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A Critique of Alvin Plantinga's Speech: "Science and Religion: Where the Conflict Really Lies?"

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1. The Emergence Of Conflict Between Science And Religion

1.1. Basics of Conflict

Science and religion are two different appearance of the social life; religion was become important in the history of thought of humanity. As for science; it showed its existence with ancient Greek and Arabs and after that period, suddenly it gained importance in 16th century, from that time until today it preserved its importance and gradually it became more and more importance in the human life.

When we look from the social aspect, religion is a more complex phenomenon than the science. A religious faith differs from the scientific fact by its claim that it represents the absolute truth. While the science knows that there is no absolute truth, every thesis can be change by time. ¹

1.2. Historical Background

The interactions between science and religion have often had an aggressive character. There has been, most of the time a real warfare. ² Historical events shape the understandings of people. To make easy to understand the conflict, one should consider the historical facts that leads to conflict.

There are two historical cases that are regarded as examples of conflict. The first is the trial of Galileo in 1633. The second is Darwin's theory of evolution in the 19th century.

Galileo advocated the new Copernican theory in which the earth and planets revolve in orbits around the sun, rather than the accepted the Ptolemaic theory in which the sun and the planets revolve in orbits around the earth.

This theory get started the conflict because it was in challenge to the authority of scripture; there are some passages that imply that the earth is the

¹ Bertrand RUSSEL, *Bilim ve Din, Yüzyıllardır Süren Savaş*, İstanbul 1972, p.6

² George SARTON, *The Life of Science*, Henry Schuman, NY, p.38

center of cosmos. But the crucial factor was its being in challenge to the authority of church.

The second case is Darwin's theory of evolution in the 19th century. Some scientists and religious scholars debated that religious beliefs and evolution are incompatible.

The evolutionary theory caused the conflict for its being regarded as:

- I. A Challenge to Biblical Literalism
- II. A Challenge to Human Dignity
- III. A Challenge to Design³

2. Plantinga's Discourse At Biola

2.1. A Recap of the Discourse

Alvin Plantinga gives a lecture at Biola University on October 16, 2010, which name is Science and Religion: Where the Conflict Really Lies.⁴

In the first part of the lecture, there are lots of jokes, he mentions solipsism and after that he starts to talk about science and religion, where the conflict really lies, and he starts his speech with saying " if there is such a conflict." And he gives some examples what people regard as the reasons of conflict. Such as, divine action, scientific scripture scholarship, scientific worldview, naturalism and evolutionary theory. These concepts will be examined in further chapter.

Plantinga argues that whether the evolutionary theory is compatible with theistic belief, believe in God or not. In this part he argues that contemporary evolutionary theory is not incompatible with theistic beliefs,

And he argues naturalism, the thought that there is no such thing as the god or theistic religion or anything like God.

³ Ian G. BARBOUR, *When Science Meets Religion*, San Francisco, pp.7-9

⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjbp9PrtPS8>

He argues that the conflict is between science and naturalism, and is not between theistic religion and science. He consists of his argumentation on this topic and the other ideas of him depend on this theory. His basic argument is: "There is no conflict between science and religion." and he names the naturalists who claim the contrary as "new atheists". For example, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris are from them. He calls them as Four Horsemen. These people intentionally ignore the people who claim the contrary of their ideas and suppose that; the religions are the main reason of the wars, terrorism and conflict in the world. They point to the Crusades, to witch hunt, to religious wars, to intolerance, and much else besides. And also they support that religious beliefs are not compatible with reason, but they should be rational if they are true, religious beliefs are absurd as much as believing in Superman.

In general, if we sum up the thesis of the Plantinga, he claims that there is a conflict between science and religion but basically this conflict is between science and semi-religion, i.e. naturalism and is not between science and theistic religion.

2.1.1. Concepts

To understand clearly, a brief sum of the concepts is given under this title.

Divine Action

Divine Action is the God's action in the world that includes the creation of it. To tell the truth the conflict between the science and religion come from this topic. Because while the religious man or theologians claim that everything in the world is a result of His action, scientists claim the contrary.

Scientific Scripture Scholarship

Sometimes is called historical biblical criticism and sometimes is called higher criticism. Various theories on proposals one plane in that area conflict with go parts important parts of Christian belief. One of the most debatable topics is the age of the Universe. Scientific discoveries are against the biblical datum.

Scientific Worldview

Some people figure there is a scientific worldview which supports or and forces naturalism.

