



THE CONFLICT BETWEEN RELIGION AND SCIENCE: AN IGWEBUIKE EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHE



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Abstract

The relationship between science and religion has generally been viewed as one of antagonism and hostility. One particular instance being cited to support this view is the controversy between evolution and creationism. Creationism asserts that faith should be considered more important than science, and based its beliefs on the bible. For the creationist, God is the creator of the earth and everything in it. For evolutionists, the earth is far older than the biblical account, animals and plants are the result of a process called evolution. Two historical events demonstrate that the relationship between religion and science is far from being harmonious. The first is the outcome of the scientific revolution that led to the exaltation of science and its methods. The second is the rejection of metaphysical and religious propositions by the science-oriented logical positivists. The consequence of these events is that science has become highly esteemed and

scientific knowledge is being seen as the only reliable form of knowledge. On the contrary, religious authority and knowledge are being doubted and questioned. To address the conflict, I have introduced igwebuiké philosophy of solidarity and complementarity. I have shown how this philosophical perspective is vital in the conflict between religion and science because it promotes the spirit of mutual interdependence and respect for the view of the other. The perspective of igwebuiké philosophy applied here can be instrumental in finding a permanent solution to the disagreement between religion and science. I have employed the following methods of inquiring in the course of this work: historical, evaluative and analytic.

Keywords: Igwebuiké, sympathetic approach, complimentary approach, scientific method, religion, logical positivism

Introduction

The controversy concerning the relationship between religion and science has lingered for many decades. From an historical perspective, the relationship can be analysed in different ways. For some people this relationship can be understood in terms of rivalry; an event that is repeatedly mentioned in this respect is the encounter between the Catholic church and Galileo. Others see it in terms of harmony and collaboration; still, a small group of people believe that both disciplines are intrinsically opposed to each other. Is science a hindrance to the practice of religion? Is religious

practice opposed to scientific knowledge? Can both inquiries function together? Or are they inherently antagonistic to each other? Has the achievement of science proven that religion is wrong? Has religion an obstacle to the advancement of science? My purpose in this essay is to show how igwebuike philosophy can offer a better understanding of, and solution to the disagreement between science and philosophy.

Science and its methods

Science attempt to search for knowledge and understand the universe is carried out through the means of method experimentation and observation. Science is distinguished by its methodology- the scientific method. Although there are disagreements concerning a common and collective method that applies to the different scientific disciplines, it is still generally accepted that the scientific method is the core element of science. The scientific method is the combination of observation, experiment and theory that results in the creation of laws concerning the universe.

Science is a special kind of inquiring and every inquiring has a subject matter- what is being inquired about. Inquiring consists of investigative utterances and questions. . For example, The National Science Foundation in the US emphasises the importance of inquiring in doing science:

When engaging in inquiring, students describe objects and events, ask questions, construct explanations, test those explanations against current scientific knowledge, and communicate their ideas to others. They identify their assumptions, use critical and logical thinking, and consider alternative explanations. In this way, students actively develop their understanding of science by combining scientific knowledge with reasoning and thinking skills¹.

Inquiring is one of the fundamental elements of every learning process particularly in science, and starts with asking questions and questioning everything. To question everything does not simply mean doubting everything, but an attempt to understand the universe and nature by seeking explanations and clarifications.

Another vital aspect of inquiring is its approach and reaction to authority. Inquiring should be unbiased and uncontrolled by authority. Since it is connected with the quest for truth, the goal of inquiring is to disclose the facts. The ideal science is obsessed with the desire to ask questions and seek answers and

¹Sundar Sarukkai, *What is Science?* (India: National Book Trust, 2012) p. 17.

examine the answers given even if it is the findings of respected scientists. While this attitude of inquiring can be found in every human enterprise, it is a standard and bedrock of scientific knowledge.

There is also an inherent relationship between science and truth. This relationship is rooted in the conviction of science that its descriptions and assertions about the universe are true. Scientists believe that with the knowledge available to them at a particular time, their statements concerning the world are true. Science is an enterprise that aims to discover truth concerning the universe that is not available and comprehensible to normal perception and cognitive process.

Deduction and Induction methods

In a deductive argument the premises give conclusive evidence to the truth of its conclusion. In other words, a deductive argument is said to be valid if its conclusion necessarily follows from its premises. Consequently, the conclusion in a deductive argument cannot be false if its premises are true. A good example of a deductive argument is the form: All A is B, C is A, Therefore, C is B. (All men are intelligent, John is a man, therefore John is intelligent.)

