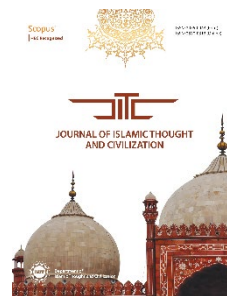
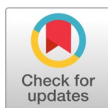


Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

Volume 16 Issue 1, Spring 2026

ISSN(P): 2075-0943 ISSN(E): 2520-0313

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC>



- Title:** **Re-Sacralization of Nature and Sufi Ecotheology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s Contribution to Environmental Ethics in the Anthropocene**
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- Affiliation (s):** University of PTIQ, Jakarta, Indonesia
- DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.161.22>
- History:** Received: October 30, 2025, Revised: March 08, 2026, Accepted: March 09, 2026, Published: May 11, 2026
- Citation:** Santono, Agung Nugroho Reformis, Muhammad Zainuddin, Muhammad Lytto Syahrums Armins, Muhammad Ikhyia Ulumuddin, Tholhah, Nasirin, Aidul Fitriawan, Dannu Akbar, & Nurul Jannah. “Re-Sacralization of Nature and Sufi Ecotheology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s Contribution to Environmental Ethics in the Anthropocene.” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 16, no. 1 (2026): 375–392. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.161.22>
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- Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of


Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, School of Social Science and Humanities
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Re-Sacralization of Nature and Sufi Ecotheology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Contribution to Environmental Ethics in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

The global ecological crisis in the Anthropocene is fundamentally a crisis of cosmology and modern spirituality, driven by an anthropocentric and secular paradigm that desacralizes nature and reduces the environment to a mere exploitable commodity. While existing Islamic ecotheology predominantly focuses on normative and legalistic frameworks, there remains a significant research gap concerning the deeper ontological and metaphysical roots of environmental degradation. This article addresses this critical gap by systematically analyzing Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophical thought through a comprehensive Sufi ecotheological lens. Using a qualitative, library-based method with a Sufi-hermeneutic approach, this study examines Nasr's major works to articulate his critique of modernity and his vision for the re-sacralization of nature. The findings reveal that Nasr's unique contribution lies in three core pillars: (1) restoring awareness of the sacred cosmos as a *tajallī*; (2) reinterpreting the human role simultaneously as *khalifah* and *'abd* to maintain cosmic balance; and (3) developing "sacred science" as an alternative epistemology uniting rationality with metaphysical awareness. Addressing academic critiques regarding its perceived spiritual elitism and lack of practical applicability, this study explicitly synthesizes Nasr's thought into a novel "cosmotheocentric" conceptual model. This cosmotheocentrism transcends the rigid tradition-modernity binary, offering a profound Islamic-Sufi contribution to global environmental ethics. Ultimately, it positions the re-sacralization of the cosmos not just as a theoretical ideal, but as the essential prerequisite for building a sustainable and just ecological civilization.

Keywords: Anthropocene, ecotheology, re-sacralization of nature, sacred science, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, sufism

Introduction

Climate change and ecological degradation have assumed a central position in contemporary global discourse. According to the State of the Climate 2024 report published by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the past decade has recorded the highest average global temperatures in the history of modern observation, with 2024 identified as the hottest year ever

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documented.¹ The concentration of greenhouse gases has exceeded 420 parts per million, marking the highest level in the past two million years.² Concurrently, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services has warned that ecosystem degradation threatens the well-being of more than 3.2 billion people globally. Manifestations of this crisis—such as extreme heatwaves, accelerated Arctic ice melt, freshwater scarcity in parts of Africa and South Asia, and large-scale wildfires—indicate that the ecological crisis is no longer localized but rather systemic and multidimensional.³ This alarming situation underscores the need for a thorough investigation into the roots of the crisis.

The roots of this ecological crisis lie in a modern, anthropocentric paradigm. Historically, the acceleration of this crisis is deeply intertwined with the dawn of industrialization and the relentless pursuit of unchecked economic expansion. Early warnings about the physical and ecological boundaries of industrial capitalism were famously articulated in the 1972 Club of Rome report, *The Limits to Growth*, which highlighted the systemic unsustainability of exponential industrial and demographic growth on a finite planet.⁴ In parallel to this structural critique, legal and ethical frameworks began to be challenged, as seen in Christopher D. Stone's seminal essay, *Should Trees Have Standing?*, which argued for granting intrinsic legal rights to natural entities to protect them from being treated as mere property for anthropocentric exploitation.⁵ Despite these early warnings, modernity (grounded in rationalism, secularism, and capitalism) continued to place humans at the center, and as rulers over nature. Nature is reduced to a mere object, commodity, or resource valued only insofar as it serves human needs. This paradigm neglects the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the human–environment relationship, resulting in large-scale exploitation that disregards cosmic balance.⁶ Consequently, the relationship between humans and nature loses its ethical and spiritual depth, turning nature into nothing more than a commodity. Addressing this crisis requires a shift toward a relational worldview in which humans are understood as part of the cosmos, not its masters.⁷

As a response, ecotheology emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century to articulate a faith-based ecological ethic. Lynn White Jr.'s classic 1967 article highlighted how certain theological interpretations contributed to a dominative stance toward nature, while opening the door to a renewed reading of religious traditions.⁸ From there, various strands developed, such as creation spirituality (Matthew Fox), earth theology (Sallie McFague) and ecofeminist theology (Rosemary Radford Ruether), emphasizing humanity's interconnectedness with the Earth. However, this discourse has

¹World Meteorological Organization, *State of the Global Climate 2024*, WMO-No. 1368 (Geneva, Switzerland: World Meteorological Organization, 2025).

