

Review Essay

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Works on Environmental Issues: A Survey

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Abstract

This review essay focuses synthesising Seyyed Hossein Nasr's (b. 1933) views on ecological questions through a critical analysis of his works on eco-religious understanding from a practical perspective. It aims to make the reader familiar with Nasr's eco-philosophical and eco-spiritual thought and show how he connects the present ecological issues with religious and spiritual traditions of the world, making a significant contribution to sustaining the environment. In so doing, the survey is expected to enrich the current discussions of ecological issues from religious perspectives.

Keywords

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, environment, ecology, eco-religious perspective.

Introduction

The present environmental problems are seriously debated in world religions.¹ Cooperation of faith traditions and communities is essential to the solution of ecological disequilibrium. Scholars of religion and ecology, and even some

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¹ Md. Abu Sayem, "Environmental Crisis as a Religious Issue: Assessing Some Relevant Works in the Field," *Asia Journal of Theology* 33, no. 1 (2019): 127–47.

scientists,² urge to emphasise moral foundations of faith and spiritual traditions to reform current human perceptions of nature and motivate environment-friendly human behaviours. Western scholars of religions especially those having Christian background have dominated the debate of religious ecology for many years. Scholars from religious traditions other than Christianity also responded to ecological issues, though they are very few in number. As a Muslim scholar and philosopher, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's (b.1933) works on the issues of the environment are praise worthy. This survey analyses his selected works on ecological crisis and elaborates his eco-religious views.

Nasr's Works on Ecological Issues

Nasr's *The Encounter of Man and Nature* (1968) is a pioneering and innovative work in the field of religion and ecology. It is an exceptional book in the discipline of eco-theology and environmental philosophy. In his review of the book, E. L. Mascall applauds this book as a unique and distinct work.³ Haven O'More notes that Nasr's *Encounter of Man and Nature* presents challenges to the present scientific world view.⁴ This book is originally based on Nasr's four lectures on "the spiritual crisis of modern man," which he delivered at the University of Chicago, in May 1966. In 1968, these lectures were published as *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*.⁵ A paperback of the same was published as *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*⁶ in 1976. The book warns that humans are in grave danger due to their broken relationship with nature. Relying on data from history and philosophy as well as religious and cultural traditions of both Europe and Asia, Nasr argues that the sense of harmony between humans and nature declined in the West under the influence of Aristotelian philosophy and the rise of modern sciences. He opines that though such relationship still exists in Eastern traditions, but it is under threat due to the pressure of the Western sciences, secularism, and the modern scientific world view. He further contends that if humans want to save themselves from any environmental catastrophe, they must rediscover the metaphysical significance of nature. He

² Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, "Introduction: The Emerging Alliance of Religion and Ecology," *Daedalus* 130, no. 4 (2001): 9–10.

³ E. L. Mascall, review of *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religious Studies* 6, no. 1 (1970):103.

⁴ Haven O'More, review of *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Aperture* 15, no. 2 (1970): 58.

⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968).

⁶ Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1976).

views that Eastern traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, including Islam and Eastern Christianity comprise rich source material that can strengthen relation between humans and nature, because these traditions bear metaphysical significance of the natural world. Nasr urges Christians to revive the metaphysical tradition of Christianity as the Western version of Christianity lost this tradition. For him, Islam can help the Western tradition, because Islam comes from the same Abrahamic faith root. Nasr reiterates that a pure metaphysical doctrine of nature can revive a spiritual conception of nature. O'More recommends Nasr's work as one of the best resources of consultation for policy makers to properly address the ecological crisis from the grass-root level.⁷

