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Review Article

Religion, Modernity, Democracy, and Ecological Wisdom. A Review Article of “Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr,” by Md. Abu Sayem

Religia, nowoczesność, demokracja i ekologiczna mądrość. Recenzja książki autorstwa Md. Abu Sayema pt. „Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr”

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Abstract

This review article discusses Md. Abu Sayem's book *Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* as an important contribution to contemporary scholarship at the intersection of religion and ecology. It presents Cobb as a thinker whose process theology links ecological responsibility with interdependence, the common good, and a critique of economism, while Nasr is interpreted as a metaphysical critic of modernity who diagnoses ecological devastation in terms of desacralization and spiritual alienation. The review argues that Sayem's book is especially valuable because it presents religion as both potentially complicit in ecological domination and capable of offering moral and spiritual resources for ecological restraint, care, and responsibility. At the same time, the article extends Sayem's argument by situating it within a broader discussion of democracy, pluralism, public reason, and ecological legitimacy. Referring to John Rawls and Bryan G. Norton, it suggests that ecological responsibility in contemporary societies must also be articulated in a way compatible with democratic pluralism and overlapping consensus. The article concludes that the significance of Sayem's book lies in showing how different religious traditions may converge in support of ecological wisdom without erasing their theological and philosophical differences.

Keywords

religion and ecology, ecological crisis, John B. Cobb Jr., Seyyed Hossein Nasr, environmental ethics, democracy, public reason, ecological wisdom

Streszczenie

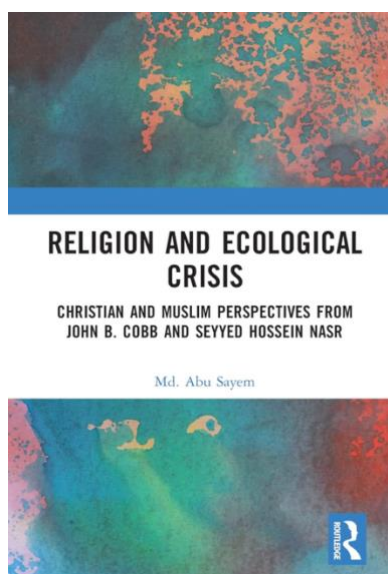
Niniejszy artykuł recenzyjny omawia książkę Md. Abu Sayema *Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* jako ważny wkład we współczesne badania na styku religii i ekologii. Przedstawia Johna B. Cobba Jr. jako myśliciela, którego teologia procesu łączy odpowiedzialność ekologiczną ze współzależnością, dobrem wspólnym i krytyką ekonomizmu, podczas gdy Seyyed Hossein Nasr zostaje ukazany jako metafizyczny krytyk nowoczesności, diagnozujący dewastację ekologiczną w kategoriach desakralizacji i duchowej alienacji. Artykuł recenzyjny dowodzi, że książka Sayema jest szczególnie cenna, ponieważ ukazuje religię zarówno jako potencjalnie współodpowiedzialną za dominację nad przyrodą, jak i jako zdolną do dostarczania moralnych i duchowych zasobów niezbędnych dla ekologicznego samoograniczenia, troski i odpowiedzialności. Jednocześnie tekst rozwija argumentację Sayema, umieszczając ją w szerszym kontekście dyskusji o demokracji, pluralizmie, rozumie publicznym i legitymizacji ekologicznej. Odwołując się do Johna Rawlsa i Bryana G. Nortona, autor sugeruje, że odpowiedzialność ekologiczna we współczesnych społeczeństwach musi być również formułowana w sposób zgodny z demokratycznym pluralizmem i częściowo nakładającym się konsensusem. Artykuł dochodzi do wniosku, że znaczenie książki Sayema polega na ukazaniu, w jaki sposób różne tradycje religijne mogą zbiegać się we wspieraniu ekologicznej mądrości bez zacierania ich teologicznych i filozoficznych różnic.

Słowa kluczowe

religia i ekologia, kryzys ekologiczny, John B. Cobb Jr., Seyyed Hossein Nasr, etyka środowiskowa, demokracja, rozum publiczny, mądrość ekologiczna

Introduction

The book “*Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*,” by Md. Abu Sayem asks a question that remains central to contemporary



environmental thought: can religion provide meaningful intellectual, moral, and spiritual resources for confronting the ecological crisis? Sayem's answer is cautious but affirmative. He argues that environmental devastation cannot be reduced to a merely technical failure, nor can it be adequately addressed through scientific innovation and policy reform alone. Ecological collapse is also a crisis of values, self-understanding, and worldview. It concerns the human being's image of nature, the moral status of the nonhuman world, and the deeper metaphysical assumptions that shape patterns of domination, consumption, and indifference.

