

**THE MOST RECENT STUDIES
IN
SCIENCE AND ART**

EDITORS

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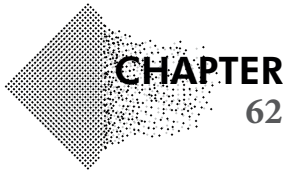
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CHAPTER
62

**SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR'S CONCEPTION OF THE
HUMAN BEING**

Turgay SIRIN

INTRODUCTION

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is among the most important spokesmen of traditional thought and stated that approximation to the creative will, that he placed at the center, in the contemplative life fed by religious sources is the most important factor in guiding human beings to the straight path. A person who walks with the pleasure and divine wisdom of this approximation has established his connection with the center. The person who has achieved it has discovered the channel of God's mercy that reminds the inhabitants of the world of the grace and spirit bestowed from the heavens and elevates his presence to the Creator (Nasr, 1997:23). Regarding the person who cannot achieve it, Nasr emphasizes that the divine truth reaches people like the light beams of the sun, however, problems arise concerning human beings as a result of the disruption of the center-periphery connection due to the willful rejection by human beings as well as their forgetfulness or disengagement from their soul (Nasr, 2013b:18).

Nasr's conception of the human being is primarily shaped by his understanding of a tradition originating in the sacred. This tradition shapes the human being himself and also his expressions, behaviors and attitudes towards those around him. The strength of transmission of these expressions, behaviors and attitudes has degenerated due to modernism. The most important solution of this degeneration is the fact that the human being first learns to exercise asceticism and satisfaction as an individual.

If we liken Nasr's thought structure to a pyramid, it is based on tradition. This pyramid, which goes upwardly with asceticism, satisfaction and devotion, reaches the peak by the realization of the archetypal human being who is the true or existent core of humanity, in other words, the Muhammadan way or path. The person who has reached this level is the person who has canalized all of the angels that comprise himself to the divine and has not stopped his connection and communication with the creative force existing in the center, on the contrary, he has established them again and firmly. For all of these, the person should have an actionary attitude and take on responsibility.

Basic Concepts in Understanding Nasr's Description of the Human Being

It will be important to talk about some concepts for the understanding of the subject before going into Nasr's Description of the Human Being. These concepts, which also constitute the basic framework of Nasr's views, draw the boundaries of the sub-structure of his whole thought system and consequently perspective on the human being.

The most common concepts at the basis of Nasr's thought structure can generally be listed as tradition, sharia, divine truth, tariqa, archetype and asceticism, and the understanding of the perfect human being in the light of them.

The concept of "tradition" that frequently appears in Nasr's thought system can be expressed, in the most general term, as "The Last Coming First" (Nasr, 2001:76) or "All Principles of the Divine Origin" (Nasr, 2001:78). Nasr defines the concept of tradition as the principles and truths of the divine source that have been or have not been explained to people, and the general cosmic field of these principles in different fields from law to social structure, art and science through other mediators such as messengers, prophets, avatars and logos (Nasr, 2001). Those people who have comprehended this concept of tradition respect even the smallest detail of each holy tradition and properly pay tribute to everything they regard as a manifestation of the sacred (Chittick, 2012:44). According to Nasr, it is necessary to understand the relationships between outwardness and inwardness in the narration of the concepts such as revelation, religion and the sacred, and the scientific and artistic elements, in order to completely understand the concept of tradition (Nasr, 2001). When it is considered from this point of view, it is understood that tradition has encircled all living creatures. For this reason, if we liken Nasr's thought structure to a pyramid, we can say that the concept of "tradition" constitutes the basis and the widest part of the pyramid.

