular paradigms can be integrated into Islamic epistemology.[85] Some scholars argue that Guessoum's approach remains overly accommodative toward scientific modernity. Yet, precisely at this point lies the significance of his thought: the courage to establish a critical dialogue between Islamic tradition and contemporary science without falling into epistemological romanticism.[86] Consequently, *multilevel reading* remains one of the most relevant models of integration in the modern context.

Overall, *multilevel reading* in the thought of Nidhal Guessoum may be positioned as a model of integrative epistemology that seeks to reconcile Islamic tradition with modern scientific rationality through hermeneutical and philosophical approaches.[87] This framework not only offers a method for interpreting religious texts, but also establishes a methodological foundation for dialogue between religion and science. Within contemporary Islamic

[81] Mudzaffar Iqbal, *Islam and Science* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 19–25.

[82] Guessoum, "The Qur'an, Science, and the (Related) Contemporary Muslim Discourse."

[83] Syarip Syarip, Zuhdiyah Zuhdiyah, and Maryamah Maryamah, "Epistemological Foundations of Science and Technology in Islam: A Literature Review," *Academia Open* 11, no. 1 (January 2026): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13128.

[84] Toedien and Dewi, "Integration of Religion and Science in Nidhal Guessoum's Thought: An Epistemological Analysis and Its Implications for Islamic Education."

[85] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 71–76.

[86] Sardar, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures*.

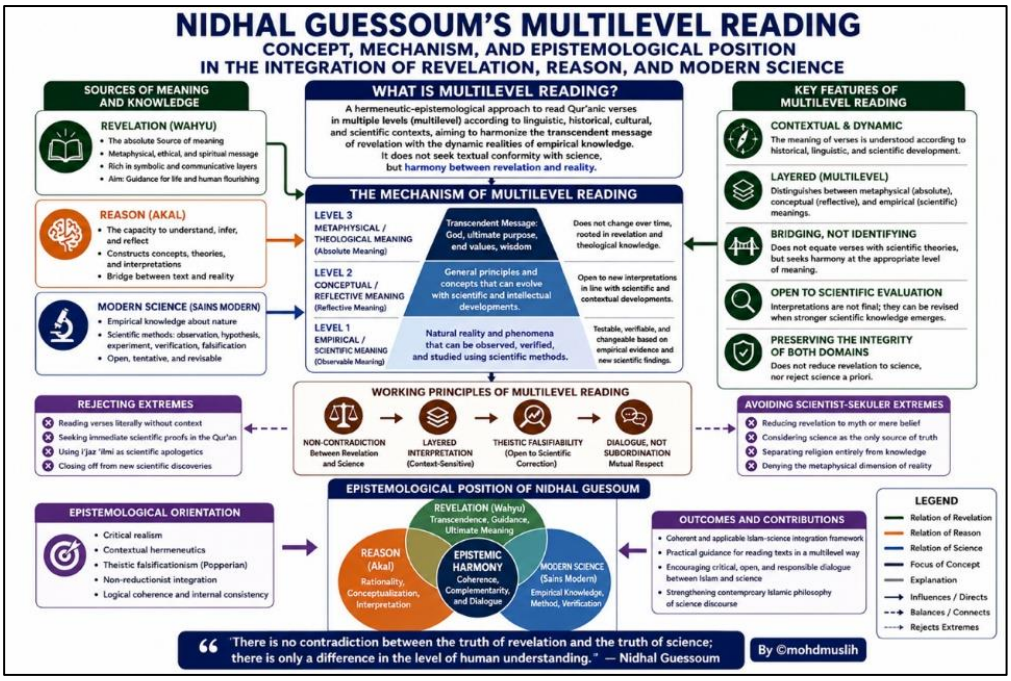
[87] Muslih et al., "Al-Qur'an-Based Paradigm in Science Integration at The Al-Qur'an Science University, Indonesia."

Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies (JIOS)
Vol. 4, No 1 (2026): 115-137
DOI: 10.21111/jios.v4i1.107

epistemology, Guessoum's thought signifies a shift from apologetic paradigms toward critical-dialogical paradigms. As such, Islam–science integration is no longer understood merely as symbolic harmonization, but as a dynamic and open epistemological process.[88] Therefore, Guessoum's thought makes an important contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic philosophy of science.

