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THE IDEA OF NATURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN R.G. COLLINGWOOD AND SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

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Abstract

The work at hand explores the idea of nature from two standpoints; one hailing from the twentieth-century Western philosophy and expounded by the British Idealist R.G. Collingwood (d.1943) and the other from Perennialists among the contemporary Muslim tradition of philosophy as expounded by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b.1933). Together, they are discussed to show the transformation of the perception of the idea of nature as the world met modernity in the twentieth-century. While R.G. Collingwood considers nature as part of human construct and hence bearing an immanent feature; Nasr on the other hand, attempts to interpret it through bestowing nature with its independent agency – one that is part of transcendental realities and acts on divine principles. The comparative analysis between two standpoints provided in this paper is relevant to the debate on conceptualizing the idea of nature in the wake of modern scientific interventions and the conservation of nature. It addresses the fundamental issue of mankind's sustainable relationship with his environment – herein being referred to as nature.

Keywords: *Islam and Cosmology, Islam and metaphysics, Concept of Nature, History of ideas*

Introduction

Generally, it is thought that modern western philosophy meets criticism only from the eastern thinkers. The difference is usually measured in terms of the East and the West or Non-European and Europeans, often ignoring the self-examination which comes from each tradition itself. One such domain is the idea of nature, upon which there is present rich discourse in modern literature. It is noteworthy to mention that the concept is explored as trope which exhibits multiple dimensions. Of these, an important issue is to explore the relationship of man with nature especially in the wake of scientific interventions.

The dawn of modernity brought in its wake a problematic of man's relationship with nature. "In what ways could man engage with nature", formed a fundamental inquiry especially in the period of modernity. In the world today, humanity is grappling with the questions of morality and ethics in the so-called utilitarian pursuit of existence. Moreover, the idea of nature is problematized as to what an extent can nature be given her agency or should she be considered as an object alone?

Confining ourselves to the twentieth-century discourse on the afore-mentioned problem of the idea of nature. In this regard, two viewpoints have been chosen. One belonging to British philosophy namely, Robert George Collingwood (1889-1943) and the other belonging to the tradition of Perennialism (as expounded by French philosopher Frithjof Schuon (1907-1988)), Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933).[1]

The aim is to provide a comparison between how the idea of nature is viewed from within Western philosophy such as in the ideas of R.G. Collingwood and providing an alternative narrative on the same from the tradition of Islamic philosophy, that is, in view of Seyyed

Hossein Nasr. The review aims to invite an inspection into the role of science in modern western civilization and how has the transformation in the perception of the idea of nature has shaped modernity.

R.G. Collingwood – the Western Philosophical Perspective

R.G. Collingwood (1889-1943) is best known for his interest in the philosophy of History. He belonged to the tradition of British Idealism endorsing the views of Hegel and Vico among others. His works include debates on 'analytic philosophy' in which he explicitly criticized mechanistic materialism and rejecting positivism. His work, '*The Idea of Nature'* (1945) published posthumously provides some critical themes on the subject which is relevant for contextualization of the present study.

According to R.G. Collingwood, European thought developed in phases on the concept of Nature and determining its cosmological paradigm. [2] These phases are

a) The Greek view of Nature
b) The Renaissance view of Nature
c) The Modern view of Nature

Collingwood delineates how man's understanding of nature is reflected in his reasoning and developing his thought process. In his view, the Greeks focused on nature as an intelligent being – one that is metaphysically personified. This view shifted towards a mechanistic view of nature during Renaissance period of European history owing to science and machines. On the other hand, modern worldview of Nature is analogous to the historical development; in a sense that it cannot be understood as static. On the contrary, just in a way the theory of evolution in biological and natural sciences explain, the idea of nature in the modern world is dynamic. On the whole, the modern view of nature is holistic taking into account the major fields of cosmology, natural and even social sciences.

The Greeks

Here, we shall discuss the above-mentioned three major progressive worldviews on the idea of Nature as explained by R.G. Collingwood (in brief) with special emphasis on the consequences of the Modern worldview on the contemporary scientific and philosophical thought. It would further be analyzed with the critique done on the West by a contemporary Muslim philosopher, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in the later part of this work.

