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Compatibility of religion and science

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Abstract: Science and religion are regarded as two conflicting entities within the Western cultural paradigm, particularly among naturalists. The claims made by religion regarding supernatural entities are rejected by naturalist groups, who emphasize their arguments based on science. However, within the perspective of Islamic culture, there exists a close relationship between science and religion. Science and religion are two entities that exist on the same path and cannot be pitted against each other. The author will present Alvin Plantinga's arguments against Richard Dawkins regarding the compatibility of science and religion, as Dawkins, being a naturalist, deems them incompatible. The author will also put forth arguments by Naquib Al-Attas concerning the inseparable relationship between science and religion. In conclusion, the differing understandings of religion and science give rise to conflicts between perspectives. The methodology employed by the author is theoretical and comparative descriptive, involving the explanation of prominent figures' thoughts on a subject and the comparison of these thoughts to identify the fundamental issues stemming from differences in their perspectives.

Keywords: Alvin Plantinga, naturalism, religion, science

Abstrak: Sains dan agama dianggap sebagai dua entitas yang saling bertentangan dalam paradigma budaya Barat, khususnya di kalangan naturalis. Klaim yang dibuat oleh agama mengenai entitas supernatural ditolak oleh kelompok naturalis yang menekankan argumen mereka berdasarkan sains. Namun dalam perspektif budaya Islam, terdapat hubungan yang erat antara sains dan agama. Sains dan agama adalah dua entitas yang berada pada jalur yang sama dan tidak dapat diadu domba. Penulis akan memaparkan argumentasi Alvin Plantinga yang menentang Richard Dawkins mengenai kesesuaian sains dan agama, karena Dawkins, sebagai seorang naturalis, menganggapnya tidak sejalan. Penulis juga akan mengemukakan argumentasi Naquib Al-Attas mengenai hubungan yang tidak dapat dipisahkan antara ilmu pengetahuan dan agama. Kesimpulannya, perbedaan pemahaman agama dan sains menimbulkan konflik antar perspektif. Metodologi yang penulis gunakan adalah deskriptif teoritis dan komparatif, yang meliputi penjelasan pemikiran tokoh-tokoh mengenai suatu subjek dan perbandingan pemikiran-pemikiran tersebut untuk mengidentifikasi persoalan-persoalan mendasar yang timbul dari perbedaan cara pandang mereka.

Kata Kunci: agama, Alvin Plantinga, naturalisme, sains

Introduction

Demonstrating the compatibility between science and religion is not an easy task. The current progress of science has not been able to provide answers to the entirety of religious teachings. Or is it perhaps that science is incapable of fully revealing the contents of religion? Are science and religion inherently incompatible? These questions underlie the author's motivation to compose this article. The author will present arguments from Alvin Plantinga in his book titled "Where The Conflict Really Lies" (2011). Plantinga, a researcher in the field of philosophy of religion, steadfastly rejects the arguments put forth by naturalist groups, specifically referencing Richard Dawkins.

Subsequently, the author will demonstrate that both Plantinga and Dawkins possess differing perspectives on science and religion. The author will also present the Islamic perspective on the concept of science and religion as articulated by Naquib Al-Attas in "Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin" (2001). From this perspective, the question of whether science and religion are compatible with each other can be elucidated differently.

The methodology employed by the author is theoretical and comparative descriptive, as found in the book "Metodologi Penelitian Filsafat" by Dr. Anton Bakker and Drs. Achmad Charris Zubair (1990), as part of a research model regarding a concept throughout history. This method involves the explanation of prominent figures' thoughts on a specific conceptual framework throughout history and advances the

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comparison of these thoughts to identify fundamental issues stemming from differences in their perspectives.

Naturalism, Science, and Religion

Alvin Plantinga is well-known in the field of philosophy of religion. On one hand, he is a devout follower of Christian teachings, but on the other hand, he consistently attempts to demonstrate the weaknesses of claims that science is incompatible with religion through his studies in philosophy of religion. In his book titled "Where the Conflict Really Lies" (2011), Plantinga delves into the weaknesses of claims made by naturalists, particularly Richard Dawkins, a proponent of naturalism, regarding the incompatibility of science with religion. He bases his arguments on Dawkins' own arguments concerning evolution.

In broad terms, naturalism asserts that there are no supernatural entities that govern the universe. All events are the result of causal relationships governed by natural laws. Naturalism employs science to justify the truth behind all natural phenomena. Specifically, Dawkins, in his book "The Blind Watchmaker" (1986), insists that with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, the question of good design (a term he uses to refer to our current form) has been answered. There is no God, and natural processes, supported by scientific evidence, sufficiently serve as proof of good design.

Plantinga presents arguments that counter Dawkins' claims in his book. He specifically points out the weaknesses in Dawkins' arguments regarding evolution. In "The Blind Watchmaker," Dawkins states:

> "All appearances to the contrary, the only watchmaker in nature is the blind forces of physics, albeit deployed in a very special way. A true watchmaker has foresight: he designs his cogs and springs, and plans their interconnections, with a future purpose in his mind's eye. Natural selection, the blind, unconscious automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind and no mind's eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is the blind watchmaker."

