International Academic Institute for Science and Technology

International Academic Journal of Humanities
Vol.11, No.1, 2024, pp.26-32.

ISSN 2454-2245

International Academic Journal of Humanities

www.iaiest.com

A Comparative Study of Islam and Christianity's View of Nature

Dr. Azizollah Fahimi [a]

[a] *Assistant Professor, Law Faculty, Qom University, Iran. E-mail: Aziz.Fahimi@Yahoo.com*

Abstract

Some Western intellectuals, such as M. White, attribute the current environmental crises to a religious view of the environment, and believe that religious teachings about the environment have destroyed natural gifts in the world today. This needs to be reviewed and analyzed. The infiltration of some Aristotelian philosophical ideas of Ancient Rome into the body of Christian thought reinforces the views of people like M. White. While the ideas originated from the Greek school of Alexandria, inspired by Socratic thought, there has always been a loving view of nature, and nature has considered the embodiment of the gods which this thought has also been influential in some Christians in Europe. But the Oriental schools, and at the top of them the comprehensive school of Islam, have never been competitive and angry view with nature and have considered it a beautiful image of the divine creation. Therefore, the slogan of land destruction is due to a religious view, which is a false slogan. The propagation of Oriental rulings and teachings can have a large audience in the world and eliminate these biased attacks.

Keywords: Nature, Environment, Islam, Christianity, Religious View.

DOI:10.9756/IAJH/V11I1/IAJH1103
Received: 04 January 2024/Accepted: 29 January 2024/Published: 13 February 2024

Definitions

Before a comparative study of the religious view of nature, definitions are necessarily provided and then the study is presented in two parts.

1. Cosmology

Cosmology is a science that deals with all levels and systems of formal reality, of which the material system is only one. Cosmology is a science that deals with all levels and systems of apparent reality, of which the material system is only one. It is a sacred knowledge that is doomed to be associated with revelation and metaphysical theory, and only with them does it find meaning and be useful (Nasr, 2008).

2. Christian and Hellenistic views

The Christian view, inspired by the Aristotelian view of Ancient Roman Empire, based on rationalism and naturalism, replaced rational philosophy with metaphysics instead of an institutional view of nature. Instead, the Hellenistic view that originated from the Greek School of Alexandria and was similar to the thinking of old Aryans, saw nature as the abode of the gods and the soul as the condition for the survival of matter. So the Islamic view is closer to the Greek view than to the Roman view.

3. Metaphysics

Metaphysics is a theory of reality whose realization means spiritual purity and perfection. Therefore, it can only be achieved within the framework of a revelatory tradition (Nasr).

Part 1: A Destructive or Supportive Religious View of the Environment

A: History of Attitudes Towards Nature in the West

The environmental crisis of the present age cannot be solved without paying special attention to the spiritual dimension of the problem and no one can deny the role of religion in explaining the situation that led to this crisis. Reference to the history of science and philosophy in the West shows the historical roots of the environmental crisis, and this deviation is due to misconceptions about the history of science and philosophy, and the way to correct it also depends on correcting this deviant view. Positivist thinking the history of science, which has been popular since the time of its founders E. Mach and G. Sarton, overcame the non-positivist thinking of P. duhem. This went on until, in 1960, American students occupied one of the universities and declared that the attitude towards the history of science had to be changed in order to determine how the Western attitude was explainable for Western man. Nowadays, the attitude of religious cosmology and Oriental thought must be used to clarify the view of nature and its importance, just as some Western thinkers such as Huston Smith and Gilbert-Durand have tried to offer a new interpretation of traditional science in relation to nature.

Today, it is not possible to cure the spiritual pain of Western man without his spiritual rebirth. Just like some works, Theodore Roszak's “Where the Wasteland Ends?” seeks to revive religious traditions in the West.

Today's Western man has to break the idols he has made and worshiped. Man's spiritual life is captivated by self-made idols such as positivism, humanism, and individualism.

It is not possible to break these idols except by returning to the forgotten inner roots of human beings, because her restless existence and all natural manifestations speak of God “With His praise glorifies nothing but that.” (Al-Isra,). There is not a single thing that does not glorify His praises.[1] Alas! Such a creature makes its extravagant desires its goddess. Usually the basic problem of human beings is the cultural problem. Therefore, correcting the view of science and its efficiency is the basic way to prevent the plunder of the natural gifts of the environment. Our problem is that today mankind is trying to conquer more of the peaks of nature by further disturbing the balance between man and nature. Nowadays, man thinks that his trouble is due to underdevelopment, while his main problem is overdevelopment and its solution depends on reconciling with nature and heaven, not overdevelopment.