Collingwood explains that the Greek idea of nature is that of a living organism; a rational animal possessing all of the three major constituents which make living essential i.e. soul, mind and body. It is due to the presence of the soul which makes motion possible in the expanse of the universe; the mind which brings forth orderliness and the physical form or body that is observable through sensory perception. [3]

To the Greeks, the living creatures in the world have psychic abilities that conform to the way how Nature maps its way of action. Hence, an organism/animal/plant psychically participates in the life process of the world, producing a motion through a soul, orderliness through a mind and finally bringing forth a physical form to exist and tangibly observed.[4]

Collingwood describes that the word 'Nature' as used in the modern European languages, is a Latin translation of the Greek word for Nature.[5] It is, therefore, considered very close to its primary Greek understanding which refers to the 'inner-principle' that presides over all natural things in the world. In other words, it is inherent and unchangeable, the behavior or the *principium* (as expounded by the early Ionian Philosophers of Miletus).[6]

The idea of Ionian philosophers regarding Nature remained the same in Pythagorean age except for a few differences in analogy. For Pythagoreans, it is the Structure – the 'Geometry'

of Nature that brings about the change in the world of appearance. It's the structure of the nature and not the function that makes it behave in a certain order.[7] It should be noted here, however, that these enterprises of Greek mind to explain the cosmology are based on the primary understanding of nature i.e. the *principium* or the inherent.

Further along the history, we find Plato and his contemporaries proposing the secondary idea of Nature in terms of 'material' and 'immaterial' characteristics of not just the *principium* but of the 'Natural world' as a whole.

Hence, for Plato also, the underlining notion of Nature being a rational animal/organism according to the overall Greek thought is the same, except that a notion of 'God's Creative Act' is introduced in the form of an intelligible world that exists abstractly as an 'ideal'. The present world that we observe is the temporal reflection of that intelligible, immaterial organism and hence, is termed as material one. [8]

Plato's idea of unchangeable ideal existence was criticized by his disciple, Aristotle and his likes. He provided a theory of cosmology in terms of the change in Nature and explained the causal relationship between transcendental and immanent world in his idea of Prime Mover. Aristotle describes Nature as self-moving (secondary to the Prime Mover which is unmoved itself) again like an organism explaining that 'change' in Nature is 'cyclical' and not 'progressive'; while, the changes which are not understood completely as cyclical are mutilated and fall beyond human understanding, yet preserving their cyclical form. [9] This Aristotelian principle forms the second major aspect of Greek Cosmology (first being that of Nature as rational organism). [10]

It is interesting to note here that while describing the peculiar characteristics of nature, almost all of these latter Greek philosophers propounded a basal principle of Oneness[11] – that of a connection between transcendental and immanent, of material and immaterial, of existent and non-existent such that there's found an inherent paradox instead of a blatant dichotomy in their understanding of the idea of Nature. The organism of Nature in their view, although without a well-defined causal principle (except for Aristotle), was inclusive of everything that exists having a multitude of organizations within itself.

The Period of Renaissance

According to Collingwood, the Renaissance period of European history (16th and 17th Century) bears two major stages in the development of Cosmology. Both of them resemble as well as differ with the earlier Greek view.

Their resemblance lies in the notion that the early renaissance thought accepts Plato's and Pythagorean's view of Nature in providing its structural description rather than functional, thus, giving rise to Neo Platonism and Neo Pythagoreanism respectively.

Their difference (which is more crucial to this work) lies in the supposition that the nature no longer remains an organism but has turned into a machine i.e. the animism or hylozoism of Nature becomes a recessive factor in the beginning of Renaissance age (fifteenth and sixteenth century) until it is completely replaced by the mechanistic approach in the centuries that followed. Also, the teleology found in earlier Greek thought (as psychical coordination of everything that exists) is slowly being replaced by the budding 'efficient' formal cause in the Renaissance period.

In addition, as far as the immanent and transcendental faces of Nature were concerned, these too differed with the earlier Aristotelian age in the Renaissance period: Nature was considered to be (virtually) 'self-creative' i.e. the formal and efficient causes came forth from 'within' the materialistic world of nature and not from 'outside' of its being. Thus, it slowly and gradually

acquired a somewhat divine status by the end of fifteenth century (in the times of Leonardo da Vinci).

However, the real crisis of cosmology, as described by Collingwood, came with the discoveries of Copernicus (which marks the first stage of the development of Renaissance Cosmology) when he proposed that the universe was no longer geo-centric. In fact, considering the expanse of the universe, any point in it can be taken as a center (for instance sun, hence the heliocentric concept). The reason why it is considered to have brought a revolution in the cosmology was the fact that by proposing the universe having no specific center, the idea of Nature as an organism entirely collapsed, in turn, implying the collapse of the metaphysics (as it was propounded by the early Philosophers of Christianity and Greece). Nature with no particular center meant the homogeneity of the matter. And the laws that governed this matter were the same for earth as well as the outer-space meaning that the heavenly world was no longer holy or divine (as was considered in Aristotelian cosmology and Christian philosophy). This implied that if man could understand these laws that govern the earth (and the space alike), it would enlarge his scope of power and diminish his need for a belief in Divine. [12]

The second stage of Renaissance Cosmology was the idea of materialism of nature as proposed by Bruno in mid-sixteenth century.[13] Bruno tried to explain the Copernicus's view of Astronomy and regarded that the 'matter' in itself was the cause (the cause within) and the principle of whatever happens in nature. Although, never being able to propose it with full clarity, his notion was to replace the previous animistic view of nature with a Mechanistic view which ultimately suggested that Nature does not transcend itself in the need of a Cause. On the contrary, the Cause is immanently generated within itself. [14]

Bruno's attempt to eradicate this dualism could not be achieved even in the following centuries. On the contrary, dualism emerged between once unified sciences such as that of Metaphysics (between body and mind) and Cosmology (between God and nature).

