

## Understanding the Consensus and Conflicting Aspects in Religion and Science: A Review

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### Abstract

*Debate on the relationships between science and religion has been going for decades. Every religion has its own standpoint in this regard and scholars from various background have also developed varying perspectives. Studies suggest that both science and religion reciprocate each other in the discovery of the universe, the creation of human, stages of human existence and heaven. On the contrary, scholars in the contemporary world have still to find the consonance and conflict between science and religion. This article explore the nature of relationship between science and religion with special emphasise on highlighting the key important areas like conflict, independence, dialogue and integration in the contemporary world.*

### Introduction

Many research studies have been undertaken on the nature, origin, evolution, scope and subject matter of science and religion which have found no ultimate answer to the debate between religion and science (Brooke, 1991; Lindberg, 1986; Lindberg, 2007; Roger, 1986; Dundes, 1988; Roochnik, 2004; Ferngren 2002; Asad 2003; Beattie 2007). However, some studies of the recent origin have given rather a substantial answers to the questions posed by the scholars few years ago (Dixon, 2008; Evans and Evans, 2008; Baker, 2012; Sherkat, 2011; Cragun, 2013; Antoun, 2008; Harrison 2015; (Catto et al. 2019; Evans and Evans 2008; Kaden et al. 2017; Catto et al. 2019). Salmenniemi et al. 2020; Zaman 2019; Tiaynen-Qadir 2020).

As the reviewed literature suggests that scholars of theology and science that religion and science are separate and independent entities, sometimes opposing each other. Currently there can be at least four ways in which science and religion can be related to each other. The identified key points on which religion and science are complementing and contrasting with each other include conflict, independence, dialogue and integration (Haught, 1995). The way in which science and religion are related to each other has a topic of immense debate among scholars but one of the best model in this regard is that of the Barbour (1997) who outlined four important ways in which science and religion are related to each other.

The first point where religion can be related to science is conflict in which it is claimed that science and religion are completely opposed to each other especially science invalidates religion in various ways and thus both are or both are irreconcilable. Secondly, there is a point of contrast between science and religion and this approach asserts that there might be no conflict between the two because both are dealing and responding to glaringly different questions. This approach argues that science and religion are both valid, but there is such a great deal of difference exists as a consequence one might say that conflict at any point is logically impossible. According to a well known theorist, Ian Barbour who outlined in his book that this approach is called independence (Barbour, 1997). Thirdly, there is also a point of contact between science and religion which posit that despite of differences in scope and subject matter, religion has always implications for science and vice versa. Scholars are agreed on the point that religion and science must interact and thereby both must not ignore the possibilities of exploring new paths and ways of development. Therefore, they emphasized on lively interaction, dialogue, and points of possible agreement between religion and science. Such engagement with each other has been termed as dialogue and contact (Haught, 1995; Barbour, 1997). The last point highlighted is the confirmation between science and religion. As the name suggest, this approach focuses on the ways and paths in which religion and religious philosophy could positively supports the rational, logical and scientific adventure of discoveries. It searches out for those trajectories in which religion might not intervene with science and rather pave the way for some novel ideas those are workable in the realm of science (Barbour, 1997). Likewise, science in so many ways could confirms some basic realities surrounding religion.

It is pertinent to discuss the above mentioned approaches regarding the relationship between religion and science in Christian perspective and then we will move on to concentrate on those point whether there is (was) such conflict or contradiction exists between Islam and Science or not?

From a historical vantage point, one of the most striking examples of conflict between religion and science in the Christian world is that of the persecution of Galileo (1564-1642) by the church. The trial of Galileo was held in 1632, and he was judged through a vote of seven to three for disrespecting an order which was sent to him in 1616 telling him not to teach, hold, or defend his conviction in any form that the earth is moving. He denied and prefer to spent the rest of his life under house arrest. However, Galileo in his letter which he send to Grand Duchess Christina in 1615, presented some principles of interpretation which might be used in time when any scientific assumption seemsto be in conflict with interpretation of religious scripts (Cited in Rafiabadi, 2017). In some of his writing, Galileo claimed that science and religious scripts having entirely different goals and thus becomes irrelevant to each other. He cites Augustine's proclamation that scriptures do not teach us about matters that are irrelevant to our salvation. He continued with his argumentation while quoting the Cardinal Bronius "The purpose of the Sanctified Ghost is to teach us how one can go to heaven but not how heaven goes". This is the best explanation of the point of "independence model" of the relationship between science and religion. Furthermore, in other of his writing, Galileo argued that a metaphorical interpretation of the religious scripts could be acceptable only in the case when literal interpretation is coming into conflict with a scientific theory or inquiry. Likewise, any scientific theory that cannot be logically demonstrated may be rejected in favour of a literal interpretation of a scripture. Such explanations concerning religion and science in the Christian world were not welcomed by denominations and churches which resulted in persecution and punishment.

