

Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, **Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man**, London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1991, 152 pp.

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A biologist would interpret our world as balanced interactions and feedbacks among the living components and environment in time and space. This constitution has deteriorated up to a level identified as ecological crisis. Most of the scientists accuse human enterprise itself as its major cause, producing multiple echoes for the root causes and solutions. The book, “*Man and Nature: the Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*”, is an echo from the traditionalist camp, which links the root cause of this ecological blight with *modern man’s spiritual destitution*, major catalyst being the *modern science* turned into *a scientism*, which taken as the sole legitimate body of knowledge, is the major caveat in accepting inner deprivation of soul, as the main cause of this imbalance.

Book criticises science historians in making modern science the only legitimate and possible science of nature, and considering all other cosmological sciences as its early anticipations or deviations, hailing for instance Pre-Socratic accomplishments in philosophy as forerunners of modern science, totally ignoring their metaphysical implications. Babylonian mathematics is forcefully superimposed on modern mathematics. The elements of Islamic science, which gave rise to the modern science, are hailed, leaving all of its gnostic components aside.

In context of philosophy, book sees all pre-Socratic philosophers keen in contemplating the Real: both in spiritual and corporeal domains. The crisis starts with decay of the Greek Olympian religion, trickling out the blessedness of nature from cosmology and physics. Birth of Aristotle marks the demise of philosophy that supports man in making to the real, and rationalism prevails in the Roman Empire, also set up as a permanent backdrop of Western civilisation, from then onwards.

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In the 17th century, Descartes associates scepticism with philosophy, and attempts to penetrate into the certainty in knowledge by mathematics, building up foundations for mathematical physics and many other sciences. Just occupying the mathematico-physical space, physics emerges as a modern science. With exception of few dim voices from the Cambridge Platonists, only physical reality of the cosmos survives this mathematicism.

Eighteenth century empiricists draw the logical conclusion of Descartes' philosophy, demonstrating the inability of human intelligence to know the true reality of things. Logical empiricism stressed on the inability of science to discover some aspects of reality. Operationalism contemplates all scientific significance in operations rather than the real. Many scientists realise that science is totally deprived of an explicit philosophy.

Contemplative philosophy of cosmos survives only in Art and literature in the 19th century. Theory of relativity puts everything in relative physical motion in 20th century. The theory of evolution takes the form of a zeitgeist in biological sciences, contemplating evolution or history of biological entities, rather than their archetypal essence.

Book highlights a turning point in the history of Christianity when it comes in dialogue with Alexandria, where it opposes Alexandrian gnosis of seeing in man a natural aptitude to know the Real and takes refuge in will and love. From 11th to 13th centuries, Christianity further makes a selective absorption of Latin translated Arabic works, ending up in the build-up of an Aristotelianised theology, secularising the cosmos, and consequently making room for the absorption of Copernican revolution in 14th century. Renaissance brings more losses, with an endorsement of plunder from the world of nature. Man's position as the divine image in the cosmos is lost. Book identifies one single factor that lacks throughout this complex situation – integration of all the scientific gains with the metaphysical knowledge that contemplates the Absolute in the objects of nature.

Book puts forward the curing cocktail for ecological deterioration: integration of modern science with a metaphysics rooted in a revealed tradition. In support of the thesis that West should seek help from the

Orient, book provides evidences for nature's contemplative place in the Oriental traditions in general and in Islam specifically. Chinese Taoism and Neo-Confucianism revolves around the tenet that "*All things under Heaven are products of Being, but Being itself is the product of Not-Being*". One finds a reverential attitude for nature in Shintoism and Hinduism contemplating the symbolism of nature to make to the Real.

In Islam, the entire operation of knowing revolves around the axis of Unity [*Tawheed*]. Quran ensures an inseparable association between man and nature. Both Quran and the Universe are taken as sources of revelation. Instead of celebrating man's birth in this temporal world, Islam starts from pre-fall man in Eden as the Primordial Man. Post-fall state brings him into the centre of this cosmos. On perfect realisation of his centrality here, he in fact surpasses his pre-fall state, and makes to the state of Universal Man [*al-insan al-kamil*], realising the total knowledge of all entities in the cosmos, consequently fulfilling the actual purpose of

Being a student of biology, I would agree that today a biologist often evades the need of any sound philosophy of life in the entire logic of contemporary biology. Strongly supporting the cure cocktail presented in this book, the viable solution to the entire ecological crises is integration of all intellectual gains in modern sciences with a metaphysics rooted in revelation.