Although science is respected, its use instead of heavenly wisdom has resulted in nothing but the destruction of natural gifts. Today, Christian and secular theology cannot afford such a corrective attitude. In such a situation, there is no choice but to be inspired by Oriental traditions.

[1] https://quran.com. Dr. Mustafa Khattab, the Clear Quran

B: Explaining the Problem of Nature Crisis

Nature is the mother of human beings and has made their existence possible with indescribable generosity. But the Western view deals with this mother harshly, so that the basis of her existence is threatened. The apparent dominance of human beings over nature has upset the balance of nature. Today, the sanctity of nature has become meaningless in human life. The relationship between nature and man is similar to the dead center of some Western families in which there are no emotional relationships and their lives are managed commercially and none of them respects each other's rights.

According to one Western thinker, the great social and political evil of Westerners is machine life. Today, the machine is a great villain in Western life and the machine is known for its firepower, iron, and invisible forces. But to speak of the machine and to serve it to the spirit of the human age is utterly absurd and baseless. The mechanization of life means the enslavement of man, so that there isn't superhuman, animal, and non- collective resurrection in it. The power of the machine followed the kingship of iron, and their most spiritual face exposed the human nature as the one who first created the machine and eventually became the creature of the machine (Schuon, 1953). Elsewhere, Schuon argues, it is no longer human intellect that determines what man is, what reason is, or what truth is, but rather machine, physics, chemistry, or biology. Under these conditions, the human mind is more and more dependent on the space created by him and then it is science and the machine that create man, and if so, it can be arrogantly claimed that they also create "God". (Schuon, 2006).

Because the gap thus created by the overthrow of God's kingdom should not be left empty. The fact of the existence of God and his impression on human nature requires that this divinity be installed by something. A false absolute that can replace the absurdity of self and human consciousness without content (Schuon, 1963).

According to Bronowski, the values that are considered constant today have emerged from the Renaissance and the scientific revolution, and have changed the arts, sciences, and medieval values (Bronowski, 1965).

Accordingly, in order to solve the problem, one must first start from the natural sciences and the views that exist about the Western philosophical and theological sciences, and then examine the inherent limitations within those sciences, which are in fact responsible for the crisis for humanity. For non - modern man, nature and the whole material world were sacred and the phenomena were meaningful, but today the universe contains an artificial message for man. In order for the new natural sciences to enter the arena, the universe must first be emptied of its sacred character and become secular. The worldview of new science, especially as it has been widely disseminated, has contributed to the secularization of nature and its creatures (Nasr, 2008).

The new mission was to acquaint man with the science of transcendence and neglect of nature, which creates the most miserable conditions for man as a composite being.

C: The Christian View of Nature

The objectivity of a real cosmology in the West is generally due to disregard for metaphysics, in particular the failure to remember a hierarchy of existence and knowledge. Different and multiple levels of reality have been reduced to a single physical-psychological realm. Metaphysics has been downgraded to a rationalist philosophy. This philosophy has become an assistant to the natural and mathematical sciences, so much so that scholars consider the only role of philosophy to explain the methods and rational mechanisms of the sciences and the critical role of problem that man has to play in the face of the science that is himself the creator of the human mind has completely disappeared Nasr, 2008). Some historians of science and philosophy also have acknowledged it (A. Burt, 1925).

Christianity has an absurd and imprisoned view of nature by substituting love and affection for reason and logic. Maskal said that I cannot ignore any major damage to Christianity other than linking it to arguments based on ambiguity and confusion and or scientific views are only temporary (Maskal, 1956).

Another Christian scholar, confessing the prevailing views of the established Christianity, says that only a complete Christian Catholic faith can support the fundamental theological and philosophical beliefs for the nature of universe is necessary to justify its demand through the scientific method, and it is also the motivation and inspiration that compels people to strive for such)., Smithhurst study a Scientists' latest endeavors have reached the point where followers of the Positivist school acknowledge that it is not the task of science to discover the nature of objects or aspects of reality, but is to make connections between mathematical and physical symptoms, which are called symbols. One of these scientists is Ph. Frank, who has dealt with this issue in his book "Modern Science and its Philosophy". (Frank, 1949, various pages). This view can be further explored in the "Age of Experience and Analysis" by M. White, who believes in the destructiveness of religious teachings over the environment and nature (White, 1995).

