

Towards An Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective

İbrahim Özdemir

Do they not ponder over the Qur'an in order to understand its deep meaning, or is it that their minds are locked up from within? (Qur'an 47:24)

Introduction

The Qur'an, which Muslims consider to be the last of the chain of divine revelations, has been a source of inspiration, illumination and guidance for Muslim philosophers, theologians, Sufi masters, scientists, jurists, and average Muslims who have accepted it as their sacred revelation, in addition to others of divergent ways and different paths of thought that may be found in the Islamic tradition. It could be said that the Qur'an has been regarded by Muslims as a book of law, prayer, wisdom, worship, and invocation--in short, a unique and comprehensive sacred text that contains whatever pertains essentially to the human condition. For this reason, it is unanimously considered by insiders and outsiders alike to be the most fundamental basis both for the faith of the individual Muslim and for what is called Islamic civilization. Muslims naturally believe that the Qur'an can and should continue to play such a role today in our quest for conducting a meaningfully ethical life. As is clear from the records of history, the Qur'an has played this role in the life of Muslims from the very beginning of revelation, providing a comprehensive, integrated, and holistic worldview based on the unity of reality (*tawhid*).

It is an irony of history that during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, the predominant view held by the positivists and scientifically-minded philosophers was that science and technology could satisfy humanity and solve its problems totally, without creating new problems. Further, such people tried to convince us that not only religions but also all metaphysical propositions and speculations were meaningless, and therefore should be eliminated from the concerns of the

modern man.¹ As a result of this view, modern man lost his awareness of the sacred dimension of nature and alienated himself from it. Today, however, thanks to a growing ecological awakening, we can understand clearly that man is not separate from or above nature, but rather is a part and parcel of the web of life.

Since the appearance of the environmental crisis modern man has begun to perceive religions from a new standpoint, an ecological outlook in which everything is connected to everything else and nature is seen as an organic unity.² It is this type of reasoning that has motivated members of all faiths to study and reevaluate their traditions.

What is more surprising is the global character of environmental problems, which has encouraged the members of diverse world religions to cooperate with each other, to see the problems in a real context. To put it differently, this new understanding brings members of different faiths and traditions to a new frontier and paves the way for a dialogue between them that has never before been experienced in human history. With the commencement of a new millennium, it seems that humanity is once more turning its mind, heart, and face toward a transcendental Being, not only to study it for its own sake, but also for hope and a better future; and not only for man, but for all creation as well. Since the nature of any ecological reasoning is holistic and interdependent, it urges us to reconsider and to rediscover our religious values at the threshold of a new millennium. There is now the immediate necessity to fill what Hans Jonas calls an "ethical vacuum at the core of the contemporary modern culture."³ It is also necessary, therefore, to begin by outlining the main propositions underlying the modern worldview.

One of these is the notion that nature is a machine, that it has no value and expresses no sense of purpose. In a nutshell, this view robs nature of all its inherent qualities. John Locke's theory of primary and secondary qualities also should be remembered in this context. Locke argues that only primary qualities exist in nature; there is no place for secondary qualities. Rather, the latter are products of the human mind which are imposed on nature, which in itself is devoid of soul and intelligence and has no inherent or intrinsic values at all. In short, "nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless: merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly."⁴ A tree, for example, has no intrinsic value of its own being as such. According to the modern materialistic concept of nature, a tree gains its value through human intervention, such as when it becomes a chair, a table or whatever. The only value that nature can have is instrumental value. Such an understanding of nature has provided justification for the exploitative use of nature and natural resources.⁵

The instrumental view of nature which characterizes modern thought has been very severely criticized by environmentalists in recent decades. Environmentalists claim that there is a strong and direct relationship between environmental problems and our modern understanding of nature. To put it more concretely, the value systems that we hold and which, in turn, shape and mold our behavior and attitudes towards society and nature, are the result of our overall beliefs and metaphysical views concerning all reality.

Consequently, any alternative theories of environmental ethics can be expected to challenge the basic propositions of the dominant modern understanding of nature.

Although it can be claimed that the modern scientific worldview is a Western phenomenon, its influence can be felt everywhere, and Islamic lands are not an exception to this.⁶ This is due in large part to the followers of traditional value systems being educated in the West or in Western-style institutions; as a result, their hearts and minds have been dominated by modern concepts and values. This observation leads us to seek to rediscover the meaning of universe, which may be regarded as the missing dimension of modernity or "the sacred dimension of reality" as some would name it. Our interest is in exploring a Qur'anic alternative that is, discovering the meaning of nature and man's place within it from a Qur'anic perspective. If we address ourselves to these questions attentively, then we can develop a Qur'anic environmental ethic. At the same time, our position assumes that the members of other faiths also can propose their own ethic. Presumably religion, as a system defining cultures and guiding human behavior, can provide the metaphysical foundation necessary for an environmental ethic.⁷

Looking at the earliest revelations in the Qur'an, which were revealed during the Meccan period, we see that their main purpose is "to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and universe."⁸ The result will be, first, to change his overall worldview, then to construct his image of himself, and finally, his attitudes, feelings, sentiments and the patterns of his relationships with reality will begin to change accordingly. These important verses are a key to understanding the overall Qur'anic worldview. The great Muslim philosopher and Sufi, Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111 A.D.), for example, in evaluating the meaning of the Qur'anic verses, argues that the early suras are "the essence of the Qur'an, its heart, its pith, and its secret."⁹ For Ghazali, it is these verses that give us and show us the meaning of reality. They are about God and how we can understand and comprehend His existence and presence through the natural world. Therefore, Ghazali encourages us to make a serious effort to know the deep meaning hidden within the verses of the Qur'an.¹⁰

The Qur'an, with its emphasis on the metaphysical dimension of nature, replaced the pagan Arabs' conception of nature with a new and vivid understanding. It is surprising to see the striking similarity between the Arabs' view of nature as lifeless, meaningless and purposeless and the ideas put forward in the name of the so-called "scientific" worldview of modern times. Today, the Qur'an is as ready as ever to challenge the modern materialistic conception of nature and to provide a more comprehensive and holistic approach to developing an environmental ethical theory. The questions we face are as follows:

- Does nature have any objective and independent existence?
- What is the meaning of nature?
- What does nature stand for?

- How does the Qur'an look at nature as a whole?
- What is the place of human beings in the great chain of being?

It is my firm conviction that once the metaphysical foundation for an environmental ethic is discovered within the Qur'anic value system, it will not be difficult to develop an environmental ethic on this basis. Furthermore, understanding the metaphysical dimension of the Qur'anic message will give us the opportunity of understanding and appreciating the development of sensitive ideas and attitudes concerning environment in the course of Islamic history.

Nature from the Qur'anic Perspective

The Metaphysical Dimension of Nature

Nature from the Qur'anic perspective can be seen best in the first revelations to the prophet Muhammad which he received in the cave Hira on Mount Jabal al-Nur. We know that the first verse was a command from God: "Read! (or Recite!)" to which Muhammad immediately responded, "I do not know how." And the angel Gabriel, the bearer of revelation, insisted, "Read!" Then Gabriel repeated the command a third time, saying, "Read in the name of your Lord and Sustainer who created." (Qur'an 96:1)

The point is that Muhammad was not literate, and there was not yet a text in any form to be read, so what was the meaning of this first holy command "Read!?" One answer, I think, is that "reading" here means a completely new way of looking at the world. The key notion is that this reading should be in the name of our Sustainer. So, at the very beginning it is taught that God, as the Sustainer and Creator, gives existence and meaning to everything else. God, according to the Qur'an, is the real Creator, Owner and Sustainer of all reality. Hence, all reality should be seen and read with this point of view in mind. It may be pointed out that all books written by Muslims begin with the sentence, "In the name of God Most Gracious, Most Merciful," a phrase which is also repeated by Muslims throughout their daily lives as an indication of this Qur'anic outlook.

