

Volume 15, No. 2  December 2018

JOURNAL OF

Islam in Asia

A Refereed International Biannual Arabic – English Journal

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

إِنَّمَا
يُنشأ
الله
من
عبادته
العلماء



JOURNAL OF *Islam in Asia*

Volume 15, No. 2, December 2018

ISSN: 1823-0970 E-ISSN: 2289-8077

Journal of Islam in Asia

EDITOR-in-CHIEF

Mohammed Farid Ali al-Fijawi

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Homam Altabaa

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Kamel Ouinez

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

LOCAL MEMBERS

Rahmah Bt. Ahmad H. Osman (IIUM)
Badri Najib bin Zubir (IIUM)
Abdel Aziz Berghout (IIUM)
Sayed Sikandar Shah (IIUM)
Thameem Ushama (IIUM)
Hassan Ibrahim Hendaoui (IIUM)
Muhammed Mumtaz Ali (IIUM)
Nadzrah Ahmad (IIUM)
Saidatolakma Mohd Yunus (IIUM)

INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS

Zafar Ishaque Ansari (Pakistan)
Abdullah Khalil Al-Juburi (UAE)
Abu Bakr Rafique (Bangladesh)
Fikret Karcic (Bosnia)
Muhammad Al-Zuhayli (UAE)
Anis Ahmad (Pakistan)

Articles submitted for publication in the *Journal of Islam in Asia* are subject to a process of peer review, in accordance with the normal academic practice.

This journal is indexed by ERA 2010 Journal Title List, Australian Research Council, Australian Government.

© 2018by

International Islamic University Malaysia

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

A Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problem with a Special Concentration on Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of Environmental Sustainability¹

Perspektif Sains terhadap Krisis Alam dan Persekitaran: Pemikiran Seyyed Hossein Nasr tentang Kelestarian Alam Sekitar

Md. Abu Sayem *

Abstract

The present paper attempts to expose how the scientific world-view of nature contributes to the present environmental crisis. Alongside this, it relates European Renaissance, humanism, secularism, the scientific and industrial revolutions, modern philosophy, scientism, technology-based modern life, consumerism-based modern society, etc. with current environmental problems. By focusing on Nasr's traditional understanding of nature, the paper explores how materialistic and mechanistic world-views are deeply connected with the present ecological crisis. It also offers a critical analysis of Nasr's spiritual and religious world-view of nature and examines its relevance. In doing so, it aims to highlight some demerits of the present world-view, and to call to reform current perceptions of nature by revitalizing traditional wisdom in order to protect the environment from further degradation. Thus, the paper is scholarly addition to the ongoing discourse on the issue of religions and the environment.

Keywords: Eco-theology, Environmental Degradation, Materialistic and Mechanistic Views of Nature, Scientism, Spiritual Crisis of Modern humans, Religious and Spiritual World-Views.

Abstrak

Kertas kajian ini menerangkan bagaimana pandangan saintifik telah menyumbang kepada krisis alam sekitar semasa. Disamping itu, kertas ini akan menhub-

¹ This work is based on a term paper titled "Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Thought on Environmental Ethics: A Traditional and Spiritual Approach with Bio-centric Understanding of the natural World" submitted to the Chinese University of Hong Kong on 2 May 2017 as a course requirement (RELS-6001 – Graduate Seminar 1).

* PhD Candidate in Religious Studies (with Hong Kong PhD Fellowship award 2016-2017), Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong; Faculty Member of World Religions and Culture Department (on study leave) in the University of Dhaka; and Ernst Mach Fellow (as a visiting PhD student) in Religious Studies at the University of Vienna (e-mail: sayemwrcdu@gmail.com).

