

## Islam Answers to the Environmental Crisis: Green Economy in Islamic Perspective

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### Abstract

#### Purpose:

In this paper, we will discuss how to interpret Green Economy concepts and policies within the framework of Islamic environmentalism, one of which is by using the thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

#### Methodology:

The approach in research that the author uses is a qualitative approach, a scientific and systematic method to conduct and study an object without manipulation and hypothesis testing. At the same time, the form of research that the author will carry out is a form of library research.

#### Findings:

Amid this complicated problem, Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a solution: As a Modern Man, he must place the universe (cosmos, both macro and micro) as a theophany. It means that modern society needs to re-establish its understanding of the existence of self, nature, and God and how their relationship can be harmonious.

#### Implication:

Seyyed Hossein Nasr invites us to reflect that human essence is integral to nature through this the-centrism framework. At the same time, the universe is a reflection of Divine power.

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## INTRODUCTION

The modern world has given humanity excellent progress and prosperity, but on the other hand, it has also had the impact of destruction. According to many philosophers and scholars of environmental ethics, modern humans are creatures that have been jolted from their awe of nature, so they have divorced humans into the processes of the cosmos to become a distanced and remote attitude. "Animate nature" is killed through desecralization and continues to dissolve social institutions from religious symbols through secularization.

The environmental crisis has captured the attention of the world community, along with related topics such as the climate crisis, *global warming*, and mass deforestation. The global community has begun to realize that industrialization and development oriented toward fulfilling the economy and technology have threatened the planet's future. Sustainable environmental damage on an extensive scale requires the global community to unite to deal with it in various ways and disciplines (Gorz, 2003).

In this context, as Muslims, it is exciting to re-examine the thoughts of Islamic philosophers and intellectuals, one of whom is Seyyed Hossein Nasr, which relates to environmental ethics and how humans should behave towards the environment. As one of the contemporary traditionalist Muslim thinkers, he has made us aware of the worrying condition of modern humans (one of which is outlined in his book *Islam and the Plight of the Modern Man*), which is very relevant to our current human condition.

Moreover, amid increasing public awareness (including from outside Islam) regarding environmental issues, *civil society*, and research institutions have created and offered various sustainable or environmentally friendly development concepts to become solutions for humanity. Some popular concepts that have built momentum over the past decade include the *Green and Circular Economy*. The two are often grouped under the 'Green Economy' umbrella and have even become jargon in business, industry, and government.

Muslims who believe that humans have a responsibility as *Khalifah* Allah on this earth must be able to take a stand and integrate these latest development concepts into the Modern Islamic *Worldview*. In this paper, we will

discuss how to interpret Green Economy concepts and policies within the framework of Islamic environmentalism, one of which is by using the thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

## METHODS

The research approach that the author uses is qualitative, namely a scientific and systematic method to conduct a study of an object without manipulation and hypothesis testing. This qualitative approach is often referred to as a naturalistic research method because, in its research, it always prioritizes natural conditions. So, in the research process that the author will carry out, the author will move away from relative objects and not change (Afifuddin & Saebani, 2009).

The form of research that the author will carry out is a form of library research. Library research is a series of activities to solve problems using library data as a data source. The primary data sources in this study consisted of books, journals, and writings from the Islamic figure Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Meanwhile, secondary data sources in this research use scientific study sources such as books and journals relevant to the research object.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**A Brief Life History of Seyyed Hossein Nasr.** Nasr was born in Iran in 1933. He received his academic training in the United States, graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in Physics and Mathematics. Then, he continued to Harvard University with a concentration in Geology and Geophysics. After that, he completed his Ph.D in History of Science and Philosophy. After graduating, Nasr returned to Iran, where he was appointed professor of philosophy at the University of Tehran, specializing in esoteric philosophy.

Then, he continued his post-doctoral education in "Traditional Education Systems" with several experts (Assar and Qazwini). In 1973, Nasr founded the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy under the auspices of the Queen of Iran. This institution was created to study and disseminate traditional sciences, especially Islamic philosophy, and amazingly, this institution has attracted scholars, both from East and West, such as Henry Corbin and Toshihiko Izutsu. However, after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Nasr was forced to leave Iran again and return to the United States. Since 1984, he has held the Professor of Comparative Religion and Islamic Studies position at George Washington University in Downtown Washington DC (Nasr, 2002).

In terms of writing, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has written more than fifty books and hundreds of articles and taught various subjects ranging from traditional Islamic cosmology, metaphysics, science, philosophy, theology, Sufism, art, and Islamic architecture to modernity and religious pluralism. He has contributed to and edited several anthologies and encyclopedias. In addition to these academic works, Nasr also wrote several books aimed at the general public in order to introduce Islam concerning modernity, such as *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (1985), *Islam and the Fate of Modern Humans* (1975) and *The Islamic Youth Guide to Modern World* (1998).

