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Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Traditionalism

Mehmet Vural¹

Abstract: In this study, the basic views of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, one of the contemporary Islamic thinkers, on Traditionalism have been analysed. Nasr, one of the leading figures of the Traditionalism movement, has written in many fields from art to architecture, from science to philosophy, from religion to literature, and in these works he has tried to examine issues from a Traditionalist perspective. According to Nasr, one of the main problems facing the Islamic world today lies in the modernist and secular worldview and the view of nature, science and technology. According to him, modernism has brought anthropocentrism, unprincipledness, reductionism, progressivism and evolutionism. These have not been for the good of humanity and have led to wrong paths. He proposes the rediscovery of Tradition as a solution to today's individual and social problems. Nasr's identification of the problems in this way and his solution proposals have also received some criticism, and it has been stated that Tradition and Sufism, which are presented as solution proposals, will be insufficient in solving the problems. However, his criticisms and thoughts, especially his views on Traditionalism, are followed with interest.

Keywords: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, traditionalism, modernism, secularism, Sufism

The Life of Seyyed Hossain Nasr

Childhood Years (1933-1945)

Seyyed Hossein Nasr was born in Tehran on April 7, 1933. His father was Dr. Seyyed Waliyullah Nasr (1876-1946) and his mother was Mrs. Ashraf. His father, who was a physician, worked in the field of education and was appointed as the head of an institution that corresponded to the Ministry of National Education during the Shah's reign, and was a well-equipped intellectual who was well-versed in Eastern and Western languages. His mother, Mrs. Ashraf, was Nasr's first teacher, who strived for Nasr's good upbringing and taught him prayers, Quranic surahs and prayers. She too was the daughter of a well-established Iranian family prominent in politics and science. Nasr's childhood home was an intellectual environment where religious, scientific, philosophical and literary debates took place. He spent his childhood years following the discussions in this house, which had a large library, with interest.

When Nasr was 13 years old, his father, Dr. Seyyid Waliyullah, decided to send him to the United States with his relatives for a good education. Part of the reason for this was that he had broken his scapula in a bicycle accident, and in the war climate at the time, he should have gone to Europe for treatment but could not. Dr. Seyyid Waliyullah, who felt that he could not take care of his son's education, said goodbye to Nasr as he sent him to the United States to be

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with his brother, saying, “I will never see you again, but I will follow you wherever you are.” Nasr would never forget his father’s last words to him, and a few months later, his father passed away. Nasr started his long journey from Tehran in October 1945 and reached Cairo after Baghdad, Damascus and Palestine. After a short stay there, he took a ship from the port of Alexandria, first to Thessaloniki, then to the port of Marseille, and then across the Atlantic Ocean to New York on December 17, 1945. After a difficult journey that lasted about two months, he eventually joined his uncles and cousins (Nasr, 2007, p. 18).

Years of Education in America (1945-1958)

Upon Nasr’s arrival in the US, the search for a school began immediately and it was decided that he would attend the Peddie School in New Jersey. This was a Baptist community school, a branch of Protestantism. Nasr attended Saturday services at the church with his friends and learned about the beliefs and rituals of other religions (Nasr, 2007, p. 10). In 1945, Nasr started 8th grade and graduated at the top of his class. Looking for a university education, Nasr decided to study physics and mathematics with a scholarship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), one of the world’s leading universities, in Boston in 1950 with the advice of his teachers. Although he would successfully graduate with honors from the Physics department, the questions in his mind and the thoughts of the British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) about physics in a lecture at MIT caused him to distance himself from physics, which he thought did not take human beings into account. Russell’s statement that physics is not concerned with the nature of physical reality per se, but with the mathematical structures related to it, in a way confirmed Nasr, who already had such questions and doubts in his mind (Chittick, 2012, p. 9-16). Thus, his field of interest shifted away from physics towards philosophy and metaphysics. The excessive, albeit implicit, understanding of positivism and scientism at the time was another reason for his detachment from physics (Nasr, 1996, p. 32).

During his undergraduate studies in physics at MIT, Nasr’s meeting with Italian Professor Giorgio de Santillana (1902-1974), who knew Eastern and Western philosophies and taught history of science, was, in his own words, “the turning point of his intellectual life”. De Santillana, in whose lectures on the history of science and the history of scientific thought Nasr showed great interest, told him about the Traditionalist school and suggested that he read the works of René Guénon (1886-1951) and other Traditionalist thinkers such as Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998). In this way, he was introduced to this school, which he would be a part of throughout his life and to which he would make great contributions. Especially through the works of Coomaraswamy, Guénon and Schuon, he began to feel himself within the Traditionalist school (Nasr, 2007, p. 18).

The rich library of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy made the greatest contribution to Nasr’s acquaintance with the important names and works of this school. Rama Coomaraswamy opened his father Ananda’s library to Nasr. It was in this library that Nasr first encountered the works of Traditionalist writers such as René Guénon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Marco Pallis and Martin Lings. These names and especially Schuon had a great influence on Nasr’s intellectual and intellectual development. He met Schuon in France in 1957 and kept in touch with him frequently in Morocco until his death in 1998. He described Schuon, for whom he had great love and respect, as the “Cosmic Mind” charged with the energy of divine grace and “the Frenchman of Ibn ‘Arabî” (Nasr, 2012, p. 120).