In his *The Need for a Sacred Science*,⁸ Nasr argues for the necessity of a universal guidance to control the modern uncontrolled science and technology. For Anton Heinen, Nasr's *Need for a Sacred Science* is a useful source material for realising negative effects of modern science and technology in terms of ecological crisis.⁹ Nasr clearly differentiates between sacred science and secular science, though he considers science as secular and neutral. For him, the "sacred science" refers to the "science of the Real."¹⁰ The metaphysical basis of the sacred science is God and the world of the spirit.¹¹ He argues that this science belongs to the very essence of human being and the authentic religious teaching, which is attained by the intellect.¹² On the other hand, the modern science developed by the West can work at best as a shadow or physical appearance of the reality. Modern science is based on empirical understanding of phenomena while sacred science entails contemplating the reality that is beyond any phenomenon. Modern science ignores metaphysics, but it works as the basis of sacred science. Modern science is viewed as value free, but sacred science itself is embodied in absolute value. That is why, modern science and technology can be used for destruction. Humans are utilising them for gaining control over nature. Instead of being part of nature, they consider themselves master of it, rejecting the right of non-human creatures to share the same planet. Nasr blames modern science as materialistic, utilitarian, and inhuman and considers it incapable of dealing with the present ecological crisis. In his view, it is not possible to address

⁷ O'More, review of *Encounter of Man and Nature*, 58.

⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

⁹ Anton Heinen, review of *The Need for a Sacred Science*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science Society* 85, no. 4 (1994): 681–82.

¹⁰ Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*, 173.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1–2.

environmental degradation without a clear understanding of the root problems of modern science and technology. A realisation of multidimensional problems created by modern science is, therefore, crucial for understanding the necessity of a sacred science. For Nasr, without such deep realization and action accordingly, there will be no peace on earth. Heinen comments that Nasr's arguments and suggestions are very ambitious for a permanent solution of ecological destruction, but the problem is that if these are taken for granted, modern humans have to bury all hopes for a truly human science.¹³

The 1994 Cadbury Lectures of Nasr at the University of Birmingham were published as *Religion and the Order of Nature*.¹⁴ It is another significant work in the discipline of religious traditions, science and ecology. Scholars published reviews on this book,¹⁵ which elaborates how modern science destroyed traditional views of nature. For Nasr, religious and cultural traditions were not antagonistic to the traditional approach to nature; rather, they supported it. It is modern science, he argues, that regarded centuries-old religious and cultural views of nature as superstitions. As a result, sacred feature of nature was abandoned and nature was considered a machine to produce benefits to humans only. This suppressed order of nature and created the present ecological crisis. Nasr compares nature with a living human body, which works like a machine, but is also a spiritual composition that functions in human body meticulously with living organs and cells of a human. The problem of science is that it cannot detect this spiritual force in human body. Similarly, nature performs all of its actions with the force or power of spirit. It is true, though mundane science cannot prove it by its technological knowledge. For this reason, modern science sees nature as a machine having no spiritual force. For Nasr, such view of modern science promoted mechanistic and materialistic world view, destroying metaphysical understanding of nature. He also provides a brief account of the development of modern science in the West and its separation from traditional religions. He is not satisfied with the role of Christianity in stopping the process of desacralising nature in the West and criticises certain medieval Christian scholars for their failure to stop desacralisation of nature. However, he appreciates St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226 CE) for his efforts of reconciliation

¹³ Heinen, review of *Need for a Sacred Science*, 682.

¹⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford Universe Press, 1996).

¹⁵ For instance, see Egbert Giles Leigh Jr., review of *Religion and the Order of Nature*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 44, no. 2 (1998): 124–26; Leonard T. Librande, review of *Religion and the Order of Nature*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35, no. 3 (1998): 515.

between human and non-human worlds. Nasr sees Christianity capable of learning from the Eastern and far-Eastern religious and cultural traditions like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Daoism with respect to rediscovering the sacrality of nature. He urges adherents of religions to make a unity to save the world from ecological destruction. Thus, Nasr's *Religion and the Order of Nature* calls for restoring human relationship with the natural environment.

In *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*,¹⁶ Nasr gives an introductory exposition of the origin and development of Islamic cosmology. It was originally his doctoral dissertation submitted in 1958 to the Department of the History of Science and Learning, Harvard University, USA. Harvard University Press published its revised and expanded version in 1964 with a preface by a famous historian and orientalist, H. A. R. Gibb. Michael E. Marmura reviewed the book in *Speculum*.¹⁷ In *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Nasr emphasises that in Islam, like other revealed religions, cosmological sciences are closely related to the divine knowledge that is acquired through the revelation, but depend on the perspective of the observer or the qualitative essence of the civilisation in which these are cultivated.¹⁸ Though cosmological sciences imply the same truth manifested in different forms, but humans see this truth differently according to their religious and cultural understanding. Because of such variation of human perception, different cosmological sciences may exist within the same civilisation.¹⁹ Therefore, Nasr suggests studying nature as a book of symbols with a deep contemplation to reach ultimate liberation and illumination.²⁰ He holds that during the first three centuries of Islamic history Muslim scholars collected materials of various sciences from the Greece, Persia, Egypt, India, Babylonia, China, etc., and combined these with the unitary perspective of Islam.²¹ During the next two centuries (the golden age of Islam), Muslim scientists reached the peak in natural and mathematical sciences, and at the same time, formulated Islamic cosmological doctrines that have been