²Pierre Friedlingstein et al., “Global Carbon Budget 2022,” *Earth System Science Data* 14, no. 11 (November 2022): 4811–4900, <https://doi.org/10.5194/ESSD-14-4811-2022>.

³IPBES, *The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (Germany: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2025).

⁴Donella H. Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), 45.

⁵Christopher D. Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects,” *Southern California Law Review* 45 (1972): 450–501.

⁶Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World* (Chicago: Kazi Publication, 1994), 215.

⁷Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*, 1990, 17. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1990), 17.

⁸Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203>.

largely been dominated by Christian and Western perspectives and has not yet fully integrated the richness of non-Western traditions into the global academic conversation.⁹

In the Islamic context, ecotheology has begun to gain attention, yet it remains largely confined to normative frameworks such as the concepts of *khalīfah*¹⁰ and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law).¹¹ While these prior studies successfully establish a legal and ethical duty to protect the environment, they often fail to challenge the underlying anthropocentric epistemology itself, maintaining a subtle separation between the human subject and the natural object. In fact, Islam's spiritual heritage, especially through Sufism, offers a relational vision of the cosmos. Thinkers like Ibn 'Arabī regard nature as a *tajallī*¹² of the Divine attributes, wherein every creature possesses intrinsic value by virtue of reflecting the Divine Reality.¹³ This outlook has the potential to broaden the horizon of Islamic ecotheology, moving beyond normative anthropocentrism toward a robust cosmotheocentrism.

One contemporary Muslim thinker who underscores the urgency of this perspective is Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Nasr's critique of modernity highlights how the secularization of science and instrumental rationalism have severed the sacredness of nature, thereby precipitating the ecological crisis. As a remedy, he advances a paradigm of the re-sacralization of nature through a Sufi framework, emphasizing *tawhīd* (Divine unity), *wahdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being), and "sacred science" as foundations for an ecological ethic. From this vantage point, caring for the Earth is not merely an ethical obligation but also a spiritual path to God.

This article aims to explore Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thought as an Islamic contribution to the global conversation on ecotheology. Its primary focus is how the Sufi framework he proposes can serve as an alternative to the modern anthropocentric paradigm, offering a novel cosmotheocentric model that transcends both secular materialism and purely legalistic religious approaches. The article is organized into four main sections: (1) an account of the ecological crisis within the Anthropocene framework; (2) the global discourse on ecotheology; (3) an analysis of Nasr's idea of the re-sacralization of nature; and (4) an Islamic-Sufi contribution to global ecotheological discussions through an ecological ethic.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Anthropocene and the Need for Ecotheology

The concept of the Anthropocene, introduced by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in the early twenty-first century, signals a new awareness that human activity has become a geological force

⁹Teresa Messias, "From Ecotheology to Ecospirituality in *Laudato Si*—Ecological Spirituality beyond Christian Religion," *Religions* 15 (2024): 68, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010068>.

¹⁰Translated as God's 'vicegerent,' *khalīfah* in this ecotheological framework refers to humanity's role as ethically responsible guardians of the Earth. This station requires humans to safeguard cosmic balance and is inextricably linked to their role as 'abd (servant) in submission to the Divine will.

¹¹Jens Koehrsen, "Muslims and Climate Change: How Islam, Muslim Organizations, and Religious Leaders Influence Climate Change Perceptions and Mitigation Activities," *WIREs Climate Change* 12, no. 3 (2021): e702, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.702>.

¹²*Tajallī* refers to the continuous manifestation or self-disclosure of God in Sufi metaphysics.

¹³Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, "Modern Islamic Eco-Religion: Historical Contexts," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 19, no. 2 (March 2025): 237–64, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.27632>.

shaping the planet's trajectory.¹⁴ However, the term is not merely a scientific category; it also sparks philosophical and political debate. Some thinkers propose alternatives such as *Capitalocene*¹⁵ to underscore the role of the global capitalist system in the ecological crisis, or *Plantationocene*¹⁶ to highlight colonialism, slavery, and land exploitation. These debates indicate that ecological issues cannot be separated from epistemological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

Probing further, the roots of this crisis lie in an anthropocentric paradigm that separates humans from the cosmos. Modernity has placed humans at the center while reducing nature to a material object to be calculated, exploited, and traded. This paradigm gives rise to an instrumental relationship with nature, in which the intrinsic value of other beings is ignored.¹⁷ Consequently, ecological problems are not merely an environmental crisis but also a crisis of cosmology, namely, how humans understand themselves within the order of the universe.¹⁸

Efforts to resolve this crisis through technical solutions, such as renewable energy, green technologies, or global regulations, while important, fail to address its roots. As long as the anthropocentric paradigm goes unchallenged, technical fixes will serve as "patchwork repairs" without altering the fundamental orientation of human–nature relations. In other words, the ecological crisis is a crisis of spirituality and a crisis of meaning.¹⁹

Since the 1960s, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has asserted that the ecological crisis cannot be separated from the spiritual crisis of modernity. In his classic work *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (1968), Nasr argues that environmental degradation manifests humanity's severance from the sacred cosmos.

