

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Perspective on the Theory of Islamization of Knowledge

Abdullatif Ahmadi Ramchahi (Corresponding author)

Department of al-Quran & al-Hadith, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya
(UM), Malaysia (magapu2005@um.edu.my)

M.Y. Zulkifli bin Haji Mohd Yusoff

Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya (UM), Malaysia (zulkifli@gmail.com)

Monika Munirah Abd Razzak

Department of al-Quran & al-Hadith, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya
(UM), Malaysia (Munirahar@um.edu.my)

Soraya Daryanavard

Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia.
(sorayadaryanavard64@yahoo.com)

Zakaria Ahmadi Ramchahi

Faculty of Psychology, UCSI University, Malaysia
(zakariarazi85@yahoo.com)

Abstract

This article aims to study Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perspective on Islamization of Knowledge. This is performed by focusing on his books and articles about Knowledge. The researchers first present in brief Nasr's life. They then discuss his attempts on Islamization of Knowledge focusing on his view about religion and secularism, his perspective on the sources of knowledge, and his theory on re-understanding the Islamic Philosophy. The researchers then analyze his criticism against Modern Sciences. Finally, they present his theory of Sacred Knowledge. This research approaches these issues using the methods of descriptive analysis and Induction.

Keywords: Islamization of Knowledge, Perspective, Modern Sciences, Islamic Philosophy, Sacred Knowledge.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we will display the standpoints of one of prominent Muslim personalities in the Islamization of knowledge and science. He is a Persian scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr who is University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University. The author of over fifty books and five hundred articles, he is one of the world's most respected writers and speakers on Islam, its arts and sciences, and its traditional mystical path, Sufism.

He propagates traditional teachings, in general, and the various facets of traditional Islam and other religions, in particular. Spiritually located in the perennial philosophy, traditional teachings are reflected not only religious teachings but also in philosophy, the sciences and arts. With special emphasis on manifesting these perennial teachings as contained in the Quran, the Foundation will include studies on the various facets of Islamic thought, art and civilization.

2. A brief biography of Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Seyyed Hossein Nasr was born on April 7, 1933 in Tehran into a family of distinguished scholars and physicians. His father, Seyyed Valiallah, a man of great learning and piety, was a physician to the Iranian royal family, as was his father before him. Nasr also comes from a family of Sufis. One of his ancestors was Mulla Seyyed Muhammad Taqi Poshtmashhadi, who was a famous saint of Kashan, and his mausoleum which is located next to the tomb of the Safavid king Shah Abbas.

Nasr's arrival in America at the young age of twelve marked the beginning of a new period in his life which was totally different from his early life in Iran. He attended The Peddie School in Hightstown, New Jersey and in 1950 graduated as the valedictorian of his class and also winner of the Wycliffe Award which was the school's highest honor given to the most outstanding all-round student. It was during the four years at Peddie that Nasr acquired his knowledge of the English language, as well as studying the sciences, American history, Western culture and Christianity.

Nasr chose to go to M.I.T. for college. He began his studies at M.I.T in the Physics Department with some of the most gifted students in the country and outstanding professors of physics. Nasr began his serious study of not only the ancient Greek wisdom but also

European, Medieval philosophy, Dante's highly mystical and symbolic Divine Comedy, Hinduism and a critique of modern Western thought.

Upon his graduation from M.I.T., Nasr enrolled himself in a graduate program in geology and geophysics at Harvard University. After obtaining his Master's degree in geology and geophysics in 1956, he went on to pursue his Ph.D. degree in the history of science and learning at Harvard. He struggled with philosophical Arabic while getting some assistance from Wolfson and Gibb. However, the mastery of philosophical Arabic was only attained after he studied Islamic philosophy from the traditional masters of Iran after his return to his homeland in 1958.

At twenty-five, Nasr graduated with a Ph.D. degree from Harvard and on the way to completing his first book, *Science and Civilization in Islam*.

Although he was offered a position as assistant professor at M.I.T., Nasr decided to return permanently to Iran. Back in Iran, Nasr was offered a position as an Associate Professor of philosophy and the history of science at the Faculty of Letters in Tehran University. A few months after his return, Nasr married a young woman from a respected family whose members were close friends of his family. Five years later at the age of thirty, Nasr became the youngest person to become a full professor at the University.

