

The Eco-Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Spiritual Crisis and Environmental Degradation

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on Seyyed Hossein Nasr's eco-philosophical understanding in connection to the present ecological crisis. By correlating Nasr's eco-spiritual discussion with the environment, the paper investigates how deeply the human spiritual mind is connected in the ecological equilibrium. It tries to expose why Nasr's ideas and suggestions in relation to the sustainability of environment seem significant. Here, a critical analysis of Nasr's eco-philosophical and eco-spiritual understanding is also offered from a real-life perspective of the present world. In so doing, the paper will contribute to the ongoing debates on the spiritual crisis of modern humans and ecological disequilibrium.

Keywords

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ecology, eco-theology, eco-spirituality, environment, nature, crisis, degradation.

Introduction

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933)¹ is a well-known Muslim philosopher and

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This article is based on the author's PhD dissertation. He is indebted to his PhD supervisors Professor Lai Pan Chiu and Professor James D. Frankel as well as the anonymous reviewers for their valued suggestions to improve the article.

¹ For a short biography of Nasr, see Enes Karić, "Nasr: Thinker of the Sacred," in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Jr. Stone (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), 782–83. For a detailed biographical description, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "An Intellectual Autobiography," in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Jr. Stone (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), 3–85; Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger,

Islamic scholar. He sees environmental issues from a deeply rooted level of spiritual, religious and philosophical understanding. Nasr's intellectual contribution to developing the traditional world view of nature based on eternal wisdoms is praiseworthy.² Having considered the present ecological crisis as a spiritual crisis of modern humans,³ Nasr works for developing a spiritual feeling in the human mind for the natural world. The modern world view is highly attached to secular approaches to nature, where there is no place for spiritual thought. Spirituality mostly comes from religious traditions and the modern scientific world view negates such knowledge; treasures which actually could pave the way towards a kind of awareness and deep attachment with the natural world, and thus, to motivate humans to prevent the present ecological crisis from further damage. On the other hand, the traditional method of education and understanding, where there was a scope for spiritual teaching, has disappeared from the world, which makes a very challenging issue for spirituality and growing spiritual feelings for nature. Without such a feeling for nature, no human can work towards the sustainability of the environment. The issue of spirituality in relation with the environment remains largely unexplored in the academic world. In line with this timely issue, Nasr attempts to provide some points from the traditional religious understanding. In some ways, Nasr has successfully integrated religious spirituality with the natural world and tried to show a potential correlation between environmental degradation and spiritual crisis.

Though educated and trained in modern science, philosophy, and history, Nasr always prefers to deal with current issues from a traditional viewpoint and a spiritual insight.⁴ Instead of a scientific approach to nature, he emphasises on the traditional approach; even in this regard, he claims himself

2010), 1-59, 80-90.

² For an account of his intellectual works, see Mehdi Aminrazavi and Zailan Moris, *A Complete Bibliography of the Works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: From 1958 through April 1993* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Academy of Science, 1994); Aminrazavi, Moris, and Ibrahim Kalin, "Bibliography of the Writings of Seyyed Hossein Nasr," in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Jr. Stone (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), 833-964.

³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Muzaffar Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis: Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Conversation with Muzaffar Iqbal," *Islam & Science* 5, no.1 (2007): 75-96.

⁴ Before going to the USA for his education, Nasr studied basic Islamic knowledge including Persian poetry and the mystical history of Iran from his parents, relatives, and guests. After returning to Tehran, he also studied under traditional teachers of religious sciences. For details about Nasr's education, see Nasr and Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred*, 1-59, 80-90; Nasr, "An Intellectual Autobiography," 3-85.

as a traditionalist.⁵ He is very much a critic of secular humanism, mechanistic science and the anthropocentric understanding of nature. Influenced by Nasr's seminal works on environmental issues⁶ some contemporary scholars, for example, Wersal, Beringer, Saniotis, Murad, Mevorach, Quadir, Grith, Clark, Shah-Kazemi, Bakar, and Sayem among others, have produced significant contributions⁷ to the study of Nasr's thought by connecting his understanding of nature with the present ecological crisis. Based on these resources, this paper tries to explore how the environment is attached to spirituality in Nasr's view and why his eco-philosophical approach seems significant to address the present environmental problem. It also investigates the validity of Nasr's arguments by contextualizing with the present environmental degradation.

Traditional Wisdoms in Nasr's Eco-philosophical Understanding of Nature

The term "tradition" usually implies a set of beliefs, customs, attitudes behaviours, stories, etc., that are transmitted from one generation to another. By a process of continuation, it connects the past with the present. Like a mirror, it reflects the treasury of knowledge of the eventful past and reminds the present generation of it. Tradition is an inseparable part of human civilisation. Throughout the history of the human race, tradition is valued as a

⁵ Enes Karić considers Nasr "a deeply traditional thinker." For him, Nasr's traditional way of thinking "corresponds to the Islamic attitude according to which the world is seen as traditional (not traditionalistic): the Prophet Muhammad did not bring a new religion but only revealed the ancient one, linked to the inexhaustible spring, and heralded by all of the Divine Messengers." See Karić, "Nasr: Thinker of the Sacred," 783.

⁶ For example, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968); Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993); Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁷ For example, see Tarik M. Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2013); Ian Mevorach, "In Search of a Christian-Muslim Common Path from Desacralization to Resacralization of Nature: Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Ecological Crisis" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2015); Almut Beringer, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Perennial Philosophy, and Sustainability Education," *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 11, no. 1, (2006): 26–42; Md. Abu Sayem, "A Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problem with a Special Concentration on Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of Environmental Sustainability," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 15, no. 2 (2018): 312–28; Osman Bakar, "Nature as a Sacred Book: A Core Element of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Philosophical Teachings," *Sacred Web* 40 (Winter 2017): 75–101; Munjed M. Murad, "Inner and Outer Nature: An Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," *Journal of Islam and Science* 10, no. 2 (2012): 117–37; Reza Shah-Kazemi, "From Sacrilege to Sacralisation: Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Perspectives on the Ecological Crisis in the Light of the Holy Qur'an," *Sacred Web* 40 (Winter 2017): 103–11.

source of guidance and a supporting idea for human progressiveness, but unfortunately beginning from the age of the European Enlightenment during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (CE 1620 to CE 1781)⁸ tradition has been viewed in opposition to modernity and progressive thought. It is true that traditional experiences and knowledge cannot support uncontrolled human activities in the name of human comfort, because it focuses balancing way of life. For further clarification, let us see how Nasr understands the term. Rather than using “tradition” in its general understanding, Nasr has focused its eternal principles for human guidance, which are carried through traditions, stating,

