



Sacred sustainability as a post-development ethos: Recontextualizing Seyyed Hossein Nasr's metaphysics for Indonesia's ecological crisis

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ABSTRACT

Background: The contemporary ecological crisis in Indonesia reflects not only a failure of governance but a deeper metaphysical rupture caused by the dominance of anthropocentric and extractive development models. While existing literature has extensively discussed Islamic environmental ethics or Seyyed Hossein Nasr's eco-spirituality separately, there is a scarcity of studies that critically bridge Nasr's metaphysical traditionalism with modern structural critiques to address the specific political-economic context of Indonesia. This study aims to fill this gap by formulating a "Sacred Sustainability" framework that integrates Qur'anic theocentrism with critical social theory to offer a holistic solution to Indonesia's environmental degradation. **Methods:** The study employs a qualitative library research approach, utilizing philosophical hermeneutics to interpret texts. The analytical framework synthesizes Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophia perennis with Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action and Arturo Escobar's post-development theory. Data were analyzed using an interactive model involving condensation, display, and verification to reconstruct a relevant ethical model. **Findings:** The research finds that while Nasr's concepts of *Tawhīd* (unity), *Khalifah* (stewardship), and *Mizān* (balance) provide a strong ontological basis for restoring the sanctity of nature, they lack the political instrumentality to challenge the structural dominance of oligarchy and capitalism in Indonesia. By integrating Critical Theory, this study operationalizes Nasr's metaphysics into a "Sacred Sustainability" paradigm that not only demands spiritual restoration but also structural transformation through deliberative ethics and the decolonization of development policies. **Conclusion:** Addressing Indonesia's ecological crisis requires a paradigm shift from material accumulation to spiritual responsibility, positioning environmental preservation as both an ethical obligation and a devotional act. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The novelty of this research lies in its unique theoretical synthesis that bridges the gap between Traditionalist Islamic metaphysics and modern Critical Theory (Post-development). It creates a new, contextually grounded framework of "Sacred Sustainability" that transcends the dichotomy between spiritual normativity and socio-political praxis.

KEYWORDS: Indonesian development; Islamic environmental ethics; Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

1. Introduction

The current global ecological crisis not only marks the failure of modern environmental policy, but also reflects a more fundamental disorientation in the ontological relationship

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between humans and nature (Morgan, 2025). In various parts of the world, this crisis manifests itself in the form of rising global temperatures (Gabric, 2023), marine ecosystem damage (Han et al., 2021), declining soil quality (Zahedifar, 2023), mass extinction (Cowie et al., 2022), as well as increasingly frequent and unpredictable ecological disasters (Gao et al., 2025). Although various countries have established environmental legal regimes, international agreements, and global governance mechanisms to respond to these issues (McCormick, 2023), the global ecological reality shows an increasingly alarming downward trend. This situation indicates that environmental issues cannot be understood solely as technical, administrative, or legalistic problems, but rather as a crisis of civilization that touches on the very basis of how humans understand reality, nature, and their own existence (Safdar & Shams-Ur-rehman, 2021).

In the Indonesian context, the ecological crisis is profoundly concrete and empirically alarming. Over the past few decades, Indonesia has experienced significant primary forest loss, largely driven by the aggressive expansion of monoculture palm oil plantations and logging concessions in regions such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, and increasingly Papua (Santoro et al., 2023; Erwiningsih, 2023). Furthermore, the rapid expansion of the mining industry—particularly massive coal extraction in East Kalimantan and the booming nickel processing industry in Sulawesi and Maluku to support global supply chains—has led to widespread land clearing, heavy metal contamination in marine ecosystems, and the displacement of indigenous communities (Munawaroh et al., 2024; Werner et al., 2023). Erwiningsih (2023) These environmental degradations are compounded by severe river and sea pollution (Sugiharto et al., 2025) and systemic crises in natural resource governance (Munawaroh et al., 2024; Trihatmoko & Susilo, 2024). These phenomena are not isolated incidents but rather the structural symptoms of an exploitative development paradigm. The national development model in recent decades has tended to place economic growth as the main indicator of success (Hardi et al., 2024), often at the expense of ecological sustainability and social justice (Esaputri et al., 2025). As a result, the exploitation of natural resources is occurring at a rate that exceeds nature's capacity for regeneration. This situation confirms that development in Indonesia is facing not only a physical ecological crisis, but also a deeper paradigm crisis, namely a failure to establish an ethical relationship between humans, nature, and the meaning of development itself (Gunansyah, 2022).

This situation is in line with reports from various international institutions such as the IPCC and UNEP, which indicate that environmental degradation has reached a critical and systemic phase (Citaristi, 2022; van der Geest & van den Berg, 2021). The climate crisis, for example, is not merely the result of carbon emissions, but rather a product of the global economic-political structure, excessive consumption, and a development epistemology that views nature as a commodity (Rizky & Djunatan, 2025). Within this framework, the environment is no longer understood as having intrinsic value, but rather as an economic object whose value is determined by the market (Gorton et al., 2021). This relational model indicates that the ecological crisis is fundamentally a reflection of a crisis in the modern worldview regarding reality (Sayem, 2021a).

In this context, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique of modernity gains significant theoretical relevance. Seyyed Hossein Nasr understands the environmental crisis not merely as physical damage to ecosystems, but as a manifestation of a metaphysical crisis, namely humanity's disconnection from the sacred dimension of reality due to the dominance of a secular worldview (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2015). According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, modernity has shifted the world's orientation from theocentric to anthropocentric, from cosmic consciousness to instrumental rationality, and from spirituality to materialism (Vural, 2024). In this view, nature is no longer understood as God's verses containing cosmic meaning, but is reduced to a neutral object that can be exploited without limits (Chancellor, 2023).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues that the deepest roots of the modern ecological crisis lie in positivistic epistemology and mechanistic philosophy, which have removed the sacred dimension from the structure of human knowledge (Nasr, 1990). The dominance of

reductionist modern science has changed the way humans understand nature, from a living and meaningful reality to a cosmic machine without intrinsic value (Nasr, 1990). As a result, the relationship between humans and nature is reduced to a hierarchical and instrumental subject-object relationship (Ames & Rošker, 2025). In this context, environmental technologies and policies developed within a secular paradigm only address the symptoms, not the root causes of the problem. Therefore, solutions to the ecological crisis require a spiritual and ontological reconstruction of the relationship between humans and nature, not just policy innovations or green technologies.

