

## Responsibility as a Primary Environmental Virtue in Islam

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### ABSTRACT

The exploration of environmental virtues within religious teachings has gained significant attention in recent years, as scholars in the field of religious environmentalism seek to apply the framework of environmental virtue ethics to religious contexts. This paper focuses on Islam and proposes that responsibility is a fundamental environmental virtue within this tradition. By employing a qualitative analysis method, the paper examines scriptural and scholarly resources within Islam to provide a comprehensive understanding of this virtue. The argument posits that responsibility is considered an environmental virtue due to its essential role in guiding Muslims' attitudes and behaviors towards God, themselves, society, and the natural world. It emphasizes that the concept of responsibility in Islam can only be fully comprehended within the broader Islamic worldview, which acknowledges God as the ultimate source and owner of all things and recognizes the pivotal role of human beings in God's divine plan. This research not only contributes to the broader discourse on religious environmental virtue ethics but also specifically advances the development of an Islamic environmental virtue ethics framework.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the face of escalating environmental challenges, the urgent need to address the complex ecological crises that confront our planet is more apparent than ever. From climate change and deforestation to pollution and species extinction, humanity finds itself at a critical juncture that demands immediate action and a paradigm shift in our relationship with the natural world. As we strive to forge a sustainable future, it becomes increasingly evident that simply relying on technological advancements and policy changes may not be sufficient. A deeper transformation of our values, attitudes, and behaviors is required – a shift toward embracing environmental virtues.

Environmental virtues, rooted in the philosophical concept of virtues, offer a promising framework for cultivating ethical responsibility and fostering sustainable practices. Virtues, broadly defined as moral excellences or character traits that enable individuals to lead good lives, have long been explored in ethical philosophy. However, their application to environmental concerns has gained significant traction in recent years. Environmental virtues encompass a range of qualities such as reverence, gratitude, humility, empathy, stewardship, and mindfulness, among others, which guide individuals in their interactions with the environment and promote harmonious coexistence with the natural world.

As environmental concerns increasingly transcend national boundaries, it becomes imperative to explore diverse cultural and religious perspectives in order to foster a holistic and inclusive approach to environmental ethics. In this regard, Islam, as one of the world's major religions, offers a rich framework that emphasizes the notion of responsibility towards the environment. This paper aims to establish responsibility as a key environmental virtue within Islam by investigating the religious teachings, principles, and practices that shape Muslims' approach to environmental stewardship. By analyzing relevant sources, the paper elucidates the significance of responsibility in guiding Muslims' attitudes and actions towards the natural world. The virtue of responsibility towards creation, however, must be understood within the comprehensive outlook of the Islamic life in which Muslims must exercise responsibility to God, self, society, and creation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Environmental ethics is “the study of the ethical relationships between human beings and the natural environment, including the non-human individuals that populate and constitute it” (Sandler, 2013). As part of the field of environmental philosophy, it entails acquiring a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between humans and nature, recognizing the goods and values that are inherent to or arise from this relationship, establishing the norms and principles that are supported by those goods and values, and utilizing these norms to generate guidance concerning environmental matters and interactions. Within the field of environmental ethics, there is a sub-field of virtue environmental ethics which focuses on character traits, determining which traits are environmental virtues or vices. It plays a role in environmental ethics by highlighting the significance of developing virtuous character to address

environmental issues. By cultivating environmental virtues and avoiding vices, individuals can make responsible choices for environmental well-being, promoting a harmonious human-nature relationship (Sandler, 2013).

Environmental virtue ethics is derived from virtue ethics which is a philosophical approach to ethics that focuses on the development of moral character and virtues. It places emphasis on personal qualities and character traits rather than on specific actions or rules. According to virtue ethics, ethical behavior is not solely determined by following a set of rules or maximizing consequences, but by cultivating virtuous traits that lead to a good and fulfilling life. Thus, "Virtue ethics is an approach to normative ethical theory that builds upon the notion that virtue evaluation is primary" (Driver, 2013).

Numerous scholars have contributed to the exploration of environmental virtue ethics, including Hill, Jr. (1983), O'Neill (1993), Wensveen (2000), Newton (2003), Hursthouse (2007), Sandler (2007), Zwolinski and Schmidtz (2013), and Cafaro (2015). While environmental virtue ethics is predominantly discussed within secular environmental philosophy, its influence extends to religious discourse as well. Scholars specializing in religious environmentalism have identified virtues derived from religious teachings that promote environmental well-being. For instance, Buddhist virtues such as loving kindness, compassion, accountability, and moderation have been examined as essential environmental virtues (Cooper and James, 2005; Sahni, 2007; Keown, 2007; Le Duc, 2015, 2018). Similarly, Christian scholars have explored environmental virtues within the Christian tradition (Blanchard and O'Brien, 2014; Bouma-Prediger, 2016, 2020). Bouma-Prediger (2020) has proposed a list of eight virtues, including wonder, humility, self-control, wisdom, justice, love, courage, and hope. These virtues have significant prominence in Christianity, drawing inspiration from the classical virtue tradition. Moreover, certain aspects of these virtues are discernible in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), a significant official document on the environment within the Catholic Church.