By “tradition” we do not mean habit or custom or the automatic transmission of ideas and motifs from one generation to another, but rather a set of principles which have descended from Heaven and which are identified at their origin with a particular manifestation of the Divine along with the application and deployment of these principles of different moments of time and in different conditions for a particular humanity.⁹

Elsewhere, Nasr sees tradition “as encompassing principles and truths of a sacred origin along with their unfolding application and manifestation.”¹⁰ For Nasr, tradition is not an “outmoded mythology,” rather “is rooted in the nature of Reality.”¹¹ In his view, tradition is “a living continuity” which carries “the science of Ultimate Reality.”¹² Furthermore, for Nasr “it is the call from the Center which alone can allow human to return from the rim to the Center.”¹³ Though Nasr never compares traditions with Revelation, it is argued that traditions were reflected and manifested by the revelations. The value of traditional wisdoms, as Nasr argues, is enormous, which cannot be underestimated by profane or secular sciences which only deal with the shadow of reality, for these sciences cannot grasp the absolutely real beyond the appearances that are only relatively real, while traditional sciences can go

⁸ According to a majority of scholars, “it [the Enlightenment] covers about a century and half in Europe,” beginning with the publication of Francis Bacon’s work *Nivum Organum* in 1620 and ending with Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. From a social-political perspective, the Enlightenment is dated from the end of the Thirty Years’ War (1648) to the French Revolution (1789). “Age of Enlightenment,” in *New World Encyclopedia*, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Age_of_Enlightenment.

⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, 1975), 73.

¹⁰ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 24.

¹¹ Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, 73.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

beyond the visible and sensible appearance of the reality and can perceive the absolutely Real or the ultimate Reality. Thus, being convinced and enlightened by wisdom traditions,¹⁴ Nasr has based his works on traditions, despite his educational orientation with modern science.¹⁵

In his works,¹⁶ Nasr emphasises traditional wisdoms and the metaphysical significance of nature with regard to environmental sustainability. Nasr argues that the traditional world view of nature was based on metaphysical understanding, where humans were seen as deeply connected to God and the natural world. Unlike the modern scientific understanding, traditional wisdoms can present humans as an owner of the world, but also remind humans that they are just a part of nature and should take care of it. While the modern scientific world view sees nature as a machine, the traditional world view considers nature as a living body.¹⁷ A spiritual feeling for the natural world is found in traditional wisdoms,¹⁸ which is essential for being sympathetic to non-human animals. When humans can realise that they are not foreign to the order of nature, they cannot perform any activity, which massively affects the natural system. Nasr reiterates that a pure metaphysical doctrine of nature can revive a spiritual conception of nature.

Nasr regrettably notes that modern humans are disconnected from their spiritual contemplation and treat such spiritual attachments as superstitions or backward aspects of human life and experience. Nasr considers such transformation—from a spiritual insightful view to secular outlook—as a suicidal step of human civilisation.¹⁹ In many of his works,²⁰ Nasr labels such problems as a spiritual crisis of modern humans. For him, a spiritual world view that lies in traditional religions can save humans from this pervasive crisis.²¹ In Nasr's view, though world religious traditions are different (externally) from one another, they can cooperate and enhance traditional value systems and spiritual feelings for the natural world in their own ways.²² There is therefore an urgent need for unity amongst these systems in this regard. Nasr does not ignore the role of any authentic religious and cultural

¹⁴ Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism*, 16–17.

¹⁵ For more information, see Nasr and Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred*, 1–59, 80–90; Nasr, “An Intellectual Autobiography,” 3–85.

¹⁶ Nasr, *Man and Nature*; Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*; Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*.

¹⁷ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 4, 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹ Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, 4.

²⁰ Nasr, *Man and Nature*; Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*; Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*; Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*; Nasr, “The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis,” *The Ecologist* 30, no. 1 (2000): 18–20.

²¹ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 7–14, 201–23, 270–78, 284–88.

²² Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 57, 82–85.

traditions of the world in the formation of a viable human civilisation and environmental sustainability.

In Nasr's view, if humans want to save themselves from environmental catastrophe, they will have to rediscover their broken relationship with God and nature.²³ In this context, Nasr sees Eastern religious and cultural traditions—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and also the eastern form of Christianity—as helpful resource materials for revitalizing intimacy between humans and nature.²⁴ For him, these Eastern traditions still now carry the metaphysical significance of the natural world,²⁵ and can help Western traditions, especially the Latin form of Christianity, to become closer to the natural world.²⁶ Nasr also requests Christians to revive the metaphysical tradition within Christianity as the Western version of Christianity has lost this tradition. Here, Nasr argues, Islam can offer more help to Western Christianity²⁷ because Islam comes from the same Abrahamic roots.

After identifying the root cause of the present ecological crisis, Nasr presents some suggestions for addressing them. His suggestions are rooted in a spiritual and philosophical understanding of the human-nature relationship. Nasr advocates realising a deeper spiritual attachment with the natural environment, which is commonly found in all traditional sciences and religions, so he chooses the traditional ways of understanding the environment and promotes rediscovering the traditional cosmological understanding of nature, which is almost lost and replaced by the modern scientific world view. Some highlights of his traditional world view are discussed below.

Sacred Science

The term “sacred science” is the English translation of the Latin *scientia sacra*. Nasr connects this term with metaphysical knowledge and its application to the natural world. In Nasr's view, metaphysics deals with the Divine Principles which are the basic sources of knowledge. For Nasr, this knowledge is “at the very center of man's being as well as at the heart of all orthodox and authentic religions.”²⁸ In Nasr's view, this is not mundane knowledge because

²³ Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*, 84–85, 173; Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 14.

²⁴ Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 81–103.

²⁵ In Nasr's words, “The Oriental traditions emphasize on the hierarchic nature of reality, the predominance of the spiritual over the material, the sacred character of the cosmos, the inseparability of man's destiny from that of natural and cosmic environment, and the unity of knowledge and the interpretations of all things. These teachings of the oriental traditions comprise the metaphysical aspects of oriental cultures.” Nasr, *Man, and Nature*, 73.

²⁶ Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, 51.

²⁷ Mevorach, “In Search of a Christian-Muslim Common Path,” 122–23.

