



Australian Journal of Islamic Studies

<https://ajis.com.au>

ISSN (online): 2207-4414

Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation

Charles Sturt University CRICOS 00005F

Islamic Sciences and Research Academy of Australia

## Religions and Environmental Sustainability

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To cite this article:

Sayem, Md. Abu. "Religions and Environmental Sustainability: Focusing on Some Practical Approaches by John B. Cobb Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 65-80.



Published online: 22 January 2021



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# RELIGIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: FOCUSING ON SOME PRACTICAL APPROACHES BY JOHN B. COBB JR. AND SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

Md. Abu Sayem\*

**Abstract:** John B. Cobb Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr attempt to bring religious moral foundation into the discourse on environmental sustainability. The present study focuses how Cobb and Nasr address the ecological crisis in connection with their respective faith traditions. It investigates whether their eco-theological thoughts are complementary in contextualising religious moral foundations with the present environmental problems. By making a comparative analysis of their eco-religious understanding and suggestions, this paper shows why their eco-theological thoughts seem significant for addressing environmental issues and how their suggestions can motivate humans to protect the natural environment.

**Keywords:** *Christianity, eco-theology, environmental ethics, Islam, religious morality*

## INTRODUCTION

The current ecological crisis is a direct result of uncontrolled human activities in the natural world. Using modern science and technology, greedy humans exploit nature for their economic affluence and military supremacy. Keeping these factors in hand, eco-religious scholars John B. Cobb Jr. (1925–) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933–) have extensively worked on environmental issues by connecting their respective religious and spiritual traditions – Christianity and Islam. Though some other eco-religious scholars’ contributions to environmental sustainability<sup>1</sup> and their suggestions for collaboration between religious

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This article is based on author’s (2020) PhD dissertation in religious studies, “Religious Perspectives on Environmental Issues: A Comparative Study on John B. Cobb, Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr” at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The substance was read at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Oxford Symposium on Religious Studies held in Oxford on 4-6 December 2017. The author acknowledges the valued suggestions of his PhD supervisor Professor Lai Pan-Chiu and PhD co-supervisor Professor James D. Frankel of Religious Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for the formation and improvement of this article. The author also expresses thanks to the Chinese University of Hong Kong and University Grants Committee for travel grant to attend the symposium.

<sup>1</sup> Stephen C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder, *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue—An Interfaith Dialogue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Aimie L. B. Hope and Christopher R. Jones, “The Impact of Religious Faith on Attitudes to Environmental Issues and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) Technologies: A Mixed Methods Study,” *Technology in Society* 38 (2014); Willis Jenkins and Christopher K. Chapple, “Religion and Environment,” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36 (2011); Lai

communities and environmental activists<sup>2</sup> are appreciable, the works by Cobb<sup>3</sup> and Nasr<sup>4</sup> play pioneering roles in this field. With their extensive works, both scholars relate eco-religious teachings with the present discourse of environmental issues. They reinterpret religious moral teachings on the environment for the same purpose, but in different ways. There are similarities and differences in their understanding, approaches and methods of application. Here, comparative and dialogical methods are chosen for analysing their theories and approaches to shed more light on the discourse of eco-religious understanding. In so doing, the current study explores new research in the present body of knowledge for collaboration between religious communities and environmental movements.

## BASIC INFORMATION OF JOHN B. COBB JR. AND SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

Cobb<sup>5</sup> was born in Japan in 1925 to an American Christian missionary family and brought up there until World War II in 1943. Then he moved to the United States with his parents. He

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Pan-Chiu, "Interreligious Dialogue and Environmental Ethics," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 21, no. 1 (2011): 5, 17; Lai Pan-Chiu, "God of Life and Ecological Theology: A Chinese Christian Perspective," *Ecumenical Review* 65, no. 1 (2013): 67.

