The Nature and Perspectives of Environmental Ethics with an Emphasis on the Islamic View

■ Ahmad Ābedi Sarvestāni[1]
■ Mansour Shāhvali[2]
■ Seyyed Mostafa Mohaqeq Damad[3]

Abstract

The escalating severity of today's environmental crises poses a serious threat to human and non-human life, prompting increased focus on the ethical foundations that shape human interaction with nature. Among these, environmental ethics has become central, with existing theories ranging from anthropocentric to ecocentric frameworks, each assigning different intrinsic values to nature. However, recent efforts to address these crises have turned toward religious and spiritual perspectives for deeper, more holistic solutions. This paper examines environmental ethics through two core questions: "Where does intrinsic value lie?" and "What defines ethical action?" It argues for a theocentric approach as a more comprehensive ethical framework for environmental protection. Drawing from Islamic anthropology, the study introduces the concept of "self-ecology," a spiritually grounded model of environmental ethics. Emphasizing the soul's spiritual nature, self-ecology encourages a balanced and respectful relationship with nature, rooted in self-awareness and inner preservation. This approach not only redefines the human-nature relationship but also presents an ethical path that integrates spiritual insight with environmental responsibility.

Keywords: Environmental Ethics, Environmental Crisis, Theocentrism, Self-Ecology

1. Ph.D. Candidate in Agricultural Extension and Education, Shiraz University (Corresponding Author). E-mail: abediac@yahoo.com
2. Associate Professor of Agricultural Extension and Education, Shiraz University, Iran.
3. Professor of Law, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran.

Introduction

Today, the natural environment is under threat, as technological advancements have enabled humans to cause environmental destruction on a global scale (Bourdeau, 2004: 9-15). The emergence of environmental crises has raised the question of whether the environment can sustain current human behavior. Every day, it becomes clearer that we cannot continue consuming the world's resources as we have in the past (Rshm, 2000: 109), and signs of environmental constraints are evident everywhere.

While statistical data on environmental conditions are essential, what is even more critical is reaching a consensus on how humanity should treat the planet (Robinson, 1378 Sh). In these circumstances, humans must answer the difficult question of how to prevent overexploitation and destruction of natural resources when individuals are seeking to maximize their own profits (Kortenkamp, 2001: 261-272). In fact, the existing challenge is not how to live on Earth, but how to convince people of this way of life (Fricker, 2002; 427-433). In this regard, we can refer to the warning statement by scientists to humanity in 1992, when more than 1,000 scientists from 72 countries, including 105 Nobel laureates, issued a letter declaring that a new ethics and approach to thinking is necessary to pay attention to the Earth. This ethics must inspire a massive movement and force government leaders and unwilling people to make the necessary changes (Tucker, 2001: xv-xxxii.). With an understanding of the importance of ethics in environmental protection, various individuals have attempted to present theories and approaches regarding environmental ethics. Among them are Aldo Leopold, Holmes Rolston, Paul Taylor, Baird Callicott, Tom Regan, and Arne Naess. These individuals, by emphasizing the need to extend the ethical standing to other beings, each believe in a type of environmental ethics where certain species, ecosystem components, or the entire ecosystem have ethical standing. For example, Reagan, advocating for biocentrism, proposed an environmental ethic that can be considered a strong stance in support of animals. In contrast, Leopold, by presenting land ethics, believes in a form of ecosystem-centered ethics where correct behavior towards the environment is that which contributes to the preservation of the integrity, stability, and

beauty of the Earth. Although the efforts made in presenting theories and approaches to environmental ethics are valuable in their own right, the world still requires a comprehensive theory on this matter.

Methodology and Objectives

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach to highlight the necessity of environmental ethics, introducing the most significant existing perspectives in this field, and emphasizing the role of religion in shaping environmental ethics. Additionally, it seeks to propose a suitable ethical framework from an Islamic perspective for addressing environmental concerns.