²⁸ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 1–2.

of its sacred characteristic, rather is supreme knowledge. This knowledge is attainable only by the true intellect with a deep spiritual contemplation.²⁹ This knowledge comes from the ultimate Reality or the supreme Unity, which is itself sacred,³⁰ so it is sacred science which Nasr illustrates “the science of the Real.”³¹ In other words, it is the wisdom that implies the supreme knowledge about the reality. For Nasr, the metaphysical ground of sacred science is God and the world of the spirit.³²

Sacred science never separates nature from its intimate relationship with humans, as nature is seen as sacred in itself. Modern science is purely based on human rationality and has no relation with spirituality. By becoming standardised and reductionist, modern scientists do not talk about the sacred character of nature and non-visible spirits beyond all components of nature. Nasr divides the sacred science from traditional sciences, occultism and other forms of superstitious knowledge. Nasr calls modern science as profane science or secular science because a scientific understanding ignores religious contemplation and spiritual feelings.

For meeting the present ecological crisis Nasr reiterates reviving the sacred science³³ and hopes that only through the revival of sacred science it is possible to rediscover and reconnect the sacredness with the natural environment. If nature is felt sacred in such a deeper understanding, humans can show their due respect to nature, which will motivate them finally to give more priority for the protection of the environment.

Traditional Sciences

Nasr considers traditional sciences beneficiary knowledge. These sciences are not purely based on metaphysical principles as sacred sciences, but unlike modern science, they are divorced from the principle order of metaphysics. Nasr shows how all traditional civilisations cultivated these sciences in past before the seventeenth century.³⁴

Nasr distinguishes traditional sciences from the social, juridical and theological knowledge of past civilisations.³⁵ In some ways, these sciences can be compared with occultism because of their deep relation to esoteric dimensions but should not be called superstitious beliefs or social prejudices.³⁶

²⁹ Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*, 1–2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 71, 96–99, 129–45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

For Nasr, these sciences were cultivated by sages who had the required spiritual and intellectual capacity to predict but did not follow an occult tradition.

Traditional sciences are not fully sacred sciences, however as they were associated with human speculations they had a clear connection with sacred science. Nasr makes it clear that the thoughts of Pliny, Strabon, Brahmagupta and al-Biruni cannot be considered as sacred science.³⁷ There are basic differences between traditional science and modern science. In Nasr's view, in traditional science the profane is marginal and the sacred is central, but in modern science the profane is central and the sacred is powerless.³⁸ Furthermore, Nasr distinguishes:

The traditional sciences are essentially sacred and accidentally profane, and modern science essentially profane and only accidentally aware of the sacred quality of the universe and, even in such rare instances, unable to accept the sacred as the sacred. Modern science shares fully the characteristic of modern man as a creature who has lost the sense of the sacred.³⁹

In traditional science, the physical world is seen as the lowest domain of reality while the spiritual world is seen as highest domain of reality, but in profane science, the physical world is seen as the highest domain of reality while there is no value given to the spiritual world.⁴⁰ Traditional sciences are aware of the Divine Origin of the world, while the modern science does not believe in such a divine origin and speaks about the materialistic origin of the physical world.⁴¹ Traditional doctrines talk about the paradisaical perfection of human beings with the help of the Creator but modern science talks about the evolution of the human species into the future. In traditional sciences, a human is seen as a totality of body, mind, soul and spirit; so, it covers a human's physical, mental, and spiritual needs. In modern science, only a human's physical body is considered; so, it only highlights its physical needs.⁴²

Through showing certain distinctions between traditional sciences and profane sciences, Nasr argues that traditional scientific understandings are more relevant to address the present ecological crisis, because it promotes a participatory view and a deeper understanding of the human-nature

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 96–97.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 97.

⁴¹ Ibid., 97–98.

⁴² Ibid., 98.

relationship. Thus, by criticising the very foundation of profane science, Nasr proves the value of traditional science from a holistic vision.

Spiritual Feeling for Nature and the Environment

Nasr states the ecological crisis as a spiritual crisis of modern humanity.⁴³ In his view, humans have forgotten to feel that they are part and parcel of nature, they are just a microcosmic part of the macrocosmic universe. In modern education, world-order and social system, there is no space to talk about a value of spirituality. Regrettably, spirituality is considered a matter of superstition in the modern world view, which keeps humans aside from a way of spiritual feeling. As a result, an emptiness is created in the human mind that is not being met by the modern lifestyle. Nasr argues that humans consist of both a material body and a spiritual mind; their bodily functions deal with worldly affairs while their mind connects with an emotion and romanticism for something with this present world and beyond.

For Nasr, a human will never be complete by rejecting an essential part of the formation of his own existence. Even humans cannot feel peace with an unlimited economic prosperity and military power if their spiritual mind is not free from disorder. Modern humans want to be happy with their apparent substances, but they are failing to feel peace in heart, because they cannot realise that happiness is a relative thing mostly connected with the mind rather than economic prosperity. In Nasr's view, peace cannot be achieved until humans can maintain peace with nature.⁴⁴ The real peace lies, as Nasr argues, in a harmonious relationship between the earth and heavens;⁴⁵ when inhabitants of the earth, i.e., humans, can establish a deeper connection with the spiritual beings of the heavens in accordance with the divine commandments of the Supreme Being, only then peace is achievable.

As Nasr understands that the present ecological crisis is a spiritual issue from the side of modern humans, he suggests a revolutionary reformation in human thought with regard to the natural world. Nasr proposes the development of a feeling for nature from the human spiritual mind, which can motivate humans to bring a substantial change in the present form of economic activities and power practicing competitions between/among nations. Without a deep spiritual attachment with nature, other activities will work superficially for the time being. To do work for a permanent solution with regard to ecological sustainability, humans need the revitalisation of a spiritual mind for the non-human world.

⁴³ Nasr, "Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis," 18.

⁴⁴ Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 14, 136.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

For Nasr, modern humans speak about the ecological crisis but they do not keep themselves away from avoiding topics, which create the problems for the planetary environment.⁴⁶ Nasr describes such things of modern humans as a dilemma,⁴⁷ which is created by a lack of spiritual feeling for the environment that humans have a deep intimacy with every component of the natural world. Until this kind of spiritual feeling for the environment returns in human heart, the ecological crisis continues.