This critical framework is particularly relevant for Indonesia, a country with a Muslim majority. In Islam itself, nature is understood not merely as a material entity, but as signs of God's presence (*āyāt kauniyyah*) (Dwyer, 2021). For example, the concept of *tauḥīd* offered by Islam as a form of affirmation of cosmic unity between God, humans, and nature (Al Mahmud, 2023), while the concept of *khalīfah* mandates humanity's moral responsibility to care for the earth (Rakhmat, 2022). In addition, the principles of *maslahah al-ammah* negate that excessive exploitation of nature is a violation of the cosmic order established by God (Al Anang et al., 2022). Ironically, even though Islam has a very strong foundation of environmental ethics, development practices in Muslim countries, including Indonesia, often follow the logic of modern secular and instrumentalistic development (Mahdi et al., 2025).

Epistemological tensions also arise between Islamic environmental ethics and the modern development paradigm. On the one hand, Islam offers an ecological perspective based on the sanctity of nature and spiritual responsibility. On the other hand, national development policies are still largely influenced by the logic of economic growth, investment, and industrialization, which tends to ignore the ethical-spiritual dimensions of the relationship between humans and nature (Hardiyanto et al., 2025; Rosyidah et al., 2023). As a result, the discourse on sustainability in Indonesia often stops at technical issues such as renewable energy, green economy, and corporate sustainability. (Rasyid et al., 2022), without touching on the ontological and epistemological roots of environmental issues.

In this context, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking becomes very interesting, yet problematic. On the one hand, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique of modernity provides a strong philosophical basis for understanding the ecological crisis as a spiritual problem. On the other hand, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perennial metaphysical approach is often criticized for not providing sufficient analytical tools for reading the structures of power, global economic domination, and political relations in contemporary development (Manna, 2024). Indonesia's development is not only spiritually devoid of values, but also shaped by the logic of extractive capitalism, the interests of the economic oligarchy, and the pressures of neoliberal globalism (Wenger, 2023). Recent scholarship in political ecology further highlights how environmental degradation in the Global South is structurally tied to asymmetrical power relations, land commodification, and state-corporate nexuses (Robbins, 2019; Williams, 2023). From this political ecology perspective, ecological crises are never merely apolitical management failures, but rather the planned outcomes of capital accumulation that disproportionately marginalize local communities and ecosystems (Hasselbalch et al., 2023). Therefore, there is a fundamental question to what extent can Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique of modernity explain and respond to the highly political and structural reality of Indonesia's development.

At this point, a conceptual dialogue between Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking and contemporary critical theories of modernity is needed. Post-development theory, particularly as formulated by Arturo Escobar, shows how modern development is not merely an economic project, but a form of epistemic colonization that imposes Western models on the developing world (Escobar, 1995). On the other hand, communicative action theory helps to interpret the crisis of modernity as a failure of communicative rationality and the dominance of instrumental rationality in the public sphere. (Habermas, 1987a). With this approach, this study indirectly read Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts in their entirety in the context of modernity. Thus, it is possible to have a more holistic critique of

development, not only in a spiritual framework, but also in political, epistemological, and social dimensions.

A number of recent studies in the field of environmental philosophy also reinforce the need for a holistic approach to the ecological crisis. Studies on deep ecology (Barzola-Elizagaray & Agoglia, 2024), eco-phenomenology (Baklien et al., 2024), as well as relational ethics (Maarif, 2023), shows that the spiritual relationship between humans and nature has a concrete impact on the formation of public ecological awareness. Thinkers such as Arne Naess and Emmanuel Levinas assert that the environmental crisis cannot be separated from the crisis of meaning, relationships, and human existential responsibility towards others, including nature itself (Oldenburg, 2024). Furthermore, contemporary literature on sustainability transitions emphasizes that bridging these ethical dimensions with structural political ecology is essential to avoid superficial 'greenwashing' and to drive genuine socio-ecological transformations (Scoones et al., 2020). This finding reinforces Seyyed Hossein Nasr's premise that the ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual crisis, but at the same time calls for a more dialogical and critical approach to the structures of modernity (Sayem, 2021b).

Based on this description, a clear research gap can be identified. Although various studies have discussed Islamic environmental ethics and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's eco-spirituality, very few have systematically, (1) examined the adequacy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perennial metaphysics in responding to the challenges of modern development; (2) dialogue Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking with critical theories of modernity such as post-development and communicative action; and (3) apply this framework specifically in the context of ecological development in Indonesia, which is influenced by extractive capitalism and the environmental governance crisis. Without this kind of analysis, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking risks being reduced to a strongly spiritual but socially impractical normative-metaphysical discourse.

Based on these research gaps, this study aims to critically examine Seyyed Hossein Nasr's theocentric framework as the foundation of Islamic environmental ethics, while also testing its relevance in responding to the complexities of development in Indonesia. This study not only explores Seyyed Hossein Nasr's views on nature from an Islamic perspective, but also synthesizes them with post-development theory and communicative action theory in an effort to construct a model of Islamic environmental ethics that is more responsive to contemporary social, political, and economic realities (Rehman, 2025; Hutagalung, 2024; Sayem, 2021a).

Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding the discourse on the integration between Islamic metaphysics and modern critical theory within the framework of environmental ethics. In practical terms, this research is expected to provide an alternative paradigm for sustainable development based on Islamic spirituality that does not stop at normative narratives, but also has policy and social praxis implications. Thus, this research is expected to steer Indonesia's development towards sustainability that is not only ecological, but also ethical and spiritual.