Nothing is more dangerous in the current ecological debate than that scientific view of man and nature which cuts man from his spiritual roots and takes a desacralized nature for granted while expanding its physical boundaries by billions of light years. This view destroys the reality of the spiritual world while speaking of awe before the grandeur of the cosmos. It destroys man's centrality in the cosmic order and his access to the spiritual world while speaking of the incredible science-fiction of the evolution of man from the original soup of molecules which supposedly contained the whole of cosmic reality at the beginning following the big bang.²⁰

However, reading Nasr's critique requires critical nuance. Presenting modernity as a monolithic, purely secular force risks creating a rigid and oversimplified tradition–modernity binary. Recent scholarship in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and postcolonial theory demonstrates that modernities are plural and contested, often entangled with local traditions and non-Western

¹⁴Czeslaw Mesjasz, "The Anthropocene and Complexity: A Survey of Ideas," in Brauch, H.G. (eds) *Towards Rethinking Politics, Policy and Polity in the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene: Politik—Economics—Society—Science*, vol. 35. (Springer, Cham 2025), 161–206, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71807-6_3.

¹⁵Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 3 (May 2017): 594–630, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036>.

¹⁶Maan Barua, "Plantationocene: A Vegetal Geography," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 113, no. 1 (2023): 13–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2022.2094326>.

¹⁷Helen Kopnina et al., "Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 31, no. 1 (February 2018): 109–27, <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10806-018-9711-1/METRICS>.

¹⁸Mesjasz, "The Anthropocene and Complexity: A Survey of Ideas."

¹⁹Cindel J. M. White, and Matthew I. Billet, "The Roles of Anthropomorphism, Spirituality, and Gratitude in Pro-Environmental Attitudes," *Religion, Brain and Behavior* 15, no. 4 (2025): 465–483, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2024.2363759>.

²⁰Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*.

epistemologies.²¹ Therefore, Nasr's critique of the "secular-materialistic worldview" is most productive when interpreted not as a blanket rejection of all contemporary science, but rather as a decolonial critique of a specific, hegemonic form of Western instrumental rationality that erases the sacred dimension inherent in creation and justifies unbounded exploitation.

As a response to this crisis, ecotheological discourse has developed rapidly as an effort to formulate faith-based ecological ethics. From this have emerged various currents, such as *creation spirituality*, which emphasizes the cosmos as an extension of divine sacredness and underscores the interconnectedness of all creatures,²² and *ecofeminist theology*, which critiques patriarchal hierarchies as a mirror of relations of domination over nature.²³ These developments have succeeded in bringing the ecological dimension into theological discourse while broadening the horizons of ecological ethics across traditions.

In addition, a number of mystical traditions have also colored the development of ecotheology. In the Christian context, for instance, Meister Eckhart's mystical cosmology is often reread to affirm the inner unity of the human being with the universe.²⁴ Likewise, in Judaism, Kabbalah situates the cosmos as a reflection of the divine dimension that is continually progressing toward perfection.²⁵ These approaches indicate that mysticism, with its cosmological depth, holds significant potential for overcoming the limitations of normative theology in responding to the ecological crisis.

It must be acknowledged that most ecotheology that has developed remains rooted in Western-Christian traditions. Islamic perspective is relatively marginalized in the global academic conversation. Furthermore, a mapping of existing literature on Islamic ecotheology reveals a distinct methodological gap. The dominant scholarship remains heavily confined to juridical (*fiqh al-bi'ah*) and normative frameworks, predominantly utilizing the concepts of *khalīfah* and *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*²⁶ to formulate environmental regulations.²⁷ While these studies successfully establish an ethical duty for environmental stewardship, they inherently maintain a subtle anthropocentrism—positioning humans as managers standing *above* nature, rather than an interconnected part *within* it. They stop short of addressing the deeper ontological rupture.

²¹Sandra Harding, *Sciences from Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 173–75.

²²Religions and 2024, "From Ecotheology to Ecospirituality in Laudato Si—Ecological Spirituality beyond Christian Religion."

²³Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God an Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1992).

²⁴Christopher M. Wojtulewicz, "The Nature of Divine Immanence in Meister Eckhart's Thought," *Medieval Mystical Theology* 32, no. 2 (2023): 107–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20465726.2023.2268461>.

²⁵Yinon Kahan, "The Spiritual Garment in Medieval Islamic Mysticism and Kabbalah A Comprehensive Study of Zoharic Literature and the Writings of Muḥyī Al-Dīn Ibn Al-'Arabī (1165–1240)," *Medieval Encounters* 30, no. 4 (2024): 432–64, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700674-12340193>.

²⁶Translated as 'the higher objectives of Islamic law', *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* refers to the foundational goals and purposes underlying Islamic jurisprudence. In contemporary Islamic ecotheology, it is frequently utilized as a normative and juridical framework to formulate environmental regulations.

²⁷Ali Imron Mashadi, "Teologi Islam Kontemporer dan Etika Lingkungan: Pendekatan Maqasid dalam Mewujudkan Keberlanjutan" [Contemporary Islamic Theology and Environmental Ethics: The Maqasid Approach to Achieving Sustainability]. *FADZAT: Jurnal Ekonomi Syariah* 5, no. 2 (2025): 1–12, <https://jurnal.rijan.ac.id/index.php/fdz/article/view/220>.