Religious Spirituality

For Nasr, religious spirituality promotes a spiritual feeling for the environment around humans, so modern humans should come back to it. In Nasr's view, every authentic religious tradition of the world imposes obligations over its followers for spiritual contemplation, which should be followed by practitioners with a due emphasis. Even textual indications of religious scriptures in regard to the natural world cannot be understandable even in a comprehensive way without a deep spiritual thought. All founders of religions were spiritual persons and they emphasised on spirituality first. Therefore, without spirituality religion cannot work and without religious spirituality common people cannot come to a way of spiritual outlook. If humans are to address ecological crisis in a more effective way, so religious spiritual feeling for nature should be promoted as an influential agent.⁴⁸

In Nasr's view, a bond between the sacred and the profane, between spirit and nature, and the Creator and the created, can be possible through a religious spirituality. It is spirituality, which talks about the ultimate unity of all things. A very simple religious spiritual teaching motivates humans to consider them in others, which can create a participatory and cooperative approach.⁴⁹ If humans just think about their own creation, they can easily understand that in their bodily formation, there are many compound amalgamations of natural objects that came into being through a geochemical process, which implies that humans are inside nature and nature is inside humans. This understanding will automatically grow the concept in human

⁴⁶ As Nasr states, "Everyone talks today of the danger of war, over-population or the pollution of air and water. But usually the same people who discern these obvious problems speak of the necessity of further 'development,' or war against 'human misery' stemming from conditions imposed by terrestrial existence itself. In other words, they wish to overcome the problems brought about by the destruction of the equilibrium between man and nature through further conquest and domination of nature." Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 13.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 9–24; Nasr, "Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis," 18–20.

⁴⁹ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 24.

mind that there is an inseparable and inevitable relationship between humans and non-human creatures alongside all organisms of the environment. Nasr implores humans to grasp nature in this way and hopes that such a realisation can prevent humans from exploiting the natural environment in the name of endless human comfort.

Religious World Views of Nature

Nasr mentions that the modern human has abandoned a fundamental principle of religious world views⁵⁰ which is commonly found in ancient China with form of the *Tao*, in Hinduism with *rita*, in Buddhism with *dharma*, in ancient Greece with *nomos*, and in Islam with *sharī'ah*.⁵¹ Along with this, the same religious fundamental principle is manifested in different names at different religious traditions, but these different names reveal the same reality (i.e., order or law according to which all things are being governed).⁵² In Nasr's words, this fundamental religious principle is the core formation of cosmology. Religious world view shows a deep relationship between humans and the natural world in terms of following the same law. Humans should follow the law of nature in the way it is being followed by others. Nasr appeals modern humans to realise traditional religious views of nature, whereas he states,

We must realize that the traditional religious wisdom applies to us as much as it did to our remote ancestors, and that humanity must be seen, as it once was, as an inseparable part of the natural world, as God's creation and subject to the same divinely ordained laws that must be observed if we are to maintain its fundamental order.⁵³

Thus, by connecting the essence of world religions, Nasr argues that religious views are in favour of ecology. In religious understandings, nature is not seen alien or foreign to humans as modern scientific world views consider, but rather is viewed as a living organism. Furthermore, religious beliefs connect angels, spirits, or souls with the natural world. For Nasr, if humans can see nature with this deep realisation, they cannot accept the scientific world view of nature, which has developed a mechanistic-materialistic approach to the

⁵⁰ The religious world view of nature is a view of the natural world, which is expressed in the authentic religious scriptures. According to this view, "the universe consists of signs of God." Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism*, 5.

⁵¹ Nasr, "Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis," 18.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20.

environment. Thus, in opposition to the secular view of nature, Nasr promotes the religious world view of nature for environmental sustainability.

Challenging and Changing Modern Scientific World View of Nature

For more clarification of the deeply rooted ecological crisis, Nasr compares the present environmental problems with a cancer patient.⁵⁴ In his view, it is not possible to prevent a patient from cancerous substances by pouring powder on his/her face, so is it with such a cosmetic step in regard to the present environmental problem. By this analogy, Nasr makes clear that as pouring powder cannot save the patient; similarly, a cosmetic step cannot protect the environment, whereas Nasr states: "That is why simple cosmetics and good engineering will not in themselves solve the environmental crisis."⁵⁵ For Nasr, until a revolutionary transformation in the understanding of the natural world and humanity's inescapable relationship with it, there will not be a significant improvement for environmental sustainability. Nasr argues that by challenging the present scientific world view of nature a deep transformation of the current perception can proceed for a required reformed action-plan.

Nasr notes an event of the Quran⁵⁶ that one day a wise man came to a boat and created a hole at the bottom damaging it, so that it could later be saved from stealing or snatching by an unjust king.⁵⁷ The work of the wise man here may seem illogical for making a defect inside the boat, which sank it down, but by doing so he could save the boat of a poor man who needed it for his livelihood. He thought that it would be better to let the boat sink down for a while from where the owner can retrieve it again, but if it is captured by a tyrant king the owner would never regain it. In this way, the wise man saved the boat and did not destroy it. By mentioning this analogy, Nasr tries to make clear that the way the wise man could change the direction of the ship to save it from being robbed; similarly, there is an urgent need to change the direction of modern scientific world view of nature.

Immediate practical measurements and steps are fine and appreciable. In this regard, Nasr mentions the example of Istanbul and appreciates the action

⁵⁴ Nasr, "Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 86; Nasr and Iqbal, "Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," 81.

⁵⁵ Nasr and Iqbal, "Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," 91.

⁵⁶ Nasr has taken this analogy from the Qur'anic description of Moses and Khidr. For details, see Qur'an, 18: 71-75 and the commentaries of these verses.

⁵⁷ Nasr and Iqbal, "Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," 82.

of the government for the energy conversion used by the cars driving in the city. Nasr sees that with such a transformation initiative in the energy system the quality of air can be improved, but it needs a long-term energy efficiency policy. Though such immediate steps based on technological or economic policies can bring a temporary solution, these cannot work for a permanent solution until the present scientific world view of nature is changed, as Nasr states, "So I am in favor of all immediate solutions on a technological or economic level, but I do not believe that is going to solve the crisis if we insist on pursuing our present courses."⁵⁸ In another place, Nasr echoes the same:

There are technologies which can reduce pollution, but I do not believe that those technologies alone will save us from this crisis. We have to have an inner transformation. We have to have another way of looking at ourselves, at what the purpose of human life is, at what satisfies us, what makes us happy, and not turn over to consumption as the only way to be happy, seeking satiation of our never-ending thirst and satisfaction of endless wants that are then turned into needs.⁵⁹

For Nasr, the permanent solution for ecological crisis lies in a revolutionary reformation of the present mechanistic-materialistic perception of natural world. This movement, as Nasr insists, is inevitable for ecological sustainability, which must happen towards the spiritual and participatory world view of nature.⁶⁰ Such reformation will not occur until modern humans are well informed about the essentiality of ecological equilibrium for existence. They should learn how to give priority to a holistic view of existence of all living forms in the environment over a reductionist view of human life and comfort. In Nasr's view, these realisations come from "the religious-spiritual knowledge of nature,"⁶¹ which should be considered essential for diverting the present secular view of nature to the spiritual view of nature.