Since the rise of religious environmentalism over five decades ago, scholars have also contributed greatly to the discourse from the Islamic perspective. Notable scholars such as Nasr (1990, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1998), Agwan (1992), Amad (1998), and Izzy Dien (2000) have played influential roles in this discourse. Some authors have explicitly approached the topic from an environmental ethics perspective (Zaidi, 1981; Özdemir, 1997; Wersal, 1995). However, explicit and comprehensive discussions on Islamic environmental virtues are relatively less common, often receiving only passing or superficial treatment (Shomali, 2008). Consequently, this paper aims to address this gap by examining a specific environmental virtue in Islam – responsibility. This virtue is not only pertinent to Muslims' relationships with God, themselves, and society but also extends to their relationship with the natural world, considered as God's creation. While other environmental virtues can be explored within Islam, this paper chooses to focus only on the virtue of responsibility with a detailed examination.

## METHODOLOGY

Islam is a comprehensive religious tradition encompassing spiritual, social, and ethical dimensions, serving as a guiding framework for Muslims in all aspects of life, including their interaction with the natural world. Central to Islamic environmental ethics is the notion of responsibility, which stems from the belief that humans have been entrusted with the stewardship of God's creation. The primary objective of this paper is to examine the Islamic perspective on responsibility as a fundamental environmental virtue. Drawing upon religious scriptures, theological interpretations, and scholarly discourse within the Islamic tradition, this study explores the teachings that urge adherents of Islam to fulfill their environmental responsibilities. Consequently, this research employs a qualitative analysis approach to elucidate how responsibility is recognized as a central environmental virtue within the Islamic faith.

## RESEARCH RESULT

### 3.1. Human Beings' Responsibility in God's Divine Plan

Orthodox Islam sees creation of the universe, in so far as an act of revelation, as a declaration of God's will and the affirmation of God's absolute sovereignty (Dulles, 2002). According to certain views within Islamic thought, Allah created the universe as a proof of His existence and as a way of showing His names and attributes, which include mercy, compassion, justice, and many others. Indeed, the Quran affirms that Allah created the universe with significant purposes, not for idle sport (21:16, 38:27). This specific purpose is to serve Allah's will and to provide a place for humans to live and worship Him (Quran 51:56). Although Allah's creation encompasses all things, humans possess the unique ability to comprehend and know their Creator, making them central figures in this divine revelation. Islamic intellectual thought emphasizes that only human beings have the capacity to acknowledge God, and this knowledge is attainable through the intellect, which is believed to be a gift from God (Aminrazavi, 2001). In other words, among all of God's creations, it is only humans that have the capacity to know their Creator, and it is through this ongoing cosmic revelation that they come to understand their place in the universe.

Allah had a specific reason to create human beings—to install a vicegerent (Khalifat Allah) on earth who would represent God in the world and remember Him. As a unique and special gift (al-amanah), human beings were bestowed with a status and responsibility that set them apart from all of God's creation. This cosmic drama of creation is a testament to Allah's infinite wisdom and divine plan, in which human beings play a central role (Aminrazavi, 2001). The Islamic perspective holds that human beings are not a mere coincidence, but rather the product of a deliberate and purposeful act of creation by Allah. This understanding imbues human life with a sacred essence and a divine mission. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr eloquently argues, "If the human being is nothing but the result of 'blind forces' acting upon the original cosmic soup of molecules, then is not the very statement of the sacredness of human life intellectually meaningless and nothing but a hollow sentimental expression? Is

not human dignity nothing more than a conveniently contrived notion without basis in reality?" (Nasr, 2001: 275).

In Islam, human beings derive their identity and purpose solely through their relationship with Allah. As such, their foremost duty is to be obedient to the Divine Law, or Shari'ah, which acts as a guiding light for their earthly journey (Aminrazavi, 2001). Furthermore, human beings are considered as God's servants, or 'abd Allah, with a deep and unwavering receptivity to God's will (Nasr, 2001). By adhering to the teachings of the Shari'ah, human beings can maintain moral purity, achieve peace in their hearts, and secure eternal salvation in the Hereafter.