In 1964-65, Nasr spent an academic year at the American University of Beirut as the first Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Studies. Besides *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, Nasr also brought out *Islamic Studies*, which is a collection of articles discussing several fundamental aspects of the Islamic tradition.

Furthermore, from 1968 to 1972, Nasr was made Dean of the Faculty and for a while, Academic Vice-Chancellor of Tehran University. In 1972, he was appointed President of Aryamehr University by the Shah of Iran. Aryamehr University was then the leading scientific and technical university in Iran and the Shah, as the patron, wanted Professor Nasr to develop the university on the model of M.I.T. but with firm roots in Iranian culture. Consequently, a strong humanities program in Islamic thought and culture, with a particular emphasis upon an Islamic philosophy of science, was established at Aryamehr University by Nasr. In 1973, the Queen of Iran appointed Professor Nasr to establish a center for the study and propagation of philosophy under her patronage.

In 1979 at the time of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Nasr moved with his family to the United States where he would rebuild his life again and secure a university position to support himself and his family. In 1982, Nasr was invited to collaborate on a major project to bring out the Encyclopedia of World Spirituality together with Ewert Cousins. In 1983, Nasr delivered the Wiegand Lecture on the philosophy of religion at the University of Toronto in Canada. He also helped in the establishment of the section on Hermeticism and perennial philosophy at the American Academy of Religion.

Nasr was soon recognized in American academic circles as a traditionalist and a major expositor and advocate of the perennialist perspective. Much of his intellectual activities and writing since being in exile in America, are related to this function and also in the fields of comparative religion, philosophy and religious dialogue.

In 1990, he was selected as a patron of the Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations of the Sally Oaks College in Birmingham. In addition, he has played an active role in the creation and activities of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. He has also attended many conferences on this subject including the famous 1993 Parliament of World Religions.

Now, Seyyed Hossein Nasr leads an extremely active intellectual life with a very busy schedule of teaching at the university and lecturing at many institutions in America and around the world, writing scholarly works, being involved in several intellectual projects simultaneously and meeting individuals who are interested in traditional thought. At the same time, he leads a very intense spiritual life spent in prayer, meditation and contemplation and also providing spiritual counsel for those who seek his advice and guidance¹.

3. His attempts for Islamizing the knowledge

Many educated Muslims are familiar with the name of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, especially if he or she has any interest in questions concerning the function of the Islamic tradition. In my understanding he constitutes a set of Muslim individuals who belong to Muslim elite. That is to say that he has extensive influence among other Muslim intellectuals. Today, it appears as

¹ See: Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E.Auxier, Lusian W.Stone. *The philosophy of Sayyed Hossein Nasr*. Chicago: Open Court publishing company, 1st ed, 1887. pp. 3-85.

his interpretations of the Islamic tradition can strike out new paths in the understanding of Islam among Muslims. A general notion in the works of Nasr is his understanding of Islam as a comprehensive order for the individual and society. Therefore, he strives to achieve a foundation for the establishment of an Islamic science.

In capacity of education, social position in general, and as lay preachers with an experience of the so called western society he may also be able to answer the questions concerning how to live an Islamic life in Europe. It is sometimes presumed that to the category of people with a secular form of university training the traditional perception of Islam has become somewhat problematic. Yet, those who advocate an Islamization of science make use of Islamic models of categorization when they express their views on social predicaments in the society. In statements like "the Islamization of society will solve many of the problems in the Muslim community" it is implied that Islamization is a quest of ideology. In his perspective the concept of a specific 'Islamic' natural science is understood as a subsystem or subculture promoted by the all-embracing Islamic order of society

Nasr argue that science is not neutral and that it is western in its character. He makes a comparison between the results of modern science and technology, like the pollution of the environment, with a non-existing form of Islamic science - an Islamic ideal, a utopia. In some sense the practice of science performed in Europe is placed in opposition towards the norm of the ideological ideal. One paradox is that statements of researchers from the scientific tradition he criticize are used to support their own statements. In Nasr's standpoint science is subordinated to the claims of the Islamic tradition. Islam is an all-encompassing ideology, and, therefore, it must formulate ideas about an Islam science. The Nasr's perspective on Islamization of Knowledge can be presented by following issues:

3.1 His view on religion and secularism

According to Nasr's point of view, religion in Islam means first of all the Islamic revelation and all the truths, both exoteric and esoteric, revealed in the Qur'an and interpreted by the prophet in his sayings and traditions. In the case of the Shi'ah it means the saying of the Imams as well as those of the prophet. Secondly, religion means all the teaching and institutions of divine origin revealed through other prophets before Islam, many of which Islam, through the universality and synthetic power integrated in to its own perspective.