A careful examination of the early verses of the Qur'an reveals an invitation to examine and investigate the heavens and the earth, and everything that can be seen in the environment: birds, sheep, clouds, seas, grapes, dates, olives, flies, the moon, the sun, fish, camels, bees, mountains, rain, wind--in short, all natural phenomena. In its oft-repeated insistence on the investigation of nature, the Qur'an was aiming at developing an active and dynamic individual. The basic characteristic of such an individual, as far as we can understand from these verses, is that his mind is open to new events and he is aware of what is occurring around him in the heavens and on the earth. He also seeks to understand these things from a Qur'anic perspective. He will then reach the conclusion: "Our Lord! You have created (all) this not for nothing! Glory to You!" (Qur'an 3:191) This is one of the basic conclusions that the Qur'an enjoins and helps us to reach: the quest for meaning.

On many occasions the Qur'an emphasizes and re-emphasizes the ultimate principle that lies beyond nature, why nature exists and what it means. What the Qur'an is trying to explain is simple and clear: nature is not there just by accident, as a result of the process of evolution or chaotic configurations without meaning or purpose; it has order and meaning. Therefore, if man ponders and scrutinizes the very structure of natural phenomena, he can deduce the existence of a Creator who is All-Powerful, All-Knowing, and All-Merciful.

The Qur'an challenged the polytheism of the pagan Arabs, by referring to nature as an assembly of orderly, meaningful and purposive phenomena and inviting them to study its order carefully so that they could deduce from it the existence of God, who reveals and manifests his power and mercy through the universe. According to the Qur'an, nature, "having a firm and well-knit structure with no gaps, no ruptures, and no dislocations is one of the grand handiworks of the Almighty."¹¹ Like a mirror,¹² it reflects the power, beauty, wisdom and mercy of its Creator. This is explained by Said Nursi, a contemporary Muslim scholar,¹³ with the following words:

The world is also a collection of mirrors which continuously pass on one after the other; so know the One Who is manifest in them, see His light, understand the manifestations of the Names which appear in them, and love the One they signify.¹⁴

Again, the overall aim of the Qur'an comes to the fore through its insistence on the natural order, as was pointed out by one of the great students of the Qur'an in these words: "no doubt, the immediate purpose of the Qur'an in this reflective observation of nature is to awaken in man the consciousness of that which nature is regarded a symbol," and then "to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and universe."¹⁵

Another implicit result of this attitude and the Qur'an's insistence on the order in nature is that both the author of the Qur'an and the creator of nature--which is regarded in the Islamic tradition also as a Book--are the same: God. This can be seen from the following verse:

He who created the seven heavens one above another; no want of proportion will you see in the Creation of (God) Most Gracious. So turn your vision again: do you see any flaw? Again turn your vision a second time: (your) vision will come back to you dull and discomfited, in a state worn out. (Qur'an 67: 3-4)

Nature has been regarded as "the prime miracle of God, cited untiringly in the Qur'an, due to its well-knit structure and regularity."¹⁶ The Qur'an's insistence on the order, beauty and harmony of nature implies that there is no demarcation between what the Qur'an reveals and what nature manifests. We can see this at once if we reflect in the way that the Qur'an invites us to, by using our intellect and freeing ourselves from the boundaries and limitations of culture and tradition, looking at everything with an observant eye in the name of God.¹⁷

One reason for the abundance of such verses in the early chapters of the Qur'an may have been to abolish the previous pagan outlook and to

provide a fresh perspective and viewpoint, which was also explained by the previous scriptures but forgotten in course of time. Another example is the following verse, which again points to the order of nature and the maker of this order:

You see the mountains and think them firmly fixed: but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away: (such is) the artistry of God, who disposes of all things in perfect order: for He is well-acquainted with all that you do. (Qur'an 27: 88)

The Qur'an employs the perfect order of the universe not only as the proof of God's existence but also of His unity, which is known as the "cosmological evidence of God's existence" in the philosophy of Islamic theology (*kalam*).¹⁸ God is the very meaning of reality; a meaning manifested, and clarified, and brought home by the universe, developed further by man. God is the dimension that makes other dimensions possible: He gives meaning and life to everything. For example, the Qur'an sees in the humble bee a recipient of divine inspiration, and constantly calls upon the reader to observe the perpetual change of the winds, the alternation of day and night, the clouds, the starry heavens, and the planets swimming through infinite space.¹⁹

It is not difficult to grasp that the Qur'an is emphasizing nature in order to prove the existence of God and His majesty on the one hand, and on the other, the fact that it requests us to read and understand both of these attributes in their exact context. The Qur'an invited the pagan Arabs, who were illiterate, to ponder nature and the universe for at least two purposes: firstly, to have an idea about God's existence and His presence through whatever He creates; and secondly, to have a moral feeling of obligation towards a transcendental being, God. Parvez Manzoor's remarks support this argument: "Nature and ethics are, as a matter of fact, at the very core of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*. To infuse the natural world with transcendent (revealed) ethics is the main purpose of man according to the Qur'an."²⁰

When the meaning and language of the early verses are examined in this way, it is not difficult to grasp their basic idea. The Qur'an underlines the moral dimension very clearly: "Not without purpose did We create heaven and earth and all between! That were the thought of Unbelievers!..." (Qur'an 38: 27) The Qur'an rejects the argument that nature is meaningless and purposeless, as well as the resulting conclusion that human life also is meaningless and purposeless. To the contrary, if there is meaning and purpose in nature, then there must be meaning and purpose in human life, too. The basic point seems to be that there is a relationship between the purposefulness and meaningfulness of natural world and of man's conduct in life.²¹

An argument can be made, then, that the metaphysical and moral dimension of the Qur'an comes first and precedes other dimensions. The Qur'an's frequent statements about the meaningful and orderly aspects of nature and natural phenomena are there to point out that these things reflect the unlimited power and majesty of God, and that man should accept this as a metaphysical reality and by submitting and surrendering to it, be grateful to Him.²² The opposite argument is that if God does not exist and everything is

absurd, existing by accident, then in the words of Albert Camus, who not only summarized his thought as follows but also provided the general outline for a philosophy of absurdity: "all is allowed since God does not exist and man dies."²³

Another conclusion of the Qur'anic perspective, which is also important for environmental ethics, is that God does not create as "frivolity, pastime, or sport, without a serious purpose. It is incompatible with the power of the Powerful and the mercy of the Merciful that He should produce toys for amusement or as sheer whim—a blind Fate can do this but God cannot."²⁴ To support this conclusion the following verses are sufficient:

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day there are indeed Signs for men of understanding.

Men who celebrate the praises of God standing sitting and lying down on their sides and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth (with the thought): "Our Lord! You have created (all) this not for nothing!" (Qur'an 3:190-191)

Not for (idle) sport did We create the heavens and the earth and all that is between! If it had been Our wish to take (just) a pastime We should surely have taken it from the things nearest to Us if We would do (such a thing)! (Qur'an 21:16-17)

Did you then think that We had created you in jest and that you would not be brought back to Us (for account)? (Qur'an 23:115)

One immediate conclusion, from an environmentalist perspective, is that every individual creature or being has its own ontological existence as a sign of God, and by its very being manifests and reveals His majesty and mercy. Therefore, every creature deserves attention and consideration for its relation to the divine. A sincere follower of the Qur'an is always aware of the fact that "Our Lord is He who gave to each (created) thing its form and nature and further gave (it) guidance." (Qur'an 20:50) Still another example is this:

Then let man look at his food, (and how We provide it):

For that We pour forth water in abundance.

And We split the earth into fragments.

And We produce therein corn.

And grapes and nutritious plants.

And olives and dates,

And enclosed gardens, dense with lofty trees,

And fruits and fodder,

For use and convenience to you and your cattle. (Qur'an 80: 24-32)

By mentioning miracles of divine power in a purposeful sequence, these verses bind causes to effects and point to a conclusive aim with the words, "For use and convenience to you..." Nursi comments on this point as follows:

This aim proves that within the sequence of all the causes and effects is a hidden disposer who sees and follows the aim, and that the causes are a veil to him. Indeed, with the phrase, "For use and convenience to you and your cattle," it dismisses all the causes from the ability to create. It is in effect saying: "Rain comes from the sky in order to produce food for you and your animals. Since water does not possess the ability to pity and feel compassion for you and produce food, it means that the rain does not come, [by itself but] it is sent. And the earth produces plants and your food comes from there. But lacking feelings and intelligence, it is far beyond the ability of the earth to think of your sustenance and feel compassion for you, so it does not produce it itself. Furthermore, since it is remote from plants and trees to consider your food and compassionately produce fruits and grains for you, the verse demonstrates that they are strings and ropes which One All-Wise and Compassionate extends from behind the veil, to which He attaches His bounties and holds out to animate creatures. And so from this explanation numerous Divine Names [a]rise, like All-Compassionate, Provider, Bestower, and All-Generous.²⁵

A further conclusion is that, as God reveals and manifests Himself through His creation, it gives man the impression that God is within him. If God reveals Himself--that is, His majesty, mercy and all other sacred beautiful names and attributes through the esthetic dimension of nature as well as its orderly structure--then it is not difficult to get the idea that wherever man looks he can easily feel the presence of God all around and within himself.