¹⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for Its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 1964).

¹⁷ Michael E. Marmura, review of *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrine: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for Its Study by the Ikhwan al-Safa, al-Biruni, and Ibn Sina*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr), *Speculum* 40, no. 4 (1965): 744–46.

¹⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for Its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā*, rev. ed. (Bath: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

¹⁹ Nasr, *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

influencing the Muslim history over the centuries. As a case study, Nasr deals with the contributions of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', al-Bīrūnī and Ibn Sīnā. It does not mean, however, that he downplays the contributions of other Muslim scholars. Referring to the cosmological understanding of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Nasr argues that they related their metaphysical understanding of the universe to its divine origin and considered such study a valid and necessary for general sciences. For al-Bīrūnī, Nasr notes, study of nature is not a meaningless work. Nasr argues that in scientific and mathematical views of al-Bīrūnī, nature was regarded as “a purposeful domain” that manifests God’s power and wisdom.²² Similarly, Ibn Sīnā’s scientific research does not ignore ontological understanding of any being or thing; rather, he relates all beings or things to the great Being from whom they emanate and come back to.²³ These scholars and their followers believe that the whole creation is ontologically depends on God to Whom the order of cosmos is duly related for function. Therefore, Nasr argues that all cosmological knowledge must be related to God, because He is the “ontological origin” of all beings and things.

Nasr’s *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (1975) discusses the confrontation of modern science and technology with human culture and traditional norms.²⁴ Nasr argues that modern humans have burnt their hands in the fire that they themselves kindled. He blames scientism for ignoring the very essence of human identity that lies in spirit or soul. For him, ignoring spiritual dimension of human life is a suicidal step of human civilisation. At many places, he labels such problems of modern humans as a spiritual crisis. He suggests that only a spiritual world view that lies in traditional religions can save humans from this pervasive crisis. He does not ignore the role of any authentic religious and cultural tradition of the world in formation of sustainable human civilisation including environmental justice. In this context, he sees Islam as a powerful agent to a positive change for a better world with ecological equilibrium. Other two sister religions of Abrahamic faith tradition—Judaism and Christianity—can benefit from Islamic religious and cultural tradition, because Islamic view of the universe is not amalgamated with the so-called modern or scientific world views, Nasr concludes.

Nasr’s “Islam and the Environmental Crisis”²⁵ was published as a book chapter in *Islam and the Environment*. It was originally published in the *MAAS*

²² Ibid., 276.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, 2001).

²⁵ Nasr, “Islam and Environmental Crisis” in *Islam and the Environment*, ed. A. Agwan (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997).