The later scientists such as Kepler and Galileo emphasized on the quantitative aspect of nature while (almost) totally negating its qualitative aspect. Nonetheless, there are transcendental aspects still attributed to Nature but to Galileo for instance, they are the handiworks of man and his intellect; while Nature in its essence stands apart from both God and man in its inert-materialistic characteristic. [15]

As described earlier that one of the differences between the worldviews of Greeks and the Renaissance Scientists/Philosophers is that of teleological causation of the world of Nature. Renaissance thought is matured against the teleological aspect replacing it with an efficient cause i.e. things do not move in a certain direction to meet their final realization in a psychical manner (as was held true in the Greek Cosmology); in fact, it is mere movements deprived of any final realization as would be in the case of Machine and its efficiency.

The idea of Galileo finally gave rise to the full-fledge doctrine of Materialism in the idea of Gassendi – the Neo Epicurean scientist and propounded by Descartes (along with his other philosophical discourses) in the later part of the Renaissance period towards the age of Enlightenment (i.e. the seventeenth century). This final form while framed in the parameters of religion (namely Christian piety) is also different from it: Similar to religion because it regarded 'Matter' to be the ultimate source/cause, at times worshipped as something as holy as God; Different in a sense that it disqualified a transcendental reality of God thereby giving rise to the immanent feature of the Nature and (somewhat) ultimate control of man on this newly-discovered Machine. [16]

The next group of the scientists cum philosophers included that of Spinoza, Newton, Leibniz and Locke. Their underlining idea about Nature with regards to Man was that both come from a source that is God. However, Nature is totally materialistic and is created as such whereas the other part is immaterial and constitutes the human mind (and other intelligible forms).

It seems that Collingwood reviews the differences between Greek and Renaissance cosmology relating the Paradoxical Oneness found in the former with the Paradoxical Duality found in the latter. Here, it is worthy to note that both of the worldviews are neither the same nor altogether different from each other. The only definite difference (or so it seems) is that of emerging materialism and independent autonomy exercised by the human mind as opposed to his psychical connection with the Nature. Also, till before the eighteenth century, the scientists although interested in finding out the material principles of the existing world, still confined themselves to the belief in the existence of God, be it in the form of duality of mind and matter as proposed by Spinoza or in the form of cause and machine in the viewpoints of those before him.[17]

Philosophers of the Eighteenth century like Berkeley and Kant expounded to solve the problem of the early renaissance period concerning the duality of Nature. Whereas Berkeley seemed to have caught in his problem of explaining the mind of God as the driving principle of the material world, there on the other hand, Kant expounds his idea of human mind as the ultimate creator of things that exist i.e. the natural world. Ultimately, Kant is considered to be the classical Idealist of the Post Renaissance age. Here also, we find a new discipline growing in the epistemology. Kantian philosophy expounds the 'Phenomenological' study of Nature i.e. the only observable aspect of nature is Phenomena: how things are apparently perceived through their processes. Therefore, reality does not exist but in the mind or intellect of man (thus is the Kant's Idealism).

The last of the Renaissance philosopher and the most important to be discussed is Hegel. Hegel proposed a notion of Logical Priority against the Temporal Priority i.e. he believed that these are the intellectual concepts – the Idea which creates the existential world which evolve and change. Hence, to him Nature, although a machine, is not static. In fact, it is permeated with change and processes. However, these processes occur in the abstract world of Logic and not in the mechanistic world. This idea holds an impression of his age when Physics had 'dead matter' at its disposal to be the essence of nature. It was naturally impossible for Hegel to accept that a life form might evolve from a dead matter as in the process of change or evolution. Therefore, to bring about reconciliation between a static/mechanic form of Nature and that of a changeable one, he put forth his Realist method of 'objective Idealism' as against the 'subjective Idealism' of Berkeley and Kant.[18]

With Hegel, we come at the nexus of Post Renaissance and Modern world's viewpoints. The intellectual thought is submerged in the Realist and Idealist approach towards Nature at this moment of history. We shall now see how the Modern worldview of nature is grounded in European history and shall mark the differences it bears from its past as it evolved.

The Modern

The Modern view of Nature as described by Collingwood bears a new and radical idea which was not present as such in the earlier viewpoints of Cosmology. It was the conception of 'Life' apart from mind and matter that marked the difference in this age.