According to Nasr, sharia is the divine law in which the person himself becomes a Muslim by his own free will. However, the Divine Truth saves Islam from formalism and stops being a set of hollow orders. According to Nasr, the Divine Truth is the soul of Islam in the Qur'an (Nasr, 2003). Tariqa is a path, and it is related to the interior of all things; it is the sincerity of faith and the search for eternity. Nasr likened Sharia to the circle of a disc and likened tariqa to its radius while describing these three concepts. The Divine Truth is the center. Tariqa and Divine Truth constitute the metaphysical dimension of Islam and are manifested by the "state." The need for Sufism is due to the human being's longing for the eternal. According to Nasr, since Sufism is a mirror that reflects the divine names, it is a journey that happens by searching for those needed to resolve the separation among perfect human beings who seek union with Allah (Nasr, 2001).

The concept of the archetype is another important concept of Nasr. This concept is expressed as the prototype of humanity, the archetype of humanity with his personality that contains all levels of existence, and this human being is the perfect human being (Chittick, 2012). In the Islamic religious or mystical literature, the essence and full manifestation of this are present in the prophet; a universal, in other words, perfect human being is summarized as the Prophet Muhammad. In line with all this understanding, it can be said that to be exactly human being is to rediscover the essential unity from which the whole earth and the heavens have arisen but from which nothing has really separated. Here, Nasr places the creative force at the center of existence and explains the psychical deterioration in human by the disengagement of human from this center (Nasr, 2013b:18).

The concept of asceticism is another basic concept of Nasr. According to Nasr, asceticism means that the human being regards an action as a sin or he avoids taking action, keeps away from it, acts dismissively towards that action and

abandons it because of the possibility that this sin would lead to a sin. Asceticism is a sincere state and a dynamic concept. In other words, it refers to being able to be present in the world with the awareness that he can be controlled by Allah at any moment (Nasr, 2003).

The Human Being

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, it is possible to understand the definition of human by being able to grasp the deep philosophy behind it, the creation of the human being and the cosmic knowledge behind it. According to him, knowing cannot be separated from being, and the mind cannot be separated from the sacred. In this period, especially with the modernization process, knowledge has been almost completely made apparent and has been broken away from the holy, and therefore, the functions of the mind have become unable to uncton according to their proper nature. According to him, the rediscovery of tradition is a grace of a Divine World of Souls, a kind of cosmic compensation at a moment during which everything is thought to have been lost (Nasr, 2001:75). According to him, it is necessary to define the concept of “the Sacred” well and to have this feeling in order to understand the traditional perspective. By the most general definition, the Holy is the unchangeable and eternal Divine Truth (Nasr, 2001: 89). The Sacred is present in the nature of the truth, and human has the holy in his soul. The purpose of traditional civilization is to create a world dominated by the holy. Only in this way, the person can organize life as a whole and can find peace by getting rid of the terror of nihilism and skepticism. Although many different traditions have classified the person’s education in this journey to peace with symbolic figures such as seven, forty or other and attempted to explain the paths within a traditional perspective, according to Nasr, it can be reduced to two basic dimensions: the apparent is the divine message that organizes human life as a whole and the inward is the spiritual and intellectual needs. As we have already described, to follow the apparent dimension of religion is to remain in the circle. The inward is the radius from a point on the circumference to the center, in other words, to the Divine Truth. The real inwardness is related to the holy and is the supreme way of reaching the holy. According to tradition, access to knowledge of the paths leading to this center is achieved by twin sources, in other words, mental and intellectual anticipation. The mind is a divine gift and is able to know the truth. It is a beam that pierces the covers of cosmic being and that connects the circle of existence on which human life has fallen to the center where there is the Entity (Nasr, 2001: 160). The metacosmic principle that is called the mind is the root and center of consciousness, in other words, the source of both knowledge and existence of knowing subjective consciousness and the known objective order. The human being is a rational creature by nature. Accordingly, the human being should remember and confirm the knowledge engraved into the depths of his being. Human needs the revelation that will realize his intellect in him and that will allow him to function. This knowledge is proved by the cosmogonic event stated in Surah al-Araf, verse 172 in the Qur’an. In this verse, it is stated that “When your Lord brought forth descendants from the loins of the sons of Adam, and made them witnesses against their ownselves. asking them: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes, we do testify.’ 134 We did so lest you claim on the Day of Resurrection: ‘We