Nasr, who had planned to switch from physics to another field during his undergraduate studies, decided not to continue his graduate studies at MIT. Even though people like the famous philosopher of religion Paul Tillich (1886-1965) wanted him to stay at MIT and do graduate studies, he chose not to do so. After graduating from MIT in 1954, he went to Harvard University and earned a master's degree in geology and geophysics. After completing his master's degree in 1956, he started a PhD program at Harvard at the History of Science Chair founded by George Sarton, where many famous professors taught at the time. In his doctoral courses, which were very productive, he had the chance to take courses from world-renowned professors. He took Islamic thought courses from H. A. R. Gibb (1895-1971), history of science courses from George Sarton (1884-1956) and I. Bernard Cohen (1914-2003), and history of theology and philosophy courses from Harry A. Wolfson (1887-1974). During his studies, he met Aydın Sayılı (1913-1993), who had come back to Turkey to do research. Sayılı was the first scholar from Turkey to be sent to Harvard for a PhD in the history of science and the first PhD in this field in 1942. Nasr continued his contact with Aydın Sayılı from time to time in Turkey.

Although Nasr wanted to work with George Sarton as his doctoral thesis advisor, upon Sarton's death in 1956, he successfully submitted his doctoral thesis, *Conceptions of Natura in Islamic Thought* in 1958 under the joint supervision of I. Bernard Cohen, H. A. R. Gibb and Harry A. Wolfson. This work was later revised and published in 1964 as *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. During this highly successful and productive period at Harvard, he became the assistant of Richard N. Freye (1920-2014), the Aga Khan Professor of Iranian Studies at Harvard University. At the same time, he published his first book, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (1968). In this work, he mainly tried to introduce the concept of "Islamic Science" into the literature. During this period, he traveled to many countries in Europe, met important names and conducted research. All these expanded his intellectual development and horizons of thought. In this process, he constantly emphasised that his travels to France, Spain and Morocco and the friendships and spiritual experiences he gained here were very important in his life. Meeting names such as Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984), Marco Pallis (1895-1989), Martin Lings (1909-2005) and Henry Corbin (1903-1978) in France caused him to see this country as a special place in his life. Spain, on the other hand, became a place where he felt that the spirit of Andalusia was still alive and he wanted to travel constantly. In Morocco, his initiation into the Sufi school led by Sheikh Ahmed al-Alawi, a branch of the Shazeliya order, in 1958 led to a spiritual closeness to this region (Nasr, 2007, p. 34-40). Thus, his years of graduate studies at Harvard University were highly influential in shaping Nasr's thoughts and fully embracing the ideas of the Traditionalist school.

Back to Iran (1958)

Nasr returned to Iran in 1958 and started working at Tehran University. In addition to his teaching activities, he served as a dean, and from 1968-72 he was the vice-rector of this university. Among his many students in Tehran were William Chittick (b. 1943) and the Japanese woman scientist Sachiko Murata (b. 1943). While in his home country, he translated his doctoral thesis into Persian, which was awarded the Royal Prize. Although Nasr was well-versed in Eastern and Western thought, he felt that he was lacking in the sciences taught in his traditional education, so he studied for ten years in Iran with madrasa scholars. Thus, he became a world-renowned teacher and at the same time a student who took lessons from very important names. In madrasas in the cities of Tehran, Qom and Qazvin, he mainly studied Arabic, Islamic

law, Islamic philosophy and natural sciences. Among his teachers were his father's close friend Seyyid Muhammad Kazim Asrar, Allāme Husain Tabatabaī and Seyyid Abū al-Hasan Qazvinī.

It was during this period that Nasr began to receive invitations from universities in many countries to give lectures. In 1962 and 1965, he lectured on the history of science at Harvard University, where he had earned his doctorate. He was invited to give short seminars at Princeton University and the University of Utah. In the 1964-65 academic year, he lectured at the Aga Khan Department of Islamic Studies at the American University of Beirut.

While conducting intensive scientific studies at home and abroad, he was appointed by the Shah as the rector of Arya Mehr University of Science and Technology in 1972. He served in this position until 1975, when he fell ill. Nasr took part in the "Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy" (Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy/Encümen-i Shahanshahi-i Felsefe-i İran), commonly known as the "Imperial Academy", which was established in 1973 under the patronage of the Queen, and contributed to the publication of its journal *Sophia*.² In addition to Nasr, H. Giben, Toshihiko Izutsu, H. Smith, William Chittick, M. Morteza, C. Ashtiyani, Hairi Yazdi and others made important contributions to the work of the Academy. Nasr, too, carried out very important work in this institution, which he called the most important project of my life.

Especially his studies on Suhrawardī and Mollā Sadrā with Henry Corbin at this institution attracted much attention. During this period, he expanded his knowledge by studying Japanese aesthetics and Far Eastern philosophy with Toshihiko Izutsu. Nasr, who was in contact with many countries of the world during his academic career in Iran, started to visit Turkey from the end of the 1960s and to participate in scientific activities such as conferences and panels. Among the people he met in Turkey were Aydın Sayılı (1913-1993), whom he met at Harvard, as well as well-known scholars such as Zeki Velidi Togan (1890-1970), Süheyl Ünver (1898-1986), Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı (1900-1982), Ahmet Ateş (1917-1966), Nuri Arlasez (1910-2000) and Tahsin Yazıcı (1922-2002).