In the Post Renaissance world i.e. in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the science of Evolutionary Biology came into existence with the dawn of the theory of Evolution by

Darwin. His work, although, directly related to disciplines of life sciences, cannot really be overlooked in relationship with the philosophical understanding of Nature in this age.

As is known, the idea of Evolution proposes the idea of the 'Survival of the Fittest' in biological terms. However, seen from the indirect philosophical understanding of nature, it posits the theory of Natural selection as the work of Nature 'itself'. Hence, Nature is found to be working on its own, except that it is different from the Greeks' psychic and Renaissance's dualistic phenomena as it works without a conscious principle: the selection is incidental more than an intelligent execution as could have been the matter with the mind.

We find that in this era of history, Physics slowly detaches itself from the Biological sciences pertaining to their fundamental line of differences i.e. dead matter and life, respectively. [19]

The same idea (more or less) is attributed to the nineteenth-century philosopher Bergson. According to Collingwood, Bergson has followed the same course of his early predecessors in the Renaissance history: the method of Reduction. While, the Renaissance philosophers reduced their understanding to the Materialism and Physics, Bergson tried to do so with Biology. For him, physical or the inorganic world is a by-product of the life itself. Here, we meet a paradox again because naturally, life as is observed exists on inorganic strata making the former inseparable with the latter. Therefore, the life and hence the 'Vitalism*'* can only be fathomed if life in itself is proved to be a real force and its understanding as real intuition. Otherwise, it's akin to believing in nothingness.

In explaining the Modern Cosmology, Collingwood takes two model examples; namely Alexander and Whitehead. Alexander, the modern philosopher proclaims that evolution in the Nature does exist but it is from individual to whole; from incomplete to complete (somewhat resembling the teleological aspect of Greeks). However, his views are deeply engrossed in the Empirical way of defining things i.e. everything must be explained within the constraints of time and space. Therefore, while explaining the reality of Nature he goes on to propound that God exists as a creature of a human mind – as an answer to the question of the cause. While in reality, this God is nothing; rather, it is space-time factor which should be considered the true Creator of the natural world. In addition, in terms of the 'Natural Piety', this God is yet to exist in the perfected space-time stratum. [20]

Whitehead on the other hand, is the leading Realist of the twentieth century. According to him, the cosmic process has two main characteristics; 'extensiveness' i.e. development on the stratum of time and space, and 'aim' which explains the process in terms of teleology, the ultimate goal or end of cosmic development. The former characteristic is basically similar to that of Alexander's positing that Natural laws are arbitrary and hence are not perfectly obeyed. It is due to their arbitrariness that we find occasional disorder replaced by a new form of order altogether.

In Whitehead's view of Cosmology, he also seems to have revived the Idealism of Plato that the perfect reality and the Prime Mover of Aristotle (in the form of Higher Being) do exist. Consequently, Whitehead's view is the aggregate of all the previous philosophies, from Greek Idealism to the Modern Empiricism to the ultimate Twentieth Century Realism. He has also incorporated in his philosophy the theological beliefs without ignoring the Physicists' viewpoints. Nonetheless, there are still the loopholes which do not concern the domain of this work. [21]

Collingwood concludes his work proposing that throughout the history, Nature is considered to be dependent on another form of thought which in his view is 'History'. He proclaims that science while maintaining its idiosyncratic nature should not overlook the facts as manifested

by the History. He also criticizes Positivism of late Renaissance period as having an effect on the Modern ultra-empirical method of knowledge whereby the philosophy and the records of history are deemed unworthy. To him, they should carry equal weight as was propounded by some of the philosophers of the Twentieth Century on epistemological basis.

After this overview of the gradual evolution of the Idea of Nature in the Western History, the next part of this work shall now deal with the critique done on the Modern western idea of Nature by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a contemporary Muslim philosopher from the Orient.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr – The Islamic Perspective

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933) hails from the tradition of perennial philosophy and is a renowned scholar on Islam and science. His major contributions include his critique on the modern west, especially the civilization which stems from the vicissitudes of science and its narrow specializations. In essence, Nasr aims to bridge metaphysics and modern science under the umbrella of perennial philosophy and claims of transcendental truths. Nasr's book '*Man and nature: the spiritual crisis of modern man'* addresses the problem of science in a similar context.

Nasr's major enterprises in the academic world deal with his work on developing the Islamic philosophy in the Modern times as well as discerning the loopholes found in the contemporary West in the study of Science and Metaphysics.[22]

Nasr is also a proponent of Oriental metaphysics having perennial foundations but nonetheless preserves his idiosyncrasy in his works. He's also a staunch advocate of unifying all the present sciences under the 'higher' science of metaphysics. Thus, his critique is mostly on the 'compartmentalization of Knowledge in the Modern age' as against the unifying concept of knowledge in ancient philosophies whose remnants are relatively more conspicuously available in today's Eastern course of Metaphysics than that which is found in the contemporary West.