were unaware of this (Qur'an, al-Araf, 7/172)". Accordingly, the call of Islam is to remember and confirm the salvific nature of humanity's testimony in eternity and preserved in their knowledge. For this reason, according to Nasr, if the cardinal sin in Christianity is disobedience, the great sin in Islam is to forget Allah, in other words, the inability of the mind of a human being, who has been created to know Allah, to function as a result of forgetfulness. For this reason, shirk, which means the deification of anything besides Allah and denying His oneness, is the cardinal sin in Islam (Chittick, 2012). The place of intellect is the heart as it is also stated in all traditional doctrines. The heart is also the place of feeling and will, which are the other important elements of the human being. The heart is the place where this microcosmic triad has come together. In the heart, knowledge is always present simultaneously with love. In this state, the human is a being who thinks, perceives and loves. Only in this way, the mental explanation of the intuition of the intellect in the heart can be fully understood by a person and comes true through the activity of the intellect; and also, only in this case, knowledge can transform into an angelic state in a person (Nasr, 2001:165).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr greatly emphasizes natural disposition (*fitrah*) and its relationship with the creative will while describing the human being. According to him, the human being is stated as a being who has the ability to see the truth as required by his natural disposition although he has forgotten his soul which is in the depths of his self, not as a being to whom the revelation of the Creator has been sent just to compensate his original sins, as it is in Christianity (Chittick, 2012:64). For this reason, a human being must act in accordance with his natural disposition and must progress in the the journey of self-actualisation.

The state of the human being, which is the bridge between the heavens and the earth, is reflected in his entire existence and capabilities. The human being, who is the mirror of the divine names and attributes and is the prototype (or archetype) of creation, also has his own archetype. Each person who reflects the human race is also different and unique, such as the fact that each point on the circumference of a circle reflects the center but is different from another point. The fact that the human being has an opportunity to reach a hierarchy of abilities at various levels of being human and consciousness, and even, a hierarchy of "ores" in himself has repeatedly been mentioned in traditional Islamic sciences related to human. The first way to understand human microcosm is based on understanding the three dimension of which it consists: *ruh* (soul), *nafs* (self) and *jism* (body). In fact, these three divisions are the simplified form of many complex layers and levels that are actually present in being. In many traditions, the body is mentioned only as the visible part of the other bodies, not as contradictory with *nafs* and soul. Although the human has a visible body, he also has spiritual and graceful bodies that are consistent with many different worlds from which they originate. At the core of traditional doctrines, the journey that human takes between the layers of his own being means self-discovery of human, meeting with his own soul. In Sufism, these spiritual bodies are called "*lataif-e-sitta*".

As it is understood from the points that have been previously mentioned, Nasr states that Islam primarily addresses the human being as an intellect, not as a will. However, he emphasizes that the human must have a complete devotion to

Allah by discovering all other angels of human to reach perfection. The fact that all angels of human are not together just means devotion in appearance, which is a dangerous situation. The state of asceticism is experienced in a human who has directed all his angels to Allah, which is a state that enables the protection of human. In particular, the most important state that can protect the human from the effects of the modern world is asceticism and satisfaction (Chittick, 2012:51).

According to Nasr, the human cannot find the straight path without revelation although he is a rational being by nature. Human needs revelation because he is innately forgetful, carefree and inadequate. Indeed, in a verse from the Qur'an, it is stated that "We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; He was indeed unjust and foolish (Qur'an Ahzab, 33/72)". It is also stated in the other Qur'anic verses that human is the caliph of the earth (Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2/30; al-En'am, 6/165). Nasr specifically addresses the human caliphate and stated that the human is responsible to Allah because of his actions and that he is the supervisor and protector of the earth provided that he sees himself as an earthly being created in a divine form (Nasr, 2013a:172). However, here there is a point regarding the fact that the human is the servant of Allah takes precedence over the caliphate. He must not forget that he is an earthly being created in a divine form and is a servant. The human exactly becomes aware of his limits by his servanthood. The human who has realized his characteristics such as his helplessness, weakness, and poverty in the face of creative power gets free of the attributes belonging to him and understands the names and attributes of Allah, and even, they are manifested in him. Thus, he becomes caliph of God on earth..