To God belong the East and the West; whithersoever you turn there is the presence of God. For God is All-Pervading All-Knowing. (Qur'an 2: 115)

Seeing God everywhere and being fully aware of the divine environment which surrounds and permeates both the world of nature and the ambience of humanity,²⁶ strengthens man's moral dimension and motivates him to act accordingly. It is in this sense that Fazlur Rahman considers the Qur'an as "a document that primarily exhorts [man] to virtue and a strong sense of moral responsibility."²⁷

Another point that we should consider in this context is that God is absolute and infinite, whereas every creature is finite. Modern man has reached this understanding thanks to recent developments in the field of ecology.²⁸ To quote Rahman:

... what the Qur'an means when it says that everything except God is "measured out" (*qadar* or *qadr*, *taqdir*, etc.), and hence dependent upon God... When God creates anything, He places within it its powers or laws of behavior, called in the Qur'an "guidance," "command," or "measure" whereby it fits into the rest of the universe.²⁹

The following verses underline the same point and once more emphasize the importance of balance in the Qur'anic discourse:

The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed.

And the herbs and the trees-both (alike) bow in adoration.

And the Firmament has He raised high and He has set up the balance (of Justice)

In order that you may not transgress (due) balance

So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. (Qur'an 55:5-9)

The key term here is *balance*, which is repeated three times. To quote Yusuf Ali's comments on these verses will suffice for our purpose here. For the first part, that is universal level, he says that:

The "balance of justice" in this verse is connected with "the balance" in the next two verses, that men may act justly to each other and observe due balance in all their actions, following the golden mean and not transgressing due bounds. But the Balance is also connected figuratively with the heavens above in three symbols (1) Justice is a heavenly virtue; (2) the heavens themselves are sustained by mathematical balance; and (3) the constellation Libra (the Balance) is entered by sun at the middle of zodiacal year. For the second parts he argues that: A man should be honest and straight in every daily matter, such as weighting out things he is selling: and he should be straight, just and honest, in all the highest dealing, not only with other people, but with himself and in his obedience to God's Law.³⁰

It is evident from the above discussion that justice and balance are a universal law [of God], and that (as a result) man should conduct a just and balanced life. It might reasonably be argued that these verses alone would be enough for developing an environmental ethic from the Qur'an itself. For they establish firstly that justice and balance are universal, secondly that this universal balance is created by God, and thirdly that man must both attempt to comprehend this universal balance and to follow it in his social life as well as in his interaction with the environment. So it can be concluded by any sincere follower of the Qur'an--be he a philosopher, a scientist, an economist, an engineer, a technocrat, a statesman, or an ordinary human being--that he or she must respect and preserve this balance in his or her relations with nature.

The Qur'an's insistence on the absolute and infinite character of God on the one hand, and finitude of everything other than God on the other, is very significant in terms of current discussions about economics and development.

Any economical and developmental theory that claims to be Islamic should presuppose this fact at the very beginning.³¹

In this connection, it might be important just to remember a prophetic attitude which reflects the Qur'anic spirit very clearly and powerfully. Muhammad attached great importance to the moderate use of water,³² and forbade the excessive use of it even when taking the ablutions, saying that to do so was "detestable" (*makruh*). He prevented people from using too much water even for something like ablutions when preparing to enter the divine presence for prayer. The following *hadith* tells the story:

"God's Messenger appeared while Sa'ad was taking the ablutions. When he saw that Sa'ad was using a lot of water, he intervened saying:

"What is this? You are wasting water."

Sa'd replied asking: "Can there be wastefulness while taking the ablutions?" To which God's Messenger replied:

"Yes, even if you take them on the bank of a rushing river."³³

While reflecting on this hadith and the attitude of the Prophet, I think that it refers not only to using less water while taking the ablutions, but also to a basic and ultimate principle which is to be followed by Muslims. The following points should be emphasized in connection with it:

- God's Messenger is stating an important prohibition.
- The prohibition concerns something for which no effort was exerted in obtaining it, nor money spent, but is free: the water of a flowing river.
- Moreover, the excessive use of water causes no deficiency to nature, nor does it cause pollution, nor spoil the ecological balance.
- It causes no harm to living beings.
- Furthermore, the matter in question, that is, taking the ablutions, is not some trivial matter; it is a necessary condition for the obligatory prayers.

If then, despite all the above, it is "detestable" to use excessive water from a river while taking the ablutions and it was prohibited by the Prophet, how much stronger is the proscription on being wasteful and extravagant in some matters in which the above statements are not applicable? That is, if wastefulness

- is in something that requires the expending of effort, expense, or at least time;
- if it causes deficiency to or pollution of nature, thus spoiling the ecological balance;
- if it harms living beings;
- if it violates the rights of forthcoming generations to live in a healthy environment;
- if it is arbitrary and meaningless, and merely for enjoyment, that, is for the satisfaction of destructive side of man;³⁴

- if it is contrary to the basic aim; then how much greater would be the degree of prohibition!

The Qur'an and the *sunna*, stipulating that water is the basic need of life, place a number of obligations and responsibilities upon Muslims: the conservation of existing water supplies in the best possible way, the prevention of any activity that might lead to the pollution of water resources or spoil the purity and characteristics of the water, and never adopting an extravagant or irresponsible attitude in the consumption of water.

This example, not to mention other related ones, illustrates very clearly that the Qur'anic emphasis that there is nothing useless in the balance of nature is exemplified in the life of Prophet himself. As we are told by A'isha, the beloved wife of the Prophet, his personality and personal conduct was that of the Qur'an. Therefore, his attitudes toward nature may be regarded as concrete examples of the Qur'anic spirit.

The forgoing discussion makes clear that we should and cannot live merely as we wish--which would be a meaningless and purposeless life--but rather that we can and should lead a purposeful and meaningful life, that is, live as Muslims, who surrender themselves to the law of God. This law is evident in nature and in the Qur'an. Izzetbegovic rightly underlines the fact that "a Muslim, due to the balance of physical and moral requirements, will be in better harmony with his surroundings than any other type of man,"³⁵ presupposing that he lives according to the Qur'anic principles.³⁶ The Qur'an goes further, and calls all nature *muslim* ("submissive"). The only difference between nature and man is that nature is *muslim* without free will, implying that only man can be Muslim by his own free choice.

Nature as Muslim

The very idea that nature is created by God and is an indication and sign of His existence leads to the Qur'anic idea just mentioned, that all nature is *muslim*.³⁷ For, as discussed above, the whole of nature works according to divine laws--the so-called "natural laws"--and according to the way God designed and created it. The Qur'an therefore applies the term *islam* ("submission") to the entire universe insofar as it (ineluctably) obeys God's law. Working according to God's laws, nature submits itself to God's will.³⁸ As a result of its position, nature does not and cannot disobey God's commands and cannot violate natural laws, as explained in the following verses:

Don't you see that to God bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth the sun the moon the stars; the hills the trees the animals; and a great number among mankind? But a great number are (also) such as are fit for Punishment: and such as God shall disgrace none can rise to honor: for God carries out all that He wills. (Qur'an 22:18)

The seven heavens and the earth and all beings therein declare His glory: there not a thing but celebrates His praise; and yet you don't

understand how they declare His glory! Verily He is Oft- Forbearing Most Forgiving! (Qur'an 17:44)

Nay, thunder repeats His praises, and so do the angels with awe: He flings the loud-voiced thunder-bolts and therewith He strikes whomsoever He will...Yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about God with the strength of His power (supreme)! (Qur'an 13:13)