In an inductive argument the premises provide probable evidence for the truth of its conclusion. Unlike a deductive argument, the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises. In other

words, the relationship between the premises and the conclusion is not a logical necessity. We use the term 'probability' instead of 'validity' and 'invalidity' in inductive reasoning. While both deductive and inductive arguments are important, it is much safer and reliable to use deductive argument.

Problem of induction

David Hume (1711-1776) observed some problems with the use of inductive reasoning that have serious consequences for scientific mode of reasoning. Inductive reasoning is founded on the presupposition that the things we have not observed will behave in like manner as the things we have observed. What happens in inductive reasoning is that a small specimen is examined and then used to make a general law.

The problem of induction is a critique on our reasons for believing that the future events we have examined will behave like the past. The problem of induction criticizes our convictions and assumptions for thinking that when similar instances occur, the future will bear a resemblance to the past. For Example- because all observed Pizza or cake I have tasted have been delicious, I conclude that a similar cake of the same appearance will be delicious.

We use inductive reasoning for our daily activities even though we are not conscious of it. A good

example is our use of computer. When we turn on the micro wave, we believe it will not explode on our faces probably because it has never exploded before now. For the fact it has not exploded 'before now' does not mean it will not explode someday. Other examples of daily inductive reasoning are our use of the Television, the use of cars etc.

The use of inductive reasoning abounds in science. One good example of inductive reasoning in science is the scientific observation of the Down's Syndrome disease (DS). Scientists explain that those who suffer from DS have extra Chromosome (47) than the required(46). Scientist arrived at the conclusion using inductive reasoning because they assumed that from the few cases they have examined, all other DS patients they have not examined will also have 47 chromosome. The only explanation they can give to back up their conclusion is that the few cases of DS sufferers have 47 chromosome.

Meaning and benefits of religion

The term 'Religion' is complex and difficult to define. Generally speaking, it can be referred to as an established system of rituals and beliefs connected to the worship of a supreme being or god. Religion is generally associated with some or all of the following: a founder, sacred texts, revelation, sacred symbols, organised prayer, festivities, spiritual experiences and sacred places.

Research carried out in Psychology indicates that religion plays a vital role in general welfare of its adherents by helping them cultivate good habits and positive outlook about life. In this regard, religion is beneficial in advancing psycho-emotional health of by providing people with strength to cope with economy and political hardships. It gives people reasons to be hopeful in difficult and challenging times. It also provides them with patience and consolation when they are confused and depressed. Religion has been instrumental in the regulation of morality in the society. One of the contributions of religion to society is that it fosters peaceful co-existence among people by promoting forgiveness, tolerance, patience and selflessness. It has also contributed to the development of the human person by promoting a good positive lifestyle and moral value. The ethical teachings of religion have sustained and encouraged high moral standards in the society. Consequently, this has provided ethical direction for the socio-political and economic spheres of societal life.

In 1993, the World Parliament of Religions made declaration that was signed by more than 140 religious leaders. This declaration further indicates the indispensable function of religion in maintaining unity, peace and harmony in the world. Part of the declaration reads:

We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of our world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness².

Writing on the positive impacts of each of the different religions of the world, Aurobindo elaborates further:

Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer, Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to

² Towards A Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions, p 2.

him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities³.

Logical positivism and the critique of metaphysics and religion

Logical positivism (also known as logical empiricism) was a scientific motivated philosophical movement that began in the early part of the 20th century. Inspired by and influenced by the progress of science, it asserts that only logical truths and propositions that can be empirically verified have meaning. All other propositions that do not fulfil this condition are meaningless. All the members of this movement, also known as the Vienna Circle, had one major thing in common-a background in science and admiration for the scientific method. Apart from their common interest in science, the logical positivists were deeply suspicious of metaphysical and theological terms. They insisted on a new way of philosophy that is a departure from the traditional method of philosophy. Carnap explains this point clearly:

Furthermore, there was agreement among most of the members to reject traditional metaphysics. However, very little time was wasted in a polemic against metaphysics. The anti-

³ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga* (India: Ashram Press, 1998) p. 211.

metaphysical attitude showed itself chiefly in the choice of the language used in the discussion. We tried to avoid the terms of traditional philosophy and to use instead those of logic, mathematics, and empirical science, or of that part of the ordinary language which, though more vague, still is in principle translatable into a scientific language⁴.

