

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR'S PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE CONCEPT OF SOUL: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *This article critically examines Seyyed Hossein Nasr's concept of perennial philosophy and the concept of the soul as an answer to the spiritual crisis faced by modern humans. Using literature studies, textual-philosophical analysis, and traditionalist hermeneutics, this article aims to examine Nasr's metaphysical anthropology and assess its epistemological and practical implications for contemporary Islamic thought. This study finds that Nasr conceives of human beings as theomorphic realities structured in a vertical hierarchy of spirit (ruh), soul (nafs), and body (jism), with the intellect ('Aql) as the centre of spiritual consciousness. Within this framework, the classical levels of the soul form a dynamic roadmap for spiritual transformation that diagnoses modern pathologies such as alienation, meaninglessness, and secularism. Nasr sharply criticizes modern psychology and science for reducing the "science of the soul" to empirical behaviour detached from metaphysics and Scientia sacra. This article shows that Nasr proposes a foundation for re-establishing Islamic psychology within an ontological and cosmological hierarchy, while also emphasizing the need for further development of theoretical framework so that it becomes an empirical model suitable for critical and constructive dialogue with contemporary psychology.*

Keywords: *Perennial Philosophy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Soul, Sufism.*

Introduction

The crisis of the soul of modern man has become an urgent issue in the contemporary era. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, as one of the most prominent perennial philosophers in the contemporary era, presents a comprehensive understanding of the concept of the soul by integrating Islamic tradition, classical metaphysics, and a critical analysis of Western modernity. According to Nasr, this crisis can be viewed through a philosophical lens, which emphasizes the importance of re-understanding the nature of the soul and traditional wisdom (Handoko et al., 2023). Nasr argues that the crisis of the soul of modern man is rooted in the desacralization of science, namely the separation of knowledge from its divine source. This epistemological catastrophe has produced what Nasr identifies as *Promethean man*, that is, man who is reduced to only his rational and animalistic aspects, unaware of his divine nature, and forgetting his primary role as a bridge between heaven and earth (Nasr, 1990).

In line with the desacralization of knowledge, there has been a fundamental shift in the human worldview of reality. The once theocentric (God-centered) view has shifted to an anthropocentric (human-centered) one. In this anthropocentric view, modern men place themselves at the center of reality, making themselves the God of Absolutism, which in effect causes them to be unaware of God's presence in their hearts (Nasr, 1973). As a result, the world is seen as an object that can be exploited without limits, rather than as a divine manifestation that has sacred value and must be treated with respect. Modern men also experience a disconnect from the source of spiritual meaning that gives existential depth.

In Nasr's terminology, modern man lives in the “periphery” of his existence, so man only accepts surface knowledge about the world, and tries to reconstruct his identity based on superficial and external information. This event did not happen by chance, rather it was the result of a long historical process, particularly in the West during the Renaissance and accelerated in the modern era. Nasr analyses that initially, humans had a close and intimate relationship with sacred knowledge (*Scientia sacra*), which was inseparable from the divine presence and transformed the existence of beings (Nasr, 2001). However, with the development of rationalism, materialism, and secularism, knowledge has become fragmented and reduced to dry information that externalizes reality without opening access to the transcendent dimension.

The concept of the soul (*nafs*) in Nasr's perspective is not simply a separate psychological dimension, but a multi-dimensional reality that connects the material, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of human beings. This perspective is the main foundation for Nasr's solution to the crisis of the soul of modern man. Nasr emphasizes that in the Islamic spiritual tradition, the soul should be harmoniously united with the spirit (*ruh*) and body (*jism*) (Manna, 2024). However, in modern life, there has been a separation between the soul and the spirit, creating an externalization of humanity where individuals tend to pursue external needs without a strong spiritual foundation. This paper aims to provide a conceptual analysis of the framework developed by Nasr in response to the crisis of the soul of modern man, to elucidate the epistemological roots of the desacralization of science, and to examine the practical implications of his ideas for the spiritual reconstruction of modern humanity.