In this context, Nidhal Guessoum's *multilevel reading* may be understood as an epistemological framework that seeks to harmonize revelation, reason, and modern science without reducing one domain to another. Its significance lies in its ability to construct a dialogical and contextual model of Islam–science integration that remains open to scientific development while preserving the metaphysical authority of revelation. Through this approach, Guessoum positions Islamic epistemology within a critical and non-reductionist paradigm capable of responding to contemporary intellectual challenges. Consequently, *multilevel reading* represents not merely a hermeneutical method, but also a philosophical project aimed at reconstructing integrative epistemology in contemporary Islamic thought.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Nidhal Guessoum's Multilevel Reading



[88] Guessoum, "Issues and Agendas of Islam and Science"; Guessoum, "Islam and Science: The Next Phase of Debates."

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of Nidhal Guessoum's multilevel reading as an integrative model for relating revelation, reason, and modern science. The framework identifies three primary sources of knowledge—revelation, reason, and modern science—each possessing a distinct epistemological function while remaining complementary. Revelation provides metaphysical, ethical, and spiritual guidance; reason serves as the instrument of critical analysis and interpretation; and modern science explains natural phenomena through empirical observation and scientific methodology.

The model is structured around three levels of interpretation: the empirical, conceptual, and metaphysical levels. The empirical level concerns observable natural phenomena that can be investigated through scientific methods. The conceptual level emphasizes the interpretation of general principles that remain open to refinement in light of scientific developments. The metaphysical level focuses on the enduring theological and spiritual meanings of revelation, which transcend empirical verification.

The figure further demonstrates that the relationship between religion and science is established through the principles of non-contradiction, layered interpretation, theistic falsifiability, and constructive dialogue between revelation, reason, and scientific inquiry. Rather than seeking scientific validation for Qur'anic verses, Guessoum's framework emphasizes the distinction between the epistemological domains of revelation and science while maintaining their complementary relationship. Accordingly, multilevel reading may be understood as an integrative hermeneutical framework that promotes a dialogical engagement between revelation and modern science without reducing either domain to the other.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Nidhal Guessoum's concept of *multilevel reading* represents an important epistemological model for Islam-science integration in contemporary Islamic thought. Through this approach, Guessoum attempts to reconcile revelation and scientific rationality without reducing one into the other. His framework rejects both scientism and literalist interpretations by emphasizing contextual and layered readings of religious texts. In this perspective, the Qur'an is not treated as a scientific textbook, but as a source of metaphysical and ethical guidance that remains compatible with scientific inquiry. Consequently, *multilevel reading* functions as a mediating

Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies (JIOS)
Vol. 4, No 1 (2026): 115-137
DOI: 10.21111/jios.v4i1.107

epistemological framework between religion and modern science. This makes Guessoum's approach highly relevant within current debates on science and religion.

From an epistemological and methodological perspective, Guessoum's model possesses significant strengths, particularly in its openness toward scientific methodology and contextual hermeneutics. The integration he proposes allows dialogue between empirical knowledge and religious understanding in a more dynamic and non-conflictual manner. Nevertheless, this study also finds several limitations within the framework. The flexibility of interpretation may lead to ambiguity and potential epistemological relativism if not supported by clearer methodological boundaries. In addition, the distinction between scientific and theological domains sometimes appears overly accommodative toward modern scientific paradigms. Therefore, the consistency and methodological rigor of *multilevel reading* still require further philosophical refinement.

Ultimately, this study argues that *multilevel reading* should not merely be understood as a hermeneutical technique, but as an evolving epistemological project within the broader discourse of Islam-science integration. Its significance lies in its attempt to formulate a more coherent relationship between revelation, reason, and empirical reality in the modern age. Although the model remains open to criticism, it offers a constructive alternative to polarizing approaches that separate or absolutize religion and science. Accordingly, Guessoum's thought contributes to the development of a more dialogical, critical, and context-sensitive paradigm of Islamic epistemology. Future studies may further explore the operational application of this model in scientific research, Islamic education, and interdisciplinary knowledge production.

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