Nasr states that the modern scientific world view of nature is a serious tragedy for ecology,⁶² because this world view makes humans "the measure of all things."⁶³ This view hails from secular humanism of the renaissance era. It is

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁶⁰ Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis," in *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue—An Interfaith Dialogue*, ed. Stephen C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), 106; Lisa Wersal, "Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges," *Zygon* 30, no. 3 (1995): 458.

⁶¹ Beringer, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology," 40.

⁶² Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism*, 47.

⁶³ This kind of approach is, as Nasr calls, scientism. It is a kind of ideology of modern man to consider science the only acceptable criteria to measure all things. Therefore, for modern man it

a completely anthropocentric approach being deadly against the theocentric, bio-centric or eco-centric approaches. This view places humans in the place of God, because humans, not God, are the center of all things. Thus, God is replaced by humans, and nature is considered subservient to them. The example of such an attitude is clearly found in the utilisation of technology and scientific experimentation during which there is no minimal consideration to the interest of the natural world. Nasr states technology as a murderer of nature when it is used without thinking of its bad impact on nature. As a consequence of the irresponsible use of technology, plants and animals are dying; water, air, and soil are being polluted; global warming is getting worse; and the ozone layer is depleting; which eventually present us with climate change and the ecological crisis. These happenings are deeply connected with the modern scientific world view, which only considers the earthly welfare of humans and ignores the welfare of other non-human creatures. The modern life-style, that is based on the modern scientific world view, is based on consumerism where nothing is sacrificial for the natural world. Therefore, Nasr coins this approach of scientific world view as very selfish and mentions it as a significant cause to destroy the world. Therefore, Nasr reiterates changing the self-destructive modern scientific world view of nature in order to protect the planetary environment from further destruction.

Religious Understanding of the Cosmos/Sacred Cosmology

Nasr criticises modern reductionist scientists who distance cosmology⁶⁴ from its original meaning, according to which it does not articulate the phenomenal reality with the metaphysical discourse.⁶⁵ For Nasr, cosmology is a science that deals with all orders of natural reality with a deeper understanding of metaphysics.⁶⁶ It connects revelation and metaphysical doctrines in its scientific analysis on the orders of nature and all other physical realities. Nasr calls it sacred cosmology, according to which it is believed that the physical world originates from the spiritual world and is sustained by them.⁶⁷ The physical world cannot exist independently of the spiritual world. The spiritual

is the most reliable means to true knowledge.

⁶⁴ Generally, cosmology deals with the scientific and philosophical understanding of the universe.

⁶⁵ Beringer, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology," 31.

⁶⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis," in *Islam and the Environment*, ed. A. R. Agwan (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997), 22.

⁶⁷ In the cosmological discourse, it articulates the spiritual world with material and physical reality. In it the Divine Reality is seen as the creator because in this cosmology it is believed that "the cosmos is sustained by Divine Reality." Nasr, "Islam and Environmental crisis," 22; Beringer, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology," 35.

world is associated with a single Divine Reality though “it is in itself unknowable.”⁶⁸ In the view of sacred cosmology, humans are seen as an intermediary level between the physical and spiritual worlds, which implies one important objective of human life in regard to upholding the cosmic order in their understanding and feeling. Human souls are nothing but the vessel of the Divine.⁶⁹ Nasr argues that a real cosmology cannot deal with material and corporeal stages of existence without linking revelation in it. Nasr notes, when secular scientists removed the revelation from cosmology, it lost its sacred character and granted humans a naked license to exploit nature. To reverse this situation, Nasr gives importance to the religious understanding of cosmology instead of secular scientific understanding.

Nasr emphasises understanding the earth and cosmos (Heaven) from the traditional metaphysical, and especially cosmological, perspectives.⁷⁰ For Nasr, the study of the order of nature in different religions shows the infinite richness of the Divine Nature.⁷¹ Furthermore, Nasr states, “All religions relate the order of nature to the order within human beings and envisage both orders as bearing the imprint of the Divine Reality, which is the Origin of both man and nature.”⁷² He argues that knowledge of the whole universe does not lie in science rather in metaphysics,⁷³ which is enriched by the divine knowledge of all authentic religious traditions of the world.⁷⁴ Nasr suggests realising the various forms of knowledge and placing them within their boundaries.⁷⁵ This is not possible in modern science, because it has closed the door to such options. In Nasr’s view, studying metaphysics is crucial for a deeper understanding about original nature of a thing or a being. By bringing religion, philosophy and science in a common ground, metaphysics discusses some real issues in relation with non-visible things.⁷⁶

Nasr includes Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Jainism, and Shintoism in the spiritual-ethical foundations of the natural world, which makes the deep relationship between nature and religion, and “the religious understanding of the order of nature.”⁷⁷ In addition, there are reasonable understandings of metaphysical issues in

⁶⁸ Nasr, “Islam and Environmental Crisis,” 22; Beringer, “Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology,” 35.

⁶⁹ Nasr, “Islam and Environmental Crisis,” 22; Beringer, “Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology,” 35.

⁷⁰ Beringer, “Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology,” 33.

⁷¹ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 24.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Nasr, “Islam and Environmental Crisis,” 25.

⁷⁴ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 24.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4; Beringer, “Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology,” 33.

many traditional cultures and indigenous religions. Nasr sees that all these religious and cultural understandings can challenge the monopoly of the present scientific knowledge of cosmos.⁷⁸

Perennial Philosophical Thought

Nasr is a critic of materialistic or secular philosophy for ignoring the spiritual grounding of the world. In his view, this kind of philosophy is responsible for growing a spiritless world view, which inspired humans to treat nature as an inorganic body. To challenge such destructive philosophical attitude, Nasr talks about perennial philosophy.⁷⁹ For Nasr, perennial philosophy covers both spiritual and material grounds in a balanced way and makes a connection between them.⁸⁰ Perennial philosophy deals with the spiritual grounds of things, souls, the world, and the universe. In Nasr's view, being opposed to the materialistic philosophical ideology, perennial philosophical discourses can build a spiritual approach towards the world and the environment.