Methodology

This article is a library-research, using textual-philosophical analysis and traditional hermeneutics methods. With Nasr's perennial philosophy approach, this article offers not only an abstract philosophical critique of modernity, but also a comprehensive framework for the actualization of the restoration of the soul of modern man. This research focuses on Nasr's

thoughts through several of his works that are relevant to the discussion of perennial philosophy and the concept of the soul of modern man. The main sources of this research are Nasr's major published works, such as *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (1968), *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (1975), *Knowledge and Sacred* (1988), *Sufi Essays* (1999), *The Garden of Truth* (2007). Meanwhile, Secondary sources were drawn from various articles and journals relevant to the topic of discussion, which can serve as an alternative epistemological foundation for addressing the challenges of modernity.

Literature Review

The influence of Nasr's ideas is evident in the variety of studies that have examined his thinking. In the past decade alone, several academics have written about Nasr's ideas, with articles focusing on the relationship between perennial philosophy and modern science, the plight of modern humanity, and human spirituality. Studies of Nasr's thoughts on the relationship between perennial philosophy and spirituality have been conducted by Jaipuri Harahap (Harahap, 2017), Md Abu Sayem (Sayem, 2019), and Nur Manna (Manna, 2024). Studies of Nasr's thoughts on the relationship between perennial philosophy and science have been conducted by Asfa Widiyanto (Widiyanto, 2017), Fitri Siska Supriatna (Supriatna & Husain, 2020) and Al-Maulud (Maulud & Syaifuddin, 2025). Meanwhile, the study of Nasr's thoughts on the relationship between perennial philosophy and the plight of modern humans was written by Ahmad Sururi (Sururi et al., 2020). From the spiritual crisis experienced by modern man, this paper will explore more deeply how Nasr's perennial philosophy explains the concept of the soul and the extent to which this concept can be criticized philosophically and epistemologically. This paper aims to examine the depth of Nasr's metaphysics in understanding the essence of the soul and assess its implications for contemporary thought.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr Trajectory

Seyyed Hossein Nasr was born to an educated family of scholars in Tehran, Iran, on April 17, 1933. His father was Seyyed Valiyullah Nasr, a doctor, educator during the Qajar Dynasty, and minister during the reign of Reza Pahlavi. Nasr was born to an intelligent and educated mother in a family of scholars in Iran. Nasr spent his early years studying the verses of the Quran from his father. Nasr also studied sacred history and Persian poetry, which led him to develop a high level of openness and curiosity about knowledge (Chittick, 2007).

Nasr was raised in the tradition and milieu of great scholars such as Thabathaba'i, Hazbini, and others. With this background, it is expected that Nasr developed into an intellectual who was always full of ideas characterized by Persian Sufism (Nasr, 1990). At the age of thirteen, Nasr was sent by his father to the West to pursue higher education. Nasr then continued his studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) under the guidance of philosopher Bertrand Russell. In the West, Nasr studied Muslim philosophy under the guidance of George de Santilana, learning about Hinduism and Eastern traditions through the writings of René Guénon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and Frithjof Schuon (Nasr, 2001). In this regard, Nasr became a Muslim scholar who was raised in two traditions, namely traditional Islam and modern Western culture. This, as he admitted, meant that Nasr actually lived in constant tension.

In 1954, Nasr furthered his studies at Harvard University, majoring in geology and geophysics. However, Nasr later switched to traditional sciences, focusing on Islamic science and philosophy. Here, Nasr studied under H.A.R. Gibb, George Sarton, and Hary Walfson. In 1958, under the guidance of H.A.R. Gibb, Nasr completed his doctorate with a dissertation entitled

An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrine, which was published in 1965 (Chittick, 2007). After achieving his Ph.D., Nasr returned to Iran and was given the opportunity to teach at the University of Tehran. Nasr taught courses on the history of science and Islamic philosophy. The following year, Nasr was promoted to professor of science and Islamic philosophy. He also became dean of the Faculty of Islamic Literature for four years (1968-1972). From 1962 to 1965, Nasr was also invited to be a visiting professor at Harvard University.

When the Iranian Revolution occurred in 1979, which ended with the removal of Reza Pahlevi from the leadership, Nasr was still serving as director of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, which was a prestigious position that could have led to him receiving a title of honor from the Shah, the ruling regime that he openly supported. However, due to his closeness to the ruling regime, Nasr was blacklisted by activists of the movement opposing the Shah, including Ali Shariati. Because of this, although Nasr initially joined Ali Shariati at *Husainiyah al-Irsyad*, he eventually chose to leave the institution, partly due to ideological differences between the two (Muzammil, 2018).