**313 Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With
a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of
Environmental Sustainability**

ungkaiakan Gerakan Revolusi Humanisma di Eropah, sekularisme, revolusi sains dan perindustrian, falsafah moden, saintisme, kehidupan moden yang berasaskan teknologi, masyarakat moden yang berasaskan consumerisme, etc. dengan krisis alam sekitar yang berlaku dewasa ini. Dengan memahami pandangan Nasr terhadap alam sekitar, kertas ini akan merungkai bagaimana pandangan materialistik (kebendaan) dan mekanistik mempengaruhi krisis ekologi masa kini. Ia juga akan menganalisa pandangan spiritual dan agama Nasr terhadap alam sekitar secara kritikal dan akan menilai sejauh mana kesesuaiannya. Dengan sedemikian dapat menyedarkan manusia tentang kecacatan pandangan semasa, yang kemudiannya akan membawa kepada pembaharuan persepsi mereka terhadap alam sekitar dengan cara menghidupkan semula nilai-nilai tradisional demi mengelakkan kemerosotan alam sekitar. Kertas ini akan memuatkan idea-idea para cendekiawan dalam membincangkan isu berkaitan agama dan alam sekitar.

Kata Kunci: Eko-Teologi, Kemerosotan Alam Sekitar, Pandangan Materialistik dan Mekanistik terhadap Alam, Saintisme, Krisis Spiritual Manusia Moden, Perspektif Spiritual dan Agama.

Introduction

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-present)² is a famous Muslim philosopher and Islamic scholar. Some significant portions of his academic works³ deal with environmental issues, offering a spiritual, theological and philosophical understanding.⁴ There are some literary works⁵ done

² A short biography of Nasr is found in Enes Karic, "Nasr: Thinker of the Sacred" in Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Eds.) *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 782-783. For a detailed biography, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "An Intellectual Autobiography", in Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Eds.) *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 3-85.

³ For a detail account of his intellectual works, see M. Aminrazabi & Z. Moris (Eds.), *A Complete Bibliography of the Works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Malaysia: Islamic Academic of Science, 1994); and "Bibliography of Seyyed Hossein Nasr" in Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Eds.) *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 833-964.

⁴ See, for example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵ For instance, Almut Beringer, Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Perennial Philosophy, and Sustainability Education, *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 11(1), (2006): 26-42; 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*, (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), (School of Theology, Boston University, 2015); Tarik M Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Lanham, Maryland: University

on Nasr's view of nature and the environment. For Nasr, "environmental crisis has deep spiritual, philosophical and religious roots and causes."⁶ Therefore, he advocates for a paradigm shift from the modern scientific world-view of nature to the traditional (religious and spiritual) world-view of nature.⁷ Although he was educated and trained in modern science, philosophy, and history; he always prefers to discuss the issues from traditional ways. Instead of a scientific approach to nature, he emphasizes the traditional approach; even in this regard he claims himself as a traditionalist.⁸ He is very critical of secular humanism, mechanistic science and anthropocentric understanding of nature.

What Nasr tries to discover in regard to present ecological problems, perhaps, is the philosophical roots of the causes.⁹ If we compare

Press of America, 2013); A. Saniotis, Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics, *Contemporary Islam*, 6(2), (2012): 155-171; Lisa Wersal, Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges, *Zygon*, 30(3), (1995): 451-45.

⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Muzaffar Iqbal, The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis: Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Conversation with Muzaffar Iqbal, *Islam & Science*, 5(1), (Summer, 2007): 81.

⁷ In words of Nasr, this world-view is based on "truths or principles of a divine origin revealed or unrevealed to mankind and, in fact, a whole cosmic sector through various figures envisaged as messengers, prophets, avatāras, the Logos or other transmitting agencies in different reals including law and social structures, art, symbolism, the sciences, and embracing of course Supreme Knowledge along with the means of its attainment" (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, 67-68). Put differently, it is based on perennial philosophy or *al-ḥikmah al-khālidah* or eternal wisdom. See Asfa Widiyanto, Traditional science and *scientia sacra*: Origin and dimensions of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's concept of science, *Intellectual Discourse*, 25(1), (2017): 247-272; Munjed M. Murad, Inner and Outer: An Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis, *Islam & Science*, 10 (2), (Winter 2012): 117-137; Asfa Widiyanto, The Reception of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Ideas within the Indonesian Intellectual Landscape, *Studia Islamica: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, 23(2), (2016):193-236.