Nasr appreciates perennial philosophers, for instance Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) and René Guénon (1886–1951), for their deeper philosophical discussions about the spiritual grounds of the world.⁸¹ Nasr analyses their understanding in the context of environmental issues and suggests applying a perennial philosophical understanding to shift the paradigm from the scientific world view to the traditional world view of nature.

Pontifical Human, not Promethean Human

Nasr presents the concept of the pontifical human against the modern human. By the term "pontifical man," Nasr understands a traditional, spiritual, and religious human.⁸² The most important quality of the pontifical human, in Nasr's view, is to make a bridge between heaven and earth. For Nasr, a pontifical human is submissive to Heaven and careful to deal with the natural environment.⁸³ A pontifical human can play his role as a vicegerent or representative of God on earth, for instance the concept of *khalīfat Allāh fi 'l-*

⁷⁸ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 3; Beringer, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology," 33.

⁷⁹ The term *Philosophia Perennis* was coined by the German author Leibniz. It deals with the metaphysical, psychological, and ethical issues. Cited in Beringer, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology," 28. The term covers issues like the soul, spirit, mind, etc. It also tries to give the answer to how all things were formed through spiritual and material amalgamation.

⁸⁰ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*; Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis."

⁸¹ Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism*, 16–18; Beringer, "Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology," 28.

⁸² Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*, 160–61.

⁸³ Mevorach, "In Search of a Christian-Muslim Common Path," 144.

ard in Islam. Nasr clarifies that the human's rule should not be irresponsible, but rather he/she must take care of nature being the servant of God (*'abd Allāh*). If man's claim is only for the vicegerant, *khalīfat Allāh*, without being a humble servant of God, (*'abd Allāh*), this human can be dangerous and arrogant.⁸⁴ This is why human excellency and humbleness are balanced by both terms, *khalīfat Allāh* and *'abd Allāh*—vicegerent of Allah and His servant.⁸⁵

Nasr describes the modern human as a promethean human. In Nasr's view, the characteristics of promethean human is to deny the existence of God; he is irreligious and earthly both by his thought and works. He/she thinks only for his own immediate earthly benefits and is selfish. The promethean human always negates the religious understanding of nature and states it as superstition. Nasr repeatedly asserts that the modern scientific world view has created and triggered this kind of human all over the world. Thus, Nasr vehemently criticises the modern scientific world view for creating such a mentality in the human mind.

God-Human-Earth Hierarchical Relationship Model

Nasr recognises that in the God-human-earth relationship there is a hierarchy. In Nasr's view, this hierarchical relationship is commonly seen in all religious and cultural traditions in different ways with subtle differences among them. Nasr generalises this relationship "as a more or less universal or perennial aspect of all traditional philosophies and religions."⁸⁶ But secular environmentalists consider this hierarchical relationship as dangerous for environmental ethics, because they argue that in such a hierarchical concept the human is kept at the center, just next to God, while all other creatures are considered only for the benefits of humans. Nasr responds to their criticism by arguing that this hierarchical relationship does not give a license to humans for mistreating the earthly environment, because this relationship never grants humans the right to consider non-human creatures as valueless and never allows the rights of other species to live in the environment to be ignored; but rather humans are made responsible to the environment by taking care of it, otherwise they must show their accountability to God. So, according to this model, humans are located at the place between God and nature and they are bound to play their responsible role as a God's custodian on earth in protecting the natural world.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 145; Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*, 134–35.

⁸⁵ Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*, 134–35; Mevorach, "In Search of a Christian-Muslim Common Path," 145.

⁸⁶ Mevorach, "In Search of a Christian-Muslim Common Path," 146.

For Nasr, the God-human-earth relationship model ensures a responsible relationship of humans with non-human creatures, which never supports a human-centric relationship. In Nasr's view, it is the modern scientific world view, which separated God from humans, and subsequently, it separated humans from nature, which eventually made humans the criteria for measuring all things. As God is not an important entity in the modern scientific world view, humans are no longer responsible to God for any action, discouraging them from taking care of nature on one hand and encouraged them to think only of their earthly benefits on the other. Nasr asserts this kind of human mentality as an anthropocentric approach to nature, which is a result of the modern scientific world view. For Nasr, traditional religions deal with a triangular relationship, a relationship of God-human-earth, while the modern scientific world view deals only with a single relationship, i.e., between/among humans. The God-human-earth relationship model should not be misinterpreted by secular environmentalists in a form of anthropocentric approach to nature.

Nature as a Reflection of the Divine

For religious and spiritual people, nature works as a reflection of the divine Being/Soul whom they worship, but in modern science, it is nothing but a material object. Modern scientists see nature in their materialistic eyes, while spiritual and religious people see it with their spiritual eyes. There is a clear demarcation between these two groups of people in terms of seeing, observing and pondering the natural world. In the eyes of a spiritual person, every organism of nature reflects the divine reality and he/she can reflect himself/herself in every single sign of nature. For instance, the Qur'an says; "Verily! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding."⁸⁷

Nasr argues that if the natural world works as a reflection of the divine reality, there is no scope to underestimate any constituting substance of nature, even if it is an abiotic ingredient of natural world.⁸⁸ All the components of nature are created by God, so as a responsible creature of the same God humans should be very careful to them during taking services from them. To be disrespectful to them means to disrespect its Maker who has created it and humans. On the other hand, human love for God implies love

⁸⁷ Qur'an 3:190; the translation is of Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Noble Quran* (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, 1999).

⁸⁸ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 9.

for God's creation. Therefore, a man who believes in God never does any harmful act which can destroy a symbol of the divine reflection.