Similarly, scientists like Copernicus, Bruno and Kent have faced the same fate because they were either imprisoned or imposed death penalty. Courts were organized in such a manner to develop a potential resistance against social transformation, new trends in knowledge was strictly prohibited and discouraged in France and Italy through persecution of 10,000, and many were being imprisoned. Many research books were burn down under the guise of safeguarding the religion and its interpretation by the churches and priests (Rafiabadi, 2017). Under these circumstances, science had witnessed a serious setback for decades and the conflict and differences between science and religion was intensified due to the false perceptions and negative attitude of the churches and priests. Perhaps it was because of the hostility and antagonism, science in the western world became Godless and anti-religious sentiments were being inculcated among scientists.

However, social transformation movement in the Western world in their attempt of enlighten the masses finally came out successful in bridging the gulf between science and religion. During 1960-65, the Vatican Council (1960-65) clarified that after a long and serious conflict between religion and sciences, the supreme authorities within the Catholic Church has announced about the possibilities of agreement and consensus between true faith and true science because both are serving the cause of truth. (Haught, 1995). Furthermore, Pope John Paul II had established a commission in 1984 to re assess the events and facts that led towards the conflict between religion and science to re-examine the events, which led to the conflict of science and religion while stating that the council has committed an error by persecuting Galileo (Barbour, 1997). Likewise, the Pope had also reviewed the commission's findings in 1992 by stating that there are two different domains of knowledge and theologians had been failed in distinguishing which resulted to transpose in the area of faith, a question that is in fact relevant to the scientific realm (Barbour, 1997).

### **Islamic Viewpoint about Science**

Unlike other system of faith, there is no such hostility and conflict exists in the Muslim world with the realm of science. Islam has never been found in any point as prejudiced towards scientific knowledge and research. Regarding the connection between science and religion, even western historians and writers have negated about the conflict between faith and science. These scholars have accepted that the early period of Islam was a period largely overwhelmed by scientific knowledge, philosophies and technological development. In this regards, Briffault writes in the book entitled "*The Making of Humanity*" the new spirit of enquiry in Europe has given birth to the spirit of inquiry, new methods of exploring knowledge, methods of experimentation, empirical examination of phenomena, measurements, and mathematics which was initially unknown to the Greek. The Arabs philosophers and scientists have the credit of being introducing and infusing such spirit in to the Western world (Briffault, 1928; Iqbal, 1930; Karim, 1935; Afridi, 2013; Rafiabadi, 2017).

The foundation of modern science and technology was laid by the Muslim thinkers and scholars in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century and established a "Cordial union" between science and religion (Afridi, 2013; Rafiabadi, 2017). Islamic value system based on the injunctions of the Glorious Quran and *Sunnah* of the prophet, took scientific inventiveness with positive attitude and the overall picture was entirely different from the corresponding Euro-Christian scenario. The Holy Quran urges mankind to closely study the universe, heavens and the earth. It also encourages and teaches to understand and explore the diversity of plants and animals, the diversity in languages and colours of humans. Quran advises to understand the system of creation of the earth and heaven, wonders of nature, different stages of human development and also urges repeatedly to think over the balance and perfection

in the universe (Rafiabadi, 2017). According to Islam, the best worship is to reflect on the creation of God and wonders found in the nature. According to Hazrat Ali, one of the companions of the Prophet, the best worship is the reflection on God's creation. Likewise, according to *asaying (Hadith)* of the Prophet: An hour of meditation (*tafakur*) is better than sixty years of act of worship. Furthermore, it has been revealed by God that the universe, nature and human body possess countless sign of God which reveals the human that God is the ultimate reality. In a verse, Allah says that "We shall soon show them our signs in the universe and in their own bodies (soul) so it becomes clear unto them that He is in-deed the Truth ( Al-Quran, 41:53). Hence, the ultimate purpose behind the natural sciences is to discover nature, universe to acquaint and familiarize humanity with the existence of God in the universe.