Nasr's thinking as an Iranian intellectual was influenced by both internal and external factors, including: *First*, his religious and academic family background. This greatly influenced Nasr's intellectual development, enthusiasm for learning, and broad religious views. *Second*, Iranian society, which is predominantly Shiite, strongly adheres to the traditions of its scholars, especially the *mullahs* and *imams* who are considered to have special abilities in the field of religion, thus becoming role models. This tradition has a major influence in strengthening Nasr's Islamic tradition, which is certainly very valuable for his consistency in accepting the ideas of great teachers in the West. *Third*, the philosophical ideas he received from various figures who guided him, such as Frithjof Schuon, Titus Gurchardt, and others. It is possible that the perennial philosophy he studied originated from these figures, although Nasr has harmonized it with Islamic views.

The Basis of Nasr's Perennial Philosophy

This article is based on the framework of perennial philosophy, a school of thought that synthesizes the universal metaphysical truths underlying all orthodox religious traditions, transcending their formal and cultural particularities (Serai, 2024). The spiritual and intellectual heritage of perennial philosophy refers to three figures who were greatly influential in providing inspiration and reinterpretation in the twentieth century. They are Rene Guenon (1886-1951), Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), and Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998). The three figures above distinguished themselves from other philosophers in perennial philosophy by promoting the theme of *Sophia perennis* or *religio perennis*. Their philosophy became a clear religious philosophy, and they also referred to themselves as traditionalists (Sotillos, n.d.). Tradition is like a living event that leaves its mark, but is not reduced to that mark.

A critique of the modern world by Rene Guenon focuses on three main areas of exposition, namely metaphysics, initiation, and symbolism. Each of these domains provides Guenon's readers with an understanding of what is meant by the term tradition. Etymologically, the word "tradition" comes from transmission and, in its broadest meaning, encompasses the idea of the transmission of knowledge, practices, techniques, laws, forms, and many other elements, both spoken and written (Guenon, 2004). In Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's thought, the statement *philosophia perennis* receives a new explanation, his contribution primarily lies in his ability to

reveal the spiritual relationship that unites symbolism, aesthetics, contemplation, and artistic work.

The symbolism in his writings is not merely a museum of references and correspondences; rather, it is a living workshop of spiritual transformation. Coomaraswamy devoted his attention to Buddhism, Neoplatonism, and Christian mysticism, including Eastern Christianity (Coomaraswamy, n.d.). If René Guénon and Coomaraswamy can be considered the pioneers of *Sophia perennis* and *philosophia perennis* in the twentieth century, Frithjof Schuon was more interested in *religio perennis* than in using the terms *Sophia perennis* or *philosophia perennis*. Among the three pioneers of perennial philosophy, Nasr acknowledges his intellectual and spiritual “debt” to Schuon rather than Guénon and Coomaraswamy. However, Nasr prefers the terms *Sophia perennis* or *philosophia perennis* to *religio perennis*.

Among the three pioneers of perennial philosophy mentioned above, Nasr has three unique characteristics, including: *First*, Nasr is a public figure, speaker, and proponent of perennial philosophy ideas recognized by America and Europe. *Second*, Nasr is a writer of perennial philosophy theory closely identified with the Islamic religious tradition. *Third*, Nasr is also a writer of perennial philosophy who has received intensive academic training and is advanced in modern sciences (Wahyuni et al., 2021). Nasr is able to scientifically read and investigate the errors of science that are disconnected from metaphysical principles. All of these unique characteristics have brought the ideas of perennialism to the contemporary world.

Specifically, this analysis uses Nasr's articulation of perennialism, which integrates metaphysical hierarchy, ontological reality, and sacred knowledge. *First*, at the level of metaphysical hierarchy, reality consists of several interconnected levels, from the transcendent Divine principle, to the intermediate world of the soul and intellect, to physical manifestations. This hierarchy is not dualistic, but rather unified through symbolic correspondence and emanation. The Absolute is both Transcendent and Immanent. *Second*, the soul as an intermediate ontological reality. The human soul occupies a critical intermediate position in the cosmic hierarchy (Nasr, 1989). Looking at Islamic metaphysics, Nasr understands that the soul is a subtle substance (*jawhar latif*) that is distinct from both the spiritual intellect (*'aql*) and the body (*jism*). The soul is eternal, capable of good and evil, and destined for union with its Divine source through re-sacralization.