2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach based on library research to critically examine Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts on the critique of modernity and the formulation of a theocentric Islamic environmental ethic based on the Qur'an. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study does not focus on empirical measurement or statistical generalization, but rather on the interpretation of meaning, conceptual analysis, and philosophical criticism of the structure of thought. Therefore, this study aims to understand the conceptual structure, epistemological assumptions, and normative implications of Nasr's thoughts in the context of the contemporary ecological crisis.

Ontologically, this study is based on an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, which views reality not as an objective entity that stands alone, but as a world of meaning that is formed through texts, discourse, and symbolic interpretation. In this view, the ecological

crisis is understood not only as a physical fact, but also as a symptom of metaphysical disorientation resulting from changes in the human perspective on nature. This paradigm allows the study to approach the environmental crisis as both an ontological and epistemological issue, so that Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique of modernity is not seen merely as a critique of policy, but as a critique of the modern worldview.

Epistemologically, this study uses philosophical hermeneutics as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer as its main interpretive framework. Hermeneutics is used not only to understand the textual meaning of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, but also to actualize his thoughts in the contemporary socio-ecological context. Thus, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's works are not treated as static doctrines, but as philosophical texts that are open to critical dialogue with modern reality. Interpretation is carried out through a dialectical relationship between the text, context, and researcher, applying Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*), so that the meaning of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts is read within the horizon of Indonesian and global ecological problems.

Methodologically, this study integrates critical modernity theory as its primary analytical lens, specifically Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action and Arturo Escobar's post-development theory. The rationale for selecting these specific theorists lies in their complementary critiques of structural modernity: Habermas provides the procedural critique of how instrumental rationality dominates the public sphere (a structural aspect Nasr lacks), while Escobar provides the decolonial critique of how Western development models marginalize local spiritualities. Habermas's framework is used to analyze how modern rationality has been reduced to instrumental rationality that dominates the living space and marginalizes ethical and communicative dimensions, ultimately contributing to the ecological crisis. Meanwhile, Escobar's theory is used to read modern development as a hegemonic discourse that marginalizes local knowledge, spirituality, and non-Western cosmological views. These two approaches enable a more structural critical analysis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking, not only normatively-metaphysically, but also socio-politically.

Using these two frameworks, this study examines the extent to which Seyyed Hossein Nasr's metaphysical critique of modernity is capable of addressing the structural dimensions of the ecological crisis, such as global capitalism, the colonization of knowledge, and the epistemic dominance of the West in development policy. Thus, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking is not only positioned as a spiritual offering, but also as an object of philosophical and theoretical critique. This approach allows for a more objective assessment of the strengths and limitations of the theocentric environmental ethics he formulates as conceptualized in Figure 1.

Neo-traditionalist philosophy

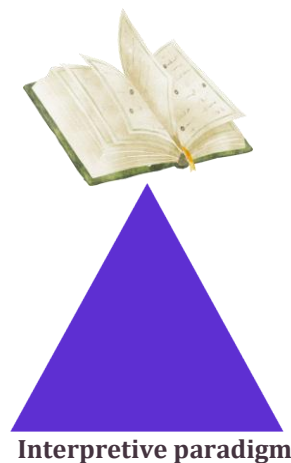


Fig.1. Conceptual Analysis of Text

The primary data sources in this study include Seyyed Hossein Nasr's major works that directly discuss Islamic cosmology and criticism of modernity, including *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* and *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*. These texts were purposively selected based on two specific criteria; (1) their foundational role in articulating his perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*), and (2) their direct conceptual engagement with the critique of modern science and ecological degradation. These works are considered the most authoritative representations of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ecological metaphysical perspective. Secondary data sources include Habermas' critical theory literature, Escobar's contemporary development theory, Islamic environmental ethics studies, environmental philosophy, and environmental policy documents in Indonesia. The selection of sources is based on theoretical relevance and the academic authority in order to build a strong interpretive foundation.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles et al. (2018). The analytical process of theoretical synthesis was systematically carried out in three distinct steps; The First, data condensation; Textual data is encoded into conceptual themes such as "Seyyed Hossein Nasr's metaphysical epistemology," "sacred cosmology," "critique of instrumental rationality," "post-development critique," and "theocentric ethics". Second, data display and critical dialogue: An analytical matrix was prepared to read Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ideas through the critical lenses of Habermas and Escobar systematically. Third, conceptual synthesis and conclusion drawing: Formulating a reconstructed theoretical structure of "Sacred Sustainability" that is relevant to the Indonesian context. (Miles et al., 2018).

To maintain the validity of interpretation and credibility of analysis, this study applies interpretive triangulation by comparing Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thoughts with classical and contemporary interpretations of the Qur'an, modern critical theory literature, and empirical studies on ecological development in Indonesia. In addition, interpretive rigor and consistency were ensured through continuous reflexivity, continuously testing the assumptions and epistemological positions of the researcher during the analysis process.

The selection of Indonesia as the context for this study is based on the country's level of ecological vulnerability, its Muslim majority population, and the tension between religious values and development practices. Indonesia is treated not as an empirical case study, but as an interpretive space to test the relevance of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's theory in concrete social reality. Thus, this study can critically assess the extent to which theocentric environmental ethics can function as an epistemological foundation for sustainable development.

Through the integration of philosophical hermeneutics, critical theory of modernity, and post-development approaches, this study provides a comprehensive methodological framework for an in-depth examination of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thought. This methodology allows the study not only to present Nasr's ideas, but also to evaluate their capacity as an epistemological alternative in facing the ecological crisis in Muslim-majority developing countries.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 *The epistemological structure of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Sacred cosmology, theocentrism, and criticism of modern metaphysics*

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's epistemology is based on perennial metaphysics, which places reality as a hierarchical manifestation of the principle of the Oneness of God (*tawhīd*). (Moten, 2023). Within this framework, existence is not understood in a homogeneous and flat manner as in modern ontology, but rather as a hierarchical order that unites the material world, the psychic world, and the spiritual world into a single living and meaningful cosmos. Nature (*al-ālam*) is not merely an external object that stands apart from the human subject, but is a "*theophany*", that is, a mirror of the Divine presence in cosmic form (Nasr,

1996). Therefore, true knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ḥaqīqī*) cannot be separated from metaphysical awareness of the sacred structure of existence.

