

An Illusion of Harmony: Science and Religion in Islam

by Taner Edis

Introductory Essay by Munawar A. Anees

The debate on Islam's relationship with science, unlike its Western counterpart, is in its early phases, with the likelihood of shifting positions or unexpected conclusions. This book falls into this category and forms part of a growing body of literature on the subject. Written by a secular Turkish author, it is a mix of perceptions derived from personal experiences of life in Turkey and a professional career in physical science in the West.

An Illusion of Harmony reviews the contemporary evolution of science and technology in the Muslim world. Rebuffing claims of the "inherent rationality and scientific orientation of Islam" [19] it casts a long shadow. However, solutions to some of the critical problems as to why "did modern science arise not in the Muslim world but in Europe" [22] or why "do Muslim countries continue to lag in scientific and technological capabilities" [22] are not offered by the author.

Making little or no recourse to Islamic epistemology, the author moves to discuss some key philosophical issues. With good reason, he identifies Quranic literalism as one of the major contenders in this debate and argues that it is patently wrong to seek support from science to validate the "truth" of the scriptures. Although the author has largely restricted himself to the Turkish debate, by a detailed expose of the Nur Movement, the issue is actively pursued with greater rigor in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Muslim world.

Until recently there has been virtually no Muslim discourse on evolution vs. creation. However, with the meteoric rise of writings attributed to a Turkish author, Harun Yahya, the subject now is widely debated across the Muslim world. The vision of "harmony and morality-infused nature" [154] is deeply disturbed by the dictates of Darwinian evolution. The entire chapter devoted to the rise of creationism thus is indicative of an intellectual digression with serious consequences for the Muslim world.

The author has added an interesting dimension to his narrative by covering the so-called Islamization of knowledge. Contrary to the common view of science and religion where only the natural sciences come into play, Islamization of knowledge encompasses the domain of social sciences as well. One finds several parallels between Quranic literalism and the Islamization of knowledge exercise. While the author recognizes the ethical concerns of social sciences, the "Islamized" approach of Muslim social scientists is characterized by him as "the failure of imagination" [196].

Taner Edis has attempted to cover a vast subject in presenting the Turkish view of Islam and science discourse. A vibrant debate is taking place across many Muslim lands. To understand it in some fair depth it is important to study the diversity of Muslim opinion on the subject. This secular critique presents one side of this important discourse. Other volumes in the ISSR Library and such sources as the *Journal of Islamic Science* might be looked to for other perspectives.