The first archetype of the human being is present in that first perfect and universal being or in the human who is the mirror of names with divine attributes and is the prototype of creation. This person finds himself in the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The first created human archetype is the Prophet Muhammad. He is the true perfect human being. However, the human, who has been able to realize himself when he is in the world, becomes a spiritual person who is a reflection of a perfect human being and is the comprehension and concrete example of it, and that a person personally becomes the "pole" rotating the universe (Chittick, 2012:86).

The human is the model of the universe (microcosm). Indeed, he is the reflection of the opportunities that appear as the world in the basic realm of existence. For this reason, the human is more than being a human. The world is not seen as a reflection of human as a human but as a reflection of human in the existence of whom the divine attributes are holistically and fundamentally reflected. The attributes reflected in the human in this way are reflected in a scattered and dispersed form throughout the world and they create an order (Nasr, 2013a:177).

In terms of Islam, the cosmic dimension of the human is different from that in the West. Islam sees human as a natural being. In fact, it accepts nature as a messenger of Allah boiled over by a grace arising from Allah in his main veins. His natural essence that cannot be reduced to the naturalist conception of the human person of the Renaissance or Rousseau and French encyclopaedists. Furthermore, the human is a medium of grace in nature because he is the caliph of Allah on the

earth and in which he occupies the central position. A spiritual human is a means that has escaped from destruction and drowning as it is confirmed by the alchemists of the western hermetic tradition, in which nature breathes the spiritual life. If the human completely fails to follow the spiritual life and has lost contact with the spiritual world, he cannot be a source of light for nature, and he tends to destroy nature and to ruin it. However, only the human has the subjective condition of the genuine intellect that we call common sense. For this reason, only he can destroy the intrinsic harmony of nature (Chittick, 2012:86-88).

Between the Perfect Human Being and the Promethean Human Being

In Islam, the concept of human is present in the Prophet of Islam by his essence and full manifestation, and the intellectual explanation and formulation of this concept are summarized in “perfect human being,” in other words, excellent human model by intellectuals such as Ibn Arabi and Jalaluddin Rumi. In fact, this situation also manifests itself in shahada (Islamic statement of faith), and the Islamic wisdom focuses on these two bases. The first one of these is the names, attributes and actual manifestations of Allah, and the second one is the perfect human being axis related to human and cosmos. In other words, the first one is related to the source of creation while the second one is related to the appearance of the creatures and their return to the source. The first part corresponds to “*lā ilāha illallah*” (There is no god other than Allah) part of the shahada, and the second part corresponds to “*Muhammedür-Resûlullah*” (Muhammad is the messenger of Allah). Accordingly, the Prophet Muhammad is an example of perfection and the symbol of all living creatures. In fact, the perfect human being is he, his divine light. At this point, according to Nasr, with this meaning, the perfect human being is the archetype of both cosmos and human that contains all levels of existence (Chittick, 2012:85).

Although the perfect human being is dominated by nature in appearance, he internally dominates the objects. The main reason for it is that he has conquered the nature of inwardness. It should be stated here that when the human is highly proud of conquering the nature, an opposite process, in other words, asceticism causes human to be enslaved by his own passions and natural tendencies more than ever along with the lack of spiritual discipline and other deficiencies in himself (Chittick, 2012:86).