One of Nasr's activities during this period was to be the first Muslim and even the first Eastern thinker to be invited to the Gifford Conference in 1981, which had been held since 1889. Nasr participated in the conference on "On the Theology of Nature" in Scotland, to which very important names such as Heisenberg, Paul Tillich, A. Toynbee, A. N. Whitehead were invited, and evaluated the conference subject from the Traditionalist point of view. His most famous work, *Knowledge and the Sacred* is based on the texts he presented at this conference.

Exile to the West (January 6, 1979-)

Nasr worked in Iran as a lecturer, authored books, worked at the Academy and carried out scholarly activities until the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. He also took part in the Pahlavi Foundation, which the Queen established in 1970 for education, training and cultural activities, and worked under her patronage by being appointed as the head of her private office. Two weeks before the revolution, Nasr went to England on assignment, but due to the unrest in his country, he was called by Queen Shahbanu Farah Pahlavi and advised to stay abroad for a while longer. After the Iranian-Islamic Revolution in 1979, his self-imposed exile to the West began.

² Today, this Academy continues its activities under the name of "Institute for Philosophical Research".

In search of work, he went to the United States and worked briefly at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Utah (March 1979). He then moved to Temple University in Philadelphia, where he worked from 1979 to 1984. From 1984 onwards, he taught for a long time in the field of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, where he would last serve. Especially at his last university, he trained many students. Under Nasr's supervision, well-known names such as Zailan Moris from Malaysia, Walid al-Ansari from Egypt and İbrahim Kalin from Turkey received their PhDs. Nasr was the first Muslim scholar to receive the "Templeton Religion and Science Course" award in 1999.

The Main Philosophical Views of Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Tradition and Traditionalism

Traditionalism is a school that emerged in the West at the beginning of the twentieth century and whose founder is considered to be René Guénon. Although there is no unity in the definition of Tradition among the thinkers belonging to this school, there is a consensus that the Tradition in daily use and the Tradition in the use of the Traditionalist school are completely different from each other. In this sense, Tradition is not the transmission of customs, habits or thought motifs between generations; it is a set of principles that have descended from the sky and are identified with a manifestation of the divine (Nasr, 1984, p. 89). Tradition is essentially sacred and divine.³

Nasr explains this distinction as follows: A traditionalist and a Traditionalist are very different from each other. While a traditionalist is a person who adheres to his customs, traditions, customs and traditions, a Traditionalist is a person who adheres to the sacred, revelation and religion. Again, a traditionalist is a person who is not based on any accurate information and has a tendency to long for the past. A Traditionalist, on the other hand, is someone who defends Tradition, who does not rely on blind faith or simple slogans and rhetoric, who knows the West, and who is able to respond to the problems of the modern age from an Islamic perspective. Traditionalists put forward views in many fields from philosophy to art, from architecture to literature, and make a holistic defense of Tradition. Traditionalists are a class of scholars who know the West well without being slaves of the West (Nasr, 1989, p. 328). Within the Traditionalist school, Tradition is often used to mean eternal wisdom, metaphysics and *al-dīn* (Nasr, 1984, p. 165). The source of Tradition is the Truth, the sacred, *al-dīn*. According to Nasr, the sacred as an ontological reality is like blood circulating in a vein (Nasr, 2012, p. 89).

According to the Traditionalist school, everything that has its origin in the heavenly/revelation is Tradition. If Revelation is the root of a tree, its trunk and branches constitute Tradition. Tradition is the totality of revealed truth (Nasr, 1984, p. 25). Tradition is the manifestation of God, the source of eternal wisdom. Tradition is the application of the principles of revelation, both celestial and divine in source, in different times and places. Tradition, which has a transhuman character and is handed down from generation to generation, manifests itself mostly in the fields of art, literature, philosophy, architecture, mysticism, etc. It

³ According to the Greek-born Traditionalist thinker Marco Pallis (1895-1989), who traveled to the Himalayas to study Buddhist philosophy and wrote *Peaks and Lamas* (1942), wherever there is a complete Tradition, there is the presence of a revelation and the transmission of Tradition through generations (*initiatic*). See. (Pallis, 2007, p. 8).

manifests itself in worship, culture and symbols. In this sense, Tradition is the chain that connects civilisation to revelation (Northbourne, 2003, p. 35).

According to the Traditionalist school, there is actually only one Tradition. Nasr describes this Tradition with different names such as “Ancient Tradition” and “hanif religion”. Other traditions are worldly manifestations of this Ancient Tradition. In this context, Tradition and Truth are used interchangeably. He defines the transcendent, divine revelation in the vertical dimension as “Absolute Truth”, and its horizontal manifestation in the form of culture, civilisation, art, etc. as “Relative Truth”. In this sense, religions such as Christianity and Judaism are special manifestations of the Absolute Truth. The language in which God speaks is sacred. According to Guénon, human history has been illuminated by divine revelation and divine light throughout history. This light has manifested itself as Tradition and it has always existed and will always exist. Transcendent wisdom has always existed and will continue to exist in every authentic Tradition (Nasr, 1995c, p. 18).

Nasr takes an optimistic approach to this issue by stating that Tradition (religion) will always exist in the life of society until the end of history. Even if its influence in the social sphere diminishes, the Tradition will never disappear because it is based on a divine foundation. The revelation aspect of religion is the transcendental dimension; the interpreted, continuity aspect of Tradition is the horizontal dimension (Nasr, 1984, p. 15). The transcendent dimension is absolute; all religions that include orthodoxy, that is, a true belief, are relative absolutes. Unlike other religions, Islam, the last revelation, is a Tradition with a deep spiritual dimension and preservation (Nasr, 1996, p. 50).

