

Murtadha Muthahhari Ecological Vision: Unveiling the Spiritual Foundation of Harmony Between Humans and Nature in Islamic Ecology

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Abstract

Murtadha Muthahhari, a philosopher and theologian, offers an "eco-spiritual insight" on the worsening environmental crisis. He believes the environmental problem is spiritual, caused by humanity's disconnect from nature, leading to its exploitation. Muthahhari proposes an awakening to our interconnectedness with all life forms, stressing a new understanding of our role in the natural world. He draws from Islamic teachings, emphasizing stewardship, arguing that humans are caretakers, not masters, responsible for preserving nature's balance. His vision challenges the human-centered view and suggests a more sustainable relationship between humans and the environment. Additionally, in the abstract, the research aims to explore and elucidate Muthahhari's eco-spiritual insight as a transformative framework for addressing the environmental crisis. The objectives include analyzing Muthahhari's concept of eco-spiritual insight, examining its roots in Islamic teachings, and evaluating its potential impact on reshaping humanity's relationship with the environment. Methodologically, the research involves a comprehensive literature review of Muthahhari's works, particularly focusing on his writings related to eco-spirituality and environmental ethics. Additionally, it includes an analysis of Islamic teachings that form the basis of Muthahhari's perspective. The research employs qualitative methods to interpret and synthesize Muthahhari's ideas, providing a deep understanding of the eco-spiritual insight he advocates. The results of the research showcase the significance of Muthahhari's eco-spiritual insight in offering a unique approach to environmentalism. The formulation of results emphasizes the reawakening of spiritual consciousness, the need for a new ontology, and the concept of khalifah as pivotal elements in fostering a more sustainable and harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world. The study concludes by highlighting the potential of Muthahhari's eco-spiritual vision to inspire a paradigm shift in environmental discourse and action.

Keywords: Murtadha Muthahhari; Ecology; Spiritual; Ontology

Introduction

Spirituality as the foundation of ecology is a discourse within the philosophical realm, rooted in the perspectives of thinkers examining the harmony between nature and humans in reality. Angraini dan Rohmatika explores the spiritual discourse within ecological foundations, emphasizing the interdependence of humans and nature for a harmonious existence (Anggraini & Rohmatika, 2021). According to Syafwan Rozi, the mutual needs of humans and nature are essential for material and immaterial perfection (Rozi, 2019). his perspective sees nature as both a provider of individual needs and a beneficiary of human preservation efforts.

In the modern ecological discourse, thinkers like Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Fritjof Capra highlight the crisis of harmony between humans and nature (Nasr, 2007). This crisis is rooted in the Western Enlightenment's shift from religious doctrines to rationality, as articulated by Descartes and Bruno. Descartes' famous phrase "I think, therefore I am" establishes humans as subjects capable of analyzing the objective reality of the universe (Nock, 2017).

Giordano Bruno extends Descartes' ideas, emphasizing individual potential and reason as tools for analyzing nature to determine life's direction and purpose (Gatti, 1999). Nasr

critiques this Cartesian-Brunian paradigm for separating humans and nature, leading to the exploitation of the environment for material perfection (Asghari, 2021).

The Renaissance thinkers' influence on Western philosophy, materialism, and anthropocentrism is evident (Omosulu & Inja, 2019). Materialists like Feuerbach and Lamettrie updated empirical rationalism, considering the world as a mathematical formulation to be tested through sensory perception (Wolfe, 2010). Lamettrie further outlined human perfection through sensory perception, mathematical calculation, and systematic improvement of life through nature (Riskin, 2010).

In summary, the Renaissance thinkers' perspectives on the separation of humans and nature contributed to the Western crisis of harmony, fostering exploitative attitudes toward the environment in the pursuit of material perfection.

Based on the various explanations above, it can be understood that Western thinkers from the Renaissance to modern era view nature and humans as separate entities, causing a disconnect between the two. Western Materialism and Anthropocentrism consider nature as an object of human material perfection, leading to the necessity of exploiting the object for the subject in reality. As a result, in the Western projection, nature and humans lack harmonization value with each other. The lack of harmony between humans and nature, along with the object-subject paradigm in the views of Western thinkers, has led to various environmental degradation practices in reality (Saniotis, 2012). Otto Soemarwoto, in his research titled "*Atur-Diri-Sendiri: Paradigma Baru Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup*" explains that the quality of human life has declined in various countries, marked by an increase in environmental degradation practices such as massive deforestation, water and air pollution due to industrial smoke, and factory waste disposal causing the extinction of several animal species and biodiversity loss (Soemarwoto, 2004).

