

## The Impact of Separation Between Science and Religion: An Observation

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**Abstract:** Historically the sciences and religion were never separated. The main objective of this study is to elucidate the impact of separation between the sciences and religion on the muslim society. Secondly, it attempts to explain how this development influences the understanding of the Quran vis-a-vis sciences and other knowledge among the muslims. An important finding of this study is that this division occurs in other field of knowledge and not only in the field of sciences. Consequently, dualism in the educational system has occurred and a modern intellectual crisis arose among the muslim intellectuals.

**Key words:** Quran, religious, society, muslim, educational system

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### INTRODUCTION

Research that has been carried out by Islamic scholars had produced various patterns of knowledge areas. Notwithstanding, the numerous knowledge instigated is still being seen within one perspective and look upon as having been related to one another. It is seen, as branches that sprout from a knowledge tree. Within this context, Professor Dr. Osman made the following observation.

According to this principle, knowledge is like a tree with the roots, core, trunk and bark with all the branches and twigs and the leaves. There are trees that bear fruits and without fruits, just like knowledge, some are of benefit to human while others are of no benefits. The root system is the, revelation which is a mysterious paranormal phenomenon which is oblivious from the eyes of normal human, the same with the roots which are deep-rooted in the soil. The core of knowledge is tawhid which is the knowledge about the oneness of God, the knowledge that joins all the branches of knowledge together just like the trunk and core of the tree that unite all the branches and twigs

The aim of all knowledge is as a united meeting and relationship with the natural world. In addition, all these sources of knowledge is considered one. It carries the truth from Allah as the al-Haq, where he himself is the absolute truth. All the knowledge awarded by Him to human being is related to one another. There would be no inconsistency among the truths because the all the truths

are of different aspects from Allah as the sole absolute truth. Therefore, there should be no inconsistencies between the truth taught by religion and the truth found in the social science as well as natural science (Osman Bakar, 1991).

The views regarding the unity and integration of knowledge are further supported by Professor Ismail al-Faruqi. To explain further on this question, he wrote:

To acknowledge the Godliness of God and His unity is to acknowledge the truth and its unity. Divine unity and the unity of truth are inseparable. They are aspects of one and the same reality. This become evident when we consider that truthfulness is a quality of the proposition of al tawhid namely that God is One. For if truth was not one, then the statement God is One could be true and the statement some other thing or power is God could also be true. To say that truth is one is therefore to assert not only that God is One but that no other God is God but God, the very combination of negation and assertion that the shahadah conveys, La ilaha illa Allah (Faruqi and Raji, 1998)

The early Islamic scholars had used various mediums which presumably reaching the fact about the reality based on the rabbaniyah truth. History has shown that early Islamic scholars had utilized various forms of approaches to gain and understand the different stages and tiers of the existence of knowledge. Among the common approaches used were experimental method, reasoning (using mind) and intuition. All approaches were combined within the tawhid paradigm based on the

revelation. This proves that natural science is very much related to religion if it is viewed from the positive perspectives without conflict. This development clearly shows that the early scholars had used harmonizing and integrated approaches in the knowledge activities.

Within the recent scientific development, it seems the efforts to integrate knowledge have been carried out by Ian G. Barbour which is closing towards the vision. Zainal Abidin Bagir in commenting Barbour's roles in this issue states:

If the possibility of the conflict is accepted, then the action that must be done knows the sources of each literature. And if there is certainty that the sacred text and the natural text are from the same God, the analysis will reveal that there should be no conflict between both truths which were derived from the same source. To do it is by modifying the philosophical supposition on academic theory or by revisiting theology. In this manner, Barbour and other researchers in the other Western world have moved farther compared to other religious groups by mapping the possibilities of the positive relationship between the compatible two (Barbour and Muhammad, 2002)

The reality of what were achieved by Islamic science was confirmed by George Sarton, a science philosopher who reiterated that during the period of 750-1100 AD, the Muslims were the undoubted world's intellectual pioneers. Between the years 1100-1350 AD, the learning centers in the Islamic world were actually the world's intellectual centers that attracted countless intellectuals from around the world to acquire knowledge there (Golshani, 1980). The contributions afforded by the Islamic scholars eventually configured the European civilization (Roberson, 1994). This is backed by Robert Briffault in his book *The Making of Humanity* which stated:

It was under the influence of the Arabs and the Moorish revival of culture and not in the 15th century that a real renaissance took place. Spain not Italy was the cradle of the re-birth of Europe. After steadily sinking lower and lower into barbarism, it has reached the darkest depths of ignorance and degradation when cities of the Saracenic world, Baghdad, Cairo, Cordova and Toledo were growing centers of civilisation and intellectual activity. It was there that the new life arose which was to grow into a new phase of human evolution. From the time when the influence of their culture made itself felt began the stirring of a new life (Ziauddin, 1986)

He also says that it was under their successors at the Oxford School (that is successors to the Muslim of Spain) that Roger Bacon learned Arab and Arabic Sciences. Neither Roger Bacon nor his later namesake has a title to be credited with having introduced the experimental method. Roger Bacon was no >1 of the apostles of Muslim Science and Method to Christian Europe (Ziauddin, 1986). Notwithstanding, the esteemed contributions presented by the Islamic ummah to the Western civilization were invaluable towards the development and evolution of science and technology (Roberson, 1994; Irfan, 2008).

### **SEPARATION OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION AND ITS IMPACT**

After 1350 AD (the 14th century), the European world began to progress while at the same time, the Islamic world dwindled. The Islamic world was not only stagnant in its intellectual activities but also failed to absorb the progress made by the outside world. Religious learning centres and theologian schools began to exclude all knowledge related to natural science from their curriculum except for classical astronomy and mathematics (Sutcliffe, 1975). This isolation had resulted in the termination of the wave of the glorious Islamic world. This is further exacerbated by the physical and mental colonization by the Western power on the Islamic ummah (Roberson, 1994). Several implications can be seen resulted from the separation of science and religion. Among others, the products of the Islamic ummah are exploited by foreigners. The Europeans were meticulous in researching and explaining the hidden natural laws of the universe apart from exploiting the sources and products. The Muslims on the other hand had abandoned this activity, leaving them to be exploited by others even though they had their right. Consequently, today the Muslims reach a point where they have to depend on other countries, such as America, Europe and Japan, especially in the fields of science and technology (Roberson, 1994; Olshewsky, 1982). The probable reason for that could be that the Islamic countries have failed (or do not have the capability) to utilise their natural sources and leaving them to be exploited by others.

Secondly, knowledge separation. Muslims learn the empirical knowledge with the features that are separated from the religious knowledge. The results were that they lack the pure understanding of the Islamic view and replaced by the vision of not believing in God (Ilhad) which corrupted the European intellectual tradition. This continues to be practiced and the implications are felt in some of the science subjects across the Islamic world. Some of them even believed that Islam is an obstacle to development (Sutcliffe, 1975).

Thirdly, the existence of dualistic educational system. The termination of the natural science from the Islamic religious curriculum in madrasah and religious school and the inadequate direct exposure towards sources of modern knowledge in some of the students and religious scholars (Wadad and Billeh, 2006) had given rise to two distinct intellectual streams common to the Islamic world.

Some Muslims had accepted and are influenced by the development and progress in science and technology in the West without knowing the boundary of the empirical knowledge (Sutcliffe, 1975). Subsequently, they tried to interpret the Al-Quran and al-Hadith according to their own supposition (Khir, 2000). For example, the interpretation of the Al-Quran by Tantawi and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan belong to this group. More than that there are those who claimed that all modern scientific discoveries can be found in the Al-Quran and Hadith. The claims were probably done to show the miracles and the sacredness of the divine revelation of the Al-Quran. Syaikh Mahmud Shaltut, the former Syaikh al-Azhar in the preface of his tafsir stated (Golshani, 1980):

Allah does not reveal the Quran to inform the human being the scientific theories and technological techniques if we try to harmonise the Quran and the scientific tentative hypotheses, we are putting the Quran on a situation of impermanent for the whole theories and scientific hypotheses that are not conclusive. This would result in the exposure of the Quran as apologetic and defensive in its characteristics. Whatever is said in the Quran regarding the secrets of creation and worldly phenomena are for the purpose of encouraging human to make interpretation and enquiry towards the events with which would increase their faith

Some of the religious scholars were of the opinion that the scientific theories are contradictory to the religious beliefs and consequently, they declared their opposition towards science. As a result, many Muslims regarded science has nothing to do with religion (Ahmed, 2002). This kind of thinking is still common and if actions are taken immediately, there will be continuous gap in the belief in this country. In view of that, the intention of the country to achieve the era of developed country in this decade (according to our own formula) would be futile.