According to Nasr, Islam is the greatest and last revelation in human history. It is the last of the traditions and is therefore a return to the religion of fitrat (*al-dîn al-hanif*) and a synthesis of the religions that came before it (Nasr, 1988b, p. 83). Islam is the heir, not the denier, of the truths of other traditions. In this sense, it is the summation of revelations. That is why most Western Traditionalists have embraced Islam. Titus Burckhardt (İbrahim İzzeddin), Michel Valsan (Mustafa Valsan), Frithjof Schuon (Sheikh İsa Nureddin), Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Siraceddin), Lord Northbourne (Sidi Noah) are examples of Traditionalists, most of whom converted to Islam through Sufism.

Basic Concepts Related to Tradition

The Traditionalist school frequently uses a number of terms and concepts that are unique to them. One of these concepts is *philosophia perennis*.⁴ *Philosophia perennis*, which translates as “eternal wisdom” in English, is expressed in other languages with different words such as *lex Aeterna*, *Hagia Sophia*, *al-Dînü'l-Haqq*, *Akaliko Dhammo*, *Sanātana Dharma*, *al-Hikmetü'l-hâlîde*, *al-Hikmetü'l-lâdüniyye*, and *câvidân-ı hired*. *Philosophia perennis* refers to the eternal and eternal Truth at the heart of all Traditions. *Philosophia perennis* is based on universal metaphysics with its application to fields such as metaphysics, cosmology, psychology, art, poetry and music. Due to the frequent use of this term by the Traditionalist school, this school is also called the “*Philosophia Perennis School*”. This school believes that

⁴ Although Aldox Huxley, in his *Perennial Philosophy* (1945), claims that the concept of *Philosophia Perennis* first appeared in a letter Leibniz wrote to Remond in 1714, Nasr disagrees with this view. According to him, this phrase was first used in the sense of eternal wisdom in the work *De prenni philosophia* by Agostino Steuco (1497-1548), a Renaissance thinker.

there is a Primordial Tradition, received through direct revelation at a time when heaven and earth were yet one, which constituted the first and original spiritual intellectual heritage of man. All religions and traditions have emerged from this Original Tradition on which they are based. Every Tradition is a reflection of the Original Tradition.

Another concept closely related to *Philosophia Perennis* is *Sophia Perennis*. In the understanding of *Sophia Perennis* as the Ancient Tradition, there is really only one *Sophia Perennis*; the others are worldly manifestations of the Ancient Tradition. *Philosophia Perennis* is the intellectual aspect of Truth; *Sophia Perennis* is the embodiment of Truth.

One of the basic concepts related to Tradition is *Religio Cordis*. This concept, which means going from the shell to the core, is frequently used in the circle-center symbolism of the Traditionalists. In this metaphor, the core represents the religion at the root, the religion of the heart. The closer we are to the center of the circle, the more we are surrounded by Tradition. Traditionalists describe this essence with the concept of *Scientia Sacra* (Sacred Knowledge). In fact, *Scientia Sacra* is nothing other than what is at the core of every revelation and the center of the circle that encompasses and defines Tradition. This knowledge is not attained through reasoning, but only through intellectual intuition (*ilm al-huzūrī*) (Nasr, 2012, p. 141).⁵

Scientia Sacra, properly understood as the ultimate knowledge of Truth, is nothing but metaphysics. Nasr especially emphasises that metaphysics has nothing to do with philosophy but is a discipline in its own right. He states that the prefix “meta” (transcendental) in the name of metaphysics causes misunderstandings and does not indicate immanent existence, whereas metaphysics encompasses the principles of all sciences, and that thinking of metaphysics as a branch of philosophy also limits it (Nasr, 2012, p. 143). According to him, metaphysics is “the knowledge of Truth, of the beginning and end of all things, of the Absolute and what is relative in its light.”⁶ Metaphysics is as clear and precise as mathematics. Metaphysics is a monotheistic (*tawhīd*) knowledge at the heart of all true religions (Nasr, 1995a, p. 8).

Within the Traditionalist school, the concept of *Homo Islamicus*, which Nasr in particular frequently uses in his works, defines the Traditionalist human being. The opposite of this concept is *Homo Promethean* (Promethean Man), which represents the Renaissance man who is in rebellion against Heaven, anthropomorphist, and kills the divinity. Promethean Man defines the unruly, modernist man who wants to change everything. The characteristic of this person is that he closes himself to the Truth, dulls his abilities to realise spiritual truths and interprets the Truth in the postmodern style as everyone’s own subjective truths.

Homo Islamicus is both Allah’s servant and His vicegerent on earth. He is the equal of creation. He is accountable to God for his actions and is the overseer and protector of the earth, provided that he sees himself as the central earthly being created in “divine form” (a being in the image of God who lives in this world but is created for eternity) (Nasr, 2012, p. 172; 1995d, p. 82; 1984, p. 113).

⁵ To indicate the difference between *ilm al-husūlī*, which characterises acquired knowledge, and *ilm al-huzūrī*, which characterises unmediated knowledge given to the ready, examples of the former being merely knowledgeable about love and the latter being in love are often given.

⁶ According to Nasr, Aristotle’s counting metaphysics as a branch of philosophy was an unfortunate experiment. By doing so, doubts arose in philosophy and metaphysics lost credibility. According to him, philosophy arises from reason (*raison*), which is a purely individual ability, whereas metaphysics arises from mere perception (intellect). Religion, on the other hand, expresses metaphysical and universal truths in a dogmatic language. See. (Schuon, 2010, p. 16; 1988, p. 103, 105).