Source: Amazon.com.

The author focuses on two major figures: John B. Cobb Jr., a Christian process theologian and ecotheologian, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Islamic philosopher associated with perennialism and the critique

of modernity. The comparison is fruitful because Cobb and Nasr share a profound dissatisfaction with reductionist modernity while differing significantly in style, metaphysics, and practical emphasis. Cobb is more reconstructive, reformist, and publicly engaged. Nasr is more metaphysical, contemplative and radical. Together they illuminate the plurality of religious ecological discourse and show that religion may still function as a site of ecological self-critique rather than merely as a relic of premodern consciousness.

Sayem's book (Sayem 2023) deserves serious scholarly attention for at least three reasons. First, it conceptualizes ecological crisis as a civilizational disorder rather than a narrowly environmental problem. Second, it offers a subtle account of religion's ambivalence, avoiding both secular disregard and religious apologetics. Third, it opens a productive space for thinking about how distinct religious traditions may converge in support of ecological responsibility. At the same time, the book also raises questions that extend beyond its own immediate scope – especially questions concerning democracy, pluralism, and the public justification of ecological norms.

1. Ecological Crisis as a Crisis of Modernity

Sayem does not treat environmental degradation as a narrow problem confined to climate policy, pollution control, or resource management. Rather, ecological crisis appears as a symptom of a wider disorder embedded in modern civilization itself. Climate disruption, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and pollution are not isolated technical failures. They are expressions of deeper pathologies rooted in modern conceptions of nature, progress, agency, and the human person.

Sayem's diagnosis refuses contemporary reductionism. Modern civilization has normalized a mode of being in which nature is treated as inert material, external resource, or object of technical manipulation. The crisis is therefore inseparable from anthropocentrism, consumerism, and instrumental rationality. The problem is not simply that human beings use nature too intensively, it is that modernity has shaped human subjects inclined to dominate, exploit, and consume. Ecological destruction is a moral and spiritual deformation.

This diagnosis places Sayem in a broader stream of thought that interprets ecological collapse as inseparable from the desacralization of the world (Skolimowski 1992). He does not deny the importance of science, policy, or technology. Rather, he argues that such responses remain insufficient when detached from deeper changes in culture, desire, and worldview. In this respect, the book is strong not when it proposes specific institutional reforms, but when it shows why ecological devastation cannot be adequately understood

apart from broader civilizational assumptions.

2. Religion Between Complicity and Critique

Sayem's treatment of religion is notably more balanced than either simple religious apologetics or the familiar secular accusation that religion is itself one of the chief causes of ecological destruction. He is fully aware of the debate shaped by Lynn White Jr.'s influential claim that the Judaeo-Christian tradition helped generate exploitative attitudes toward nature. Yet he does not accept this thesis in a simplistic or unqualified way (White 1967).

Religion is neither innocent nor obsolete. On the one hand, religious traditions have sometimes reinforced hierarchical and anthropocentric visions of reality, especially when they have interpreted the human being as radically separated from the rest of creation and authorized to rule over it without limit. On the other hand, religion also preserves ethical and symbolic resources – humility, stewardship, reverence, restraint, accountability, trusteeship – that may be indispensable in confronting ecological collapse.

Religious traditions are not merely systems of doctrine; they are also modes of moral formation. They shape imagination, desire, ritual practice, and communal habits. Ecological politics, in turn, requires more than regulation and expertise. It requires transformed dispositions: self-limitation, care, responsibility, and a renewed understanding of humanity's place within a larger order of life. Sayem is especially convincing when he shows that religion may still matter precisely because it can address the existential and normative dimensions of the ecological crisis that technocratic discourse often leaves untouched.

At its best, religion can challenge the illusion that nature is merely raw material for human purposes. It can disclose the world as creation, cosmos, or sanctuary rather than as a stockpile of resources. Yet Sayem is equally right to insist that religion can become ecologically dangerous when it absolutizes human exceptionalism, severs spirit from nature, or interprets dominion as arbitrary rule. In this sense, the ecological significance of religion depends not on religion as such, but on the kind of anthropology and cosmology a given religious interpretation promotes.