Greek scientists believed that mathematical science had a duty to depict mental patterns in order to "preserve phenomena". On the other hand, Islamic scholars believed that even in the realm of mathematics, the role of science is to discover an aspect of the fact that Aristotelian Physics and Biological Realism System has been used in the realm of the most precise mathematical science, astronomy, and Ptolemaic Epicycle System of also evolved. Ptolemaic Epicycle System explained that spheres are circles with the center of each circle on a larger circle. While the positivists were opposed to the Aristotelian Realism System and sought to completely de-objectify science, they did so by denying the ontological importance of science.

In protest, J. Martin argues that the school of positivism has mistakenly combined the cognitive empirical analysis of objects with ontological analysis, and that modern physics seeks to de-objectify objects, and that positivism about science is superstitious (Martin, 1941).

One of the authors, criticizing the prevailing view of Christianity in disregard for nature, believed that today the feeling of the sanctity of nature in Europe is mainly among the rural population, because they are always present in this context and Christianity, which is still associated with the hymn of cosmic worship, continues to exist (Eliad, 1959).

And another said that,

This transition from objectivism to subjectivism in its own way repeats and reflects the fall of Adam (pbuh) and the loss of paradise. Mankind has achieved sophisticated richness (the self) by losing the symbolic and contemplative perspective that was based on his non-personal self and the metaphysical cognition of objects and phenomena. The world of allegories and divine manifestations has become the world of words. In all such cases, the heaven's gates are closed to us, without us ever realizing this fact. Instead, we discover a land that has been our place of inattention for a long time, or at least seems so to us. The land that opens its arms to greet its children and wants them to forget all the lost paradises (Schuon, 1925).

Another Christian critic wrote that I think the scientific explanation at the lowest level should be completed with something much broader and deeper, that is, the interpretation at the highest level. Until such a thing is realized, our reliance on fundamental Christian truth is weak and often ineffective (Yarnold, 1959).

What is noteworthy in the confrontation of Christianity with nature is that in Christianity, naturalism, empiricism, and rationalism were very common, and human wisdom took on a divine form, and instead Roman civilization attached great importance to nature. From the Christian point of view, Knowledge of nature seemed to be a kind of blasphemy and audacity to the sacred, which prevented the intuition of God from being seen.

Christianity showed a difficult reaction by defining the boundary between nature and metaphysics, which resulted in the deprivation of nature of its inner spirit, which arose from the hearts of all the objects and beings of the universe. Therefore, Christianity ignored nature altogether or considered it insignificant, and for this reason, the study of nature did not have a theological view in Western Christianity (B. Bavink, 1932).

In the same article, the author points out that Christianity has forgotten the study of nature beyond human existence.

To properly understand the Christian view of nature, there is no choice but to pay attention to the roots of Christian culture in this regard. The roots of Christian culture in this regard go back to the Aristotelian view. With the advent of Aristotle, Western philosophy was introduced and Oriental philosophy was forgotten. After him, rationalism became popular in schools such as the Stoic, Epicurean, and other later schools, and it directly contributed little to the natural sciences (Schuon, 1953). Unfortunately, post-Renaissance European universities have followed the Aristotelian view of nature, although under the guise of a new science (Nasr, 2008).

To better understand the Christian and Islamic point of view, it must be said that what penetrated Christianity was the view of the Roman Empire, that is, it spread Aristotelian ideas with a weak view of nature in Europe and its universities, but the Islamic view is close to that of the Greek Alexandrian school. The Greeks had a mindset similar to that of the ancient Aryans, who considered nature and its elements to be the abode of the gods, and matter was alive through the soul, and there was no separation between matter and spirit. But with the advent of Socrates and his views, nature was no longer the abode of the gods and the general movement to change thoughts was from the symbolic interpretation of nature to naturalism, or from theoretical metaphysics to rational philosophy (Cornford, 1952, various pages).

In contrast, Rome's view was that of Neoplatonic metaphysics, Neo - Pythagorean mathematics, and the Hellenistic school. In contrast, the Roman view was of Neoplatonic metaphysics, Neo-Pythagorean mathematics, and the Hellenistic school, which was at the heart of a kind of metaphysics that was aware of the symbolic and transparent

nature of the objects of the universe. Thus, the background and history of Western civilization, in its external and official form, is Roman, while what Islam gained from the Greco-Hellenistic heritage is mainly rooted in the Alexandrian school (Nasr, 2008).

