

Sayyed Hossein Nasr's Critique of Modernity: The Perspective of Perennial Philosophy and Its Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Thought

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Abstract

Modernity has not only resulted in advancements in science and technology but has also given rise to fundamental dilemmas within the landscape of contemporary Islamic thought – particularly concerning the crisis of meaning, the marginalization of spirituality, and the dominance of secular epistemology. This article aims to analyze Sayyed Hossein Nasr's critique of modernity and examine the relevance of the perennial philosophy he proposes in addressing these challenges within the context of contemporary Islamic thought. This study employs a qualitative research method grounded in library research. The approach utilized is philosophical hermeneutics combined with discourse analysis of Nasr's thought, particularly referencing primary works such as *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*. Nasr contends that modernity is inherently reductionist, as it places excessive emphasis on the empirical-material dimension while neglecting the metaphysical aspect and the human connection to transcendent reality. In response, the perennial philosophy he advocates underscores the significance of universal spiritual values, the transcendent unity of religions, and the preservation of tradition as foundational elements for restoring the balance between spirituality and rationality in contemporary life. Unlike previous studies, this article specifically emphasizes the integration of Nasr's perennial philosophy with the dynamics of contemporary Islamic thought, particularly in addressing the epistemological crisis resulting from the modernization of knowledge. The article contributes to the discourse on the significance of revitalizing spirituality and the Islamic scholarly tradition as a critical and constructive response to the dominance of modernity.

Abstrak

Modernitas tidak hanya menciptakan kemajuan dalam bidang ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi, tetapi juga melahirkan dilema mendasar dalam lanskap pemikiran Islam kontemporer, terutama terkait krisis makna, marginalisasi spiritualitas, dan dominasi epistemologi sekuler. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kritik Sayyed Hossein Nasr terhadap modernitas serta relevansi tawaran filsafat perennial dalam menjawab tantangan-tantangan tersebut dalam konteks pemikiran Islam kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka, pendekatan yang digunakan adalah hermeneutika filosofis dan analisis wacana pemikiran Nasr, dengan merujuk pada karya-karya primer seperti *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*. Nasr menilai bahwa modernitas bersifat reduksionis karena terlalu menekankan dimensi empiris-material dan mengabaikan aspek metafisik serta keterhubungan manusia dengan realitas transenden. Sebagai tanggapan, filsafat perennial yang ia tawarkan menekankan pentingnya nilai-nilai spiritual universal, kesatuan transenden agama-agama, dan pelestarian tradisi sebagai fondasi untuk merestorasi keseimbangan antara spiritualitas dan rasionalitas dalam kehidupan modern. Berbeda dari kajian-kajian sebelumnya, artikel ini menyoroti secara spesifik integrasi pemikiran filsafat perennial Nasr dengan dinamika pemikiran Islam kontemporer, khususnya dalam menghadapi krisis epistemologis akibat modernisasi pengetahuan. Artikel ini berkontribusi dalam memperluas diskursus tentang pentingnya revitalisasi spiritualitas dan tradisi keilmuan Islam sebagai respon kritis dan konstruktif terhadap hegemoni modernitas.

Keywords:

Modernity;
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Kata kunci:

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Introduction

Modernity constitutes a historical process that has significantly transformed human life across social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual domains. Originating in Western Europe during the seventeenth century Enlightenment, this process marked a shift wherein rationality, individual freedom, and scientific inquiry supplanted religious authority and tradition as the principal sources of knowledge and truth. Modernity engendered profound changes in societal values, not only by relegating religion to the private sphere but also by fostering a secular and materialistic mode of thought.¹ Modernity, understood as both an epistemological framework and an ideological construct, has profoundly shaped intellectual paradigms within contemporary Islamic thought. This impact has elicited a range of responses from Muslim scholars striving to comprehend and navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving historical context.

Phenomena such as modernization, secularization, and globalization have influenced not only social institutions but have also disrupted the spiritual foundations of Muslim life. In particular, globalization, as an extension of modernity, has facilitated the dissemination of values including liberalism, individualism, and pluralism. These values frequently stand in tension with core Islamic principles, engendering a dialectic between those advocating for the reinterpretation of Islam in light of modern realities and those who reject modernity on the grounds that it compromises the transcendental values intrinsic to Islam.²

Numerous scholars contend that modernity has precipitated not only a crisis of identity but also a diminution of spiritual meaning in contemporary human existence (Weber, 1905; Esposito, 2019). Consequently, it is imperative to examine how Islam, through its value system and spiritual framework, addresses the challenges posed by modernity while maintaining its authentic identity. This article seeks to investigate the core ideas of Sayyed Hossein Nasr, who proposes an alternative narrative to the prevailing secular and reductionist epistemologies characteristic of Western modernity. Utilizing an interdisciplinary methodology that synthesizes philosophy, sociology of religion, and intellectual history, this study contributes to the scholarly discourse concerning the interplay between Islam and modernity, particularly within contemporary Muslim societies endeavoring to reconcile the preservation of tradition with adaptation to modern conditions.³

Modernity is a historical phenomenon characterized by profound transformations across social, political, economic, and cultural spheres, particularly

¹ I Supena, A H Thahir, and ..., "Neutrality Debate in Philosophy against The Integration of Science Technology and Religion," *International ...* 14, no. 3 (2020): 892–908, [https://repository.iainkediri.ac.id/874/%0Ahttp://repository.iainkediri.ac.id/874/1/Neutrality Debate in Philosophy against The Integration of Science Technology and Religion.pdf](https://repository.iainkediri.ac.id/874/%0Ahttp://repository.iainkediri.ac.id/874/1/Neutrality%20Debate%20in%20Philosophy%20against%20The%20Integration%20of%20Science%20Technology%20and%20Religion.pdf).

² Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam, Postmodernism. What Moment?*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526183750.00017>.

³ Middle Eastern et al., *Islam 's Predicament with Modernity*, 2009.

evident in 17th- and 18th-century Europe. During this period, societies shifted from religious and spiritual foundations toward rationalism, individualism, and secularism. This transition involved significant changes in values, including the marginalization of religion in public life and an increased emphasis on technological advancement and material scientific progress. Within the framework of rationalism, modernity prioritizes human reason as the principal source of knowledge. Max Weber, in "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1905), contends that modernity initiated a process of "rationalization" that constrained the role of spirituality and reinforced the predominance of science and technology in the interpretation of reality.⁴

Secularism is commonly defined as the separation of religion from state affairs, leading to the privatization of religion and limiting its influence within the public sphere. This separation fundamentally impacts the interaction between religious belief and contemporary society. Additionally, modern materialism prioritizes the pursuit of wealth and comfort as primary life objectives, often neglecting the spiritual or metaphysical dimensions central to traditional religious life.⁵ The advent of modernity has induced substantial transformations within Islamic thought. On one hand, modernist intellectuals such as Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani endeavored to harmonize Islam with modern values, contending that Islam is not in opposition to science and progress but rather promotes innovation within the ethical framework of Islam. They championed the reinterpretation of Islamic texts to maintain their relevance in the contemporary era.⁶

Numerous scholars contend that modernity has precipitated a crisis of identity and spiritual decline within Muslim societies. John L. Esposito, in "Islam and Secularism" (2019), elucidates how modernity frequently advances secularization, thereby directly challenging Islam's principle of the integration between religion and socio-political life. Furthermore, modernity has transformed the social and economic frameworks in Muslim-majority countries, fostering the emergence of secular movements aimed at excluding religion from public and political domains. Olivier Roy, in "The Failure of Political Islam" (1994), posits that this dynamic has engendered a state of confusion among Muslims, who are caught between the pursuit of Western-style modernity and the preservation of Islamic tradition's authenticity.⁷

In his work *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1982), Fazlur Rahman contends that modernity has necessitated the adaptation of

⁴ Putri Alisia Silaen et al., "Modernisasi Dan Sekularisasi Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia," *Jayapangus Press* 4, no. 2 (2024): 82-93, <https://doi.org/10.62214/jat.v6i2.143>.

⁵ Rusdianti, "Materialisme Dalam Pemikiran Tan Malaka & Relevansinya Dengan Nilai Nilai Keislaman: Tinjauan Atas Madilog," 2024.

⁶ A. Pihar, "Modernization of Islamic Religious Education in the Era of Society 5.0," *Journey-Liasion Academia and Society* 1, no. 1 (2022): 1-12, <https://j-las.lemkomindo.org/index.php/BCoPJ-LAS>.

⁷ I Arifin, "Religion (Islam) And Politics; Analysis Discussion," *Jurnal Administrare: Jurnal Pemikiran* ... 8, no. 1 (2021): 225-32, <http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=2964983&val=26423&title=Religion Islam And Politics Analysis Discussion>.

Islamic teachings in response to advancements in science, technology, and social change. However, he emphasizes that such adaptations must not undermine the fundamental principles of Islam. Additionally, globalization—often regarded as an extension of modernity—has impacted Islamic thought by compelling Muslim communities to confront challenges including pluralism, individualism, and moral relativism (Ziauddin Sardar, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures*, 2003). These dynamics have generated tensions between the imperative to preserve a robust religious identity and the need to engage with contemporary values.⁸

Sayyed Hossein Nasr is recognized as one of the most prominent contemporary Muslim intellectuals who offers a rigorous critique of modernity. In his work “Islam and the Plight of Modern Man” (1975), Nasr elucidates how modernity marginalizes the spiritual dimension of human existence, supplanting it with materialistic values and thereby disrupting the intrinsic connections among human beings, nature, religion, and transcendental meaning. His critique is grounded in the framework of perennial philosophy, which posits the existence of universal metaphysical truths underlying all authentic religious traditions. Nasr contends that modern science is reductive in nature, as it acknowledges solely the physical aspect of reality while disregarding the spiritual dimension and humanity’s relationship with the divine. From this vantage point, he argues that contemporary Islamic thought has been profoundly shaped by modern epistemology, which neglects Islam’s metaphysical heritage; consequently, he advocates for a return to a tradition that harmoniously integrates revelation, spirituality, and intellectual inquiry.⁹