Nasr's works have been translated into many languages: Indonesian, Japanese, Bosnian, Turkish, Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Polish, Tamil, French, Dutch and others (22 languages in total). His last two books, *Jiwa Islam: Defending Human Values* (2004) and *Garden of Truth: Sufi Visions and Promises, Islamic Mystical Traditions* (2007), are works that present the face of Islam and Sufism that are relevant to the contemporary human condition.

**Environmental Economics Problems in the Modern Era, and the Emergence of the Green Economy.** Economic development, both as an idea and at an implementation level, has existed since humans appeared on the earth's surface. In Islamic teachings, humans come to earth by carrying out the mandate as *Khalifah fil ard*, accompanied by instructions on living life by adhering to His revelation. The Qur'an as a revelation has recorded classical Egyptian civilization which tells the story of the Prophet Yusuf AS as Egypt's minister of economy and finance, who made development plans to face seven years of prosperity for the Egyptian people and faced crises in the following seven years (Q.S. Yusuf [12]: 46-49, and 55). Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad SAW, 14 centuries ago, succeeded in building civilization and the economy and was then continued by his friends.

When traced, the thoughts of Islamic scholars related to economic development were long before the time of the father of capitalist economics, Adam Smith (1737-1890 AD), or the socialist economics teacher Karl Marx (1818-1883). These Muslim thinkers include Ibn Taimiyah (1263-1328 AD), Ibn Rushd (1126-1298 AD), Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 AD), and Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD). Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Taimiyah have

written in their respective book various economic issues such as labor issues, state finances, taxes, economic growth, population, and so on (Islahi, 2005).

However, attention to economic development in various parts of the world is still new because it only developed after World War II. Therefore, the study of economic development is still new compared to other economic sciences, such as macroeconomics, labor economics, public finance, and political economics. Apart from being the newest, it is also said that development economics is the most challenging and exciting compared to other economic disciplines (Islahi, 2005).

Even though it was born by classical capitalist economists, development economics differs from economics widely applied in capitalist countries, namely traditional neoclassical economics, which is liberal but not socialist economics, centralized ala Marxist. Development economics is exceptional because it specifically studies countries in the third world, which are developing countries and, on average, live with underdevelopment. Development economics is economics that recognizes and demonstrates that the existing conventional economics, namely capitalist economics and socialist economics, is unable to overcome various economic problems in developing countries.

Therefore, a new approach to economics is needed by synergizing the role of government and the participation of a more advanced and modern society to realize more equitable prosperity. Economic development is very complex, multidimensional, and has a comprehensive perspective. It is not just an economic phenomenon but has a broader social dimension involving all aspects of human life, both horizontally between humans, humans, and other creatures, including the relationship between humans and nature and their environment, as well as the vertical, transcendental relationship between humans and their creators. Therefore, the economic development approach, which has so far tended to focus on the economic side and ignored social, cultural, and moral issues, has actually led to failure, where the level of absolute poverty is increasing, the income gap is widening, and environmental damage is also becoming more rampant (Jhingan, 2011).

This development approach, which mainly originates from the thoughts of Western economists, is built and conceptualized based on standards of moral, social, spiritual, and environmental values that are very different from those of developing countries. The tendency of Western values to prioritize material aspects means that existing theories remain materialistic. Therefore, only some development theories from the West can be applied to all *developing countries* (NSB). It means that development cannot only be interpreted as the achievement of one particular dimension but rather as a multidimensional process involving all components of the socio-economic system. Development must not ignore social and environmental externalities.

Today, the world is increasingly aware of the importance of the impact of various environmental issues on the success of development efforts. As noted earlier, classic market failures have also caused too much environmental damage. It is natural, considering that for an economic system whose sole strategy is to increase growth (GDP growth), attention to environmental aspects is a dichotomy. Moreover, the operationalization of production carried out is capital-intensive.

Attention to environmental aspects in economic design like this is an obstacle to creating the highest growth. For example, economic growth that empowers *non-renewable resources* or *depletable resources*. On the one hand, the production that empowers this type of resource provides high-added value for growth, but on the other hand, resource exploitation like this is not *sustainable*. Not only in the production aspect, sometimes development that places more emphasis on infrastructure development also often has to inflame the environment, such as the decreasing amount of green land, both agricultural land and forests.

Such production, economic, and development systems conflict with sustainability issues and create negative environmental externalities. One of the issues often associated with this is the issue of global warming and climate change, in addition to the issue of air pollution and waste caused by environmentally unfriendly production processes. Global warming is a condition where the temperature of the earth's surface becomes hotter over a certain period caused by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases at the atmosphere's surface.