Third, in sacred knowledge, Nasr distinguishes between sacred knowledge rooted in revelation, metaphysics, and intellectual intuition, and modern science, which is based on positivist materialism, mechanical reductionism, and the separation of knowledge from transcendent meaning. The process of desacralization is the destruction of the sacred dimension of knowledge, which is also a fatal and fundamental error of modernity (Chittick, 2007). From the three points above, Nasr attempts to revive traditional metaphysics by emphasizing the principles of *philosophia perennis* and *tawhid*. Nasr views the universe as a theophany (divine manifestation). He opposes modern reductionism, which views nature only in secular terms, by returning science to its spiritual, sacred, and transcendental roots, restoring the cosmos to its sacral essence.

The Concept of Soul in Nasr's Thought

The concept of the soul in Islam has been an important and profound discourse throughout the history of Islamic thought. Terms such as *ruh*, *nafs*, and *qalb* are the key terminologies in the Quran and Hadith that refer to the complex internal aspects of human beings, reflecting the

inner structure and spiritual consciousness of humans (Al Faruqi et al., 2024). These three terms not only refer to metaphysical entities, but also have ethical, psychological, and existential dimensions that shape human personality and moral qualities (Azwar et al., 2025). The soul in Islam is not understood merely as the “driver of the body” as in classical dualism, but as the centre of consciousness, the source of free will, the repository of values, and the field of spiritual struggle between good and evil tendencies.

The discussion of the soul has been a major topic in Islamic discourse from ancient times to the present day. Islamic thinking about the soul has developed over time with various views from great Islamic thinkers. Muslim thinkers such as Ibn Sina and al-Farabi viewed the soul philosophically, using ideas from Aristotle and other Greek philosophers, then adapting those ideas to Islamic beliefs. The soul is a major topic in Islamic thought and remains an important concept for many Muslims today. On the other hand, Sufis such as al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi emphasized the spiritual and mystical aspects of the soul, highlighting the process of purification of the soul and its existential relationship with the divine (Azwar et al., 2025). Each approach has its own characteristics, whether in terminology, ontological dimensions, or methodological approaches, but still maintains a spiritual aspect in every discussion.

Nasr is one of the foremost Islamic scholars concerned with the crisis experienced by modern man today. Since the 1950s and beyond, many of Nasr's works have discussed the crises experienced by modern man as a result of modernity, humanism, and the secularization of science. Nasr was aware that modern man was experiencing a serious crisis of meaning, faith, and spirituality. Nasr integrates his critique of modernity with Islamic cosmology and spirituality, emphasizing that the roots of the crisis are not only psychological or moral, but also epistemological (disconnection from the sacred) (Nasr, 2010). Nasr enhances this discourse with real examples from the Islamic world and links them directly to contemporary phenomena, one of which is the crisis of the soul of modern man. It is within this framework that Nasr's major works can be understood as an elaboration and correction of the pre-existing crisis of modern man.

Nasr's interpretation of the structure of the human soul can be understood through three aspects, namely hierarchical, spiritual, and symbolic, which are rooted in the traditions of Sufism and Islamic philosophy. In the hierarchical aspect, Nasr understands humans as entities consisting of three levels of ontological existence that are interconnected and integrated. Using the traditional terms applied by Nasr, this hierarchy can be described as follows: the highest stage is the spirit, followed by the intermediate soul, and the material body at the lowest stage (Chittick, 2007). These three stages are not separate, but rather form an integrated whole, with each stage connected to the stage above it through symbolic correspondence and metaphysical emanation.

In Nasr's perspective, there are three fundamental dimensions of the soul. The first dimension is the spirit (*ruh* or *Jabarut*) which is the Divine dimension, eternal, transcendent, and directly connected to Divine reality. This spirit does not belong to individuals alone, but is a manifestation of the Universal Spirit (*ruh al-kulliy*) that permeates and nourishes all dimensions of the cosmos. At the intermediate level, there is the soul (*nafs* or *Malakut*), which is a subtle substance (*jawhar latif*) that connects the Spirit with the material body. The soul integrates the spiritual dimension with the material dimension, and it is also the site where moral and spiritual choices occur. The soul has the capacity for good and evil, glory and humility, depending on the spiritual orientation and discipline applied to it. Therefore, the balance of the soul is very

important in determining the good and bad attitudes of humans in living their lives. The lowest level is the body (*jism* or *Nasut*). The body is a rough material dimension that is mortal; it can change over time and is subject to the laws of material physics. The body is also a dwelling place for the soul in its journey through this worldly life (Sotillos, 2021).