Transcendent Unity of Being

All things are created by the same creator, so everything is relatively related to each other. In this way, if humans can think, they will easily find their deep attachment with every component of nature. For this reason, there is an urgent need for a deeper spiritual understanding through which humans can imagine themselves in a transcendent unity of Being with all other creatures of God, which motivates them eventually to be more tolerable to non-human animals and to acknowledge their rights to live on the earth with them. This sort of a deeper spiritual contemplation, as Nasr argues, is essential for restoring the human-nature relationship.⁸⁹ For Nasr, without such a deeper understanding of the unity of existence no initiative can work for environmental sustainability.⁹⁰

Spiritual World View of Nature

It is the loss of an authentically spiritual (and traditional) way of knowing (and not just loving) nature that means the modern and post-modern cannot offer a sustainable relationship with the natural world, which inspires Nasr to reject both the modern and post-modern view of nature and advocate for the spiritual way of understanding. Like Nasr, even some other post-modern scholars, for instance John B. Cobb, Jr., argue that the scientific world view of nature is not in favour of nature, but rather acted as a dominant cause to nature. The modern world view ignores spiritual feelings for non-human animals because it has denounced spirituality from its scientific discourses.

Nasr clarifies this point by giving the example of modern humans. For Nasr, modern humans can talk about environmental crisis, but they do not feel for the ecological equilibrium within their spiritual mind.⁹¹ They lack a deep spiritual feeling or love for the environment, which allows Nasr to reiterate the present ecological problems as a spiritual crisis of modern humans. In Nasr's view, if a spiritual world view of nature is developed and is followed world-wide, humans can reverse the present ecological crisis, whereas Nasr states: "The solution of the environmental crisis can come about only

⁸⁹ Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 20, 135–36.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 13.

when the modern spiritual malaise is cured and there is a rediscovery of the world of the Spirit."⁹²

Traditional Agricultural System

Nasr criticises the modern agricultural system, which is based on technology and chemical fertilisers. For him, the way the modern agricultural system grows crops and fruits is very harmful to the environment, because it alters the quality of the soil and destroys the ecological system through killing biotic organisms like earthworms and other insects by using pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilisers in farming lands.⁹³ These chemical ingredients gradually enter human body through consumption, which eventually results in rare and unfamiliar diseases such as different forms of cancer. Apparently, the modern agricultural system provides humans sufficient foods to meet their appetites, but in the long run it keeps humans at risk for their health and destroys the environment.⁹⁴ For this reason, Nasr urges reviving traditional technologies in cultivating the farming lands to produce healthy and environmentally friendly foods.⁹⁵

Traditional Way of Building Houses

Nasr advocates building houses and roads using traditional methods, which have less of a negative impact on the environment. For Nasr, though these methods are not completely free from damaging the environment, these carry less dangerous effects for the natural environment compared with modern methods of building houses and roads. By noting some architects and engineers, Nasr sees, it is not impossible to erect buildings by applying traditional methods.⁹⁶ For an example, he appreciates the building design plan of Hasan Fathi, an Egyptian architect, who used to speak in favour of traditional methods. In Fathi's view, as Nasr mentions, by using mud, bricks, stone and other traditional materials instead of metals like iron, steel, and aluminum, it is still possible to build remarkable architecture in consideration of environmental sustainability.⁹⁷ The great Wall of China, the Pyramid of Egypt, and the Kutub Minar of Delhi are the best example of buildings in traditional ways.

⁹² Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis," 106; Wersal, "Islam and Environmental Ethics," 458.

⁹³ Nasr and Iqbal, "Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," 88.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 90-91.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Less Consumption

Nasr advocates for the idea that humans must be very careful when consuming any modern product. For him, humans should think that what they consume can be harmful to their own health and to nature. If the harm of any consumed items weighs more than their benefit, they should be avoided immediately. Humans should consider what has less consequence to the environment in regard to consumption. In this way, Nasr calls for a balanced way of consuming that is in harmony with nature. For Nasr, it is very unfair to think that we are entitled to consume much because of availability or easy accessibility or our attraction to foods. For further clarification, Nasr mentions an example that when people go to any restaurant, they see many delicious dishes there, but they receive what they like to eat.⁹⁸ Thus, Nasr suggests, if such choice is taken in consideration of ecological interest, the entire situation will be positively changed for environmental sustainability.

Controlling Human Greed

Despite of being aware of the present ecological crisis, modern humans are continuing their uncontrolled activities in the environment for achieving more economic benefits and military power. Nasr narrates this situation as a paradoxical state of modern humans.⁹⁹ Actually, this paradox is a result of human greediness, which guides humans now by forgetting their responsibility to the environment.¹⁰⁰ Humans should control greed, but they work as if they are a slave of greed. Modern science and consumerism based economic system have triggered such greed in human mind.¹⁰¹ Everything of the current world is being measured by an exterior achievement in terms of economic prosperity, which has turned modern humans into a greedy and selfish animal.

The market-based economic system has created artificial wants all over the world and motivated humans to fulfill those unnecessary demands. On the other hand, common people, whom modern economic system treat just as a customer and consumer, become more greedier day by day in order to meet excess wants in their lives. Unfortunately, the current economic system lacks a solid foundation to lower down human greed or to keep it at a tolerable level. Similarly, modern science and technology are totally disconnected from any

⁹⁸ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁹ Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 13; Nasr and Iqbal, "Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," 84.

¹⁰⁰ Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis," 23.

¹⁰¹ Nasr and Iqbal, "Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," 83.

moral or ethical guidance to grow a controlling capacity in human mind. Therefore, humans are greedier than ever before. Until greed is controlled, there will be no possibility for environmental sustainability. To keep human greed at a tolerable ground, Nasr suggests humans to follow the path of traditional wisdoms and to reconnect them with the primordial character.

Wise Economic Function

The environmental problem has a logical relationship with current economic activities. Human activities in nature are almost related with their earthly welfare and benefits. Before the seventeenth century, humans used to maintain a deep relationship with the natural world in their economic functions. But since that century the secular spirit has been working as a major criterion in all human affairs, especially economic activities. Secular modern economists developed economic theories and policies with regard to earthly benefits only. In the present economic and marketing system, there is no consideration for ecological equilibrium. For this reason, Nasr talks about the wise economic activities where ecological sustainability is considered along with the production, distribution, marketing and consumption. Nasr does not believe that those wise economists could save the environment,¹⁰² but he assumes that at least their economic policies could not torture nature massively like the current economic policies.

