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Research Article

Science And Religion: Quest For The Human Welfare

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Abstract. August Comte in the 19th century, James Frazer and Sigmund Freud in the 20th century declared earnestly that religion will be superseded by science. Science according to them would explain everything that humanity would be confronted with in the future including purpose of life and the working of the universe. The global resurgence of religious movements since the 1970s, however surprised many such Euro-Western intellectuals who had assumed that the process of secularization, based on 19th and the 20th centuries positivistic ideas of progress and modernization, was universal, unidirectional, and inevitable. In their view all societies were moving relentlessly to increasingly secular conditions in which religious institutions would be progressively marginalized and their hold on society would diminish. The great Islamic Revolution of Iran (1979), the conversion of great number of non-Muslims to Islam since the momentous September 11, 2001 event and the proliferation of New Spiritualities the world over (21st century) astonished the scientists and secularists who could see religion dominating the human affairs defying all claims of science and 'Enlightenment' rationality. The renaissance of religion made many a men of intelligence to revisit the essence of religion. Like the scientists, Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle in the past, they began to see their work as the part of religious enterprise devoted to the understanding of God's creation. In the paper my objectives would be aiming at identifying the prominent themes where science finds religion as complimentary and partner in furthering the cause of human welfare. The areas where religion (especially Islam), and

science stand neutral towards one another may also be analysed. The research is primarily a library research analyzing narratives and arguments from selected religious and secular/scientific works.

Keywords: Nature, Scripture, Religion, Science, Reason, Revelation

INTRODUCTION

A human being unlike other living creatures constantly seeks answers about his existence, the relationship, and his position in the grand universe. The distinctive intelligence and the inferring ability that human beings possess make them to unravel the mysteries of the nature.

However, owing to the complex nature of the universe as a whole, man falls short of arriving at the final answer of knowing the mechanism of the world and the purpose of his own existence. Nonetheless man hardly ceases intellectual efforts, he is as curious as ever to discover the cause and purpose of the phenomena around him. The entire human history bears witness to the fact that man has used all the resources to find out the complexities of life and the nature surrounding him.

The sense perception, observation, experiments and religious teachings all have been employed by man to understand the phenomena of nature surrounding him. The motto of Muslim scholars at the House of Wisdom in Baghdad during the 9th-15th centuries stood as: "Whoever doesn't know astronomy and anatomy is deficient in the Knowledge of God."¹ Pioneers of early modern science as Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle saw their work as a part of religious enterprise devoted to understand God's creation. Earlier Galileo had expressed that if the Bible talks about how to go to heaven, science may teach us how the heavens go. Thus men of intellect have resorted to both Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture in understanding the creation.

However it was at a certain point of human history that the realm of religion was abandoned, and the entire reliance was based on the sense perception and the direct observation of the natural phenomena. Logical positivism or scientific empiricism became a regular movement in the second quarter of the 20th century. Anything that defied the test of verification or direct confirmation was seen as fictitious. The movement generated a response from the religionists who persisted to secure the role of religion in understanding the functioning of nature and the human life. While science claimed to know every necessary detail of the creation and functioning of the nature, independent of religion, religionists felt unsatisfied with some of such claims. Religionists could in no way accept the philosophy of science in certain matters of human life. The resulting gulf between religion and science made men from both the parties to revisit their positions. Some intellectuals from both the groups sought to create harmony/compatibility between science and religion. Some remained adamant in scoring over the other, while few saw the domains of science and religion separate but not antagonistic.

¹ Dixon, Thomas, *Religion and Science: A very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.16

In the upcoming pages we will be looking for all instances in the contemporary times. The seemingly tug of war between science and religion in our times may be a struggle to ascertain: Which is the true representative of human welfare? Science or Religion!