Having explained the Historical development of the Western idea of Nature (from Collingwood's reference point) in the first half of this dissertation, an attempt would now be made to describe the critique done by Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Western concept of Nature and the study of Natural empirical sciences as developed over the European history.

The modern man and the order of nature – Nasr's thesis

Nasr's basic problem with the Western idea of Nature deals with the new outlook towards Nature and man's interaction with it[23]. While explaining his viewpoint in the introduction to his book *Man and Nature, the Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man,* Nasr explains that the dilemma of Modern Man is his lack of understanding towards the cause of the crises that mankind is facing today. Nasr makes the lack of equilibrium in the nature with regards to interaction with the man his core postulate and builds upon it the problem of the Modern Man. According to him, man does recognize the lack of equilibrium between himself and the nature that he is constantly interacting with. However, the solution that modern mind is proposing to solve this problem is but having adverse effects on the overall situation.

In order to explain the crisis of the Modern Man, he uses the term domination of nature (by man) which has produced undesirable results for the welfare of the humankind. He describes that man in his urge to dominate over the nature, using its resources to his own benefits has deprived him of his supra-natural (spiritual) quality such that in conquering the natural world, the conqueror (man) himself has lost his own worth i.e. the existence of man and his worth is determined through his subordinate, his own creation in the form of his created philosophy:

science. In other words, man's no longer the judge of his own creation; instead, the creation itself has taken intellectual control of the creator.

Hence, as a consequence of this scientific development which is deprived of the essential moral, ethical and spiritual part, the situation has come at the verge of saturation: Nature can no longer provide benefits to man in the same capacity as it could before, to serve his thirst for 'more'. Hence, we find here the root-cause of the most crucial phenomenon that plagues our world today: the crisis of War and Peace as a consequence of man's inadequate encounter with Nature.

In his own words thus, he explains it in the following manner:

> "[…..] Rather than being like a married woman from whom a man benefits but also towards whom he is responsible, for modern man nature has become like a prostitute – to be benefited from without any sense of obligation and responsibility toward her. The difficulty is that the condition of prostituted nature is becoming such as to make any further enjoyment of it impossible…"[24]

Resultantly, man has lost peace not only in the terrestrial world, in his social and economical structures; in fact, his mind has met utter chaos as well. According to Nasr, man's domination over nature is a form of usurpation since according to the religious point of view, man was sent as a guardian or a custodian for the Nature instead of conquering and defeating it.

Metaphysics and philosophy in antiquity and middle ages

The way of domination of Nature, as seen by Nasr, has been through the gradual secularization of scientific and philosophical knowledge in both its 'goals' and its 'means'. According to him, man's *ratio* – the rational ability or intellect has been desecrated from 'the Principle' which is spiritual, higher and belongs to the supra-natural transcendental world. In other words, the disequilibrium found between man and nature is due to the destruction of the harmony between man and God.

In his book, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, Nasr's elaborates this problem more effectively while relating it to its historical development and significance in the West. He proclaims that the Western history is enriched with sacredness found in the order of Nature, both in the Greek antiquity and the European Middle Ages. According to him, it is only in the post-medieval centuries, with the dawn of the Renaissance age, that the Nature gained its secondary meaning of separate mechanistic character from that of Transcendental Reality when even the Western philosophy turned its back against religion and focused entirely on empiricism. [25]

With respect to a general comparison between Collingwood's descriptions of the phases of Western history in the idea of Nature, Nasr's understanding of this history is an oriental understanding in its primary sense. Here we shall see how he perceives these eras in history in contrast or in similarity to the former's worldview.

Beginning from the Greeks' perspective, Nasr explains that hylozoism found in the subliminal Greek cosmology inasmuch the same way as was described by Collingwood. However, Nasr does not dispatches Greek philosophy and science from its earlier Greek religions altogether. In fact, Greek religion (as was portrayed by Homer and Hesiod) left their marks even in the later stages of Greek philosophy. Not only that, Nasr maintains that Greek worldview of Cosmos and the order of nature was also related to that of Indo-Aryan as well as to the Far-Eastern Cosmology, in terms of its religious sacredness and symbolism. [26]

Furthermore, his way of explaining the Greek cosmology holds in itself the inclusion of Divine when he consistently uses the word 'God' while describing the early Greeks or that of

Aristotelian elaboration of the world of ideas and forms towards Plotinus or that of Stoics and Hermeticism thereby relating it with the religious paradigms such as that of Abrahamic religions. This way of explaining the order of nature is hardly found in the Western or Occident point of view as we find in Collingwood's historical analysis of Antiquity (perhaps pertaining to the overall atheistic atmosphere prevalent in the West).