Here, ecotheology grounded in Islamic mysticism becomes significant to bridge this research gap. Unlike ethical approaches that tend to be abstract or legalistic, Islamic mysticism as explained by Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a sacred cosmology that views nature as a theophany of God. Within this framework, all creation is not merely material entities but Divine signs (*āyāt*) reflecting His presence and attributes. This Sufi perspective radically shifts the discourse from normative anthropocentrism toward a “cosmotheocentrism,” affirming humans as an integral part of the cosmos that possesses intrinsic value and sacredness.

For Nasr, the ecological crisis can only be addressed through the recovery of a sacred vision of the cosmos. By re-situating nature within a spiritual horizon, the human relationship with the Earth is no longer dominative-instrumental, but marked by reverence, responsibility, and compassion.²⁸ Sufi ecotheology does not stop at the theoretical level, it also inspires praxis: from simple, balanced ways of living to public policies rooted in cosmic ethics.

Thus, the Anthropocene era demands not only technological innovation but a transformation of spiritual consciousness. The Sufi perspective articulated by Nasr offers an alternative framework for ecotheology, building a sustainable environmental ethic by reviving the mystical and sacred dimension of the Islamic tradition.

3. Method

This study is a qualitative inquiry employing a library research approach that focuses on exploring Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s thought on the ecological crisis and the concept of the re-sacralization of nature.²⁹ To methodologically ground the critique of modern anthropocentrism, this study aligns with the epistemological framework proposed by Ziauddin Sardar in *The Touch of Midas*. Sardar argues that the ecological crisis is intrinsically linked to the reductionist and value-free claims of Western science, necessitating an Islamic scientific paradigm that reintegrates physical realities with transcendent moral and spiritual values.³⁰ Guided by this need for an integrated epistemology, this method is selected because it is well suited to analyze the philosophical and theological works that constitute the principle basis of Nasr’s ideas.

To ensure procedural rigor, the research process was strictly divided into two distinct stages: data collection and data analysis.

Data collection: The primary data in this research were purposively collected from Nasr’s own works, such as *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, and *Knowledge and the Sacred*—which directly articulate his critique of modernity and his Sufi cosmological proposal. Secondary sources consist of academic literature that examines Nasr’s thought within the contexts of ecotheology, Islamic philosophy, and environmental ethics. Data analysis: The collected texts were systematically processed using qualitative content analysis. This analytical process was conducted in three specific steps: (1) *Thematic Coding*, where texts were closely read to identify and extract key concepts such as the desacralization of nature, *wahdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being), the concept of *khalīfah*, and “sacred science”; (2) *Conceptual Synthesis*, which involved mapping the conceptual relationships between Nasr’s critique of instrumental rationality and his proposed mystical alternatives; and (3) *Contextual Interpretation*, where these synthesized themes were evaluated against the broader discourse of the Anthropocene.

²⁸Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and The Sacred* (New York: University of New York Press, 1989).

²⁹Abdul Fattah Nasution, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif [Qualitative Research Methods]*, ed. Meyniar Albina (Bandung: Harfa Creative, 2023).

³⁰Ziauddin Sardar, ed., *The Touch of Midas: Science, Values and Environment in Islam and the West* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 1–14.

A Sufi hermeneutic serves as the interpretive framework, grounded in the understanding that for Nasr, nature is a Divine *tajallī* possessing intrinsic value.³¹ It is crucial to methodologically reflect on the epistemological limits of this approach. Unlike the historical-critical method—which analyzes texts strictly as products of their specific socio-political and historical contexts—Sufi hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) approaches texts and natural phenomena as symbols (*āyāt*) that point toward timeless metaphysical realities. The epistemological orientation here is inherently normative and spiritual, prioritizing ontological meaning over empirical falsifiability. Accordingly, this research does not merely present Nasr's ideas descriptively; it also emphasizes their critical and constructive dimensions; namely, how the re-sacralization of nature can be positioned as an Islamic-Sufi contribution to the global ecotheological discourse in the Anthropocene era.

4. Result

4.1. The Desacralization of Nature in Modernity: Nasr's Ecological Critique

After recognizing how the ecological crisis stems from the modern anthropocentric paradigm, it is time to highlight a more radical critique of its roots. Much ecotheological discourse seeks solutions, yet often remains within the bounds of normative ethics without touching deeper cosmological and spiritual dimensions. This is where Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thought becomes significant. He situates the ecological problem as a consequence of modernity's reduction of nature to a mere material object and the banishment of its sacred dimension. Nasr's critique of modernity not only exposes the crisis's foundations but also opens a path toward an alternative Sufi-based cosmology that offers a new horizon for ecotheology³².

For Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the modern ecological crisis is rooted in a more fundamental spiritual crisis. Modern science, which separates space, time, matter, and energy from metaphysical order and divine sovereignty, has given rise to what he calls profane knowledge.³³ Nature has been reduced to a material object that can be measured and exploited, resulting in the desacralization of the cosmos—the loss of the traditional cosmological view that saw nature as a divine theophany. The resulting ecosystem destruction and mass extinction of species are direct results of this perspective that removes the sacred dimension from the world.³⁴ Anthropocentric and reductionist modernization, along with the technologies it has developed, have deepened human domination over nature while eroding the organic structures of traditional societies—family ties, local communities, and even spiritual orders—that previously sustained humanity's connection to the cosmos as a whole.

