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ISLAM AND ECOLOGY by Marjorie Hope and James Young

Seyyed Hossein Nasr sees at the center of Islam a charge to protect the natural world -- a world that reflects the higher reality of the transcendent God.

MARJORIE HOPE and JAMES YOUNG are a husband-and-wife writing team who have traveled in more than eighty countries. This article forms part of a book-in-progress on the potential for an effective ecological ethic in several major religions, tentatively entitled *The New Alliance: Faith and Ecology*.

The Qur'an and the *Hadith* are rich in proverbs and precepts that speak of the Almighty's design for creation and humanity's responsibility for preserving it. For many Muslims, citing these is enough to prove that Islam has always embraced a complete environmental ethic. Others are more critical. They readily acknowledge that the guidelines are all there in Islamic doctrine. *Tawhid* (unity), *khilafa* (trusteeship), and *akhirah* (accountability, or literally, the hereafter), three central concepts of Islam, are also the pillars of Islam's environmental ethic. But they add that Muslims have strayed from this nexus of values and need to return to it.

Many of the Qur'anic verses cited by Muslims bear a striking resemblance to passages in the Bible, and portray a similar view of creation. "Praise be to Allah who created the heavens and the earth and made light and darkness" (Q.6:1). Later, in Q.6:102, we glimpse the principle of unity: ". . . There is no God but He, the Creator of all things." The dignity of all creation is proclaimed: "The seven heavens and the earth and all therein declare His glory: there is not a thing but celebrates His praise. . ." (Q. 17:44).

To humankind is given the role of *khalifa* (trustee): "Behold, the Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent on earth. . .'" (Q.2:30). But it is a role that each person must perform wisely and responsibly, fully aware of human accountability to the Almighty. "Do no mischief on the earth after it hath been set in order, but call on him with fear and longing in your hearts: for the Mercy of God is always near to those who do good" (Q.7:56). In other parts of the Qur'an we read that God rejoices in creation; all nature declares God's bounteousness; the variety in creation points to the unity in the divine plan; and God gave humankind spiritual insight so that it should understand nature. Moreover, the principle of balance is fundamental to that plan: "And the earth We have

spread out like a carpet; set thereon mountains firm and immobile; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance" (Q.15:19).

Although many Muslims with whom we have talked are familiar with these broad Qur'anic principles, few see any need to move an ecological ethic to the center of their awareness. True, some Muslims have become heads of national and international environmental organizations, but the average citizen is only vaguely aware of the extent of the crisis; most political and educational leaders perceive only a few of the problems, and those in isolation. Moreover, many advance the common argument that "when we catch up with the technological superiority of the West, *then* we can begin to focus on this issue." Not a few Muslims see environmentalism as still another form of Western control, intended to keep Islam from developing and Muslims from realizing their economic potential. Hence it is hardly surprising that, generally speaking, there is little discussion about actually applying Islamic principles to environmental practice. A few scholars and grassroots leaders, however, have begun to grapple with the question.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

While Islamic writing in general lacks the self-criticism that Westerners value, and the study of comparative religion is seldom considered important, the view of the distinguished philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr is wider in scope. Born in Iran, he studied physics and math at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, obtained a doctorate in science and philosophy at Harvard, and then returned to Iran, where he eventually became chancellor of Aryamehr University. After the Khomeini revolution in 1979, he began teaching Islamic studies in the United States. Although most of his twenty-odd books focus on Islamic civilization, some deal with the spiritual crisis facing humanity today, and all evidence his knowledge of Western and Eastern scientific and religious traditions. We met him at George Washington University in his well-ordered office, lined with books in many languages.

Dark and slender, with a neat, graying beard, Nasr spoke gravely, in impeccable English. He greeted us cordially, but seemed eager to move to the business at hand. We asked him to comment on the impact of the movement to join the forces of religion and ecology.

"Well, in the West, it has certainly made some compelling statements. But one has to ask, 'What power does it have over the political domain?' The politicians may nod and even agree -- but the developers go right ahead, cutting down woods, uprooting endangered species. That's a result of the Western dogma of separating science from the sacred and religion from the secular. In Islamic countries religion is a stronger force. In a *true* Islamic society, political leadership could act in accordance with the *shari'ah* as set out by doctors of the law. If they pronounced polluting industries and certain kinds of development in violation of Islamic principles, political leaders would have to take strong measures against transgressors. Remember, I am talking about what would happen in a *true* Islamic society. Unfortunately, today the West dominates the world economy, so Islam reacts to the West both economically and politically. The West sets the agenda."