The word "Islam" means "peace" as well as "submission." The implication to be drawn here is the intimate connection between submitting to God's will and the attainment of personal, social, and ecological peace. The Shari'ah provides a comprehensive framework for the human experience, encompassing every aspect of human life and existence. Through their obedience to the Shari'ah, human beings can fulfill their divine mission on earth and achieve the ultimate purpose of their creation. Without perfect submission to God, there can never be true tranquility either in this life or the hereafter. This concept extends beyond individuals to families and societies as a whole. When families submit to God in their interactions and care for one another, they experience harmony and peace. Similarly, societies can experience peace by following God's teachings and principles in their social affairs.

In addition to submitting to Allah, human beings have a unique role as the "Pontifex," acting as a bridge between God and the rest of creation. This is emphasized in the Quran, which repeatedly reminds Muslims of God's sovereignty over the universe and the importance of acknowledging and accepting this truth. By fulfilling this role and bearing witness to God's supremacy, human beings can find a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their lives.

The concept of human beings as God's vicegerent is a profound and spiritual one, rooted in the very essence of human creation. As creatures made in the "image of God," humans possess a multitude of attributes that reflect Allah's divine nature. Their ability to reason, reflect, make decisions, exercise love and empathy towards others, act with justice, and display creativity in artistic expressions and scientific innovations are all manifestations of the divine spark that resides within them. The very fact that human beings reflect certain qualities of God makes them theomorphic in nature and endows them with a sacred role on earth. They are not only created in the image of God but are imbued with the ability to embody divine qualities in their lives. Through their actions, humans have the potential to manifest divine love, compassion, justice, and creativity in the world. In this way, they assume a sacerdotal function, representing the divine on earth and contributing to the ongoing unfolding of creation (Nasr, 2001).

Human beings have been endowed with a variety of attributes, including the capacity for free will. This means that they have the ability to choose whether to serve God with complete obedience or to act contrary to His will.

However, it is important to recognize that this choice carries with it significant consequences, as what all Islamic schools of thought and ordinary believers agree on is that God is the ultimate creator and cause of human existence. Thus, it is the duty of humans to honor and fulfill their responsibilities towards Him, and their rights as human beings are derived from their obedience to His will. Thus, the true identity of human beings and their ultimate fulfillment is intrinsically tied to their responsibility to worship and serve God. Nasr notes, "Only in carrying out the aim and purpose of our existence are we fully human. Otherwise, although we carry the human reality within ourselves, we fall short of it and live beneath the fully human state" (Nasr, 2001: 277). The power of free will, along with other noble attributes bestowed upon individuals, is a double-edged sword, granting them the freedom to choose their path but also requiring them to accept the consequences of their actions. Recognizing the supreme importance of the relationship with God, one can understand the vital role that obedience to His will plays in their lives. By fulfilling responsibilities towards God, individuals simultaneously honor their own humanity and ensure the upholding of their rights as human beings.

### **3.2. Human Beings' Responsibility to Self**

The responsibility to oneself is integral to the responsibility to God, the pinnacle of the hierarchy. Individuals owe their existence to the divine, giving their lives sacredness and dignity. However, this does not grant them unrestricted control over their bodies and lives. Muslims are obligated to maintain their physical health and avoid harm, except in cases of self-defense or when engaged in a battle or struggle for others (Nasr, 2001). The Quran warns against self-destruction, emphasizing the importance of physical well-being (2:195). Prophet Muhammad valued strong believers while recognizing the goodness in both the strong and weak (Sunan Ibn Majah 79). He also advised moderation in food consumption, as excessive indulgence could dim the light of faith in their hearts (Sahih al-Bukhari 5373).

Islam's central tenets encompass spiritual practices with physical benefits. Fasting during Ramadan, by abstaining from food and drink, detoxifies and rejuvenates the body, improving overall health (Ahrabi-Fard, 1974). Properly observing Ramadan enhances brain function, alertness, and productivity, strengthens the immune system, reduces the risk of diseases, and improves digestion. It also promotes better sleep quality and the adoption of healthier habits (Ansari, 2023). The responsibility to oneself in Islam involves improving spiritual health through activities like seeking knowledge of God and the teachings of Islam (Quran 3:18). Gaining knowledge and standing firm on justice are emphasized, as they go hand in hand and are considered acts of gratitude to God (Quran 96:1-5). Sharing and proclaiming knowledge for the benefit of all is an integral part of this responsibility.

Moreover, consistent prayer and worship, along with reflection and contemplation, are spiritually beneficial activities in Islam. Salah, or prayer, holds immense significance as an act of submission to Allah and a means of establishing a personal connection with Him. Muslims are obligated to perform

five daily prayers at specific times, involving recitation, physical postures, and facing the Kaaba in Mecca. The benefits of salah extend beyond the physical act itself. It brings spiritual purification, strengthens faith, and fosters a closer bond with Allah. Salah is a way to seek forgiveness, cultivate gratitude and humility, and develop discipline and self-control. It serves as a reminder of life's transience and the importance of striving for the hereafter. The Quran emphasizes the significance of salah, highlighting its role in prohibiting immorality, promoting remembrance of Allah, and urging devoutness (Quran 29:45; 2:238).