⁸ Enes Karic 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 Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Eds.) *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 783.

⁹ Tarik M Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013), 5.

**315 Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With
a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of
Environmental Sustainability**

Nasr's work *The Encounter of Man and Nature* with Lynn White's¹⁰ (1967) essay "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,"¹¹ we will recognize that Nasr tries to search the philosophical roots of ecological crisis while White searches for historical roots of the same crisis. Unfortunately, Nasr's work mostly goes unnoticed compared to White's thesis.¹² White states that Christianity is responsible for creating anthropocentric approach to environmental ethics but Nasr does not accept White's argument that Christianity is completely responsible.¹³ Rejecting White's argument, Nasr argues that it is not the biblical teaching or faith based knowledge but rather it is the glorification of humanism or reason-based knowledge from European renaissance (1000 CE – 1600CE) with the help of scientific revolution, secularism and industrialization that form the root cause of present ecological crisis. White overlooks the stewardship of the biblical injunction to the natural world; so, it is very unfair to judge the Bible as a document favoring of human centric approach to nature. On the other hand, White fails to strongly criticize the scientific world-views of nature which is the root cause of the present environmental degradation as Nasr argues.¹⁴ Nasr tries to show that prior to Industrial Revolution (1760CE- 1850CE) there was no rapid environmental degradation.¹⁵ Why is it from Industrial Revolution? This question has been answered by Nasr in a philosophical way which is, in short, changing world-views from spirituality to secularity; and from the re-

¹⁰ Lynn Townsend White, Jr. (1907-1987) was an American historian. He had an expertise on the European history of medieval technology. But White has become an iconic figure for his short speech on the topic titled "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis". On 26 December 1966, he delivered a lecture on it in Washington at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, that was published in the following year. This ground-breaking work presents a short account of ecological degradation by uncontrolled works of humans in the name of development, progress and construction of different kinds. White argues, due to such human actions in nature, ecological equilibrium is collapsing fatally.

¹¹ Lynn White, The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis, *Science*, 155 (3767), (1967): 1203-1207.

¹² Tarik M Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013, 14.

¹³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976), 55-67.

¹⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 71.

¹⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976), 51-54.

naissance the secular and scientific world-views of nature have been reducing the sacredness from the natural world and treating nature just like a machine to exploit it for the earthly benefit only.

Thus, the scientific world-view, alongside rapidly technological use, has created a new world which is alien to nature, and now nature starts to get feedback with some disasters. If humans want a sustainable environment, they will have to build an intimate relationship between nature and themselves which was seen before the renaissance and in all traditional religions. This intimacy is a matter of spiritual feeling which cannot be acquired by modern scientific view of nature. That is why, Nasr reiterates about spiritual reconnection and reattachment of humans with the natural world as a solution to present ecological crisis.

Modern scientific world-views of Nature and Its Relation to Environmental Degradation

Let's search for some answers of why Nasr vehemently criticizes present scientific world-views of nature.¹⁶ Nasr deeply sees present ecological crisis as a result of scientific world-view of nature. Nasr recognizes that ecological destruction also happened in past by human activities but that was within limitation and solvable because people had an intimacy with the natural world which was deeply rooted in their cultural attitudes, religious spirituality and metaphysical understanding of the cosmology. After the seventeenth century, this traditional approach to the natural world was replaced by modern scientific world-view of nature.¹⁷ Though this world-view originated from European renaissance, it is firmly accepted all over the world through modern education based on secular and scientific approaches. As it has been supported from the outset by secular scientists, secular philosophers, secular humanists, state powers, and industrial world; religious appeal and approaches to nature was no longer heard by humans. Thus, in the West religion lost its claim to cos-

¹⁶ The scientific world-view of nature is the view of natural world which is explained by modern scientists. It is completely materialistic view of the universe. According to this view, "the universe consists of ontologically unrelated material entities with no reference to any supra-natural source of their existence" (Tarik M Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013, 5).

¹⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976), 70.

