



**Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction.** Thomas Dixon and Adam R. Shapiro. Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2022, 2nd edn. 184 pages. Price: £ 8.99. ISBN: 9780198831020.

This is the second edition of the insightful book which was first published in 2008. More precise commentary and explanations can be found in this second edition on important issues like debating the God–Nature relationship, and the linkages between brain and mind. This book discusses the tumultuous relationship between ideas in science and beliefs in religion. There have been times in the modern world (say, during the last 500 years or so), when science and religion were considered diametrically opposite notions, meaning that if one was religious, one did not need for scientific philosophies. The opposite was also diligently followed, in the sense that those with a scientific temper should not have belief in any form of superpower (God). Only during the later periods did communities start to comprehend that religion and science could coexist. However, this was not complete or far-reaching. Religious institutions still doubted scientific ideas. They considered them anti-sacred, ungodly and even unreasonable. There are, even today, frequent debates about which one is superior and more plausible. For instance, in September 2022, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* mentioned the religion–science relationship (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-science/>) and stated: ‘The relationship between religion and science is the subject of continued debate in philosophy and theology. To what extent are religion and science compatible? Are religious beliefs sometimes conducive to science, or do they inevitably pose obstacles to scientific inquiry?’

Some of these aspects are discussed in this book, although with a modern flavour. In the Preface, the authors write: ‘Historical notions about famous individuals, especially Galileo Galilei and Charles Darwin, philosophical assumptions about miracles, laws of nature, and scientific knowledge, and discussions of the religious and moral implications of modern science, from quantum mechanics to neuroscience, are regular features of science–religion debates today.’ With great leaps being made in science, these debates have been taken to higher levels, such as discussions on consciousness, brain activity, and the evolution of nature, among others. Both sides have their take on the God–science mystery.

As the subtitle states, this book is a short introduction, and should be read to familiarize oneself with the debates, expose our minds to the ideas of earlier scholars, and most importantly, to allow ourselves to be intellectually equipped to uncover the truth. The last purpose is significant, because the style of writing, the content and the illustrations will kindle the interest of the readers and make them dig deeper into self-discovery. As an aid, the authors have included a fine list of works for further reading, besides references. Interesting anecdotes, powerful utterances and a sincere discourse of the science–religion debate make this a useful book.

Many of us are familiar with the trial of Galileo, who was accused of blasphemy by the Church or the voyages of Charles Darwin in *HMS Beagle*, where he refined his ideas regarding evolution. However, many are unaware of the development of natural theology, which attempts to establish religious truths through rational argument rather than reliance on alleged revelations or written scriptures. Readers would find many interesting points and opinions in this field, and insightful thoughts of Thomas Aquinas, John Ray, David Hume and others. This book is euro-centric in the sense that the debates that are documented are occidental rather than oriental. Since the book talks about the science–religion relationship a few centuries ago in Europe, it must be surmised that the Church, the State (or Monarchy) and the politics of that time significantly impacted the nature, content and context of the debates.

In chapter 5, the authors write about issues of morality and ethics. For instance, they report how Dalai Lama has encouraged Buddhist monks to collaborate with neuroscientists to study cognitive abilities, meditative practices and their effects on the

physical brain and mental well-being. Without a doubt, this practice by the head of a Buddhist clan has not been without criticism. On this issue, the authors write: ‘The Dalai Lama, leader of a Tibetan Buddhist movement, has strongly supported neuroscientific research on Buddhist meditation and encouraged his followers to participate in fMRI studies. His engagement with science in this way has not been without controversy. Some scientists have protested his speaking at neuroscience conferences, claiming that inviting him promotes religion in what should be a secular setting.’ In the same chapter, there are discussions and simple introductions to ideas of selfishness, altruism and deviance.

In the final chapter, there is a discerning narration of how the State and its citizens interact when it comes to scientific explorations. A case in point is the resistance faced by authorities in the Hawaii Islands in July 2019. The dispute was between the native Hawaiians and the establishment that wanted to construct the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). It was not the TMT that the natives were against, but the location of the construction site that they objected to. According to the scientific authorities, the summit of Mount Maunakea was the most suitable location. However, for the natives, this mountain was sacred and the birthplace of the God Wakea. Maunakea – a blessed spot, is a religious homeland and part of the natives’ spiritual topography. Many such thoughts and opinions float across the globe even today. Hence, it has become difficult to reconcile religious sentiments with scientific fervour. In conclusion, the authors state that this book will help the readers to be acquainted with the historical and contemporary dialogues, discussions and disagreements relating to the science–religion deliberations. More nuanced and refined debates will surely come up in the future. As a straightforward introduction to science–religion synthesis, this book will serve its purpose as an appetizer.

G. NARASIMHA RAGHAVAN

*Associate Professor in Economics,  
Jansons School of Business,  
Coimbatore 641 659, India  
e-mail: raghavangnarasimha@gmail.com*