METHODOLOGY

The paper employs historical, descriptive, conceptual, and analytical methods. The primary, secondary and tertiary including online sources are consulted in the paper. The research carried out in the paper is essentially a library research drawing insights and making assessments of the selected works written on religion and science.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religion is often thought to be at odds with science where each attempts to outclass the other. The rivalry or contempt towards each other was fuelled after the Renaissance and Enlightenment Periods in Europe. One section of the population including the religious strata protested against the scientific interference in metaphysical and ethical realms of religion. Likewise scientists were disgusted with the religious commentary on the working of universe and the natural phenomena. Though much of the rivalry was /is based on illiteracy of each other's disciplines, at times it becomes one of ego and prejudice. In such scenario it becomes necessary to approach the two within proper perspective.

Harmony between Religion and Science

We must remember that the pioneers of the modern science like Newton, Boyle, and Descartes never intended to undermine the religious belief. In fact they envisaged nature as an orderly system of mechanical interactions governed by mathematical laws. They hoped that people would see in this the new vision of the strongest possible evidence of divine power and intelligence.

The goal of a constructive and collaborative dialogue between science and religion has been endorsed by many Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the modern world. The idea that scientific and religious views are inevitably in tension is also contradicted by the large number of religious scientists who continue to see their research as a complement rather than a challenge to their faith, including the theoretical physicist John Polkinghorne, former director of the Human Genome Project Francis S. Collins, astronomer Owen Gingerich to name a few.² In the contemporary times the efforts to develop a harmonious and complimentary relationship between science and religion is not overlooked.

Academic work by scientists and theologians seeking to develop a harmonious inter-disciplinary dialogue has been supported by a range of institutions, including the Roman Catholic Church, through the work of the Vatican Observatory, and also the John Templeton Foundation in America- a philanthropic organisation particularly committed to supporting research that harmonizes science with religion...The John Templeton Foundation spends millions of dollars on research grants every year,

² Ibid, pp.2-3

including an annual Templeton Prize currently valued as about 1.5 million dollar, given to an individual for 'Progress Toward Research or Discoveries about spiritual Realities.' Former winners have included Christian evangelists, leading figures from non-Christian faiths, and also many individuals who have been prominent in the academic dialogue between science and religion, such as Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, Paul Davies, and George Ellis. Like many of those who have contributed to the creation of science and religion as an academic subject, all of the figures just named fall into the category of religiously committed professional scientists (and in some cases ordained ministers). There are also many historians, philosophers, and theologians who have contributed significantly to the field. It is a topic that even attracts impassioned contributions from scientific atheists, such as Oxford University's Professor for the Public Understanding of Science, Richard Dawkins.³ One may remember the work of famous French surgeon- Dr. Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, The Qur'an and Science*. He emphatically declared that the Qur'an can best be understood in the light of the modern scientific knowledge. He says, "It was in a totally objective spirit, and without any preconceived ideas that I first examined the Qur'anic Revelation. I was looking for the degree of compatibility between the Qur'anic text and the data of modern science. I knew from translations that the Quran often made allusion to all sorts of natural phenomena, but I had a summary knowledge of it. It was only when I examined the text very closely in Arabic that I kept a list of them at the end of which I had to acknowledge the evidence in front of me: the Qur'an didn't contain a single statement that was assailable from a modern scientific point of view."⁴ Francis S. Collins, the former director of the Human Genome Project, whose mention we made above believes that religion and science are compatible and the current conflict over evolution vs. faith, particularly in the evangelical community, is unnecessary. Collins, an evangelical Christian, talks about his path from atheism to Christianity and his belief that science provides evidence of God. He cites the Big Bang theory and the fact that the universe had a beginning out of nothing. He adds that the laws of physics have precisely the values needed for life to occur on earth and argues that would seem to point to a creator.⁵ The laws of nature that secular scientists put forward as an explanation of the functioning of natural world is interpreted by some religionists as compatible with the principles set by none other than God Himself. The view can be put as: If we admit that the source of the laws of nature that govern everything from the stars and planets to the biological aspects of human life, is the revelation which is received by everything from the universal consciousness, we have less difficulty in accepting the parallel belief that, for the psychological part of man too, laws must stem from that external consciousness. In other words the course of celestial and the earthly bodies is governed by God. Islam attempts to synthesize reason and revelation, knowledge and values, in its approach to the study of nature. Knowledge acquired through rational