The word *Ilm* (knowledge) in the Quran is being mentioned for the science of nature as well as other kinds of sciences dealing with human social, psychological and political aspects. The study of nature is repeatedly advised in the Quran in order to discover the programs and patterns set forth by God within the universe (Faruqi 2007; Faruqi, 2006a; Faruqi, 2006b; Zaidi, 1991; Said, 1989). Islam urges us to observe the natural and social phenomena with open heart, logic and reason with the purpose to understand and appreciate the glory of Allah and comprehending His great blessings.

In Islamic worldview, God is the central point and thus the main purpose of this reflection and *Tahqiq* should be conducted to arrive at *Haqq* (The word *Tahqiq* has originated from the same root as *Haqq*, which is a noun, verb and an adjective which carries the meaning of reality, correctness, appropriateness, and fairness. The terms *Haqq*, God is the Reality or the Real, the Right, Just and the Truth. When the word *Haqq* is used in the context of creatures, it does not simply connote its truth and reality but also describes the just and appropriate demands of the creation of human by God. Therefore, it is pertinent to conduct *Tahqiq (research)* in order to find out *Haqq*, to know the unseen being who is the creator of the universe and responsible for its existence. A famous Irani poet Shekh Saadi Sherazi says

برگ درختان سبز در نظر هوشیار  
هر ورق دفترست معرفت کردگار

A small green leaf tells volumes of God's creativity (*Mahrifa*) to those people who can understand. Another poet has rightly said that

علمی که راه حق نه نماید جهالت است

"The knowledge which does not lead a person to the path of righteousness is ignorance".

#### Quranic Ways of Understanding Nature

Quran also urges people and demands us to do *Tafaquh*, *Tadabbar*, *Tafakur* and *Tahaqul* in many verses. In the word *Tafaquhu* Quran demands us to visualize, imagine and understand the exact ideas, concept and meaning of things. Likewise, Quran also mentions the word *Tadabbur* which explains about the method of knowledge and also guide mankind how to put knowledge in to proper use. Another word *Tafakur* also mentioned in the Quran which is another intellectual process meant for unfolding the origin, properties, and characteristics of things in the universe. Lastly, in the word *Tahaqul* Quran guide us how to make an appropriate use of things in our daily lives. Moreover *Tafakkur* means the process of observing and managing things and to understand the unseen forces behind the occurrence of events and incidents. It was the act and practice of meditation i.e. *Tafakur* and *Tahaqul*, that made various scientific research possible by the early Muslim scholars and it was through the help of *Tafaquh* and *Tadabbur*, that led them towards discovering harmony in all the manifestation of the universes (al-Ghazzali, 1968: 133; Ibn Taymiyyah, 1989: 13; al-Ghazzali, 2005: 188; al-Munajjid, 2009; al-Suyuti, 2009: 61).

It is deduced from the above discussion that the mentioned four words in the Holy Quran, teaches us important lessons about the following subjects:

- The origin, evolution and existence of the universe.
- The existence of harmony and equilibrium in the universe
- The purpose and telos of the universe.
- The importance of mankind and humanity. The Quran honours and bless humanity and mentions about all types of possibilities to human for the earth and heavens.
- The reason, process and logic behind the possibility of resurrection and life after death.
- Argument, reason and logic regarding the unity of God (*Tawhid*) from the unicity of nature.

The study of nature can only be result oriented and fruitful if one has faith in the existence of God and an honest intention to arrive at reality (*Haqq*). As the Quran mentions "Say, consider what is it that is in the heavens and the earth and signs and warners did not benefit those who are not believing" (Al-Quran, 10:10). If a scientist or a research scholar observe and study the nature with faith in God, his faith may be further fortified by his scientific work, otherwise the study of nature without faith may not be necessarily leading the researcher to God. Without the metaphysical presupposition, a scientist cannot reach to the reality and truth thus a sound metaphysical framework leads to the reality and God.