On the other hand, Secularism considered as everything whose origin is merely human and therefore non-divine and whose metaphysical basis lies in this ontological separation between man and God.

The Muslims made the scientific heritage of Alexandria their own, because these forms of knowledge sought to show the unity of Nature and the inter-relatedness of all that exists. Therefore, far from being Secular modes of knowledge, they were closely related to the central theme of Islamic wisdom, unity, and throughout Muslim history the sciences and religious and metaphysical doctrines were wed together. But from the 19th centuries onward, secularism attacked upon Islam and influenced many educated Muslims. Moreover, schools on a European model and teaching European subjects have often been built by Muslim authorities.

The new education represents an important factor in the introduction of Secularism. This especially true not so much of the subject-matter but because of the point of view from which the subjects are taught. The modern subjects are not simply the continuation of the Islamic sciences, as is claimed by many Muslim apologists. Nasr asserted that this is true that the modern sciences have borrowed many techniques and ideas from the ancient and medieval sciences, but the point of view in the two cases is completely different. The Muslim sciences breathed in a universe in which God was everywhere. They were based upon certainty and searched after the principle of unity in things which is reached through synthesis and integration. The modern sciences on the contrary, live in a world in which God is nowhere or, even his there; He is ignored as far as the sciences are concerned. They are based on doubt. Having once turned their back on the unifying principles of things, they seek to analyze and divide the contents of nature to an ever greater degree, moving towards multiplicity and away from unity.

Finally, he mentioned that certainly the Islamic world cannot hope to return to a homogeneous and integrated life while the ever increasing disorder in the western world continues. Moreover, Islam is not exclusively a way of love like Christianity and therefore can not remain oblivious to any form of knowledge. The way of Islam is essentially Gnostic.

Therefore it must have a response to other system which claims to expound a science of things and must be able to place all orders of existence within its universal perspective².

3.2 The sources of knowledge in Islam

Seyyed Hossein Nasr like other Muslim scholars stated that all Islamic doctrines are originated in the Quran or the Hadith, which is the inspired commentary upon it. All schools of theology and philosophy, all schools of law and political theory based their teaching upon the tenets of the Qur'an, which is like an ocean in to which all streams of Islamic thought flow and form which they ultimately originate. There is no claim to Islamicity without a Qur'anic basis.

Although the foundation of the shari'ah must also be sought in the Hadith and the elaboration of the law depends, furthermore, upon consensus (Ijma') and analogical reasoning (Qiyas), in the principle of the shari'ah is already contained in the Qur'an. The other sources are only means of elaborating and making explicit what is already contained in the sacred text. As for ethical attitudes related to the practice of the sacred law, they too are to be found in the Qur'an, which determined for Muslims all ethical norms and all moral principles. The Qur'an is also the source of way or the Tariqah which is crystallize later in Sufi. What the Qur'an teaches constitutes morality, not what human reason determines on the basis of its own judgments. In the Islamic universe there is no spirituality possible without the aid of the book, which teaches man all that he can know or that can be known and which leads man to the goal for which he was created.

According to Nasr's perspective, The Sunnah as a second important source of knowledge is a commentary upon the Qur'an and the manner by which the Muslims came to learn how the truths of the sacred Text were lived by the most perfect of God's creation in a life that was human yet completely immersed in the sacred. Through the Sunnah every facet of human life has become sacralized, for the Divine law (al-Shari'ah) itself, which provides the matrix for the Islamic life, is based not only on the Qur'an but also on the Sunnah, which, comprising all of the action and traditions of the prophet.

The unity of the Sunnah as revolving around the prophet and his traditions and actions as well as response to various situation and circumstances is not, however, in any way

² See: Nasr, Seyyed Hossein., *Islamic studies: essays on law and security, the sciences, and philosophy and Sufism*. Beirut: systeco press, 1st ed, 1967. pp.14-24.

compromised by the acceptance of certain older traditions by the prophet. This very acceptance marked also their integration into the total pattern that he sought to establish as a model for the Islamic life.

The Sunnah comprises the strands of which the fiber of Islamic life is woven. Although not all Muslims live always according to the Sunnah, the practice of the Sunnah has remained always an ideal to be achieved. Moreover, it is an ideal that has been realized to a remarkable degree over the ages and has, in any case, always been of central concern for those who have sought to live a spiritual life according to the "Muhammadan model".

