

Ecosophism and the Crisis of Modern Western Spirituality: A Philosophical Study of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Thought

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the concept of eco-sophistication developed by Sayyed Hossein Nasr and analyze its relevance to the crisis of modern Western spirituality. This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with the method of literature study and philosophical analysis of Nasr's main works and relevant supporting literature. The results of the study show that Nasr's eco-sufism is rooted in Sufism and Islamic metaphysics, which views nature as a sacred reality and the manifestation of Divine verses (*āyāt kauniyyah*). In this perspective, environmental damage is understood not simply as a technical or economic problem, but as a consequence of the loss of spiritual consciousness of modern humans. Ecosufism offers an alternative paradigm through the integration of science, ethics, and spirituality within the framework of sacred science, so that man's relationship with nature is built on the basis of moral responsibility and transcendental awareness. The relevance of Nasr's ecosufism to the crisis of modern Western spirituality lies in its ability to critique the philosophical foundations of modernity while offering a path to reconstruct the harmonious relationship between man, nature, and God. Thus, ecosufism not only contributes to the discourse of spiritual ecology, but also becomes an important conceptual offering in the cross-civilizational dialogue to respond to the multidimensional crisis of the modern world.

Keywords: Ecosufism, Sayyed Hossein Nasr, Spirituality, Western Modernity, Ecological Crisis.

1. Introduction

The ecological crisis that is occurring globally today shows that the problem of environmental damage cannot be understood solely as a technical, economic, or policy development problem. Various studies show that the crisis is closely related to the crisis of modern human spirituality, especially in Western civilization that developed under the dominance of rationalism, secularization, and materialism. The modern worldview has separated humans from the transcendental dimension and eliminated the sacredness of nature, so that nature is understood only as an object of exploitation for the benefit of humans.¹

Sayyed Hossein Nasr, a contemporary Islamic philosopher and thinker, proposed a fundamental critique of Western modernity by emphasizing the loss of the metaphysical dimension in modern science. According to Nasr, the ecological crisis is

¹ Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point of Civilization: Science, Society, and the Rise of New Cultures*, ed. M. Thoyibi (Yogyakarta: Bentang Budaya, 2001), 27–32.

essentially a manifestation of the spiritual crisis of modern man who no longer views nature as a sacred reality.² In this perspective, environmental destruction is a direct consequence of a worldview that denies God and separates man from the harmonious cosmic order.

Alternatively, Nasr offers the concept of ecosufism, which is an ecological approach rooted in Sufism and Islamic metaphysics. Ecosufism views nature as God's verses (*Ayat al-Kauniyah*), which have symbolic and spiritual meaning. Therefore, man's relationship with nature must be based on spiritual awareness, ethics, and moral responsibility.³ This idea has become relevant in responding to the crisis of modern Western spirituality marked by the emptiness of the meaning of life, the alienation of man from nature, and the crisis of values in modern civilization.⁴ Thus, the study of Sayyed Hossein Nasr's eco-sufism is important to see his contribution as a conceptual offer in rebuilding the harmonious relationship between man, nature, and God in the midst of the multidimensional crisis of the modern world.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Ecosufism

Talking about ecosufism, there are two words combined, namely "eco" and "sufism". Etymologically, the word "ecology" in English comes from the Greek, namely "oikos," which means dwelling, and "logos," which means science. Thus, terminologically, ecology refers to the science that studies the mutual relationship between living things and their environment. This term was first introduced by Haeckel in 1866, a prominent biologist.

Nasr uses the concept of ecology as the basis of ethics towards the environment. In this view, humans are required to maintain the sanctity of nature and be wise towards the environment by maintaining the natural order and not destroying it.⁵ This is in line with what Nasr said:

*"Ecology deals with environmental ethics and in fact has a religious impact and, in some cases, a direct religious dimension. However, it is impossible to discuss such topics in the current context, since our goal is to study religion itself in relation to the natural order. Therefore, we must limit ourselves to those who speak as religious thinkers or theologians. A new ethics for everything, including subatomic particles, which also has the potential to enrich experience, and it speaks of the pyramid of life at the top of which humans are located."*⁶

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, ed. Ali Noer Zaman (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), 5–12.