**317 Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With
a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of
Environmental Sustainability**

mos within the same century.¹⁸ Even in the course of time some religious scholars and institutes, for instance Christian Church in the Western world tolerated this world-view first, and then supported it to some extent by arguing that human supremacy over the natural world is also endorsed by religious scriptures; thus, they were habituated with this scientific world-view of nature.¹⁹ In this way both groups, religious or secular in the West are destroying the natural world whereas Nasr states:

“(T)he world of nature is being desecrated and destroyed in an unprecedented manner globally by both who have secularized the world around them and developed a science and technology capable of destroying nature on an unimaginable scale and by those who still live within a religious universe, even if the mode of destruction of the order of nature by the groups is both quantitatively and qualitatively different”.²⁰

For Nasr, first attack on nature by modern humans was to desecrate it from its sacredness.²¹ When nature is no longer sacred thing it appears just like a machine to be utilized for unlimited human benefits. Nature is always being utilized by humans for the support of their existence and survival. It is permitted for human beings to meet their basic needs from the natural world; but the problem of modern humans in relation to environmental degradation lies in their uncontrolled greed and lust for earthly benefits, as Nasr asserts: “(T)he sense of domination over nature and a materialistic conception of nature on the part of modern humans are combined, moreover, with a lust and sense of greed which makes an even greater demand upon the environment.”²² Human is greedy, his greediness was controlled by a sense of attachment with belief with the hereafter; but modern human, who is far from religion and to whom science is the only criteria for judging all things is greedier than a

¹⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ For Saniotis, during the European Renaissance “nature is increasingly desacralized and de-mystified”, and this process continues up to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (A. Saniotis, *Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics*, *Contemporary Islam*, 6(2), (2012): 165). He echoes with Nasr that desacralization of nature is a result of humanism which supports domination of nature for economic benefits (ibd.).

²² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976), 18-19; A. Saniotis, *Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics*, *Contemporary Islam*, 6(2), (2012): 165.

human who follows a faith. Modern human only thinks of the benefits of this worldly life; so, for such earthy convenient he exploits nature which he treats like a machine.

There are basic differences between traditional views and modern scientific views. Nasr compares these differences with an analogy of married woman and prostitute; in traditional ways of understanding nature can be compared with “a married woman from whom a man benefits but also towards whom he is responsible” while “for modern man nature has become like a prostitute – to be benefitted from without any sense of obligation and responsibility toward her.”²³ So, it is explicit that in traditional ways of perception nature was used with responsibility but in modern ways of understanding nature is being used without showing any sense of responsibility. Now, in the view of modern human, nature is lifeless mass, and like a machine.²⁴ Thus, nature is being dominated and manipulated by a purely earthy human²⁵ who is completely free from spiritual feeling or thought rather than being obsessed with earthly welfare. This earthly human is product of renaissance by the idea of absolutizing humans and secular humanistic approach.²⁶ Thus, because of such irresponsible human activities with the natural environment for four centuries now nature gives us its bad feedback in the form of ecological crisis, natural calamities, environmental destruction and catastrophe. For Nasr, behind all these causes and their consecutive results in terms of environmental degradation, the present scientific world-view of nature works as the main source;²⁷ that is why he vehemently criticizes this world-view.

Modern Science and Technology as a massive Cause for Environmental Destruction

For environmental degradation, Nasr holds the Western modern science responsible. He argues that this science, along with its technolog-

²³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976), 18.

²⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Eds.) *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 288.