Nasr endeavors to revive traditional values, particularly within Islam, as a strategy to address the challenges posed by modernity. He underscores the significance of returning to spiritual teachings that recognize divine reality and foster a harmonious relationship between humanity, God, and nature. This approach contrasts sharply with contemporary worldviews characterized by materialism and secularism. Furthermore, Nasr contends that one of the most detrimental consequences of modernity is the disjunction between science and religion. He advocates that Islamic science should remain intrinsically connected to spirituality and be firmly rooted in metaphysical and cosmological principles inherent to Islam. Nasr’s perspective on the interplay between Islam and modernity continues to hold considerable relevance, as Muslim communities navigate the complexities introduced by globalization, technological

⁸ Haminah Sabiah Vitry and Syamsir, “Analisis Peranan Pemuda Dalam Melestarikan Budaya Lokal Di Era Globalisasi,” *Triwikrama: Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu Sosial* 3, no. 88 (2024): 1–12.

⁹ K. N. Afiah et al., *The Social Movement of Women in Pesantren (Islamic Boarding Schools): From Empowerment to Resistance against Patriarchal Culture, Religion, Education, Science and Technology towards a More Inclusive and Sustainable Future: Proceedings of the 5th International Colloquium on Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (ICIIS 2022)*, Lombok, Indonesia, 19-20 October 2022, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003322054-40>.

advancement, and secularism. William Chittick similarly endorses Nasr's position regarding the necessity of integrating spirituality and science within Islamic thought.¹⁰

This study adopts a qualitative approach centered on literature analysis. This methodology was selected due to its capacity to facilitate an in-depth examination of the perspectives of Muslim scholars and their responses to modernity through the analysis of written sources. Data were gathered from a diverse array of pertinent classical and contemporary literature, including journal articles, academic books, and scholarly documents that address the relationship between Islam and modernity. The primary sources for this research are the works of Sayyed Hossein Nasr, notably *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (1975) and *Knowledge and the Sacred* (1989), which explicitly present his critique of modernity and his endorsement of perennial philosophy. Data analysis was performed using content analysis, entailing the interpretation of the philosophical and spiritual meanings embedded within the texts and their connection to the contextual challenges posed by modernity in contemporary Islamic thought. Through this approach, the study aims to develop a critical and reflective synthesis of Nasr's perennialist contributions to ongoing Islamic intellectual discourse.

Results and Discussion

Sayyed Hossein Nasr's Perspective on Perennial Philosophy

Sayyed Hossein Nasr conceptualizes Perennial Philosophy as an approach that underscores the transcendent unity of religions, the pivotal role of tradition in preserving spiritual equilibrium, and the importance of metaphysical values within Islam. The notion of transcendent unity is grounded in the conviction that all authentic religions derive from a singular divine source, despite variations in their forms and expressions shaped by historical and cultural contexts.¹¹ This principle is exemplified in the Qur'anic verse: *"To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed He would have made you a single people but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues..."* (Qur'an, Al-Mā'idah 5:48). This verse acknowledges the plurality of religions while affirming their shared ultimate divine purpose.

Nasr underscores the pivotal role of tradition in sustaining spiritual harmony in the context of the ascendancy of materialistic and secular modernity. He posits that tradition serves as a mechanism for preserving the human connection with God, nature, and fellow human beings. Through tradition, sacred values are transmitted across generations via rituals, art, and knowledge grounded in revelation. Moreover, Nasr interprets the Perennial Philosophy as a means to revitalize Islamic values by

¹⁰ Agus Dwi Cahya et al., "Transformasi Manageria Transformasi Manageria," *Journal Of Islamic Education Management* 2, no. 1 (2021): 57–72, <https://doi.org/10.47476/manageria.v4i1.523>.

¹¹ Fathin Fauhatun, "Islam Dan Filsafat Perenial: Respon Seyyed Hossein Nasr Terhadap Nestapa Manusia Modern," *Jurnal Fuaduna: Jurnal Kajian Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 4, no. 1 (2020): 54, <https://doi.org/10.30983/fuaduna.v4i1.2728>.

deepening the comprehension of tawḥīd and the relationship between humanity and the divine reality. Consequently, he contends that Muslims must reengage with the intellectual heritage of classical Islamic philosophers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn 'Arabi, who synthesized philosophy, science, and spirituality within an Islamic worldview.¹²

From an epistemological perspective, Perennial Philosophy rejects modern reductionism, which confines reality to the physical and empirical domains. Nasr advocates for a holistic epistemology that synthesizes revelation, reason, and spiritual intuition. He contends that the division between science and spirituality constitutes a form of desacralization of knowledge, a hallmark of modernity and the underlying cause of the contemporary spiritual crisis. Accordingly, Perennial Philosophy functions not only as a critique of modernity but also as an alternative framework for reconstructing Islamic thought on integral foundations that encompass rational, metaphysical, and transcendental dimensions. This approach enables Islamic thought to maintain its relevance in the context of globalization and evolving circumstances while preserving its spiritual essence and sacred values.¹³