A final concept often used by the Traditionalist school is orthodoxy, which refers to strict adherence to an authentic faith. In order for a Tradition (religion) to have orthodoxy, it must have an absolute teaching and a spirituality with theory and practice. This raises the issue of how to distinguish between what is authentic and authentic and what is superstition and *bid'ah*. To the question of whether there is superstition, etc. outside of religion (revelation) within the Eternal Wisdom (*Philosophia Perennis*), Guénon replied, "Truth does not change, non-religious things change. The transmission of evil in history is incidental. The non-religious view from the traditional essence undergoes change and becomes superstition." (Guénon, 2010, p. 96). According to him, the preservation of Tradition is only possible through the proper interpretation of the Bible and other things, in accordance with the principles of the Book. The frequent use of such terms and concepts by the Traditionalist school is actually to better characterise and explain the Absolute Truth and the Original Tradition (eternal religion).

Nasr's Criticisms of the Changes in Western Thought

Traditionalist thinkers severely criticised the Renaissance and the processes of change that followed, which they saw as a sharp departure and deviation from religion, metaphysics and human nature. Almost all of these thinkers see the Renaissance as a milestone as a deviation from Tradition. Nasr, like these thinkers, sees the Renaissance as the beginning of the deviation, while Guénon sees it as the end.

Traditionalist thinkers have interesting stories and analogies about the change between the pre-Renaissance period and the post-Renaissance period. Nasr's story on this subject is interesting: "In the past, people did not realise that they were living in Tradition. With Modernism, this difference became apparent. We can explain this with the following story: Baby fish ask their mother about the nature of water, which they have heard much about but have not seen and whose qualities have not been explained to them. The mother fish says that when she finds something that is not water, she will explain the nature of water to them." According to him, pre-modern man was like the baby fish in the Sufi parable. Pre-modern people lived in worlds that were saturated with what we now call Tradition. They did not have a separate concept called Tradition, which needs to be defined and explained in the modern world. They were familiar with revelation, wisdom and the sacred... In the pre-modern period when Tradition was dominant, nature was viewed as sacred and there was a harmony between man, things and nature (Nasr, 2012, p. 76).

Nasr sees the Renaissance (1500-1700) as the turning point of this change in Europe. However, there are a number of thinkers and events that prepared this process. Foremost among these is William of Occam, who he believes paved the way for the attack on reason and skepticism in the fourteenth century. Therefore, according to Nasr, there are four main stages of the break with Tradition in Western thought. These are: a. William of Occam, b. Descartes' philosophy, c. Kant's philosophy, d. Renaissance thought.

The Pioneer of the Break with Tradition: William of Occam. According to Nasr, the nominalist philosophy of William of Occam (1285-1347), which in a sense concluded the subject of universals, separated the paths of theology and reason and reduced human knowledge to empirical data. According to William of Occam's nominalist interpretation of universals, universal concepts do not have any reality. These concepts are just a naming and a sign. Although this understanding led to a development in the sciences and mathematical fields that emphasised symbolic description, it dealt a heavy blow to metaphysics. Because the reality of universal concepts was not accepted, all religious discussions became symbolic. After this, agnosticism emerged in the fields of theology and philosophy. Nominalism led to the secularisation (desacralisation) of knowledge by excluding metaphysics and faith (Nasr, 1995c, p. 132-134).⁷

William of Occam and the Occamites who followed him created an atmosphere of philosophical doubt, nominalist theology replaced philosophy, and interest in metaphysics began to fade (Nasr, 1988a, p. 77). The atmosphere of doubt created by nominalist philosophy led to the Renaissance in the fourteenth century and lasted until the Age of Scientific Revolution and Copernicus in the seventeenth century. Therefore, according to Nasr, nominalism marks the final stage of the intellect's departure from certain knowledge.

Descartes' Philosophy Based on the Subject. René Descartes (1596-1650), who is considered the founder of modern philosophy, established a philosophy based on the subject (cogito) instead of acting from the object, and adopted an approach that wanted to apply rational knowledge to every field. Descartes' cogito considered the consciousness of his own limited self as the measure of existence (Nasr, 1984, p. 110). According to Nasr, this Cartesian philosophy opened by Descartes is the root cause of the dilemmas in the Western understanding of science. Modern science after Descartes developed in a unidirectional and material dimension from the seventeenth century onwards. According to him, modern Western (secular) science caused an epistemic and ontological crisis in Western thought due to its single and pure content, its reliance on a single method, its claim to absolute objectivity, its rejection of reality beyond experiment and observation, its denial of different ways of knowing and spirituality.

Nasr makes an interesting distinction between reason and intellect here and emphasises that the power of the intellect is only to explain by stating that the intellect is the faculty that can penetrate the intelligible. In this context, he draws attention to the fact that the Cartesian intellect (reason), which was dominant in the West after Descartes, would have a limited knowledge, and that in this process, reason was reduced to reason (rationality/Cartesian intellect) (Nasr, 2012, p. 65-66).

⁷ Ernest Renan ironically states that "Eons, jinns, sefirot, demiurges, demiurges, metatrons, and the like have been extinct since the merciless Occam caused the gods to flee with his Scholastic axiom, 'Possibilities should not be multiplied without necessity. See. (Renan, 2021, p. 98).