Journal of Islamic Science in 1990. Nasr notes that the Islamic view of nature is more significant for the West itself, because Islam shares many things with the West as a religious tradition of Abrahamic family.²⁶ In his view, the way traditional Islamic society dealt with the natural environment was criticised by many Christian critics who accused Muslims of being naturalistic.²⁷ He states that Islamic guidelines of the natural environment cannot be perceived without a clear comprehensive Islamic knowledge of human identity. He argues that the status of human as God's vicegerent on earth does not provide an open license to exploit nature; rather, it is checked and balanced by God's servanthood as another identity of humans in the eye of God. If humans want to enjoy their position as God's vicegerent on earth without their identity as servant and slave of God, they will become the most dangerous creature on earth to exploit what on earth.²⁸ Nasr criticises many modern Muslim scholars like Muḥammad 'Alī of Egypt, Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān of India, Muḥammad 'Abduh of Egypt, Zia Gokalp of Turkey, Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzādah of Persia, and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, among others, for emphasising one side of human identity at the cost of the other. He has a critical understanding of human rights from Islamic point of view. He argues, "responsibilities precede rights."²⁹ Therefore, humans cannot claim their rights independent of God, and even over nature or over themselves, because they are not the creator of their own beings.³⁰ He states that Judeo-Christian tradition also shared the same view, but it was replaced by rationalistic humanism in the West since the European renaissance. For Nasr, the Western civilisation considers humans purely earthly and gives them unrestricted power to control the natural environment. He notes that such perception never existed in traditional Islamic world. He does not consider Judeo-Christian tradition responsible for the present ecological crisis and argues that Christianity struggled for five centuries against rationalism and secularism.³¹ He urges Christian scholars to formulate a Christian theology of nature. In this regard, Islamic view of nature can be a great significance for those interested in reformulating a theology of nature. Nasr argues that though spiritual view of nature has also weakened in Muslim countries, but it never disappeared like in the West. He suggests creating environmental laws in light of Islamic teachings, emphasising Islamic

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

²⁸ Ibid., 22.

²⁹ Ibid., 23.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 26.

love of non-human realm, and starting dialogue with other religious and cultural traditions.

In a brief paper, "The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis,"³² Nasr elaborates various terms of different religions like *Tao* (in ancient Chinese tradition), *rita* (in Hinduism), *dharmā* (in Buddhism), *nomos* (in the ancient Greeks), and *sharī'ah* (in Islam), and connects them with natural order and beauty. He notes that traditional societies could maintain a harmonious relationship with natural system due to their religious understanding of nature. Then he mentions some other themes, which overlaps with those of his previous works. Lastly, he urges to change the present world view completely for the sake of environmental sustainability and does not allow any compromise in this regard; rather, he regards a compromise as the worst sort of treason.

In "Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environment,"³³ Nasr gives an account of environmental problems in Muslim countries and suggests how they should respond the issue from an Islamic perspective. He states that the present uncontrolled industrialisation is like a cancer in the body of nature, which would lead to the destruction of natural system.³⁴ Until this cancerous substance is uprooted from the body of nature, there will be no real cure. He includes modern medicine, biotechnology, genetic engineering and cloning, scientism, migration from villages to cities, etc. as supporting causes of environmental degradation.³⁵ Muslim countries are not immune from this pervasive disease. Nasr proposes elaboration of legal and philosophical-theological teachings of Islam regarding the natural environment.³⁶ For him, Muslim religious scholars could have played a vital role in restoring close relationship between humans and nature, but they could not perform their duties due to many causes. Most '*ulamā*' remained unaware of ecological crisis. Therefore, he emphasises training them properly so that they could know Islamic teachings about the environment. Nasr recognises that though the main schools of Islamic theology did not give special importance to theology of nature, but certain Sufi texts and numerous works of Islamic philosophers addressed Islamic philosophy and theology of nature. Besides, various literary

³² Nasr, "The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis," *Ecologist* 30, (2000): 18–20.

³³ 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 Center for the Study of World Religions [Harvard Divinity School] with Harvard University Press, 2003).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 88–89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 86–87.

works of Muslims in different parts of the globe reveal Islamic view of nature-human relationship. All this literature should be employed as a source material to propagate Islamic understanding of the environment. Nasr notes that cosmos is primordial revelation or God's first revelation, because it works, in fact, as a sign of God.³⁷ All creatures, he believes, sing the praise of God³⁸ and completely destroying a species entails stopping a whole class from worshipping God.³⁹ For him, creation is sacred because it is "the effect of the Divine Creative Act."⁴⁰ He further argues that what comes directly from the All-Sacred, the holy name of Islamic God (*al-Quddūs*), and what reflects God's wisdom is also sacred.⁴¹ Moreover, since nature reflects the wisdom of God, it must be sacred. Nasr states that nature is not just for humans' consumption, rather it has direct relation with God and creatures will directly speak to God on the Day of Judgement.⁴² Nature also has an eschatological significance, because Paradise in Islam is portrayed as a place with full of animals and plants.⁴³ As for dealing with nature, Nasr contends that human beings must respect and pay what is due to each creature.⁴⁴ He reminds humans that each creature has its own intrinsic value that they must not violate.⁴⁵ Islamic stance is contradictory to the idea that other creatures cannot enjoy any right except what humans decide to allow them.⁴⁶ Humans must remember that they are not the ones who gave the rights to animals, but God Himself granted the rights to His creatures. Furthermore, he states that even the permission to dominate (*taskhīr*) the earth is granted to humans on the condition that humans remain in a state of servanthood to God.⁴⁷ Nasr criticises some Muslim modernists for stressing human supremacy over non-human creatures without mentioning such condition. In contrast, he reiterates that the Qur'ān never allows humans to dominate nature without protecting it and acting as stewards.⁴⁸ As for the rights of humans over non-human creatures, he argues that responsibility precedes rights. By mentioning some practices of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), Nasr suggests Muslims to plant trees, love animals, show kindness to them, establish protected areas for natural life,