**319 Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With
a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of
Environmental Sustainability**

ical application,²⁸ is so powerful that everywhere it is being rapidly used by modern humans to make human life comfortable, though it has already caused “unprecedented environmental disasters.”²⁹ Nasr tries to alert us that if this trend continues it will bring us to “the total collapse” of our beautiful planetary environment.³⁰

In search of deeply rooted causes of the problems, Nasr sees that from the seventeenth century, especially from the Renaissance period, modern science goes to the rationalistic approach of thought in every issue. For Nasr, the problem in modern science is that it limits itself within materialistic view of nature and never talks about any reality beyond materialistic components of the natural world.³¹ It has removed sacredness from nature through secularization process. After desacralizing the natural world, humans started to treat nature as machine through the philosophical understanding of the time. Even religious people overlooked the sense of spiritual significance of nature.³² Thus, in the seventeenth century due to scientific revolution, cosmos was secularized; religion was weakened through internal and external conflicts; and metaphysical thoughts were nearly forgotten.³³ Then, after seventeenth century, religion and science became totally divorced from each other; and at the same way, spirit and matter were separated by the scientists and philosophers alike in their discourses.³⁴ Because of such secular and scientific thought human beings lost something very important in their life, i.e., intimacy with nature. Now nature is alien to them. In the modern scien-

²⁸ Nasr states the environmental crisis “as a result of modern technology” (Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Muzaffar Iqbal, *The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis, Islam & Science*, 5(1), Summer 2007: 76). Furthermore, he clarifies that the way modern technology is being used is not driven only by need but also human greed for more economic benefits (Ibid.). It is true that the present marketing system is creating artificial needs for modern technologies (Ibid.); now people of remote villages are also habituated with these technologies. Thus, rapid and unjust use of modern technology has created extra pressure on nature and contributed to destroy the ecological balance.

²⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 71, 83.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Tarik M Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013, 5.

³² Elide 1959:179 cited Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976), 17.

³³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976), 68.

³⁴ Ibid., 70.

tific view, nature is considered inanimate, lifeless and spiritless. For modern humans, nature serves just like a machine. There is no concept of sacred and spirituality with the natural world which have already been removed from nature. These thoughts and attitudes of modern humans towards the natural world have given them an open license to brutally exploit the natural environment, as Nasr categorically states:

“The environmental crisis has come upon the scene to remind (hu)man that there is something profoundly wrong with the concept of (hu)man and his relationship with nature cultivated since the seventeenth century in the west and based on the forgetfulness of the sacred sciences which view (hu)man and the cosmos in one grand harmony.”³⁵

Because of secular or profane science, the spiritual feeling of humans for nature was cut off, in one hand; and on the other hand, secular science, alongside its technology, allows humans to ruthlessly utilize the natural resources without showing any compassion to it, whereas Nasr rightly mentions: “It is nearly completely the outcome of the indiscriminate use of technology tied to lust and passion by a civilization which has given (hu)man absolute rights over nature and over himself without making him aware of the responsibility.”³⁶ This irresponsible treatment happens with the natural world when nature is secularized. In Nasr’s views, secularization of nature means that the Hands of God are cut off from nature;³⁷ it indicates that God has no business with nature. After this change, from sacralization to secularization, human does not feel any responsibility to the natural world; nature is considered as a source of materials.³⁸ Nasr notes that industrial revolution³⁹ triggered environmental crisis in unprecedented ways.⁴⁰ At the outset of this revolution, the crisis

³⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 79.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Muzaffar Iqbal, The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis, *Islam & Science*, 5(1), Summer 2007: 80.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Industrial revolution is considered turning point for environmental degradation. It brought a rapid change for human comfort at the price of nature and the beautiful natural world.

⁴⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Muzaffar Iqbal, The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis, *Islam & Science*, 5(1), Summer 2007: 78.

**321 Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With
a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of
Environmental Sustainability**

was local, especially in western Europe, due to the location of the factories and scientific experimentation; then it spread to other places of the globe, from the west to the east and from the north to the south. The use of new technology especially from the nineteenth century has totally changed traditional cultivation of foods and contributed rapidly to destroy forests in every part of the world. Bio-engineering food system and uncontrolled agro-economics policies are now a great challenge to human life. That is why, he sharply criticizes irresponsible use of technology, as he states: "Although science is legitimate in itself, the role and function of science and its application have become illegitimate and even dangerous..."⁴¹ Thus, it has become clear that the main cause of ecological crisis, as Nasr discovers, is desacralization of nature through philosophical and scientific rationalization, because it disconnects nature from God and humans removing spiritual and religious values of the natural world from human mind. Then, materialistic philosophy and mechanistic science are applied through technology and this technology has directly brought the present crisis in the environment.

