



Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man

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This is a spiritual tour de force which explores the relationship between Man and Nature as found in Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, particularly its Sufi dimension.

Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man Details

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somewhat simplistic and out-of-date. The neo-Darwinists he rightfully critiques are, at best, one voice among many in that branch of science; and the process-philosophical followers of Alfred North Whitehead (whom Nasr cites favourably at several points) have gained some ground in this field, though perhaps not nearly enough. Nasr also has a remarkable detestation for the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, but from what I understand that goes somewhat hand-in-glove with his antipathy to the neo-Darwinists. But while evolutionary metaphors are egregious and noxious in other fields, particularly where they take on the shades of Herbert Spencer's cruel anthropology, that doesn't necessarily amount to a solid critique of biological evolution *per se*. Indeed, one would think that a set of observations noting the fundamental dependence of biological life on the elements of virgin nature, and the *interdependence* of life and the elements across many generations, properly contextualised, would be a major to Dr Nasr's metaphysical-religious frame of mind!

However, Dr Nasr's punchline is still dead-on. We need a new metaphysics - or rather, we need a new birth of interest in the old metaphysics. Only once we understand that nature is translucent and pregnant with the energies of the Divine, and exists to be awed rather than dissected, cut up, mechanised and exploited, can we begin to fundamentally reorient ourselves to nature.

Bob Nichols says

Nasr attributes the modern environmental "crisis" to the desacralization of nature, that began early in the West with the rise of science. Before then, nature was seen as the manifestation of the Universal Intellect, an Absolute presence that provided certainty, predictability and ordered harmony. Science, he says, "emptied the cosmos of its sacred character." In doing so, man saw nature not as a reflection of Intelligent Mind or of God's reality but as a thing for man to use, resulting in the inevitable abuse of nature and "a veritable crime against creation."

In this desacralization process man moved away from the "real." Nature was "reduced to quantity," but "lost its tripartite structure of spirit, soul and body," and thereby transformed "the higher to the lower." Man moved from "half angel" to "a totally earth-bound creature," but gained liberty "at the expense of losing his freedom to transcend his terrestrial limitations." This all points to Nasr's solution to not just have a relationship with nature but with the cosmos itself. Though he does not mention Plato at all, Nasr is working within a Platonic theological-philosophical framework. "Real" is not our world. It is the world of Plato's Forms. The body, the "earthbound creature," is secondary to the soul that ascends to Real Knowledge and Transcendent Truth. Nature – our material world – is a reflection and creation of this world beyond. "The whole of nature," Nasr writes, "speaks of God."

And now we get to the meat of Nasr's critique of Western science. That science merely describes what has been put there by the Universal, Transcendent Mind. Modern science needs to be integrated into this larger realm of "metaphysical science" and "metaphysical knowledge" so that its findings can be properly interpreted, evaluated and critiqued. Newton and Einstein's findings are only about "quantification." They are not "qualitative" and therefore cannot connect "each being ontologically to its source" and, thereby, "to show exactly what they mean." In doing so, Nasr hints (writing in code?) that time stops and space is one, eternal place. Nasr calls biological evolution "fashionable" "dogma." "It's not a scientific theory because it contradicts the "archetypal reality of species." "Like other things," he writes, "the species is an 'idea' whose imprint in material form does not confine and exhaust its essential reality which remains independent of matter. A species could not evolve into another because each species is an independent reality qualitatively different from another." By reinterpretation of such scientific findings in this way, it's hard to envision that our relationship with nature will be improved upon. He's rebuilding his house on a foundation of sand.

Nasr is stuck in time. He denies the senses as the highest source of truth because he operates from a higher

plain of reality. His metaphysical science and its absolute truth has been usurped by modern science, which sees itself as the arbiter of the real when it is but a reflection of the Real. Nasr puts a stake in the ground to reclaim his territory. He wants absolute time and space, not the absolutes of process and flux. He wants us to go backwards to experience cosmic majesty even when modern science, daily, touches on unfathomable, magnificent mysteries. Why there is such a fundamental split in ways of seeing the world is an interesting question.

