

# Book Review

## *THE ENCOUNTER OF MAN AND NATURE.*

By Seyyed Hossein Nasr.  
(Allen and Unwin. 30s.).

Review by K.E. Pringle

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PROFESSOR NASR has given this book the sub-title "The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man," and he explains that the chapters are based on four lectures delivered at the University of Chicago during May 1966; lectures given under the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Foundation. He says, "The very fact that such lectures are held annually attests the apprehension existing in many circles today about the misdeeds of technology and the threat of science and technology to peace."

The first chapter is entitled "The Problem." Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes "... for the most part philosophy, and in fact the general use of intelligence itself, have been surrendered to science" but a little later he adds, "There are, amidst this scene, those who seek to demonstrate the limitations of science and others who explore with genuine interest the problems of the encounter between science, philosophy and religion." This gives the opportunity for a summary of many of the credible and less credible points of view expressed in our time, including those of scientists, philosophers and Christian theologians.

The second chapter is entitled "The Intellectual and Historical Causes." Seyyed Hossein Nasr gives a documented analysis of the historical bases of the sciences from antiquity through the medieval period to the present day and of their former relationships with the religions. The connections between the sciences and Christianity are specially considered and the interrelations between Islam and Christianity. He questions the validity of the views of some professional science historians, saying, "Many have written about the concepts of matter or motion in the ancient world as if in those days people held the same views about the physical world as the contemporary ones"; giving as examples the symbolic significance of the "water" of Thales and the "seven planets" of the Babylonians.

The third chapter is entitled "Some Metaphysical Principles Pertaining to Nature." It is devoted to the metaphysical doctrines of the Greeks and the early founders of Christian theology, and in more detail to those of Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, and of the later Christian writers, mystics and alchemists. Quoting the Tao Te-Ching, "All things under Heaven are products of Being, but Being itself is the product of Not-Being" he writes "In this simple assertion is contained the principle of all metaphysics..."

The fourth chapter is entitled "Certain Applications to the Contemporary Situation." In this last chapter the author considers what might be the beneficial effects "If there were to be a

rediscovery of metaphysics and the re-establishment of a metaphysical tradition in the West tied to the appropriate spiritual methods and within the fold of Christianity..."

Seyyed Hossein Nasr concludes, "Of course the feasibility of applying the programme proposed in these chapters, and the question of whether proposals of this kind ever have the chance of being carried out in a world which does not seem to want to change its course until events force it to do so is itself a matter to consider, one which however important we cannot treat here. Our task, rather, has been to make this analysis..."

The author and the publishers are to be congratulated on the publication and presentation of this book. Professor Nasr gives comprehensive references and notes with quotations. Many of these quotations are of particular importance, opening up the depths of the subject. There is also a full index.

This book is recommended to those studying religion and science and to those who seek firm ground, having come to doubt the current belief in "progress."