The Concepts and Characteristics of Modernity within the Framework of Islamic Thought

Islamic thought conceptualizes modernity as a civilizational phase that induces significant transformations in human perceptions of reality, knowledge, and the relationship with the Divine. Broadly, modernity is characterized by the predominance of rationality, secularism, the fragmentation of knowledge, and the exclusion of the sacred dimension from nature. Scholars such as Sayyed Hossein Nasr critique modernity for its tendency to alienate humanity from metaphysical principles regarded as sacred. From the Islamic intellectual standpoint, modernity is not merely an external phenomenon but constitutes a profound epistemological and spiritual challenge to the Islamic framework of understanding knowledge and meaning.¹⁴

Modernity constitutes a comprehensive concept that encompasses social, cultural, and economic transformations occurring within society, particularly since the eighteenth century. It is commonly associated with scientific progress, technological innovation, and shifts in intellectual paradigms. As Schoorl posits, modernity entails transformations across all facets of life, signifying a transition from traditional approaches to rational and scientific methods, alongside alterations in social structures and value systems.¹⁵ Generally, modernity is understood as an endeavor to supplant established beliefs, customs, and institutions with novel modes of thought,

¹² Abu Syahrin, "Agama Dan Filsafat Perennial Perspektif Seyyed Hossein Nasr," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Theosofi Dan Peradaban Islam* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.51900/alhikmah.v1i1.4034>.

¹³ Eastern et al., *Islam 's Predicament with Modernity*.

¹⁴ Muhammad Faiz Nurahyan, "Eksistensi Tradisi Islam Di Tengah Modernitas Perspektif Seyyed Hossein Nasr Muhammad" 6, no. 2 (2024): 139-62, <https://doi.org/10.15408/paradigma.v6i02.37173>.

¹⁵ Meliya Morniwati, "Pengaruh Modernitas Di Dalam Keluarga Terhadap Penelantaran Lansia Di Desa Caturtunggal, Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta" 151 (2016): 10-17.

methodologies, and systems grounded in science and contemporary values. It is frequently characterized as a period marked by continual discovery, especially in the domains of science, technology, and production.¹⁶

The characteristics of modernity can be delineated through several key indicators that signify transformations in social behavior and structure:¹⁷ (1) Openness to new experiences, whereby modern societies demonstrate receptivity to innovation and novel ideas; (2) Independence from traditional authority, with individuals increasingly relying on critical thinking and scientific knowledge rather than established traditions; (3) Confidence in science, reflecting a strong trust in scientific methods to elucidate natural and social phenomena; (4) High mobility and ambition, as individuals strive to enhance their social and economic status and are willing to relocate to achieve these objectives; (5) Emphasis on long-term planning, highlighting a focus on future-oriented strategies in both personal and societal contexts; and (6) Active political participation, characterized by the encouragement of civic engagement within political processes.

Modernity, therefore, encompasses not only material and technological dimensions but also represents a transformation in social values and modes of thought. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of modernity necessitates an examination from multiple perspectives to thoroughly evaluate its impact on society.

The Impact of Modernity on Islamic Intellectual Traditions

Modernity has introduced profound transformations in Islamic thought and practice, presenting both challenges and opportunities for Muslims globally. Advances in science, technology, secular ideologies, and individualism have not only reshaped human civilization broadly but have also influenced the ways in which Muslims interpret and implement their religious teachings. Two aspects warrant particular attention: the challenges engendered by modernity and the responses articulated by Muslim intellectuals.

Since the colonial period, Muslims have encountered pressures to reconcile religious doctrines with global, rational, and frequently secular frameworks. Significant challenges emerge when contemporary principles such as democracy, human rights, and scientific rationality appear to conflict with traditional Islamic norms. Muslim intellectuals have responded in varied manners. For instance, Fazlur Rahman (1982) adopted a reformist stance by revitalizing *ijtihād* and utilizing a historical-critical methodology to maintain the relevance of Islamic teachings amid evolving social contexts. Conversely, scholars such as Sayyid Hossein Nasr provide a profound critique of modernity grounded in Perennial Philosophy, contending that modernity has disrupted the human connection to cosmic and spiritual order.¹⁸

Efforts to harmonize Islamic values with modern principles have emerged across various domains, including education, law, and governance. In the field of education,

¹⁶ Sanuri, *Teologi, Hukum Islam Dan Tren Modernitas*, 2017, digilib.uinsby.ac.id.

¹⁷ Meliya Morniwati, "Pengaruh Modernitas Di Dalam Keluarga Terhadap Penelantaran Lansia Di Desa Caturtunggal, Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta."