- <sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Breuilly and Martin Palmer, eds., *Christianity and Ecology* (New York: Cassel, 1992); Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, "Introduction: The Emerging Alliance of Religion and Ecology," *Daedalus* 130, no. 4 (2001):1-22; Willis J. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Willis J. Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Pattern* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013); Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); James B. Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003); R. P. Misra, ed., *Environmental Ethics: A Dialogue of Culture* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1995); Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny and Azizan Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2003); Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of the Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Centre for the Study of World Religions, 2000); M. Izzi Dien, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2000); Kathryn D. Blanchard and Kevin J. O'Brien, *An Introduction to Christian Environmentalism: Ecology, Virtue, and Ethics* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014).
- <sup>3</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (Texas: Environmental Ethics Book, 1972); John B. Cobb, Jr., *Sustainability: Economics, Ecology and Justice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1992); John B. Cobb, Jr., *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994); John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Earthist Challenge to Economism: A Theological Critique of the World Bank* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, Environment, and Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- <sup>4</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Muzaffar Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," *Islam & Science* 5, no. 1 (2007); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1990); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis," *The Ecologist* 30, no. 1 (2000); Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS) and Seyyed Hossain Nasr, "A Religious Nature: Philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr on Islam and the Environment," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 71, no. 5 (2015).
- <sup>5</sup> For his life and works, see John B. Cobb, Jr., *Theological Reminiscences* (Claremont, California: Process Century Press, 2014). For his theological biography, see David Ray Griffin and Joseph C. Hough,

undertook his education in the USA and worked thereafter. His basic education is Christian theology. Afterwards, he became interested in process philosophy and then he related it successfully with Christian theology. He is credited with the development of process theology using process thoughts in the Christian faith. Process philosophy helps him to understand nature and ecology. In process theology, he attempts to respond to some environmental problems by reconstructing some Christian moral teachings on the environment. In short, his eco-theological understanding deals with reconstruction and reformation. To address the present ecological problems, Cobb moves gradually from mainstream theology to ecology through process thoughts. On the way to ecology, he also deals with biological science and economical functions of everyday human life.

Nasr<sup>6</sup> was born in Iran in 1933 to a Shia Muslim family and brought up there until 1946. He came to the United States for his education. After completing secondary school to PhD, he went back to Iran in 1965 and served there until 1979. He was forced to leave Iran after Khomeini's (Islamic) revolution (in 1979) and came back to the United States. Unlike Cobb, Nasr's educational background is in science, though he is a critic of modern science. Having interests in philosophy and spirituality, Nasr relates philosophical understanding successfully with religious spirituality. He reconnects the natural world with the human heart. In his eco-theological understanding, Nasr gives more focus on spiritual feeling for the environment. For him, traditional views of the environment are not independent of religions, but are indivisible.<sup>7</sup> Seemingly, Nasr retrieves the traditional approach instead of the modern scientific approach to nature.

These scholars come from different backgrounds in terms of their religious affiliation and education. Cobb, coming from theological background, and Nasr, coming from science background, have converged on a common issue of the present ecological crisis. Their theoretical discussions differ from one another in terms of approaches. Cobb talks more about practical steps than spiritually feeling for the environment while Nasr focuses more on spiritual feeling than practical activities. Cobb seems more philosophical and practical in his approach, but Nasr seems more traditional and spiritual. Nasr seems assertive of traditional views of nature, but Cobb seems somewhat critical of traditional ways of understanding. So, Cobb's approach is reconstructive and Nasr's approach is retrieval. In Nasr's view, without changing the present secular scientific worldview, it is not possible to solve the ecological crisis properly. In contrast, Cobb sees the possibility in his proposed ecological model of life and development. In this regard, Nasr seems somewhat pessimistic while Cobb seems more optimistic. However,

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*Theology and the University: Essays in Honor of John B. Cobb* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> For a short biography on Nasr, see Enes Karic, "Nasr: Tinker of the Sacred" in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, eds., Lewis Edwin Hahn; Randall E. Auxier; Lucian W. Jr. Stone (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 781-791. For a detailed biographical description, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "An Intellectual Autobiography," in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier and Lucian W. Stone (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001), 3-85.