³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and Natural Order*, ed. Rahmani Astuti (Bandung: Mizan, 2003), 85–90.

⁴ Komaruddin Hidayat, *The Psychology of Death: Turning Fear into Optimism* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2006), 41–45.

⁵ Lorens Bagus, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2005). p. 182.

⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and The Order of Nature*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). h. 192-194.

Meanwhile, Sufism etymologically, in Indonesian, comes from the root word "sufi" which means "expert in the science of Sufism; expert of the science of Suluk".⁷ Then, given the suffix "ism," which in Indonesian, the suffix -ism contains the meaning of 'teachings, understanding, flow'. In the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI), the meaning of the word Sufism is a common name for various Sufi schools in Islam. According to another explanation, we can understand that it describes a person who always protects himself from sinning and describes a state of the soul that is always inclined towards the truth.⁸ Nasr uses this concept as a way of viewing and an attitude of life in treating nature and the environment more broadly and contextually. This gives rise to a combination of two concepts, namely ecology and Sufism.

Ecosufism, or what is called green Sufism, is a new concept in the Sufi world that is constructed through the union of two consciousnesses at once, namely awareness of environmental issues and awareness in terms of divinity. In Sufism, it is the science in terms of knowing how to purify the soul, purify morals, build *zahir* and mind, and obtain what is called happiness. Just as it is used to instill spiritual awareness that loving the universe is a part of loving God as well, loving something that has belonged to God also means the same as loving God himself.⁹ So it can be said that, in Nasr's view, the affirmation of the meaning of eco-sufism is mentioned by the term ecology, but the meaning of the word ecology is the same as the meaning of eco-sufism, which is a religion of greening or spiritual ecology. So what Nasr means by ecology is an ethics regarding environmental problems and how to understand the order of nature.

2.2 The Dominance of Rationality, Materialism and Scientism

The dominance of rationality, materialism, and scientism is the main characteristics of modern Western civilization that contribute greatly to the crisis of spirituality. Modern rationality, which is rooted in the thought of René Descartes and has flourished since the Enlightenment, places reason as the only legitimate source of truth. As a result, non-rational forms of knowledge such as intuition, revelation, and spiritual experience are considered unscientific and set aside. This kind of rationality gives birth to a mechanistic view of reality, in which nature and humans are understood like machines that can be analyzed, controlled, and manipulated mathematically.¹⁰

Along with the dominance of rationality, materialism has become a paradigm that has strengthened in modern life. Materialism views reality as limited to physical and material aspects alone, and rejects the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions. In this view, the purpose of human life is reduced to the achievement of material well-being, economic progress, and sensory satisfaction. As a result, spiritual values such as the meaning of life, purity, and transcendent relationship with God are increasingly

⁷ KBBI online. <https://kbbi.web.id/sufi>, retrieved November 25, 2025

⁸ Abudin Nata, *The Morals of Sufism* (Jakarta: Raja Garfindo Persada, 1996). p. 279

⁹ Nur Laila, "Ekosufism of the Zikir Council of the Kingdom of Habib Muhammad Dardanylla Shahab Pekalongan", *Religion*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2018. p. 68.

¹⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, terj. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), hlm. 181–183.

marginalized. Modern humans experience an inner emptiness due to the loss of the spiritual orientation that was previously the center of life.¹¹

Scientism exacerbates this condition by claiming that the empirical method of science is the only legitimate way to acquire knowledge. Everything that cannot be empirically verified is considered meaningless or a mere illusion. This view not only limits the horizons of human knowledge but also denies metaphysical reality and spiritual truth. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, science has made science a "new religion" that has lost its sacred dimension, thus separating man from traditional wisdom that comes from revelation and spiritual intellect.¹²

The combination of reductive rationality, hedonistic materialism, and exclusive scientism gave birth to a spiritual crisis in modern Western civilization. This crisis is manifested in man's increasing alienation from himself, from nature, and from God. Although the modern West has made tremendous progress in science and technology, it has not been matched by spiritual depth and moral wisdom. As a result, modern man lives in existential anxiety and loses the true meaning of life.