The hajj pilgrimage is a vital component of Islam, known as one of the Five Pillars. Muslims are expected to undertake this journey to the Kaaba in Mecca at least once in their lifetime, if they are physically and financially able. The hajj offers numerous spiritual benefits, including purification, seeking forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and strengthening faith and connection with Allah. The pilgrimage involves rituals symbolizing Prophet Ibrahim's life and devotion to Allah. The journey begins with entering the state of ihram, wearing white sheets that represent purity and equality. Pilgrims then circumambulate the Kaaba seven times, reciting prayers and supplications. The hajj brings Muslims from different backgrounds together, emphasizing worship and devotion to Allah regardless of social status or race. Acts of sacrifice involved in this pilgrimage demonstrate obedience to Allah and the willingness to let go of personal desires. The Quran highlights its importance, proclaiming the pilgrimage as a manifestation of devotion to Allah and a path to moral and spiritual purification (22:27).

### **3.3. Human Beings' Responsibility to Society**

Another area of responsibility is towards the society. Islam emphasizes the responsibilities Muslims have towards society, beginning with the family. The Quran stresses the importance of children treating parents with kindness and respect (17:23). At the same time, the Prophet Muhammad reminded that parents have a duty to educate their children about Islam (Sahih Muslim Book 13, Hadith 4005). By instilling good values, individuals can anticipate rewards in this life and the hereafter. Aside from the relationship between parents and children, the Quran also emphasizes the importance of treating one's spouse with kindness and compassion. The Prophet Muhammad said, as related by Ibn `Abbas, "The best among you is the best towards his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives" (Fathi, 2023).

Social responsibility extends beyond the family, and Islam instructs believers to treat neighbors with respect regardless of their background. The Quran underscores the significance of doing good to relatives, orphans, the needy, and the vulnerable in the community and the world. Islam discourages arrogance and self-delusion in interactions with others (4:36). The Five Pillars of Islam provide a framework for these responsibilities. Zakat, a mandatory act of charity, involves giving a portion of one's wealth to those in need, including the poor, orphans, and widows. This act not only aids those in need but also purifies the giver's wealth and soul. Sawm, the practice of fasting during

Ramadan, cultivates empathy and compassion for those who suffer from hunger and thirst. By experiencing deprivation, Muslims develop gratitude for their blessings and are encouraged to share with others.

Islamic teachings also emphasize participation in social justice issues and the defense of others' rights, particularly those of the vulnerable, even when it conflicts with personal interests. The Quran urges believers to persistently stand firm in justice and bear witness, even if it is against themselves or their loved ones (4:135). Justice should not be swayed by personal inclinations or biases. Upholding justice and overcoming hatred are essential, as every human being possesses inherent dignity and worth (Quran 5:8). By prioritizing justice and advocating for the vulnerable, Muslims contribute to a more equitable and compassionate society

### **3.4. Human Beings' Responsibility to Creation as an Environmental Virtue**

The responsibility to care for the environment is an essential component of Islamic social and religious responsibility. According to Seyyed Hosein Nasr, "The world around us is not limited to the human sphere—we also have responsibilities toward animals and plants and even inanimate parts of nature such as water, air, and soil. This latter set of responsibilities involves what modern Western writers now refer to as environmental ethics" (2001: 279). The concept of caring for creation is integral to the Islamic injunction to promote the common good, which is intricately linked to the principles of justice, equity, mutual responsibility, and environmental stewardship. This highlights the significance of collaborative efforts towards achieving the greater good and upholding moral values that benefit society as a whole. In this section, we will delve into a number of Islamic concepts that help human beings to fulfill their responsibility to God vis-à-vis care for the environment.

#### **3.4.1. Responsibility to Respect Unity**

Authors who write about Islamic environmentalism emphasize that God is the owner of all creation (Quran 30:26). As Allah sets the celestial bodies in motion, causes rain to fall, regulates the cycle of day and night and the seasons of the year, and creates animals and plants to thrive on earth, all of creation is a part of Allah's revelation, and its well-being is vital to one's understanding of Allah. The integrity and sustainability of creation, manifesting balance and harmony among human beings and nonhuman creation, and within nonhuman creation itself, bear witness to the Oneness and Uniqueness of God, as expressed in the doctrine of Tawhid (Naseef, 1998). According to Fazlun Khalid, "Tawhid is the primordial testimony of the unity of all creation and the interlocking grid of the natural order of which man is intrinsically a part" (1998:18).