<sup>7</sup> See Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 18; Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, 2; Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 9-24; Nasr, "The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis;" BAS and Nasr, "A Religious Nature."

both scholars regard the present form of environmental ethics as insufficient to address the problems and support dialogue between/among religions on ecological issues. They also suggest faith communities to cooperate with others to mitigate the problem.

## **PRACTICAL APPROACHES BY COBB AND NASR TO ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Cobb and Nasr attempt to promote environmental sustainability. They have not confined their discussions only to theoretical analysis; rather, they have also presented some frameworks for practical action. Cobb's ecological model of life and Nasr's environment-friendly human action model are truly appreciable and workable. As noted above, Cobb's model refers usually to post-modern action plans while Nasr's model prefers pre-modern or traditional ways of action. Again, both share one another's model, though in different ways. Similarity is commonly found in their models rather than difference; they are complementary rather than contradictory.

Cobb and Nasr emphasise planting trees in huge numbers.<sup>8</sup> From their respective faith traditions, they state planting is a great work. They are against any sort of deforestation. In many ways, Cobb and Nasr attempt to motivate people to launch social forestation programs by their own initiatives. In this regard, they see main religious institutions, churches and mosques for example, can play a vital role in making their audiences conscious about the importance of forestation in light of their respective faiths, then organise people to implement forestation programs in their own areas. Priests and imams, along with members of the governing body, should lead such social organisations for the greater cause of environmental sustainability. It should be volunteer work; its aim should be to please God through serving His creatures. It is well known to all that green trees provide life-supporting oxygen to all living forms on earth. So, saving or planting more trees implies saving creatures of God. On the other hand, destroying virgin trees without logical grounds should be considered an act causing extinction. Moreover, trees are essential parts of the ecosystem. Actually, without trees no life is possible. In line with these guidelines, if church and mosque committees can motivate their communities, it will be effective work. As far as expenditure is concerned, they can collect money from their own community members, should maintain transparency in income and expenditure, and spend it only for implementation of social forestation programs. Besides, religious non-governmental organisations (RNGOs) can develop programs like this for the same purpose. Government, regional, trans-regional and international organisations can help faith-based institutions and RNGOs with providing money and other logistical support for implementation of social forestation programs. Nasr appreciates the Grand Mufti of Syria, Shaykh Ahmad Kiftaru, for making people conscious about the environment through education and other social activities;<sup>9</sup> and he praises world-wide Islamic environmental movements,

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<sup>8</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 60; Cobb, *Sustainability*, 37-41; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 86-88, 91; BAS and Nasr, "A Religious Nature," 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 214; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 86-88.

Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences for instance, for their motivation and works. Similarly, Cobb praises programs taken by churches and other Christian organisations for their involvement in the movement. Still now, all these programs and organisations are not at a satisfactory level. They want to see more programs and movements like these all over the world.

Cobb and Nasr express their deep concern for the present agricultural system.<sup>10</sup> They argue, in it, multidimensional destruction occurs to land, water, human health, ecosystem and biodiversity. In the present system of agriculture, people can obtain more food in huge quantities, but they are not quality foods. The way farmers use chemical fertilisers and pesticides alongside other medicines for killing insects and growing more products is a matter of serious anxiety. Chemical fertiliser decreases the fertility of land, quality of soil and contaminates artificial substances in natural elements of soil. It also washes out to bodies of water like rivers, lakes, ponds and seas. Pesticides are one kind of poison. By using them, farmers kill some insects that are also helpful to maintain the ecosystem. This pesticide mixes easily with air, soil and water, so it is very dangerous for the environment. During harvesting, storing and food processing, other kinds of poison like formalin or preservation medicines are used frequently. It is seen, from cultivation to final processing for use, all agricultural products are mixed with different poisons. All these contaminated foods enter the human body and gradually transform it into a toxic entity. Thus, the modern scientific agricultural system has become a failed system. That is why Cobb and Nasr recommend traditional agricultural systems and organic food production.