2.3 Previous Research

Studies on the crisis of spirituality, ecology, and thought of Sayyed Hossein Nasr have been conducted by a number of researchers with diverse approaches and focuses. These studies are an important foothold in understanding the position and contribution of Nasr's eco-Sufism to the problems of modern civilization.

Research conducted by Komaruddin Hidayat highlights the crisis of the meaning of life in modern society as a result of secularization and the dominance of instrumental rationality. In his work, Hidayat emphasizes that religion in the modern era has been marginalized into the private space, thus losing its transformational function in social and ecological life. However, this research has not specifically linked the spiritual crisis to ecological issues and Sayyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts in depth.¹³

Another study was conducted by Haedar Nashir that discussed the crisis of modern civilization from the perspective of religion and humanity. He showed that modernity has given birth to human alienation from transcendental spiritual and ethical values. This study emphasizes the importance of religious reintegration in modern life, but has not reviewed the cosmological and spiritual ecological dimensions as developed in Nasr's ecosufism.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Ahmad Zainul Hamdi's research discusses Sayyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts regarding his criticism of modern science and the secularization of knowledge. The results of his research show that Nasr offers the concept of sacred knowledge as an alternative to modern reductionistic science. However, the focus of this research is

¹¹ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), hlm. 378–380.

¹² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), hlm. 3–6.

¹³ Komaruddin Hidayat, *Religion Has a Thousand Lives* (Jakarta: Noura Books, 2012), 45–60.

¹⁴ Haedar Nashir, *The Crisis of Modern Civilization and the Future of Humanity* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2015), 30–42.

more on Islamic epistemology and has not explicitly placed eco-sufism as a response to the spiritual crisis of the modern West.¹⁵

More specific research on spiritual ecology was conducted by Mulyadhi Kartanegara, who emphasized the importance of metaphysics and Sufism in building environmental ethics. He showed that the Islamic tradition has a strong spiritual basis in maintaining cosmic balance. However, this study is normative-philosophical and has not directly linked it to the criticism of modern Western civilization as formulated by Nasr.¹⁶

Based on the analysis of the previous research, it can be concluded that although there have been many studies that have discussed the spiritual crisis, Western modernity, and the thought of Sayyed Hossein Nasr, there is still a space for study that has not been optimally filled. This research seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the relevance of Sayyed Hossein Nasr's eco-sufism as a response to the crisis of modern Western spirituality, especially in the context of the secularization of life and the desacralization of nature.

3 Method

3.1 Type and scope of research

This research is qualitative research with a library research approach. Qualitative research is used because the object of study is in the form of philosophical ideas and thoughts that are analyzed in depth, not through numerical measurements. The literature approach was chosen because the main source of research comes from the works of Sayyed Hossein Nasr and relevant scientific research. Literature research emphasizes the processing of textual data through critical and analytical reading of books, journals, articles, and other scientific works related to the research topic.

3.2 Data Source

The data sources of this study consist of primary sources and secondary sources.

1. The primary source in this study is the works of Sayyed Hossein Nasr related to ecology, spirituality, and the critique of modernity, especially *The Encounter of Man and Nature*, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, and *Religion and the Order of Nature*.

2. Secondary sources, including books, journals, scientific articles, and academic works that discuss Nasr's thought, ecosufism, and the crisis of modern Western spirituality. These sources serve to strengthen the analysis of Nasr's thought and the position of the research in the context of the development of academic studies.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this study is carried out through documentation studies, which is the process of collecting data from written sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, and other academic works that are relevant to the focus of

¹⁵ Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, "Sayyed Hossein Nasr's Critique of Modern Science," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2011): 150–162.

¹⁶ Mulyadhi Kartanegara, *Religious Reason: Understanding the Essence of God, Nature, and Man* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2007), 95–110.

the research. The documentation study was chosen because this research uses a literature approach that makes text the main object. Data collection was carried out by tracing Sayyed Hossein Nasr's primary works related to ecosufism, spirituality, and criticism of modernity, as well as secondary sources consisting of previous research, journal articles, and academic books that discuss Nasr's thought and modern Western spirituality problems. Data collection was carried out through physical libraries, e-libraries, Google Scholar, and academic databases to ensure the completeness and validity of the sources.