The Ministry of Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia, in its report, explains that the quality of life in 2019 and 2020 has consistently declined due to high levels of environmental pollution, reaching 30% in 2019 and increasing to 43% in the following year. The significant increase in environmental pollution over the past two years is attributed to the discharge of liquid waste into irrigation areas, contaminating several community lands. On one hand, deforestation is also a problem causing floods and landslides at various points. In 2019, there were 1433 recorded cases of landslides and floods in Indonesia, followed by a somewhat insignificant increase to 1452 cases (Hidup, I. K. N. L, 2009).

The variety of increasing pollution and natural disasters is based on the paradigm of humans viewing nature as an object that can lead them to material perfection. If various environmental damages and pollution are not addressed, it will affect the quality of individual lives, impacting human sustainability, such as deteriorating health conditions and global warming leading to droughts with consequential death rates (Rahman et al., 2017).

To address the range of issues mentioned above, wise solutions are needed to understand the existence of nature and humans, as well as their harmonization to improve human quality of life. The main issue with the Western thinkers' paradigm is placing the existence of humans and nature in a material context, emphasizing the subject-object relationship (Warno, 2023). In the discourse, it is understood that nature and humans should also be viewed immaterially through their harmonization. In the philosophical tradition, Islam is known to be one of the thought traditions that examines subjects through a spiritual approach, especially the existence of humans. One Muslim philosopher who comprehensively and explanatively examines the existence of humans and nature is Murtadha Muthahhari in

his work titled "Man and Universe." Muthahhari explains that humans must build awareness of nature to describe their harmonization as an attitude towards achieving a perfect life through religious tendencies in reality (Mutahheri, 1990).

The religious tendencies within humans drive them to make various efforts, including sacrificing individual interests and instincts to take responsibility for all forms of damage on the Earth's surface (Nasr, 1975). Only religious tendencies make humans perceive everything as sacred and give authority to things over humans. The human conception of nature must be seen through philosophical and religious concepts that can form the basis of awareness that nature and its system are blessings from the Wise One through His grace and mercy. This means that the universe is a manifestation of God or a divine manifestation. Therefore, with the collective intellect of modern humans, every knowledge gained does not become wisdom to see the essence of the universe as a mirror of His oneness (Muthahhari, 2014). Instead, it merely becomes an object for the material interests of humans.

According to Murtadha Muthahhari achieving a harmonious life between humans and nature requires the establishment of religious tendencies that can encourage individuals to make various efforts, even if it means sacrificing individualistic feelings and instincts. On the other hand, nature becomes a source of knowledge, spirituality, and the necessities of life for humans. This can happen if humans reach a level of purity and fully control their existence. Therefore, as stewards of the earth, humans can manifest their stewardship duties by actualizing spiritual values within themselves. Thus, existentially, humans can reach the stage of perfection (Insan Kamil) (Muthahhari et al., 1993), which is a living reality where the potential within oneself is utilized, giving rise to an alternative system of human values and morals.

The article titled "Eco-Spiritual Insight: Murtadha Muthahhari Vision for Environmental Awakening through Ontology" aims to examine the significance of spirituality as the basis for ontological ecological awareness in Islam, believed to enhance harmony between nature and humans through religious spaces. The main outcome of this research is to offer a new perspective in ecological discourse, radically interpreting the harmony between nature and humans through a spiritual approach.

Method

This research is a descriptive-philosophical library research that aims to explore and evaluate data on humanism from various sources such as books, philosophical texts, journals, theses, and dissertations. The qualitative research methodology is utilized, providing advantages such as obtaining fundamental data, conducting in-depth discussions, and being open to diverse information from different fields (Mohajan, 2018). The data sources include primary data from Murtadha Muthahhari's "Man and Universe," focusing on his views on ecology and spirituality. Secondary sources consist of books, articles, theses, journals, and dissertations discussing ecology and Murtadha Muthahhari philosophical teachings (Adlini et al., 2022).