The focus of this article is the second level, namely the soul (*nafs* or *Malakut*) in modern man. In Islamic tradition, especially in Sufism and esoteric Islamic philosophy, the soul (*nafs* or *Malakut*) is a dynamic entity that is constantly undergoing spiritual transformation. The journey of the human soul is a continuous journey from lower levels of consciousness to higher levels. From a state of separation from Divine reality to unity with the Absolute through a process of purification known as *tazkiyat al-Nafs* (Rothman, n.d.). Nasr emphasizes that without a proper understanding of the dynamics and hierarchy of these levels of the soul, modern man cannot understand the true nature of the spiritual struggle that is at the core of a meaningful human life. The following are the levels of the soul in Islam as articulated by Nasr in the context of the crisis of the soul of modern man:

First, *Nafs al-Ammarah* which literally means “the commanding soul.” It can command towards evil and sin. *Nafs al-Ammarah* is the lowest level of the soul, where spiritual awareness is at a bare minimum, and the soul is dominated by ego, desires, and animalistic urges. At this level, humans are closely attached to material things, appetites, and passions. Men are driven by momentary pleasures, without moral and spiritual consideration (Rothman, n.d.). Men at this stage tend to be impulsive in pursuing worldly pleasures without considering the ethical implications. In a contemporary context, Nasr implicitly suggests that much of the destructive and immoral behavior that occurs in modern society is a manifestation of the soul being trapped at the level of *nafs al-Ammarah*. When modern men are driven entirely by material desires and hedonism, and lack moral values and spiritual awareness, they essentially function at the level of *nafs al-Ammarah* (Sotillos, 2021). This does not mean that every modern man is cruel and immoral, but rather, it proves that without spiritual effort and strict discipline, human nature naturally tends to remain at this level. This is why Nasr emphasizes that spiritual discipline and obedience to divine law are absolute necessities for elevating the soul from this lowest level to a higher one.

Second, *nafs al-Lawwamah*, which means “the blaming soul.” At this stage, human consciousness begins to awaken, and humans become aware of their mistakes. This is the phase in which humans begin to fight against their ego with the urge toward awareness of the truth (Rosalina, 2023). In the Sufi tradition, *nafs al-Lawwamah* is often described as a battleground between good and evil. Humans at this phase have not yet achieved peace and serenity, but they are beginning their journey of transformation. Nasr emphasizes that although *nafs al-Lawwamah* is a progressive stage compared to *nafs al-Ammarah*, it is still not the end of the spiritual journey (Chittick, 2007). Most modern men identify themselves as having spiritual awareness and a desire to do good, but they still struggle with consistency and have not yet achieved true spiritual stability.

Third, *nafs al-Muthmainnah*, which literally means “the peaceful soul.” This is the highest stage of development in the hierarchy of the human soul in its spiritual journey. At this stage, humans have achieved complete surrender to God’s will. Humans have been harmoniously integrated into all aspects of spirituality, true peace that comes from absolute faith in God, and complete harmony with Divine Reality (Rahman & Mehnaz, 2024). Nasr asserts that the attainment of *nafs al-Muthmainnah* is equivalent to “*fana*” or annihilation of ego in God, and “*baqa*” or

subsistence in Divine Reality in Sufi terminology (Vural, 2024). This is the stage where humans, in a fundamental spiritual sense, have died to their self-interest and desires, so that they live entirely in awareness of the Divine presence and will.

The spiritual journey of man in Nasr's perspective can be understood as a gradual process of transformation from *nafs al-Ammarah* to *nafs al-Muthmainnah*. Starting from the lowest condition of the human soul, which is dominated by ego and material desires, man progresses and improves towards *nafs al-Lawwamah* to then reach the highest level, namely *nafs al-Muthmainnah*. At this highest level, humans find true peace of mind in surrendering themselves to the divine will. These three levels are not merely psychological descriptions, but rather a spiritual roadmap of discipline, awareness, and obedience that humans build in order to obey divine laws. Without this transformative effort, modern humans will remain trapped in the lowest state of the soul, shaken by waves of worldly desires without a clear spiritual direction.