### **MODERN INTELLECTUAL CRISIS**

Due to the separation between sciences and religion in the Muslim society is the pattern of thinking that sees

science, as an entity separate from religion, materialistic and repudiation of God represents an erroneous concept and is promoted based on the development of nihilism and atheism. The exposure of this understanding among others has resulted in the occurrence in the ambiguity of thinking of most distinguished intellects, especially the confused blind intellects which are different from the lead intellects. This situation has been observed by Akbar Ahmed, according to his understanding on Ibn Khaldun's theory of civilization (Ahmed, 2002).

This attitude has brought them towards failure in establishing the principle of unity and integration of knowledge. They failed to reinterpret the modern knowledge within the framework, mould and spirit of Al-Quran. Analogically, if the knowledge is seen as a tree, the branches are the empirical knowledge and the root system is the religious knowledge. It seems that the "blind" intellects were confused and obsessed with maintaining the branches and twigs of the knowledge tree as a results of the hazy nihilism and atheism that cover their hearts without realising that they had thrown out the root system and the trunk as what was actually done by their teachers in forsaking religion. Obviously, the tree with only the branches and twigs, even though it appears as shady as it may seem would not be able to sustain its existence.

This is the feature of the modern knowledge that depleted its unifying characteristic that exemplifies most of the Islamic countries now. Professor Osman Bakar described this situation as wrongly impregnated. According to Professor Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, the knowledge is considered as impregnated in tyranny. It is because, it had loss its specific aims, i.e., unsure of its past history, specific place and utilisation. As a result, the knowledge has brought forth the state of instability and chaos in the self and daily living of the individual. In essence, the knowledge should sway the live of the individual towards peacefulness, tranquillity and impartiality (Attas and Naguib, 1977).

The biggest crisis within the modern intellectual domain that occurs currently is the plagiarism and direct acceptance of the concept and philosophy of the Western secular science that isolates the knowledge concept with the factual entity of God, as the source of all knowledge (Elshakry, 2010). The Western science which is based on experimentation is limited within the material aspects only. Therefore, the existence of God which is based on intangible element cannot be proven through material methodology. This narrow and limited concept of science according to western views is not applicable within the Islamic world view that is more holistic in nature.

According to him, science which limits the methodology on the experimental research would not have the rights to discuss about faith and believing in God. This is due to the fact that the issue of faith and belief has no relevance in research that only focuses on material elements. It requires a unique methodology in which the experimental method is only a section of the overall methodology. Within this context, the writer acknowledges the views brought forward by Sayyid Mujtaba Rukni Musawi Lari when he critiqued the limit put forward by current scientific methodology. He stressed:

The subject that the experimental sciences must study is the material world-material phenomena alone. The scientific tools and their measures for attaining their goals, consist of observation, hypothesis, experiment with control and proof. They work on the world and its objects, from the largest to the infinitesimal. Hence, they are judged to be objective and impersonal. If their findings accord with the external world, they are accepted. If not, they are rejected. Testing proves the conformity of a finding with the world around it

Accordingly he stressed that in reality, experimental science does not have any concern with or without the existence of faith in the individual. This is due to the fact that natural science is a phenomenon of the universe which is characterised by materialistic elements which could not reveal the thinking about God in a positive or negative mode. All streams of religious knowledge are based on the revelation which taught that God is not physical substance. All five human senses are unable to perceive God. God is not contained within spatial and time changes. The evidence of His existence is so perfect and complete. He does not require anything outside of his complete self. You can search and read all books and essays by scientists who perform experimentation, you would not be able to find any experimentation that was performed on God or any of His attributes. This is due to the fact that God is not a worldly phenomenon. There is no experimentation that could be made to test and hypotheses about him.