Moving towards the medieval philosophy, Nasr elaborates the metaphysics as propounded by the Christian theologians and philosophers like St. Aquinas and Erigena.

The latter, for instance, describes Nature as a construction of four basic norms; 1) that which creates without being created itself, corresponding to God, 2) that which creates and is created, corresponding to the Intelligence and the Cause, 3) that which is created and does not create – the temporal world and, 4) that which neither creates nor is created – God in implicitness.[27]

While explaining the structure proposed by Erigena, Nasr propounds that his idea was actually to include God as the alpha and the omega of whatever that ever existed or will exist. In other words, the universe and God who were divided once in earlier Greek philosophy were united once again in this four-fold structure of Nature but without ensuing pantheistic vibes i.e. the Ultimate Cause and the Finale remains one: God, but whose transcendence and distinct character is nonetheless maintained.

However, being a Christian philosopher, Erigena takes original sin committed by the man to have affected his perception of conceiving the nature of these phenomena as one and in One God. Therefore, to him, philosophy held the place of the heart of the truth to find the order of the Nature. [28]

The cosmological principles proposed by these early Christian philosophers remained alive till before the dawn of humanism in the Renaissance age, Nasr maintains. In fact, the traces of these perspectives can still be found today in some of the occult sciences which are not yet marked with the plague of empiricism and positivism.

The Problem

According to Nasr, it is in the Renaissance age, with the dawn of Humanism and its likes; the seed of the problem of the Modern world is sown.[29] Nasr's problem with the modern idea of Nature and Cosmology lies in the schism between Greater and Lesser form of Knowledge, the detachment of Metaphysical Principle to the knowledge of Nature i.e. from Sacred to Profane (which was not present in the earlier philosophies). According to him, the 'non-modern' man, in past or present, would take the Cosmos as sacred; hence and therefore, everything that happens in the Cosmos is just not simply a scientific physical or chemical phenomenon (as is perceived in the Modern world with the dawn of the Empirical and Positivist movements). On the contrary, it's the 'symbol' in itself that corresponds to a higher world of transcendence. Cosmos then becomes 'The Intellect', The Logos in which things are connected psychically to each other.

Nasr describes Metaphysics to be the sacred science of all the knowledge that exists. He denounces the reductionism that was followed by the scientists[30] and philosophers of the Renaissance period against the metaphysics of the ancient and medieval Western period in a way similar to that propounded by R.G. Collingwood when he discoursed on the Renaissance thought on Nature (yet different in basic principles). Nasr, as has already been explained, proposes that Cosmology as understood by the ancients was a knowledge encompassing both the transcendental and the immanent (material) world such that the knowledge was connected with the higher Reality and descended from it in a 'greater to lesser' hierarchical manner.

On the contrary, the modern approach towards knowledge moved from 'lesser to greater' which in itself is a fallible basis. Science, being the product of Man's intellect – a relatively higher form, has gradually started to rule man, his intellect and his worth. The pitfall lies in the fact that this situation has created a delirium whereby man is indisputably made a prey to the paradoxes he has happened to create in the form of Secular Science.

Another important feature of this new secular science is that of its Quantification[31] of knowledge meaning that the qualitative aspect of Nature – the metaphysical part – is altogether ignored in the modern sciences which deal with the study of nature. Hence, all the data, all the sources as well as the knowledge acquired through them should be quantitatively verified before it is accepted as in the academic world. This distinction has caused the laity to remain at the far end while Scientists (in most accrued of the sense) take lead to interpret knowledge in the light of strict reductionism i.e. Science has become a deity in itself, never to be criticized.

This, in turn, has caused a reinterpretation of Cosmology in the Modern Western world as well. An entity which was defined as sacred in the ancient world encompassing all the tangible and intangible aspects of existence was reduced to the material aspect alone: Metaphysics was turned into a materialistic phenomenon as opposed to its wholesome structure of which matter was only a part. [32]

This historical shift that was witnessed by the Western world, in Nasr's point of view, bears its roots in a kind of a science developed by the Positivists of seventeenth century. Here again, we find a similarity between Nasr and Collingwood: the allegation against Positivism as playing an essential role in creating the dichotomy between metaphysics/religion and science.

Oriental and Occidental Metaphysics – Comparison

However, unlike Collingwood, Nasr's differences in his proposal for the unification of knowledge lie in his way of idealizing Oriental Metaphysical principles as is found, for instance, in the Far Eastern Religions of Taoism and Zen Buddhism, to the Hindu Vedanta Philosophy.

