

Redefining Harmony: A Domain-Specific Approach to Science and Religion in the Islamic Intellectual Tradition

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Abstract

This study explores the domains of science and religion, focusing on their unique methodologies and approaches to understanding reality. Science operates through observation, experimentation, and logical reasoning, uncovering the mechanisms and laws that govern the universe. Religion, on the other hand, approaches reality from a purpose-oriented perspective, offering guidance, hope, and moral direction, and addressing questions of meaning and ultimate purpose that science alone cannot resolve. By examining the Quranic perspective on creation, revelation, and human existence, this study highlights how religious knowledge is based on divine guidance, 'Ilm-ul-Wahi' and faith, which require trust and interpretation beyond empirical evidence. The study emphasises that understanding the boundaries and strengths of each domain is essential for achieving harmony. Science reveals how the universe functions and provides tools for human well-being, while religion explains why these phenomena exist and how humans should relate to them for the betterment of humanity, drawing on a beyond-material approach. When both domains operate within their proper spheres, they complement rather than contradict each other, offering a fuller understanding of life, the universe, and human purpose.

Keywords: Science and Religion, Epistemology, Quranic Perspective, Human Purpose and Meaning.

Introduction:

Science has almost taken over every aspect of human life. The sensual world has been completely transformed and is continually changing. Each and every day, with the help of technology, humanity discovers another mystery of the universe. With advances in science, this not only affects the material world but also shapes a new perspective on the secrets of the universe, which were once the domain of religion. For centuries, religion has held the domain of answering humanity's most sacred questions. Religious ideologies were formulated to address the mysteries of the universe and the most important questions, such as how it began, who governs it, who maintains proper order in this great phenomenon, and how the laws of nature are upheld with absolute perfection. These claims are held by theology. But when science goes on in its way, it also challenges the claimed realities of religious doctrines.

New worldviews are emerging that argue that scientific research offers different explanations from theological answers. The basic idea of a theological claim comes from the source of divine intervention and guidance, whereas scientific claims are based on empirical research, which can be readily observed. So, this difference in the two explanations can be observed: one claims the domain of divine knowledge, which is absolute, while the other claims the realm of scientific knowledge, which can be challenged on the basis of evidence.

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While the finality of claiming the truth on behalf of different approaches causes a serious conflict, as we have seen in the early Renaissance. So far, there is a strong conflict between these two approaches, and we want to harmonise them to benefit humanity.

The Methodology of Science: Empirical Inquiry and the Nature of Reality:

Science influences all fields of humanity. The understanding of humanity from itself to the larger cosmic order has changed. Science has developed cures and treatments for many diseases that were previously considered incurable. With the invention of vaccines, many diseases could be eliminated before they even started. In the advancement of the field of Physics, humans became capable of travelling in space and landing on the Moon. The field of chemistry provides specific medications that help cure many diseases, and in biology, many mysteries about living organisms are resolved. But science holds specific criteria for research and for finding hidden reality. Once a hypothesis has been proposed, it must be justified using scientific methods and supported by evidence to prove the claim. This entire procedure for finding reality is based on pure scientific reasoning, which is the human senses' basic inclination and is grounded in scientific methods.

As Bertrand Russell¹ explains,

"Science attempts to discover, with observation, specific facts which are reasoning-based and connected to laws. The great contribution of science for the welfare and utilisation of humanity could not be overlooked"²

So, science focuses only on discoveries based on observation and specific facts that fall within the domain of scientific laws, unlike some holy or great person who says that, in fact, the claims of anyone who is not based on scientific and empirical realities are far from consideration.

"Science didn't ask to believe in something without question, because some 'great' person said this, only the thing or fact could become trusted on the basis of empirical evidence."³

The great theologian Paul Davis⁴ also explains scientific knowledge and its role in finding and answering the mysteries of the universe. The power of science cannot be underestimated, especially in explaining the mysteries of the universe.

¹ Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) was a British philosopher, logician, and mathematician, widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. He made important contributions in analytic philosophy, logic, and the philosophy of science. Russell was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950. His works often explain the relationship between science, religion, and rational justification.

² Russell, Bertrand. *Religion and Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 8.

³ Russell, *Religion and Science*, 16.

“Science holds the power to give an explanation of the secrets of the universe, how is all this going on? How could this mechanism be done properly? What is the mechanism of the universe?”⁵

So, science holds the power to answer the question on a deeper level about how the laws of nature work. How is this mechanism going on? What mechanism in the universe is going on? These were the things humans were unaware of in reality. When science discloses them, humanity has played its role in making and forming marvellous technologies.

With advanced scientific knowledge in theoretical physics, scientists can now explain the exact conditions at the beginning of the universe. Not only that, but the formation of our solar system could be understood in detail. Even with the description of science, humanity could also elaborate on Earth's formation and the core material it is made of. The twenty-first-century great scientist, Stephen Hawking⁶ explains that,

"The revolution in the twentieth century in the field of cosmology (and with the invention of the Hubble telescope), we came to know that the universe is expanding, and with proper calculation, we can measure the age of the universe as around ten to fifteen billion years ago." ⁷

So, what a great blessing humanity could avail itself of with the advancement of science: humans could now calculate the age and the initial conditions of the universe. Even Hawking claims that we can understand the universe and its laws without the intervention of any Supernatural being.