The logical positivists use the Principle of verification as a criterion to differentiate meaningful factual propositions from meaningless statements. The principle of verification asserts that propositions have meaning only if it is possible to determine their truthfulness or falsehood by experience. The principle of verification, according to Horrigan, 'maintains that, aside from the tautological statements of logic and mathematics, meaningful propositions must be verifiable, either directly or indirectly, by sense experiences.

Carnap, a logical positivist, points out that one of the areas where Wittgenstein radically influenced his

⁴ Rudolf Carnap, 'Intellectual Autobiography' in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, p. 20.

⁵ Paul Gerard Horrigan, Critique of Logical Positivism, p. 1.
https://www.academia.edu/9966303/Critique_of_Logical_Positivism.

own philosophical thought is the critique of metaphysics, particularly traditional metaphysics. He explains that unlike in the empirical sciences and Logical Analysis of Language, many philosophical propositions in metaphysics are meaningless, unproductive and lack cognition in content. For Carnap, the reason for this problem is simply because a good number of this proposition arise from the wrong application of language and the abuse of logic. Carnap expresses the reason for his critique of metaphysics:

I came to hold the view that many theses of traditional metaphysics are not only useless, but even devoid of cognitive content. They are pseudo-sentences, that is to say, they seem to make assertions because they have the grammatical form of declarative sentences, and the words occurring in them have many strong and emotionally loaded associations, while in fact they do not make any assertions, do not express any propositions, and are therefore neither true nor false⁶.

However, due to the strong opposition Carnap and other members received for their strong criticism of

⁶ Rudolf Carnap, 'Intellectual Autobiography' in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, p. 44.

metaphysics, they soft-pedalled on their earlier position. They admit that although metaphysical statements have no theoretical and cognitive meaning, they do, however, have emotional, psychological and motivating significance.

One of the reasons for Carnap's objection to metaphysics is because its propositions are not grounded on the empirical but on realities beyond the realm of experience. For this reason, he insists that it is impossible to find meaningful metaphysical propositions since the function of metaphysics is 'to discover and formulate a kind of knowledge which is not accessible to empirical science'⁷.

In 'The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language' Carnap associates the meaningfulness of a proposition with its verifiability and states that the function of a statement is to affirm propositions that are empirical in nature. Any statement or proposition beyond the realm of experience does not fulfil this condition and so should not be thought of, mentioned or even spoken of.

Meaning and sources of Igwebuike philosophy

Igwebuike can be used in two different ways: as a

⁷ Rudolf Carnap, 'The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language' in *Logical Positivism*, A. Y. Ayer (ed.) (New York: The Free Press, 1959) p. 76.

sentence and as a word. As a word it is written as 'Igwebuiké'; as a sentence it is written as 'Igwe bu ike'. 'Igwe' denotes 'population' or 'number'; 'bu' means 'is' and 'ike' translates as 'strength' or 'power'. Joined together, 'igwe bu ike' means 'number is power'. In other words, human beings are powerful and stronger and can make meaningful progress when they unite or agree.

Igwebuiké philosophy has its root in the igbo-african perspective of complementarity where individual persons work for the good and survival of the whole. The individual differences can be a source of strength, harmony and unity. Igwebuiké cosmological viewpoint stresses the fact that while the identity of the individual persons is entrenched in their singularity, it is the community that gives foundation and significance to this identity.

What are the primary materials from which igwebuiké philosophy is formed? These sources are African proverbs, African songs, African symbols, African Myths, African folk tales and the works of African professional philosophers.

African Names-For African people, names are not merely labels for distinguishing one person from the other, but they carry with them more deeper significance. Names for Africans may be a description of an event that happened at the time of

the birth of a child or they may be a narration of a painful event like the death of a relation. The point here is that African names are an essential source of Igwebuiké philosophy, the latter being a philosophy of complementarity that promotes the spirit of unity, solidarity and peaceful coexistence. African names comprise of three categories: Names for human beings, Titles for human beings and African names for God. African names link the life of an individual to others and demonstrate how the accomplishments of individual persons influence others in the community.

Names for human beings- These are names given to people at birth. They include names like Obinwanne (The heart of a brother); Obiageli (A visitor must partake in its goodness); Lotanna (Remember the father); Adaeze (Daughter of a king).

Titles given to people- Africans give titles to people who have reached a certain peak in their profession or career. The title to be can be a description of the good things a person has done or can do. Some examples of such titles are: Onwa na etiri ora (Man of the people, a philanthropist); Aka ji mba (The people's livewire).