The Relationship Between the Soul and the Intellect (al-'Aql) as the Center of Spiritual Consciousness

Although the analysis of the levels of *nafs* provides a deep understanding of the spiritual and emotional dimensions of human beings, Nasr's perspective does not focus merely on the soul. In the comprehensive framework of Islamic epistemology, Nasr integrates the concept of intellect ('*aql*') as an essential driving force in the transformation of the soul. In the Islamic tradition, '*aql*' is not merely a cognitive ability, but a divine light that shines in the human soul (Nasr, 1979). Understanding how '*aql*' interacts with the soul, and how spiritual intellect can guide and direct the soul through various levels towards perfection, is key to understanding Nasr's holistic vision of human renewal and contemporary Islamic civilization.

In Nasr's viewpoint, man is divided into two types of knowledge, namely rational and intellectual. Knowledge is often only considered to be rational, discursive, and indirect, but this does not apply to intellectual knowledge. For Nasr, the intellect is the source of all knowledge that distinguishes reason from intelligence. The intellect is not only an organ for knowing, but also the basis of human existence and the presence of God in humans (Adiningsih et al., 2023). Philosophical questions such as who are humans? Where do they come from? What should humans do in the world? And where will humans go? are fundamental questions that arise in human thought.

The majority dismiss these questions as unimportant, some are satisfied with the answers provided by their families, communities, or religions, and only a few truly think deeply about the question “who am I?” Nasr is one of the few who has explored in depth the nature of humanity and its connection to the sacred. Nasr said: “*How we act and think and how we develop the latent possibilities within us spends totally on the answer we provide for ourselves to this basic question of who we are, for human beings live and act for the most part according to the image they have of themselves.*” (Nasr, 2007).

From the statement above, it can be inferred that Nasr uses Sufism to answer the question “who am I?” In Islamic tradition, the Sufi path provides a means to determine the main answer to basic questions and discover the essence of human identity. It is through the Sufi path that humans move from the exterior to the interior, from forgetfulness to remembrance, from selfishness to selflessness, and from falsehood to the garden of truth, where true human identity can be realized and experienced. For Nasr, the essence of human identity lies at a level deeper than human existence itself. Nasr refers to this deeper level as the intellect, which is the

microcosm of humanity and also the unifying organ of knowledge associated with intelligence. The intellect is also the place where Divine Reality resides (Nasr, 2007). In his various writings, Nasr always uses the word intellect to describe the “eye of the heart” or “eye of the soul” that enables humans to see reality with true clarity. This is not the physical eye that sees material things as mere objects, but rather a spiritual part that perceives reality in its Divine essence (Nasr, 1979).

Only through “intellect” one can access what Nasr calls sacred knowledge (*Scientia sacra*). *Scientia sacra* is knowledge that integrates all dimensions of intellectual, spiritual, moral, and practical truth into a single, unified vision. In Nasr's words, *Scientia sacra* is knowledge of the Real, knowledge that cannot be obtained simply by reading books, studying philosophy, or conducting intellectual analysis. Instead, this knowledge can only be accessed when the heart has been purified (Nasr, 1979). The intellect has been awakened through divine blessings and spiritual discipline, so that in the end, humans are fully in line with God's will and truth. When humans are in line with divine will and truth, the human soul becomes calmer and more focused.

Critical Analysis

In the discussion of the soul, Nasr always uses a metaphysical anthropological framework rather than empirical psychology. Nasr follows the traditional philosophical and Sufi framework, in accordance with the belief that humans consist of a body (*jism*), soul (*nafs*), and spirit (*ruh*) centered on the intellectus (*'aql*) which resides in the heart. The human soul is immortal and humans are theomorphic beings, created in the image of God, so that the inner structure of humans reflects the Names and Attributes of God. Nasr's thoughts on the soul, which developed in his monumental literature and works, have greatly contributed to building an understanding of the nature of humans and the role of the soul in moral and spiritual life. However, this understanding is not without weaknesses and limitations in the context of its application in contemporary times. Therefore, it is necessary to highlight some of Nasr's criticisms of classical thinking on the soul, as well as the importance of an integrative approach in understanding the soul in contemporary Islamic thought.