Kant's Limitation of Knowledge to the Phenomenal Domain. Nasr continues his criticism of Western thought with Enlightenment philosophers and Kant. According to him, with the Enlightenment, human beings lost the sacred and were regarded as mere piles of flesh and bones. In the Age of Enlightenment, religion was corroded, the Divine Principle was distanced from the humanism, deism, agnosticism and atheism, and life became secularised.⁸ In this process, the people who wrote Encyclopedia articles for the dissemination of knowledge to the public were also among Nasr's targets. According to him, with the Encyclopedists, the idea of human beings without transcendental aspects spread to the public and reality was reduced to utility.

Nasr summarises these changes and transformations in Western thought in six points:

First, the secular understanding of the universe ignored the traces of the sacred in nature and opposed the idea of the 'purpose' of the universe.

Secondly, since modern philosophy and science claimed that they could explain everything rationally and scientifically, they tried to construct the universe as a machine. Therefore, they concluded that the methods of analysis and measurement of physics could explain the universe.

Third, empiricism and rationalism were the only ways to reach the Truth.

Fourth, as a result of Cartesian dualism, a clear distinction emerged between the known object and the knowing subject, and as a result of this understanding, man became epistemologically and spiritually alienated from his natural environment.

Fifth, man was conceived as a 'Promethean man' as the measure of all things.

Sixth and last, nature was conceived as an object to be exploited as a source of power. This new understanding has overthrown the classical understanding of the cosmos and has led to environmental crises and nuclear wars (Kalın, 2009, p. 138-139).

Nasr reminds us of God's name "al-Muhīt" (the All-encompassing) and states that the main cause of the environmental crisis and ecological problems is the rejection of God as the true All-encompassing God (Nasr, 1995a, p. 177). According to him, in order to solve environmental problems, it is necessary to completely change our way of life and stand against the negativities of modernism.

These criticisms of Western thought, shaped by Nasr's profound interpretations, are actually intended to reveal the footprints of the road to modernism. According to him, this whole process prepared the way for the arrival of modernism. Nasr and other Traditionalists target modernism and modernist thinkers. For this reason, the Traditionalist school is even seen as a kind of anti-modernist movement.

⁸ For this reason, Guénon preferred the term "Tradition" instead of "religion", which was vulgarized and reduced to a pejorative meaning with the Renaissance.

Rebellion against God: Renaissance Thought. In Nasr's criticism of Western thought, the Renaissance thought has the highest share. For this reason, we do not take the change in the West chronologically, and we consider the Renaissance, which is seen as the cause of all developments, last. According to Nasr, the Renaissance, which is seen as the beginning of material progress in the West, is actually a mental and spiritual regression. The Renaissance and the subsequent Reformation declared war on the sacred and rebelled against God. The Renaissance initiated a radical secularisation of man and knowledge, resulting in humanism. The Renaissance, which expressed the cultural resurgence of the Latins against the military power of the Teutons in the West, was not a rebirth, but in fact the intellectual death of many things (Nasr, 2012, p. 41).

Nasr criticises this movement, which is considered a milestone in Western thought because it symbolises the liberation of man and the birth of modern science and art. According to him, the "painter-engineer" class that emerged in Italy with the Renaissance was instrumental in the emergence of the idea of a mechanical universe by challenging religion. The Renaissance is nothing but a resurrection of the Promethean and Titanic spirit (Nasr, 2002b, p. 136).

Nasr's Criticisms of Modernism and Other Movements

Nasr sees modernism, which has been achieved as a result of the process of change in the Western world, as the biggest problem for both the West and the Islamic world, and even for the whole humanity. According to him, four currents stand out in today's Islamic world that are influenced by the intellectual development in the West: fundamentalism, secularism, Mahdist/messianic movements and modernism:

1. *Fundamentalism*: This movement, which is based on a literal and narrow interpretation of the Bible, first emerged in the early twentieth century in the United States by Protestant evangelicals as a reaction to the secular way of life with the idea that modern science and biblical interpretations could not be reconciled.⁹ Nasr finds it strange that this Christian movement has also affected the Islamic world and sees fundamentalism as a movement that interprets religion ideologically (Nasr, 1984, p. 94). According to him, such movements destroy the sacred and spirituality in religion and make it look like a man-made ideology. However, the rival of religions should be religions. Throughout history, Islam has demonstrated its superiority over religions such as Christianity and Judaism through theological methods.

However, those who interpret religion ideologically have turned it into an ideological movement, a product of the Age of Enlightenment. Despite these criticisms, Nasr finds the efforts for the revival of Islam in the Islamic world important but draws attention to the fact that this creates a Pan-Islamist, *Salafist*, ideological and artificial tradition. He also finds the fundamentalist Salafist movements' criticism and distancing of Sufism because they think that it leads Muslims to laziness, their criticism of philosophy, which they see as the product of Ancient Greece (the science of the ancients/*ulūm al-awāil*), and their retrospective approach aiming to return to *Asr al-Sahadat* unrealistic. He gives examples from the Islamic world such

⁹ The emergence of Fundamentalism as a movement in the West can be traced to the 12-volume *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, edited by evangelical fundamentalists Reuben Archer Torrey (1856-1928) and Amzi Dixon (1854-1925) and written by 64 authors between 1910 and 1915: edited by 64 authors between 1910 and 1915. The authors in the book mainly expressed their reactions to modernity, the secular way of life, modernist interpretations of religion, the theory of evolution, and the thesis that modern science and the Bible can be reconciled.

as Ikhwân-ı Müslimin, Mawdudî and Jamaat-i Islam and Said Nursi as examples of this trend (Nasr, 1984, p. 96-97).