Naturalism

Naturalism is the thought that there is no person as God, or anything like God. Naturalism is what we call a worldview, a sort of total way looking at our world and ourselves. It isn't clearly a religion: the term "religion" is vague, and naturalism falls into the vague area of its application. Still naturalism plays many of the same roles as religion. In particular, it gives answers to the great human questions: is there such a person as God? How should we live? Can we look forward to life after death? What is our place in the universe? How are we related to other creatures? Naturalism gives answers here: there is no God, and it makes no sense to hope for life after death. As to our place in the grand scheme of things, we human beings are just another animal with a peculiar way of making a living. Naturalism isn't clearly a religion; but since it plays some of the same roles as religion, we could properly call it a quasi-religion.⁵

Evolutionary Theory

The evolutionary theory is incompatible with Christian belief. According to Gould, "Before Darwin, we were thought that a benevolent God had created us." After Darwin, though, he says, we realize that "No intervening spirit watches lovingly over the affairs of the nature."⁶

Darwinism

Darwinism is the idea that the main or possibly even only mechanism driving the whole process of evolution is natural selection culling random genetic mutation. A Darwinist will think there is a complete Darwinian history for every contemporary species, and indeed for every contemporary organism.

⁵ Alvin PLANTINGA, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, New York, 2011

⁶ Caner TASLAMAN, *Allah, Felsefe ve Bilim*, Istanbul, 2012, p. 176

2.2. Evolutionary Theory versus Christian Belief

According to Alvin Plantinga, there is no real conflict between theistic religion and scientific theory of evolution. What there is, instead, as conflict between theistic religion and a philosophical gloss or add-on to the scientific doctrine of evolution: the claim that evolution is undirected unguided or unorchestrated by God or anyone else.

He argues that contemporary evolutionary theory is compatible with believe in God. Evolution covers a multitude of thesis, the New Testament says love covers a multitude of sins, evolution covers but term covers not necessarily a multitude of sins but a multitude of thesis.

He argues second the piece is a descent with modification where the idea is that all the vast variety of flora and fauna hollow brass righty enormous variety someone find in the living world all came to be by virtual offspring differing ordinarily in rather small respects from their parents and these differences proliferate and spread out and as a result someone get those enormous variation that you do find in our contemporary living world.

And then he continues third there's a common ancestry basis the idea that could pick any to many to world to pick any two living creatures not just any two people not just any to animals but any two living creatures and trace their ancestry for enough back you'll run into a common ancestor.

And the fourth one is Darwinism, the claim that the principal mechanism driving this process at the central modification is natural selection winnowing or working on random genetic mutation.

Darwinism is the idea that the drives this process a descent with modification is natural selection working on random genetic mutation.

2.2.1. Is Darwinism incompatible with theistic religions?

According to Plantinga a large number of people think so. Four Horsemen; Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris claim that contemporary evolutionary theory is incompatible with Christianity or any theistic religion, it is incompatible with belief in God. They

argued that contemporary evolutionary theory has been scientifically established therefore Christian belief is false in real.

But Plantinga claims the contrary, he argues that Christianity doesn't say anything about how God created a living world, he could have done this in many ways, he could have used some process like sometime Darwinian process involving descent with modification.

There's no contradiction there God could certainly have done it that way he could have caused the right mutations to arrives at the right time for example he could have protected various Maria species various groups of animals from various kinds have hazards and dangers.

Plantinga argues that evolutionary theory and natural selection and Darwinism are not incompatible with theistic religion because it is also a result of God's action. He seems them as directed, guided and orchestrated by God.

He criticizes the general understanding of creation in Bible, God has created the human in His image, and scholars who support the idea that evolution and Darwinism are unguided and undirected.

3. Critique Of Plantinga

3.1. Evolutionary Theory and Belief in God

In every monotheistic religion a God-centric ontology is the basis. The most important question is whether the evolutionary theory is a threat for God's superiority or not? One of the crucial problems in this theory is its relationship with God's creation.

One of the common biases is making relation between atheism and evolutionary theory and theism and denying evolutionary theory. But this does not represent the truth; because there are so many theists who believe in evolutionary theory, and so many atheists become atheist without caring about evolutionary theory.

People can be classified according to their belief in God and evolutionary theory in three groups:

A.

1. Who believe in evolutionary theory- Agnostics
2. Who believe in evolutionary theory- Atheists
3. Who believe in evolutionary theory- Theists

B.

1. Who deny evolutionary theory- Agnostics
2. Who deny evolutionary theory- Atheists
3. Who deny evolutionary theory- Theists

C.

1. Who says evolutionary theory can't be known- Agnostics
2. Who says evolutionary theory can't be known- Atheists
3. Who says evolutionary theory can't be known- Theists

So as it can be seen from the classification there is no strict distinction between belief in God and evolutionary theory.⁷

3.2. Islamic Perspective toward the Age of World and the Universe

In Quran, it is stated that the world is created in "6 days", the Arabic form of day is *yawm*, and it has the same root with its Hebrew. The word *yawm* expresses 24 hours as well as long periods of time. Usage of the word *yawm* for 50 thousand years reasoned the understanding of 6 days as 6 long periods.⁸

Related Qu'ranic verses are:

يدبر الامر من السماء الى العرض ثم يعرج اليه في يوم كان مقداره الف سنة مما تعدون.