The process of knowing is not merely a cognitive-rational activity, but rather a spiritual activity that involves the whole of human existence. Reason, intuition (*dhawq*), intellect (*'aql*), and metaphysical contemplation work together to capture the deepest meaning of reality (Nasr, 1989). In classical Islamic tradition, the concept of *ḥikmah* refers not only to practical intelligence, but also to knowledge that connects humans with God through cosmic understanding. Such epistemology reconstructs the framework of Islamic knowledge as an effort to restore *scientia sacra*—sacred knowledge that serves to guide humans toward divine consciousness through nature as a medium for reflection on God.

This framework explicitly confronts modern epistemology originating from the European Enlightenment (Bazac, 2021). Modernity has shifted the axis of knowledge from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, from cosmic unity to the secularization of reality (Nasr, 1994). Instrumental rationality, which makes efficiency, productivity, and control the main parameters of knowledge, replaces the search for metaphysical truth (Dash, 2024). This transformation is not only epistemological, but also ontological, meaning that nature is no longer understood as having intrinsic value, but as a technical object ready to be manipulated.

In the structure of the modernity paradigm, the position of humans has changed from guardians of the cosmos to rulers of nature. The mechanistic worldview that has developed since Descartes, Newton, and Bacon has constructed nature as a giant machine that has no soul, meaning, or transcendent purpose (Robinson, 2024). This paradigm is the philosophical foundation of modern ecological exploitation (Droz, 2022; Kopnina et al., 2021). Nature is reduced to raw material for industry, science, and capital, while humans affirm themselves as the center of all values.

This shift is a metaphysical crisis, not merely a crisis of policy or technology. Modernity has been uprooted from its spiritual roots and lost its awareness of its connection to God and the cosmos. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphatically states: This shift is a metaphysical crisis, not merely a crisis of policy or technology. Modernity has been uprooted from its spiritual roots and lost its awareness of its connection to God and the cosmos. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphatically states:

"The environmental crisis requires not simply rhetoric or cosmetic solutions but a death and rebirth of modern man and his worldview. Man need not be and in fact cannot be "reinvented" as some have claimed, but he must be reborn as traditional or pontifical man, a bridge between Heaven and Earth, and the world of nature must once again be conceived as it has always been, a sacred realm reflecting the divine creative energies. There must be the rebirth of the religious knowledge of nature, the traditional cosmologies and sacred sciences still preserved in many of the non-Western areas of the world, while the heritage of the Western tradition in this domain must itself be resuscitated in a serious manner creative energies. There must be the rebirth of the religious knowledge of nature, the traditional cosmologies and sacred sciences still preserved in many of the non-Western areas of the world, while the heritage of the Western tradition in this domain must itself be resuscitated in a serious manner." (Nasr, 1996)

This statement affirms that ecological solutions cannot stop at technological engineering or normative policies alone. What is needed is a "rebirth of humanity" in a spiritual and metaphysical sense, namely the restoration of human consciousness as pontifical man, a bridge between heaven and earth (Caporali, 2024).

The dominance of modern positivistic science has led to a narrowing of the meaning of knowledge. Science is no longer seen as a path to wisdom, but rather as an instrument of domination and control. This is what he calls *the tyranny of the quantitative*, namely modernity's tendency to measure the value of everything quantitatively: productivity, efficiency, profit, and growth (Bell, 1994). Within this framework, meaning, spirituality, and

sanctity no longer have a place in science. This analysis appears to be in line with Max Weber's thesis on the disenchantment of the world, namely the disappearance of sacred meaning from modern life (Greisman, 1976). However, unlike Weber, Seyyed Hossein Nasr does not stop at sociological diagnosis, but offers metaphysical therapy, namely the resacralization of knowledge (Nasr, 2005). He calls for a revival of sacred cosmology, traditional sciences, and symbolic awareness of nature.

In the Quranic World View, nature is described as *āyāt*, or signs of God. The cosmos is not an empty space without meaning, but a field of theophany that reveals divine attributes (Hanif, 2024). Humans, in their position as *khalīfah*, are not given the mandate to exploit nature, but to maintain *mīzān* (cosmic balance) (Q.S. 2:30; 6:165). Disobedience to this mandate, according to the Qur'an, leads to *fasād fī al-arḍ* (Q.S. 30:41), namely ecological destruction which is a reflection of cosmic sin.

Meanwhile, Seyyed Hossein Nasr positions the environmental crisis as a direct result of the collapse of theocentric consciousness (Nasr, 1978). When God is removed from epistemology, nature becomes a commodity. When sanctity is eliminated, consumption becomes an ideology. In this context, capitalism is not seen merely as an economic system, but as a rival cosmology based on materialism and utilitarianism. Therefore, the epistemology offered by Seyyed Hossein Nasr is not merely a theoretical critique, but a civilizational project. This is because he calls for the return of science to its metaphysical foundations, where nature is treated as a cosmic subject, not a technical object. Science must return to being a path of *ta'arruf*, the recognition of God through His creation (Nasr, 1996).

This epistemological framework simultaneously gives rise to Islamic environmental ethics based on three main pillars: (1) *tawhīd* as cosmic unity, (2) *khalīfah* as a moral mandate, and (3) *mīzān* as cosmic balance, which are hierarchically illustrated in Figure 2. Environmental ethics is no longer understood as a technical response to ecological degradation, but rather as an expression of spiritual obedience. Within this framework, preserving nature is worship, while destroying it is a form of betrayal of God. (Nasr, 1990).



Fig. 2. Hierarchy of ethical concepts in Quran

Thus, this epistemological structure forms a framework of thought that connects metaphysics, ethics, and ecology into one integral system. His sacred cosmological view is a direct antithesis to modern rationalism, which separates facts and values. However, it is this metaphysical power that will be tested in the next subsection, namely whether Seyyed Hossein Nasr's sacred cosmology is capable of dealing with the complexity of modern development, which is fraught with global economic and political interests.

