

Science and Belief: Discourses on New Perceptions

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Book Review

In today's world the issue of the relationship between science and religious belief deserves serious attention because of the increasing awareness that the philosophy of pure reductionism and materialism is insufficient to meet human needs. Instead, the belief that reductionist accounts of natural phenomena must always be complemented by holistic perspectives has gained ground especially through awareness among the public of ecological interdependencies. In the past, religious beliefs were able to operate within science, giving it sanction, hypotheses for theory selection as well as regulating its methods and applications. Such mutual relevances between science and religion suffered setbacks however largely from perspectives such as the Freudian. Freud's critique of religion had the effect of disqualifying religious belief from functioning as a complement to the conclusions of science.

However, the tides began to turn at the beginning of the century hence as a result of unexpected discoveries in physics which had been dubbed as bringing about the second scientific revolution, new revelations came to the fore with regards the nature of reality and with it the relationships between man, nature and God. For many commentators the developments in physics had the impact of showing in bolder relief; the complimentary between scientific and religious discourses, holistic conceptions of reality and the relevance of human values in influencing priorities for scientific research and directing applications of science and technology. In the Malaysian context, the subject of science and belief is also of direct relevance especially when viewed from the needs and aspirations of the Vision 2020. In parts of their books *The Challenge* (1993) and *Menangani Perubahan* (1989) respectively, the honourable Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister both devote some of their attention to the dynamics of the interaction between science and religion in the context of national development.

In Chapter 1, the author tries to explain how, religion, science and philosophy should and could combine efforts in providing a comprehensive understanding of what the relationship between man, nature and God is. Such an understanding could then form the basis of coherence in a worldwide essential for ensuring that culture and civilisation can be sustained in a state of balance and harmony. Chapter 2 shows how correspondence exist between the efforts of thinkers and scientists in different religious traditions to try to show the complementary role that can be played by religion and science in a holistic understanding of reality. Though their own studies respectively, each of the writers being portrayed described how the realm of the 'super-natural' could be understood in 'natural, 'close-to-life', concepts and ideas that are empirically verifiable. The end product of the author analyses has been nothing less than a exposition of the meaning of life itself [1].

Chapter 3 tries to make clear what the relationship between science and religion is. Although Islamic in its overall context, the chapter is also relevant to anyone interested in the origins of modern science. Chapter 4 tries to draw attention to an issue which is increasingly becoming critical when the interface between science and society is considered. Biology is especially unique amongst the natural sciences by virtue of it being concerned with the most fundamental fact of our existence,

which is life itself. What could be more vital than issues that actually affect the quality of that life which exists at the so-called 'biological' and 'social' level?

To the author at least, one of the justifications for the topic tackled in Chapter Five, is the national education philosophy/policy itself. This philosophy/policy emphasizes two major concerns in the building of a 'progressive society - science and technology, the development and use of which should not be divorced from faith in God and a code of ethics corresponding with that faith. Much debate has arisen regarding the definition, scope, character and more importantly the possible 'contemporary form' of such an Islamic science. Chapter 6 therefore is an attempt to make a contribution to the debate by drawing attention to the need/usefulness of first of all, looking at the fundamental meaning of the study of nature in relation to revelation in Islam. Such a discourse is given the term theology of nature.

In recent years the local public has been voicing concern over the quality of graduates churned out by the universities. In an effort to address this problem, a forum was organised at which one of the topics selected for discussion was attitude towards knowledge which is the subject of Chapter 7. Chapter 8 tries to deal with the tension felt by some in the Malay Community between 'being Islamic' and 'being Malay'. Connected with this tension is also the confusion regarding the concept of 'fate'. Finally it must be noted that in treating the subject of science and religious belief, it is never the intention nor the philosophy of the author to state or indicate that the book of revelation is a book of science. Criticisms have in the past been levelled at those who try to read the meaning of religious texts by using 'Scientific Information'. The critic's argument is that scientific theories are in a constant state of being improved and are therefore susceptible to being changed or proven false from time to time.

References

1. (2012) Kuala Lumpur: Institut Kajian Dasar. pp: 233.

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