4 Results

4.1 The Relevance of Ecosufism to the Spiritual Crisis of the Modern West

The results of the study show that Sayyed Hossein Nasr's concept of eco-sufism has significant relevance in responding to the spiritual crisis that has hit modern Western civilization. The spiritual crisis is characterized by the loss of transcendental orientation, the dominance of instrumental rationality, and the alienation of humans from nature and the meaning of life. In Nasr's view, this condition is a direct result of Western modernity that removes the metaphysical dimension and the sanctity of reality.¹⁷

First, ecosophism reaffirms the principle of the sacredness of nature that has been ignored by the modern worldview. Nasr views nature as a manifestation of God's verses (*āyāt kauniyyah*) that have symbolic and spiritual meanings, not just a material reality that is freely exploited. The relevance of this idea is seen in efforts to overcome the Western spiritual crisis rooted in the disconnection of man with God and the cosmos. By restoring the sacred meaning of nature, ecosufism encourages the formation of a deeper spiritual awareness in man's relationship with the environment.

Second, Nasr's ecosufism provides a sharp critique of modern science that is reductionistic and secular. Nasr proposes the concept of sacred science, which is a science that is integrated with metaphysics and spiritual wisdom.¹⁸ This concept is relevant in response to the crisis of meaning in Western civilization, where science is developing rapidly but losing its ethical and spiritual dimensions, thus being unable to provide a complete life orientation for modern humans.

Third, Nasr's eco-sophistication offers a reconstruction of the understanding of man's position in the cosmic order. Man is not understood as an absolute ruler over nature, but rather as a part of the cosmos that has moral and spiritual responsibilities. This perspective is a direct criticism of Western anthropocentrism, which is one of the roots of spiritual and ecological crises. Thus, ecosufism serves as an alternative paradigm that integrates spirituality, ethics, and ecology.

¹⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, ed. Ali Noer Zaman (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), 1–8.

¹⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and Holiness*, ed. Suharsono (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Siswa, 1997), 145–152.

4.2 The Secularization of Modern Western Life

The results of the study show that the secularization of life is the most fundamental root of the spiritual crisis that has hit modern Western civilization. Secularization is not only interpreted as an institutional separation between religion and the state, but also as a historical, cultural, and epistemological process that systematically removes religion and transcendental values from the center of human life. In the paradigm of Western modernity, religion is reduced to private and subjective affairs, while public life encompasses science, economics, politics, and human relations with nature is carried out based on instrumental rationality and material interests.¹⁹ As a result, religion loses its role as the source of meaning, ethical orientation, and cosmological foundation of human life.

The secularization of life also has an impact on the way modern humans understand reality. Nature, which was previously seen as God's creation full of symbolic and spiritual meaning, has been reduced to a neutral and value-free material reality. In Sayyed Hossein Nasr's view, this process of natural desacralization is a direct consequence of secularization, which breaks the metaphysical relationship between man and the cosmos.²⁰ Nature is no longer treated as God's verses (*āyāt kauniyyah*), but rather as an object of exploitation subject to economic and technological logic. These findings show that the secularization of life is the main bridge between spiritual crises and ecological crises in modern Western civilization.

Furthermore, secularization also shapes the character of modern science. Science develops within a positivistic framework that removes revelation, metaphysics, and spiritual intuition from the process of seeking truth. Nasr calls this condition the loss of sacred knowledge, which is knowledge that is integrated with the awareness of transcendental reality. As a result, science loses its ethical and spiritual dimensions, so it is no longer able to provide moral guidance for modern humans. This contributes to the emergence of a void of meaning in life, existential alienation, and a crisis of spiritual identity.

The secularization of life also has implications for the construction of modern human identity. Human beings are understood primarily as rational and economic beings (*homo rationalis* and *homo economicus*), not as spiritual beings who have an ontological relationship with God and the cosmos. In this condition, material achievements and technological advances are used as the main benchmarks for the success of life. This view exacerbates the spiritual crisis, because humans lose their transcendental orientation to life and are trapped in a consumptive and competitive lifestyle.

5. Discussion

This discussion emphasizes that the crisis of modern Western spirituality cannot be separated from the paradigm of modernity that relies on the secularization of life,

¹⁹ Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, ed. Inyik Ridwan Muzir (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2012), 45–52.

²⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, ed. Ali Noer Zaman (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), 20–28.

rationalism, and materialism. The results of the study show that secularization has shifted religion from the center of the orientation of human life and limited it to the private realm alone. As a result, transcendental values are no longer the basis in science, ethics, and human relations with nature. This condition strengthens Sayyed Hossein Nasr's view that spiritual crisis is the deepest root of the multidimensional crisis faced by modern Western civilization.²¹

In Nasr's perspective, secularization not only has an impact on the decline of the role of religion socially, but also affects the way humans understand reality ontologically. Nature undergoes a process of desacralization, which is the loss of its symbolic and spiritual meaning as God's verses.²² The findings of this study are in line with this view that the spiritual crisis of the modern West is characterized by the alienation of man from the cosmos and the loss of awareness of the metaphysical attachment between man, nature, and God. Thus, the ecological crisis that occurs is not a mere technical or policy problem, but a manifestation of a secular and anthropocentric worldview crisis.

Sayyed Hossein Nasr's eco-sufism, as shown in the results of the research, offers a fundamental critique of the philosophical foundations of Western modernity while providing an alternative paradigm. Rooted in Sufism and Islamic metaphysics, eco-Sufism restores the principle of the sanctity of nature and views nature as a living reality, full of spiritual meaning. In this framework, humans are not positioned as absolute rulers over nature, but as part of a cosmic order that has moral and spiritual responsibilities. This view is a direct criticism of Western anthropocentrism, which has been the basis for the massive exploitation of nature.

Furthermore, this discussion finds that the concept of sacred knowledge put forward by Nasr has a central role in responding to the spiritual crisis of the modern West. Modern science that develops in a positivist and value-free framework has proven to be incapable of providing an orientation of meaning and ethics for human life. Nasr emphasizes the importance of the reintegration of science with metaphysics and spirituality so that knowledge is not separated from transcendental wisdom and consciousness. In this context, eco-Sufism functions as a path of spiritual recovery through the reunification of science, ethics, and cosmic consciousness.

Thus, this discussion reinforces the research findings that Sayyed Hossein Nasr's eco-Sufism is relevant not only as a philosophical critique of Western modernity, but also as an alternative paradigm that offers a direction for the reconstruction of civilization. This relevance lies in its ability to integrate religion, spirituality, and ecology in a single holistic worldview, thus being able to respond to the spiritual crisis of the modern West in a more fundamental and transformative way.

²¹ Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and Modern Human Nestapa*, ed. Anas Mahyuddin (Bandung: Pustaka, 1983), 15–22.

²² Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, ed. Ali Noer Zaman (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), 25–32.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the studies and discussions that have been conducted, it can be concluded that the crisis of modern Western spirituality is a fundamental problem rooted in the paradigm of modernity that is secular, rationalistic, and materialistic. The secularization of life has separated religion from the public sphere and distanced humans from the transcendental dimension, so that spiritual values are no longer the basis of science, ethics, and human relations with nature. This condition gives birth to the desacralization of nature, existential alienation, and the emptiness of the meaning of life that are the main characteristics of the modern Western spiritual crisis.

The concept of ecosufism developed by Sayyed Hossein Nasr offers a profound critique as well as a paradigmatic alternative to this condition. Rooted in Sufism and Islamic metaphysics, ecosufism views nature as a sacred reality and a manifestation of God's verses (*āyāt kauniyyah*), so man's relationship with nature must be built on the basis of spiritual awareness, ethics, and moral responsibility. In this perspective, ecological crisis is not understood solely as a technical or economic problem, but rather as a manifestation of a spiritual crisis and a mistaken worldview.

The relevance of Nasr's ecosufism to the crisis of modern Western spirituality lies in its ability to reintegrate science, spirituality, and cosmology within the framework of sacred knowledge. Thus, ecosufism serves not only as a critique of the philosophical foundations of Western modernity, but also as a conceptual offer to reconstruct the harmonious relationship between man, nature, and God. Therefore, Sayyed Hossein Nasr's ecosufism has an important contribution to the discourse of spiritual ecology and can be used as an ethical-spiritual foundation in an effort to respond to the multidimensional crisis of the modern world.

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