³⁷ Ibid., 95.

³⁸ Ibid., 96.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

and reduce wastefulness and needless destruction of nature.⁴⁹ He suggests introducing courses on the environment at all levels of education in order to train the next generation.⁵⁰ Subjects like engineering and economics should not be taught without acquainting the students with the environmental impact of the projects related to their subjects.⁵¹ Courses on the environment should be included in Islamic schools. Since religious scholars have a strong influence on common Muslims in Muslim world, they can address ecological issues effectively in light of religious guidelines if they are given proper training. Media can also play a pivotal role in spreading the messages and broadcasting the related news. He emphasises joint efforts of religious, political, and social leaders⁵² and holds that such joint struggle can effectively combat increasing deterioration of the natural environment. He also refers to the significance of nongovernmental institutions including the institutions of religious endowments (*awqāf*) for environmental sustainability.⁵³ He suggests adopting green technology and renewable energy sources for reducing the environmental crisis. He considers governments of Muslim countries part of the problem not the solution⁵⁴ and stresses the importance on the efforts of individuals and small groups. To sum, Nasr suggests first to recognise the environmental crisis in its spiritual and religious depth and⁵⁵ then revive Islamic view carefully without any compromise.⁵⁶

Nasr's "The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis"⁵⁷ is an analytical work on the current environmental problems especially in Muslim countries and repeats his earlier statements about the causes of the present environmental crisis resulting from modern science and technology. In line with previous critical analysis of the contributing factors of ecological problems, he recognises that environmental crisis has also philosophical, religious, and spiritual causes⁵⁸ supported modern scientific world view of nature. Without addressing those supporting causes, it is difficult to deal with ecological crisis. This requires paradigm shift from scientific world view to spiritual one.⁵⁹ He does not deny importance of short-term practical measures

⁴⁹ Ibid., 97-98.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 100-01.

⁵¹ Ibid., 101.

⁵² Ibid., 102.

⁵³ Ibid., 102-03.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ 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.

⁵⁸ Nasr and Iqbal, "Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," 81.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

for reducing the problem, but also emphasises the permanent solution of the crisis through a radical change in the current lifestyle. He also blames governments of Muslim countries and some individual Muslims for being deeply influenced by Western science, technology, and culture and for adopting them without adapting them to Islamic traditional and spiritual norms, values, and guidelines.

In another conversation,⁶⁰ Nasr insists on reviving the sacred feature of nature for mitigating global environmental problem. Referring to some Qur'ānic verses, he shows that every substance in the universe prostrates God Who swears by some of His creations and speaks to them.⁶¹ If humans were aware of these significant interactions between God and creation, they would not dare to mistreat any substance of nature. He clarifies Islamic view of caliphate (*khilāfah*) by connecting it with a more responsible attitude to God's creation. He sees humans from a holistic perspective combining their physical and spiritual dimensions with their service-consuming and service-offering aspects.⁶² In his view, ecological teachings in Islamic world view are clear, understandable, unique, balanced, and distinct, compared to other religions.⁶³ Nasr concludes that though contemporary Muslims are not conscious enough about the essentiality of ecological equilibrium, but they have very enriched moral and spiritual traditions to enlighten themselves and others about saving the natural world.