Cobb and Nasr emphasise quality of food rather than quantity.<sup>11</sup> They see, if foods are enriched with pure quality, less quantity can suffice the fundamental needs of people with quality of life; on the other hand, if foods are more in quantity, this meets the hunger of people more satisfactorily, but people are deprived of quality of life. Nasr attempts to convince Muslims farmers to follow traditional ways of cultivation, to use organic fertilisers and to apply traditional methods for driving out insects from farmland. He also requests them to imitate traditional methods of harvesting and storing foodstuffs. Nasr believes, if farmers and other food producers are well-informed about the demerits of modern agricultural system and the government is found helpful in this regard, it is possible to follow traditional ways of farming, storing and processing all agricultural products. Similarly, Cobb talks about some required measures for following traditional ways of agriculture. He suggests for immediately transforming American rural agriculture into traditional agriculture. Cobb does not support use of modern technology in ploughing the land, because it destroys many biotic organisms in the soil, which help seeds to germinate and grow. He is also strongly against the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides for the purpose of so-called greater production.<sup>12</sup> Instead, he proposes organic fertilisers and natural ways to drive insects from farmlands. Through an agricultural

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<sup>10</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 60; Cobb, *Sustainability*, 42; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 87-88.

<sup>11</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 63; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 90.

<sup>12</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 60.

project in China, Cobb attempts to prove it is still possible to follow traditional methods in agriculture instead of the present technology based agricultural system, and in this way, people's basic food need can also be met.

Nowadays, traditional villages have turned to modern villages. Village people are now habituated to a modern way of life and likely to follow technology based methods in every part of their lives. Having observed such dramatic changes in modern village life, Cobb and Nasr are dissatisfied.<sup>13</sup> For them, in villages it is easier to lead life in natural ways more than in cities. They blame multinational corporations and governments for polluting and damaging village life. They argue, giant companies have made village people customers of their multidimensional products and governments work as puppets of these corporations.<sup>14</sup> They control everything in the name of hybrid production; even seeds are no longer at the disposal of farmers. Village life is based on agriculture and their economy is mainly dependent on agroeconomics, which is now in the hands of corporations. However, according to their view, village life should be completely environmentally friendly based on ecological model. In this regard, they advise village people to come forward and to try to understand their long-term benefits. They should preserve their farmlands, seeds of crop, cattle, fruits, etc., from being polluted, contaminated and hybridised. They should refrain from using the so-called technology, chemical fertiliser and pesticide on their lands; rather, they should follow the traditional methods of cultivating, harvesting and processing. They should not sell or lease their lands to any companies for industrialisation or to the government of their countries for unnecessary construction. They should have mutual understanding and a strong alliance among themselves for meeting their basic needs. In this way, if village people are united and committed to maintaining their lifestyle matching with natural environment, villages may gain new life and become environmentally friendly living places like before. It requires a strong awareness among village people about the essentiality of environmental sustainability, first, then a spirit of collective effort among them to bring out their commitment in practice. At the same time, the government should realise the importance of ecology-based villages and village life, then cooperate with village people to keep villages as environmentally friendly dwelling places.

Cobb and Nasr are also concerned with the modern way of building houses and roads.<sup>15</sup> For them, the way people build houses and roads is not supportive of the ecosystem; rather, it destroys it and puts intolerable pressure on the whole environment. In their view, the materials they use in construction and the way these materials are produced for construction are completely hostile to a healthy environment; so, without substantial change in this regard, ecological justice is not possible. Building houses and construction of roads are always a problem for the natural environment, so people should think about the method and style of building and construction that put less pressure on the environment. In this context, Nasr

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<sup>13</sup> Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good*, 57-63; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 91-95.

<sup>14</sup> Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 44-61.