Nasr also added a key concept in Islamic culture and thought. This key its understanding is necessary for the comprehension of the various dimensions of Islamic spirituality is Adab. Adab means at once courtesy, manners, correct comportment and upbringing, culture and literature. To possess adab is to be truly cultured in a manner that embraces not only the mind but also the body and soul. This aspect of adab is of great importance in the spiritual life, and a certain amount of adab is a prerequisite for embarking upon the spiritual path. In any case, adab, so visible in traditional Islamic society, is inextricably tied to the Sunnah and reflects the prophetic practices and traditions on a particular level that is of great importance both socially and spiritually.

To emulate the Sunnah is to live Islamically and according to God's will. Moreover, to live according to the Sunnah means to live in constant remembrance of God, to be severe with one self and generous with those about us, to understand our nothingness before that awesome Majesty that is God and to live in truth and certainty of the saving power of the One who is both absolute and infinite. There is no Islamic spirituality possible without the Sunnah, for the gate to the higher worlds was opened for the Islamic sector of humanity by the prophet alone during his nocturnal journey. It is he alone who holds the key to those gates and who alone can guide the Muslim on the path of spiritual realization³.

4. Islamic philosophy –Reorientation or Re-understanding

Philosophical ideas which have originated and developed in the west are studied avidly nearly everywhere in the Islamic world today, especially in university and academic

³ See: Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islamic Spirituality Foundations*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1st ed, 1991. pp. 3-10 and 97-110; and Nasr. *Islamic studies*. pp. 48-51.

circles. They are taught in the classroom so that many of those who are the products of the modern educational system often know a great deal more about a second-rate European philosopher than about the most famous of the Muslim sages.

Although it is not our intention to discuss the various principles of Islamic philosophy here, a few of its cardinal inestimable value features which highlighted by Sayyed Hossein Nasr and which should be taken into consideration by modern thinkers are mentioning below:

- Islam is a tradition based wholly upon revelation; consequently, the sense of the transcendent and the revealed is a potent force in Islamic society. Islamic philosophy is precisely prophetic philosophy, a world view in which the role of revelation, in both macrocosmic and the microcosmic sense, looms strong on the horizon. And it is in Islamic philosophy that prophetic philosophy finds its most complete and perfect expression.
- It is the relation between reason and revelation which occupied the Muslim philosophers from the very beginning and which found its most harmonious solution in the hands of great Muslim scholars who expounded that divine wisdom, that gnosis in which faith and reason find their common ground.
- Islamic philosophy possesses a unified vision of things- that is, a view of the interrelation between all realms of knowledge. To be able to create and maintain an interrelation between various fields of knowledge is therefore of vital importance for all who are interested in the welfare of Muslim society. And here, the Muslim intellectual heritage offers ample guidance.
- Islamic philosophy develop an ethical system based not only on "rational ethics" but on the specific teaching of the Qur'an. In Islamic ethics the divine will appears not in an abstract manner but in concrete injunctions contained in the sacred law or Shari'ah. This law helps human intelligence to overcome the limitations imposed on it by the passions and to see the good and evil nature of things in their true perspective.
- The expression of Islamic philosophy- especially metaphysics- is combined with the beauty of language and highly artistic forms of expression.

One of the features that characterize modern man is that he always seeks to reform everything from social and economic institutions to philosophical and religious traditions, but rarely does he will to reform himself. It is in this mental climate that the question of the reorientation of Islamic philosophy is approached.

To reorient means to possess a knowledge of the goal to be pursued and then to turn one's efforts towards that goal. But to know the goal to be pursued must in itself be the fruit of a philosophy and a world view. We want to determine a goal through our own human understanding and then reorient religious thought towards it, thereby admitting whether consciously or unconsciously to the primacy of the human over the divine. Also the word "orient" brings to mind the abode of spiritual light which illuminates us and through which we receive true knowledge.

The re-understanding of Islamic philosophy is therefore incumbent upon us, no matter what direction we wish to pursue in the future. No matter where one wants to go, one must start from where one is. So what must be done is to disengage the content of Islamic philosophy from the language which is not well received today and to present it in terms more conformable to the intellectual horizon of our contemporaries. What is needed essentially is a re-presentation of the whole body of Islamic wisdom in a contemporary language so that the solution offered by this form of wisdom to various problems can be discovered by those who seek them without language or mental barriers. The tenets of Islamic philosophy must be made well known both for the solutions they offered by perennial questions and as the basis and line of approach for the questions that beset modern man specifically as a result of the peculiar and one might say anomalous conditions of the modern world.