Within the Islamic social tradition, the individual is connected to an organic social order in which meaning and support are found. Islamic society is not founded on individualism, in which society fragments into atomic units, nor is it akin to an ant colony, where the individual loses inner freedom and risks the stifling of creative power through uniformity and rigid rules.³⁵ The ecological problem is fundamentally a cosmological one: how humans understand themselves, nature, and God within a single web of existence. Therefore, this crisis cannot be adequately addressed with technical innovation or political regulation; it requires a spiritual revolution that restores awareness of the

³¹Reflita, and Jonni Syatri, "Konstruksi Hermeneutika Tafsir Sufi" [Hermeneutical Construction of Sufi Exegesis], *Mashdar* 2, no. 2 (2020): 169–98, <https://doi.org/10.15548/mashdar.v2i2.1675>.

³²Tarik M. Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism: The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (New York: University Press of America, 2013).

³³Abu Sayem, "The Eco-Religious Understandings of John B. Cobb, Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr: A Comparative Study," *Islamic Studies* 61, no. 1 (2022): 45–62, <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v61i1.2195>.

³⁴Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1987).

³⁵Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*.

sacredness of nature. From this perspective, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's environmental theology has a direct impact on legal philosophy: it challenges the dominance of the anthropocentric "Human Rights" paradigm and encourages a shift towards the "Rights of Nature." If nature has intrinsic value as a sacred creation, then it demands ethical and legal recognition not simply for human benefit, but for its own ontological dignity.

4.2. Ibn 'Arabi's Sufi Metaphysics as the Basis of Nasr's Ecotheology

Nasr's critique of modernity does not stop at rejecting anthropocentrism; it leads to the recovery of a sacred cosmology through Sufism. Drawing on the Sufi framework of Ibn 'Arabi, he offers an ecotheological vision that sees nature as a divine theophany and the human being as an integral part of the web of being.

Within Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thought, deeply inspired by Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical teachings, Sufism is the most authoritative source for reviving the sacred dimension of the cosmos. Sufism rejects the modern view that reduces nature to a mere material object to be exploited, and instead affirms that nature is *āyāt Allāh*, signs that continuously disclose the Divine Reality. In the Sufi tradition of Ibn 'Arabi, the cosmos is understood as *al-kitāb al-manshūr* (the unrolled book) alongside *al-kitāb al-mastūr* (the written book, namely the Qur'ān).³⁶ All creation is not merely a living environment but a sacred text to be read, contemplated, and revered.

Through Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology, Nasr sets forth a profound ontological framework of the structure of reality. Ibn 'Arabi distinguishes between the transcendent, absolute Divine Being and His manifestations in creation, which unfold in hierarchical degrees. As Ibn 'Arabi explains: "Truly, this heaven is a compendium of wondrous open images. When this heaven becomes the origin of existence, His Light appears manifest, and this Light is called *al-Nūr* (Light) from the presence of being. That Light is manifestation. And you receive those images, may God bless you! from that heaven."³⁷

He explains this through the five levels of existence according to Ibn 'Arabi, each of which depicts a particular aspect of cosmic and metaphysical reality. These presences comprise: the level of the Divine Reality itself (the Essence, *al-Aḥadiyyah*); the Divine Names and Attributes (*al-Asmā' wa al-Ṣifāt*, or *Wāḥidiyyah*); the world of the great angels (*jabarūt*); the subtle and psychic world (*malakūt*); and the physical world (*mulk*).³⁸

It is important to understand, however, that these five levels are not separate, disconnected entities; rather, they are interrelated in a harmonious chain of causation. Each level of being contains the principles and essences of the level below it, forming a unified, continuous hierarchical whole.³⁹ This Sufi cosmology offers a vision of the universe that is not only hierarchically structured but also ontologically integrated, revealing a profound interconnection between the Divine and the creation.

From this framework of five levels of being, Ibn 'Arabi develops the metaphysical doctrine known as *wahdat al-wujūd*.⁴⁰ This concept affirms that although reality appears in diverse forms and degrees, in essence all being proceeds from and returns to a single Absolute Reality (God). The

³⁶Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futuhat Al-Makkīyah*, vol. I (Cairo: Būlāq Press, 1967), 155.

³⁷Arabi, *Al-Futuhat Al-Makkīyah*.

³⁸William Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007), 197.

³⁹William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: University of New York Press, 2008), 14.

⁴⁰Translated as 'the unity of being,' this principle affirms that despite reality's diverse forms, all existence essentially stems from a single Absolute Reality. This study utilizes it as the foundational cosmology to reject the separation between humanity and nature.

diversity of the cosmos is not a sign of separation from God; it is a layered manifestation of His Names and Attributes.

There is Being at the beginning, dependent on nothing else to exist; indeed, everything that exists depends upon Him—Exalted is He—for its existence. The entire world exists through Him, and He Himself stands as the intermediary between that existence and itself.

There is no beginning to His Being and no end to its continuance. His Being is absolute, unlimited, and self-subsisting. His Essence is indivisible, not measurable by place, not encompassed by space, and not subject to boundaries. He has no body, and no direction or meeting point pertains to Him. He is pure from all directions and points.