<sup>15</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 60; Cobb, *Sustainability*, 37-41; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 90-91.

advocates for traditional methods; he argues, though it is somewhat difficult and costly, it carries less impact on the ecosystem compared with the modern way of building and construction. Noting some examples from the past like the Great Wall of China, pyramids of Egypt, etc., Nasr attempts to convince modern architects, designers and engineers to adopt traditional ways of building houses and constructing roads. Though Cobb does not use the same term as Nasr, he categorically proposes ecologically suitable ways of building and construction. Referring to designer Paolo Solerio's model,<sup>16</sup> he tries to convince people to consider environmentally friendly houses and roads.

Cobb and Nasr advocate for less consumption.<sup>17</sup> For them, modern society is mainly based on consumption. The present market-based economic system needs more consumers for its economic growth. Through different ways of advertisement, commercial companies create more markets for their products and people are also convinced to purchase these products, though most are not connected directly to their basic needs. In this way, modern humans consume much than ever before. While consuming, they also misuse and abuse in huge numbers. There is an uneven ratio of consumption in different parts of the world. Consumption levels in developed countries are unimaginably higher than developing and under-developed countries. Unfortunately, most people consume much in rich countries while most people in poor countries cannot meet their basic needs. However, a consumption-based modern world exhausts natural resources rapidly, because now human demand is higher than the planet's production capacity. If this trend of consumption continues, humans will need many other worlds to meet their demands; but this is not feasible. According to the World Wildlife Fund's 2012 Living Planet Report,

(If all of humanity lived like an average resident of Indonesia, only two-thirds of the planet's bio capacity would be used; if everyone lived like an average Argentinean, humanity would demand more than half an additional planet; and if everyone lived like an average resident of the USA, a total of four Earths would be required to regenerate humanity's annual demand on nature.<sup>18</sup>

So, it is very urgent to halt such increasing global consumption rates and reduce them to a sustainable level. In this regard, Nasr suggests humans think about what is more beneficiary for their health and the environment.<sup>19</sup> For him, humans should consume only those things that have less consequence to ecology and their health. Thus, he attempts to develop a controlling approach to ongoing consumption. Similarly, Cobb develops a model of ecological asceticism to decrease human consumption.<sup>20</sup> By this term he refers to a simple lifestyle based on reduced consumption. Cobb and Nasr are critical of over-consumption and promoters of simple

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<sup>16</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Cobb, *Sustainability*, 3; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 90.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Savas Alpay, İbrahim Özdemir and Dilek Demirbas, "Environment and Islam," *Journal of Economic Cooperation and Development* 34, no. 4 (2013): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 90.

<sup>20</sup> Cobb, *Sustainability*, 3.



lifestyles.<sup>21</sup> For them, less consumption refers to good health and environment, while over-consumption means bad health and environment.

In the modern world, economic development is given highest priority where spiritual or holistic development is ignored. It is true that basic economic development is essential for survival, but that development should be as least destructive as possible. For Cobb, the current ecological crisis has not happened due to basic economic development; rather, over-economic development has substantially caused the present environmental crisis.<sup>22</sup> He relates the present economic activities of modern humans with the current unprecedented ecological crisis. Cobb argues, behind all human activities is economic interest without which modern humans do nothing; so, without dealing with modern economical activities, it is not possible to deal properly with the issue of environmental sustainability.<sup>23</sup> From this ground, Cobb attempts to address some basic economic functions of humans from the perspective of sustainable development.