After its emergence, Christianity was confronted with ideas in which naturalism, empiricism, and rationalism were prevalent, and this view (human knowledge) replaced the divine knowledge that Christianity considered blasphemous because it caused people to misunderstand the divine intuition. Christianity, therefore, took a stand against it and created a gap between nature and metaphysics, and by depriving nature of its inner spirit, it forgot nature, or at least made a very small contribution to it and for this reason, the study of nature did not have a god-centered view in Western Christianity (Bading, 1392).

Christianity opposed cosmic religion in order to preserve and safeguard a correct theology, and introduced nature as a mortal mass (massa peritionis) and the nature of God as the human soul and salvation and but the Greeks emphasized the divine nature of the universe and the metaphysical dignity of the human intellect that compelled man to know the world (Ibid, 1964, Various pages and Schuon, 1953).

Christianity emphasized the way of love and affection, instead of eliminating the sacred view of nature, and in the face of rationalism devoid of knowledge, put knowledge at the service of faith and forgot the metaphysical substance of natural wisdom within man. Christianity has forgotten the essence of the metaphysics of natural wisdom within human beings. During that time, a kind of alienation from nature took shape, what left its mark on the forefront of the next history of Christianity, which is one of the deep roots of the current crisis of the new man in his encounter with the nature around him.

Christianity has considered man as a will and not as reason and intelligence, therefore he preferred faith and love to knowledge and marginalized Oriental knowledge and cognition. Christianity regarded man as a wandering will whose pain must be healed by faith without the aid of reason, but Greek knowledge regarded man's innate talent for knowledge as a means to an absolute truth (Nasr, 2008).

Among Islamic philosophers, Abu Ali Sina is the greatest peripatetic (Masha'i) Muslim philosopher who has so far maintained his influence on the Islamic intellectual life.

Unlike the West, where the Aristotelianization of ideas led to the Aristotelianization of Christian theology and the extinction of the metaphysical dimension of Christianity in a rationalistic environment, the spiritual and profound view of nature to be increasingly discarded. The history of Ibn Sina’s cosmology has a special connection in this development. According to Ibn Sina, cosmology was closely related to the love of angels and corresponded to a religious view of the natural world. People like William tried to remove the angels from the natural world and, by abandoning the spirits of Ibn Sina’s heavens, practically secularized the world to some extent and prepared it for the Copernican revolution. A revolution that could only take place when its symbolic and spiritual meaning was abandoned. The universe that had become pure reality and was separated from metaphysics. It thus became the subject of pure physics (Nasr, 1964, Various pages).

Part 2: Some Metaphysical Principles Related to Nature and Some of Its Usages of Specific in the Current Situation

A. Some Metaphysical Principles Related to Nature

Metaphysics means the knowledge of absolute reality, and according to Schuon, a metaphysical doctrine is the embodiment of a universal truth in the mind. A Cohen’s rational philosophical system is the solution to some of the problems we raise for ourselves (Schuon, 1953). Those who believe in Oriental metaphysics that this science is in the special light of mysticism and secret knowledge and is the only science that can distinguish between absolute existence, God, and relative existence. In the Oriental religious traditions, metaphysics has always survived to this day (Guenon, 1951, various pages).

Despite background of metaphysics in the Orient and Greece, and among many of the early founders of Christian theology, such as Irenaeus, who believed in the sacred view of nature, metaphysics was unfortunately recognized as a branch of philosophy after the spread of Western philosophy since Aristotle and in the Christian world, will and love have replaced wisdom, wisdom, and knowledge. What is known today as metaphysics is only a faint shadow of real metaphysics. The lack of a relationship between man and nature was the result of a new Western metaphysical perspective, and today man turned to Oriental traditions to rediscover the metaphysical importance of nature and revive the metaphysical tradition in Christianity. If the Orient tries by force to learn Western techniques of

domination of nature, this domination will lead to its mere destruction, so to avoid this, it has no choice but to rely on Oriental metaphysics (Nasr, 2008).

Science never grew out of the rational world of religious tradition, and nature never found a secular face. Examining Islam, we come across a religious tradition that is similar to Christianity in its theological foundations, yet it contains knowledge that is similar to the metaphysical beliefs of other Oriental religions. In this regard, Islam, like many of its other constructions, is "the middle nation" in both geographical and metaphysical senses, according to the Noble Quran. For this reason, the rational structure of Islam and its cosmological beliefs and natural sciences can be of the greatest help in awakening some of the special possibilities of silence and stagnation within Christianity (Nasr, 2008).