**Urgency for Paradigm Shift from Scientific World-Views to
Traditional/Spiritual World-Views**

After identifying the root cause of present ecological crisis Nasr presents some suggestions to be followed for halting environmental problems. His suggestions are deeply rooted in spiritual and philosophical understanding of human-nature relationship. He suggests humans to have deep feeling and spiritual attachment with the natural environment which are commonly found in all traditional sciences⁴² and religions; that is why, he chooses a traditional way of understanding for ecological crisis and promotes us to rediscover the traditional cosmological understanding

⁴¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976), 14.

⁴² Traditional sciences should not be understood as occult sciences. Like modern science, traditional sciences also deal with scientific understanding of the world, but not deny metaphysics. So, basic difference between modern science and traditional sciences is that modern science denies metaphysical significance in scientific understanding of nature while traditional sciences accept metaphysics as the basis of scientific understandings of the universe. In contrast to modern science, traditional sciences see the spiritual world as the highest domain of reality while physical world as the lowest domain of reality. So, traditional sciences always give preference of the spiritual world over physical world. For details, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 95-99.

of nature which is almost lost and replaced by modern scientific world-views of nature, and then to reconnect this human heritage with the natural environment.

However, some of his basic suggestions are discussed below.

Nasr does not believe in any cosmetic change for curing the crisis. For more clarification of the deeply rooted cause he compares the crisis with a cancer patient who is about to die, and compares cosmetic step taken for stopping ecological crisis with pouring powder on face of the patient who is dying of cancer.⁴³ With this analogy, Nasr makes clear that as pouring powder cannot save the patient; so, similarly any cosmetic step cannot protect the environment, as Nasr states: “(T)hat is why simple cosmetics and good engineering will not in themselves solve the environmental crisis.”⁴⁴ So, he repeatedly advocates for a deep transformation of understanding of nature and human, and their deeply rooted mutual relationship to each other as God’s wonderful creation. Nasr believes that this deep transformation of understanding can pose a challenge to the present scientific world-views, and then it can work for a radical change in the present scientific world-view.

Nasr mentions another analogy of a ship from the Quran.⁴⁵ A wise man comes inside the ship and plugs a hole at the bottom so that it can be saved from stealing or snatching by a mighty man. Though externally it seems ugly and a defect in the ship because of which it goes under water for a temporary time, but by this process it is saved from stealing and remains under the ownership of the owner. By mentioning this analogy Nasr tries to clarify that the way the wise man changes the direction of the ship for saving it from being robbed; similarly, there is an urgent need to change the direction of modern scientific world-view of nature. Immediate practical measurements steps are fine and appreciable. Nasr mentions the example of Istanbul and appreciates the action of government for energy conversion used by cars driving in the city. Because of such changes in energy system the quality of air has improved. Though such immediate steps based on technological or economic policies can bring temporary solution, these cannot work for long-term solution until changing the present scientific world-view of nature, as Nasr states: “So I am in favor of all immediate solutions on a technological or

⁴³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Muzaffar Iqbal, The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis, *Islam & Science*, 5(1), Summer 2007: 81.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁵ Nasr has taken this analogy from the Quranic description of Moses and Khidr. See the Quran, 18: 71-75.

**323 Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With
a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of
Environmental Sustainability**

economic level, but I do not believe that is going to solve the crisis if we insist on pursuing our present courses."⁴⁶ In another place, Nasr reverberates:

“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.”⁴⁷

So, for Nasr, permanent solution for ecological crisis lies in changing the present scientific world-view of nature. This change, as Nasr repeatedly mentions, toward the spiritual world-view of nature.⁴⁸ More specifically, in Nasr's view, “the religious-spiritual knowledge of nature”⁴⁹ is essential for diverting the present world-view of nature to the spiritual world-view of nature.