So in the case of reorientation we should mention that man comes to know the truth not by reorienting it but by reorienting himself so that he can become worthy of its recipient⁴.

5. His criticism against modern sciences

Nasr's work on science is discomfoting for many. His defense of traditional sciences, his criticism on modern sciences, and his attack on the philosophical foundation of modern sciences makes the modernists uneasy both in the East and the West.

⁴ See: Nasr. *Islamic Studies*. pp. 97-112

A quick look at Nasr's wide-ranging works shows that the question of science occupies a central place in his thought. Nasr does not remain content with the critique of modern Western science and presents his alternative view of science on the basis of traditional doctrines. The heavy emphasis put on the distinction between the traditional and the modern, or the sacred and the profane, runs through Nasr's work, and his work comprises many facets of traditional and modern sciences. A considerable number of his works are thus devoted to the exposition of traditional sciences, the metaphysical and cosmological principles on which they are based, and their meaning for a day and age that tends to see them as no more than superstitions and old wives' tales. The second part of Nasr's work is focused on modern science, its historical formation, its philosophical premises and claims, and the catastrophic events brought about by the unquestioned acceptance of modern sciences and technology. In both of these fields, Nasr stands out as a religious practitioner of the traditional school and presents a profound evaluation of the traditional and modern natural sciences from the point of view of traditional doctrines.

It is important to note that Nasr's critique of modern science is marked off from the current criticism leveled against modern Western science by its metaphysical and religious stance. According to Nasr, modern sciences is an anomaly not simply because we have to pay a high price by destroying the natural environment, but because modern science operates within a seriously misguided framework in which everything is reduced to pure quantity and by which modern man is made to think that all of his problems, from transportation to spiritual salvation, can ultimately be solved by further progress in science.

Thus, Nasr's highly critical stance towards modern science can best be understood in the light of his notion of sacred science, which might be described very briefly as an application of the one and the Absolute to the plan of relative existence. It is, however, extremely important not to lose sight of the fact that Nasr is not opposed to science itself out to its philosophical claims that apparently exceed its legitimate boundaries.

In this regard Nasr's encounter with the intellectual premises of secular Western sciences can be interpreted as an archeology of modern science whose roots go back to the seventeenth century Scientific Revolution. Five main traits of modern science come to the fore in Nasr's critical analysis.

The first is the secular view of the universe that sees no traces of the divine in the natural order. Nature is no longer the vestigial Dei of Christian cosmology but a self-subsistent entity that can be encapsulated exhaustively in the quantitative formulate of natural sciences. Secular view, consequently, leads to the glorification of the human mind as the sole locus of meaning and value, and thus slips in to a gross subjectivism. Nasr rejects this subjectivism, insists on the intrinsic qualities of nature, and make the bold epistemological claim that the world of nature, or the external world, displays certain qualities intrinsic to itself which cannot be confined to the feelings or the cognition of the knowing subject. As Nasr repeatedly states, the projection of nature as pure material is a reflection of the secular outlook of modern science in which a "supposition less" encounter with the world is pushed to the limits of relegating nature to a structure of brute facts with no meaning and even practical use.

The second feature is the mechanization of the world-picture upon the model of machines and clocks. Once couched in terms of mechanistic relations, nature becomes something absolutely determinable and predictable – a much needed safety zone for the rise of modern industrial society and capitalism. In the case of "machine" and "clock", nature had to be construed as a machine in the full sense of the term so that the rise of industrial society could go ahead without any serious objection from religion or society. Nasr sees the disastrous effects of the mechanistic view of the cosmos in this misconceived belief in science that has led to the eclipse of traditional ideas and values on the one hand, and to a number of modern disasters on the other.

The third aspect of modern sciences is rationalism and empiricism. Modern rationalism, according to Nasr and traditional school, rests on a serious misunderstanding of the notion of "reason" when it relegates the intellect to calculation and analysis. Modern empiricism, for its part, falls into a similar predication by repudiating any principle higher than sense perception.