B: Some Usages of Special in the Current Situation

The Christian conception was that attention to nature was polytheism and that one had to fight it, while there was a difference between the animal worship that Christianity fought against and the naturalism of the people of northern Europe, for whom nature was of symbolic and spiritual importance. According to Schuon, Christianity had to react against a united evil spirit, and at the same time it had to remove from the scene values that did not deserve Paganism and to instill in man a natural hatred of nature and to make him understand that nature is a property to be enjoyed or exploited, or even an enemy to be overcome (Schuon, 1966).

On the other hand, the modern natural sciences with a metaphysical science based on reason, revelation, and the natural philosophy can provide interpretations and evaluations of scientific discoveries and hypotheses, insofar as the new sciences deal with partial knowledge and metaphysics with existing ultimate knowledge. The two can complement each other. At the same time, metaphysics, which is independent of science, can examine the presuppositions of science and act as an impartial critic and judge of science (Caldin).

From the Islamic point of view, man must discover knowledge about the beings of the universe and become a perfect human being, that is, a full- fledged mirror of divine names and attributes. The divine goal of human creation is to make a perfect human being, and human beings have a special place in the world and are at the center of the cosmic space. At the same time, man is aware and guardian of nature and knows the names of all beings and rules over nature as the caliph of God on earth, and this means rebellion against heaven. Man is the conduit of grace and mercy for nature, in that by actively participating in the spiritual world, he illuminates the world of nature and is the mouth through which nature breathes and lives. Due to the friendly relationship between man and nature, the inner state of man is reflected in nature arrangement (Sirajuddin, 1952). Nature is a reflection of the human soul (Ibid).

Since in Islam nature is not considered as a worldly thing and the sciences of nature have never been studied as the nature of the creature without considering the nature of the Creator, the presence of metaphysical theory and a series of degrees of knowledge enabled Islam to use various sciences and technologies to exert the greatest influence on Western science without disturbing the Islamic rational structure and someone like Ibn Sina was brought up who became a peripatetic (Masha'i) philosopher and explained his Eastern philosophy through enlightenment (Kress, 1961, various pages) and or a person like Khawaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was trained as a mathematician, astronomer, and reviver of peripatetic (Masha'i) philosophy, and became the author of the best work on Shiite theology and prominent treatises on Sufism. Hence, the reason why new sciences did not emerge in China and the Islamic world can be said to be due to metaphysical beliefs and a traditional structure. In fact, they refused to secularize nature and did not want nature to lose its cash status and for this reason, their belief dimensions become so weak that a completely secular science of nature emerges outside the traditional rational framework (Nasr, 2008).

References

Schuon, F. (2007). *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts: A New Translation with Selected Letters*. World Wisdom, Inc.

Nasr, S.H. (2008). The Man and Nature, translated by Abdolrahim Gavahi, Office for Publication of Islamic Culture, Tehran.

Burt, E.A. (1925). *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*, London.

Bavink, B. (1932). *Introduction to the scientific philosophy of today*. New York.

Pepin, (1964). *Cosmic Theology and Christian Theology; Comparison of Christian Theology and Cosmic Religion*, Paris.

Cornford, F.M., & Guthrie, W.K.C. (1952). *Principium Sapientiae: The Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought*. Cambridge University.

Nasr, S.H. (1964). *Three Muslim Sages*. Cambridge University.

Guenon, R. (1951). Eastern Metaphysics, Paris.
Schuon, F. (1966). *The Symbolic Perspective*. Tomorrow Magazine, Winter.
Caldin. (1952). *The power and limits of science; a philosophical study*. Sirajuddin, Abu Bakr, "Legislation", London.
Henry, C. (1961). *Avicenna and the visionary recital, T.W. Trask,* New York.
Caldin. (1951). *The power and limits of science; a philosophical study*. R. Guenon. Lam metaphysi queorientale, parise.
Cornford, F. (1952). *Principium Sapientiae*. Cambrige.
Pepin, (1964). *Cosmic theology and Christian theology*. Paris.
Yarnold, G.D. (1959). *The spiritual crisis of the scientific Age*. New York.
Schuon, F. (2006). *Light on the Ancient Worlds: A New Translation with Selected Letters*. World Wisdom, Inc.
Bronowski, J. (1965). *Science and Human Values*. New York.
Schuon, F. (1963). *Understanding Islam, T.D.M. Matheson*. London.
Schuon, F. (1953). *Spiritual perspectives and Human facts, T.D.M. Matheson*. London.