This increase in greenhouse concentration will cause the reflection of geothermal heat into the atmosphere to be hampered, which is known as the greenhouse effect. The greenhouse effect causes an increase in the average temperature on the earth's surface, which is known as global warming. In the following process, global warming will cause climate changes, such as increasing seawater temperatures, which causes increased evaporation and changes in rainfall patterns and air pressure. The impact of this event is the melting of polar ice, rising sea levels,

and shifts in seasons, which cause changes in the pattern of ecosystems and the environment, which are dangerous for humans and living creatures.

Among the mitigation measures that can be taken are preventing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) gas from being released into the atmosphere and reducing the production of greenhouse gases. Carbon dioxide gas in the air can be reduced by reforestation. Meanwhile, reducing greenhouse gas production can be done by adjusting industrial or other fossil fuel activities. These two mitigation steps directly relate to previously described production, economic, and development systems. Even though countries are trying to adapt to this possible risk, clear and significant impact adaptation steps still need to be taken.

This condition encourages people worldwide to develop various alternatives and new production, economic, and development approaches. Among the concepts that have developed a lot to correct or become an alternative to the classic system are *green economy*, *degrowth movement*, and *circular economy*. *Green Economy*, in general, can be interpreted as an economic approach that aims to improve human and social welfare while reducing environmental risks significantly.

In line with this, the *Degrowth Movement* is a form of correction (counter) to conventional economics, which always prioritizes growth (economic growth) through production and consumption as measured by GDP growth. An economy that is "required" to always grow harms the depletion of natural resources and environmental damage. *Degrowth* tries to redefine the economy by measuring it in monetary terms (material aspects) and looking at human needs (needs) and nature's ability to meet them.

Meanwhile, the *Circular Economy* concept is a systemic approach to economic development designed to benefit business, society, and the environment. In contrast to the linear 'take-make-waste' or 'take-use-dispose' model, the circular economy is designed to be restorative and regenerative, where products, materials, and resources used in the production and consumption processes are stored in the system for as long as possible. To minimize waste generation or return waste to the production process (Rutqvist, 2018).

These various alternative development and production economic approaches clearly show that paying attention to environmental aspects is crucial to achieving sustainable economic development. These objectives and focuses are very relevant to the Islamic economic development strategy, which also pays close attention to environmental aspects in economic and development activities. In addition, protecting the environment is also closely related to the basic foundation of reducing Islamic economic development goals, namely *Maqashid Syariah*.

Because the environment is a gift from Allah, human behavior towards the environment is to protect it. In Islam, a person has been taught how human responsibility is towards the environment. Environmental jurisprudence is closely related to *maqashid sharia* because in caring for the environment, there is an element of benefit for human life (Bakar, 2008). From this, we can see that the environment is one of the objectives of the Shari'a, so it is necessary to preserve life for the continuity of other living things.

As the essence of *maqashid sharia* is to maintain human benefit, with environmental preservation, humankind will obtain many benefits because if we talk about the environment, it is related to humans. After all, the good of the environment will impact humans, and vice versa. Damage to the environment will harm humans. The resulting benefit must be universal (covering all individuals), not just partial (specifically to one group or one individual), so that benefit cannot only be attributed to one group or individual and not comprehensively to all humans. This new approach to economics and development can be better understood and integrated into the Islamic *worldview* through the framework of thought initiated by Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

**Environmental Crisis: Causes and Solutions according to Islamic Perspective.** Environmental ethicists, especially in the West, agree that anthropocentrism is one of the *Root Causes* of the emergence of the environmental crisis. Anthropocentrism is a perspective that considers humans to be the Center of the ecosystem. For adherents of this view, the highest and most determining value in the ecosystem order is humans, their goals, welfare, and interests. Thus, everything in this ecosystem other than humans (*the other beings*) will only have value if it supports human interests; it has no value (Suparlan, 1996).

Therefore, nature is seen only as objects, tools, and means of fulfilling human needs. It also bears similarities to Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism ideology. Modern humans, in general, have lost the proper perspective on the Cosmos (Universe). Seyyed Hossein Nasr has reminded us of human arrogance towards nature. In one of his magnum opuses, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (1968), he said that when his work was written, the ecological crisis had already occurred due to human greed in "raping" nature.

In other words, this ecological crisis is the result of the lifestyle of scientism, which does not regard modern science as a way to know nature but as the only way/philosophy for it, so that as a whole and totalitarianism reduces all reality into the physical domain (ignoring the metaphysical) and not wanting to accept the possibility of non-scientific (non-empirical) worldviews. In this case, we must examine the classical Chinese tradition, especially in Taoism and Neo-Confucianism.