The forth trait is the legacy of Cartesian dualism that presupposes a complete separation between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, that is, between the knowing subject and the object to be known. With this cleavage, the epistemological alienation of man from nature comes to completion by leaving behind a torrent of pseudo-problems in modern philosophy, the notorious mind-body problem being a special case in point. Nasr sees the roots of this modern predicament in the Cartesian heritage and argues very strongly for what we may call

an "epistemology of unity", according to which the unity between the intellect and the intelligible is to be reasserted in order to have a genuine relationship with the world of nature as well as with other human beings.

The last important aspect of modern science is in a sense a culmination of the foregoing feature, and it is the exploitation of nature as a source of power and domination- a fact not known to modern capitalist society. This pertains to the very context in which modern science is pursued and supported by governments, institutions and corporations. At this point, one of the most apparent leitmotifs of modern science is its connecting with power and domination that has received a global prevalence with the consolidation of the world capitalist economy. In addition, an important outcome of this new spirit has been the wedding between science and technology to such an extent that one can hardly speak of "pure science" anymore, a science that will not succumb to the demands and conditions of consumerist economy. Many critics of modern science have warned against the danger of rapid technological change, a pace that creates a state of unbounded dependency on the one hand, and an irremediable sense of dislocation on the other. Nasr sees the roots of this predicament in the very assumptions of modern science and its stance towards nature. Accordingly, any plausible solution for the persisting problems caused by modern science and technology can be achieved not by better engineering or further progress but by reconsidering the entire perspective of the modern worldview regarding nature, human life, and its meaning.

In conclusion, Nasr's critical work, although it may seem too radical and uncompromising to some, is likely to be a secure starting point for a more comprehensive and plausible discourse on the relation between religion and science. Nasr also opens up a new avenue for facing up to the challenge of modern science without sacrificing the traditional ideas and values, and for rejecting the totalizing claims of the modern secular worldview which continue ever increasingly to dominate every facet of human life⁵.

⁵ See: Nasr, Seyyed Hosein. *science and civilization in Islam*. UK: Cambridge Islamic Text Society, 2nd ed, 2003, pp:21-40 ; Nasr. *Islamic studies*. pp. 26-34; Nasr and Katherine O'Brien., *In guest of the sacred the modern world in the light of Tradition*. Washington,DC: the foundation for traditional studies, 1st ed,1994, pp: 161-175; Nasr. *The need for a sacred science*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, pp:71-92; Hahn, Lewis Edwin, Randall E.Auxier, Lusian W.Stone. *The philosophy of Sayyed Hossein Nasr*. Chicago: Open Court publishing company, 1st ed, 1887, pp. 445-458.

6. The need for sacred knowledge and science

Nasr, in the epitome of his work regarding spiritual knowledge, knowledge and sacred, he argues not only the knowledge has spiritual-metaphysical foundations, but also that the goal of knowledge, as originally outlined in the Gnostic-Hermetic-platonic traditions, is sapient. In other words, knowledge is originally part of the tree of life, not part of the realm of the profane. He contends that real knowledge can result in the elevation of the soul to higher realms, the true meaning of alchemy. For Nasr, the sublime meaning of spiritual knowledge is at the heart of the Islamic message: "hikmat-i ilahi (the wisdom of God). The concept of spiritual knowledge is not only a powerful theme in the Qur'an, but it also holds the essence of the idea of initiation in the world's higher religions. According to him, the concept of spiritual knowledge, or knowledge of the sacred, transcends all religious divisions and is the essence of religion itself.

In assessing the contribution Nasr has made to philosophy itself through the concept of spiritual knowledge or knowledge of the sacred, one must first evaluate his method. His method is highly eclectic. It draws on several different sources. Nasr is academically trained in mathematics, physics, and the history of science, as well as method of philosophy and comparative religion, but his inspiration comes from the Sufi practice of Illumination through intellectual intuition. Although he is critical of the use of rational and empirical methods in an isolated sense in philosophy, he makes wide use of logical, deductive, and empirical methods in his philosophical investigations. His deep intellectual intuition into Sufi spirituality and the history of science and scientific method has led him to be one of the primary discussants of the correspondence between modern physics and the insights of oriental doctrines.

After examining Nasr's eclectic method, it become quite clear what he considers knowledge to be? It is absolutely easy to understand that, for Nasr, there is sacred and profane knowledge. Profane knowledge is all too evident in the present age. It is not that anything in the world which needs to be understood is particularly profane. When knowledge is gathered purely for selfish motives and worldly results, by any method, it is profane. For example, the knowledge which led to the splitting of the atom clearly has its profane uses, but on its sacred side it holds the very key to the nature of atomic matter and energy.