3.2 *Epistemological evaluation: Modern rationality and post-development criticism of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*

Environmental ethics in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking is known to be rooted in a fundamental critique of Western modernity as an epistemic formation that has stripped reality of its sacred dimension. The contemporary ecological crisis is not merely a technical problem or managerial failure in resource management, but rather a concrete expression of a deeper spiritual crisis, which stems from the shift in the orientation of human knowledge from a theocentric paradigm to an anthropocentric one (Nasr, 1996). Modernity has given rise to a process of desacralization of the cosmos, transforming nature from a symbolic reality into a material object devoid of moral consciousness, an epistemological transformation that reduces nature to nothing more than an economic resource and an object of exploitation. This process, which sociologists understand as the disenchantment of nature, is seen by Seyyed Hossein Nasr as the emptying of the world of spiritual and symbolic meaning, causing the cosmos to lose its status as the living verses of God (Nasr, 1987). Within this framework, modern science no longer stands as a contemplative means of recognizing divine order, but has developed into a system of knowledge production that is subject to the logic of control, efficiency, and domination (Nasr, 2005). Instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) became the dominant epistemic paradigm, while wisdom (*ḥikmah*) as a value orientation of knowledge was excluded from the public sphere.

Although Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique of modernity is very sharp, his epistemological framework requires critical evaluation in dialogue with contemporary theories of modernity, particularly through the thinking of Jürgen Habermas. Nasr's critique of the dominance of instrumental rationality finds strong resonance in Habermas' thesis regarding the colonization of the lifeworld by systems, namely the dominance of economic logic and bureaucracy over the lifeworld, which should be a space for ethics, culture, and human communication (Habermas, 1987b). Both agree that modernity has lost its normative direction by making technological efficiency the highest value. However, the fundamental difference lies in the epistemological solutions offered. Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes the importance of restoring sacred rationality rooted in the hierarchy of truth in *philosophia perennis*, which sees truth as a hierarchical metaphysical reality originating from the Transcendent (Nasr, 1996). In contrast, Habermas rejects the restoration of metaphysics and proposes communicative rationality as a way out that places truth in an inclusive and domination-free intersubjective discourse (Habermas, 1987). When analyzed from Habermas' perspective, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's approach risks producing an authoritarian epistemology, because it legitimizes truth through metaphysical claims that do not provide a mechanism for public deliberation in a pluralistic and democratic society (Guillard, 2025). In other words, this is not a matter of diagnosing a crisis of rationality, but rather questioning its epistemic therapy, which can be considered incompatible with modern legitimation procedures.

An epistemological evaluation of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking is also strengthened when examined through the lens of post-development and decolonial studies, especially through the thinking of Arturo Escobar. Epistemically, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Escobar are in the same line of criticism of Western modernity as a hegemonic project that is colonial, materialistic, and reduces reality to economic categories (Escobar, 1995). Both reject Western universalism and emphasize the need for an alternative epistemology. However, a fundamental difference arises in the conception of universalism itself. Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a sacred universalism through the claim of the metaphysical unity of all traditions within the framework of *philosophia perennis* (Nasr, 1989). Meanwhile, Escobar proposed the concept of pluriversality as a direct critique of all forms of universalism, including religious or metaphysical universalism (Escobar, 2017). From this perspective, the assertion of a universal metaphysics, however sacred it may be, still has the potential to become a new form of epistemic colonization that replaces Western domination with the domination of traditionalism (Escobar, 2020). Seyyed Hossein Nasr's conception of

universal truth, if not translated dialogically, risks ignoring the diversity of local cosmologies and the ontologies of non-Western societies.

This criticism is particularly relevant in the context of Indonesia, which is culturally and ecologically diverse. Local cosmologies such as Tri Hita Karana in Bali This criticism is particularly relevant in the context of Indonesia, which is culturally and ecologically diverse. Local cosmologies such as Tri Hita Karana in Bali (Ardiana et al., 2025), *memayu hayuning bawana in Javanese tradition* (Fung & Tan, 2024), as well as other traditional belief systems in the archipelago, have a relational and ecological cosmological view, although this is not always articulated in classical Islamic theological language. If Seyyed Hossein Nasr's epistemology is applied normatively and hierarchically, there is a risk that local ontology will be subordinated to a global metaphysical framework that is not always contextual (Bartosch, 2023). In this context, it shows that the limits of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking, namely the resacralization of knowledge that he offers, must be interpreted through a process of inter-epistemological dialogue so that it does not turn into spiritual homogenization, which is contrary to the spirit of decolonization.

Thus, an epistemological evaluation of Seyyed Hossein Nasr through the Habermas and Escobar Approach to Modernity reveals two important aspects of his thinking. On the one hand, Seyyed Hossein Nasr presents a very strong metaphysical analysis in revealing the ontological roots of the modern ecological crisis. This is because he successfully shows that environmental problems cannot be separated from the crisis of meaning, spirituality, and human knowledge. However, on the other hand, his thinking shows limitations in offering social and political mechanisms that are compatible with pluralism and democracy. There are at least two epistemological evaluations, namely the affirmation of the weak procedural legitimacy in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's approach and its limitations in accommodating the ontological pluriversality of non-Western societies. Therefore, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking is very strong in diagnosing crises, but it is still problematic in formulating inclusive social transformation strategies.

Nasr's thinking provides a very important philosophical foundation for the development of Islamic eco-theology, but it needs to be integrated with deliberative and decolonial approaches in order to be operationalized contextually outside the framework of pure metaphysics. Without this integration, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's epistemology has the potential to remain a strong normative critique but weak in social praxis. It is this limitation that opens up space for further discussion on the relevance of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's epistemology in the context of Indonesia's pluralistic, democratic, and multicultural sustainable development.