The Necessity of Environmental Ethics

In conventional definitions of development, spiritual and ethical dimensions are often overlooked (Aminzadeh, 2002: 97–106). This raises an important question: Can environmental challenges resulting from development be managed solely through policy interventions, or should we also look to spiritual heritage for solutions by fostering environmental ethics in today's secular world? (Jenkins,1998: 151-163)

The reality is that the historical roots of environmental crises, our philosophical, religious, and ethical views toward them, including values, dos and don'ts, and the notions of good and evil, are rarely discussed. Without properly addressing these issues in their most comprehensive philosophical and ethical forms, no matter how much is said about the destruction of the environment and the need for its preservation, we will not make progress (Benson, 1383 SH: 336). The importance of understanding and recognizing ethics is such that many scientists and environmental specialists consider environmental protection an important ethical issue (Ehrich, 2002: 31-43).

However, in the context of the type of ethics that can go beyond pragmatism by analyzing environmental disasters and crises, offering a new understanding and perception of the place of creatures in the world, there is a lack of it (Holden, 2003: 94-108). Traditionally, ethics has dealt with defining relationships between individuals and relationships between individuals and society, and

according to some ethicists, ethics that regulate the mutual relationship between humans and the Earth, animals, and plants have not existed until now. In their view, expanding ethics to this third component—human interaction with the environment—is both a revolutionary opportunity and an environmental necessity (Sesin, 2003). Today, the need is more deeply felt for human interests to be balanced with the interests of other creatures; because the important point is how to protect non-human populations from human harm (Oughton, 2003: 3-18). Therefore, environmental ethics is considered as a foundation for addressing such concerns.

Human activities have significantly altered nature, raising questions about ethical positions toward the environment and the necessity of evaluating them. As a result, environmental ethics has become concerned with redefining moral obligations and prohibitions regarding nature and reassessing humanity's role and responsibilities toward it.

The lack of consensus on how to reform or reshape the problematic human-environment relationship has led to a variety of diverse—and often conflicting—proposals. These proposals are primarily conceptualized as normative models for social behavior or environmental ethics frameworks (Abaidoo, 1997: 305).

Another key reason for the necessity of environmental ethics is the profound impact that worldviews and ethical guidance have on both individual and collective behavior (Hatcher, 2004: 357-363). Environmental beliefs or worldviews—as systems of attitudes and convictions about the relationship between humans and nature—play a crucial role in shaping conservation behaviors and serve as reference frameworks for interactions with the environment (Corral-Verdugo, 2003: 247-257).

In this regard, it can be argued that our mindset is the first thing that enters the environment—it influences how we assign value to different components of the ecosystem, which in turn determines how we interact with it (Miser, 1383 Sh). Therefore, the way we interact with the environment is largely dependent on how we perceive our relationship with it. The value we assign to the environment determines how we view our role and function on Earth and how we behave in sharing these resources with others.

Foundations of Environmental Ethics

In general, ethics serves as a guide for human actions. Throughout history, people have grappled with fundamental moral questions: What constitutes right behavior? What is considered wrong? What criteria determine whether an action is morally acceptable or not? (Oughton, 2003: 3-18)

Ethics can be understood as the philosophical study of right and wrong behavior, as well as the principles and rules that should govern human conduct. By establishing standards for distinguishing right from wrong and defining boundaries through moral obligations and prohibitions, ethics rejects unchecked human freedom. Adhering to ethical principles plays a crucial role in preserving social cohesion and integrity.

The recognition that nature possesses inherent value can be considered the starting point of environmental ethics. This ethical framework is based on the idea that moral considerations should extend beyond human relationships to include interactions between humans and nature.

Some scholars argue that examining the human-environment relationship through an ethical lens is a modern development (Robinson & Chris 1378 Sh). The rise of environmental ethics can be traced back to the 1960s, coinciding with the growth of the environmental movement (Kortenkamp, 2001: 261-272).

Environmental ethics is a branch of applied philosophy (Minteer, 2003: 131-156) and a core area of bioethics[1], tasked with evaluating the complex interplay between empirical realities, ideologies, and human values (O'neill, 2002: 228). Its primary goal is to provide systematic and comprehensive reasoning for why ethical relationships between humans and the natural world should exist. In this sense, it can be defined as the study of right and wrong behavior within a specific environmental context (Hatcher, 2004: 357-363). Thus, the main role of environmental ethics is to establish internal moral constraints within society, guiding human behavior toward nature in a responsible and ethical manner (Sesin, 2003).