Nasr states modern scientific world-view of nature as a tragedy because this world-view makes human “the measure of all things.”⁵⁰ This view hails from secular humanism of renaissance era. It is completely anthropocentric approach being deadly against theocentric, bio-centric or eco-centric approaches. This view places human in a place of God; because human, not God, is the center of all things. Thus, God is replaced

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁸ Lisa Wersal, Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges, *Zygon*, 30(3), (1995): 458; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islam and Environmental Crisis in Stephen C. Rockefeller, and John C. Elder (Eds.) *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue—An Interfaith Dialogue*, 83-108, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

⁴⁹ Almut Beringer, Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Perennial Philosophy, and Sustainability Education, *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 11(1), (2006): 40.

⁵⁰ This kind of approach is, as Nasr calls, scientism. It is a kind of ideology of modern human to consider science only acceptable criteria to measure all things. So, for modern human it is “the most reliable means to true knowledge” (Tarik M Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013, 5).

by human, and nature is considered as servant to human. The example of such attitude is clearly found in the utilization of technology and scientific experimentation during which there is no minimum consideration paid to interest of the natural world. Nasr sates technology as a murderer of nature when it is used without thinking of its bad impact on nature. As a consequence of irresponsible use of technology, plants and animals are dying; water, air, and soil are being polluting; global warming is increasing; and the ozone layer is deploying; which eventually present us climate change and ecological crisis. These are happening because of modern scientific world-view which only considers the earthy welfare of human and ignores welfare of the rest of nature. Modern life-style that is based on the modern scientific world-view is very much consumerism where nothing is sacrificial for the natural world. Therefore, Nasr coins this approach of scientific world-view as selfishness which is enough to destroy the entire world. There is no alternative way, as Nasr sees, without changing the self-destructive modern scientific world-view of nature, if humans really want to save the planetary environment.

A Critical Analysis on Nasr's Approach to Environmental Sustainability

Nasr tries to divert our attention from the present scientific world-view of nature to traditional religious world-view of nature. His main thesis is to rediscover the sacredness in nature which is forgotten by modern science, and this sacredness is not possible to be reconnected in human attitudes until they are in the modern scientific world-view. That is why, he advocates for going back to traditional view of nature which is endorsed by traditional sciences. His suggestions remain ideal type narratives because he could not present any concrete programs in practice. He always emphasizes on theoretical understanding of the causes from deeply philosophical insights which seem difficult to understand for common people who are already habituated with modern life-style. He suggests changing in modern life-style completely, but we do not know how to make it possible. He does not support to compromise between traditional view and scientific view of nature; so, his approach seemingly cannot articulate a moderate approach between two mutually opposite views – traditional and modern; but rather he advocates for a total change of the world-view that has been practicing by modern humans for four centuries.

If Nasr's proposal is considered for implementation, it will require a long process because he suggests changing consumerism-based

**325 Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With
a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of
Environmental Sustainability**

life-style and reforming the present world-view, which are not an easy task. The question remains vital: What should be done in the mean time? Besides, it will be difficult to deal with people who do not believe in God or any religion. How can we request those who are atheists or anti-religious people to change their world-view in favor of a religious or spiritual world-view of nature? It is difficult to handle them with Nasr's suggestion. Nasr is a very liberal scholar but his approach to environmental issue talks about radical change in human activities which shows a potential conflict with the current scientific world-view of nature. Nasr's approach indicates another clash with present economic interest and marketing system; but Nasr cannot give any practical suggestions for alternative activities to the current financial and marketing activities.

However, despite such limitations and short-comings Nasr's views still carry many merits. He has searched philosophical roots of ecological crisis and has caught some fundamental reasons for current environmental problems; and so, he has suggested accordingly. Someone can argue that Nasr's proposals are ideal type narrative with deep philosophical thoughts; but in consideration of changing the world-view, Nasr has connected successfully the timely needed thematic issue like ecological crisis with faith and spiritual traditions of the world.