The perfect human being has a special place in the human understanding of Nasr. In this concept, the whole metaphysical dimension of which is too broad to be explained in this study, the perfect human being is the sum of all levels of existence, is a holistic mirror in divine peace and is also the uppermost archetype of creation. It is the prototype of human, and it is also a truth that the human can always comprehend due to desire, enthusiasm, and mercy that he carries as intention. Therefore, it is necessary for a human to comprehend the holistic possibility of his own existence, to know himself completely and to obtain the treasures of peace and real happiness that he has searched for in many places but has not been able to find in appearance (Chittick, 2012:86).

According to Nasr, the perfect human being is the opposite of the concept of ideal human that is expressed as “*pontifex*” or “*antropos*” in ancient Greek philosophy and as a bridge between the earth and the heavens, the modern concept

of the human being described as a Promethean earthly creature that revolts against its creator and tries to take over His creative role. The concept of caliph that is included in Islam with this meaning and is an honor for human is the human being who lives to a traditional way of life in a world that has an origin and a center. This human lives in the comprehension of the first origin that possesses its own perfection and is the owner of the integrity and original purity that aims to imitate, regain and transfer. He also lives in a circle where he is always conscious of its center and to which he wants to reach in his life, thoughts, and behaviors. Caliph is the reflection of the center in the circle. The echo of the origin in the periods after him is his reflection. He is responsible for his actions before Allah. Although he lives in this world, he is the guardian of the earth, the command of which has been offered to him, and the caliphate of Allah, his successor, on the earth, in other words, he is "Caliph" as long as he is being faithful to Allah as a earthly form created in His representation for eternity (Chittick, 2012:205-206). On the other hand, the Promethean man is a creature of this world. This person feels at home while he is in the world. This world is regarded as the artificial world that has been actually presented by the Promethean man to make it possible to forget Allah and his own spiritual truth. This person sees life as a big market where he is free to walk around and to choose things as much as he likes. When he loses the sense of divinity, he becomes a slave of the lower nature when he accepts devotion as freedom by being drowned in transience and discontinuity. This human follows the downward flow of the circle of humanity, and by doing so, he acquires arrogance that he has created his own destiny. However, he has a longing for his Holy and Eternal structure as a human being, and therefore, he resorts to many different ways from mysticism, that is induced by drugs to satisfy the relevant need, to psychological fictions. The Promethean man also causes the destruction of the natural environment and nature. The Promethean man is a human who has been swallowed up by the dungeon he has created, by avoiding the destruction caused by him and the city surrounding in which he has been forced to live. He searches for a solution everywhere, even in the doctrines in which the traditional human, who is caliph, has lived for ages. However, these sources cannot help him because he approaches these truths as a Promethean man, as well. The only way for this man's salvation is to understand the nature of Caliph in this world who has witnessed the real origin from where he has come and he will eventually return, and human as a central being (Chittick, 2012:206-207).

Dilemma of a Modern Western Human

The events experienced in today's world and the destructive attitude towards nature adopted by humanity have caused that modern civilization has started to question the validity of the concept of human in the Western world since birth. However, despite this recent awakening, it is necessary to be able to discuss such a big problem in a meaningful and constructive manner. Indeed, according to Nasr, the modern human burnt his hand with the fire he lit on the day which he began to forget who he is. The human tried to control the environment, but he turned it into jamming by selling his soul in a Faustian style to dominate the natural environment; consequently, he not only destroyed the environment but also created a situation that also led to suicide (Nasr, 2015:17-18). Since the mental faculties of a western

human have been disengaged from revelation and intellectual intuition, the human has been detached from all elements of love and has started to live the life just with its material dimension. Since he was not aware of the situation under the influence of the drug offered by the modern world, he has become lazy in meeting the needs of his soul, and eventually he has not been able to find a solution and has found himself with serious psychological problems (Nasr, 1997; Nasr, 2002). Especially in the process starting with the Renaissance, as a result of the fact that the modern western people, who rebelled against the heavens, have lost the divine wisdom of pleasure dimension, the concepts of unity and hierarchy in knowledge have disappeared, the sacred has disappeared. Furthermore, although scientism, which is a product of this century, has now become old-fashioned, it has led to the formation of a order called human sciences within a postivist atmosphere. Many of these disciplines, which were established because of the initial misunderstanding of human nature, have "equalized" the limited/finite conscious of human to the Divine Eternal Conscious. God has begun to be seen as the image of the human being although the human being needed to be seen as image of God. Thus, the human not only attempted to steal the fire from the heavens but also tried to kill the gods (Nasr, 2001: 177).