In terms of data collection, literature related to the research object is gathered, incorporating thoughts from Western and Muslim philosophers on ecology, and analyzed for meanings. The data analysis involves reviewing information from primary and secondary sources to generate comprehensive discussions on humanism and Mulla Sadra's philosophy (Rofiah, 2022). The process includes determining the research object, collecting perspectives on ecology, addressing shortcomings in views, gathering data on spirituality and the human-

nature relationship from Murtadha Muthahhari's perspective, and analyzing the concept of Islamic ecology as proposed by Muthahhari in comparison to Western thinkers' perspectives.

Finding

Western Perspective on Ecological Discourse

Historically, the development of ecology in the realm of philosophy has its roots in the thoughts of Renaissance philosophers who divided the reality of the world into two existences: subject and object (Keller & Golley, 2000). Corliss Lamont, in his work "The Philosophy of Humanism," explained that Renaissance thinkers such as Rene Descartes and Giordano Bruno divided the existence of reality based on their roles in the world: subject and object. According to Renaissance thinkers, the subject is a free existence with the potential to realize its existence based on rationality (Collins, 2009). On the other hand, the existence of the object is passive, regulated by the existence of the subject, and requires reflection from the subject.

Furthermore, Lamont mentioned that Descartes' reasoning linked the object to the existence of nature, seen as an object for exploration based on individual or subjective thinking (Lamont, 2009). This subject-object reasoning influenced other Renaissance thinkers, such as Giordano Bruno, who viewed nature as a passive existence that requires the role of humans for empowerment. This separation led to the perception that nature and humans have separate existences (Gatti, 1999). This perspective was later developed by Thomas Hobbes, who examined the position of nature through three approaches: empirical, measurable, and systematic (Herbert, 2011).

Hobbes argued that the existence of nature could be proven empirically, must be understood mathematically, and has various structures that require systematic calculation. Hobbes's view opened the door to the reading of the history of ecology, where nature was seen as a secondary existence that required the presence of humans for actualization (Ryan, 2018). Consequently, the separation between humans and nature led to environmental damage as individuals sought to fulfill their needs.

In the 19th century, Western thinkers began to highlight discussions about nature and humans that focused more on reality. Figures like Ernst Haeckel were the first to examine the dynamics of Renaissance thinking and then emphasize the urgency of the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature to create a harmonious living space (Kroeber, 1994). Aragaw Ambule, in "Introduction to Ecology," argued that Western ecological discourse aims to prevent various views that separate the existence of nature and humans (Odum, 1983).

This view aligns with the perspective of Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sina, who, through the theory of emanation, considered nature to consist of various levels of existence. Ibn Sina emphasized that the levels of nature are a process of radiation from higher to lower levels, considered as a place for human perfection. Thus, nature and humans have a parallel position, and both are interrelated for the process of perfection (Sadullaevna & Baratovna, 2021). This view was later reinforced by Muslim philosophers afterward, such as Suhrawardi, who explained that nature has various gradations and humans have different levels of perfection (Cancelliere, 2014.).

Meanwhile, this writing will discuss the spiritual approach to ecology in the views of Murtadha Muthahhari. Muthahhari sees the environment as an integral part of human existence that must be preserved and nurtured. In his spiritual perspective, Muthahhari

emphasizes the deep connection between humans and nature as a reflection of the perfection of the soul. So, this discussion will delve deeper into how Murtadha Muthahhari's spiritual perspective contributes to the discourse of ecology, adding a dimension of interconnectedness between humans and nature in the achievement of existential perfection.

Murtadha Muthahhari's Perspective on the Spiritual Ecology of the Universe

Murtadha Muthahhari, in "Man and Universe," elucidates the interdependence of humans and nature. Nature serves as the abode for human fulfillment in reality, while humans continually care for and preserve nature for the sustainable future of the universe. This unity can be understood materially (Muthahhari, 1990). In a spiritual approach, Muthahhari posits that nature consists of various levels linked to the perfection of the human soul.

Murtadha Muthahhari examines the unity of nature and humanity through Mulla Sadra's substantial motion approach, asserting that the soul is the primary perfection with potential qualities (Riahi et al., 2015). Human potential perfection requires a reflection on nature to comprehend various knowledge through sensory perception (Hatfield, 1986). This knowledge can drive the soul's actuality to unveil the essence of the universe comprehensively, beyond its material aspects.