"From reading your work, we've seen how destructive you feel the separation between religion and the secular domain to be."

He nodded. "That is rooted in Western modern science and its domination of our view of nature, a view that separates nature from the sacred. Renaissance humanism gave rise to a world centered on man instead of God. Human reason was no longer bounded by allegiance to anything beyond itself. Before, all civilizations looked beyond themselves to God -- to revelation. I'm not hostile to Western science but to its claim to be the only valid

science of the natural world. There are other ways of 'knowing.' Western science *has* become illegitimate because scientists and the rest of society fail to see the need for a higher knowledge into which it could be integrated. The spiritual value of nature is destroyed. We can't save the natural world except by rediscovering the sacred in nature."

"That is what Thomas Berry is talking about," we observed.

"Yes. Yes, Berry speaks to the heart of the matter. He brings the urgency of the crisis to the fore. But his 'geologian' concept of religion is limited to the earth, without remembrance of transcendence. The traditional perspective of the Muslim -- and Christian -- is that man comes from a sacred heaven to an earth which is also divine creation. Even the American Indians have a sky father. What I am saying is that the whole of nature is descended from higher spiritual realms. There can be no sacredness of the earth without the sacredness of Heaven. Man is that special creature who transcends the earth. A theology is not valid unless we remember where the sacred comes from."

"What are some other ways your thought differs from Berry's?"

"His view also has roots in evolutionism," Nasr said. "But I would say you cannot hold a true ecological philosophy and a belief in Darwinism at the same time. Darwinism has eradicated the sense of the sacred. 'Survival of the fittest' runs counter to the harmony in nature. True, on television we can actually *see* violence -- like lions eating other animals. But that's what television chooses to focus on -- violence, competition -- rather than the cooperation that is so basic in nature."

"Cooperation. Isn't that the emphasis of the Russian scientist Kropotkin, who observed mutual aid among animals in Siberia, then criticized Darwin for stressing competition?"

"That's right." He nodded briefly. "The idea that man comes out of the mud, so to speak, is false. It simply provides a way of reducing the higher to the lower."

"Your writings suggest that we need to reestablish a metaphysical tradition in the West within the framework of Christianity. This would provide a criterion for judging and regulating the sciences. And for evaluating evolutionary theory, too?"

"Yes, we would no longer rely on evolution as dogma. Evolutionary theory gives rise to pseudo-philosophies like the survival of the fittest, picturing man as the inevitable winner of the long struggle, with the right to dominate all things. This destroys the spiritual significance of nature -- which depends on the fact that it reflects a permanent reality beyond itself."

"And this sense of the sacred pervaded the world of Islam and the rest of the East until the onslaught of Western science and technology?"

"Yes, and eventually the onslaught of Western religion, too." Nasr's smile was ironic. "Western Christianity wed itself to the Western sciences. Missionaries brought modern medicine and technology, and worked hand-in-glove with Western governments for what they called 'progress.' The very idea of unilateral progress disoriented the East. At first it had little meaning for the people. They had always lived close to the cyclical rhythms of nature. In fact, previously nineteenth-century Westerners called Arabs 'naturalists' in a disparaging way. Islam did resist the West until pressure became too great. So even the Arabs and Persians who had once created the glories of Islamic science -- the very foundations of European mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, physics -- proceeded to learn Western science. And to be corrupted by its mechanistic and materialistic worldview."

"In the 1960s, Iran was the most advanced Muslim country in the Middle East. While industrializing rapidly, we created nature parks, and in the 1970s we held environmental conferences attended by Ivan Illich and other notables. Yet when the Shah asked for advice about shifting to nuclear power, and I suggested he should rely instead on resources like wind and solar energy, my advice was not followed by the government."

He sighed heavily. "It is much more dangerous in the West today. They want to remove problems brought on by destroying the balance between man and nature through further domination of nature. The problem is not really underdevelopment in the Third World, but *overdevelopment* brought by the West."

"Yet you seem to believe that to some degree Islamic societies have resisted Western modes of thought."

"Yes, they are the only ones where significant segments of the population, from jurists to villagers, refuse to consider any form of knowledge as secular -- where religion can still function as the foundation of a wholistic approach. Of course, it can be distorted into a parody of itself. Certain countries try to copy the West, mostly because they have to recycle petrodollars and so are forced into this game. Their pretense of being completely Islamic societies is in fact not completely true, especially as far as the environment is concerned. Still, as I say, throughout the world there are many Muslims who are trying to rediscover traditional Islam. Traditional as distinguished from neo-fundamentalist Islam."