He discloses Himself to hearts and to sight, if He so wills.⁴¹

This ontological framework views all of reality—from angels to the smallest particle—as *tajallī*, an ongoing divine self-disclosure, thus understanding the exploitation of nature for the sake of capital accumulation as a form of desacralization of the cosmos. Historically, however, Ibn ‘Arabī formulated *wahdat al-wujūd* within a medieval theological context focused on spiritual realization and gnosis, without an ecological agenda. Seyyed Hossein Nasr later reconstructed this metaphysics through the lens of perennialism, making it an eco-theological instrument for critiquing Western modernity. This synthesis effectively bridges classical Sufism and contemporary environmental ethics, but it is Nasr's uniquely modern conceptual elaboration, not a direct representation of Ibn ‘Arabī's historical intentions.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, heir to the Ibn ‘Arabi tradition, regards *wahdat al-wujūd* as the foundation of a sacred cosmology. Through this principle, he rejects any sharp dualism between God and the world, between humanity and nature. Nature is no longer seen as a dead object severed from its transcendent source, but as a living theophany that discloses the Divine Reality at every stratum of existence.⁴² With this awareness, in a Sufi-based ecotheology, Nasr offers a way out of the modern ecological crisis by restoring a worldview that affirms the sanctity of the cosmos as a manifestation of God.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Vision of a Sufi Ecotheology: Re-Sacralizing Nature from Metaphysics to Ecological Ethics

Ecotheology generally responds to the environmental crisis by reinterpreting religious traditions to be more environmentally friendly, emphasizing ethical values such as interconnectedness, responsibility, and ecological justice. While this approach successfully seeks to shift the anthropocentric paradigm toward a cosmo-centric one by placing nature as primary and possessing intrinsic value,⁴³ such tendencies often still subtly separate God from nature. Nature is regarded as important primarily because of its cosmic and ecological utility, while its profoundly sacred and metaphysical dimensions are frequently set aside.⁴⁴ In contrast to this, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ideas form an ecotheology that is fundamentally restorative, rooted in a Sufi cosmology that sees the cosmos as a direct divine theophany. In this view, the solution to the ecological crisis is not merely technical or regulatory but demands the recovery of sacred consciousness. This ecotheology is not

⁴¹Arabi, *Al-Futuhat Al-Makkiyah*.

⁴²Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*.

⁴³Carolyn M. King, “Ecotheology: A Marriage between Secular Ecological Science and Rational, Compassionate Faith,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 6, no. 1 (March 2021): 40–69, <https://doi.org/10.1558/ecotheology.v6i1.40>.

⁴⁴Mohammad Fazlhashemi, “Islamic Ecotheology,” in *Intersections of Religion, Education, and a Sustainable World* (Cham: Springer, 2025), 25–40, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-81809-7_3.

only as an abstract theory but as a profound ethical guide that directs humans to live civilly with nature, to preserve harmony, and categorically reject exploitation. By understanding, the ecological crisis as an outward manifestation of an inner spiritual crisis, Nasr's orientation leads to three important implications: the need for the re-sacralization of nature, the reinterpretation human role in the cosmos; and the elevation of sacred science as an alternative epistemology.

5.1.1. Re-Sacralization of Nature

The modern paradigm, born in the Renaissance and maturing through the Enlightenment, has profoundly reshaped how humans view nature—reducing the cosmos to neutral matter subject to mechanistic laws and detached from any spiritual meaning. This outlook gives rise to an extreme anthropocentrism, in which humans place themselves as the absolute proprietors of a quantitative universe meant to be calculated, controlled, and traded.⁴⁵

From Nasr's perspective, this worldview constitutes a "disenchantment of nature" with devastating implications, leading humans to forget their dual ontological station as *khalīfah* and '*abd*.'⁴⁶ When nature is no longer regarded as an *āyah* of God, a sign of the Divine, but merely as an economic resource,⁴⁷ what is urgently required is the re-sacralization of nature: restoring the awareness that the cosmos is a divine theophany, *tajallī al-asmā' wa al-ṣifāt*,⁴⁸ a living manifestation of God's Names and Attributes.⁴⁹ The Qur'ān itself uses the term *āyah* not only for the verses of the Book but also for natural phenomena, signaling that every element of creation—from the macrocosmic heavens to the microcosmic human soul—is a sign of God's majesty. As the Sufi 'Azīz al-Nasafi explains, each part of nature, can be likened to a *sūrah*, an *āyah*, and a letter in the Qur'ān; thus, studying nature is akin to interpreting divine revelation on a macrocosmic scale.⁵⁰ With this awareness, every natural phenomenon functions as a mirror of the Divine, elevating the human-cosmos relationship from a purely economic-instrumental dynamic to a deeply spiritual communion.

5.1.2. The Human Role in the Cosmos

Second, there emerges an ecological ethic rooted in a reinterpreted understanding of the human role. In the Qur'ān (e.g., al-Baqara 02:30), the human being bears two primary ontological identities: *khalīfah* and '*abd*.' As *khalīfah*, humans are entrusted to safeguard the earth according to the principles of justice and balance, acting as ethically responsible guardians rather than absolute owners.⁵¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes that while humans are granted authority over nature, but that authority is legitimate only because they serve as God's vicegerents, not as rebels against the

⁴⁵Mazhar Ali Jarwar, Stefano Dumontet, and Vincenzo Pasquale, "The Natural World in Western Thought," *Challenges* 15, no. 1 (March 2024): 17, <https://doi.org/10.3390/CHALLE15010017>.

⁴⁶Translated as God's 'servant,' this term refers to the human condition of being wholly submitted to the Divine will. It acts as the necessary ontological foundation, as one must first recognize their subordinate station as a servant before undertaking the office of *khalīfah* (vicegerent).

⁴⁷Md. Abu Sayem, "A Scientific World-View of Nature and Environmental Problem with a Special Concentration on Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Understanding of Environmental Sustainability," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 15, no. 2 (2018): [halaman yang dikutip], <https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v15i2.753>.