African names for God- These are names given by the Igbo people to illustrate God's deeds or to express what they want God to do for them. Some examples of such names are Agbataobi nwa ogbenye (The

friend of the poor); Agbataobi onye ajuru aju (The friend of the rejected); Echeta obi esike (The giver of confidence).

African proverbs- These play a vital role in communication in African socio-cultural existence. The Igbo, Yoruba, Zulu and many other African tribes have acknowledged the importance of proverbs in African language and rhetorics. The Igbo people, for instance, describe proverbs as the oil with which words are eaten. An African proverb is an embodiment of the history, insight and culture of the people. African proverbs illustrate the laws, conventions, creed, values, aspirations, yearnings and the way of life of a people. An example of an Igbo proverb is this: Aka nri kwo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwo aka nri (If the right hand washes the left hand, the left hand would wash the right hand).

Folktales- Africans love telling stories. These stories, which emanated from popular culture and passed from one generation to another, describe the beliefs, the behaviour and the way of life of a people. In the structure of education in African, instruction is connected to hunting, farming, fetching of water etc, and is given at different times and places- in the village square, during meals at night, on the way to the stream or farm etc. The aim of these stories is to teach African values and morals, and the listeners understand the lessons buried in these tales.

African songs- Africans love singing and music is enshrined in the fabrics of African social and cultural life. Africans sing everywhere- in the market place, in the farms, in the kitchen, during wars, in the shrine, when telling stories. They sing for certain reasons: to express their hope and confidence in the gods or to teach certain values and principles. These songs are source of Igwebuike philosophy because they tell us something about the relationship between individuals, deities and the community.

Symbols-These are important in African culture because they depict invisible existence around the people. Africans use symbols to stimulate Africans and make them aware of an essential thing. An important symbol among the igbos is Kola nut. For the Igbos, kola nut symbolises life, hence the saying: Onye wetara oji wetara ndu(he who brings kola brings life). The kola nut also symbolises peace, goodwill and communion between the living and the dead. It is broken when people visit to show that they are gladly received. It is also used when sacrifices are offered in the shrine to signify an affinity between the dead and the living. The kola nut highlights the African philosophy of complementarity which emphasises the inherent harmony between the individual and the others in the community

Three approaches to the nature of the relationship between religion and science

Many people think that religion and science are separate and should have nothing in common. Two events in history partly contributed to this view of the relationship between religion and science. The first is the church's opposition to the idea of Galileo on the solar system; the second is the opposition from many religious leaders to the theory of evolution formulated by Darwin. Some theologians and Christians think that religion emphasizes certain features that makes it unique and also set it apart from science. They assert that religion has its own system and pattern that make it different from the scientific method. Other theologians insist that religious knowledge, unlike scientific knowledge, comes from God's manifestation of himself through revelation. It is pertinent to ask at this moment: What is the nature of the disagreement between religion and science? How can we describe the pattern of this rivalry? There are different ways of analysing the relationship between religion and science. In his book, *Issues in Science and Religion*, Barbour outlines different models for understanding the relationship between religion and sciences. For the purpose of this write-up, I will enumerate the following models:

8 Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Publisher, 1966), pp. 116, 134.

The Independent model

The independent model asserts that science and religion are separate entities and should be concerned with their respective areas. This model emphasises the fact that they should have their respective areas of specialization and should maintain their boundaries. Because of the emphasis on freedom and self-reliance, this model discourages any search for knowledge that is focused on the general explanation for understanding existence. However, the independent model gives room for mutual discussion on issues affecting the human person and the society.

The Contrasts model

The Contrast model asserts that science and religion should be separate because both are totally different. They have nothing in common in terms of content, object and method of acquiring knowledge. Both enterprises have peculiar subjects and use different languages. As a result of this, there is no way they can be compared with each other. Conflict occurred between them in the past because they were not understood as separate and distinct enterprises. The model reiterates that the antagonism of science towards religion will be avoided if this is done.