This passage is Dawkins' comment on William Paley, a 19th-century theologian, who in his book "Natural Theology or Evidences of the Existence and Attribute of the Diety" (1802) posited that God is akin to a watchmaker. Dawkins disagrees with Paley's notion of God's intervention. As a naturalist, Dawkins emphasizes that science provides the answers to the questions about order described by Paley. Dawkins also presents five questions in "The Blind Watchmaker" regarding the development of the human eye's functional changes, which he believes to be the result of refinement through evolution. Plantinga takes three of Dawkins' five questions to illustrate that Dawkins' claims are, in fact, incomplete.

> "Just for purposes of argument, let's concede that Dawkins succeeds in refuting each of these claims of impossibility. Clearly that doesn't entail that the impossibility claims are false; it shows only that certain arguments for them are not cogent. The question still remains: is it possible that unguided natural selection generate all the stunning marvels of the living world? Dawkins puts this question in the following tripartite fashion:
> (1) Is there a continuous series of Xs connecting the modern human eye to a state with no eye at all?
> (2) Considering each member of the series of hypothetical Xs connecting the human eye to no eye at all, is it plausible that every one of them was made available by random mutation of its predecessor?
> (3) Considering each member of the series of Xs connecting the human eye to no eye at all, is it plausible that every one of them worked sufficiently well that it assisted the survival and reproduction of the animals concerned?"

In these questions, Dawkins states that the human eye can evolve through a series of gradual changes that enhance its complexity and functionality. Plantinga uses these questions to show that Dawkins views evolution as a natural process that is likely to occur and produce beneficial outcomes. By quoting Dawkins' questions, Plantinga emphasizes that there are still unanswered questions and arguments that

need further examination before fully accepting the viewpoint that evolution without guidance through natural selection can explain the origins of the complexity of the human eye.

Plantinga continues the discussion of these three questions by posing a serious question of his own, which he calls the Big Question (BQ): "(BQ) Is there a path through organic space connecting, say, some ancient population of unicellular life with the human eye, where each point on the path could plausibly have come from a preceding point by way of a heritable random genetic mutation that was adaptively useful, and that could plausibly then have spread through the appropriate population by way of unguided natural selection?"

Plantinga answers the BQ with five arguments, as follows:

1. The human eye is just one representation of a broader spectrum of life forms, so the question is not limited to the development of the human eye alone but extends to all current life forms.
2. The question should begin with actual populations of unicellular organisms, not just hypothetical populations. The argument to be made is that humans (and therefore the human eye) could have evolved through undirected natural selection from actual populations of unicellular organisms.
3. Other life forms, as transitional forms, along that evolutionary path must be possible, even if they don't necessarily exist in actual form. In this case, it is sufficient that those life forms could have possibly existed.
4. The points along that evolutionary path must be indexed temporally, with a sufficient temporal distance between two points for relevant mutations to spread through the respective population. This means that the time elapsed from the initial population of unicellular organisms to the emergence of the eye will determine the number of points on the path and the temporal distance between them; the number of points and their temporal distance can be significant but not unlimited.
5. Lastly, it is important to understand the meaning of "possible" in the sentence "is it plausible that every one of them was made available by random mutation of its predecessor?" We are not discussing a broad logical possibility; we are not asking if there is a possible world in which this development occurs. That would be too weak; as Dawkins explained, there is a possible world in which a bronze statue in the park (in its current state) waves its hand as we leave.

Note: The last sentence is a direct quote from Dawkins' argument, included to clarify the meaning of "possible" in the context of Plantinga's response.

Dawkins' proposed possibility does not necessarily mean it is wrong, but it is very weak in demonstrating the sequence of changes in a biological structure like the eye. It does not address other biological forms or social aspects. Plantinga concludes that Dawkins' claim about evolution is weak. Describing the outcomes of evolution as possibilities does not provide new information. Winning in science does not limit the possibilities that can occur, but even with the principle of possibility, science cannot provide adequate answers. The question of why something is not possible is answered with another question, "Why is it not impossible?" and that answer is not satisfactory.

Plantinga also presents his counter-argument against the concept of naturalistic evolution, famously known as EAAN (Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism). Jim Slagle (2021) summarizes the argument as follows:

Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism

(1) P(R|N&E) is low.
(2) Anyone who accepts (believes) N&E and sees that P(R|N&E) is low has a defeater for R.
(3) Anyone who has a defeater for R has a defeater for any other belief she thinks she has, including N&E itself.
(4) If one who accepts N&E thereby acquires a defeater for N&E, N&E is self-defeating and can't rationally be accepted. Conclusion: N&E can't rationally be accepted.