A Society of Human Beings with Profound Responsibility for Nature

Nasr reiterates emphasising human responsibility to the planetary environment. First, he advocates keeping a deep spiritual feeling for the natural world, and then, he suggests changing rapidly human attitudes in favour of nature. For Nasr, if humans can realise that they have a profound responsibility to the natural world, it can motivate them to reform a positive change in their own capacity. In his view, without such a radical transformation in human feeling and their activities, the present situation cannot be reversed. It requires a society of responsibility as a whole towards the natural environment, where consumerism must be limited and controlled by a deeper understanding of the reality and a profound sense of responsibility. This projected society is possible, if humans can decide to come back to a religious world view of nature, to have a sense of accountability to God for their every action, to feel intimacy with the rest of creation, and to have a real vision for achieving peace through serving God's creatures. Nasr's such hypothetical society articulates a sacrificial mentality for all and a

¹⁰² Ibid., 79.

beneficiary attitude to nature, which is based on the essentiality of religions in human society.¹⁰³

A Critical Analysis of Nasr's Eco-Philosophical Understanding¹⁰⁴

If anyone goes through Nasr's eco-philosophical understanding, I see, s/he will appreciate Nasr's extensive works on the environment in connection with traditional world view. Nasr has made a praiseworthy attempt to divert human concentration from the present scientific world view of nature to the traditional world view of nature. He has taken a brave initiative to rediscover the sacredness in nature, which is completely ignored by modern science, by arguing that it is not impossible to revitalise sacredness in nature, if humans really want the permanent solution of the present ecological crisis. By criticising the bad consequences of the mechanistic-materialistic world view of nature, Nasr focuses on the traditional world view of nature due to its balanced relationship of God-human-nature. With all these motivated arguments and theoretical foundations, Nasr advocates going back to the traditional view of nature, which is endorsed by sacred and traditional sciences.

Despite so many merits in his theoretical works, some observers may consider his eco-religious suggestions as an ideal type narrative by arguing that Nasr's works lack proposals for concrete suggestions from a practical perspective. They may argue that Nasr does not attempt to remedy the condition of modern human lifestyles, for Nasr criticises bitterly the modern world without providing an idea of a better and a more comfortable life than what modern humans follow. Scholars may not be satisfied with Nasr's proposal for reforming modern life as he suggests a total departure from it. Modern humans, who are already accustomed to the present living fashion, may criticise Nasr for promoting an impractical and utopian plan before them. Nasr nevertheless remains uncompromising in his vision, so scholars can criticise him for not giving a space of compromise between traditional and scientific views of nature. Scholars, who like to see moderation in ideas, will be disappointed when they see that Nasr cannot articulate a moderate approach between two mutually opposite views—traditional and modern—but rather insists on a total reform of the world view that has been followed by human civilisation for four centuries.

¹⁰³ Nasr, "Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis," 20.

¹⁰⁴ A similar argument was made in another work by the author. See Sayem, "Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problem," 312–28. The present assessment is a modified and elaborated form of the earlier version.

Policy analysts can argue that if Nasr's suggestion is considered for implementation it will require a long process, as he suggests a departure from the consumer-based lifestyle and a reformation of the present world view of nature, which are not easy tasks. They may question further: What should be done immediately? Should the present humans wait for a revolutionary reformation as Nasr suggests? Or should they think of some less invasive action-plans?

Modern humans are individually free to accept or reject any faith, which may allow some scholars to contend that Nasr's motive has left no space for people of no religion, meaning atheists or those who are anti-religion. It is argued that disbelieving humans will not support an initiative, which is based purely on a religious foundation. If any influential group of humans cannot cooperate with an initiative taken for a good purpose, it will be difficult to implement that project to address the ecological crisis.

For some scholars, Nasr's proposal for ecological equilibrium may become a radical approach because of his uncompromising attitude to the traditional world view of nature, which presents a conflict with the current scientific world view of nature. They can also argue that Nasr's approach creates another clash with the present economic interest and marketing system, but he cannot give any practical suggestions for alternative activities to reform the current financial and marketing systems.

The way Nasr compares the abused state of nature with that of a prostitute may create confusion among scholars. Scholars may argue that Nasr should use the metaphor of a mother instead of prostitute. It may be argued that many environmentalists compare the natural world with a mother, which shows a degree of respect and love to nature. By using such a metaphoric example, a group of scholars call the planetary earth as the mother earth.

Sometimes, Nasr uses a deep esoteric narrative, which seems a bit difficult even for young scholars to realise the significance of those mystic descriptions. Without a basic orientation of religious and spiritual traditions, people cannot grasp easily his deeper esoteric discourses, which he made in connection with nature. The problem of modern scholars is that they have a very poor foundation about faith and spiritual traditions in regard to nature, so they can face some difficulties to understand Nasr's eco-spiritual insightful philosophies.

Nasr's proposal for going back to the traditional world view of nature can be misunderstood by modern scholars and proponents of the scientific world view of nature. They can consider Nasr's suggestions a backward and old-fashioned line of thought by arguing that every moment the world moves forward and never goes back. It therefore seems easy for them to raise the

question: how is it possible to bring humans back to an ancient idea? For this group of scholars, Nasr's appeal remains illogical. According to them Nasr could, at best, propose a reformed view that combines both science and tradition.

However, the above critical analyses have seemingly failed to reduce the significance of Nasr's Islamic eco-philosophical understanding. Nasr has searched the philosophical roots of the current ecological crisis and brought to light some major causes of the current environmental problems. Some can argue that Nasr's philosophical and spiritual understanding are an ideal type narrative with a deeper philosophical insight, but in consideration of changing the world view, Nasr has connected successfully the desperately needed issue of ecological crisis to a perspective of faith and the spiritual traditions of the world.

Conclusion

It becomes clear that Nasr has related the ecological crisis with the spiritual crisis, which is not a dominant part of modern environmental ethics. This is why he has written about religious spirituality through which humans can feel the problem and can be convinced by themselves to treat with natural world in a very modest way. He has also proposed perennial philosophy in the place of materialistic philosophy and suggested reviving the traditional metaphysical understanding for thinking deeply about the intimacy between human beings and the natural world. Thus, by connecting eternal wisdoms with the environment Nasr has tried to grow a positive sentiment in favor of ecological equilibrium. Secular environmentalists or atheist philosophers may criticise Nasr's eco-philosophical understanding of nature as a backward vision, but they cannot completely deny the significance of the insightful philosophical and spiritual motivations Nasr has brought to address the present ecological crisis. Remarkably, Nasr has tried to show the traditional understanding of nature as a support for environmental sustainability. He has emphasised how traditional science and religious spirituality, being accompanied with the sacred sciences, worked in past towards the sustainability of the environment; and by using these examples, for the long-term solution of the ecological problem, Nasr has suggested for a paradigm shift from the modern scientific world views to the spirituality-based world view of nature.

