

Question Bank

DNA
Evidence:
Endogenous
Retroviruses



Watch the video: “**DNA Evidence That Humans and Chimps Share A Common Ancestor: Endogenous Retroviruses,**” Stated Clearly, 5 April 2021.

Q: How do we explain that about 95–98 percent of genetic information is the same/shared between us human beings and chimpanzees, as seen in the video “DNA Evidence That Humans and Chimps Share A Common Ancestor: Endogenous Retroviruses,” in a way that does not conflict with Islamic teachings?

A: This answer will depend on whether you prefer Human or Adamic exceptionalism.

Adamic Exceptionalism and Genetic Similarities with Chimpanzees

The concept of Adamic Exceptionalism allows for a reconciliation between the scientific observation of genetic similarities and Islamic teachings. This perspective acknowledges the special, non-evolutionary creation of Adam (pbuh) (and Ḥawwā’ (pbuh)) by God, which is distinct from the creation of other beings. This unique creation event sets Adam (pbuh) apart from the evolutionary processes that might apply to other forms of life, including the hominins that were present on Earth before or at the time of Adam’s (pbuh) creation. According to Adamic Exceptionalism, the genetic similarities between humans and chimpanzees can be understood in the following ways:

Shared Design Principles: The genetic similarities reflect shared design principles employed by the Creator in various forms of life. Different creations might share certain physical laws or materials, but they might also share genetic sequences that serve similar biological functions.

Historical Interbreeding: The concept allows for the possibility that descendants of Adam (pbuh) could have interbred with other hominins. This interbreeding could have incorporated genetic material from these hominins into the human gene pool, thereby accounting for the genetic similarities observed between humans and other primates.

■ **Divine Wisdom:** The genetic similarities might be seen as part of the divine wisdom in creation, serving purposes that we may not fully understand. This perspective does not diminish the unique status of Adam (pbuh) and his direct creation by God but rather highlights the complexity and interconnectedness of God's creation.

■ **Non-Evolutionary Creation of Adam (pbuh):** The unique creation of Adam (pbuh), as described in Islamic texts, suggests that the essential qualities that define human exceptionalism—such as spiritual, moral, and intellectual capacities—are not the products of evolutionary processes but are instead directly bestowed by God. This allows for a distinction between the physical body, which may share genetic material with other species, and the non-physical aspects of humanity, such as the soul, which are unique to humans.

Human Exceptionalism and Genetic Similarities with Chimpanzees

Under the premise of Human Exceptionalism, the genetic similarities between humans and chimpanzees might be interpreted through several lenses that do not conflict with the concept's core beliefs:

■ **Convergent Design:** The similarities in genetic information could be seen as a result of a convergent design by the Creator, where similar genetic sequences serve similar biological functions across different species. This concept implies that the Creator used a common design for various life forms, resulting in genetic similarities, without implying a direct evolutionary lineage.

■ **Functional Necessity:** The genetic similarities could also be understood as a reflection of the functional necessities of living organisms. Certain genes and genetic sequences may be fundamental to basic biological functions, such as cellular processes, metabolism, and reproduction, leading to similarities across species without implying evolutionary descent.

■ **Distinctive Creation with Shared Elements:** In line with Human Exceptionalism, humans could be viewed as a distinct creation that, while sharing some material and biological elements with other creatures (as part of a unified design of life), are set apart by non-material qualities (such as the soul, moral reasoning, and intellectual capabilities) that are not reflected in genetic material and are not a product of evolutionary processes.

Limitations of Scientific Interpretation: Proponents of Human Exceptionalism might argue that the interpretation of genetic similarities is limited by the current understanding of science, which is always subject to revision and refinement. They may contend that scientific findings do not encompass the entirety of human existence and do not account for the non-physical aspects that confer human uniqueness.

Conclusion:

The interpretation of the genetic similarities between humans and chimpanzees is deeply influenced by one's inclination toward Adamic Exceptionalism, which harmonizes these similarities with the divine narrative of human creation, or Human Exceptionalism, which emphasizes the transcendent qualities of humans beyond their biological make-up. Adamic Exceptionalism offers a theological lens, integrating scientific discoveries with the belief in special creation, thus maintaining the unique status of humans within Islamic thought without disregarding scientific evidence. On the other hand, Human Exceptionalism underscores the non-material aspects of humanity, such as spirituality and morality, viewing genetic similarities as mere reflections of shared biological functions rather than indications of common ancestry. This nuanced juxtaposition invites students to reflect on the complex relationship between faith and science, encouraging personal exploration of how these perspectives resonate with their understanding of human uniqueness and the broader existential questions about our place in the natural world. Ultimately, the choice between these perspectives is left to the reader, inviting a personal reflection on the interplay between faith, science, and the profound questions about what it means to be human. Each framework offers a possible pathway for integrating scientific knowledge with religious beliefs, highlighting the diverse ways humanity can understand its place in the vast tapestry of life.

*This text (and the course) aims at increasing learner's reasoning capacities using an epistemic framework. Hence, it does not map out which stance is the authors' preferred view. The matter remains subject to vigorous scholarly debate at the time of this book's writing.