According to Nasr, both schools highly value devotion to nature and the importance of metaphysical understanding. Moreover, the same reverent attitude towards nature, including a strong sense of symbolism, awareness of the clarity of the cosmos, and transparency before metaphysical reality, can be found in Japan. Shintoism strongly emphasizes this attitude. That is why landscape paintings are true icons in classical Eastern art, especially in the Taoist and Zen traditions. The painting evokes sentimental pleasure in the viewer and conveys a gift and means of communion with transcendent reality.

Amid this complicated problem, Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a solution: As a Modern Man, he must place the universe (*cosmos*, both macro and micro) as a theophany. It means that modern society needs to re-establish its understanding of the existence of self, nature, and God and how the relationship between the three can be harmonious (Hoffman, 2005). Seeing nature through the correct lens of intellectualism is a perspective that does not place nature as a pattern of externalized and gross realities but as a theater in which divine qualities are embedded.

Like thousands of mirrors that depict a beloved face, like a theophany of a single reality at the Center of the human personality itself. Seeing nature as a theophany is seeing a reflection of His Essential Presence in nature and its forms. With this, Muslims themselves will expand awareness of the Sharia teachings regarding ethical treatment of the natural environment and expand the field of application following the Sharia principles themselves, such as the Sharia's commands regarding the care and preservation of nature (which is in line with the concept of benefit in *Maqasid Syariah* itself), as well as fostering friendly feelings and attitudes towards other creatures created by Allah, such as animals and plants.

It means making laws related to environmental preservation, as is the case in modern countries. Enforcing this law will only occur by emphasizing the teachings of divine law. The perspective that modern Islamic humans should adopt towards the *cosmos* is *Tawhid*. In the *Tawhid* perspective, God is the Center, while nature and humans are manifestations of God's attributes (Nata, 2016). That is the essence of the teachings of monotheism, where nature, humans, and God are combined in a holistic relationship.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr invites us to reflect that human essence is integral to nature through this the-centrism framework. At the same time, the universe is a reflection of Divine power. So, in this context, taking steps to make peace and live in harmony with nature is the best way. Because for Nasr, there will be no peace between humans unless there is peace and harmony with nature. For all of this to be realized, humans must be in harmony with the source and origins of creatures. According to Nasr, whoever makes peace with God will also make peace with His creation, nature, and people.

In essence, humans are an integral part of nature. Nature represents His presence and human position as *Khalifatullah fil ard* is a cosmic entity that cannot be separated. So, it is not appropriate for humans, with their greed, to deliberately exploit nature arbitrarily. If we relate this to the three approaches to Green Economy development which are pretty popular in the world of business and government, namely: *green economy*, *degrowth movement*, and *circular economy*, it can be concluded that these three approaches, from the perspective of the Islamic environmental paradigm, are a *means to an end*, a system-ways to achieve the goals and ideals discussed earlier.

Anyone who upholds theo-centrism and theophany towards the universe will automatically come to development methods that align with the three Green Economy approaches. *The fundamental values* that can be taken from the sustainable development paradigm are: First, stop and avoid damage to all of God's creatures. Second, have a holistic target and not unidimensional just for quantitative growth. Third, eliminate *irreversible waste* in all aspects of economic activity. All of this aligns with the teachings and essence of Islamic teachings in the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad.

The biggest challenge here is not at the theoretical *alignment* level but at the implementation, action, and policy level. Will the jargon and slogans put forward through a *degrowth circular economy*? It will follow the substance and impact of the statutory policies, corporate actions, and individual actions (including *lifestyle choices*). Alternatively, it will only become an empty framework of activism, which, in the end, will not be able to solve the

complex problem of the environmental crisis. Everything will depend on those who will implement it, namely modern humans. The point goes back to the self-transformation of modern humans, *an inward transformation*.

Modern humans experiencing an identity and spiritual crisis must immediately rebuild their esoteric dimensions to re-establish a harmonious relationship with nature. In other words, modern science must be integrated with the metaphysics of Divine Reality to view nature as a mirror of God's power and not merely material for fulfilling desires (Rahman, 1984). The emphasis is on how natural science must be combined with the noble values of Islamic teachings, which are crystallized in its Divine roots.

## CONCLUSION

The global community has begun to realize that industrialization and development oriented toward fulfilling the economy and technology have threatened the planet's future. In this context, as Muslims, it is exciting to re-examine the thoughts of Islamic philosophers and intellectuals, one of whom is Seyyed Hossein Nasr, which relates to environmental ethics and how humans should behave towards the environment.

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