3. Cobb: Ecological Reform and Christian Reconstruction

John B. Cobb Jr. is presented as a thinker whose ecological reflection emerges from process theology, biblical reinterpretation, and socio-economic critique. Cobb's importance lies not merely in defending environmental concern within Christianity, but in rethinking Christianity itself so that ecological responsibility

becomes intrinsic to theological reflection rather than an optional moral supplement. Influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, Cobb rejects a static and dualistic metaphysics in favour of a relational ontology in which beings exist through interdependence and process. Nature is no longer dead matter external to human meaning, it belongs to a dynamic web of relations. God, likewise, is not distant from creation but intimately related to it. This metaphysical shift makes ecological concern central rather than peripheral to theology.

Sayem emphasizes that Cobb does not abolish human distinctiveness but reinterprets it. Human uniqueness is not sovereignty but responsibility. This allows Cobb to preserve the seriousness of Christian anthropology while rejecting domination. The human vocation is not unlimited mastery over nature, but participation in a wider community of life under conditions of reciprocity, care, and accountability (Cobb 1972).

Cobb's significance, however, extends beyond theology in a narrow sense. Sayem effectively highlights Cobb's critique of economism, consumer culture, unlimited growth, and market-centred conceptions of progress. Here Cobb becomes a critic of modern civilization itself. His language of the common good, sustainability, moderation, and ecological civilization broadens ecotheology into a socio-political vision. This is the strong dimension of Sayem's book, because it demonstrates that ecological theology can move from symbolic reverence for nature toward institutional and economic critique.

Sayem does not present Cobb uncritically. One difficulty is whether Cobb's position remains fully continuous with classical Christian orthodoxy, given its dependence on Whiteheadian process metaphysics. Another difficulty concerns feasibility, Cobb's proposals carry moral force, but they can appear idealistic when confronted with global capitalism, geopolitical inequality, and entrenched institutional inertia. These limitations mark the tension between prophetic critique and political practicability.

4. Nasr: Sacred Cosmology and the Critique of Desacralization

If Cobb represents the reformist pole of Sayem's study, Seyyed Hossein Nasr represents its metaphysical and contemplative pole. Sayem presents Nasr as a profound critic of modernity who understands ecological crisis not primarily as a failure of regulation or morality, but as the consequence of a civilizational rupture with sacred reality. Nasr locates the roots of ecological devastation in the rise of modern Western science and the desacralization of the cosmos. Once nature is no longer seen as theophanic – as a sign of divine order – it becomes available for exploitation. Nasr's target of criticism is not empirical inquiry as such, but

scientism – the elevation of one mode of knowledge, empirical science, to the sole legitimate horizon of truth. The result is not only epistemological narrowing but existential impoverishment. Human beings lose the capacity to encounter the world as sacred, symbolically meaningful, and morally significant. Ecological crisis thus appears as the outward sign of an inner spiritual amnesia.

Sayem tries to explain the role of *scientia sacra* in Nasr's thought. Sacred knowledge denotes an integrated vision of reality in which empirical, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions are not artificially separated. From Nasr's standpoint, ecological devastation is the logical consequence of a desacralized worldview. It is not merely a matter of bad policy or greed, it is rooted in false assumptions about reality itself. The anthropological implications are equally significant. Nasr does not reject the distinctiveness of the human being, but he redefines it in terms of accountability before God. Human beings are not sovereign possessors of the earth but trustees. In this context Sayem highlights the importance of Islamic concepts such as *amānah* and *khalīfah*, which frame human power as stewardship rather than ownership. This allows Nasr to articulate an ecological ethic grounded in reverence, discipline, and ontological humility (Nasr 2007).

Nasr's diagnosis of modernity is powerful, but his prescriptions can remain too general in institutional terms. The recovery of sacred cosmology is philosophically rich, but its implications for energy systems, law, governance, or economic restructuring are less fully developed. Nasr is thus more compelling as a diagnostician of spiritual crisis than as a guide to public ecological reconstruction.

The comparative dimension of Sayem's book is among its most important achievements. He does not simply juxtapose Cobb and Nasr as representatives of Christianity and Islam. Rather, he places them in a productive tension. Both reject reductionist modernity; both view ecological crisis as a profound disorder of human – world relations; both insist that religion still has a role in ecological reflection. Yet they differ sharply in emphasis. Cobb works through institutional critique, reform, and theological reconstruction, Nasr works through metaphysical diagnosis, spiritual recollection, and civilizational criticism.