³ Ibid, pp.14-15

⁴ Bucaille, Maurice *The Qur'an, The Bible and Science*, (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2015), P.20

⁵ Pew Research Centre, "Religion and Public Life" (2009), "Religion and Science: Conflict or Harmony", 2009, <http://www.pewforum.org>

human efforts and through the Qur'an is seen as complementary: a sign of God that enables humanity to study and understand nature exclaims Ziauddin Sardar.⁶

Conflict between Science and Religion

The conflict of science and religion can be gauged by the following words of T R Miles in his book, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook*, "It might be said that metaphysicians of the past have done something comparable to writing a cheque without adequate funds in the bank. They have used words without proper cash to back them; they have been unable to give their words cash value in terms of states of affairs. The absolute is incapable of evolution and progress is a grammatically correct sentence; but the words are like a dud cheque, and cannot be 'cashed'." ⁷

Recently, in an interview with the Spanish newspaper El Mundo, Hawking said: Before we understood science, it was natural to believe that God created the universe, but now science offers a more convincing explanation. ⁸ On the other hand the supporters of the movement promoting Intelligent Design or ID, since 1990, in the United States have been mounting a challenge to the neo- Darwinism theory that propounds that all forms of life have evolved through the processes of genetic variation, heredity, and natural selection. Devotees of ID, including the lawyer Philip Johnson, the mathematician, philosopher, and theologian William Dembski, and the biochemist Michael Behe, say that ID represents a serious challenge to evolution.⁹

Many intelligent design neo-creationists accept what they call as microevolution while macroevolution is unthinkable for them. They accept the fact of the change within a species but they reject the idea that a species may evolve into a new species.¹⁰

One of the prominent religious authors, Harun Yahya touches on just about all the typical creationist themes, alleging that transitional fossils do not exist, that functioning intermediate forms are impossible anyway, that the evidence for human evolution is fraudulent, that radiometric dating methods are unreliable, that physical cosmology produces clear signs that the universe is a divine design, and that evolution at the molecular level is statistically impossible. Yahya also explains why Western scientists and Turkish fellow-travelers are so enamored of evolution if it is so clearly false. Like Christian creationists, Yahya thinks that beguiled by the secular philosophies of the European Enlightenment, scientists got caught up in a long war against God. ¹¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr remarks that the debate between modern science and religion or spirituality is not new. Voluminous works have been devoted to the

⁶ Masud, Ehsan (Ed.), *How Do You Know? Reading Ziauddin Sardar on Islam, Science and Cultural Relations*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006), p.108

⁷ Miles, T.R. , *Religion and the Scientific Outlook* (London: George Allen and Unwin,1959), p.20

⁸Huffpost, "12 Famous Scientists on the possibility of God", 2017, <http://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/12-famous-scientists-on-the-possibility-of-god>, Accessed on Nov, 2022

⁹ Dixon, Thomas, *Religion and Science, A very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.81

¹⁰ Edis, Taner, *Why Intelligent Design Fails* (pdf), (London: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p.4

¹¹ Edis , Taner, *An Illusion of Harmony: Science and Religion in Islam* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007), p.86

“warfare” between theology and science in the West. In the East also for over a century numerous figures from nearly every Oriental tradition have tried to harmonize science and religion usually with a sentimental optimism and lack of intellectual rigor that is far below the dignity of civilizations which have produced their Shankaras, Nagarjunas, Ibn Sinas and Menciuses. In fact pseudo-scientific theories such as that of evolution have entered in certain cases into the domain of religion itself, and some have attempted to synthesize such theories with the existing metaphysical and spiritual teachings of the Oriental traditions in question with results that cannot be called anything less than catastrophic.¹² Religion and science have to be approached within a proper perspective. Often the reductionist approaches to religion have given rise to faulty conclusions on religion as the evolutionary models of Tylor, Frazer, or Sigmund Freud. Similarly the pseudo-knowledge of science could also lead anyone to a wrong conclusion. Fazlur Rahman states that the clash between science and religion [here Islam] could be axiological in nature. According to him, knowledge has two qualities, “like a two-sided weapon that must be handled with care and responsibility, it is very important to use it and get it right.” Good or bad science depends on the moral qualities of the wearer.¹³