"Could you tell us a little more about how you see that distinction?"

"Certainly. Today there are basically three types of Islam: traditionalism, modernism, and a variety of forms of revivalism usually brought together as fundamentalism. Until two hundred years ago, in spite of the many schools and interpretations, all Muslims lived within the tradition, with its roots in the Qur'an, *Hadith*, and the *shari'ah*. It was a living tradition, emphasizing the harmony of law, art, and all forms of knowledge. In the eighteenth century modernism, with its roots in secular humanism, entered this world, in all fields from science and philosophy to art, and traditional Islam began to weaken. Today we also see it struggling against many of the forms of violent revivalism usually called Islamic fundamentalism, which speaks of reviving Islam in opposition to modernism. But most so-called fundamentalists are pseudo-traditional, as can be seen in their attitude toward modern technologies and the destruction of the environment. Many of the so-called fundamentalists, like Christian fundamentalists, pull out a verse from the scriptures and give it a meaning quite contrary to its traditional commentary. Also, even while denouncing modernism as the 'Great Satan,' many fundamentalists accept its foundations, especially science and technology. For traditionalists, there is beauty in nature which must be preserved and beauty in every aspect of traditional life, from chanting the Qur'an to the artisan's fashioning a bowl or everyday pot. Both fundamentalists and modernists, however, could just as easily produce mosques that look like factories. Many fundamentalists even seek a Qur'anic basis for modern man's domination and destruction of nature by referring to the injunction to 'dominate the earth' -- misconstruing entirely the basic idea of vicegerency: that man is expected to be the perfect *servant* of God."

"To turn to a very tangible environmental problem like overpopulation -- what would traditionalists say about that?"

"It is a problem, a major one. But it is not soluble as an entity unto itself; it is connected with other issues. Because of the imbalances in the political situation, many in Muslim countries have felt that power lies in numbers. But in the end, overpopulation is simply too great a burden, and there are now new interpretations among religious scholars who

try to interpret the teachings of the Prophet to enable planning for one's family in accordance with one's possibility of supporting them."

"Good. But isn't the real question how many can the earth support? And doesn't a just and workable solution involve allowing more women to become Islamic scholars and jurists?"

He looked at his watch and stood up quickly. "I would like to be able to discuss these matters with you, but regrettably, I have an appointment. Women do have more power in Islam than most Westerners realize. I regret I must end our conversation now."

* * *

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's writings spell out many of these ideas in greater detail.^(*) Running through them is the theme of "man's total disharmony with his environment." He sees the crisis as the externalization of an inner malaise that cannot be solved without "the spiritual rebirth of Western man." The human destiny, says Nasr, entails fulfilling the role of God's vicegerent on earth and protecting the natural order, thus bearing witness to the truth that the whole of nature speaks of God.

The Renaissance led to the separation of philosophy from theology, reason from faith, and mysticism from gnosis. (The latter term Nasr uses not to designate a secret knowledge based on mystic revelation but to refer broadly to "illuminated knowledge.") In medieval times Christianity, like Islam, was steeped in tradition. But as the West emphasized the rigid logic of Aristotelian thinking, the sense of the sacred diminished. By the seventeenth century the science of the cosmos was secularized. The scientific revolution mechanized the Western worldview, and, with the appearance of the nineteenth-century sociologist Auguste Comte, led to examining the person and society as elements that could be measured with the aim of manipulation and predictability.

Nasr attacks what he calls the "hypothesis" of evolution. He uses the term not to mean modifications within a particular species (which do occur, he says, as a species adapts itself to changed natural conditions) but the belief that through natural processes one species is actually transformed into another. Nasr passionately criticizes this on a wide variety of grounds -- metaphysical, cosmological, religious, logical, mathematical, physical, biological, and paleontological -- building arguments too complex to recapitulate here. His central concern is that what he calls "the deification of historical process" has become so powerful that in many souls it has replaced religion and veils the archetypal realities.

Among his arguments is the contention that there is a remarkable unanimity that humankind descends from a celestial archetype but does not ascend from the ape or any other creature. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, and many other traditions do demonstrate awareness that other creatures have preceded humankind on earth and that the earth's geological configuration has changed. For example, over a thousand years ago Muslim scientists knew that sea shells on top of mountains meant that mountains had turned into seas and seas into mountains, and that land animals had preceded humans on earth. But no sacred scriptures, whether they speak of creation in six days or of cosmic cycles enduring over vast expanses of time, speak of higher life forms as evolving from lower ones.