¹⁸ Silaen et al., "Modernisasi Dan Sekularisasi Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia."

reform movements have aimed to incorporate modern sciences into Islamic curricula to enable Muslims to contribute to global civilization while preserving their spiritual identity. Within Islamic law, contemporary reforms prioritize justice and the common good, reinterpreting shari'ah to address present-day circumstances. In Indonesia and other Muslim-majority societies, ongoing debates engage with issues of secularism, pluralism, and democracy within Islamic discourse. These developments demonstrate that modernity is not inherently antagonistic to religion; rather, it can function as a catalyst for the reinterpretation of Islamic values in the public sphere.¹⁹

Modernity, however, also poses significant epistemological challenges. The rationalization of religion and the predominance of empirical science have marginalized spirituality within Muslim life. This phenomenon has been characterized by many scholars as the “desacralization of knowledge,” wherein modern worldviews tend to dismiss the metaphysical dimensions of existence. In response, an emerging intellectual movement within Islam advocates for the revitalization of its integrative intellectual tradition—one that transcends material confines and seeks to harmonize reason, revelation, and spirituality. Consequently, the interaction between modernity and Islamic thought constitutes a complex and dynamic process, continuously shaped by ongoing debate. This underscores that Islam, as a rich intellectual tradition, demonstrates both resilience and vitality in addressing modern transformations while preserving its core teachings.²⁰

Several significant challenges emerge within Islamic thought as a result of modernity. *First*, secularism: modernity is often associated with secularization, which may reduce the influence of religion in both public and private spheres.²¹ *Second*, the identity crisis: many Muslims experience tension between maintaining religious traditions and adapting to contemporary societal expectations, leading to confusion, particularly among younger generations.²² *Third*, social and moral transformation: modernity alters moral and social norms, prompting debates on issues such as gender justice, human rights, and pluralism within Muslim communities.²³ *Fourth*, intellectual

¹⁹ Muhammad Irsan Barus, “Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam Menurut Azyumardi Azra,” *Jurnal Al-Karim STAI-YAPTIP Pasaman Barat* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1–12, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334304297_Modernisasi_Pendidikan_Islam_Menurut_Azyumardi_Azra.

²⁰ Muhammad Zein Damanik et al., “Modernisasi Dan Sekularisasi Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia,” *Jurnal At-Tabayyun* 6, no. 2 (2023): 82–93, <https://doi.org/10.62214/jat.v6i2.143>.

²¹ Nur Rohmah and Kholid Mawardi, “Respon Islam Terhadap Modernitas Barat,” *Transformasi Manageria: Journal of Islamic Education Management* 4, no. 1 (2023): 42–52, <https://doi.org/10.47467/manageria.v4i1.3729>.

²² Kasyiful Akmalia, Nurkhalis Nurkhalis, and Raina Wildan, “Islam Dan Tantangan Modernitas Perspektif Nurcholish Madjid,” *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 2, no. 1 (2021): 178, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jpi.v2i1.11315>.

²³ Aminudin Aminudin, “Pemikiran Abdullah Saeed Tentang Muslim Progresif Sebagai Jalan Alternatif Tantangan Era Modern,” *RUSYDIAH: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 2, no. 1 (2021): 40–52, <https://doi.org/10.35961/rsd.v2i1.267>.

stagnation: it is argued by some that Islamic thought has lagged in responding to new intellectual and technological advancements.²⁴

Perennial Philosophy as an Alternative Framework

Perennial Philosophy (*Philosophia Perennis*) represents a philosophical viewpoint that posits the existence of a universal truth underlying all major religions and world traditions. This perspective is grounded in the conviction that each religion embodies the same metaphysical and spiritual essence, which manifests through diverse esoteric (inner) and exoteric (outer) forms shaped by historical and cultural contexts.²⁵ According to Sayyed Hossein Nasr, Perennial Philosophy is crucial for addressing the crisis of modernity, characterized by the erosion of the spiritual dimension and the predominance of materialism. Nasr identifies modernity as the fundamental cause of human alienation from traditional spirituality and the sacred order. Consequently, he advocates for Perennial Philosophy as an alternative framework that prioritizes the preservation of sacred values and the integration of traditional principles across various domains, including science, education, and culture.²⁶

Perennial Philosophy presents an alternative ontological and epistemological framework in response to the predominant influence of modernity, characterized by secularism, reductionism, and anti-metaphysical tendencies. Grounded in the premise that all authentic traditional religions share a common metaphysical truth (*religio perennis*), Perennial Philosophy challenges the modern dichotomy that separates religion from science—a defining feature of Western thought since the Enlightenment. According to Nasr, modernity has precipitated a spiritual crisis through what he terms the “desacralization of knowledge,” which entails the division between reason and revelation, as well as between humanity and the higher cosmic order. Perennial Philosophy aims to reestablish divine revelation as the primary source of knowledge, wherein reason serves to deepen the understanding of reality, encompassing not only its physical and empirical dimensions but also its metaphysical and divine aspects.²⁷

Perennial Philosophy is not intended as an escape from contemporary realities. Instead, it represents a deliberate effort to reestablish a harmonious relationship among human beings, the divine, and the natural world. In an era when many modern Muslims grapple with identity issues—torn between fundamentalist and liberal inclinations—Perennial Philosophy provides a balanced alternative that integrates

²⁴ Edy Imam Supeno and Ansari, “Nalar Kritis Hukum Islam Terhadap Respon Modernitas,” *AL-ASHLAH: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 2 (2023): 1–23.