Don't you see that it is God Whose praises all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise. And God knows well all that they do. (Qur'an 24:41-42)

Since every thing in the universe behaves in accordance with laws enacted by God, the whole universe is therefore *muslim*, surrendering to the will of God. "Do they seek for other than the religion of God? While all creatures in the heavens and on earth have willingly or unwillingly bowed to His will (i.e., accepted Islam) and to Him shall they all be brought back." (Qur'an 3: 83) As the Qur'an emphasizes, man is the only exception to this universal law, for he is the only being endowed with the free choice of obeying or disobeying the command of God. The only difference is that while every other creature follows its nature automatically, man *ought* to follow his nature; this transformation of the *is* into *ought* is both the unique privilege and unique risk of man.³⁹

Another important point related to nature as being *muslim* is that the Islamic way of prayer is a synthesis of the methods of prayer of all the beings in the universe. Muhammad Hamidullah relates that one day as he was reciting verse 22:18, he began to think of the significance of the acts of Islamic prayers with regard to the prayer of nature as a whole:

The universe consists of three kingdoms, minerals, animals, and vegetables. Their particularities are respectively resting, erect, and motionless, remaining perpetually bent, and resting perpetually prostrate. I mean to say that since the roots constitute the mouths for the plants, they are perpetually posed on the ground. A Muslim purifies himself/herself like water, praises God aloud like thunder, remains erect like hills, bends himself like animals, and prostrates like plants. Service means obeying to the orders of the Lord. God has ordered mountains to rest immobile and (to Muslim the Qur'an 2:238 says) "and stand before God devoutly"; to animals to remain perpetually bent and (to Muslim the Qur'an 2:43 commands) "and to trees to remain prostrate and (to Muslim the Qur'an 53:62 orders) "But you fall down in prostration to God and adore (Him)!"⁴⁰

Thus, with his daily prayers, the Muslim is firstly participating in the call of all creation on the one hand, and realizing the integration of his self with all reality on the other. Then, he looks upon all creation as his brethren before God.⁴¹ The Qur'an aims at the realization of an integrated and holistic selfhood.

Still another important point is that “there not a thing but celebrates His praise; and yet you don’t understand how they declare His glory!” (Qur’an 17: 44) This has led many Muslim thinkers to consider nature as a whole as a living being. For example, al-Ghazali, when commenting on this and similar verses, regards it as the language of creation:

...you suppose that in the universe there is only the language of statement. This is why you did not understand the meaning of the words of God (may He be exalted!) “There is not a thing but celebrates His praise.” Nor do you understand the meaning of the words of God (may He be exalted!) “They [the heavens and the earth] submitted [to You] willingly (41:11),” unless you suppose that the earth has a language and life.⁴²

Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, the great Sufi master and thinker of the thirteenth century, makes similar observations on the same subject, and offers a warning:

Since God hath made Man from dust, it behooves thee to recognize the real nature of every particle of the universe,
That while from this aspect they are dead, from that aspect they are living: silent here, but speaking Yonder.
When He sends them down to our world, the rod of Moses becomes a dragon in regard to us;
The mountains sing with David, iron becomes as wax in his hand;
The wind becomes a carrier for Solomon, the sea understands what God said to Moses concerning it.
The moon obeys the sign given by Muhammad, the fire (of Nimrod) becomes a garden of roses for Abraham.
They all cry, “we are hearing and seeing and responsive, though to you, the uninitiated, we are mute.”
Ascend from materially into the world of spirit, hearken to loud voice of the universe,
Then thou wilt know that God is glorified by all inanimate things: the doubts raised by false interpreters will not beguile thee.⁴³

Said Nursi also reflects on this Qur’anic perspective as follows: “the All-Wise Qur’an speaks of the universe in order to make known the Divine Essence, attributes and, Names. That is, it explains the meaning of the Book of the Universe to make known its Creator. That means it looks at beings, not for themselves, but for their Creator.”⁴⁴ And Nursi provides many examples for his claim. The following will suffice to understand his reasoning, which also reflects the Qur’anic spirit:

Now consider the springs, the streams, and the rivers! Their welling-up out of the ground and out of mountains is not by chance. For it is demonstrated by the testimony of their benefits and fruits, the works of Divine Mercy, and by the statement of their being stored up in mountains with the balance of wisdom in proportion to need, that they are subjugated and stored up by an All-Wise Sustainer, and that their flowing forth is their conforming exuberantly to His command.

Now consider all the varieties of stones and jewels and minerals in the earth! Their decorations and beneficial properties, the wise benefits connected to them, and their being prepared in a manner appropriate to human and animal needs and vital necessities all show that they are made in that way through the decoration, arrangement, planning, and forming of an All-Wise Maker.

Now consider the flowers and fruits! Their smiles tastes, beauties, embroideries, and scents are each like an invitation to and menu for the table of a Most Munificent Maker, an All-Compassionate Bestower of Bounties; they are given as various menus and invitations to each species of beings through their different colors, scents, and tastes.⁴⁵

In the forgoing discussion, as we have seen, a different view of nature—which is unique to the Qur'an—emerges. The Muslim lives in a world that is alive, meaningful, purposeful, and more importantly, *muslim* like himself, even prostrating itself before God. The immediate result is the discovery of the wholeness of all creation and integration with it, physically and spiritually. When a devout Muslim looks at his environment, everything seems to be somehow familiar and friendly. Moreover, everything is a symbol and a sign, pointing to an all-wise and all-merciful creator.

Nature as Signs of God

When the Qur'an invites people to believe in God, it bases its claim on some arguments. It does not invite people to believe in a God who is incomprehensible. The Qur'an begins its invitation by inviting people to ponder over their environment. The universe and everything in it, the Qur'an claims, are signs (*ayat*) pointing to something "beyond" themselves, that is, something without which the universe, despite all its natural causes, would be nothing. Therefore the Qur'an invites man with the following and other similar verses to read the universe as signs of God:

We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within their own souls, until it is clear to them that He is the Real. (Qur'an 41:53)

On the earth are Signs for those of assured Faith,

As also in your own selves: will you not then see? (Qur'an 51:20-21)

So, a sign—the word is repeated in singular or plural form two hundred eighty-eight times in the Qur'an—is "any phenomenon that gives news of God. It may be a prophet, a prophetic message, a prophetic miracle, or

simply the things of the natural world...In short everything in the universe is a sign of God."⁴⁶ Rahman also underlines this point when dealing with the concept of nature from a Qur'anic perspective: "Nature with its incomprehensible vastness and regularity should serve as God's sign for humans, since none but an infinite and unique Being could have created it. This may be called a 'natural sign.'"⁴⁷ And thus, "this gigantic machine, the universe, with all its causal processes, is the prime 'sign' (*aya*) or proof of its Maker."⁴⁸

When the pagan people of the time, demanded proofs, "signs" or miracles for the existence of God, the Qur'an's usual response is to point out to the complexity, the regularity, and the order in nature, and to emphasize that the universe and all that is in it could not have come into existence by themselves. Within the Qur'anic discourse, nature is a living, holistic, orderly and perfect world, populated by angels, jinn, human beings and animals. Above all, the universe, with all its causal processes, is the prime sign and proof of its Maker.⁴⁹

It should be obvious that every masterpiece of art deserves not only our attention, appreciation, and admiration, but also our protection. We are quick to recognize that a masterpiece of painting deserves every sort of care and appreciation. Nature, likewise, which is full of signs of God and is furthermore a masterpiece of His creative effort, deserves our watchfulness, gratefulness, and respect. In addition, nature, consisting of signs of God, somehow possesses intrinsic value beyond what human beings attribute to it instrumentally. In this context, the following verses deserve our attention:

And verily in cattle [too] will you find an instructive Sign. For what is within their bodies, between excretions and blood, we produce, for your drink, milk, pure and agreeable to those who drink it. (Qur'an, 16:66)

Do they not look at the Camels how they are made?

And at the Sky how it is raised high?

And at the Mountains How they are fixed firm?