In this connection, one of the profound Muslim scientists al-Bairuni says: our sights connect what we see to be the sign of Divine wisdom and knowledge in creation and deduces the presence of the Creator. Levy presented his famous commentary on the outlook of the Muslims scientists and stated that: “only few scientists were inspired by the by Greek philosophical ideas, the Muslim scientists who were engaged in the search of science did a notable job by discovering the wonders of nature and signs of the glory of God. According to Islamic injunctions and thoughts, the purpose of knowledge either revealed or attained through human endeavour is to discover God’s signs, attributes and to reach at ultimate reality (*Haqq*). By revealed knowledge, we mean the knowledge which is not directly the construction of human mind but from the divine origin revealed with the purpose to provide unbreakable link between humanity, universe and God.

Regarding the scope and subject matter of religion and science, some Muslim scholars and researchers have outlined that both science and religion complement each other and guide humanity to the ultimate truth. According to a Muslim scholar Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), “The Quran does not mention about the position of earth. It does not mention either the earth is stationary or in motion. Similarly, it does not mention that the Sun is static or in motion. It is deduced from the discussion that the Holy Quran is not concerned with the issue of astronomy because Quran mentioned that mankind has been blessed with knowledge, wisdom, and reason to explore and decide such matters. I am fully convinced that the *Work of God* and the *Word of God* can never be antagonistic to each other (cited in Hoodhboy, 1991). Likewise, the scientific knowledge acquired through observations and experimentation and inferencing concerns itself only with verifiable data attained through sense knowledge (Northbourne, 1999). Renowned theologian Haught (1995) outlines about the difference between religion and science in this way:

“The scope of science is to empirically examine the natural world while religion is the expression of the ultimate meaning which is transcendental to the empirical world. Science deals with the question that how things happened in the universe while religion deals with why there is anything at all rather than nothing. Science explores causes and religion gives and explain meaning. The scope and subject matter of science is to deal with solvable problems while religion deals with unsolvable mystery. Science finds out answers to some specific questions about natural process whereas religion provide explanation about the ground of nature. Science concerning with discovering some particular truth while the domain of religion is to explain why one may seek truth at all” (Haught, 1995). Likewise, Gould says that scientists try to document the facts surrounding natural world and develop theories and knowledge that can integrate these facts. On the other hand, religion also deals with important but different realm of human purposes, values and meanings (Smith, 2001).

#### **Why there is Conflict between Science and Religion**

When scientists do not keep in mind the scope of science and above differences, they conflate science with scientism. Scientism is a philosophical belief system that enshrines science as the only completely trustworthy method of putting the human mind in touch with “objective “reality (Haught, 1995). Scientism flourished briefly in nineteenth century, when a few thinkers impressed by such triumphs as Newtonian dynamics and the second law of thermodynamics, permitted themselves to imagine that science might soon be able to muster the sophistication to recognize such claims as hyperbolic.

This conflation of science with scientism as John Haught observes “lies at the root of most modern opposition by scientists to religion.” He further says “without usually being aware of it, scientific skeptics have uncritically fused the scientific method with scientism, a belief system that assumes, without any scientific demonstration, that science is the only appropriate way of looking at things” (Haught, 1995). The supporters of scientism believe that sensory data are the only source of knowledge. Thus, they are of the opinion, that science has to get rid of meta-physical concepts because they are not rooted in sense experience. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, various forms of empiricism, such as positivism, existentialism and operationalism emerged. The common factor between all these schools of thought was their limitation of knowledge to sense based data and their denial of metaphysical. In their view, sense based knowledge is the only way to get to the truth, and the truth is equivalent to what can be acquired through this source. This outlook affected all circles of the first half of the twentieth century and we still witness its influences in the academic circles in the form of scientism, scientific materialism and Reductionism implies any apparently higher levels, such as life, mind and religious ideas of “God”, can all be fully explained in terms of the lower level sciences of chemistry and physics (Haught, 1995).

Meta-physical reductionism means that scientific analysis is the only way to grasp what things really are. It insists that knowledge of the molecular make-up and activity of living cells, or neurophysiological comprehension of the human brain, is all we need to understand what life or mind really is. In Crick’s terms there is no need for any other kind of explanation than that provided by pure science since there is no other kind of reality other than the purely physical.

Francis Crick goes on to such extent by saying “only scientific certainty “(with all its limitations), can in the long run rid us of the superstitions of our ancestors. It is the result of that scientific materialism that Crick maintains that the “majority of neuroscientists believe that the idea of the soul is a myth.” (Crick, 1994). Such scientists give prime importance to matter. They are of the opinion that mind is nothing more than an expression

of the brain and brain is, to put it indelicately, essentially a piece of meat, though a highly complex one (Crick, 1994).