A number of scientists have found difficulties with the theory of evolution, Nasr says. For example, the lack of fossils intermediate between the great groups requires explanation. Contrary to Darwinian theory, each new species enters life quite suddenly, over an extended region, and with all its essential characteristics. A truly scientific statement

would be that nature produces species that are constant and unchanging, but occasionally disappear. Nasr comes to the rather startling conclusion that as long as humans have lived on earth, they have not evolved at all. Moreover, Nasr says in *Man and Nature* the same species still live, die, and regenerate themselves -- except for the unfortunate species that modern humanity has made extinct (128).

Underlying these developments, Nasr says, was the absence of a higher form of knowledge which encompasses all learning and all phenomena: metaphysics. In the East, this "sacred science" endures to this day. Some early Christian thinkers were metaphysicians -- Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, for example -- and so were such later mystics and theologians as Eckhart, Erigena, and Nicolas of Cusa.

For Nasr, Muslims are a kind of "middle people," geographically and metaphysically located between other Oriental traditions and Western Christianity. Islam's elaborate hierarchy of knowledge is integrated by the principle of unity (*tawhid*), running as an axis through every mode of knowledge and being. There are juridical, social, theological, gnostic, and metaphysical sciences, their principles all derived from the Qur'an. Within Islamic civilization, too, there have developed philosophical, natural, and mathematical sciences that became integrated with the worldview of Islam. On each level of knowledge, nature is seen in a particular way. For jurists it is the background for human action, for scientists a domain to be analyzed, and for metaphysicians the object of contemplation. Ultimately, all Islamic sciences affirm the Divine Unity.

Nasr finds throughout Islamic history an intimate connection between the metaphysical dimension of the tradition and the study of nature. Muslim scientists were Sufis. In Islamic as in Chinese civilization, observation of nature and even experimentation generally stood on the gnostic and mystic side of the tradition. In Islam the indivisible link between humans and nature and between religion and the sciences lies in the Qur'an itself, the Logos or Word of God. "By refusing to separate man and nature completely, Islam has preserved an integral view of the Universe and sees in the arteries of the cosmic and natural world order the flow of divine grace, or *barakah*. . . . Man can learn to contemplate it, not as an independent domain of reality but as a mirror reflecting a higher reality" (*Man in Nature*, 95). In Islam, then, nature has never been considered profane. Someone like Avicenna could be both a physician and a philosopher who sought knowledge through illumination. That modern science did not develop in the bosom of Islam is a sign not of decadence, but of the Islamic refusal to consider any form of knowledge as purely secular and divorced from the ultimate goal of human existence.

Across the centuries, the same principles of the Divine Unity have guided Islamic science, art, and law. Islamic cosmology and cosmography have served as matrix for the Islamic sciences, from geography to alchemy. Maps were based on observation, and remain amazingly accurate. Yet they were also works of art. Islamic medicine produced detailed, accurate anatomical studies, even while following the ancient injunction against dissection. Founded on the doctrines of unity and balance, Islamic medicine is to this day practiced with success in places like the Hamdard Institutes. The plant world was studied with minute care, but with the goal of drawing spiritual lessons from it. Muslim scientists have always recognized that nature is, above all, a reflection of the Paradise whose memories we still bear in the depths of our souls.

This symbolic approach to creation can be likened to the Orthodox Christian view that icons are an image of the divine world. Indeed, at one point Nasr observes that Islamic science is in the most profound sense an art, one that enables the human to contemplate the visible cosmos as an icon revealing the spiritual world beyond it. Thus, we humans have studied animals not only for their own sake, but also to know better our own inner reality. This reality is the total reflection of the Divine Names and Qualities, just as

animals are the partial, but often more direct reflections. Humans, as central in the terrestrial environment, are better able to exercise responsibility for it.

The correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, and the study of the gradation of beings, form the background for scrutinizing the various forms in nature. Humankind stands at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. But "man cannot gain an awareness of the sacred aspects of nature without discovering the sacred within himself or herself," Nasr once told an interfaith conference on "Spirit and Nature," which was recorded for a program produced by Bill Moyers.

The perfect expression of the microcosm opening to the macrocosm lies in Sufism, which Nasr calls the inner dimension of Islam. The author of several books on Jalal al-Din Rumi and other Sufi mystics, he frequently quotes from their works, as in these lines of the Persian poet Hafiz:

There is no veil between the lover and the Beloved;
Thou art thine own veil, O Hafiz, remove thyself.