Cobb criticises the dominant economic theories first, because such theories inspire modern humans to earn more wealth to make their lives more comfortable and these theories give value only to the achievement of economic development and never evaluate ecological balance with development. In these economic theories, as Cobb states, the natural environment has no intrinsic value; it works like a machine for meeting human needs.<sup>24</sup> Second, he presents an alternative framework for sustainable economic development in contrast to modern economic activities. His ecological model of development poses a great challenge to the so-called development issues. In his model, he vehemently criticises the appreciation of every year's GDP/GNP growth. He argues, the way it is appreciated encourages destruction of equilibrium between humans and the natural world.<sup>25</sup> For him, behind every growth in economic achievement is a lot of environmental destruction, so economic growth means ecological degradation. However, as a matter of fact, humans must do economic activities, so they should try to make as little impact on the environment as possible. Any economic function should match the ecosystem; if it violates the ecosystem, people should leave it and think of an alternative that is less harmful. He proposes market mechanism instead of the present market-based society where society is controlled by markets and markets are controlled by some corporations. He argues, in no way should society be controlled by markets; rather, markets should be controlled by society and society should consider ecological sustainability in controlling markets.<sup>26</sup> He advocates creating local markets to smoothly handle local agro-economical products among local people, first, then to supply efficiently the rest of the products to other parts of the country and other parts of the world. In this regard, Cobb's bioregionalism seems suitable for ecological balance. In it he advocates for community based economic,

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<sup>21</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 58, 63.

<sup>22</sup> Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 382-406; Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good*, vii-ix.

<sup>23</sup> Birch and Cobb, *The Liberation of Life*, 251.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 150, 263.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>26</sup> Cobb, *The Earthist Challenge to Economism*, 7-21.

industrial and marketing activities where community interests along with ecological balance of their surrounding areas will be given utmost priority.

As far as international commerce and trade are concerned, Cobb suggests balanced trade and commerce between/among nations so every country can gain equal benefits.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, Cobb attempts to reconstruct modern economic function based on ecological sustainability. If all governments can take unanimous decision and if the business elites cooperate with them, compromising their interest to some extent for the greater interest of environmental justice, Cobb's proposed model of ecological development can bring some good results in terms of ecological sustainability.

Like Cobb, Nasr sees the logical relationship between economic activities and environmental problems; he has not offered any specific model, as Cobb presents, for controlling and reducing human economic activities to a sustainable level. In this regard, Nasr talks about the role of wise economists,<sup>28</sup> but he does not think they can save the environment or change the attitude and behaviour of modern humans in terms of economic dealings. For him, the current economic function and market system are based on all-pervading secular ideology, which talk only of earthly benefits to humans; so, in all economic theories and activities, there is no place for ecological consideration. If Cobb's ecological model of development is placed before Nasr, perhaps he cannot deny its workability for the time being though he does not see a permanent solution in this model. For Nasr, any measurement or step taken based on secular scientific worldview may give some relief, but this cannot work as a long-term solution.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, he focuses on going back to a traditional approach or spiritual worldview for better understanding of nature and he believes this realisation can motivate how humans deal with their economic activities regarding the natural environment. Until then, humans cannot take the right decisions for ecological sustainability and cannot formulate their economic activities as environmentally friendly. Here, one sees Cobb as more optimistic than Nasr. Cobb attempts to find a solution within the existing system while Nasr suggests rectifying present human attitudes and behaviours in line with traditional or spiritual realisation. Cobb looks more practical and Nasr seems more idealist. No doubt, both are serious and sincere to divert present human economic activities to a way of sustainable development in line with ecological justice.

The present ecological problems are a direct consequence of carbon dioxide emission. It started with the Industrial Revolution and continues. In the process of industrialisation, Western Europe first used coal for operating machines in the factories. Coal-based energy discharges huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the open air, polluting surrounding areas with black particles. Though the Industrial Revolution is regarded as a turning point of economic affluence and comfortable life for humans, in cost-benefit analysis it is considered a pioneering medium or agent of environmental destruction. Cobb and Nasr criticise the Industrial

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<sup>27</sup> Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 299.

<sup>28</sup> Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 79.

<sup>29</sup> Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 7.