Tara says

The author made many points I agreed with. He was insightful, he drew together some arguments which I found provocative and inspiring. Nonetheless, the book was tinged with a sexism I found repugnant, and it repeated itself in a dead sort of way. Considering that he was defending life and nature, he was terribly dry. I love John Scotus Erigena and many of the other people he talked about, but his analysis was too shallow and a result of his own biases. Still, there is definitely something to be gained from this book, especially for those of the scientific mind-set who prostrate themselves before technology without setting it in the broader context of life. I just think other people have said it better.

Farhad says

Some of my favourite passages:

"Man sees in nature what he is himself and penetrates into the inner meaning of nature only on the condition of being able to delve into the inner depths of his own being and to cease to lie merely on the periphery of his being. Men who live only on the surface of their being can study nature as something to be manipulated and dominated. But only he who has turned toward the inner dimension of his being can see nature as a symbol, as a transparent reality and come to know and understand it in the real sense."

"It is indeed curious that in the modern world, where everything is criticized and questioned, where there are critics of art, of literature, of politics, of philosophy, and even of religion there are no critics of science."

"...for to seek to discover the truth in any matter is the most constructive of all acts."

"In the end what we can say with all certainty is that there is no peace possible among men unless there is peace and harmony with nature. And in order to have peace and harmony with nature one must be in harmony and equilibrium with Heaven, and ultimately with the Source and Origin of all things"

Nina Lana says

good

Aziza Aouhassi says

"Un the end what se can say with all certainty is that there is no peace possible among men unless there is peace and harmony with nature. And n order to have peace and harmony with nature one must be in harmony and equilibrium with Heaven, and ultimately with the Source and Origin of all things. He who is at peace with God is also at peace with His creation, both with nature and man."

Soroush says

This book by Seyyed Hossein Nasr consists of four chapters based on his lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in 1966. Although it has been written decades ago, most of its content can be applied to today's environmental crisis. In other words, when you read this book, you wouldn't think, for the most part, that it is based on lectures given decades ago. His overall objective in this book is to show that to solve our environmental problems, we need to revive our metaphysical and spiritual understanding of nature. Subsequently, we should place ourselves in the bigger cosmological picture and instead of trying to dominate nature, work with nature and attain harmony with it. Nasr draws a historical line to show how we got to where we are now; how we gradually lost our metaphysical and spiritual understanding of nature and its significance in the cosmological picture. He emphasizes on the existence of a hierarchy of knowledge based on the existence of a hierarchy of reality. Material and physical understanding of nature covers only one plane of existence, and for him, we must advance vertically instead of horizontally to be able to bridge our material understanding of the world with the overall metaphysical reality of it.

This book isn't a scientific book. If you are used to reading science books with academic citations and references to scientific journals or investigations, you will most likely find this book lacking. This book is meant to make you curious to look for a different perspective or approach to reality. It is a relatively small book, so its effectiveness is questionable and depends on how receptive you already are to such ideas. If you do choose to read this book, in my opinion, start from the second chapter. First chapter is a survey chapter, which may be quite frustrating to read and follow. Once you're finished with the book, then you can come back and read the first chapter to choose your next step, if you wish to follow up on some of the issues mentioned in the book. Chapter four seems to be a bit too repetitive, and unfortunately, in chapter four he writes against the theory of evolution to strengthen his points. Nowadays, what he wrote against evolution, may backfire against him. But perhaps to be charitable, more people used to be against the theory of evolution in 1966 than today. Chapters two and three are quite good. In these chapters some important points are raised that deserve to be examined and contemplated upon.

In a nutshell, if you're quite concerned about the current environmental crisis, as I think we should all be, and you want a very different perspective on the cause of it and the solution for it, then this book may provide you with what you are looking for; that is if you're receptive and open to ideas of metaphysics and spirituality.

Xinyuan Wong says

One of the best books I have had the privilege of reading in a long time.

May be a bit difficult for the average reader in the European and North American sphere, but is helpful for East Asians that have had exposure to the fields of History of Science / the works of Joseph Needham / Daoist and Buddhist understandings of nature.

Notwithstanding the fact that apparently ISIS has decided to takfir Prof. Nasr, his books contributed a great

deal to helping me understand how present-day Europe and North America ended up with its spiritual crisis, in relation to how nature is used as raw material instead of being respected in its own right as alive and filled with sacredness. (In other words, plants and animals are alive, you a**holes.)