⁴⁸Translated as 'a living manifestation of God's Names and Attributes'. This concept restores the awareness that the cosmos acts as an ongoing self-disclosure of the Divine, which is essential for the re-sacralization of nature.

⁴⁹Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*.

⁵⁰Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Harvard, vol. 3 (Harvard Press, 1978), 2.

⁵¹Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*.

heavens. This station has meaning only when inextricably united with the identity of *'abd*, the servant wholly submitted to the Divine will.⁵² Sachiko Murata further explains that one must first be a servant, recognizing one's subordinate station, before undertaking the office of *khalīfah*. A true representative of God must act as a caretaker who enacts Divine attributes—spreading mercy, compassion, and loving-kindness—rather than exploiting nature and vulnerable populations.⁵³

Humanity's dual vocation finds its deepest meaning within a Sufi framework. In a hadith *qudsī* it is stated that God created the cosmos because He wished to be known: "I am a hidden treasure; I desired to be known, so I created creation that I might be known."⁵⁴ As servant, the human reflects submission and limitation; as God's representative, the human mirrors Divine qualities such as *rahmah* (mercy), *hikmah* (wisdom), and *'adl* (justice). These intertwined aspects make the human being a locus of God's *tajallī*—a mirror where God beholds Himself through creation. Thus, human ecological responsibility transcends social ethics to become a metaphysical project: to making the earth a realm for the knowledge and witnessing of the Divine in its most perfected form.

5.1.3. Sacred Science as an Alternative

Third, there arises sacred science as an epistemic alternative that unites rational knowledge with metaphysical awareness. Since the eighteenth century, the Western notion of progress has been heavily defined by unlimited material evolution and technological development, ignoring traditional perspectives that view time as cyclical or emphasize spiritual realization over linear material accumulation.⁵⁵

The traditionalist critique highlights how this purely material conception of progress has produced catastrophic ecological crises and social damage by neglecting the metaphysical dimensions of the human existence.⁵⁶ In response, traditionalists call for the restoration of *scientia sacra* (sacred science)—the highest science concerning Divine Principles and their manifestations. Accessible to both the intellect and the supra-natural faculties whose source is God, sacred science is a unitative knowledge that transcends the subject-object split.

Unlike modern science, which has severed itself from the metaphysical dimension, sacred science remains rooted in metaphysical principles and never departs from the sacred domain.⁵⁷ Consequently, exploring the cosmos does not end with functional analysis; it becomes a direct path to spiritual realization and the deepening of ecological consciousness, redefining true progress as a harmony between spiritual awareness and environmental sustainability.

5.2. Strengths and Challenges of Nasr's Sufi Ecotheology

Although Seyyed Hossein Nasr's concept of Sufi eco-theology offers an ideal framework for addressing the environmental crisis by restoring a sacred consciousness toward the cosmos, it has not escaped criticism. First, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's approach is often criticized for being spiritually elitist: the mystical awareness he offers is relatively accessible to intellectuals and practitioners of

⁵²Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*.

⁵³Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999), 84.

⁵⁴A *Hadith Qudsī* is a saying of God transmitted by the Prophet Muhammad outside of the Qur'ān. The meaning originates from God, while the wording is from the Prophet, often relating to deep spiritual aspects and the master-servant relationship.

⁵⁵Asfa Widiyanto, "Traditional Science and Scientia Sacra: Origin and Dimensions of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Concept of Science," *Intellectual Discourse* 25, no. 1 (June 2017): 247–72, <https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v25i1.1000>.

⁵⁶Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (UK: Taylor and Francis Ltd., 2005), 209.

⁵⁷Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*.

Sufism, but is seen as lacking practical, operational guidance for the wider public facing the immediate socio-economic impacts of the climate crisis.⁵⁸

Second, this framework is often criticized for overemphasizing the ecological crisis as a spiritual disease, thereby paying less attention to political-structural factors such as global capitalism, corporate extraction, and the legacy of colonialism that have significantly marginalized the Global South and indigenous communities.⁵⁹

Third, Nasr's traditionalism is considered prone to romanticizing the past, and thus provides less of a practical roadmap for confronting modern ecological challenges that demand regulatory interventions, technological solutions, and social transformation. Accordingly, while his ideas contribute philosophically to a paradigm reorientation, in terms of practicality and application the concept requires further development in order to make a concrete contribution in today's global context.⁶⁰

Despite these highly relevant criticisms regarding its apolitical and elitist tendencies, a full grasp of Nasr's ideas requires recognizing that his project is primarily ontological rather than technocratic. Nasr's thought is not meant to serve as a technical policy manual; rather, it provides the essential philosophical groundwork that must precede any structural effort.⁶¹

From this perspective, it appears that Seyyed Hossein Nasr views the relationship between humans and the cosmos not merely as a technical ecological issue, but as an existential relationship rooted in metaphysical reality.⁶² Therefore, environmental policies and green technology will be temporary unless they are based on a radical paradigm shift in how humans view nature.

5.3. Theoretical Contribution

This article offers an important theoretical contribution to eco-theological studies by proposing a cosmotheocentric framework of ecological civilization rooted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Sufism. Unlike much Western eco-theology, which often emphasizes normative ethics or social critique, this model centers the ecological crisis on problems of spirituality and cosmology, thereby underscoring the need for the re-sacralization of nature as an epistemological and ethical foundation. This concept broadens the horizon of global eco-theology by positioning sacred awareness as the prerequisite for the emergence of a sustainable environmental ethic.