2. *Secularism*: Nasr claims that movements in the history of Western thought such as progressivism, historicism, evolutionism, scientism, historicism, existentialism, psychologism and materialism are all the result of secularism. Islam does not give Caesar the right of Caesar in the motto “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto Jesus the things that are Jesus”. This is because religion integrates world affairs within the framework of the principle of tawhid. According to him, secularism has been in constant struggle with religion, challenging it since the Renaissance.

3. *Mahdist/messianic movements*: According to Nasr, Mahdist movements have always existed throughout history. These currents are revolutionary currents that are kept in the refrigerator in the Islamic world and put on display from time to time. Especially as the attacks on the Islamic world from the West increase, this trend is on the rise (Nasr, 1984, p. 94-95).

4. *Modernism*: The term modern refers to the new economic, social and political situation that began with the Renaissance in Europe. Although modernism defines itself in positive terms such as modernity and the rediscovery of nature, according to Nasr, the opposite is the case.

Nasr sees modernism as the opposite of Tradition, a deviation and break from it, reducing everything to the human level, severing ties with the divine and transcendent, and the source of the world’s problems. According to him, modernism, which began with the Renaissance, is the most fanatical, dogmatic and extreme ideology in the history of the world. Modernism is a secular movement that makes humanity unhappy, despairing, deceiving and creating false happiness and distancing humanity from the sacred. Modernism, a slippery and slippery concept, has replaced the Absolute Truth with relative truth.

Nasr finds the criticisms of modernism in the Islamic world weak and insufficient because they are made in a fideistic and voluntarist manner (Nasr, 1984, p. 322). However, he states that modernist currents, like fundamentalism, are also effective in the Islamic world and that these currents seek a synthesis with Western thought and criticises these currents severely. Especially within the Islamic modernism movement, he finds the apologetic writings and thoughts of Islamic modernists such as Afghani, Seyyed Ahmad Khan, Tahawi and Amir Ali unacceptable (Nasr, 1988b, p. 16).

In addition, the Traditionalist school is constantly criticised as a modern movement. Nasr responds to those who claim that Tradition is also in modernism by saying, “Tradition emanates from Heaven; modernism emanates from the individual. In fact, the Traditionalists are not against the new, they are against modern epistemology and modern science, and against the new destroying nature and corrupting human nature. Modernism creates false prophets with movements such as positivism (Comte), materialism (Marx), psychoanalysis (Freud), progressivism (Spencer) and these new discourses disconnect humanity from revelation.

In this context, Nasr emphasises anthropocentrism, unprincipledness, reductionism, progressivism and evolutionism of modernism:

1. *Anthropocentrism (Renaissance)*: The Renaissance did not liberate man; on the contrary, it enslaved him. The self-centered character of man destroyed nature and the universe. In this process, in which the charm of nature was disrupted, man, who had previously been in

harmony with nature and the Sky, was replaced by the Promethean man, who saw himself as the authority over everything and tried to subjugate nature.

2. *Unprincipledness (loss of center)*: Nasr sees the settlement of sophistic, septic, modernist and postmodern thought with the shift from the God-centered conception of the universe to the human-centered conception as unprincipled.

3. *Reductionism (Agnosticism)*: Again, according to Nasr, harmful movements for humanity such as naturalism, socialism, skepticism and agnosticism, especially evolutionism and humanism, are products of modernism. Contemporary Western thought is reductionist in almost every field. Freud and his psychoanalysis can be given as an example. Freud's assertion that the soul is not immortal, his reduction of the soul to the ego, and his claim that human actions are caused by subconscious forces are all aimed at eliminating human moral responsibility (Nasr, 1995b, p. 239).

4. Overconfidence in progress and the idea of evolution that this understanding brings forth: According to Nasr, the ultimate destination of *progressivism* is secularism. Again, a bad gift of progressivism is the idea of *evolution*. For him, evolution is to divinize the historical process, to transfer the power of creation from the transcendent divinity to the historical process. Therefore, the opium of the peoples is not divine religions, but the idea of evolution and progress, which promises us that we will become like the gods (Nasr, 1995c, p. 145). According to Nasr, the most harmful of modernist movements is Darwinism.¹⁰ Darwinism is the craziest example of modernism, a theory that still confuses and confuses people. Nasr gives the theory of evolution as an example of the presuppositional, fashionable and ideological aspect of science (Nasr, 1988a, p. 163). According to him, evolution is not a view with scientific objectivity, but a worldview and a conception of existence like metaphysical, physicalist and mythological theories that try to explain the universe.

Nasr's distinction between Tradition and Traditionalism and modernism can be summarised as follows:

- Tradition is a movement that is divine, that leads to the sacred, that elevates; modernism, on the other hand, is a movement that is humanistic, that takes away from sacred values, that degrades human beings.

- While tradition is reconciled with religion and religious life, modernism is disconnected from the sacred.

- While tradition is God-centered, modernism is human-centered.

- While tradition explains everything within the framework of the principle of tawhid, modernism is unprincipled.

- While tradition adopts a hierarchical view of existence, modernism is reductionist.

- While sacred knowledge is valuable and important in tradition, in modernism it is only secular knowledge that is valuable.

- While the question "why?" is more important in tradition, the question "how?" is important in modernism.