All of these religions perceive Nature to be sacred and not profane. In fact, Nature is the reflection of a Higher Reality (Tao, the Supreme Being). The concept of *Maya* in Hindu Vedanta philosophy is not then a negative connotation ascribed to this world, but rather it is considered to be Divine Play[33] through which the Ultimate Reality is to be searched and found. Therefore, we find great regard in Eastern metaphysics for the Nature and its higher principles.

On the other hand, the only resemblance that Nasr finds in the Western history with that of Eastern history of Metaphysics is in the period of Antiquity and early Medieval Centuries of Christian theology. In the period of Antiquity he cites the Greek idea of Cosmology especially that of Pythagoreans and Plotinus having defined the metaphysical aspect of Nature and Existence as something transcendental and sacred[34]. Early Christian Theologians have also propounded the idea of Nature as Sacred in some of their work, hence, giving rise to Monk and Hermit culture. However, Nasr's critique, as it seems, is rather severe on the Theologians of the late Medieval and Early Renaissance period who, in an apologetic attempt to defend the Doctrine of Christianity against the developing Science, forgot to maintain the Metaphysical understanding of nature as the core principle that underlines the Religion itself. Resultantly, according to Nasr, Gnosticism which was once considered to be the 'intuitive' and 'illuminative' knowledge started being misinterpreted in the form of different Occult sciences and secret societies. According to Nasr, it was actually at the hands of the Christian

theologians and philosophers, that man's intellect was replaced by the sentimental love and Cosmology on the whole was replaced by the rational principles of theology[35] (as the core principle of faith in Christianity) that caused a new kind of reductionism. Hence, and therefore, man was detached from Cosmos in a peculiar sense of standing alone before his actual Creator – with no particular interaction with the world around him: Nature in this new doctrine was indifferently considered dead.

However, being a Perennial Philosopher himself, Nasr also cites the example of American Indians metaphysical interaction with Nature as a model for the contemporary West to follow. American Indians, to him, were highly experienced in following the Symbolism[36] found in the Nature around them. This symbolism actually referred to their deep connection that transcended the mundane aspect of the world. For them, Nature and the happenings in it, led to higher realities and meaning, inasmuch the same way like in the science of Alchemy. It was due to this fact that they preserved the Nature while benefitting from it.

However, the existing situation of the West in the Renaissance period especially that of the Metaphysics eventually gave rise to the schism between religion and science in the centuries that followed. So much so, that by the end of the nineteenth century, Positivistic and Empirical Science itself had been deified as 'the' only knowledge instead of being only a part of the vast expanse of hierarchical understanding of the world.

Nexus Between Eastern and Western Metaphysics

The East and the West being at bay from each other in terms of their metaphysical principles, as Nasr has expounded, needs a nexus which could provide the West to solve its crucial problem of existent crisis with the Nature. This, he proposes can be solved by looking into the metaphysics found in the religion of Islam and incorporating this system into to the Christian (and hence the Western) Cosmology.

Islamic worldview of Cosmology and Metaphysics is based on its inherent principle of *Tawhid* or Oneness; such that everything in the Universe corresponds to One Reality in the form of 'Symbolism'. There is no blatant distinction between the sacred and profane; rather, only a spiritual transcendence is found to reach man's ultimate abode.

To achieve this purpose, man has been given a revelation in the form of the Qur'an – the *Logos* of God. However, unlike Christianity, the revelation encompasses both the metaphysical as well as the physical phenomena in the Universe; hence man is to transcend this world while acquiring the knowledge of transcendence 'through' this world. [37]

This Islamic doctrine of Absolute One Reality and the Relativism of the existential world, bridges a synthesis between the Orient and Occident viewpoints regarding nature thereby providing a solution for the crisis of the Modern man in Nasr's worldview. Islam, as is expounded by Nasr, is the most appropriate and balanced way that a modern man could adopt in almost all aspects and walks of life which includes the middle-path even in his interaction with the Nature. For Islam, Nature is not only a physical phenomenon; in fact, it is a mean to decipher the truths in the higher plane. The Reality of God is an essential to be known through the knowledge provided by the Science. Hence, the Muslim scientists and the philosophers took every scientific datum and experiment in this light – to know and reach the ultimate Reality.

Therefore, it is through the way of Islam that Science can be truly criticized and then legitimized to practice its sphere under the Metaphysical principles. Once this middle-path is practiced, man would find peace with nature as a result of finding peace with his own soul. To Nasr, the phenomenon of War in the world is but an occasional reflection of Man's war

with Nature. Since, Nature has become non-sacred in the view of the Modern Man, the prospect of preserving and learning from it has been forgotten and replaced by apathy and indifference; and once this indifference is exercised, it takes multiple forms of manifestation, of which war is only one to be mentioned.