⁵⁸Osman Bakar, "Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The Islamic Heritage," *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (2022): 114, <https://doi.org/doi:10.2979/jems.3.2.09>.

⁵⁹Asfa Widiyanto, Andri Soemitra, and Hamka Siregar, "The Reception of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Ideas within the Indonesian Intellectual Landscape," *Studia Islamika* 23, no. 2 (2016): 193–236, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v23i2.3002>.

⁶⁰Salamuddin Salamuddin, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Concept of The Relationship Between Man, Nature, and God," *KARSA Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 25, no. 1 (June 2017): 33–56, <https://doi.org/10.19105/KARSA.V25I1.1203>.

⁶¹Abu Sayem, "A Survey Study of Recent Works on Nasr's Eco-Religious Thought and Approach," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 18, no. 1 (2021): 232–50, <https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v18i1.858>.

⁶²Muhammad Syihabuddin, and Kirwan, "Reconception of Environmental Ethics in Islam: A Review of the Philosophy and Applications of Husein Nasr's Thought," *Refleksi Jurnal Filsafat Dan Pemikiran Islam* 23, no. 2 (March 2023): 238–60, <https://doi.org/10.14421/REF.V23I2.5228>.

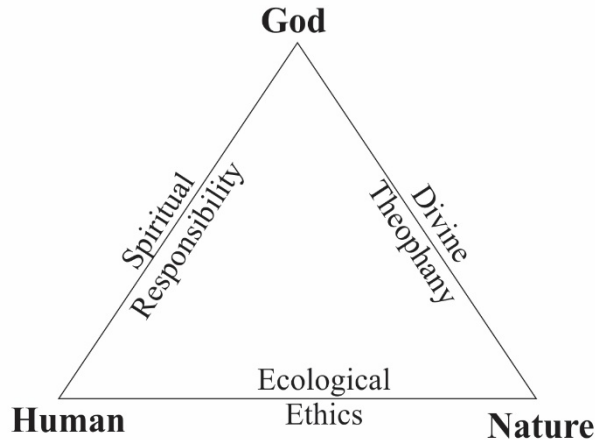


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Cosmotheocentric Ecological Civilization

A tangible proof of this progressive momentum in Islamic eco-civilization is the recent formulation of *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth*. Drafted by prominent Muslim scholars and endorsed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Al-Mizan* successfully operationalizes the cosmotheocentric and ethical ideals discussed in this study into a global Islamic environmental charter, bridging classical metaphysics with contemporary global climate action.⁶³

5.4. Conclusion

The global ecological crisis in the Anthropocene makes clear that environmental degradation cannot be grasped merely as a technical problem or a managerial failure; it is the destructive materialization of a modern, secular-capitalist cosmology that desacralizes nature. Through a Sufi eco-theology rooted in Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics, Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a cosmotheocentric framework that restores human awareness of the cosmos's sacredness. In this view, nature is understood as a theophany of God, while the human being assumes a dual role as *khalifah* and *'abd*, guarding the earth not simply as a resource but as a sacred cosmic book.

More than a historical reconstruction or a mere rereading of traditional thought, this study's key theoretical contribution is positioning Nasr's cosmotheocentrism as a radical epistemological alternative to normative, purely legalistic environmental ethics. However, engaging with critical perspectives, this study also acknowledges that Nasr's perennial framework can appear spiritually elitist and structurally disconnected from the harsh realities of global ecological injustices shaped by capitalism and colonial legacies. Therefore, Nasr's philosophy is best utilized not as a standalone technical policy manual, but rather as the essential ontological prerequisite for any genuine socio-political transformation.

Genuine ecological solutions cannot stop at green technology, international regulations, or sustainable economic policy if they remain trapped within an anthropocentric logic. The crisis demands a structural and spiritual paradigm shift—one that transitions from an exclusive legal focus on 'Human Rights' toward a profound recognition of the 'Rights of Nature'. Nasr's Sufi eco-theology

⁶³Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) and UNEP, *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth* (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2024), 2, 12–15.

can serve as a bridge toward this universal ecospirituality, in which humans relearn their place within the cosmic web as humble and reverent guardians.

Finally, as evidenced by recent global milestones like *Al-Mizān: A Covenant for the Earth*, this cosmotheocentric awareness is not a romanticized relic of the past, but an active blueprint for a new ecological civilization. Further research must shift from theoretical exploration to empirical and structural application, investigating how sacred science and Sufi ecotheology can be practically integrated into decolonial environmental policies, grassroots climate justice movements, and broader public education.

Author's Contribution

Agung Nugroho Reformis Santono: conceptualization, supervision, manuscript revision. **muhammad zainuddin:** methodology, validation. **Muhammad Lytto Syahrums Arminsa:** literature review, data analysis. **Muhammad Ikhyia Ulumuddin:** data collection, interpretation. **Tholhah:** field investigation, documentation. **Nasirin:** data collection, editing. **Aidul Fitriawan:** draft preparation, reference management. **Dannu Akbar:** project administration, writing – review & editing. **Nurul Jannah:** project administration, writing – review & editing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

Funding Details

This research was funded by LPDP - Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education Agency.

Generative AI Disclosure Statement

The authors did not use any type of generative artificial intelligence software for this research.

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