⁷ Caner TASLAMAN, *Evrin Teorisi, Felsefe ve Tanrı*, İstanbul, 2007, pp. 321-23

⁸ Caner TASLAMAN, *Evrin Teorisi, Felsefe ve Tanrı*, İstanbul, 2007, p. 363

He arranges every affair from the heaven to the earth, then it will go up to him in one day is the space of which a thousand years of what you count of your years.(32 al-Sajdah, 5)⁹

تعرج الملائكة ر الروح اليه في يوم كان مقداره خمسين الف سنة.

Ascend the Angels and the Spirit to Him in a day is the measure whereof fifty thousand years. (70 al-Ma'arij, 4)¹⁰

This usage of the Quran is understood as the whole process of the creation of the universe as well as the relativity of the time. Our mistake about time is our consideration towards it as absolute for everyone in every condition. But these verses show us our mistake.

The age of the universe has not been a cause for science and religion conflict in the Islamic world because there is no dilemma as Christendom. No one in the Islamic world didn't try to attain the absolute age of the universe as Christian theologians did. Christian theologians decided as a consequent of big debates that the universe is created 4008 B.C.

Even in 16th century, the second president of Cambridge University, Leitfood determined that the creation is occurred 4004 year before the Jesus on October 23 at 9 am.¹¹

3.3. Is There any Sign in the Quran Towards Evolutionary Theory?

Some verses are regarded as proof for evolutionary theory via long comments. These verses are:

و قد خلقكم اطوارا.

And surely He has created you in stages. (70 al-Noah, 14)¹²

و الله انبتكم من العرض نباتا.

⁹ Hacı Ahmet DİDİN, The Holy Quran and Word by Word English Translation, Ankara, 2007, pp. 439-440

¹⁰ Hacı Ahmet DİDİN, The Holy Quran and Word by Word English Translation, Ankara, 2007, p. 567

¹¹ Muhammed Ali AYNİ, Bilim-Din Çatışması, Din Bilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi, 3, İstanbul, 2003, p.239

¹² Hacı Ahmet DİDİN, The Holy Quran and Word by Word English Translation, Ankara, 2007, p. 570

And Allah has brought you forth from the dust of earth as a growth. (70 al-Noah, 17)¹³

The first verse indicates that the human being is created in stages; even we consider this statement as evolution, there are serious differentiations between evolution and evolutionary theory. So in this verse, there is no relation with evolutionary theory. In this regard, the rupture point is the difference between saying that evolution is used in the Quran and saying that evolutionary theory which claims that all species evaluated from each other and has a common ancestor used in the Quran.

And also second verse does not include any sign towards evolutionary theory; it just makes an analogy between the human being and the plants. Plants are growth from the earth and they grow up with water and human being is created from the soil and water.¹⁴

Conclusion

The fundamental reason of the conflict between science and religion is the aim to gain superiority over the other. Because both of them are claiming that they represent the way to absolute truth. The most real guide is science in the life. But actually it is not. Although science support the idea that there is no absolute truth, every premise can be false, it expect a trust from the people.

A Notre-Dame University professor Alvin Plantinga gives a lecture about this topic, the title of his lecture is: Science and Religion, Where the Conflict Really Lies. In this regard he claims that there is no conflict between theistic religion (Christianity) and evolutionary theory, he makes a quartet classification, namely, alleged conflict, superficial conflict, deep conflict and deep concord.

He argues that there is no conflict between theistic religion and evolutionary theory, but there is conflict between theistic religion and a philosophical gloss or add-on to the scientific doctrine of evolution: the claim that evolution is undirected, unguided or unorchestrated by God or anyone

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Caner TASLAMAN, *Evrin Teorisi, Felsefe ve Tanrı*, İstanbul, 2007, p. 376

else. He argues that evolution is directed, guided and orchestrated by God, and this is compatible with Darwinism.

Rupture point is, Plantinga is a Christian man. When he mentions theistic religion he always thought with the Christian terminology. The topic has very different dimensions in the Islamic world. For Muslim world, as to tell the truth, there is no conflict between science and religion. Islam encourages science.

And for evolutionary theory, however Plantinga argues that evolution is guided, his claim is refuted by both naturalists and evolutionists. Also he sees the naturalism in a deep conflict with science or evolutionary theory. But this claim looks nonsensical, while they have a common denominator, while they have a common sense, which is the absence of God or a Creator or something else, how can they be in a deep conflict?