This difference seems philosophically productive. Cobb shows that religious environmental thought can enter public life through critique of economics, social institutions, and unsustainable growth. Nasr shows that ecological crisis cannot be fully understood without confronting the metaphysical impoverishment of modern civilization. Structural reform without spiritual depth may remain superficial, spiritual critique without institutional translation may remain politically indeterminate.

5. Anthropocentrism, Ecological Responsibility, and Religious Environmental Thought

Contemporary environmental ethics has often been structured by a stark opposition: either one remains anthropocentric and thereby risks legitimizing human domination over nature, or one rejects anthropocentrism and grounds moral concern in nonhuman beings, living systems, or ecological wholes. It is useful here to refer to a more nuanced conceptual framework offered by Allen Thompson in *Anthropocentrism: Humanity as Peril and Promise* (Thompson 2017, 77-89; Francuz 2019). Rather than treating anthropocentrism as a single, uniformly objectionable doctrine, Thompson distinguishes its ontological, ethical, and conceptual forms, and in doing so reopens the question that much environmental ethics has too quickly settled dogmatically. His analysis is especially helpful when brought into dialogue with the religious ecological visions associated with John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, for it clarifies that the decisive issue is not whether human uniqueness can be eliminated, but whether it can be morally and spiritually transformed. Both thinkers accept weak anthropocentrism and reject strong anthropocentrism, which absolutizes human appetite, domination, and control. In turn, weak anthropocentrism retains human distinctiveness but subjects it to moral and metaphysical discipline.

Thompson carefully differentiates between several meanings of “human-centeredness.” Ontological anthropocentrism places humanity at the metaphysical centre of reality; ethical anthropocentrism grants human beings superior or overriding moral worth; conceptual anthropocentrism, by contrast, refers to the inescapable fact that human beings understand, evaluate, and deliberate from within a specifically human conceptual horizon. Thompson challenges the assumption that a credible environmental ethic must purge itself of every trace of human-centeredness. On the contrary, if ethics is to guide human action, some reference to human evaluative practices is ineliminable.

This argument becomes especially significant in relation to the religious ecological thought of Cobb and Nasr. Both thinkers oppose the exploitative understanding of nature, which is characteristic of modern industrial civilization. They resist strong ethical anthropocentrism, the view that nonhuman nature is morally negligible or merely instrumental (Francuz 2020). Cobb’s Christian ecological thought seeks to relocate humanity within a wider community of life, while Nasr’s Islamic metaphysical vision seeks to reintegrate humanity into a sacred cosmic order. In both cases, the task is not to erase the human perspective, but to reform it (Francuz 2018). Thompson’s distinction between objectionable ethical anthropocentrism and unavoidable conceptual anthropocentrism therefore provides a valuable key for interpreting both projects.

Cobb does not deny that human beings occupy a distinctive moral position, rather, he challenges the interpretation of that distinctiveness as authorization of domination. His ecological theology can thus be understood as an attempt to shift Christian thought away from sovereignty and toward responsibility, interdependence, and participation in the broader community of creation. Thompson's analysis helps illuminate the philosophical coherence of such a move, one can reject strong ethical anthropocentrism without denying that ecological responsibility must still be expressed in terms accessible to human moral agents.

Nasr's ecological vision may be situated somewhat differently. His critique is directed less at moral individualism than at the metaphysical and spiritual desacralization of the modern world. Nature, in his account, is not merely a stock of manipulable resources but a reality bearing sacred meaning. Thompson's distinction between ontological and ethical anthropocentrism is also helpful here, because it allows one to see that Nasr's thought is not a continuation of exploitative human exceptionalism, but rather a challenge to the reduction of both humanity and nature to secularized matter. Nasr does not eliminate human distinctiveness, he assigns humanity a special vocation of perception, discipline, reverence, and restraint.

6. Religion, Democracy, and the Public Justification of Ecological Responsibility

A recurrent problem in environmental political theory is the tension between the urgency of ecological protection and the liberal-democratic commitment to individual freedom, civic equality and value pluralism (Francuz 2008). Some strands of green thought distrust ordinary human preferences and therefore endorse political restrictions on liberty for the sake of ecological stability. In that sense, ecological politics may assume a paternalistic form, it begins from the claim that citizens, left to their own desires, will tend toward self-indulgence, acquisitiveness, and environmentally destructive behaviour, and that they must therefore be guided toward a more disciplined and morally elevated way of life.