The doctrine of Tawhid, derived from the Arabic word "wahid" meaning "one" or "unique," is a central concept in Islamic belief. It asserts the oneness and uniqueness of Allah (God) as the fundamental principle of Islamic theology and the most important belief of all Muslims. The doctrine has three aspects: Tawhid al-Rububiyyah, Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah, and Tawhid al-Asma' wa al-Sifat. Tawhid al-Rububiyyah affirms that Allah is the only creator and sustainer



of the universe. Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah asserts that Allah is the only one worthy of worship and that all forms of worship and devotion should be directed towards Him alone. Tawhid al-Asma' wa al-Sifat declares that Allah has unique names and attributes, and possesses the most perfect attributes. The doctrine of Tawhid is considered the cornerstone of Islamic belief. By recognizing the oneness and uniqueness of Allah, Muslims strive to purify their beliefs, actions, and intentions and seek to live their lives according to the teachings of Islam.

The understanding of the Unity of the Creator suggests that in the created order, every part of creation has a unique and complementary role to play, and by fulfilling these roles, all parts of creation support one another (Khalid, 1998). In the Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah states, "And the earth We have spread out (like a carpet); set thereon mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance" (2:22), highlighting the interconnectedness of all aspects of creation. This interconnectedness calls for human responsibility to care for the environment, as it is a manifestation of Allah's wisdom and greatness. As such, it is the Muslims' duty to utilize the environment in a responsible and sustainable manner and safeguard it from harm, thus demonstrating their worship and glorification of Allah.

### **3.3.2. Responsibility to Maintain Universal Balance**

Human beings exist within the primordial pattern of creation and are subject to God's immutable laws just like nonhuman creation. It is crucial to maintain balance and justice in all aspects of life, which is closely related to the teaching of Mizan in Islam. Mizan emphasizes the importance of upholding justice and fairness in dealing with others and maintaining harmony in all aspects of life. Muslims must remember that Allah has established a balance in the universe, and it is their responsibility to maintain it through their actions and behavior. The Quran states, "And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of Justice), In order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. It is He Who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures" (55:7-10). The relevance of Mizan to care for creation is significant, as it underscores the importance of treating the environment with respect, care, and responsibility. The environment is a part of Allah's creation, and it should be regarded as a trust given to humanity. Muslims have a duty to use the environment sustainably and protect it from harm.

The 2015 Islamic Declaration on Climate Change refers to Mizan in its text to warn that the current rate of consuming natural resources is unsustainable and puts the earth's balance at risk:

This current rate of climate change cannot be sustained, and the earth's fine equilibrium (*mīzān*) may soon be lost. As we humans are woven into the fabric of the natural world, its gifts are for us to savour. But the same fossil fuels that helped us achieve most of the prosperity we see today are the main cause of climate change. Excessive pollution from fossil fuels threatens to destroy the gifts bestowed on us by God – gifts such as a functioning climate, healthy air to

breathe, regular seasons, and living oceans. But our attitude to these gifts has been short-sighted, and we have abused them.

The concept of Mizan also points to the divine origin of the order (fitrah) imposed in the world. The Quran (30:30) locates human beings within this natural pattern of creation (Khalid, 1998). Also, the balance between the seasons, cycle of growth and harvest, and species of animals and plants is also divinely ordained. Khalid asserts, "To function within the limiting principles of creation, if only to leave behind an earth that is liveable for our children and theirs, we need to reabsorb the certainties of tawhid, and regain our role as khalifah. This will give us a sense of where the mizan is and locate our awareness in the fitrah" (1998: 30). Maintaining environmental equilibrium is also an act of submission to God and revering God in all things. Careless or irresponsible actions by Muslims risk Allah's wrath. Mehmet Ozalp opines that because human beings have been made the khalifah by God, care for creation becomes an Islamic obligation (fard) for every individual Muslim, Muslim organisations, and Muslim nations and governments. He writes that we are "charged with the responsibility of protecting the natural world and not causing 'corruption on earth' by destroying either its order or its beauty. Whenever the Quran puts responsibility onto humans, it comes with an obligation to follow through with the responsibility and the resultant accountability before God. Hence, humans should expect to be judged on how they treat other living creatures and the environment" (Ozalp, 2023: Online).