Nasr sharply criticizes modern psychology, which he believes has reduced the “science of the soul” to a mere empirical study of behavior and mental mechanisms, severing the soul in modern psychology from metaphysics and the spiritual dimension. In an interview titled “*On the Science of the Soul: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr*,” Nasr emphasized that what was once called the “science of the soul” in religious traditions (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, etc.) was always rooted in metaphysics and placed the soul in a hierarchy of beings that transcended the material realm (Sotillos, 2021). According to Nasr, this reductionism makes modern psychology ontologically “half-blind.” Modern psychology masters the description of lower functions such as instincts, drives, and behavior, but has almost no language for higher levels such as spirit, intuition, and purification of the soul (*tazkiyah an-Nafs*).

In his work, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, Nasr repeatedly describes modern men as beings who suffer from spiritual amnesia. Modern men tend to forget who they are and why they were created. Nasr writes that: “*Modern man has burned his hands in the fire which he himself kindled when he allowed himself to forget who he is ... having sold his soul in the manner of Faust to gain dominion over the natural environment.*” (Nasr, 2001). According to Nasr, modern man lives on the “periphery of existence,” moving around the periphery and losing his orientation toward the ‘axis’ and “center” of existence, namely Allah. Epistemologically, this makes modern men more trusting of superficial external knowledge (data, statistics, and

information) than inner knowledge about the essence of the self and *Al-Haq*, which is the core of all Wisdom traditions (Nasr, n.d.).

Nasr also criticizes the desacralization of knowledge. Modern science tends to be separated from divine sources and the goal of purifying the soul. Knowledge has become entirely quantitative, instrumental, and technical. Modern science no longer directs the soul toward wisdom (*hikmah*), but toward the domination and exploitation of nature. In this framework, the soul is understood only as a function of the brain and nervous system, leaving no place for the soul as an immortal entity responsible to God (Tohidnia et al., 2020). Various contemporary articles on Nasr's critique of modernity show that the reduction of the soul to material-psychological dimensions is closely related to the dominance of secular humanism, which excludes transcendent experiences from the public sphere and reduces religion to a private matter with no epistemological impact on science.

Nasr rejects modern anthropology, which recognizes only two Cartesian dualities, namely the body and the mind, while the spiritual and intellectual dimensions are eliminated. In various analyses that quote Nasr, it is emphasized that modern civilization “is based solely on a concept of humanity that excludes the most essential aspect of humanity itself, namely the *intellectus* (spirit).” As a result, the concept of personality becomes flat. Human beings are understood only as a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors. There is no longer any understanding of the levels of the *nafs* and the journey of the soul towards spiritual perfection. Nasr also links the crisis of the soul of the modern man with individualism and materialism born of the project of modernity. Nasr argues that the modern orientation of life, which deifies production, consumption, and worldly pleasures, has given rise to a sense of alienation, loss of meaning, and spiritual barrenness.

Implication and Contemporary Relevance

The first implication of Nasr's thoughts for the study of contemporary Islamic psychology is the need for an ontological and cosmological refoundation of the concept of the soul. Islamic psychology cannot be built solely on the adaptation of Western psychological terminology, but must depart from Islamic cosmology and metaphysical anthropology, which clearly distinguish between the dimensions of the *ruh*, *'aql*, *nafs*, and *jism*. Nasr points out that modern psychology has failed to become a “science of the soul” because it has severed the soul from the metaphysical order and confined it within a material-empirical framework. This requires the development of an Islamic personality theory rooted in the inner structure of human beings as understood in Sufism and wisdom, not merely Islamizing the terms of existential psychology (Azlisham bin Abdul Aziz, n.d.; Sotillos, 2021).

The second implication concerns the epistemological reconstruction of the Islamic soul, which places the *intellectus* and *qalb* at the center of self-knowledge. From this perspective, knowledge of the soul and the Supreme Reality can only be achieved if Islamic psychological epistemology opens space for intellectual intuition, contemplation, and purification of the heart, rather than merely observing behavior or measuring psychometric variables (Chittick, 2007; Sotillos, 2021). This encourages the emergence of a theoretical approach that combines *wahyu*, intellect, and Sufi experience as equal sources of epistemic data, as demonstrated in the “traditional science of the soul” model developed in interviews with Nasr and other experts.