Revolution for bringing ecological crisis with it.<sup>30</sup> Modern humans are not satisfied with coal energy; they added oil and natural gas for producing more energy. Modern vehicles and industrial factories are operated by all these fossil-based energy sources. The way all these energy sources release poisonous gases pollutes the whole environment. Therefore, Cobb and Nasr equally suggest reducing carbon dioxide emissions immediately to a sustainable level.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, they advise modern humans to achieve less dependency on fossil-based energy, and advocate for green or renewable energy sources like windmills, turbines, solar power, wave power, etc. They also urge world leaders and governments to impose some restrictions over fossil-based energy and force people to use green energy sources as alternatives to present sources of energy production. Cobb and Nasr request humans to change their individual attitudes and behaviours when it comes to the question of fossil-based energy. For this purpose, Cobb encourages public transport and discourages private cars.<sup>32</sup> He also suggests people walk or cycle for short distances. In this regard, he advises city authorities to build separate lanes besides roads so people can be inspired to walk and ride bicycles. In it, there will be less use of motorised vehicles. Like Cobb, Nasr also criticises the mentality of modern people for owning private cars.<sup>33</sup> He suggests giving up this kind of attitude for the cause of environmental justice. Instead of riding in private cars, he requests people to be habituated with public transport, walking and cycling. Nasr also criticises some Muslim countries for basing their economy on the production and marketing of natural gas and oil.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, he also requests them to concentrate on alternative energy sources. Thus, Cobb and Nasr stand clearly opposed to fossil-based energy systems and suggest alternative energy sources, which have zero or less emissions.

Both scholars suggest reducing production of irreplaceable metals, plastic items, pesticides and chemical fertilisers. They are also strongly against nuclear power plants.<sup>35</sup> These materials are not environmentally friendly; rather, they are harmful to human health and the environment in many ways. These should be replaced by nature-based equipment. If some of these are allowed with justifiable causes, they should be controlled under strict rules. Cobb suggests imposing huge amount of tax so they cannot be available for use except in emergency causes.<sup>36</sup> He advises recycling and repairing instead of fresh production. Though Nasr has not given any specific suggestion in this regard, he always wants to see ecologically friendly industries and productions, and he shows it is still possible if humans really want it. However, according to

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<sup>30</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 7-9; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 81-82.

<sup>31</sup> Birch and Cobb, *The Liberation of Life*, 258-260; Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environmental Crisis," 82.

<sup>32</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Nasr and Iqbal, "The Islamic Perspective on the Environment Crisis," 81-82.

<sup>34</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions [Harvard Divinity School] with Harvard University Press, 2003), 85-105.

<sup>35</sup> Birch and Cobb, *The Liberation of Life*, 253-254.

<sup>36</sup> Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 60.

their cost–benefit analysis, modern technological production does not carry actual profit for the environment.

### **SOME CRITICAL EVALUATIONS OF THE PRACTICABILITY OF COBB’S AND NASR’S VIEWS**

If Cobb’s and Nasr’s above-mentioned views are implemented, the natural environment will regain its sustainability from further human degradations. Both scholars talk about all these practical steps to mitigate the present ecological crisis, some of which remain idealistic rather than practical. Their suggestions for social forestation seem applicable in the present socio-economic circumstance of the world, because these can enhance the current movements of forestation and government policies regarding this program. However, their other prescriptions for environmental sustainability do not seem easily applicable due to the current socio-economic and religious conditions of the world, particularly in developed countries. Cobb and Nasr suggest traditional methods in agriculture, but modern humans are not now habituated with traditional methods in agriculture. Even farmers are not supportive of traditional agricultural system, because they want more agricultural gains for economic benefits, which is not possible in the traditional agricultural system. In the present competitive economic activities, production based on traditional methods cannot survive in markets. Alongside these, government policies encourage applying modern methods in growing crops and their harvesting.

Both scholars equally suggest environmentally friendly village, but unfortunately modern villages are not like this and it does not seem possible to restore the traditional village life, which was supportive to ecological sustainability. Modern village people, though they are living in a countryside or remote area, are already habituated with the modern way of living or trying to gain all privileges a citizen can have in a city life. This implies traditional village life is a matter of the past, modern village people will not go back to it and the current policies do not insist people follow it. It is evident there is a cultural transformation from traditional to modern village life. In such a changed situation, Cobb’s and Nasr’s traditional village life seems impractical. At best, their proposals can grow an awareness and necessity of traditional village lifestyle for environmental sustainability, but it remains impossible in terms of implementation.