To summarise, it is wrong to use the inappropriate methodology to prove the existence of God just for the sake of the limited scientific premises. Thus, it is wrong to deny the existence and the authority of God just because he cannot be tested as if in the context:

If an experimental scientist utters all kinds of denials about God on the basis of his research, he has not moved out of line even of the rules of his own science. He shows himself ignorant of the subject and sphere of his occupation. The sciences have no even A-B-C of the knowledge of God. So it is utterly illogical for a person who has sunk himself in the ocean of the experimental sciences to start denying God (Musawi Lari, 1983)

The mentioned earlier statement clearly shows how twisted Western science from the foundation of science that they established in the first place. This twisted situation needs to be explained within the science education of the Islamic ummah. The limitation of science needs to be taught to the prime movers and users of science and technology among the Islamic ummah, so that they would not be forever drifted away within the wave of atheism (*kemulhidan*) as a result of the deadlock of Western knowledge in unearthing the truth and in the end getting lost in themselves.

## SCIENCE AND AL-QURAN

Another impact of this predicament is the development and achievements in science and technology in the Islamic world have progressed in a slow manner. This is due to the possibility of misunderstanding towards science by the Muslims resulted from the proliferation of the concept of *taklid* and the interpretation that scientific knowledge is not within the religious teaching (Peters, 1980). As a result according to this misunderstanding, the status of science and technology assumes a lower position than other knowledge domains, such as *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fikah* and others. The implication of this is the mistreatment of scientific and technological knowledge on a larger scale in terms of the writing and publication of religious books. This misunderstanding must be rectified.

Supposing that natural sciences were not isolated from the religious curriculum, the probability of this situation becoming the way it is now would not have happened. How could it be possible to claim the natural science can be generated within the isolation between human and God when the Al-Quran itself beyond doubts stresses the concept of thinking towards the creation of the natural world and the relationship with the Creator. Allah commands in the Quran which means:

Verily in the creation of the sky and earth and exchanges between night and day, there are signs \_kr those with the mind (which is) those who remember Allah while standing or while sitting down or while lying down and they are thinking about the creation of the sky and earth (and saying): O my lord, it is not You to create all these in futile. Your Divine, protect us from the hell fire (Al-Quran, Ali 'Imran, 3: 190-191)

If the boundary between religion and science is clearly done, there should be no reason for the disagreement towards the two factors. Precisely, both factors would compliment one another. Science is like the light of live while religion is the guide. When al-Quran and science are connected, it does not mean that Al-Quran is seen as a scientific book, such as the views of certain streams that see all the facts as scientific facts in the Al-Quran. This does not mean just by studying the Quran through the scientific perspectives can expose all the things and carry new theories and findings. This is stressed by Ziauddin Sardar which can be an eye-opener to us. He asserted:

Although, the Al-Quran verily contains several references about natural facts, it is not a scientific text. It is a guide: It provides the motivation and only through motivation, knowledge can be acquired. Knowledge begins with the Al-Quran and it does not end with it

### CONCLUSION

Essentially, the Islamic ummah now need to be ready with all the strengths and capability to face the challenges of the modern world which is heading towards chaotic and as a result of human disobedient towards God. The Western world now is facing global crisis and cannot be trusted to lead in the area of modern science and technology, especially when it comes to the area of value due to the shortage of their value.

Islam must take the crucial steps towards scientific and technological progress to revive its leadership role in science and technology as, was shown in its glorious history. The Islamic ummah need to utilise current technology and to pattern them towards Islam. This could be done when the real understanding about them is possessed. The awareness of the responsibility as the servant and the vicegerent of Allah need to be absorbed in the soul of the ummah. The needs towards a form of

science which is holy based on the revelation and human natural characteristics needs to be introduced to the world as an alternative.

All the modern scientific and technological principles must first be filtered by Muslim scholars before they are exposed and practiced. There are now efforts being made to that effect but it is still in infancy. It is timely that a rigorous action be taken into that direction. We should be self-satisfied with what we have because the wave of modern scientific and technological conception of the western world is fast approaching. The inattentiveness of the Islamic ummah towards this would destroy the outstanding vision of the ummah 'ummah wasata' from heading the leadership of the world in the modern era.

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