CONCLUSION

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who is an important representative of the traditionalist school, has been interested in all the main elements of the relationship between religion and science throughout his career. The scholarship of Nasr can be evaluated under two categories: the concept of Islamic science and the critique of modern science. Nasr defines Islamic science as the systematic examination of all kinds of natural events, based on the belief in of tawhid (oneness of God). According to Nasr, belief in of tawhid has dimensions related to philosophy, kalam, and Sufism, and we need to examine events with all these dimensions so that we can understand the contexts between the human and nature. The creative act of God is a metaphysical manifestation spreading from a single source. Similar to Christianity or Hinduism, Islamic science also regards the order in nature as the verses of Allah that indicate the divine origin of the world or life. Accordingly, the fact that the natural order has an absolute end gives it divinity and meaning. In this context, natural phenomena in the natural order can be synthesized by both analytical intelligence and intuitive intelligence, and thus, can be attributed a consistent whole by the intellect that has a higher epistemological position. The nature of Islamic science requires a hierarchical order in nature. Nasr, to explain this issue, identifies different layers of being, such as the creation of the world of abundance, of unity containing an ontological hierarchy as hierarchical units using the language of traditional Islamic philosophy. Among them, he attributed particular importance to the cosmos. According to Nasr, the hierarchic and purposeful understanding of the universe enables the Islamic natural sciences to get rid of reductionist and materialist bases. At the same time, the greatest success of the Islamic scientific tradition is that it has developed an inclusive viewpoint based on the metaphysical principles of Islam. In this context, Islamic science is not a science that has been developed and advanced only by Muslims. On the contrary, it is the scientific investigation of nature within the world-view of Islamic revelation.

The second part of Nasr's scholarship consists of his critique of modern science and the experience of modern man. Along with medieval Europe and immediately after the Renaissance developed, the modern West did not completely stop its relationship with the sacred, Christian thought was gradually abandoned; and the concept of a human being, who is suspicious of everything, and relative information were developed instead of it. All these developments actually originated from the radical change of modern human's worldview, and the human has prepared the ground for his own crisis. According to Nasr, the only way out for the stuck modern human being who is now still looking for the solution of these crises is to return to tradition and to accept the Absolute Truth.

In conclusion, upon evaluating the considerations stated by Nasr in the general framework, his opinions about humanity, his explanations related to human behaviors and the causes of these behaviors, and especially his interpretations about the relationship between nature and human are generally significant in terms of forming a theoretical basis for his thoughts in this area. In particular, the emphasis on the connection of human with the central concept, and the thought that the disconnection of this connection has had destructive consequences are a philosophy that needs to be emphasized. Nasr's human understanding also includes the importance of the emphasis on the sacred and tradition. This tradition shapes the attitudes, behaviors, thoughts, and actions that the human has adopted towards himself and those around him. This heritage that strengthened both his attitudes and behaviors has degenerated due to the appearance of modernism, and the individual must acquire asceticism for the disappearance of this degeneration. Therefore, it is of vital importance that the human must have a full devotion to what he believes to be able to get rid of the crisis he experiences. This also requires that the human directs, concentrates all his angels to this direction to include the whole of his own characteristics. Consequently, Nasr emphasizes the necessity of taking responsibility by stating that it is necessary to have a more active attitude and action awareness to develop positive and good behaviors. In conclusion, it is possible to say that Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a philosopher who has synthesized tradition and modernity well, has transported the values of tradition and especially the illuminationism philosophy to the present and has revealed the thought system as a good synthesis of tradition and modernity.

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