### **3.3.3. Responsibility to be Faithful to Trusteeship**

Human beings are entrusted with a specific role and responsibility within the divine order, as ordained by God. Fulfilling this role with utmost obedience and conscientiousness allows individuals to embody their true selves. While humans are an integral part of the overall creation, they have been endowed with unique abilities that enable them to serve as Allah's vicegerents, assuming a position of trusteeship (Quran 2:30). Alongside this honorable status, humans have been provided with various blessings. The Quran asserts that everything on earth has been created for the benefit of humanity (Quran 2:29, 17:70). Moreover, humans have been granted exceptional favors, surpassing many other creations. They possess certain gifts that even surpass those bestowed upon angels, including the capacity to enhance their piety through repentance from sin (Shirazim, nd). This serves as a profound reminder that humans are not mere ordinary beings, but rather possess a distinct purpose to fulfill within the grand scheme of existence.

Moreover, the Quran discloses that Allah presented the position of trusteeship to the heavens, earth, and mountains, which they declined to assume. However, human beings willingly accepted this role without being fully informed of its nature and responsibilities (Quran 33:72). As a result, the preservation of the environment becomes a religious obligation rather than a mere social duty (Bsoul et al., 2022). Thus, environmental stewardship is not a discretionary matter. Muslims' commitment to this responsibility also serves as a test of their worthiness of the bestowed gifts (Quran 6:165). While this position grants humans a degree of power and freedom to exercise their

creativity, it is important to acknowledge that none of these privileges are absolute, as everything ultimately belongs to God. Any creative actions must align with God's immutable laws. Nasr argues that the concept of trusteeship must be complemented by the understanding of servanthip (al-'ubudiyah), wherein human beings are servants of God ('abd Allah). He asserts, "As 'abd Allah, he must be passive towards Allah and receptive to the grace that flows from the world above. As khalifat Allah, he must be active in the world, sustaining cosmic harmony and disseminating the grace for which he is the channel as a result of his being the central creature in the terrestrial order" (Nasr, 1998: 124).

When power is not absolute but rather delegated, the exercise of that power necessitates accountability for one's actions (Eaton, 1998). Regrettably, Islamic leaders express deep concern regarding the current state of the environment, stating, "Our species, though selected to be a caretaker or steward (khalīfah) on the earth, has been the cause of such corruption and devastation on it that we are in danger ending life as we know it on our planet" (Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, 2015). The present reality reveals a stark deviation from the intended divine calling of human beings, who have shifted from their role as responsible caretakers to becoming predators and exploiters of the natural world. This destructive behavior has resulted in the depletion of the very environment upon which humans rely (Eaton, 1998).

#### **3.3.4. Responsibility to Promote the Common Good**

The concept of trusteeship in Islam necessitates that Muslims devise environmentally conscious strategies that align with God's laws. In this regard, the Islamic principle of Maslahah holds significant potential. Maslahah refers to actions that yield profit, welfare, and benefit, prioritizing the common good and aiming to enhance human well-being (Bakar et al., 2021). It is a concept that encourages individuals and communities to engage in behaviors that promote the overall welfare of society. In Islamic jurisprudence, Maslahah is often invoked to justify actions that serve the greater good or communal interests, even if they may conflict with individual preferences or interests. According to Imam al-Ghazali, a 12th-century Muslim scholar, Maslahah aims to safeguard the objectives of the Shari'ah, which include the protection of religion, life, reason, lineage, and property (Tarmizi, 2020). The comprehensive nature of Maslahah renders it applicable to diverse contemporary societal issues, serving as a fundamental principle for realizing both general and specific human interests (Tarmizi, 2020).

The concept of Maslahah is highly relevant in promoting environmental flourishing, considering its impact on the welfare of all living beings. Consequently, it becomes imperative to safeguard the environment in the public interest due to its status as a shared resource. The principle of Maslahah encourages individuals to prioritize the flourishing of the environment through the adoption of sustainable practices, resource conservation, and waste reduction, even if it entails personal sacrifice or inconvenience (Avis, 2021). By employing the concept of Maslahah, legal and policy changes aimed at

prioritizing environmental well-being, such as the promotion of clean energy, preservation of biodiversity, and reduction of pollution, can be effectively justified as serving the public interest and advancing the common good.

The Islamic tradition offers numerous instances of individuals and communities demonstrating a commitment to prioritize environmental flourishing for the betterment of society at large. Prophet Muhammad, for instance, emphasized the prudent utilization of resources and avoidance of wastefulness, as evidenced by his counsel to "not waste water, even if you are standing on the bank of a flowing river." This conscientiousness towards the welfare of the collective extends beyond the present generation and encompasses future ones who will inherit the Earth. Islamic scholars have expressed apprehension regarding individuals' myopic approach to the bounties bestowed by God, cautioning about the lasting impact Muslims leave for subsequent generations and the ultimate accountability they bear before Allah. As articulated in the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change 2015, a pertinent question arises: "What will future generations say of us?"