Daniel Dennett, who proudly calls himself a materialist, put this concept in his widely acclaimed book, *Conscious Explained*, --- there is only one sort of stuff, namely matter — the physical stuff of physics, chemistry and physiology — and mind is somehow nothing but a physical phenomenon (cited in Haught, 1995). Due to such over confidence in matter, Francis Crick declares “The Knowledge we has already makes it highly unlikely that there is anything that cannot be explained by physics and chemistry (Crick, 1994). Based on such statements by materialistic scientists, religion and spirituality was marginalised and taken as opposite to science. The fact is that both religion and science have different domains, so how they can be opposing and conflicting with each other. This fact is now being understood by many scientists, so during the last several decades many distinguished scholars have challenged the view that consciousness is explainable by the physical sciences. Kurt Gödel, one of the leading figures in the mathematical logic, wrote in his 1971 letter to H Wang: I don't think the brain came in the Darwinian manner. In fact, it is disprovable. Simple mechanisms can't yield the brain. I think the basic elements of the universe are simple. Life force is a primitive element of universe and it obeys certain laws of action. These laws are not simple and not mechanical (Crick, 1994; cited also by Haught 1994) Professor Eddington has acknowledged “that the entities of Physics can from their very nature form only a partial aspect of the reality” how are we to deal with other part? It cannot be said that other part concerns us less than the physical entities. Feeling, purpose, values, made up our consciousness as much as sense impressions (Iqbal, 1930).

So for a true understanding of nature, both human and infra-human levels should be considered and viewpoint of the modern science has to be corrected as Iqbal rightly says, “If an outlook beyond physics is possible (in fact possible), we must courageously face the possibility, even though it may disturb or tend to modify our normal way of life and thought (Iqbal, 1930). The interests of truth require that we must abandon our present attitude (Iqbal, 1930) which considers modern empirical science to be the sole arbitrator of all matter pertaining to knowledge and which is supposed to give answers to every question (Smith, 1999).

There is indeed a limit upon science is made very likely by the existence of questions that science cannot answer and that no conceivable advance of science would empower it to answer... It is not to science, therefore but to metaphysics, imaginative literature or religion that we must turn for answers to questions having to do with first and last things.” (Medawar, 1984).

In short, questions about various kinds and different levels of existence are beyond the capacity of science. Similarly, response to questions about God, spirit, morality of soul and human free will cannot be explained through science (Harrison, 2000). Similarly, science raises some questions that are relevant to its subject matter but whose explanations are beyond science's capacity. Mehdi Gulshani, an eminent Iranian Physicist cites a few examples viz; Where do the laws of Physics come from? Why can we comprehend the laws of Physics? Why should there be a universe in which such laws exist? (Gulshani, 2019). He further says, “the explanation of the foundation of science and the reasons for its success is to be sought outside of Physics.” Similarly, science cannot answer about the final cause of the universe and its purpose and meaning. In fact, there are many ways of looking at the world and each perspective shows certain aspect. Huston Smith rightly says: “taken in its entirety, the world is not as science says it is; it is as science, philosophy, religion, the arts and every day speech say” (Smith, 1999). Thus, we can say that the present day science has to be framed within a suitable meta-physical matrix, which can accommodate all levels of human knowledge and experience. In this connection George Ellis put it as “there is a dire need of using a broader criteria that take into account the whole range of human experience and not just that part which can be scientifically described (Ellis, 1993).

## Conclusion

This study concludes that historically science and religion was pole apart in viewing and understanding the realities existed in the universe. Historically, there were certain religious dogmas and beliefs which were strictly adherent to a specific standpoint and there was no place for alternative standpoints. However, at the dawn of human civilization, enlightenment and revolution of knowledge, the gape between science and religion has been bridged and some important avenues were being explored where science and religion were being found in more consensus rather than in conflict. This study further concludes that Quranic injunctions and other divine sources have infused humanity to think, examine and explore the universe with wisdom, and correlate things in a logical and reasonable manner. Such injunctions have harmonized the contrasting relations between science and religion. However, the ultimate rely and the absolute reliance on scientism still persists and the scholars need to explore ways and means to bridge the gape between the religious injunctions and the philosophes and scientific methodologies in the contemporary world.

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