This paternalistic tendency can be seen in thoughts of William Ophuls, who argues that a politics founded on "mere liberty" is ecologically unsustainable and that human appetites must be governed if genuine freedom is to be achieved. In this formulation, environmental politics does not merely regulate external conduct, it also aspires to reshape the ethical orientation of citizens. The issue, then, is not only that environmental policy may limit freedom in practice, but that it may come to rest on a substantive judgment about which forms of life are worthy and which are corrupting. Once ecological politics assumes this pedagogical and corrective role, it risks undermining a foundational liberal premise, that citizens should retain

broad freedom to determine their own conception of the good life, so long as the equal freedom of others is respected (Rawls 1999; Ophuls 1996).

Democracy is principally a commitment to procedures, whereas environmentalism often appears as a commitment to substantive results. If democratic procedures fail to generate ecologically desirable outcomes, the temptation arises to treat those procedures as normatively secondary. Democracy comes to be valued only instrumentally, only insofar as it delivers green policy. Once that happens, political pluralism is weakened, and democratic legitimacy is subordinated to prior ecological imperatives. Democratic politics appears too slow, too fragmented, and too vulnerable to short-term interests to respond effectively to impending catastrophe. Catastrophism becomes politically decisive: when the alternatives are framed as survival or destruction, ordinary democratic contestation begins to seem like dangerous luxury. The citizen is no longer a co-author of collective norms, but increasingly the object of guidance by those who claim superior insight into environmental necessity. This logic can lead to some form of eco-authoritarianism (Plumwood 2002).

Eco-authoritarianism does not merely recommend stronger institutions; it relocates the source of political legitimacy. Instead of legitimacy arising from the political agency of free and equal citizens, legitimacy is transferred to “nature,” or more precisely to a metaphysics of nature interpreted as imposing binding imperatives on human action. Environmental politics is then portrayed not as a field of contestable public judgment, but as the enforcement of necessity. Some green political theories reproduce the structure of older natural-law or nature-based political doctrines, they seek to derive a hierarchy of values and a model of collective order directly from the natural world itself. In this framework, democratic trade-offs are no longer primary, because the “laws of nature” are assumed to settle the normative hierarchy in advance.

A parallel danger arises when religion is employed as a direct foundation for environmental politics. Religion may undoubtedly inspire ecological responsibility, restraint, and care for creation. Yet if environmental law and public policy are justified primarily by appeal to one comprehensive religious worldview, then the shared political sphere is no longer structured by reasons accessible to citizens who do not affirm that doctrine. In that case, environmental politics becomes confessional in substance, even if universal in ambition. The problem is thus analogous to that posed by scientific politics: an external authority – whether scientific or religious – is elevated above democratic contestation and plural civic judgment.

The significance of this problem for Sayem’s book seems obvious. If ecological crisis is interpreted as so severe that only enlightened elites – scientific, technocratic, or religious – can legitimately decide on behalf

of society, then ecological politics risks becoming paternalistic or authoritarian. The temptation is clear: once environmental necessity is treated as self-interpreting, democracy may appear too slow, too pluralistic, or too compromised to be trusted. Yet such a move would relocate political legitimacy away from citizens and toward external authorities claiming privileged access to truth – whether scientific or theological. The ecological value of religion must therefore be distinguished from the autocratic temptation to turn one tradition into the sole basis of public coercion. Religious traditions may enrich environmental discourse, but in plural societies they must enter a field of public justification rather than replace it.

The conceptual pivot of this democratic alternative is the turn from comprehensive doctrine to public reason. Drawing on John Rawls, we can argue that environmental protection can be justified through political values that do not depend on any single moral, religious, or metaphysical worldview. A liberal democratic society has reason to preserve the natural order because that order constitutes part of the basic infrastructure of social cooperation and the precondition of human survival, welfare, and decent lives across generations. The preservation of life-sustaining ecological conditions can therefore be defended in a language shared by free and equal citizens, rather than by appeal to a sectarian metaphysics of nature or to a privileged theology of creation (Rawls 1996).