"We can use the law of nature to understand the origin of the Universe, without the intervention of supernatural power."⁸

From the above explanation, we know that science not only makes life easier for humanity but also helps uncover the realities of the universe. The perfection in the laws

⁴ Paul Davies (b. 1946) is a British physicist, cosmologist. He has written comprehensively on the relationship between science, religion, and the origin of the universe. Davies has held academic positions at several universities, including the University of Cambridge and Arizona State University, and is known for exploring the concept of cosmic design and fine-tuning.

⁵ Davis, Paul. *The Mind of God*. (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 13.

⁶ Stephen Hawking (1942–2018) was an English theoretical physicist and cosmologist, widely regarded as one of the most influential scientists of the modern era. He made major contribution in the field of physics. Hawking's works, including *A Brief History of Time*, discuss cosmology from a scientific perspective and often address the question of God, creation, and the laws of nature.

⁷ Hawking, Stephen. *The Universe in a Nutshell*. (London: Bantam Press, 2008), 76.

⁸ Hawking, Stephen. *Brief Answers to Big Questions* (London: John Murray, 2020), 29-30.

of nature could lead to the latest technologies for the betterment of humanity as well as the enhancement of the understanding capabilities of this mysterious universe.

The Epistemology of Revelation in Islam: Quranic Perspective on Creation and Knowledge:

Religious claims are very different from scientific descriptions. Where science insists on the results from research and empirical evidence, religion wants faith and unconditional belief. Religious methodology based on the criteria of 'Knowledge' from divine authority, which is also claimed as '*Ilm-ul-Wahi*'. Any claim or belief could not be challenged on a scientific basis as a believer. The authority of religion demands obedience in each and every field of life. Theological answers to the mysteries of life are claimed to be absolute, with divine will intervening. When the human mind asks questions about the creation and the workings of the universe, religion also offers explanations for how all this came into existence. How is it going? And what will be the end of this entire universe, and what is the purpose behind it? Religion gives meaning to human life and holds strong moral criteria. It also holds the package of hope when humans feel darkness in all directions.

وَبِذِهِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِذَا فَعَلَ أَهَرَأَقَلَمًا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ⁹

The Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it : "Be!" – and it is.

The claim of religion is totally based on the one Supreme authority that is God. That His will is absolute and final, and He orders what He wants. He is the originator of all heavens and earth. He creates what he wants to create by merely saying 'BE', and it becomes.

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ¹⁰

Verily, His Command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says to it, "Be!" and it is! Quranic also describes the creation procedure of the universe and its initial stage. When the creation was started all the heavens and earth was united then after that they became separated and formed different identity.

أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ¹¹

Have not those who disbelieve known that the heavens and the earth were joined together as one united piece, then We parted them? And We have made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?

In this verse, the Quran describes the initial condition of the universe, that the heavens and earth were united and He parted them to give them proper shape. But the

⁹ Al-Quran, Al-Baqarah:117

¹⁰ Al-Quran, Yaseen:82

¹¹ Al-Quran, Al-Anbiyaa:30

major and core argument is that - He is only the 'One', 'Who' created this all phenomenon.

وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِإِيمَانٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ¹² ذَارِيَات

With power did We construct the heaven. Verily, We are Able to extend the vastness of space thereof.

The Quran also describes the timeline of creation. Each and every part of creation goes according to divine will. The description of theology also claims that this all was created from specified intention, with proper planning and in specific time-line.

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ اللَّيْلَ يُظَلِّلُ خَيْفًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ وَالنُّجُومَ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ¹³

Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days, and then He Istawa (rose over) the Throne (really in a manner that suits His Majesty). He brings the night as a cover over the day, seeking it rapidly, and (He created) the sun, the moon, the stars subjected to His Command. Surely, His is the Creation and Commandment. Blessed be Allah, the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinns and all that exists)!

Theological claim that all of this has been created according to divine order and with a strong purpose within the mentioned timeline. The doctrine of some scientists who claim the presence of the universe without any deity is strongly opposed by the Quran.

The Primacy of Faith in Religion: An Analysis of Quranic Epistemic Demands :

Quranic theology not only describes this but also encourages believing these 'facts' without any doubt, and there is absolutely no place for scepticism. There are many verses in the Quran that describe the qualities of believers who unconditionally believe in the verses of the Quran, and this is the basic criterion for believers. The Quran mentioned the term 'آمنوا' which means, 'Have faith' or 'Believe' in everything that is revealed unto you.

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ¹⁴

And who believe in (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) which has been sent down (revealed) to you (Muhammad Peace be upon him) and which were sent down before you and they believe with certainty in the Hereafter.

Even the messengers are required to believe what is revealed to them. And this faith includes belief in everything mentioned in the Quranic description, including angels, holy books, and previous messengers. Along with believing, they also take an oath of unconditional obedience.