What is clear to Nasr is that the question for all knowledge, whether scientific, philosophical, or otherwise, was originally motivated by the desire to understand the creation

as a reflection of the Divine and thereby as a Divine Emanation. However, science, which began as natural philosophy, lost its primary motive and intentions as people struggle to live and became more materialistic. Nasr illustrated this point by invoking the powerful images of profane and sacred man. Pontifex is the bridge between heaven and earth-the sacred man- and Prometheus, the thief of the fire from the home of the gods, is profane man. In Nasr analysis, Prometheus is viewed as a robber against the divine, who has forgotten his real mission. On the other hand, pontifical man has never forgotten that he is the victory of God (khalifat Allah).

In addition, in Nasr's view, the concept of knowledge can be considerably broadened if we include the possibilities of human experience as expressed in Sufism, and also the Dialectic and mathematical ciphers of Plato. According to Nasr, the sacred is not separated from knowledge, but it is separated from the way a profane mind understand the world and experience. This idea goes to the very basic of the meaning of sacred. To have knowledge of the Sacred is thus to have some sublime experience which goes beyond mundane life. To have an understanding of the content of this experience is to have knowledge of the Sacred.

Nasr wants to go beyond a respect for science to the idea that there always was and will be a theme of the sacred in science itself. In Islam, for example, there never was a separation from the sacred. Under Islam, science never operated in opposition to an unsympathetic clergy as in the middle Ages and Renaissance in Europe. Nasr gives a convincing argument that the Tariqah or Spiritual path, also known as tasawwuf in Sufism, is at the root of the Islamic tradition. Shari'ah (law) and the sacred for knowledge on the path go together and cannot be separated; The Prophet Muhammad himself sought the Truth in isolation on a mountain, as did the Sufis.

Nasr finds the solution to the ecological crisis in the abandonment of the Western scientific attitude of separating the sacred and the scientific. Instead of the positivist or operationalist attitude which stresses analysis, reductionism, and separation, Nasr calls for a return to oriental science which goes back to the Vedas. There is always an attempt to find unity and interdependence⁶.

⁶ See: Nasr. *The need for a sacred science*. pp. 95-175; Nasr and Katherine O'Brien, *In guest of the sacred*, pp: 161-175; Hahn, Lewis Edwin, Randall E.Auxier, Lusian W.Stone. *The philosophy of Sayyed Hossein Nasr*. pp. 589-611.

7. Conclusion

Sayyed Hossein Nasr played a significant role in the Islamization of knowledge. His interpretations seem to influence discussions in Muslim countries. In his approach, one important task is to establish the true interpretation of the word of Allah in order to live the perfect life in accordance with the Islamic tradition. Science must, therefore, be Islamic. In its correct shape it will reveal the true understanding of nature, and increase our comprehension of the creation. According to him the sciences that are in opposition to the Quran will not be accepted. Science becomes good when it is in accordance with the Quranic text.

Nasr insists to separate the spiritual and the secular. Any true knowledge, including the knowledge in the domain of philosophy and science, has been derived from revelation, from "the niche of philosophy" to use the Qur'anic terminology. Islam could not remain indifferent to any form of knowledge, hence, any idea or doctrine should be charged in accordance with their conformity with the teaching of Islam. Nasr does not oppose science and scientific progress as such (he is too well educated not to be able to grasp its significance), but advocated the development of so called Islamic sciences.

References

- Hahn, L. E., Randall E.A. and Stone, L. W. (1887). *"The philosophy of Sayyed Hossein Nasr"*. Chicago: Open Court publishing company, 1st edn.
- Nasr, S. H. & O'Brien, K. (1994). *"In quest of the sacred the modern world in the light of Tradition"*. Washington,DC: The foundation for traditional studies, 1st edn.
- Nasr, S. H. (1991). *"Islamic Spirituality Foundations"*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1st edn.
- Nasr, S. H. (1967). *"Islamic studies: essays on law and security, the sciences, and philosophy and Sufism"*. Beirut: Systeco press, 1st edn.
- Nasr, S. H. (2003). *"Science and civilization in Islam"*. UK: Cambridge Islamic Text Society, 2nd edn.

Nasr, S. H. (1993). *“The need for a sacred science”*. Albany: State University of New York Press.