And at the Earth how it is spread out? (Qur'an, 88:17-20)

These verses invite man to think over the creation which surrounds him, which he can see in his everyday life, and which is full of meaning, high design, and the goodness of God to man.⁵⁰ In Nasr's words, nature is "the theatre wherein are manifested His signs."⁵¹ The overall influence of this understanding of nature as signs of God is very evident in the history of Islamic thought. Muslim thinkers regard nature as a sacred book, full of symbols and signs. For example, Nursi on the universe:

The cosmos [is] meaningful and well-ordered in that it took on the shape of a personified book of the Glorious One, an incarnate

Dominical Qur'an, a finely-adorned city of the Compassionate One. All *suras*, verses and words of that book, even its very letters, chapters, divisions, pages, and lines, through their constant meaningful effacement and reaffirmation, their wise changes and alternations, gave unanimous expression to the existence and presence of One Knowledgeable of all things and Empowered over all things as the author of the book, of a Glorious Inscraper and Prefect Scribe seeing all things in all things and knowing the relationship of all things with all things.⁵²

Nature might reasonably be considered as a well-ordered and well-bounded book, even it could be called "the book of the universe." This implies that just like the Qur'an, the universe reveals to us the existence of a Sustainer and Creator. As a result, it can be deduced that the book of the universe has been entrusted to us in order that we might preserve and protect it. Should those believers who hold the Qur'an in respect and awe--not touching it unless purified by ablutions--not also treat the book of the universe respectfully and lovingly? Our duty, therefore, as God's vicegerents and trustees on earth, is to show respect for the primal trust, and to preserve it carefully, and this means not wasting natural resources when making use of them. Sachiko Murata reaches a similar conclusion:

When the Koran commands people to see all things as God's signs, it is encouraging them to make use of a particular type of mental process that is not oriented toward objects, things, or data. On the contrary, the Koran tells us that we must perceive things not so much for what they are in themselves but for what they tell us of something beyond themselves.⁵³

Still another implication is the disappearance of any demarcation between man and nature as disconnected entities or objects. They are, as signs of God, interconnected with each other and interdependent; in environmentalist terms this implies a holistic, spiritual and balanced view of all reality.

The Case of Animals

Another important question related to the environment is the proper treatment of the animals, the protection which is due to them--or more correctly, extending and expressing our kindness and compassion to them. But, unfortunately, today many animal species are becoming extinct. Other animals stray abandoned and hungry in the streets of many parts of the world. On the whole, it cannot be said that we treat animals as well as we should, or carry out our responsibilities towards them. In my view, one of the most important causes for this is our unawareness of Qur'anic values, which regulate not only the believers' relations between man and man and between man and the environment, but also man's relations with other living species. A natural consequence of this is that man is answerable to God for his

attitude and actions towards nature and animals.⁵⁴ Hence, questions regarding animal rights and man's attitude towards animals, as well as the subject of species extinction, have been discussed extensively by environmentalists all over the globe and constitute some of the major problems that environmentalists have been trying to solve. The Qur'anic view of animals therefore deserves further consideration here.

The first point to be made about animals in the Qur'an, which may surprise the environmentally-sensitive reader, is the fact that numerous chapters of the sacred scripture bear the names of animals, for example, *al-Baqara* (The Cow); *al-Nahl* (The Bee), *al-Anqabut* (The Spider), and *al-Naml* (The Ant). Moreover, one of the striking expressions which the Qur'an uses in referring to animals is that they constitute a "community" (*umma*) just like us. It is especially noteworthy that this concept, which is a highly significant theme in Islamic tradition and literature, should also be used for animals:

There is not an animal [that lives] on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but [forms part of] communities like you. Nothing have We omitted from the Book, and they [all] shall be gathered to their Sustainer in the end. (Qur'an 6:38)

In addition, there exists a very close relationship between God, as Lord and Sustainer of all worlds, and animals. Our attention is drawn to the animal world once again with the following verse:

There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance depends on God: He knows the time and place of its temporary deposit: all is in a clear record. (Qur'an 11:6)

Furthermore, the Qur'an emphasizes that the natural world has not been created just for man's use. Even if man is the vicegerent of God on earth,⁵⁵ it does not necessarily mean that the whole of nature and its resources are designed for man's benefits only. This can be seen from the following verse:

And the earth has He spread out for all living beings, with fruit thereon, and palm trees with sheathed clusters [of dates], and grain growing tall on its stalks, and sweet-smelling plants.⁵⁶

Here, the meaning of *anam*, which signifies "all living beings," is very crucial for our study. From this verse it can be deduced that the bounties of the earth and all other resources are not solely for man's use, but for all creatures of God that live on the same earth.

The Qur'an also draws our attention to another aspect regarding animals: that is it is possible to communicate with them, although the extent

and nature of this communication is not defined. For example, in narrating the story of the prophet Solomon, the Qur'an informs us that he had been taught the language of birds by God:

And Solomon was David's heir. He said: "O you people! we have been taught the speech of birds and on us has been bestowed (a little) of all things: this is indeed grace manifest (from God)."

Before Solomon were marshaled his hosts--of *jinn* (genies) and men and birds--and they were all kept in order and rank.

At length when they came to a (lowly) valley of ants one of the ants said: "O you ants get into your habitations lest Solomon and his hosts crush you (under foot) without knowing it." (Qur'an 27:16-18)

The fact that according to the Qur'an Solomon could understand the languages of birds and ants implies at least two points. First, communication with animals is possible, though the extent of this not defined for the time being. Further, this may point to a transmission of meaning to other living beings.⁵⁷ Second, we must understand that animals are just like our fellow men, at least in some respects. Contrary to the prevailing modern views, there is no clear-cut distinction between humans and non-humans; they are both creatures of the same Creator. Nursi, when commenting on the miracles of prophets as mentioned in the Qur'an in connection with Solomon's comprehension of the birds' language, argues that the Qur'an encourages men to try to imitate the prophets' deeds and to attain the goals illustrated by these miracles.⁵⁸ The basic idea is that the Qur'an, in enumerating the prophets' miracles, is also hinting that human reason should develop and reach similar conclusions by means of scientific inquiries.

It is not difficult to see that animals are not mentioned here for their instrumental use as such, and that our relationship with them cannot be based only on the principle of utility. Of course, humanity will make use them and benefit from them, but this is not the only legitimate relationship we have with them. It is expected from us that we should see nature and all its inhabitants in a broad and more holistic perspective, appreciating its metaphysical, aesthetic and other aspects as well.⁵⁹

Man's Responsibility: Master or Vicegerent ?

By now the Qur'anic discourse about man and his position in the overall scheme of being and his legitimate relationship with them should be clear. Since the publication of Lynn White's provocative article,⁶⁰ many have held the Judeo-Christian tradition responsible for environmental degradation.⁶¹ Some critics have been trying to include Islam to the same category. Indeed, a piecemeal and oversimplified approach to some verses of the Qur'an would seem to support the Christian view as summarized by Keith Thomas, "giving the impression that everything on earth is created for sake of man and that man's authority over nature is unlimited. He is entitled to use it as he pleases, for profit or for pleasure. Vegetables obviously have no rights, for they are destitute of sense and therefore incapable of injury. Animals have no

rights either."⁶² The following Qur'anic verses, for example, could be construed to support such a position if taken out of the broader context:

It is He who has created for you all things that are on earth; (Qur'an 2:29)

It is He Who has made the earth manageable for you so you traverse through its tracts and enjoy of the Sustenance which He furnishes: but unto Him is the Resurrection. (Qur'an 67:15)⁶³

It is God Who has created the heavens and the earth and sends down rain from the skies and with it brings out fruits wherewith to feed you; it is He Who has made the ships subject to you that they may sail through the sea by His command; and the rivers (also) has He made subject to you.

And He has made subject to you the sun and the moon both diligently pursuing their courses: and the Night and the Day has He (also) made subject you.