Slagle adds that this argument depends on the probability equation P(R|N&E). P stands for probability, R stands for reliable cognitive abilities, N stands for naturalism, and E stands for evolution. N&E refers to the conjunction of naturalism and evolution. So, P(R|N&E) means "the probability that naturalistic evolution will result in reliable cognitive abilities."

Methodological Naturalism

It is important to note that there are at least two understandings of the term naturalism. Plantinga refers to them as philosophical naturalism and methodological naturalism. Philosophical naturalism denies the existence of supernatural entities in all aspects, while methodological naturalism does not involve supernatural entities in its research. The absence of involvement does not imply denial or rejection of the existence of supernatural entities. It can be understood as a condition of being blind to supernatural entities.

Methodological naturalism employs a series of reasoning that emphasizes rationality and logic. Human reasoning abilities are used as a basis for constructing arguments about the subjects under investigation. Therefore, the involvement of supernatural entities is not problematic if there is indeed involvement in the subject being studied. Scientific methodology criteria serve as limitations in the perspective of methodological naturalism. Plantinga quotes a statement from Ernan McMullin regarding the position of methodological naturalism:

However, of course, methodological naturalism does not restrict our study of nature; methodological naturalism only specifies the kinds of inquiries that qualify as scientific. If someone wants to take another approach to nature—and there are many other approaches—methodological naturalism has no reason to object. Scientists should proceed in this way; the methodology of natural science does not support the claim that some event or kind of event must be accounted for by direct divine action.

From the perspective of methodological naturalism, science is understood as a tool for acquiring knowledge about the desired subjects. Science is not positioned as the sole correct paradigm of thinking but rather as a tool that can reveal truths within its own scope. Therefore, the limitations of methodological naturalism are clearly defined as rationality and logic within the extent that humans can comprehend.

Thus far, it can be understood that there are two understandings of naturalism: philosophical naturalism, which rejects the existence of supernatural entities, and methodological naturalism, which does not involve supernatural entities. Religion exists as a perspective that places supernatural entities as significant in the events that occur. Consequently, methodological naturalism does not make judgments of right or wrong regarding the religious perspective because it disregards, rather than rejects, supernatural entities. On the other hand, philosophical naturalism completely denies supernatural entities, rendering the religious perspective insignificant in the quest for truth about all occurrences. Hence, differences in understanding and the placement of positions outside their respective domains become the cause of debates regarding the compatibility of science and religion.

Science and Religion in the Islamic Perspective

In his book titled "Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin" (2001), Nuqaib Al-Attas, particularly in sections 15 to 20, explains the differences in understanding of 'ilm (knowledge) between Western and Islamic studies. 'Ilm, as described by Al-Attas, is a tool for attaining truth. Since 'ilm is a tool, it cannot determine its own truth. Truth belongs to God, and through 'ilm, humans comprehend God's decrees. This understanding is supported by religious teachings, as 'ilm is considered a part of religion.

Al-Attas emphasizes the difference in understanding of 'ilm between Western and Islamic cultures based on the Islamic perspective. According to him, in the Islamic intellectual tradition, 'ilm differs from assumptions, speculations, and opinions, which in Western culture are referred to as methods and theories. Science occupies that realm within the cultural paradigm of the West. Additionally, Islamic culture also encompasses the study of mantiq, which is the study of logical reasoning, equivalent to what is referred to as logic in Western culture. According to Al-Attas, these categories are not 'ilm in themselves but are part of 'ilm and cannot stand alone.

Al-Attas continues by stating that 'ilm in Islamic culture is about recognition and understanding. Recognition involves acknowledging the status of fellow creatures as creations of God. Understanding one another means comprehending their respective positions as beings. Recognition is an effort to know human beings, animals, plants, natural phenomena, social phenomena, and everything manifested in this world.

Contrasting with 'ilm, "knowing" and "recognizing" have different meanings. In comparison to recognition, 'ilm means understanding God's decrees as the true decrees. Through 'ilm, human beings uncover the veils of worldly knowledge and transcend beyond that. Belief becomes a crucial factor in 'ilm. This belief must be based on religious teachings, establishing compatibility between 'ilm and religion. They are intertwined and complement each other. It is important to note that sorcery and magic are not considered true 'ilm. They represent a deviation in the recognition and misapplication of knowledge. 'Ilm must align with religious teachings.

Conclusion

Al-Attas' explanation opposed the viewpoint of naturalism. While naturalism dismisses supernatural entities to make knowledge acceptable on rational and logical grounds, Al-Attas places supernatural entities as the foundation of knowledge. Similarly, Plantinga rejects the notion that science is always opposed to religion. The conflict between science and religion arises from a difference in understanding that is not openly accepted. If one states that science is merely a tool and accepts it, then the existence of science is neutral towards religion. Likewise, if one considers religion to be incompatible with knowledge, the claims of religion regarding science (and knowledge) can be deemed unreasonable, and the matter can be resolved. There is no need to differentiate between the domains of science and religion.

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