²⁵ Muhammad Rusydi, “Akar Teosofis Filsafat Perennial Dan Implikasinya Pada Pendidikan Islam,” *Ekspose: Jurnal Penelitian Hukum Dan Pendidikan* 16, no. 2 (2019): 447, <https://doi.org/10.30863/ekspose.v16i2.104>.

²⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Islam and the Plight of Modern Man,” (*No Title*), accessed June 13, 2025, <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130000796868230656>.

²⁷ Amir Shofarullah Syamsuddin, “Tradisi Dan Problem Masyarakat Modern Dalam Perspektif Sayyed Hussein Nasr,” 2024, 465–74, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334304297_Modernisasi_Pendidikan_Islam_Menurut_Azyumardi_Azra.

spiritual profundity, intellectual rigor, and continuity with tradition. Its significance is increasingly evident amid current challenges such as environmental degradation, intellectual skepticism, and the decline of human values in the technological age. Muslims require more than mere technical modernization; they necessitate a reconstruction of their worldview that respects knowledge, venerates revelation, and reinstates sacred values in everyday life. Consequently, Perennial Philosophy serves not only as a critique of modernity but also as a constructive framework for reshaping contemporary Islamic thought toward a more transcendent and holistic orientation.²⁸

Perennial Philosophy is founded upon three fundamental principles. The first is the transcendent unity of religions, which posits that all authentic religious traditions ultimately derive from the same divine truth, despite variations in their forms and expressions due to historical and cultural contexts. This principle asserts that the spiritual essence of diverse religious traditions shares a common origin in divine revelation. The second principle concerns timeless truths, referring to metaphysical principles that underpin religious traditions and maintain their relevance across different eras. These principles are not limited by temporal or cultural changes but are universal, transcending both space and time. The third principle emphasizes the role of tradition, understood as divine revelation that offers a spiritual path connecting human beings with the divine. Tradition preserves sacred values and functions as a guide for society in comprehending the meaning of existence, encompassing both exoteric aspects, such as religious law, and esoteric teachings, such as *taṣawwuf* (Sufism).

In the contemporary context, Perennial Philosophy provides an alternative framework for addressing interreligious conflicts in Indonesia. By employing methods of dialogue and fostering mutual understanding, this philosophy aims to identify commonalities among various religious traditions, thereby promoting tolerance and social cohesion. More broadly, Perennial Philosophy serves not only as a bridge connecting diverse spiritual traditions but also as a mechanism to deepen the comprehension of universal values embedded within religious teachings, including those of Islam.²⁹

Sayyed Hossein Nasr's Perspectives and Critiques of Modernity

Sayyed Hossein Nasr is recognized as a prominent contemporary Islamic thinker who critically examines modernity, particularly in relation to its impact on the crisis of spirituality and knowledge within human civilization. Nasr conceptualizes modernity not merely as a transformation in social conditions and technological advancements but as a comprehensive worldview that alienates human beings from the transcendent dimension of existence. He contends that modernity has disregarded the metaphysical

²⁸ Siti Makhmudah, "Dinamika Dan Tantangan Masyarakat Islam Di Era Modernisasi: Pemikiran Dan Kontribusi Menuju MAsyarakat MAdani," *Jurnal Lentera* 1, no. 2 (2015): 242–59, <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/177281-ID-dinamika-dan-tantangan-masyarakat-islam.pdf>.

²⁹ Baharudin, "Resolusi Konflik Agama Di Indonesia," *Teologia* 25, no. 1 (2014): 29–64.

principles underpinning traditional cosmology, supplanting them with rationalism, secularism, and materialism. In his work *Knowledge and the Sacred* (1989), Nasr emphasizes that modernity has deprived knowledge of its spiritual significance, severing its connection to the divine and positioning humanity at the center of reality while neglecting God as the ultimate source of existence. According to Nasr, this paradigm constitutes the fundamental cause of modern human alienation from nature, environmental degradation, and spiritual nihilism.³⁰

Nasr's engagement with modernity also encompasses epistemological concerns. He critiques the rigid dichotomy between reason and revelation that is prevalent in modern Western thought. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition—particularly in classical Islamic philosophy and Sufism—knowledge is understood to extend beyond rational logic and empirical observation to include spiritual intuition and divine illumination derived from revelation. Modernity, with its positivist orientation, has constricted the domain of knowledge to that which can be empirically verified. Nasr regards this epistemological reductionism as perilous, as it neglects the profound dimensions of human existence. Consequently, he advocates a return to the *philosophia perennis*, which posits that universal truths transcend historical contexts and are manifested in all major religious traditions.³¹

Nasr contends that modernity has precipitated a significant decline in spirituality and traditional values.