The third implication relates to the integration of Sufism as an operational dimension of Islamic psychology, especially in the fields of psychotherapy and counselling. Nasr understands Sufism

as the “science of healing the soul” that unites the metaphysical, ethical, and psychological dimensions. A number of local and international studies have utilized Nasr's framework to formulate Sufism as a solution to the spiritual crisis of modern man and as a conceptual basis for Islamic psychotherapy. For example, by placing the practices of *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, and *mujadah* as systematic methods of *tazkiyat al-Nafs* that are relevant to the problems of existential anxiety and contemporary meaninglessness. Consequently, the reconstruction of Islamic psychology does not stop at theory, but demands the development of clinical interventions and spiritual education that are explicitly rooted in the Sufi tradition articulated by Nasr (Abitolkha, 2021).

The fourth implication touches on the curricular and institutional agenda. Contemporary Islamic psychology, if it follows Nasr's line of argument, must break away from the dichotomous pattern that separates the faculty of psychology from the faculty of *usul al-Din* and *tasawuf* from the study of the Qur'an and hadith. Nasr shows that there can be no integration of the soul without the presence of the spirit and intellect, and that true psychology is always related to *sharia* and *thariqah* as a concrete framework for life. Finally, Nasr's thinking implies the need for critical and creative dialogue between Islamic psychology and modern psychology without succumbing to modernist reductionism. On the one hand, Nasr sharply criticizes the “monopoly” of modern science as the sole interpreter of the soul and the removal of the metaphysical dimension from psychology. On the other hand, the perennial and comparative basis he uses opens up opportunities to re-examine contemporary psychological findings from the perspective of a richer hierarchy of existence and structure of the soul, as well as to utilize empirical methods as long as they do not undermine the foundations of tawhid and the sacred view of humanity.

Limitations and Future Research

This study also confirms the existence of limitations and further tasks. Nasr is known as a philosopher among contemporary Muslim scholars, he is proficient in providing theories about the soul and analyzing the crisis of the soul of modern man. However, Nasr resolves this crisis without any practical application, Nasr's highly theoretical and normative contributions still require systematic development. The future research needs to translate Nasr's hierarchical anthropology into a framework, therapeutic protocol, and educational program that can be tested, remains based on *Tawhid*, and is capable of critical dialogue with modern psychology. In this sense, Nasr's philosophy of the soul is better understood as a basic orientation for the ongoing project of reconstructing Islamic psychology in the modern era, rather than as a system that is final in its design.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, this study reveals that Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perennial metaphysics offers a comprehensive and hierarchical understanding of the human soul, which is fundamentally different from modern reductionist models. By placing humans in a vertical order of spirit, soul, and body, and placing the intellect at the center of spiritual consciousness, Nasr attempts to restore the theomorphic dignity of humans and reformulate the soul as an ontological bridge between the material world and the Divine. The levels of the soul of *nafs al-Ammarah*, *nafs al-Lawwamah*, and *nafs al-Mutmainnah* not only describe the inner state of humans, but also formulate a concrete path of purification and return to God. This explicitly addresses the crisis of faith, meaning, and spirituality of modern men.

At the same time, this analysis clarifies the depth of Nasr's criticism of modern psychology and secular science. The separation of “psychology” from metaphysics, revelation, and Scientia sacra has rendered modern scientific disciplines ontologically “half-blind.” Modern science, according to Nasr, is capable of describing the lower functions of the psyche, but lacks the language to reach the intellect, spirit, and processes of purification of the soul. To that end, Nasr intervenes in the reconstruction of Islamic psychology on an explicit metaphysical and cosmological foundation. This makes the science of the soul no longer separate from tawhid, the hierarchy of being, and the discipline of *tazkiyat al-Nafs*. The implications of this view are quite broad. Conceptually, Nasr demands that Islamic psychology clearly distinguish between the *ruh*, *'Aql*, *nafs*, and *jism*. Practically, Nasr points to the integration of Sufi practices such as *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, and *mujahadah* as methods of healing the soul in counselling and spiritual education. Institutionally, Nasr's thinking suggests reconfiguring curricula and disciplinary boundaries, as well as transcending the dichotomy between psychology faculties and *usul al-Din* or Sufism faculties.

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