This is especially important in relation to religion. Religious traditions should not be excluded from environmental reflection; on the contrary, they may remain powerful ethical and motivational resources. Religiously inspired ecological commitments may enter public debate, but the coercive force of law must be justified in terms that others can in principle accept even if they do not share the underlying theology. This is the crucial difference between religion as inspiration and religion as the direct legitimating basis of state policy.

The same distinction applies to the special sciences. Scientific inquiry is indispensable for identifying ecological risks, modelling long-term consequences, and clarifying material constraints. But science alone does not resolve the normative questions of political life: how burdens should be distributed, how competing goods should be weighed, and what sacrifices justice may require from present generations for the sake of future ones. Scientific findings must rather be mediated through democratic judgment instead of being treated as self-executing commands. Both science and religion inform public reason, they should not replace it.

This is why we need to turn to the ideas of sustainable development and overlapping consensus. Sustainable development is presented as especially valuable because it can be detached from controversial

metaphysical foundations and translated into a pragmatic, politically shareable framework. Citizens who disagree profoundly about religion, morality, or philosophy may nevertheless converge on the need to preserve the environmental conditions necessary for present and future human flourishing. In Rawlsian terms, this amounts to a form of overlapping consensus: agreement on political action despite disagreement at the level of comprehensive doctrine. Such a model preserves pluralism while still making robust ecological policy possible (Rawls 1996).

7. Religious Pluralism and Ecological Convergence

This Rawlsian extension also helps illuminate one of the fertile implications of Sayem's comparison between Cobb and Nasr: the possibility of ecological convergence under conditions of religious pluralism. Cobb and Nasr do not share the same metaphysics, anthropology, or view of modernity. Yet both generate strong reasons for limiting domination over nature. Their arguments differ, but their practical implications often converge, promoting restraint, responsibility, reverence, and care for future generations.

This convergence matters because ecological politics in actual societies cannot depend on full doctrinal consensus. People act from different religious and philosophical frameworks. A democratic ecological politics must therefore be capable of drawing on multiple moral sources while preserving public legitimacy. In that sense, Sayem's book can be read not only as a comparative study in religion and ecology, but also as an implicit contribution to the problem of how plural traditions may support shared ecological aims.

Cobb offers a Christian account of interdependence and social responsibility, Nasr offers an Islamic account of sacred order and trusteeship, Rawls offers a political account of duties to future generations. These are not identical languages, but they can be brought into fruitful relation. What unites them is not theological agreement, but a shared rejection of unlimited consumption, extractive domination, and the moral entitlement of the present to destroy the future. Seen from this standpoint, religious pluralism need not be an obstacle to ecological responsibility. Under appropriate political conditions, it may become one of its strongest foundations, because different traditions can mobilize distinct symbolic, ethical, and communal resources in support of common ecological restraint.

In this respect Bryan G. Norton advances one of the central claims of *Toward Unity among Environmentalists*: the unity of environmentalism should not be sought primarily at the level of ultimate metaphysical or moral foundations, but rather at the level of practical policy convergence. Norton

acknowledges that environmentalists speak in a plurality of idioms, including economic, intergenerational, biocentric, pragmatic, and religious vocabularies, among them a distinctly Judaeo-Christian language of stewardship and obligation to God. His argument is instead that this plurality of worldviews does not necessarily entail policy incoherence (Norton 1991; Norton 2003).

Norton's point of departure is a critique of moral monism. Borrowing from Christopher Stone's distinction, he characterizes moral monists as thinkers who assume that moral reasoning must yield one coherent and comprehensive set of principles capable of producing a single right answer in every case. Against this, Norton argues that environmentalists have in practice been pluralists. They have not operated with one universally accepted worldview, nor have they typically waited for final philosophical agreement before acting. To insist that environmentalism must first discover one ultimate principle – whether biocentric rights, utility maximization, or any other master norm – is, in Norton's view, to misunderstand the actual character of the movement. Such monism merely repeats, in another idiom, the reductionism of the very positions it opposes.

Norton insists that ecological science has helped generate a shared practical orientation even where evaluative disagreement remains unresolved. Environmentalists who endorse different values nevertheless tend to see environmental problems in similar ways because they increasingly understand them within a common ecological context. Ecology, for Norton, does not dictate values in a deductive or morally self-sufficient manner. Rather, it establishes the relevant scale and context in which practical deliberation must occur.