And He gives you of all that you ask for. But if you count the favors of God never will you be able to number them: verily man is given up to injustice and ingratitude. (Qur'an 14: 32-34)⁶⁴

To be sure, human beings are at the top of the great chain of being, but they are not the owner of nature as such. In other words, the sole aim of nature is not only to serve human beings and their ends. When the Qur'an is taken and perceived as a whole--that is, in a comprehensive and integrated whole--this impression disappears immediately. When the history of Islam, especially the history of Qur'anic exegesis, is studied from such a perspective, it can be seen that Muslims deduced from the these and other similar verses that "although the various components of the natural environment serve humanity as one of their functions, this does not imply that human use is the sole reason for their creation."⁶⁵ Both classical and contemporary Muslim scholars have interesting views on this matter. For example, al-Biruni, one of the most learned Muslim scholars and compilers of the tenth century, argues that "man does not have a right to exploit the other kingdoms for his own desires, which are insatiable, but may use them only in conformity with the law of God and in His way."⁶⁶ Further, Ibn Taymiyya, commenting on the above verses of the Qur'an, underlines his point with these words:

In considering all these verses it must be remembered that God in His wisdom created these creatures for reasons other than serving man, because in these verses He explains only the benefits of these creatures [to man].⁶⁷

Said Nursi, on the other hand, draws a similar conclusion, arguing that "there are numerous purposes for the existence of everything, and numerous results flow from its being," and that "these are not restricted to this world and to the souls of men." On the contrary, the purposes for the existence of all things and their results relate to the following three categories:

The first and the most exalted pertain to the Creator. It consists of presenting to the gaze of the Pre-Eternal Witness the bejewelled and miraculous wonders He has affixed to the object in question...Thus the first purpose of all things is to proclaim, by means of their life and existence, the miracles of power and the traces of artistry of the Maker and display them to the gaze of the Glorious Monarch.

The second purpose of all existence and the result of all beings pertain to conscious creation. Everything is like a truth-displaying missive, an artistic poem, or a wise word of the Glorious Maker, offered to the gaze of angels and jinn, of men and animals, and desiring to be read by them. It is an object for the contemplation and instruction of every conscious being that looks upon it.

The third purpose of all existence and result of all being pertains to the soul of the thing itself, and consists of such minor consequences as the experience of pleasure and joy, and living with some degree of permanence and comfort.⁶⁸

It should be apparent that nature has been entrusted to us, as we are God's vicegerents on earth. We are not the lords of nature and the world, however; the world is not our property, at our disposal to be used haphazardly and irresponsibly. On the contrary, nature was created by God, and it belongs to Him. What is important in the Qur'anic context is that we are responsible and accountable for our actions here on earth. This means that we are answerable for all that we do, both the good and the evil. As God's vicegerents, at the Last Judgement we will be called to account for our actions in fulfilling this trust: "Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, And whoever does an atom's weight of evil, shall see it." (Qur'an, 99:7-8) And again: "So glory to Him in whose hands is the dominion of all things: And to Him will you be all brought back." (Qur'an 36:83) According to Yusuf Ali, the message conveyed in this verse is the core of revelation; it explains the hereafter. All things were created by God, are maintained by Him, and will go back to Him. But the point of special interest to man is that man will also be brought back to God and is answerable to Him, and to Him alone.⁶⁹

In short, although man has been given a special place and rank in the hierarchy of creation, and nature, with all its rich resources has been given and entrusted to him, he should not forget the fact that he is also a servant of God and that the ultimate end of his creation is to serve God. Hence, "man is invited to use the opportunity for good and not to corrupt the earth (*fasad fi'l-ard*)."⁷⁰

Conclusion

Our discussion of the Qur'anic view of the environment is based on the understanding that everything in the universe is created by God. It is God who adorns the skies with the sun, the moon and the stars, and the face of the earth with flowers, trees, gardens, orchards, and the various animal species. It is again God who causes the rivers and streams to flow on the earth, who upholds the skies (without support), causes the rain to fall, and places the boundary between night and day. The universe with all its richness and vitality is the work and art of God; that is, of the Creator. It is again God who creates all plants and animals as pairs, in this way causing their procreation. God created man subsequent to all these.

Therefore, this paper concludes that an environmental ethic is the logical outcome of a Qur'anic understanding of nature and man. The Qur'anic value system has the necessary elements for developing and constructing an environmental ethic. The Qur'an's emphasis on the sacred and metaphysical dimension of universe should lead to a change in the Muslim's overall image of nature and himself as well. This Qur'anic worldview is first observed and exemplified in life of the prophet Muhammad, since his life is regarded by Muslims as the living Qur'an and has had a powerful exemplary effect on Muslims throughout the ages. Being imbued with the Prophet's attitude, Muslims have looked on nature compassionately and with tolerance. Today, all these principles are awaiting rediscovery and analysis, so that a Qur'anic environmental ethic appropriate to meeting the present crisis can be worked out.

The following principles, which are necessary for any environmental ethic, can be elicited and deduced from the Qur'an:

- The natural world has an ontological and objective existence as has been created by God and which reflects His Divine Names and Attributes.
- Nature as a whole, being created and sustained by God, has intrinsic and inherent value, independent of its usefulness for human beings.
- Human beings, though being at the top of creation, are only members of the community of nature. They have responsibilities towards the whole environment, just as they have responsibilities towards their families.
- Human beings are the vicegerents of God on earth, and therefore they will be judged in the hereafter for their actions here. They would be held accountable also for their actions related with the environment.
- Biodiversity and the richness of the ecosystem is a result of God's creation and His Will, therefore it should be respected and maintained.
- Nature has been created in order, balance and with extraordinary esthetic beauty, and all these aspects of nature while enhancing man's life here, should be honored, developed and protected accordingly.
- All patterns of man's production and consumption should be based on an overall order and balance of nature. The rights of man are not absolute and unlimited. We cannot consume and pollute nature as we wish, carelessly.

- To prevent the appearance and emergence of corruption in ecosystems, to prevent corruption on earth (*fasad f'il-ard*) is one of the primary responsibilities of all believers.

The Qur'an changed the hearts and minds of its hearers when it dawned on the Arabian Peninsula, enriching man and providing a vivid lens through which he could look at nature. Today, at the dawn of the twenty-first century and in a time of world-wide environmental crisis, it again can play such a role and give us, who believe in its truth, a fresh perspective and consciousness of nature--if we are ready to open our hearts and minds to its teaching. The relationship that the Qur'an enjoins between humans and non-humans is stated very eloquently and succinctly by Yunus Emre, a Sufi poet of the thirteenth century: "We love all creation for the sake of its Creator"!

Notes

¹ For a philosophical account of this position see, for example, Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1946).

² See Eugene P. Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co., 1971), 3.

³ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 22.

⁴ Locke's theory of primary and secondary qualities is best summarized by A.N. Whitehead, who realized the full implications of this theory, as follows: "The primary qualities are the essential qualities of substances whose spatio-temporal relationships constitute nature. The orderliness of these relationships constitutes the order of nature... But the mind in apprehending also experiences sensations which, properly speaking, are qualities of the mind alone. These sensations are projected by the mind so as to clothe appropriate bodies in external nature. Thus the bodies are perceived as with qualities which in reality do not belong to them, qualities which in fact are purely the offspring of the mind. Thus nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent: the nightingale for his song: and the sun for his radiance. The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellency of the human mind." See A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1926), 79-80 (italics added). For a recent exposition and critique of the theory of qualities, see David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 16-17.

⁵ According this understanding, "extra human nature, is indifferent to itself and also to human beings who are cast adrift in it. We may matter to ourselves, but there is no larger scheme of mattering to which we belong. Though human beings may be subjects who posit ends and act in light of purposes, nonhuman organisms are mere objects: matter in motion. And eventually humans, as part of nature, become objects of their own fabrications to be shaped according to

the designs of biotechnology. If nature presents us with no ethical norms, then no effort to change our own nature in the name of perfection, convenience, of experimentation could count as a transgression of essential limits or a violation of a natural standard of goodness." Lawrence Vogel, "Does Environmental Ethics Need A Metaphysical Grounding?" *The Hastings Center Report* 25 (1995), 30-9.

⁶ Nasr argues that the Islamic world is not totally Islamic today, and much that is Islamic lies hidden behind the cover of Western cultural, scientific, and technological ideas and practices emulated and aped to various degrees of perfection, or rather one should say of imperfection, by Muslims during the past century and a half. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis," in *Spirit and Nature*, ed. Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 87.

⁷ For our present purpose, I take George Lindbeck's definition of religion, which is in essence a sociolinguistic perspective. Lindbeck argues that "A religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought...It is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments." Quoted in Max Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 28.

⁸ Sir Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: The Ashraf Press, 1958), 8-9.