Science and Religion as Independent Disciplines

Some voices are advocating for the cultivation of science and religious sciences independently wherein each provides a way of understanding the world. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Biblical anti-evolution laws had been declared unconstitutional; laws requiring ‘balanced treatment’ for evolution and Creation Science’ had gone the same way; but opinion polls continued to find that between 45 and 50% of the population of the USA believed that human beings were created by God in their present form at some time in the last thousand years. (This figure remains the same today, with most of the rest of the population believing that humanity evolved through an evolutionary process somehow guided by God).¹⁴ The freedom of thought where every individual chooses either religion or science to understand life and nature is what forms the corner-stone of such an approach.

While science has provided us the remarkable details about the observable phenomena, yet it falls short of convincing humanity over multiple issues pertaining to their inner-selves. Man needs to know his own nature and the nature of the world he lives in, how he came into this world and what will happen to him after death. Such questions need answers which religion sets out to deal with.

Einstein had stated that in dealing with the eternal varieties, “the area of experiment is reduced and that of contemplation is enhanced”. Greeley points out that the persistence of religion is based on humanity’s inherent and permanent need

¹² Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, (Curzon Press, 1993), p.38

¹³ Fazlur Rahman as quoted in Hasan Bakti Nasution, Syahrul Holid and Suswanto (2023), “The Reality Of the Islamisation Of Knowledge”, *al-Afkar, Journal for Islamic Studies*, 6 (1), p.232, doi: 10.31943/afkarjournal.v6i1.485

¹⁴ Dixon, Thomas, *Religion and Science, A very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.95

for an ultimate system of meaning.¹⁵ Thus there remains nothing for science to oust religion out of human affairs as religion requires allowing science to make strides in offering its explanation of the material entities of the world. Many scientists and theologians find no opposition between religion and science. Each is valid, they argue, though only in its own clearly defined sphere of inquiry. We should not judge religion by the standards of science, nor vice versa, because the questions each asks are so completely disparate, and the content of their answers so distinct, that it makes no sense to compare them with each other. If religion and science were both trying to do the same job, then they might be incompatible. They have radically dissimilar tasks, and if we just keep them in their separate jurisdictions, preventing them from invading each other's territory, there can never be any real "problem" of science and religion.¹⁶

Islamic Perspective on Science

Muslims have a good share in the scientific legacy of mankind. A good number of Muslim scientists have had been inspired by *Qur'an* and the *Aḥadīth* of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). We may quote some of the verses that are likely to stimulate scientific temper: "*Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of ships through the ocean, for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; here indeed are Signs for a people that are wise*" (Qur'an, 2:164) *He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, within three darknesses.* (Qur'an, 39:6). *"The sun and the moon follow courses exactly computed"* (Qur'an, 55:5). *"It is not permitted for the sun to catch up to the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day. Each just swims along in its own orbit"* (Qur'an, 36:40). *"Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together, then We split them apart? And We made from water every living thing..."* (Qur'an, 21:30). Likewise, there is a Hadīth of the Prophet (SAAS) as: "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment".¹⁷ The saying of the Prophet (SAAS) serves as an inspiration to search for the cure of diseases, hence the the birth of medicine and surgery. But the interesting fact is that do Islam based on *Qur'an and Sunnah* of the Prophet aim at the cultivation of science for science or aspire for something more fundamental? Shibli had stated that science and religion have nothing to do with one another, being two entirely different realms. The one has to do with observable phenomena and the other with matters that are beyond the grasp of observation or experiment. As such, they do not conflict, but neither can the one be used to confirm the other.¹⁸ Such a view is more acceptable in Islam for the primary texts of Islam—*Qur'an* and *Sunnah* strive to shape the character of an