Muthahhari explains that the soul, despite being immaterial, undergoes a process of actualization to achieve perfection in reality (Yusuf, 2015). Although the soul is considered detached from matter during its actualization process, it relies on nature as a container for its perfection, continuously progressing towards self-actualization or perfection.

Murtadha Muthahhari, influenced by his mentor Muhammad Husain Thabathabai, likens the gradual perfection of the soul to a child (the soul) wearing clothes (a container). Just as a child outgrows and leaves behind childhood garments as they mature, the soul, in its potential phase, utilizes nature like a child's attire to actualize its full potential (Khair & Toresano, 2020). When the soul's potential is actualized, it adopts mature clothing to reactualize its mature potential, leaving behind the garments of childhood. The soul's detachment from material entities influences the simplicity of the human soul, describing the perfection of human paradigms and attitudes in the world through both theoretical and practical aspects based on its actualization patterns in reality.

Based on the explanation above, the soul, as the perfection of humanity, undergoes an ongoing actualization process to unveil the existence of the universe continually, aiming for perfection (Muthahhari et al., 1993). The pinnacle of the soul's perfection describes the condition of nature as its container or space for perfection, portraying nature, according to Murtadha Muthahhari, as hierarchical based on the actuality of individual substances (Muthahhari, 2014). Thus, humans will continue to exist in the universe as an integral part of it, and nature becomes a part of humans to depict the actuality of their soul.

Murtadha Muthahhari explains two main arguments for the unity of nature and humanity. Firstly, the philosophical argument that the soul, as a perpetual human substance, requires nature to fulfill its actuality (Muthahhari, 1990). Substance is perpetual, while accidents are limited, following the theory of "*kaun wa al-fasad*" that human souls are "*kaun*," constantly rising towards perfection in the stages of the universe (Nasr, 1975). The rise of substance towards perfection describes becoming, a term used in philosophy to illustrate the continuous process of perfection and immortality of an existence.

Secondly, the theological argument that humans have a creation purpose to perfect themselves, urging them to achieve it as the life orientation in the universe. As a result, humans strive tirelessly to attain the vision of life as a responsibility towards life goals and visions in reality (Luhuringbudi et al., 2020). Furthermore, life visions and goals, within Murtadha Muthahhari's theological argument, represent the direction in which humans realize their diverse potentials, extending beyond material aspects, and moving collectively with nature to actualize their transcendental nature.

Considering these two perspectives, it is evident that nature and humans are a unified entity in Murtadha Muthahhari's ecological view, impacting human perfection in understanding their orientation towards soul actuality in the universe.

Murtadha Muthahhari's perspective on the essence of nature holds that nature is the central point where God and the role of humans in existence converge. Nature is not merely a collection of separate physical entities but is seen as a living, animated entity filled with meaning, a medium that tangibly reflects the existence of God (Fathurrahman, 2019). The essence of nature, in Muthahhari's view, is a direct manifestation of God's Being that permeates and flows through every element of nature.

In this context, humans play the role of observers and guardians of the veil that unveils the essence of God through their active involvement in nature. The intellectual capacity given to humans enables profound reflection on the meaning of existence and a deeper understanding of the richness of the essence of nature. Humans, with their moral consciousness, bear the responsibility of maintaining balance and harmony in their interactions with nature, ultimately reflecting the existence and essence of God.

Starting from this perspective, it can be seen that humans are not just passive observers but rather caretakers and protectors of the harmony of the essence of nature. Their role is to recognize the presence of God in every element of nature and to absorb the beauty and complexity therein (Gračanin et al., 2018). Thus, humans become not only a part of nature but also agents actively involved in uncovering the essence of God through their interaction and attention to nature.

Therefore, the essence of nature and humans is connected through a profound spiritual symbiosis, where nature becomes a direct channel for revealing God's manifestation, and humans function as intermediaries who understand, feel, and contemplate His existence (Coccia, 2019). Awareness of this deep connection gives rise to a profound moral responsibility to preserve nature as a tangible manifestation of the eternal essence of God.