¹² Al-Quran, Az-Zariyat:47

¹³ Al-Quran, Al-A'raf:54

¹⁴ Al-Quran, Al-Baqarah:4

The Messenger (Muhammad) believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. Each one believes in Allah, His Angels, His Books, and His Messengers. They say, “We make no distinction between one another of His Messengers” – and they say, “We hear, and we obey. (We seek) Your Forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the return (of all).”

O you who believe! Believe in Allah, and His Messenger (Muhammad), and the Book (the Qur'an) which He has sent down to His Messenger, and the Scripture which He sent down to those before (him), and whosoever disbelieves in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day, then indeed he has strayed far away.

People who believe in these books and their claims are the people who are on the right track, and those are the people who are demanded by the Quran and only those people who are ‘truthful’.

Only those are the believers who have believed in Allah and His Messenger, and afterward doubt not but strive with their wealth and their lives for the Cause of Allah. Those! They are the truthful.

¹⁷Al Quran 49:15

Epistemological Differences Between Science and Religion: A Comparative Analysis:

Aspects	Religion	Science
Authority	Divine revelation, Prophets	Admirable humans' evidence
Basic Methodology	Faith in sacred sources	Experiment research
Sources Of Knowledge	Divine - couldn't be tangible	Research - Scientific methods
Changeability	Absolutely No	Always on behalf of new research
Verification Method	Believe - Admire The authority absolutely	By experimentation only proven results could Be admired
Goal / Purpose	Guidance to humanity	Uncovering the secrets of nature

The above-mentioned chart describes very clearly the difference between religion and Science. The difference in authority, Basic Methodology, Sources of Knowledge, Changeability, Verification Method, and their main Goal. Both hold very different domains. One is guiding humans to determine what is right and what is wrong, while the other is navigating the mysteries of the universe.

Understanding:

As we understand from our discussion, both approaches hold different domains. One gives meaning and morals to human life, while the other comforts it; one holds the necessity of hope, while the other gives light to the unknown mysteries. One treats the soul while the other treats the body. One works in the realm of the soul, while the other works in the realm of the physical body. One claims the purpose of creation, while the other describes the governing principles of the living body. One can ask how all this came into existence, while others explain why all life was created. Both are absolutely important to humanity; if we eliminate either, it would be beyond imagination.

Critical Analysis: A Domain-Specific Approach to Harmony Between Science and Religion:

Humans always have an intense curiosity to find the answers to the mysteries of the universe. Humans have always sought to answer these questions, and many philosophers have elaborated on their findings. While religion, in its own explanation, gives the answer to the questions of the mysteries of life. But in reality, both domains benefit human wellness: one provides the interpretation of the universe that 'how' it works, while the other answers the 'why' of why it works.

As John C Lennox¹⁸ explains by the example of ‘Aunt Matilda’s cake’

“Aunt Matilda has baked a beautiful cake, and we take the world’s top scientists to explain the cake. Nutrition scientists will tell us about the number of calories, biochemists will explain the structure of protein, physicists will mention the fundamental particles, and mathematicians will offer us elegant equations about the behaviour of those particles. Now, all experts explain the cake perfectly within their domain, but can we say their explanations are complete? because all these things are about ‘How’ the cake was made and ‘How’ its various elements relate to each other? But the final question was, “Why was the cake made? And what is the purpose behind it? All top nutritionists, biochemists, physicists and mathematicians could not answer that.

It is not the insult of those experts because these disciplines can cope only with the questions of ‘How’ and ‘Why’ is not their domain.”¹⁹

So, Lennox elaborates that the question of how the domain of science is, while the question of why is not in its paradigm. To find the answer to why and the meaning in the presence of humanity in this universe could only be related to religion.

Conclusion:

In this study, we found that:

- The human mind has been very curious to find the answer to the universe for a very long time. Humans have always tried to answer these questions. In earlier ages, many philosophers answered these questions, but as knowledge advanced, old concepts have been revised through research. Scientists of our age also tried to answer these questions on purely materialistic grounds. But they always have the way and openness to new research based on evidence. Scientific knowledge is always in the way of evolution, and it will remain.
- The doctrine of religion is very confident in its instance, and it is not changed or modified, especially in the description of divine authority. Religious claims are very decisive in their instances. Some interpretations could be changed in a very limited form, but the core argument will be stagnant.
- Rift or conflict between science and religion is only because of challenging one another’s authority and trying to work in the domain of the other.
- The best possible way to resolve the conflict and harmonise them is to make them work separately for the better of humanity in their respective fields without overlapping each other’s domain. Let science work in its domain of materialistic betterment and let religion work in the realm of hope, meaning and purpose for humanity.

¹⁸ John C. Lennox (b. 1943) is a British mathematician and philosopher of science who served as Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford. He is well known for his writings on the philosophy of science and religion, particularly his critique of scientific atheism and his apologetic approach in the favor of theism in light of modern cosmology and physics.

¹⁹ Lennox, John C. *God’s Undertaker Has Science Buried God ?*. (Oxford. Lion. 2007), 41.

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