One should learn to contemplate the world of nature as a mirror reflecting the Divine God, who is both transcendent and immanent. Trees are not only necessary to maintain life, they are a recurring symbol. The Qur'an compares the cosmos to a tree whose roots are firm in the heavens and whose branches spread to the whole of the universe, symbolizing the participation of the whole cosmos in prayer. In Islamic tradition, it is a blessed act to plant a tree even one day before the end of the world. Water has a fundamental reality which symbolizes Divine Mercy. In Islamic law, to pollute the water is a sin, and according to certain jurists, the person who does so can even be called a *kafir*, a condemnatory term for someone outside the pale of religion.

Ranging through a broad spectrum of wisdom traditions, Nasr pays homage not only to the two other Abrahamic faiths, but also to the spiritual traditions of Native Americans and Shintoists, for whom revelation is directly related to natural forms. The American Indian, for example, sees the bear or eagle as a divine presence. All religious traditions, too, posit the hierarchical nature of reality -- as in the orders of angels described by Dionysius, or intermediate worlds in the cosmologies of Mahayana Buddhism. Thus we have many traditions, yet one, the Primordial Tradition, which always *is*. This lessens neither the authenticity nor the complete originality of each, which emanates as a direct message from Heaven and conforms to a particular archetype. From interfaith dialogue we should not expect the conversion of participants. Rather, we can gain understanding of another world of sacred form and meaning through preservation of our own tradition.

The geometric patterns in Islamic art reflect the archetypal world. Traditional Islamic architecture and city planning never sought to convey a sense of defiant human power over nature. Where there were hot deserts, the streets were narrow to prevent the sun from dissipating the cool night air. Slatted wind-towers on housetops caught the breezes that ventilated homes. Even religious architecture reflected harmony with nature. Light and air entered easily into the traditional mosque, and birds often flew around during the most solemn moments of a ceremony. The sun-heated buildings, wind-turned mills, and water provided energy for small technologies. In the Middle East, particularly Persia, the Muslims perfected the ancient system of *qanats*, elaborate underground channels that stored water and carried it long distances without danger of evaporation. Many are still being used today.

In the traditional Islamic pattern of life, work is not separated from life, but reflects natural rhythms. An artisan's workday, for example, may last from dawn until long after sunset, but the work is done in the bazaar, the bosom of the community, and is interrupted

by coffee-drinking with friends, dining at home with family, prayers at the mosque, or quiet meditation.

Today, concern for a greater reality in the contemporary world can be observed, Nasr maintains, in the growing interest in ecology and a concomitant urge to rediscover the sacred. If the limitations imposed by a desacralized mode of knowing were removed, the sacred would manifest itself of its own accord, he tells us in *Knowledge and the Sacred*. "The light has not ceased to exist in itself. The cosmos seems to have become dark, spiritually speaking, only because of the veil of opacity surrounding that particular humanity called modern" (110).

Contrasting Perspectives: Thomas Berry and Seyyed Hossein Nasr

The two modes of thought represented by Nasr and Berry are both so significant that they reach well beyond conventional boundaries of separate religious and cultural traditions. Comparing their ideas, not all of them mutually exclusive, may clarify their differing approaches and highlight basic intellectual choices that religious believers concerned with ecology will eventually have to make.

Berry's starting point is the natural world. For him, as St. Paul indicates in the Epistle to the Romans, the earth itself is divine Scripture, and the universe is the ultimate sacred community. Although Nasr has called Scripture and nature the two grand books of divine knowledge, he starts with the divine world. In another sense, his starting point is revelation, the only means by which the Source can, even partially, be known. It is revelation from a personal God who created the world, watches over the acts of all human beings, and intervenes in their affairs. Although Nasr acknowledges the mode of revelation in religions that center on a nonpersonal Supreme Reality rather than a personal God, and sometimes uses "revelation" simply to refer to the world of faith, he is most concerned with direct revelation, communicated to a human prophet.

For Berry, "revelation" is the awakening of the sense of ultimate mystery. The "revelatory import of the natural world" is a recurrent motif; he asks us to listen to the universe. God is a word that Berry rarely uses: it is employed in so many different ways that it is too ambiguous; besides, he is primarily concerned with the larger society, not simply with "religious" people. More often, Berry speaks of "the divine," for it conveys better the ineffable/numinous presence in the world about us.