The consensus among environmentalists can arise not because they suddenly agree on one theory of value, but because ecological understanding forces all parties to deliberate at the level of the sustaining system rather than at the level of their conflicting first-order preferences. Norton argues that ecological science structures the field within which competing values are debated. Facts about system stability, habitat function, and ecological interdependence do not eliminate normative disagreement, but they reshape it. They disclose the background conditions upon which disparate goods depend. In this sense, ecological reasoning is neither morally neutral nor morally authoritarian. It is contextual. It reveals that neither productivity nor beauty, neither recreation nor species protection, neither human welfare nor reverence for creation can be secured if the larger ecological matrix sustaining them is destroyed.

These arguments become even more significant when placed in conversation with religiously grounded

environmental ethics. Norton explicitly includes Judaeo-Christian stewardship among the worldviews capable of supporting environmental restraint, and this inclusion has wider implications than he himself fully develops. If environmental convergence does not require metaphysical uniformity, then it becomes possible to ask how distinct religious traditions may enter a shared ecological field without surrendering their doctrinal distinctiveness. In that respect, Norton's convergence thesis becomes especially illuminating when placed alongside the ecological thought of John B. Cobb Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

The significance of this comparison lies in showing that Norton's convergence thesis is not confined to disputes between secular anthropocentrists and secular non-anthropocentrists. It also applies, with considerable force, to religious pluralism. Cobb and Nasr do not agree on the nature of revelation, the structure of reality, the meaning of modernity, or the theological basis of moral obligation. Nevertheless, both can support policies aimed at protecting ecological integrity, curbing destructive economic expansion, preserving the conditions of life, and resisting the treatment of nature as mere raw material. In other words, their convergence is not one of doctrine but of ecological orientation. They represent different pathways toward a practical environmental ethic whose public expression may overlap even where ultimate justification remains incommensurable. This is precisely the kind of outcome Norton regards as philosophically significant: pluralism need not end in paralysis if ecological conditions discipline practical judgment across rival frameworks.

Norton's framework suggests that religious traditions may function as legitimate partners in environmental deliberation even when they do not share a common metaphysical basis with secular theories. Cobb illustrates how a Christian ecological vocabulary can participate in public argument through the language of justice, sustainability, and communal flourishing. Nasr illustrates how Islamic and traditional religious thought can contribute a profound critique of desacralized modernity and recover a grammar of reverence largely absent from technocratic discourse. Those differences are real and should not be minimized, but environmental unity need not be achieved at the price of metaphysical uniformity, nor must pluralism result in paralysis. On the contrary, the very diversity of justification traditions may furnish multiple, mutually reinforcing grounds for ecological responsibility within a shared but non-uniform public sphere.

Conclusion

Sayem's book is a serious, thoughtful, and worthwhile contribution to the interdisciplinary study of religion and ecology. Its principal strengths are conceptual clarity, comparative sophistication, and philosophical depth. The book is commendable for treating ecological crisis as a problem of civilization rather than a merely environmental or technical issue. By foregrounding anthropocentrism, consumerism, scientism, and desacralization, Sayem joins a line of thought that understands ecological collapse as inseparable from moral and metaphysical disorder.

Sayem explicitly presents his study as balanced and nonpartisan, yet the book is sometimes stronger in reconstructing the promise of Cobb's and Nasr's positions than in pressing their internal tensions to their full theoretical consequences. The differences between process theology and traditionalist metaphysics, or between reformist and contemplative ecological visions, are acknowledged, but they could have been made more analytically productive. One can ask not only what Cobb and Nasr share, but also where their convergence becomes fragile, ambiguous, or difficult to translate into public ecological practice.

Sayem convincingly shows that Cobb and Nasr reject the mechanistic reduction of nature and interpret ecological crisis as a moral, spiritual, and civilizational crisis. However, convergence at the level of diagnosis does not automatically imply convergence at the level of justification, method, or political application. Cobb's process-relational vision and Nasr's sacred traditionalism may both support ecological restraint, but they do so from different ontological premises and with different attitudes toward modernity, reform, and public institutions. Similarity of ecological conclusion may conceal deep disagreement about why such conclusions are binding and how they should be defended before those who do not share the same theological assumptions.