The Parallel model

The parallel model admits that science and religion have separate subject matter, but acknowledges that

they share some similarities in structure and methodology. While this model does not encourage the inference of theological results from the method of science, it states that religion can borrow a leaf from the empirical and rational character of science. Some thinkers who subscribe to this model believe that like science, theology should be progressive, flexible, pragmatic and critical in its method and interpretation. (Ian G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion, Publisher: Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, Year: 1966, p.125-126

The role of Igwebuike in the conflict between science and religion

One of the main causes of the misunderstanding between science and religion is not the differences in their pattern or mode of inquiring. It is rather the problem of superiority complex on the part of science. As we have seen, the origin of this problem can be traced to the time of the scientific revolution and the subsequent advancement in technology which led to the rejection of metaphysic and religion. As Barbour explains:

For many people today the challenge to religious belief arises not from any conflict of content between science and religion but from the assumption that the scientific method is the only road to knowledge. Thus the concern for methodological issues, found among

both scientists and theologians, has far-reaching implications for the outlook of modern man⁹.

The complimentary approach of igwebuike epistemology is important at this point because of its affirmation of the fact that no domain of human knowledge is absolute or independent since every domain of human study is finite and confined. Science has contributed to the growth of the human person and the society; religion has also given meaning to the aspirations of the human person. Each of these human enterprises has something to offer for the good of the human person.

Some scientists who are atheists believe that there are no limitations to what science can do or achieve. But science has its limits and cannot and does not have all the answers. Science can help us fight hunger, diseases and illnesses, but questions concerning aesthetics and ethics for instance are outside the sphere of scientific inquiring. Science cannot tell us what is right or wrong, good or bad. Science cannot reliably tell us the origin of the world, the purpose of our existence, the reason we are alive, etc. science cannot solve all our problems. However, religion can attempt to give answers to the

⁹ Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Publisher, 1966)p. 137.

questions concerning our purpose and reason for living.

Igwebuiké philosophy emphasises the idea of harmony and solidarity in the pursuit of knowledge. It affirms the significance of collaboration and respect for the views of others since to be alive is to live with others in harmony and unity. No particular area of human inquiry can provide all the answers to all human problems. From the perspective of igwebuiké epistemology, knowledge is too broad to be embraced by only one sphere of human inquiry. It is also too deep to be reached by only one domain of human enterprise. Knowledge is big enough and can be accessed from different perspectives and routes. The well of knowledge is deep enough for both religion and science to draw from.

Science is basically concerned with natural or physical world that can be observed and measured empirically and experimentally. A hypothesis is established and then experiments are done to test the hypothesis. Religion is more concerned with spirituality and morality and these cannot necessarily be measured using the scientific pattern. Generally, knowledge in most religions comes from God and religious faith in God cannot be scientifically verified.

Igwebuike epistemological framework stresses the need to admit our mutual interdependence and so respect the mode of inquiring of others. Religion should respect the scientific mode of inquiring; science should also accept that religion has a different pattern of acquiring knowledge. As a result, both the scientific and religious forms of inquiring are necessary in order to achieve a comprehensive and complete knowledge. This is because every human enterprise can add some water to the 'big drum' called knowledge, and this drum can only be full through the collaborative efforts of everyone involved in the project.

The sympathetic approach of Igwebuike epistemology with its insistence on the importance of respecting the point of view of others can be applied here to foster mutual respect between religion and science. Religion and science should be seen as separate and different enterprises that can complement each other. This will help sustain a harmonious relationship that takes the unique character of each of them into consideration.

Conclusion

The goal I set out in this article is to show the positive role of igwebuike philosophy in resolving the conflict between religion and science. To give a proper understanding of the problem, I have explained the different ways in which the

relationship between religion and science can be analyzed. I have also mentioned how logical positivism and its rejection of metaphysics and religion have deepened the disagreement between religion and science. I have demonstrated how igwebuike concept of mutual interdependence can foster mutual respect between science and religion.

The tension between religion and science can be minimised if each discipline acknowledges and respects the perspective of the other, and if each discipline maintains its domain of specialization. The area of specialization of science is the empirical and observable aspects of the world. Religion's spheres are ethical questions and spiritual. Although, every discipline is free to analyse and discuss matters outside its domain of expertise, it should not lay claim to any professional competence on such matters.

We know from the history of science that scientific theories change with the discovery of new knowledge and facts: some theories are altered, others are replaced, and some are updated while others are abandoned completely. This means that the scientific theories we accept today may change and become irrelevant tomorrow when new facts emerge. The same thing can be said of certain religious beliefs and laws that were relevant many decades ago but have now become obsolete. This changing nature of human knowledge can be an

attestation to the dynamic nature of human knowledge. However, it can also be an indication that every human inquiring is limited and cannot give all the answers to all human problems.

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