For Nasr, "nature," a symbol of a transcendent reality, teaches human beings about God. His vision seems propelled by an urge to perceive patterns of unity, hierarchy, order. It might be called a mathematical vision; mathematics, an abstraction with respect to the world of the senses, is regarded by Muslims as the gateway leading from the sensible to the intelligible world. Nasr perceives reality through the lens of archetypes. Like the great naturalist writers, Berry takes joy in the wildness of the natural world -- wilderness undisturbed by human interference. He delights in the smells, tastes, sounds, the sight and the touch of the earthscape; they enter the very stuff of his being. On lone walks through the woods he enjoys listening to the trees. Indeed, he has suggested that the salvation of Christianity lies in absorbing the positive elements of paganism, as it has assimilated Greek thought and much of Oriental wisdom.

These contrasts seem related to a fundamental difference in emphasis between the religions that nurtured these men. Christianity tends to be a way of love, Islam a way of knowing through illumination. Like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, Islam has stressed sapiential doctrines. Mainstream Christian thought has tended, in Nasr's words, to

limit the "function of intellection to that of a handmaid of faith rather than the means of sanctification, which of course would not exclude the element of faith" (*Knowledge and the Sacred*, 36). In Christianity *caritas* is more important. In Berry's vision, this theme extends to the earth, and he even speaks of "falling in love with the universe."

Metaphysics is a realm that Berry rarely discusses, while for Nasr it is the *scientia sacra*. For the latter it is a key to perceiving the hierarchy and humankind's elevated position in it as vicegerent of creation. Berry's perception is closer to the Native American view that we are one among many species, each with its own distinctive grandeur: for flying the birds are infinitely superior; for swimming, the fish. So, too, for producing apples, the apple tree is best. For reflexive thinking, the human. That which is absolutely superior is the integral community of all species, for as St. Thomas says in his *Summa Theologica*, "The whole universe together participates in and manifests the divine more than any single species, whatsoever" (I, q.1, a.10).

The concept of "evolution" holds different meanings for Nasr and Berry. Nasr sees it as a vain attempt to prove that higher biological forms emerge out of lower ones. The idea violates the principle of hierarchy fundamental to Islam and is wrong in the strictly scientific sense, and in its influence on other modes of thought. Berry finds excitement in the idea that there was a time sequence in the very formation of the earth, that earlier life-forms were simpler than later ones, that the earth, especially its life forms, is in a state of continuing transformation. The universe has revealed itself as an emergent evolutionary process.

In Berry's perspective, the universe had a beginning; and time is irreversible. In Nasr's complex discussions of different conceptions of time, a recurring theme is that the movement we see in our environment is cyclical rather than evolutionary -- witness the seasons. But for Berry this does not mean that the natural world moves only in eternal, unchanging cycles. In fact, the reason we are in trouble is that while the seasons do come round again every year, the life-systems are deteriorating, continually, bringing more dust storms, contaminated water, spoiled harvests, and extinction of species that once made this earth their home.

Berry focuses on cosmogenesis, understanding the universe not as "being" but as always in the process of becoming. We human beings also evolve and our vision evolves; our story and that of the earth are intertwined. We are truly *of* the earth; our sense of the divine reflects the outer world, and can alter as that world is altered. Such a view violates the very principle of the unchanging nature of sacred realities that is fundamental to Nasr's thought. For him, nature is a reflection of the paradise whose memories we still bear. The Way is the way back, through the revival of traditions as manifested in the great civilizations. Only thus can we rediscover the sacred and dissipate the loneliness of a world from which the spirit has been banished.

Each way -- Nasr's and Berry's -- contains wisdom. Although their perspectives differ radically, both philosophers locate the source of our plight less in external conditions than in the way we perceive and approach them. Both suggest that we humble ourselves before the mystery, the awesome forces of creation -- and simplify our lives accordingly. Both remind us of the peril of hubris, forgetfulness of human limits.

Four centuries ago the Persian Sufi poet Abd al-Rahman Jami foresaw the predicament of power-driven humanity today:

I lost my intellect, soul, religion, and heart
In order to know an atom in perfection.
But no one can know the essence of the atom perfectly.

How often must I repeat that no one shall know it; then farewell!

Our brief summary of aspects of Nasr's thought is based on his *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1968); *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); *Sufi Essays* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972); *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Co. and Thorson Publishers, 1976); *Knowledge and the Sacred*, the 1981 Gifford Lectures (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); *Traditional Islam and the Modern World* (London: Kegan Paul, 1987).

Note

*[Back to text](#) Dogen, in Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 310.

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