This issue is especially visible in the asymmetry between Cobb and Nasr. Cobb's approach is more reconstructive, reformist, and socially engaged, it links theological reflection to economics, public responsibility, ecological civilization, and the critique of growth-centered modernity. Cobb's proposals may appear normatively attractive but politically vulnerable when confronted with global capitalism, entrenched inequalities, consumer desire, and institutional inertia. Nasr's approach, by contrast, is philosophically powerful as a critique of desacralization and scientism, but less specific as a program of ecological governance. His appeal to sacred cosmology, contemplative wisdom, and traditional order discloses what technocratic environmentalism often misses, but it does not by itself explain how energy transition, legal regulation, democratic deliberation, burden-sharing, or economic restructuring should be organized in plural societies.

The book resists both secular dismissal of religion and apologetic idealization of religious traditions. Nevertheless, a sharper analysis would distinguish more consistently between religion as moral inspiration, religion as metaphysical diagnosis, and religion as a possible source of public norms. These functions cannot simply be identified with one another. Religious traditions may cultivate restraint, reverence, humility, and responsibility, but they may also generate internal disagreement, selective interpretation, or conflicts with democratic equality and individual freedom. The crucial question is not merely whether religion can motivate ecological concern, but under what conditions religiously grounded ecological claims can be critically tested, publicly translated, and institutionally mediated without becoming either politically coercive or merely private and symbolic.

Sayem follows Cobb and Nasr in criticizing the reduction of nature to a dead mechanism and the modern tendency to treat scientific-technical power as self-justifying. Yet the critique of scientism could be distinguished more clearly from a critique of science as such. Ecological policy depends on climate science, biodiversity research, environmental modelling, epidemiology, agriculture, engineering, and energy studies. A stronger critical discussion would therefore ask how religious ecological wisdom can cooperate with scientific knowledge without either surrendering to technocracy or lapsing into an anti-modern suspicion of empirical inquiry.

However illuminating Cobb and Nasr may be, they cannot stand for the full diversity of Christian and Muslim environmental thought. They are highly distinctive intellectual figures and should perhaps be read more as powerful case studies than as fully representative exponents of their traditions. A more demanding critical perspective would ask how their approaches relate to internal plurality within Christianity and Islam, to liberationist, feminist, postcolonial, local, indigenous, juridical, pastoral, and activist forms of ecological reflection. Sayem's arguments are persuasive in diagnosis but less specific in testing their claims against concrete political conflicts. Moreover, Sayem's argumentation returns repeatedly to the same central theses – especially the claim that ecological crisis is fundamentally spiritual in character. The book compellingly explains why ecological crisis has spiritual and philosophical roots, but it could examine more directly how its religious insights would respond to disputed issues such as population policy, degrowth, climate migration, intergenerational justice, extractive industries, energy poverty, food systems, and the unequal distribution of ecological burdens between the Global North and the Global South. Such examples would not merely add practical detail; they would test whether the language of reverence, stewardship, trusteeship, sacrifice, and

restraint can guide decision-making when ecological responsibility requires coercive law, economic sacrifice, and conflicts between legitimate human needs.

Md. Abu Sayem's "Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr" is a timely and interesting study of religion and ecology. Its lasting achievement lies in showing that ecological crisis is not merely a matter of environmental damage, but also a crisis of anthropology, worldview, and civilization. By comparing John B. Cobb Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Sayem reconstructs two powerful religious responses to the ecological predicament of modernity. His study shows that religion and ecology cannot be separated from questions of worldview, moral formation, and civilizational self-understanding. I think that the main limitation of this book is that the bridge between spiritual diagnosis and public ecological reconstruction remains only partly built. For that reason, the book should be read not as a final theoretical synthesis but as a strong invitation to further research and discussion about religious ecological wisdom within democratic society.

The broader significance of the book, however, lies in the questions it opens beyond itself. If ecological crisis is tied to the moral and spiritual failures of modernity, then ecological wisdom cannot be reduced to better management alone. It requires a transformation in how human beings understand the world, themselves, and their responsibilities. Yet if such transformation is to remain compatible with political freedom, it must also be articulated under conditions of democracy and pluralism. Religion may contribute indispensably to this task, but not as an unquestioned authority standing above public reason. Rather, it must enter a wider conversation about justice, restraint, interdependence, and the conditions of life shared across generations. Sayem's book is an invitation to rethink the relation between religion, modernity, democracy, and ecological responsibility. It can force us to ask how the spiritual, moral, and metaphysical resources of religious traditions may be translated into publicly defensible forms of ecological wisdom adequate to a democratic and plural world.

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