- He posits that the contemporary emphasis on materialism and rationalism has marginalized the spiritual dimension of human existence. Modernity tends to prioritize empirical and material knowledge, often neglecting the spiritual and transcendental aspects of life. This dynamic contributes to the spiritual crisis experienced by modern individuals, who frequently feel alienated from the ultimate meaning and purpose of life.³²
- Furthermore, Nasr critiques the predominance of Western culture, which he argues poses a threat to the traditional values of Islamic society. According to Nasr, this influence not only undermines social institutions but also jeopardizes the core essence of Islam. Consequently, he advocates for a revival of traditional values and spiritual heritage as a means to address the contemporary crisis.³³

Nasr perceives modernity as a significant challenge to the preservation of spiritual and cultural traditions transmitted through generations.³⁴ The predominance of Western thought and lifestyle across philosophy, culture, art, politics, and society

³⁰ Syairil Fadli, "Kritik Seyyed Hossein Nasr Terhadap Klaim Kebenaran Modernisme," *NALAR: Jurnal Peradaban Dan Pemikiran Islam* 1, no. 1 (2017): 69, <https://doi.org/10.23971/njppi.v1i1.903>.

³¹ Fauhatun, "Islam Dan Filsafat Perennial: Respon Seyyed Hossein Nasr Terhadap Nestapa Manusia Modern."

³² Mohamad. Anas, "Kritik Hossein Nasr Atas Problem Sains Dan Modernitas," 2017.

³³ Muhammad Yogi. Purnomo, "Peran Tasawuf Dalam Menghadapi Krisis Spiritual Manusia Modern (Studi Pemikiran Sayyid Hossein Nasr)," 2021.

³⁴ Nasr, "Islam and the Plight of Modern Man."

has undermined traditional institutions and the esteemed values that historically constituted the foundation of human life. To address this issue, Nasr underscores the necessity of returning to authentic sources of tradition and spiritual teachings. He argues that reinforcing traditional values can alleviate the identity crisis and existential void experienced by many individuals in the contemporary era.³⁵

A central concept in Nasr's philosophy is the primacy of spirituality as a means to restore the often-neglected inner dimension of human existence. He posits that a profound spiritual orientation offers a viable alternative to the spiritual void engendered by materialistic and secular lifestyles. According to Nasr, metaphysical and spiritual values constitute indispensable elements of human life; in their absence, existence becomes devoid of meaning and direction. He argues that spirituality ought to be fundamental to various domains of life, including art and culture. Nasr contends that art transcends mere aesthetic expression, serving instead as a conduit that reconnects humanity with transcendent reality. Consequently, the synthesis of rational knowledge and spiritual wisdom is imperative for a comprehensive understanding of reality, encompassing the interrelations among the self, the cosmos, and the ethical principles that govern human conduct.³⁶

Nasr's Appeal for a Revival of Classical Islamic Tradition

Nasr underscores the significance of returning to the classical and spiritual foundations of Islam, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and the writings of early scholars. He contends that a thorough comprehension of this intellectual and spiritual heritage can provide guidance for Muslims confronting contemporary challenges.³⁷ Furthermore, Nasr endeavors to reconcile Islamic tradition with modern science, asserting that scientific inquiry should be situated within the framework of Islamic spirituality. In this context, the pursuit of truth encompasses not only the material but also the metaphysical dimensions. Consequently, knowledge serves as a means to apprehend the signs of God manifested in creation.³⁸

The concept of Islamic tradition, as articulated by Nasr, constitutes an intellectual and spiritual movement aimed at returning to the original roots of tradition as the ultimate source of truth and knowledge. Nasr contrasts Western secularism with a worldview grounded in divine revelation. His proposal is predicated on the belief that authentic knowledge acknowledges the relationship between the temporal world and the hereafter. In contrast, modern Western thought tends to regard objects of knowledge exclusively through empirical reality. Nasr, however, contends that

³⁵ Zakihidayatullah, "Pemikiran Islam Program Pascasarjana Institut Agama Islam Negeri," *Jurnal Keagamaan* 2, no. 2 (2012): 55–76.

³⁶ Purnomo, "Peran Tasawuf Dalam Menghadapi Krisis Spiritual Manusia Modern (Studi Pemikiran Sayyed Hossein Nasr)."

³⁷ MA. Siti Latifah, "Tradisi Islam Di Tengah Modernitas: Filsafat Perennial (Telaah Atas Pemikiran Sayyed Hosein Nashr)," *Al Hadi* V, no. 01 (2019): 1078–87, <http://jurnal.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/alhadi/article/view/780/738>.

³⁸ Purnomo, "Peran Tasawuf Dalam Menghadapi Krisis Spiritual Manusia Modern (Studi Pemikiran Sayyed Hossein Nasr)."

knowledge must encompass all levels of reality, ranging from the outermost to the innermost dimensions. He argues that these levels of reality are unified in the expression *Lā ilāha illā Allāh*, which serves as the foundational concept of Islam. For Nasr, *tawḥīd* represents the most profound metaphysical principle. Consequently, the concept of knowledge in Nasr's thought is grounded in the principle of unity (*tawḥīd*), signifying a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all existence. This principle enables human knowledge and action to form an integrated and harmonious whole.³⁹

Nasr's intellectual contributions offer a profound analysis of the phenomenon of secularization within contemporary Islamic discourse, which frequently overlooks the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of Islam. In the context of the predominance of rational and empirical methodologies rooted in Western thought, Nasr calls upon Muslims to critically reengage with the intellectual and spiritual traditions derived from revelation – namely, the Qur'an, Hadith, and the heritage of classical scholars. He contends that knowledge should never be severed from the divine, as the pursuit of knowledge ultimately constitutes an act of worship and a means of understanding God. By positing *tawḥīd* as the fundamental principle, Nasr emphasizes the necessity of a holistic approach to reality, wherein all elements are interconnected within a singular divine unity. His critique of modernity transcends mere rejection; rather, it advocates for a synthesis of science and spirituality within an Islamic framework. Nasr's ideas challenge Muslims to fortify their intellectual identity by transcending the dichotomy between East and West and adhering instead to a higher, transcendent truth. In doing so, he provides a framework for Islamic thought to maintain both authenticity and relevance in the contemporary era.