Cobb and Nasr advocate eco-based construction for environmental sustainability. A traditional way of constructing roads and houses may have less destruction to the natural environment compared with the modern way of construction. Considering this matter in mind, Nasr advises applying traditional methods in construction. On the other hand, Cobb talks about green technologies in construction by arguing, in this process, there is less destruction compared with ongoing construction processes. In the case of Nasr’s suggestion, we are to argue that modern construction companies will not be motivated to allow traditional methods in construction and governmental policies will not force them to do so. Regarding Cobb’s proposal of green technology, there may be a little chance for acceptance by some construction

companies if they are motivated by themselves or forced by a government policy, otherwise not. Unfortunately, current governmental policies do not seem to force them to do so. So, their prescriptions for eco-based construction will be hardly considered for implementation.

In the present consumerism-based world, only few humans can follow a less consumptive lifestyle as suggested by Cobb and Nasr, while most people will not care about it unless they are forced by government policy, but the policies of governments do not seem to do so. The current financial systems and market-based economic policies are seemingly supportive to consumerism, where Cobb's ecological asceticism and Nasr's simple lifestyle cannot play any crucial role in reforming human attitude to consumerism. It seems their proposal for less consumption will not bring any significant behavioural change in the present socio-economic and political circumstances of the world.

As the modern economic system is not based on local community interest, Cobb's bioregionalism and Nasr's indication of a wise economic policy cannot compete with the present market-based economic and commercial systems. Besides, modern trades, industries and finances are complex and are not in an unhealthy competition, where Cobb's and Nasr's suggestions for a simple economic system will be no use.

Their advice for reducing carbon emissions are appreciable. Arguably true, some of these are partly implemented in some countries (Sweden, for instance) though these have no direct relation to their suggestions. As told before, both scholars suggest reducing dependency on non-renewable energies and advise using renewable energies for industries and motorised vehicles, which strengthen the mainstream environmental movements and assist governments to draw their attention toward renewable energy sources. Their insistence on green energy and redesigning technologies can promote governments and world leaders to take some practical decisions to save the natural environment.

By discouraging waste, both scholars attempt to grow a responsible mind to carefully use any substance of the natural world. Similarly, they encourage recycling to minimise the pressure on the environment. Though 100% recycling is not possible, more than 50% recycling may be done if tried. Seemingly true, their suggestions can motivate people for less waste through developing a proper waste management system.

Thus, it becomes explicit that the current socio-economical and religious conditions of the world are not prepared to accept all of Cobb's and Nasr's philosophical views and practical approaches, except a few. A highly spiritual and less consumptive society is needed to apply their prescriptions to maintain a balanced relationship between humans and the environment. Unfortunately, the current worldview and social order do not promote that sort of society.

## CONCLUSION

For immediate action plans, Cobb and Nasr propose more forestation, traditional ways of agriculture, environmentally friendly villages, ecological models of life, development of ecological models in building houses and roads, encouraging less consumption and imposing

some restrictions on over-consumption, giving priority on holistic ways of development in terms of ecological sustainability, taking strong steps globally for reducing carbon dioxide to tolerable levels. With such understanding and suggestions in addressing the present environmental issues, both eco-religious thinkers involve themselves in bringing religious guidelines before modern humans for shedding more light on moral obligations to non-human creatures. Despite some subtle differences in their ways of analysing the situation, both commonly address the same crisis. However, with limitations in their views and suggestions, Cobb and Nasr have seriously attempted to divert and motivate human concentration toward environmental sustainability. As eco-religious scholars, they are more successful in articulating religious moral foundations with the present unprecedented ecological crisis.

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