To conclude, since the man's spiritual orderliness, as propounded by Nasr, is but reflected in the order of Nature, therefore, it is due to the lack of this spiritual orderliness that we find the chaos in the world of manifestation – the world around.[38]

Conclusion

It seems that Nasr's worldview bears a resemblance with the worldviews of Antiquity, Medieval as well as the Oriental Metaphysics. His distinction, insofar has been understood, is to merge the East and the West, the Antique/Medieval and the Modern into one paradigm. However, whether he had been successful or not or to exactly what an extent he had been successful, hitherto remains a question to be answered.

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that Nasr's outlook on the history of the intellectual thought in the West bears some major differences with that of R.G. Collingwood's outlook; perhaps because here, too, we see the encounter of the Eastern and the Western intellectual thought as decisively distinct from each other, whereas in part, it also seems to be related with Nasr's perennial understanding of Cosmology as opposed to exclusive philosophical approach of Collingwood.

On the other hand, Nasr's proposals although rooted in perennial philosophy require practical validation. The apparent conservatism – the preservation of the old and the antique – that is found in Nasr's work seems well-worked over. Also, Nasr also denounces modern Muslim paradigm shift towards science such as depicted in the corpuses of scientific interpretation of Quran. Nasr considers it as subjugation of Islamic original thought and proposes that science as a scient-ism is a modern phenomenon and that never before, even during the Muslim rule, as the term '*ilm'* qualified to the modern science as worldview.

At this point, one should also consider that modern man has myriad of intellectual limitations stemming from his recent history of Post Modernism, science and technology. A modern mind bears not only the 'intellectual' impression of Empirical and Positivist sciences but also in the form of betrayal from religion.

In essence, Nasr's idea on nature stands at odds with that put forward by R.G. Collingwood in various aspects. Where Nasr calls towards the most-needed nexus between the East and the West, the Metaphysics and the Science and the Antiquity and the Modernism, Collingwood views the idea of nature as part of a social-construct analogous to the dialectic nature of history. To Collingwood, nature can be reinterpreted as a phenomenon and cannot be given a permanent definition in the modern parlance.

The above discussion provides a preliminary study on how the two philosophers have viewed the role of metaphysics in construing the idea of nature and how far that can be considered instrumental in the transformation of our relationship with nature.

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[1] Kenneth Oldmeadow, "Signposts to the Suprasensible"
Notes on Frithjof Schuon's Understanding of "Nature," *Sacred Web* 6 (2001). Also, James S. Cutsinger, "A Knowledge That Wounds Our Nature: The Message of Frithjof Schuon," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1992).
[2] R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). *p.1*
[3] Ibid. *p. 3*
[4] Ibid. *p. 4*
[5] Ibid. *p. 45*
[6] Ibid. *p. 43-44*
[7] Ibid. *pp. 49-55*
[8] Ibid. *pp. 72-73*
[9] Ibid. *pp. 82-83*
[10] Sarah Waterlow Broadie, "What Does Aristotle's Prime Mover Do?," *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter* 239 (1994).
[11] Collingwood. *pp. 64-71*
[12] Ibid. *pp.94- 97*
[13] Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) proposed that universe is without a center i.e. infinite unlike the geocentric model of the Church. He was also a proponent of immanent nature of God that manifests itself in the natural object.
[14] Collingwood. *pp. 99-100*
[15] Ibid. *pp. 102-103.* See also, Kepler and Galileo, "Kepler and Galileo," *Springer Nature* (2024).
[16] Collingwood. *pp. 103-105*
[17] Spinoza's famous quote, *Deus sive natura – God is nature* – proposes that nature is infinite and without a center. For more, see Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1910).
[18] Ibid. *pp. 113-132*
[19] Ibid. *pp. 133-136*
[20] Ibid. *pp. 158-165*
[21] Ibid. *pp. 165-174*
[22] Ibraheem Kalin, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr (B.1933 -)."
[23] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Harmony of Man and Nature."
[24] Ibid. *p. 18*
[25] Religion and the Order of Nature, (United States of America: Oxford University Press, 1996). *pp. 81-82*
[26] Ibid. *pp. 81-83*
[27] Ibid. *pp. 90-97*
[28] Ibid. *pp. 97-98*
[29] Ibid. *p.101*
[30] Can Science Dispense with Religion?, (Tehran, Iran: Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1998).

[31] *Man and Nature*. *p. 119*
[32] Ibid. *pp. 20-24*
[33] Ibid. *p. 88*
[34] Ibid. *p. 59*
[35] Ibid. *p. 55*
[36] Ibid. *p. 121*
[37] Ibid. *pp. 95-96*
[38] *Religion and the Order of Nature*. *pp. 64.* See also his ideas on eco philosophy in MD. Abu Sayem, "The Eco-Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Spiritual Crisis and Environmental Degradation," *Islamic Studies* 58, no. 2 (2019).