The Role of Perennial Philosophy in Contemporary Islamic Thought

Perennial Philosophy plays a pivotal role in reconciling the tensions between modernity and tradition, particularly within the context of contemporary Islamic thought. In addressing the challenges posed by modernity – such as secularism and materialism – this philosophical framework advocates for an approach that underscores the compatibility between traditional values and modern developments. Central to Perennial Philosophy is the principle of the transcendent unity of religions, which facilitates the integration of spiritual values from diverse traditions, including Islam, to confront the moral and spiritual crises characteristic of the modern era. By emphasizing the metaphysical and esoteric dimensions of religion, Perennial Philosophy reestablishes human awareness of the essence of existence, transcending purely materialistic concerns.⁴⁰

³⁹ Abd. Halim, "Pandangan Kritis Syed Hossein Nasr Terhadap Relasi Sains Dan Agama," *Perspektif* 1, no. 5 (2022): 525–33.

⁴⁰ Hanna Widayani, "Pemikiran Sayyid Hossein Nasr Tentang Filsafat Perennial," *El-Afkar* 6, no. 1 (2017): 55–60.

Within the domain of education, Perennial Philosophy advocates for a curriculum that extends beyond the exclusive focus on cognitive development to also cultivate character and spirituality. This educational framework aims to synthesize the classical Islamic intellectual tradition with contemporary methodologies, thereby fostering individuals who possess a holistic comprehension of the interconnections among knowledge, morality, and life's purpose. In the scientific sphere, Perennial Philosophy advances a paradigm grounded in spirituality, conceptualizing nature as a divine sign (*āyah*) rather than merely an object for exploitation. This perspective reorients modern science—often characterized by reductionism—into a means of enhancing human understanding of the divine.⁴¹

Within cultural domains, Perennial Philosophy functions as a conceptual framework for the preservation of Islamic traditions characterized by profound aesthetic and spiritual significance. This encompasses initiatives aimed at revitalizing Islamic art, architecture, and literature, all rooted in sacred meanings. These endeavors seek to cultivate a culture that embodies Islamic identity while simultaneously engaging constructively with the challenges posed by globalization.⁴² Accordingly, Nasr's critique of contemporary Islamic thought transcends a mere reaction to current issues; it constitutes an appeal to reengage with the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Islam.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Sayyed Hossein Nasr's critique of modernity extends beyond normative or theological concerns, being fundamentally rooted in a profound epistemological analysis of the spiritual crisis confronting modern humanity. Nasr contends that modernity has engendered a novel mode of consciousness that disrupts the relationship between human beings and transcendent reality. The predominance of positivistic rationalism, secularized knowledge, and the objectification of nature exemplifies the erosion of a sacred *weltanschauung* within modern culture. While Nasr does not categorically reject science and rationality, he critically examines their philosophical underpinnings to prevent their reduction to materialistic frameworks. He advocates for the restoration of a hierarchical structure of knowledge, wherein metaphysics undergirds ethics and scientific inquiry. Consequently, Nasr's principal contribution resides in his endeavor to reconstruct the ontological foundation of knowledge through a theocentric cosmology.

As a constructive alternative, the Perennial Philosophy advanced by Nasr presents a novel framework for integrating science, religion, and spirituality within the epistemological context of *tawhīd*. This approach underscores three fundamental

⁴¹ Syarif Hidayatullah, Mahmud Arif, and Arqom Kuswanjono, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Perennialism Perspective for the Development of Religious Studies in Indonesia," *Jurnal Filsafat* 33, no. 2 (2023): 357, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.82439>.

⁴² Mohamad M Davar and Fatemeh Mohamadi Salamian, "Perennial Philosophy in the Intellectual Foundations of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Titus Burckhardt," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 8, no. 2 (2021): 241, <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v8i2.2295>.

principles: the metaphysical unity of reality, the continuity of the intellectual religious tradition, and the centrality of sacred knowledge in the formation of a moral civilization. By introducing the concept of sacred science, Nasr proposes an alternative paradigm to the prevailing relativism and moral nihilism characteristic of modern civilization. His ideas bear significant theoretical implications for contemporary Islamic philosophy and possess practical relevance in domains such as education, environmental ethics, and civilizational reconstruction. Future research should further investigate the application of Nasr's thought in scientific methodology, the philosophy of technology, and intercivilizational dialogue, thereby ensuring that Islamic metaphysical discourse remains a vital contributor to the engagement with global modernity.

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