Furthermore, Murtadha Muthahhari provides his thoughts on understanding comprehensively the essence of humans and their connection with nature (Ardeshir Larijany, 2021). Through his holistic approach involving scientific, philosophical, and spiritual bases, he invites individuals to introspect and assume the role of responsible custodians of nature. These three dimensions can be explained as follows:

Scientific Basis:

Scientific knowledge serves as the bedrock of our understanding of humans and the universe, relying on theories and experiments to formulate principles. It offers clarity and specificity, allowing for precise control and utilization of specific elements, propelling technological progress. However, its limitations become apparent as it hinges on practical experiments and provides only localized information, akin to a focused spotlight. Muthahhari argues that while science excels in addressing practical aspects, it falls short in answering fundamental

questions essential for shaping a comprehensive worldview (Muthahhari et al., 1997). Despite its practical and technical contributions, the theoretical value of scientific concepts diminishes, emphasizing the need for a broader perspective to address fundamental inquiries consistently and perpetually.

Philosophical Basis:

Muthahhari's philosophical standpoint broadens the scope of human existence within the cosmic framework, urging contemplation beyond biological aspects. He sees the universe not merely as a backdrop but as a platform for profound philosophical exploration into the meaning and purpose of human life on a grand scale. Philosophy, according to Muthahhari, steps in where science falls short, addressing fundamental questions about existence, meaning, and purpose that extend beyond the practicalities handled by science (Kamali, 2003). This philosophical knowledge, crucial for understanding the intricacies of human existence, unveils the essence of being. However, Muthahhari acknowledges the insufficiency of philosophy alone, emphasizing the need for integration with practical guidance to form a comprehensive worldview that encompasses both profound existential insights and actionable principles for human conduct.

Spiritual Basis:

Muthahhari integrates spirituality as a crucial element in grasping the core of human essence and their relationship with the universe. He argues that spirituality enhances both philosophical and scientific perspectives, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding human existence. This spiritual aspect involves acknowledging the transcendental nature of humans and their connection to a higher reality, surpassing material and biological realms (Muthahhari, 1990). Muthahhari asserts that recognizing this spiritual essence is pivotal for comprehending the profound meaning and purpose of human life. While philosophy addresses intellectual queries and science handles practical aspects, spirituality explores the soul and the transcendent, emphasizing its significance in shaping a holistic worldview that encompasses the entire spectrum of human existence (Babaei, 2016). This spiritual foundation complements scientific and philosophical dimensions, providing a deep understanding of human essence and their interconnectedness with the universe, infusing purpose, meaning, and transcendence into the overall worldview.

Murtadha Muthahhari's approach emphasizes the integration of scientific, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions to form a comprehensive worldview. He argues that each dimension contributes a unique perspective, and a holistic understanding requires the harmonious synthesis of these elements. By combining scientific knowledge, philosophical inquiry, and spiritual awareness, individuals can attain a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the essence of humans and their connection with the universe.

Murtadha Muthahhari's perspective on the essence of humans and the universe encompasses the interconnectedness of scientific, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions. He advocates for a holistic approach that integrates these facets to form a comprehensive worldview. By recognizing the limitations and contributions of each dimension, individuals can achieve a more profound understanding of their existence, purpose, and connection with the universe. Muthahhari's synthesis of science, philosophy, and spirituality offers a nuanced and enriched perspective on the essence of humans and their place in the vast tapestry of the universe.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Murtadha Muthahhari's ontological perspective offers profound insights into the intricate relationship between humans and the universe. By delving into the concepts of fundamental existence and the gradation of being, Muthahhari establishes a foundation that underscores the inseparability of human existence from its surrounding environment. Notably, he underscores the pivotal role of spirituality in unraveling the essence of humanity and in delineating ethical responsibilities towards nature.

Practically, this ontological viewpoint presents an opportunity for tangible actions in environmental preservation. It can potentially serve as a guiding principle for the development of concrete measures to safeguard the environment. Future research endeavors could explore the practical implementation of these ontological concepts within environmental conservation policies, investigating how spiritual values can be harnessed to inspire and guide tangible actions aimed at protecting the Earth. Furthermore, this conclusion invites further exploration into the potential contributions of Muthahhari's ontological perspective in addressing global environmental challenges and fostering ecological awareness within communities.

Importantly, Muthahhari's ontological understanding is not confined to a mere philosophical theory; rather, it emerges as a source of inspiration capable of effecting genuine change in human attitudes and behaviors towards the universe. This transformative potential positions Muthahhari's ontological framework as a catalyst for fostering a deeper connection between individuals and their environment, encouraging a conscientious and responsible approach to our role within the broader cosmic tapestry.

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