3.3 *Development and ecological crisis in Indonesia: The relevance and limitations of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking*

The theocentric principle in the Quranic World View is the main foundation of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking in providing a very important ontological basis for the analysis of the ecological crisis and the direction of development in Indonesia. The modern environmental crisis cannot be reduced to a matter of technical failure or weak resource management alone (Bookchin & Price, 2022), but rather a direct consequence of the radical change in the worldview of modern humans, who have shifted from a divine orientation to secular anthropocentrism (Nasr, 1996). In this paradigm, nature is no longer understood as a sacred reality that reflects divine will, but rather as a material object subject to economic calculations. Indonesia's national development model is heavily dependent on the expansion of extractive industries (Yanuardi et al., 2022), land exploitation-based economic growth (Manse, 2022), and industrialization of natural resources (Nurmaya & Saputra, 2025), shows a striking similarity to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique of global modernity. The phenomenon of deforestation reaching hundreds of thousands of hectares per year, declining water quality in many regions, coastal crises, and the increasing frequency of ecological disasters can be read as empirical manifestations of what Seyyed Hossein Nasr calls *spiritual dislocation*, the uprooting of humans from cosmic consciousness and the loss

of sacred orientation towards nature (Nasr, 1990). In this situation, Indonesia's development faces not only an environmental crisis, but also a crisis of meaning, namely the weakening of ethical and ontological foundations in human relations with the ecosystem.

The Qur'an as the foundation of Islamic epistemology has a solid foundation, including the principle of *tawhīd*, which affirms that all reality is a manifestation of Divine will and wisdom (Kazeem, 2022), so that nature has intrinsic value that does not depend on its economic usefulness. The affirmation of *exegesis scholars* provides strong theological legitimacy for this principle. For example, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* interprets the orderliness of the cosmos as rational proof of the oneness of God (Al-Rāzī, 1999). According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, this idea can be developed into what could be called cosmic theology, in which nature is not merely a creation, but rather a *tajallī*, a divine revelation in material form (Nasr, 1978). From this perspective, environmental destruction is not merely a destructive ecological act, but also a form of metaphysical blasphemy against the signs of God embedded in creation. Indonesia's development model normalizes large-scale mining (Camba, 2021), expansion of monoculture plantations (Widyati et al., 2022), and mega-infrastructure projects without adequate ecological calculations represent a concrete form of reducing nature to a commodity (Miles, 2021). Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique is particularly relevant here because he provides a moral and spiritual language for assessing development policies, which often speak only in terms of economic growth and technology. However, the limitations of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking are also evident at this point. Although he is very strong in explaining the metaphysical roots of ecological damage, he provides relatively few operational policy tools for integrating sacred consciousness into modern state systems that operate based on positive legal logic and bureaucratic rationality.

The principle of *khalifah* is another significant foundation in interpreting Indonesia's development paradigm. Wahbah az-Zuḥaylī interprets human caliphate within the framework of *'imārat al-ard*, building the earth with knowledge, justice, and moral responsibility (az-Zuḥaylī, 1991). Philosophically speaking, humans exist to bear moral responsibility for the earth. However, modern humans have lost the substantial meaning of *khalifah* and have turned into *false khalifah*. Instead of holding a claim to authority over nature, they have abandoned the spiritual awareness that should accompany it (Nasr, 1990). Philosophically speaking, humans exist to bear moral responsibility for the earth. However, modern humans have lost the substantial meaning of *khalifah* and have turned into *false khalifah*. Instead of holding a claim to authority over nature, they have abandoned the spiritual awareness that should accompany it (Suryani & Yarkovska, 2024). In this context, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking finds cultural coherence with local Indonesian traditions. However, at the state policy level, the normative-spiritual concept of caliphate faces difficulties when it must be translated into modern state legal and administrative instruments that operate within Weberian legal-rational logic. The political reality of Indonesia, which is also influenced by economic oligarchy, further narrows the moral space in development decision-making (Schäfer et al., 2025), so that the ideal of the caliphate is often reduced to an ethical slogan without strong regulatory power.

In addition to *tawhīd* and *khalifah*, the principle of *mīzān* (balance) is a key principle in critically analyzing Indonesia's development trends that exceed ecological carrying capacity. Ibn 'Ashūr, in his interpretation of QS. ar-Raḥmān [55]:7-9, defines *mīzān* as the law of cosmic justice that requires humans to maintain balance in all aspects of existence (Asyur, 1984). The extension of this concept as a universal cosmic law, the violation of which will result in ecological and moral disintegration (Victory, 1978). Indonesia is showing signs of exceeding ecological limits (planetary boundaries) in various sectors, such as deforestation, soil degradation, marine pollution, and biodiversity crisis (Wardani et al., 2023). Here, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking offers a sharp ontological critique of the development paradigm that separates economic growth from ecological sustainability. (Nasr, 1990). However, once again, methodological limitations arise, namely that the metaphysical concept of *mīzān* requires a conceptual bridge in order to be translated into modern sustainability indicators, such as *sustainability metrics*, *environmental governance*,

and *policy evaluation tools* (Usubiaga-Liaño & Ekins, 2021), something that is not systematically formulated in the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

The principles of *rahmah* and *ihsān* in the Qur'an also form the basis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ecological ethics with its affective and spiritual dimensions. Wahbah az-Zuhayli emphasizes that compassion is the foundation of human relations with all of creation (az-Zuhayli, 1991). In the religious context of Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools and organizations play a strategic role in instilling spiritual-based ecological ethics (Hayyi et al., 2025). Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ideas have great potential to inspire religious-based environmental movements. However, his highly traditionalist and universalistic approach faces serious challenges in a pluralistic society such as Indonesia. Ethics based on *rahmah* can be accepted across religions and cultures, but Seyyed Hossein Nasr's monoversal metaphysical framework may not be flexible enough to engage in dialogue with the ontological plurality of the archipelago. This concept must actually touch on the thinking paradigm of Indonesian intellectuals in order to be disseminated widely.

Thus, the relevance and limitations of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking become increasingly clear in the context of Indonesia's development. Its relevance lies in the depth of his metaphysical critique of the technocratic, anthropocentric, and economic development paradigm. Alternative epistemic language is used to assess development not only in terms of economic output, but also in terms of moral and spiritual sustainability. On the other hand, its limitations are evident in the realm of social praxis and public policy. It has not provided effective institutional, political, and technocratic mechanisms to implement its cosmic vision in the modern state. In addition, its claim to metaphysical universality faces serious challenges in a pluralistic society that demands a pluralistic and dialogical approach.