While the principle of *Maslahah* may not be universally embraced across all schools of Islamic thought, its prominence in most schools, albeit with varying degrees of application, necessitates attention when addressing environmental concerns (Wahab et Naim, 2021). In fact, this principle has found practical application through the issuance of fatwas by Islamic authorities in numerous regions. In the context of environmental issues, the principle of *Maslahah* is frequently invoked to justify the safeguarding and conservation of natural resources and the environment, as they are deemed to serve the public interest. Many fatwas pertaining to environmental matters, such as those advocating for the protection of forests, the preservation of marine life, and the mitigation of waste and pollution, exemplify the application of the principle of *Maslahah*.

Several countries have issued fatwas concerning environmental issues. For instance, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) issued a fatwa in 2014, requiring the active protection of endangered species by the country's 200 million Muslims (Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2014). Although not legally binding under Indonesian secular law, the fatwa holds authority based on Islamic law and tradition. The MUI also established an agency to promote environmental well-being and educate communities on implementing the fatwa. Similarly, the Perlis Fatwa Committee in Malaysia issued a fatwa in 2016, prohibiting harmful environmental activities and emphasizing Muslims' responsibility to protect the environment (Malay Mail, 2016). In a significant move for Islamic environmentalism, Egypt's Dar al-Ifta approved the world's first fatwa charter on climate change in October 2022, which prohibits various environmentally harmful actions based on Islamic law principles. These fatwas demonstrate the growing recognition of applying Islamic principles to address contemporary environmental challenges and contribute to sustainable development goals (Aman, 2022). Thus, fatwas have proven to be instrumental in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of Muslim communities and promoting environmental conservation and responsible resource use.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the elucidation of various Islamic teachings presented above, the ethical implications of responsibility as an Islamic environmental virtue are significant. Islam emphasizes the responsibility to care for the environment as an integral part of social and religious obligations. The concept of unity in Islam highlights the interconnectedness of all creation and the recognition that every part of the natural world has a unique and complementary role. This understanding calls for human responsibility to care for the environment, demonstrating worship and glorification of Allah. The principle of balance emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony and justice in all aspects of life, including the treatment of the environment. Muslims are urged to uphold justice and fairness, recognizing that Allah has established a balance in the universe. The concept of trusteeship highlights the role of human beings as Allah's vicegerents and the entrusted caretakers of the environment. This position grants humans power and freedom but necessitates accountability for their actions. Muslims are reminded that their commitment to environmental stewardship serves as a test of their worthiness of the bestowed gifts. The principle of the common good, as expressed through the concept of *Maslahah*, promotes actions that prioritize the flourishing of the environment for the welfare of all living beings. This principle justifies environmental conservation efforts as serving the public interest and advancing the common good. Fatwas issued by Islamic authorities further emphasize the importance of environmental protection and conservation, demonstrating the practical application of Islamic principles in addressing environmental challenges. Therefore, the environmental virtue of responsibility plays a fundamental role in Muslims' ability to be committed to stewardship of the environment, and to work to maintain balance in nature for the common good.

An implication derived from this sense of responsibility is the need for a balanced and symbiotic relationship between humanity and the natural world, emphasizing the sacredness of nature as a manifestation of the divine power and wisdom. The reckless exploitation and depletion of natural resources amounts to an unholy act of desecration. Islamic scholars attribute this degradation to a scientific worldview that disregards any spiritual connection with the natural world. In *Man and Nature*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr warns against the dangers of such a view that severs humanity from their spiritual roots, rendering nature as a desacralized and expendable commodity. Nasr writes, "Nothing is more dangerous in the current ecological debate than that scientific view of man and nature which cuts man from his spiritual roots and takes a desacralized nature for granted while expanding its physical boundaries by billions of light years. This view destroys the reality of the spiritual world while speaking of awe before the grandeur of the cosmos. It destroys man's centrality in the cosmic order and his access to the spiritual world" (Nasr, 1998: 7).

The cold and distant gaze of scientism has stripped nature of its sacred essence, reducing it to a mere object of scrutiny and manipulation. Nature, once revered as a divine manifestation, is now subject to domination and exploitation, stripped of its intrinsic value and reduced to a mere means to an end. This

objectification of nature has led to the reckless pursuit of personal pleasure without any sense of obligation or responsibility, perpetuating a cycle of degradation and destruction. The desacralization of nature has severed human connection to the divine and has left humanity wandering aimlessly in a world devoid of spiritual significance. Humanity must remember that every aspect of creation is sacred, imbued with a divine essence that reflects the Creator's power and wisdom. Muslims must recognize that all of nature is linked to the Almighty, who created it and continues to sustain it. Only by reviving this spiritual connection can humans truly restore their rightful place as caretakers of the natural world, fulfilling their obligations to the Creator and all His creations.