The precision of Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr is deft, when it comes to illustrating the relationship between political philosophy, history, "science" as understood in the Latin definitions that were transmitted into the European Enlightenment from the Islamic world via Toledo, Spain....

...and how the ibn Rushd (Averroes) transmission of philosophy came to dominate industrial modern societies, creating the quantitative shadow that pervades the English-speaking, German-speaking, and Russian-speaking spheres of thought. Till today, ibn Rushd's imprints shapes the way in which we classify people according to how much they have in their hands, casting a deep shadow of materialist reductionism over our hearts. What is the worth of a human being?

In my own journey of repentance for the fact that my great-grandfather, Mr Soh Mah Eng, was one of the most prominent British colonial collaborators and construction mogul behind the Cenotaph, it is humbling to consider the way in which his abandonment of coolies onshore during the outbreak of World War II, still shapes the way that Singaporean Anglophone ruling elites became so antagonistic towards Confucianism. In my own way, I am not unlike the descendants of the Chiang Kai-shek family. I am one of the least traumatised people of East Asian descents under 30, to be found anywhere in the world today, and I owe a lifelong debt to the forests of Nusantara for that.

Is it a debt that I can ever hope to repay? What is the role of the unseen in shaping the seen world?

Murtaza says

This is a short set of essays by Nasr offering a critique of modern science and the project of destruction that it has wrought against the natural world. Nasr's critique essentially revolves around the divorce between science and metaphysics, which has unmoored otherwise legitimate scientific endeavor from its base in a meaningful higher knowledge. As a result it has actually become dangerous and illegitimate, waging a ceaseless war against a disenchanting natural world. The external world has thus come to be a reflection of the same disharmony that has been created within modern man, who has lost his metaphysical foundations and accompanying sense of purpose and place.

This book would've probably been more revelatory to me had I read it many years ago, but its arguments are nonetheless poignant. Nature is not a brute machine to exploit to satisfy the wants of man, as the thinkers of the Renaissance would have it. Instead nature is a window to the divine, which is reflected in signs and symbols, at least for those who have not yet been made deaf to them:

"And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect."

Nasr's debt to Perennial philosophy comes across strongly in this book, much of which deals with Christianity, Hinduism and even Taoism alongside his own Islamic beliefs. There has been a remarkable consistency among traditional peoples about the ultimate value of nature and how and why to live in harmony with it. The modern idea that human beings are the only Absolute means that nature and all it contains are thus contingent, ultimately made for our enjoyment and exploitation.

Today we are becoming alarmed that we have exploited nature so much we no longer may be able to enjoy

it. If, as Nasr argues, we had subordinated the scientific process to its rightful place in the hierarchy of knowledge we would not be presently staring into the abyss that we are. Not only would nature be in a healthy equilibrium, we ourselves would not be feeling the anguish of having waged a war against the natural world and our own heedless souls in the process. We can no longer even hear nature or see its divine signs and messages to us, as we have been rendered insensible by the sound and fury of our own activity.

Given that this book was released many decades ago, its clear that the ideas it contains never succeeded in creating a decisive cultural shift. Nasr's way of expressing himself is a bit flighty - he's a better speaker than writer - but its too bad that people didn't heed his and others warnings about where the world was headed due to the scientific-industrial project of destruction, as Wael Hallaq has described it.

A related speech by the late Native American leader Russell Means, one of my favorite addresses ever, echoes many of Nasr's points in this book, even more succinctly: <https://www.filmsforaction.org/news/r...>

Ammar says

"To be at peace with the Earth one must be at peace with Heaven"

Only a brilliant scholar and intellectual such as Nasr could have so eloquently brought together our relationship with God, nature, and humanity. This series of lectures is nearly 30 years old but a more critical read today than ever. Nasr's perennial philosophies went over my head (particularly the Taosim parts), but he shows us how the divine, nature, and humanity are not mutually exclusive, rather they are integral to one another.

Gary Burns says

His key arguments weave the loose, loose because unrecognized, threads between the philosophic heritage of the West and the preservation of, especially Aristotelian ideas, in Islamic schools of thought throughout the Middle Ages. Very informative with a rich bibliography, Nasr keeps alive the fundamental relationship between metaphysical understanding and scientific investigation, a bridge so many in the West have burnt up.