⁹ Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid, *The Jewels of the Qur'an*, trans. M. Abul Quasem (London: Kegan Paul, 1983), 25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-20. According to him, "the Qur'an is like an ocean. As at the bottom of the ocean, pearls remain hidden, so also are hidden the wonderful meanings behind the Qur'anic verses." Al-Ghazali therefore argues that it is the duty of a Muslim to understand these meanings.

¹¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 3, 79.

¹² The mirror is used in Sufi literature as a symbol that reflects what is not part of something's own essence. For example, al-Ghazali explains this point very clearly, while keeping in mind the verse "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth," (Qur'an 24:35): "...the seeker and the Sought are comparable to a picture present in a mirror: The picture is not revealed in it because of rust on its surface; when, however, you polish the mirror the picture is revealed in it, neither by the movement of the picture towards it nor by its movement towards the picture, but by removal of the veil. God (may He be exalted!) is revealed by His essence and not concealed, for concealment of light is impossible, and by light everything which is concealed becomes obvious, and God is the light of the heavens and the earth." See *Jewels of the Qur'an*, 26-27. See also Perviz Morewedge, "Mystical Icons in Rumi's Metaphysical Poetry: Light, the Mediator and the Way," in *Essays in Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Mysticism* (Oneonta, NY: The State University of New York, 1995), 193.

¹³ See, Sükran Vahide, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sozler, 1995); Serif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change In Modern Turkey, The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (New York, 1989); Hamid Algar, "Said Nursi and the Risala-i Nur: An Aspect of Islam in Contemporary Turkey," in K. Ahmad and Z. Ishaq Ansary, eds., *Islamic Perspectives* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1979), 313-333.

¹⁴ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words*, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1992), 221.

¹⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: The Ashraf Press, 1958), 8-9.

¹⁶ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 68.

¹⁷ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 14 (italics mine). Nasr, when pointing out the same fact that "Nature is a book which is the macrocosmic counterpart of the Qur'an itself and which must be read and understood before it can be put away," gives us the following example of Aziz al-Nasafi, a fifteenth-century Sufi, who compares nature to the Qur'an in such a way that a genus in nature corresponds to a *surah*, each species to a verse, and each particular being to a letter. Concerning this book of nature al-Nasafi writes: "Each day destiny and the passage of time set

this book before you, *sura* for *sura*, verse for verse, letter for letter, that you may learn the content of these lines and letters..." See S. Hossein Nasr, *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (London, 1978), 2. See also Nasr, *Man and Nature* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1997[1967]) and *Religion and The Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ See Qur'an 21:22; 27:60-64; also Harvey Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of The Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

¹⁹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, pp. 3-4.

²⁰ S. Parvez Manzoor, "Environment and Values: the Islamic Perspective," in *The Touch of Midas: Science, values and environment in Islam and the West*, ed. Ziauddin Sardar (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 154. M. Iqbal also remarks the differences between two faiths with the following words: "The great point in Christianity is the search for an independent content for spiritual life which, according to the insight of its founder, could be elevated, not by the forces of a world external to the soul of man, but by the revelation of a new world within the soul. Islam fully agrees with this insight and supplements it by the further insight that *the illumination of the new world thus revealed is not something foreign to the world of matter but permeates it though and through.*" See Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 9 (italics mine).

²¹ Hans Jonas, when dealing with some conclusions of Heideggerian existentialism, underlines this point as follows: "That nature does not care, one way or another, is the true abyss. That only man cares, in his finitude facing nothing but death, alone with his contingency and the objective meaninglessness of his projecting meanings, is a truly unprecedented situation...And the product of the indifferent, his being, too, must be indifferent. Then, the facing of his mortality would simply warrant the reaction: Let us eat and drink. For tomorrow we must die. There is no point in caring for what has sanction behind it in any creative intention." Quoted in Lawrence Vogel, "Does Environmental Ethics Need A Metaphysical Grounding?"

²² Isma'il R. Faruqi also points out this aspect of the Qur'an as "the *raison d'être* or 'ground of being' of man and cosmos," and "that man may do the good works that is the reason and purpose of the creation of man, of all creation." See "On the Raison d'être of The Ummah," *Islamic Studies* 2/2 (1963), 159.

²³ David Ray Griffin also emphasizes this point very eloquently when criticizing the ideas that lie at the heart of modernity. He argues that the meaninglessness and absurdity of the universe was a peculiar characteristic of existential philosophy, and asks this crucial question: if the universe, as the leading philosophers of existential thought, such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and even Franz Kafka, has no sense of importance, and moreover everything in it is absurd, then "how could sensitive human beings make a go of human life in this context?" That is, a universe in which there is "no natural law, no divine purpose, no objective importance, no hierarchy of values is inherent in nature of things, to which we should concern." As a result of this understanding, Griffin concludes, "many people have not made a go of it, becoming alcoholics, drug addicts, war addicts, mental patients, or suicides." See *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 17.

²⁴ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 7-8.

²⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 435-436.

²⁶ Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis," 92. Especially see W. Chittick, "God Surrounds All Things: An Islamic Perspective on the Environment," *The World and I* 1/6, (1986): 671-678.

²⁷ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 46. In fact, this transformative character of the Qur'an exists in other religions as well. Iqbal, while emphasizing this aspect of religion, argues that "the transformation and guidance of man's inner and outer life is the essential aim of religion." To support this point, he quotes Whitehead as saying that religion is "a system of general truths which have effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended." See Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 2.

²⁸ As we know, "the materialistic as well as the anthropocentric understanding of nature, which regards nature as an unchangeable, indubitable and abundant machine, has been

changed for more than two decades. Now, as a result, *a new perception of nature and a new way of looking at nature begin to emerge from the recent discussion of the nature of man-nature relationship*. For example, the fact that the supply of coal and copper, oil and tin, and the other resources on or in the earth are limited has shown the dominant belief in linear and limitless progress to be inaccurate. We have recognized that it is impossible to continue progress with the speed and in the manner we have been pursuing for not more than two centuries. The idea of a sustainable development is a result of this thought, and it is based upon an understanding of the limits of natural resources as well as of human dependency on this world." See my, *The Ethical Dimension of Human Attitude[s] Towards Nature* (Ankara: Ministry of Environment, 1997), 95. Also, Garrett Hardin argues that "progress was born in 1795 with the publication of the Marquis de Condorcet's *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*. It died on the Wednesday, March 24, 1970 when the United States Senate, treading closely on the heels of House, denied any funds for the SST (supersonic transport plane) by a vote of fifty-one to forty-six." (*Exploring New Ethics for Survival* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 141).

²⁹ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 67. Cf. Qur'an 54:49: "Verily We have created all things in proportion and measure"; also 15:21 and 20:50.

³⁰ See Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Holy Qur'an* (Maryland: Amana Corp., 1983), 1472-73, ff. 5177-5178.

³¹ Mohammad I. Ansari argues that "development is a value-laden issue and is now being recognized more than ever before" and quotes these words from Denis Goulet: "Development is above all a question of values. It involves human attitudes and preferences, self-defined goals, and criteria for determining what are tolerable costs to be borne in the course of change. These are far more important than better resource allocation, upgraded skills, or the rationalization of administrative procedures" ("Islamic Perspective of Sustainable Development," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 11/3 (1994): 394-401).

³² As we know, the Qur'an regards water as the source of life and gives great importance to water as an essential and primary element of the ecosystem. With this emphasis it also draws our attention towards water: "And God has created every animal from water: of them there are some that creep on their bellies; some that walk on two legs; and some that walk on four. God creates what He wills: for verily God has power over all things." Qur'an 24:45; see also 25:54.

³³ *Musnad*, ii, 22; *Ibn Maja*, "Tahara," 48, No: 425; i, 147.

³⁴ It might reasonably be argued that there are very good reasons for Islam prohibiting wastefulness and prodigality so forcefully. We may put it this way: there are over six billion people living in the world today. Just think of each individual person cutting down a tree or killing an animal just for the fun of it. Six billion trees or animals would perish. Or think of the water they would waste, or the bread or other foodstuffs they would throw away. The serious consequences of those apparently insignificant actions are clear. Moreover, for the greater part it is not possible to reclaim the resources we have polluted, destroyed, or annihilated. It is in this light that we may understand how meaningful was the point God's Messenger was emphasizing when he said: "Even if you take the ablutions in a flowing river, do not waste the water," and how important it is for the preservation of the ecological balance.