¹⁰ In this context, Nasr also criticises Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) for evolutionism.

- In tradition, the view of man, things, nature, science and technology is humble and respectful; in modernism it is arrogant

- Tradition is based on metaphysical principles; modernism has no such concerns.

- While traditionalism is not based on pure utility, modernism is based on pure utility.

- While traditionalism does not sanctify science by practicing scientism, modernism cannot refrain from practicing scientism.

- Tradition pursues the universal, the Truth; modernism pursues the particular, the real, the quantitative.

- While traditionalism is based on ancient eternal wisdom (*philosophia perennis*), modernism is based on the scientific revolutions of the seventeenth century.

As a result, modernism has led to secular life, moral degeneration, environmental crisis, deism, agnosticism, atheism, etc. Modernism is anti-traditional, Promethean philosophy and modern thinkers are sophists like Protagoras.

Another movement criticised along with modernism is the modernist movements influenced by the West and the so-called traditionalist movements in the West. While Nasr is moderate in this regard, Guénon, a true idol-breaker and uncompromising in his attitude of clearing the ground, is stricter.¹¹ For him, theosophy, especially in the sense of the Theosophical Society of Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891) and Annie Besant (1847-1933), various kinds of spiritualism, and Western-influenced movements such as the Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj in India have nothing to do with Traditionalism (Nasr, 2012, p. 114).

Conclusion

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the leading figure of the Traditionalist school, has influenced many people working on Islamic thought in the East and West with his knowledge of Eastern and Western thought, unifying, peaceful and dialogical characteristics. The fact that almost all of the Traditionalists, with the exception of Nasr, were Westerners, and that they wrote their works in Western languages, made it possible for the West to recognise Eastern religions, philosophies and metaphysics, especially Islam.

Throughout his life, Nasr tried to stay away from ideological, temporary and destructive ideas. Nasr, who was a very prolific writer, dealt with everything from art to architecture, science to philosophy, religion to literature from the perspective of Tradition. He argued that there is such a thing as Truth and that it can be obtained through the intellect enlightened by divine revelation and through knowledge.

Nasr states that Western people are looking for a way out of the crisis they are experiencing and that he has spent a lifetime in books, articles, conferences, trainings, etc. to show this path. In his book, *Religion of the Heart*, which he wrote after the September 11 attack,

¹¹ A. K. Coomaraswamy, Schuon, and especially Guénon have also criticised philosophy in order to clear the ground of metaphysics and prevent a corruption or deviation that could lead to a confusion between sacred knowledge and Tradition/Metaphysics through disrespectful philosophy. Nasr and other Traditionalists characterise modern Western philosophy as *misophia* (love of falsehood) or “anti-philosophy”. Nasr states that the German philosopher Hermann Türck (1856-1933) was the first to use the term “*misosophy*” in the sense of hating wisdom instead of loving it. See. (Nasr, 2012, p. 67, 97)

he characterises those who believe in one God as believers and those who do not as infidels, without making any distinction between religion, sect, etc. (Nasr, 2002a).

According to Nasr, the main problems facing Islam today are the invasion of secularist worldview and philosophy, the secular view of nature, science and technology, the increase in environmental problems in parallel with the prevalence of modern technology, the need for religious pluralism and a deep understanding of other religions, the defense of religion against exclusionary secular Christianity, discovering the authenticity of Islamic art and architecture and applying it to the present day, and establishing a correct relationship between religion and science. He attaches great importance to the Islamic Tradition in solving all these problems. In this context, Nasr summarises what needs to be done today to “rediscover the intellectual Tradition” as follows:

1. To emphasise the profound dimension of Islam: For this purpose, Islam should not be interpreted in an ideological way, as modernists do, but should be considered in parallel with other divine religions.

2. Explaining the traditional wisdom of Islam in contemporary language and reformulating this accumulation in a language understandable by contemporaries: The unearthing of this Islamic heritage, which has long been neglected and inaccessible due to the lack of qualified personnel, is crucial not only for Tradition but also for scientific developments.

3. Answering the problems caused by the works of the Orientalists: The problems are not only those posed by the Orientalists, but also those within the Islamic community, of various persuasions.

4. Standing up to the challenges of modernism.

5. Promote rapprochement between different Muslim groups.

6. Dialog between Islam and other religions (Nasr, 1988b, p. 56).

7. Developments in the natural sciences, scientific discoveries, inventions, theories, etc. are very important. These should be followed closely, but the results obtained should be interpreted from a metaphysical and traditional point of view. According to him, it is necessary to interpret scientific discoveries and discoveries on the axis of “Islamic science” different from the Cartesian dualist understanding of the West and to create a new metaphysics of nature.

Criticising the process of Western thought since the Renaissance and describing himself as a follower of eternal wisdom, Nasr argues that the task of the modern Western world is to re-evaluate its own intellectual and philosophical heritage in the light of Tradition.¹² According to him, the Tradition, which carries the eternal wisdom that has always existed throughout the ages, is lost to modern man. What needs to be done in this last hour of history is to rediscover the Tradition and reaffirm the sacred nature of knowledge. And the way to do this lies in acquiring pleasure wisdom (sapiential knowledge) and re-establishing the relationship between knowledge and the sacred.

¹² It is not only the Traditionalist school that criticises the West’s rationalism, scientism and modernism. Non-Traditionalists such as Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), Ivan Illich (1926-2002) and Theodore Roszak (1933-2011) have also criticised the West severely.

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