Conclusion

In summary, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thought has touched the fundamental causes of present environmental problems. He has searched the philosophical roots of the causes behind the problems. His focusing point is why a modern human treats the environment like a machine and how this kind of mentality works in today's world. He has truly mentioned that there was a paradigm shift from the age of the European renaissance in the name of humanism which replaced the previous world-view of nature. According to Nasr, the earlier world-view of nature was environment friendly because it did not separate the sacred character from the natural world, but the modern scientific world-view of nature is very much hostile to nature because it ignores the sacred character of nature and treats the natural environment like a machine. That is why, Nasr has given his full attention on how to rediscover the sacred quality of nature. For him, it is not possible by science and technology, upon which the modern civilization is completely dependent, to regain this sacredness in nature because modern science and technology are based on materialistic ideology, which is a dominating cause of present environmental degrada-

tion. In Nasr's view, only spiritual feeling for nature can recover the situation but it is not an easy task which requires traditional religious approach. Nasr talks about sacred science and traditional science instead of modern science and technology, and then, he suggests diverting the present scientific world-view to the spiritual world-view of nature for the sake of environmental sustainability. Nasr reiterates that without radical change in human thought and actions, there is no possibility to save the planetary environment. He appreciates the cosmetic or immediate steps to stop environmental degradation, but he does not see these as long-term solutions. Though Nasr's proposal has some limitations, his suggestions have paved the way that the traditional way of understanding has a value for environmental sustainability. His arguments try to show how the traditional science and religious spirituality, being accompanied with the sacred science, worked in past for the sustainability of the environment; and by using these examples Nasr attempts to work for another paradigm shift from modern scientific world-view to the spirituality-based world-view of nature. In this Nasr sees a long-term solution for the ecological problems.

Acknowledgements

Author wishes to thank his Ph.D. supervisors, Professor Lai Pan-Chiu and Professor James D. Frankel of Religious Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, for their valued inputs to improve the paper. Author is grateful to two anonymous readers of an earlier version of the paper for their worthy comments and suggestions. Author also expresses his gratitude to the chief editor of the *Journal of Islam in Asia*, Dr. Mohammed Farid Ali Al-Fijawi, for his nice cooperation in regard to the publication.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aminrazabi, M. and Moris, Z. (Eds.). *A Complete Bibliography of the Works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*. Malaysia: Islamic Academic of Science, 1994.

Beringer, Almut. Reclaiming a Sacred Cosmology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Perennial Philosophy, and Sustainability Education, *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 11(1), (2006): 26-42.

**327 Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problems: With
a special Concentration to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of
Environmental Sustainability**

Hahn, Lewis Edwin; Auxier, Randall E.; Stone, Lucian W. Jr. (Eds.). *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001.

Karic, Enes. Nasr: Tinker of the Sacred in Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Eds.) *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001: 782-783.

Mevorach, Ian. *In Search of a Christian Muslim Common Path from Desacralization to Resacralization of Nature: Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Ecological Crisis*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). School of Theology, Boston University, 2015.

Murad, Munjed M. "Inner and Outer: An Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis." *Islam & Science*, 10 (2), (Winter 2012):117-137.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein and Muzaffar Iqbal. "The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis." *Islam & Science*, 5(1), (Summer, 2007): 75-96.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Man, and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968/1976.

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

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

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "Islam and Environmental Crisis." In Stephen C. Rockefeller, and John C. Elder (Eds.). *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue—An Interfaith Dialogue*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Knowledge and the Sacred*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. An Intellectual Autobiography in Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Eds.) *The Philosophy*

of Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001.

Quadir, Tarik M. *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2013.

Saniotis, A. "Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics." *Contemporary Islam*, 6(2), (2012): 155-171.

Wersal, Lisa. Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges, *Zygon*, 30(3), (1995): 451-45.

White, Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science*, 155 (3767), (1967):1203-1207.

Widiyanto, Asfa. "Traditional science and *Scientia Sacra*: Origin and dimensions of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's concept of science." *Intellectual Discourse*, 25 (1), (2017): 247-272.

Widiyanto, Asfa. "The Reception of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Ideas within the Indonesian Intellectual Landscape." *Studia Islamica: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, 23(2), (2016):193-236.