Therefore, in order for Nasr's ideas to function productively in the Indonesian context, integration with critical modernity theory and decolonial approaches is necessary. This integration aims to bridge the spiritual vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr with the needs of a democratic and pluralistic society. In this way, Islamic ecological ethics does not stop at normative criticism, but becomes a contextual framework for praxis in building a model of sustainable development that is just and culturally rooted.

3.4 *Towards "sacred sustainability": A synthesis of islamic eco-spirituality and critique of modernity for Indonesia*

The ecological crisis facing Indonesia cannot be separated from the dominance of the modern development paradigm, which places resource exploitation and instrumental rationality at the center of public policy (Serrano et al., 2024). This paradigm is deeply rooted in the mainstream of Western modernity, which represents nature as a passive object that can be owned, calculated, and exploited without limits (Leiss, 2023). Development is synonymous with economic growth, while the environment is reduced to a mere instrument of production (Muhammad et al., 2021). Modern Islamic environmental ethics studies show that this type of development model not only destroys ecosystems, but also results in spiritual alienation, namely the disconnection of humans from cosmic consciousness and their transcendental relationship with nature (Shaleh & Islam, 2024). In the Indonesian context, replicating the global paradigm of modernity without a theological and cosmological foundation reinforces structural ecological degradation, confirming Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thesis that the environmental crisis is essentially a metaphysical crisis born of "forgetfulness of Heaven," forgetting the divine dimension as the center of the cosmic order (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1996).

In response to this crisis, the ecological-religious paradigm has emerged as an epistemological alternative that challenges the basic assumptions of secular development. Syihabuddin et al. (2023) assert that contemporary Islamic studies must restore the religious subjectivity of nature as a critique of anthropological secularism, which objectifies creation (Syihabuddin et al., 2023). The Qur'an states that the entire universe glorifies God (Q.S. al-Isrā' [17]: 44), emphasizing that the cosmos is not a silent entity, but a spiritual

subject that lives in relation to the Divine. Seyyed Hossein Nasr articulates the theological depth of this view through sacred cosmology, in which nature is seen as a manifestation of God's Names and Attributes (Nasr, 1978; Nasr, 1987, 1996). The idea of *resacralization of knowledge* that he proposes shifts the relationship between humans and nature from mere technical management to a *spiritual discipline*, in which ecological sustainability is understood as a form of cosmic worship and ethical jihad in maintaining the harmony of creation. Within this framework, Islamic environmental ethics is no longer merely a behavioral norm, but rather a mystical practice rooted in the consciousness of tawhid.

This approach is also reinforced by recent studies. For example, Fadil's research shows that the concepts of *tawhīd*, *khalīfah*, and *mīzān* form the ethical foundation of development that places ecological balance as a requirement of faith (Fadil, 2024). Sadjali added that the environmental crisis is a spiritual crisis that occurs when science loses its connection with metaphysics (Sadjali, 2024). Ecological degradation must be read as a manifestation of epistemic facades, damage that begins with the dysfunction of knowledge and ends in the destruction of nature. Development that damages the environment is not only scientifically wrong, but also ontologically and religiously deviant.

However, in order for Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ideas to serve as a real development paradigm for Indonesia, they need to be transformed through dialogue with critical modernity theory. Jürgen Habermas's thinking is significant in bridging the concept of re-sacralization, in which knowledge about human interests leading to three domains, namely technical, practical, and emancipatory, is actualized based on the sacred bond between humans, God, and nature (Habermas, 1971). Habermas argues that modernity has failed not because of rationality itself, but because of the dominance of instrumental rationality over communicative rationality (Habermas, 1987). This view agrees with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's criticism of modern science, which has become a machine of domination. However, the difference lies in the need to build ethical legitimacy through discursive space, rather than through a hierarchy of metaphysical truth (Ochoa et al., 2021). The important implication for Indonesia is that the resacralization of such ethical values needs to be institutionalized through public deliberation mechanisms, rather than simply being conveyed as theological norms. Without an inclusive deliberative structure, Islamic ecological ethics risk being reduced to individual morality that has no regulatory power in public policy.

Habermas' paradigm cannot be complete without Arturo Escobar's decolonial approach. The procedural problem of legitimacy that Habermas focuses on stems from modern colonial development, which imposes a single global epistemology and dismisses local ontologies (Escobar, 1995, 2017). In the Indonesian context, development often ignores the cosmology of the archipelago, such as *memayu hayuning bawana* (Fung & Tan, 2024), *leuweung larangan* (Khosihan et al., 2024), or *pappaseng* (Fadli et al., 2025), which is actually in line with the principles of *tawhīd* and *mīzān*. At this point, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thinking faces serious criticism because, despite rejecting Western modernity, he still upholds the claim of a single metaphysical truth (*philosophia perennis*). If not processed dialogically, this approach has the potential to give birth to a new form of colonialism in the form of religious domination. Therefore, Indonesia's sustainability strategy should not be monoversal, but must be based on ontological plurality that recognizes the diversity of local epistemologies as legitimate sources of knowledge (Mahaswa & Syaja, 2025).

The synthesis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's concept of spirituality in the reading of communicative rationality and pluriversality accommodates the conception of "sacred sustainability" as an alternative development paradigm for Indonesia (Nasr, 1978, 1989). Ontologically, this paradigm restores nature as a sacred reality. Epistemologically, it demands a democratic space for ethical dialogue. Culturally and politically, it affirms local wisdom as authoritative ecological knowledge (Escobar, 2020). Sacred sustainability is not merely a normative approach, but a transformational framework for reconfiguring the relationships between humans and nature, the state and society, and science and revelation. This concept actually originates from the traditional art ethics framework described in the religious ethics section, as illustrated below in Figure 3.