¹⁵ Greeley, Andrew, *The Persistence of Religion*, (Herder & Herder, 1973), pp.15-16

¹⁶ Haight, John F., *Science and Religion*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), p.13

¹⁷ al Bukhāri, Muḥammad bin Isma'īl, *Saḥīḥ al Bukhārī*, Sunnah.Com, Medicine, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/76>, accessed on 19 October, 2022

¹⁸ Darulmusnifeen Shibli Academy, Architect, 2009

individual and the society at large in the best of the moulds, where a person develops firm consciousness of God and the Hereafter. To call upon an individual to contemplate on his self and the cosmos is never intended to prove and disprove any scientific theory but to orient one's life towards *Ākhirah*. As Islam deals mainly with the eternal varieties, as such it business is more with the life to come, thereby with non-observable things. There is a very interesting *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet that sums up the attitude of Islam towards material or scientific pursuits Rāfi' b. Khadij reported that Allah's Messenger came to Madīnah and the people had been grafting the trees. He said: What are you doing? They said: We are grafting them, whereupon he said: It may perhaps be good for you if you do not do that, so they abandoned this practice (and the date-palms) began to yield less fruit. They made a mention of it (to the Holy Prophet), whereupon he said: I am a human being, so when I command you about a thing pertaining to religion, do accept it, and when I command you about a thing out of my personal opinion, keep it in mind that I am a human being. 'Ikrima reported that he said something like this.¹⁹ A *Ḥadīth* recorded in *Saḥīḥ Muslim* and narrated by Al-Mughīra bin Shuba reads as, "The sun eclipsed in the lifetime of Allah's Messenger (SAAS) on the day when (his son) Ibrahim died. So the people said that the sun had eclipsed because of the death of Ibrahim. Allah's Messenger (SAAS) said, "The sun and the moon do not eclipse because of the death or life (i.e. birth) of someone. When you see the eclipse, pray and invoke Allah."²⁰ Such *Aḥādīth* of the Prophet (SAAS) leave generous space for both religion and science to flourish in their own way. The categories of religion are different and that of the science are different. As such let science address the issues falling in its domain and let religion deal that fall within its purview.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary antagonism of science needs to be analyzed in a very fair and honest manner. Barring few exceptions, men from both the groups try to ascertain the true sources of human knowledge. Scientists believe that it is they who have found out the true knowledge of the world, sufficient enough to satisfy the curiosity and needs of the humans, while religionists feel lacunae in such a claim. They assert that sources of human knowledge are not limited to experiment and observation but intuition and revelation as enshrined in the scriptures of the world's religions. So while science claims as the champion of human welfare, religion too strives for the same.

We may sum up in the words of Howard Smith, senior astrophysicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics: Religion and science can learn from each other, astronomers who once had a reasonably firm grasp on their understanding of the cosmos are no longer quite so sure. We discovered dark matter and dark energy; our discomfort has grown because we still have no idea what they really are. I think we scientists are being admirably honest in admitting that we do not know as much as

¹⁹ Muslim bin al Hajāj, *Al Jami'al Sahih*, Sunnah.Com, <https://sunnah.com/urn/258310>, Accessed on 23 Dec, 2022

²⁰ *Saḥīḥ al Bukhārī*, Book 16, *Ḥadīth* 04, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/16>, accessed on 11 August, 2023

we thought, and this lesson of humility is one that science can offer to theologians.”Smith offers the phrase “open up to me,” saying it has a profound implication for each discipline.

This is the call of modern science to spiritual seekers; open yourself up to the wonders of the universe as revealed by science and to the insights that relay that sense of awe. This is also the call of religion to the scientists ... open up to the possibilities of wonder, love, and to the ethical responsibility of living in a quantum multiverse that, behold, is very good.”²¹

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²¹ Walsh, Colleen, “Where Science and Religion Meet:From an Islamic Perspective”, 2008, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2008/05/where-science-and-religion-meet-from-an-islamicperspective/>, Accessed on 24 Nov, 2022

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