In "God is Absolute Reality and All Creation His *Tajallī* (Theophany),"⁶⁴ Nasr discusses the necessity of developing an Islamic eco-philosophy. He criticises the attitude of Westernised Muslims and the so-called Muslim fundamentalists for neglecting traditional Islamic teachings regarding relationship between humans and nature. In his view, Muslims should return to Islamic wisdom traditions for an ecological awareness. He emphasises mystic dimension of Islam to realise the metaphysical aspect of nature. Ibn al-'Arabī's *wahdat al-wujūd* (the unity of Being)—though it is misunderstood with pantheism in the West and even by some Muslim scholars—can help realise the interconnectedness of God, humans, and nature. Like in his previous works, Nasr argues that nature reflects God's power and wisdom,

⁶⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, interviewed by Elisabeth Eaves, "A Religious Nature: Philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr on Islam and the Environment," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 71, no. 5 (2015): 13–18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 14–15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁴ Nasr, "God is Absolute Reality and All Creation His *Tajallī* (Theophany)" in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, ed. John Hart (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 3–11.

though God is infinite and absolute. He compares the natural world with a mirror, arguing that nature reflects God in it just like a mirror reflects a substance kept in front of it.⁶⁵ In the mirror, though the reflected image is not the original shape of the substance, but it helps viewers to realise the original substance. If the mirror is broken, the original substance remains intact and untouched. Similarly, what nature reveals is not God, but assists humans to realise the reflection of God. If nature is destroyed, God will constantly remain the same as He is, nothing can grasp or touch Him. An understanding based on external phenomena and relative realities—for instance modern science—may not help humans realise the absolute reality, the Real One. Perceiving God and knowing the connection between the Creator and the created requires a deeply spiritual realisation, without which it is impossible to feel God in His creation. Referring to the Bible and the Qur'ān,⁶⁶ Nasr states that the universe was created by a divine word and God's holy face encompasses everywhere. The divine word was not in a state of unconscious, which implies consciousness at the beginning of the creation.⁶⁷ With this understanding, Nasr contends that the world is a state of being and we live in a living universe. Destroying nature entails destroying the sacred reflection found in nature and humans. Nasr connects the present ecological crisis with two major transformative events: (i) desacralisation of nature and humans; and (ii) pre-eminence of science and technology. For him, ecological sustainability needs rediscovering the lost spiritual dimension of nature and humans, and this rediscovery is possible by complete adherence to religious and spiritual traditions, not only to their moral and social aspects.⁶⁸ Nasr considers scientism one of the greatest obstacles in this regard, according to which only scientific knowledge is the criterion for measuring the true knowledge. He criticises such mentality for destroying human-nature relationship and suggests not to explain metaphysical concepts in light of modern science.

Conclusion

Nasr has extensively worked on environmental issues from a faith and spiritual aspect. In his works, he successfully related the present ecological degradation to the spiritual crisis of modern humans. According to his eco-religious understanding, a paradigm shift from the secular world view to the spiritual world view of nature is essential. Though it seems difficult to thoroughly follow a traditional and spiritual world view of nature, Nasr's eco-

⁶⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 8–9.

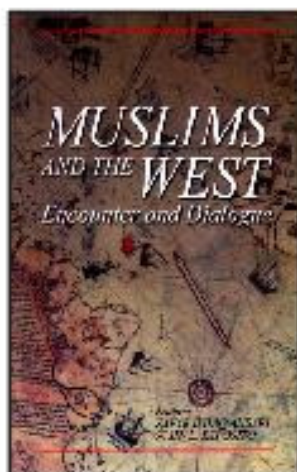
⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

philosophical and eco-spiritual understanding should be evaluated in terms of reforming the present human attitudes to the natural world. The present survey urges scholars to further analyse and examine Nasr's views on human-nature relationship and asks policy makers to benefit from his eco-religious prescriptions in order to save ecological equilibrium.



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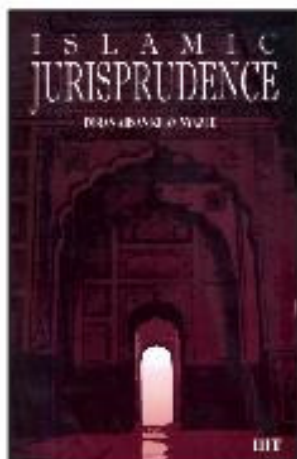


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