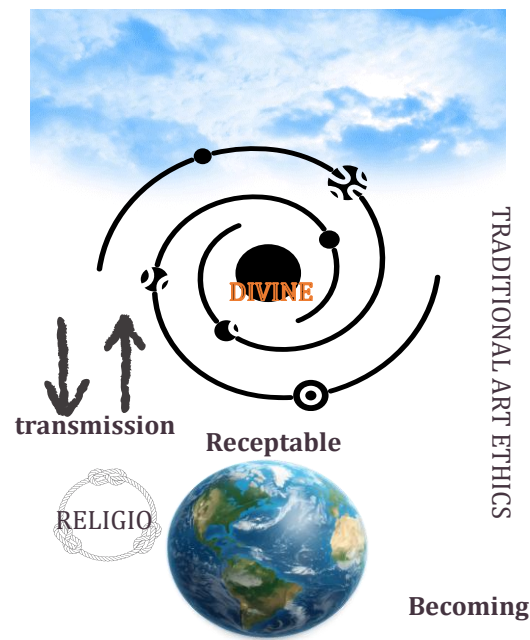


Fig. 3. Traditional art ethics for sacred sustainability

In the Indonesian context, this paradigm guides development through three strategic paths, namely the resacralization of ethics to build faith-based ecological awareness, the institutionalization of ecological communicative spaces in policy formulation, and the revitalization of the Nusantara cosmology as the foundation for decolonial sustainable development. All three encourage a paradigm shift from growth to balance, from exploitation to stewardship, and from domination to servitude (*‘ubūdiyyah*). Sacred sustainability does not reject modernity, but transforms it so that human rationality is not separated from divine ethics and local wisdom.

To operationalize "Sacred Sustainability" in social praxis, this paradigm must be translated into concrete governance and socio-cultural mechanisms. In the realm of environmental policy, it demands a shift from purely economic Environmental Impact Assessments (AMDAL) to multi-dimensional evaluations that structurally incorporate local ecological wisdom and ethical deliberation from affected communities. In the field of education, it requires integrating eco-spirituality into national curricula, moving beyond technical science to teach environmental stewardship as a core civic and spiritual duty. Furthermore, for environmental activism, this framework provides a powerful normative language that empowers faith-based organizations, such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* in Indonesia, to frame ecological preservation not merely as a secular advocacy issue, but as a defense of the sacred (environmental *jihad*), thereby mobilizing mass grassroots participation for climate justice. Thus, sacred sustainability presents a vision of development that is unique to Indonesia: spiritual ethics in local identity, dialogical in structure, and archipelagic in cultural expression. It offers an alternative form of modernity that is neither secular, technocratic, nor colonial, a modernity that is sanctified by values, institutionalized through deliberation, and grounded in local wisdom.

4. Conclusions

This study confirms that the ecological crisis in Indonesia cannot be understood solely as a technocratic failure in natural resource management, but rather as an ontological and civilizational crisis stemming from a paradigm shift in modern knowledge towards anthropocentrism and instrumentalism. Environmental degradation in this context is an expression of the severance of the metaphysical relationship between humans, nature, and God, resulting in nature being reduced to an object of economic exploitation, divorced from its sacred value and cosmic purpose. These findings indicate that ecological sustainability

cannot be achieved without reconstructing a worldview that restores the transcendental dimension to the framework of development.

The integration of the environmental ethics of the Qur'an and the perspective of sacred ecology philosophy from Seyyed Hossein Nasr formulates a coherent and systemic model of Islamic environmental ethics based on the principles of *tawhīd*, *khalīfah*, *mīzān*, and *rahmah*. This framework positions humans not merely as economic actors, but as moral and spiritual subjects who carry a cosmic mandate. Thus, environmental preservation is no longer perceived as a sectoral issue, but as a theological mandate and the embodiment of ethical responsibility towards the order of creation.

The main theoretical contribution of this research lies in the articulation of the concept of sacred sustainability as an alternative sustainability paradigm that transcends modern ecological reductionism. Unlike conventional sustainability models that rely on instrumental rationality, sacred sustainability reconstructs the discourse of development on an integrated ontological, ethical, and spiritual foundation. This approach is not only critical of secular modernity, but also constructive in formulating a new synthesis between religion, science, and culture within the framework of sustainability.

In the Indonesian context, these findings affirm the importance of a development approach rooted in local cosmology and religious traditions, rather than a historically adopting a homogeneous global development paradigm. Sacred sustainability offers a contextual, value-based development model that combines Islamic spirituality with the ecological wisdom of the archipelago. This paradigm also reinterprets modernity, not as a project of domination over nature, but as a transformative ethical process that places humans back within a network of cosmic responsibility.

Epistemologically, this research contributes to contemporary Islamic scientific discourse by offering an integrative model that combines Qur'anic interpretation, environmental philosophy, and development criticism. This framework opens up space for the development of an unfragmented Islamic epistemology, while strengthening the position of Islamic environmental ethics as a valid and relevant theoretical source in the global debate on sustainability.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges certain limitations. As a purely theoretical and philosophical inquiry, the formulation of "Sacred Sustainability" lacks empirical validation regarding its real-world efficacy in mitigating specific ecological conflicts. The synthesis presented here operates primarily at a conceptual level and has not yet been tested against the rigid bureaucratic realities of state policymaking or the complex dynamics of local agrarian conflicts. Therefore, future research must shift toward empirical investigations. Subsequent studies should conduct field research to examine how faith-based ecological movements in Indonesia operationalize these principles on the ground, or evaluate how local governments might effectively integrate eco-spiritual ethics into regional environmental regulations.

Finally, this study positions sacred sustainability as a normative paradigm that is relevant across cultural and geographical contexts and has the potential to be an important contribution of Islam to the global sustainability discourse. The theoretical and practical implications of this research point to the need to formulate development policies that are not only oriented towards economic growth, but also towards moral integrity, ecological balance, and the sustainability of civilization.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT (GPT-5, OpenAI) to assist in improving the clarity, coherence, and academic tone of the manuscript, as well as in structuring certain analytical and synthesis sections based on the author's original arguments and cited references. After using this tool, the author thoroughly reviewed, verified, and edited all generated content to ensure its accuracy, originality, and scholarly integrity, and takes full responsibility for the content of this publication.

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