³⁵ Alija Ali Izzetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West* (Ankara, 1994), 226.

³⁶ I consider having meaning in life to be crucial not only for a better attitude towards environment, but also for the well-being of man's own life. Goulet emphasizes this point as follows: "high indices of suicide in 'developed' countries have often blinded observers to the material sufficiency, or abundance, may be less essential--even for survival--than is the presence of meaning. In order to survive one must want to survive, but how can one want to survive unless life has a meaning? Accordingly, *having a meaningful existence may well be the most basic of human needs*." Denis Goulet, "Development Experts: The One-Eyed Giants," *World Development* 8 (1980): 481-89.

³⁷ The term *muslim* comes from the word *islam*, and the latter is derived from the root s.l.m., which means "to be safe"; "to be whole and integral," "not to be disintegrated." The basic

idea is that by accepting the law of God and "surrendering" to it, one avoids disintegration. See Fazlur Rahman, "Some Key Ethical Concepts of the Qur'an," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 2 (1983): 183.

³⁸ According to the Qur'an, people can and ought to avoid moral and physical peril by obeying and surrendering to the law of God. The basic idea is that, *peace, safety and integrity are not possible without having a firm belief in God, trusting in Him and surrendering to Him and His law, and then avoiding all kinds of perils, for His sake.* See Rahman, *Ibid.*

³⁹ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 23-24.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Hamidullah, "Religious Symbolism," *Hamdard Islamicus* 2/4 (1978): 7.

⁴¹ There are many examples of Muslim Sufis who call other creatures as "my brother" and treat them with respect. See, for example, Annemarie Schimmel *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

⁴² Al-Ghazali, *The Jewels of the Qur'an*, 57.

⁴³ Reynold A. Nicholson, *Rumi, Poet and Mystic* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), 119. The above notes belong to Nicholson, and once more underlines our main argument that the Qur'an has a profound role in the making of Muslim conception of himself and the natural environment. Rumi's verses refers to the following verses of the Qur'an: 7:104-107; 21:79; 34:10; the wind was subject to Solomon (21:81) and transported his throne from one country to another. God said to Moses "Smite the sea with thy rod" (26:63, whereupon it opened a way for the Israelites but engulfed Pharaoh and his hosts; 54:1; 21:69). According to the Qur'an (17:46) "there is not a thing in heaven or earth but glorifies Him."

⁴⁴ Nursi, *Words*, 251. On another occasion he expresses the same point with this words: "The world is a book of the Eternally Besought One. Its letters and words point not to themselves but to the essence, attributes, and Names of another [i.e. God]." *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁵ Nursi, *The Words*, 701-702.

⁴⁶ Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 24 (italics added).

⁴⁷ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 68.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁵⁰ As we know camel is a domesticated animal, which for Arab countries is par excellence the Camel. What a wonderful structure has this Ship of the Desert? He can store water in his stomach for days. He can live on dry and thorny desert shrubs. His limb are adapted to his life. And withal, he is so gentle! Who can sign his praises enough? (Yusuf Ali, ff. 6103, p. 1728).

⁵¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Man and Nature: Beyond Current Alternative," Paper delivered at International Seminar on Islamic Philosophy and Science, 30 May-2 June, 1989, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 3.

⁵² Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Supreme Sign*, trans. Hamid Algar (Istanbul: Sözlük, 1985), 78. Many Muslim cosmologists studied the outside world in order to bring out what we can learn about God from the qualities in the visible universe. Also many commentators have similar views on interpreting the above-mentioned verses, that is 41:53 and 51: 20-21. Murata gives us a good example of this tradition in the Islamic history of thought in Rashid al-Din Mayubi's *Kashf al-asrar*, a commentary on the Qur'an written in 520/1126. See *The Tao of Islam*, 25.27; and S. Waqar Ahmed Hussaini, *Islamic Environmental Systems Engineering* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 3, 6.

⁵³ Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 24.

⁵⁴ A hadith of the Prophet says that: "If without good reason anyone kills a sparrow, or a creature lesser than that even, the living creature will put his complaint to God on the Day of Judgement, saying: 'So-and-so killed me for no purpose.'" Nasai, *Sayd*, 34.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 33:72: "We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains: but they refused to undertake it being afraid thereof: but man undertook it he was indeed unjust and foolish."

⁵⁶ Qur'an 55:10-12. This translation is taken from Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al Andalus, 1980).

⁵⁷ Said Nursi makes an interesting interpretation about this point and argues that even minor events the All-Wise Qur'an mentions and considers conceal a universal principal and points to a tip of a general law. When interpreting the verse "Nor anything fresh or dry, but is in a record clear" he argues that "this verse states that everything, fresh or dry, is found within it, is that so? Yes, everything is found in it, but everyone cannot see everything in it, for they are found at different levels. Sometimes the seeds, sometimes the nuclei, sometimes the summaries. Sometimes the principles, sometimes the signs, are found either explicitly, or implicitly, or allusively, or vaguely, or as a reminder." (*The Words*, 260).

⁵⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 261

⁵⁹ Reynold A. Nicholson, in his book *The Mystics of Islam*, narrates us an interesting story which reflects Muslims' appreciation of animals and their intrinsic values: Bayazid [the ninth-century Muslim mystic] purchased some cardamom seed at Hamadan, and before departing put into his gabardine a small quantity which was left over. On reaching Bistam and recollecting what he had done, he took out the seed and found out that it contained a number of ants. Saying, 'I have carried the poor creatures away from their home,' he immediately set off and journeyed back to Hamadan--a distance of several hundred miles" (108-109).

⁶⁰ Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

⁶¹ It is not within the scope of this paper to indulge the discussion of White's argument. However, it should be pointed out that this article resulted in a fierce debate and produced very fruitful literature on the subject. It can be said that with this critique, White contributed greatly to a reevaluation by Christians of their tradition, eliciting new interpretations. See, for example, Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "Reflections on Religion, Nature, and The Exploitative Mentality," in *Growth in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976); Robin Attfield, "Christian Attitudes to Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44/3, (1983): 369-386; John B. Bennett, "On Responding to Lynn White: Ecology and Christianity," *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies* 5 (1977): 71-77; Thomas Berry, "The Earth Community: we must be clear about what happens when we destroy the living forms of this planet," *Christian Social Action* 1 (1988): 11-13; J. Baird Callicott, "Genesis and John Muir," *Covenant for a New Creation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991; John B. Cobb, Jr., "Biblical Responsibility for The Ecological Crisis [L. White, Jr., on Gen. 1]," *Second Opinion* 18 (1992): 11-21.

⁶² Keith Thomas, *Man and The Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1899* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), 21.

⁶³ See also 14:32; 16:12-14; 22:65; 29:61; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 43:12-14; 45:12-13.

⁶⁴ Nasr also underlines that the modernist and fundamentalists who interpret the Qur'anic concept *taskhir* as meaning the total subjugation of nature is very different from traditional Islamic perspective. See, "Man and Nature: Beyond Current Alternative," 2.

⁶⁵ Mawil Y. Izzi Deen (Samarrai), "Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law, and Society," in *Ethics of Environment and Development. Global Challenge, International Response*, ed. J. Ronald Engel and Joan Gibb Engel (London: Belhaver Press, 1990), 189.

⁶⁶ Nasr, *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 148, fn. 43. Nasr provides valuable information about al-Biruni: "Al-Biruni represents the point of view of the scholar and compiler as well as that of the mathematician and astronomer. As a very competent scientist, historian, and general observer and commentator on the civilizations of mankind, *he approaches the study of Nature as a devout Muslim who sees the world as the handiwork of God and considers the observation and study of Nature as a religious duty*" (Ibid., 275-276, italics added.).

⁶⁷ Quoted in Izzi Dien, "Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law, and Society," 190.

⁶⁸ Nursi, *The Words*, 86-87. See also Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlür, 1995), 446.

⁶⁹ Yusuf Ali, translator, *The Holy Qur'an* (Maryland: Amana, 1983), 1188, ff. 4029.

⁷⁰ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 79. Qur'an 30:41: "Mischief [corruption] has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that hands of men have earned" and the very idea of corruption repeated in the Qur'an on many occasions.