To embody true humanity, individuals must align their lives with the inherent divine blueprint ingrained within their souls, known as the Fitrah. This intrinsic inclination, bestowed by Allah upon every human being, guides individuals toward truth, goodness, and beauty, facilitating the attainment of profound knowledge and wisdom. By cultivating this innate disposition, individuals gain insight into the purpose of their existence and develop a comprehensive understanding of God and the universe. The realization of this genuine human calling necessitates the nurturing of one's Fitrah and the active pursuit of its fulfillment, thereby unleashing the latent potential embedded within the human nature.

Regrettably, as a direct consequence of the Fall, the human race is afflicted with a proclivity towards forgetfulness. Humans' awareness of God's laws and their role as stewards of His creation eludes their memory. This state of forgetfulness renders humans susceptible to the allure of detrimental social and cultural influences, which ultimately divert them from the righteous path. Even adherents of Islam, who possess the invaluable divine guidance found in the Quran and Sunnah, are not exempt from the subtle allure of worldly enticements that pose a threat to their spiritual journey. Occasionally, individuals find themselves entangled in patterns of thinking, values, and lifestyles that not only contradict the principles of their faith but also compromise their obligations towards themselves, their communities, and the natural world (Baker, 1998).

Human beings often assert their rights without adequately considering their corresponding obligations to God and the surrounding world. This propensity for forgetfulness arises from a disregard for the interconnected nature of rights and responsibilities within a broader framework of relationships that extends beyond the individual to encompass communities, societies, and the natural world. It is imperative to acknowledge that humans are not the sole entities within this complex cosmic order vested with rights and responsibilities (Nasr, 2001). Regardless of size or significance, every living creature occupies a distinct place and fulfills a unique purpose within the intricate fabric of existence. Neglecting one's responsibilities poses a risk of obscuring one's true purpose and the inherent splendor of creation. Yielding to individualism blinds the individual to the needs of others and hampers one's ability to recognize the pervasive interconnectedness that permeates all facets of life. Therefore, it becomes crucial to remain perpetually vigilant against forgetfulness in order to prevent the neglect of the natural world, the exploitation of finite resources, and harm

inflicted upon others. Recognizing the inseparable intertwining of rights and obligations is essential, as honoring both is indispensable for cultivating harmonious coexistence with creation while faithfully adhering to the divine command.

To embody a sense of responsibility in the human vocation necessitates overcoming forgetfulness and negligence (ghaflah) through the cultivation of a profound sense of remembrance (dhikr) of Allah as the "Ultimate Environment." This divine presence surrounds, encompasses, and nourishes human life in its entirety. In order to remain faithful to the inherent calling of humanity, it is imperative for Muslims to maintain unwavering vigilance against forgetfulness and strive to exhibit steadfastness in their commitment to the path set by the divine. Only through such dedication can they fulfill their obligations to God, themselves, and the natural world, working towards the restoration of balance and harmony that have been increasingly disrupted by humanity's misuse of natural resources. Although humans may occasionally stumble in fulfilling their responsibilities, they must relentlessly strive to remember their place within the broader scheme of existence and develop a deep appreciation for the delicate equilibrium of the world, recognizing their vital role in preserving it. It is through such endeavors that they can aspire to live in consonance with God and the entirety of divine creation.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper provides evidence supporting the notion that responsibility is an important environmental virtue within the context of Islam. It argues that responsibility as an environmental virtue is based solidly upon fundamental Islamic teachings. This virtue not only governs Muslims' relationship with God, themselves, and society but also extends to their relationship with the natural world. By embracing a sense of responsibility, Muslims are empowered to engage with nature in a manner that preserves its integrity and maintains a harmonious balance. Moreover, this paper highlights the effectiveness of a virtue ethics approach in addressing Islamic environmentalism. The application of virtue ethics has proven successful in secular environmental philosophy as well as in various religious environmentalisms. Therefore, it is reasonable to employ this ethical framework within an Islamic perspective.

## **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

To further develop this approach, it is recommended to explore additional environmental virtues within Islamic teachings. While other virtues such as justice, gratitude, and humility have been briefly mentioned in this paper, they warrant further exploration and emphasis. Conducting in-depth studies on these virtues and their relevance to environmental concerns will enable Muslims to gain a comprehensive understanding and apply them more effectively in their daily lives and interactions with the natural world. By deepening our understanding of these virtues through solid teachings, we enhance the potential for Muslims to integrate environmental values into their personal and communal practices. This expanded knowledge can contribute to

the development of comprehensive strategies and policies that address environmental challenges within Islamic contexts. Ultimately, the incorporation of these virtues into the lives of Muslims has the potential to promote sustainable behavior and foster a more responsible and harmonious relationship between humanity and nature.

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