In ethical systems and theories, two fundamental questions arise:

1. What possesses intrinsic value?

1. Bioethics consists of two main areas: environmental ethics and medical ethics.

2. What constitutes morally right or wrong actions, and what is the criterion for ethical behavior?

The first question is crucial because it determines who or what deserves moral consideration and ethical obligations. In traditional ethics, only humans have been regarded as morally significant. Therefore, incorporating ethics into environmental discussions requires a reassessment of human values concerning the values of nature and its components.

Philosophical debates on the moral status of the environment specifically address whether non-human entities can possess intrinsic value and whether recognizing such value is necessary to justify environmental conservation (Paterson, 2006: 144-150).

The value theory applied in environmental ethics distinguishes between two types of value: Intrinsic value and Instrumental value. Intrinsic value is typically understood in contrast to instrumental value. Instrumental value means that an entity's worth depends on its usefulness to something else—without that usefulness, it would have no value. In contrast, intrinsic value means that an entity is valuable in and of itself, regardless of whether it is beneficial to anything else. For example, those who argue that nature has intrinsic value emphasize that even in the absence of humans or human use of nature, it still possesses value in its own right.

In this regard, environmental ethics in the West can be categorized into two main approaches: anthropocentric ethics and ethics based on sentience and awareness. Over the past four to five decades, profound debates have emerged between value subjectivists and objectivists who advocate for nature’s intrinsic worth. The former argues that values require an evaluator, whereas the latter believes in the inherent value of nature.

Similarly, some scholars have distinguished three value orientations as the foundation of environmental attitudes (Zelezny, 1999: 255-265; Bejerke, 1999: 415-421; Kaltenborn & Bjereke, 2002: 1-11.). These include:

a) **Egoistic Value Orientation**, in which environmental issues are considered harmful to the individual.

b) **Social-Altruistic Value Orientation**, in which environmental issues are regarded as harmful to other people.

c) **Biocentric or Ecocentric Value Orientation**, in which nature

is considered to have intrinsic value independent of human interests.

Since the value orientations in categories (a) and (b) emphasize environmental conservation primarily for human benefit, they are both anthropocentric (Kaltenborn & Bjereke, 2002: 1-11). Accordingly, in contemporary environmental philosophy, the primary distinction in environmental ethics arises from the contrast between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. In anthropocentric ethics, only humans hold moral standing, and environmental destruction is considered significant only to the extent that it affects human interests. In contrast, the non-anthropocentric perspective rejects this view, extending moral consideration to other living beings and ecosystems as a whole. It asserts that environmental impact is significant regardless of its consequences for humans (Oughton, 2003: 3-18).

Once the question of what holds moral standing is established, the second question arises—namely, what constitutes right or wrong action from an ethical standpoint? Various ethical theories have addressed this question differently, often offering conflicting responses due to their underlying ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations. However, environmental ethics—at least in modern Western thought—can be examined within the framework of three normative ethical theories, each diverse enough to encompass the discussions on moral action criteria (Oughton, 2003: 3-18; Hasanī & ʿAlīpūr, 1382 Sh). These theories are:

a) **Utilitarianism** – This theory, the most well-known form of consequentialist ethics, holds that the desirable outcome of an action is the maximization of happiness for the greatest number of people. The primary criterion for evaluating the morality of an action is the total or average benefit for a given population.

b) **Deontology** – In this theory, the moral value of an action is independent of its consequences and is instead determined by the nature of the action itself. An action is considered morally right if it is performed in accordance with correct moral principles.

c) **Virtue-Oriented** – In this theory, virtues and vices serve as the standard for moral action. It emphasizes the character and disposition of the moral agent. An action is deemed virtuous and ethical if the agent performs it with a worthy motive, solely for its intrinsic value and virtue. Otherwise, the action is not considered morally commendable.

Common Approaches to Environmental Ethics

Based on the two fundamental ethical questions— "What holds intrinsic value?" and "What is the criterion for moral action?"—a range of approaches[1] can be identified in environmental ethics. These approaches represent efforts to expand moral concerns in a way that encompasses the natural environment and its non-human components.

The most common approaches include conservationism, preservationism (Jacob, 1994: 237-252), social ecology, animal rights, land ethics, deep ecology, ecofeminism, stewardship, sustainable development, and sustainability (Brennan, 2002).

Conservationism and preservationism are manifestations of resource-oriented environmental ethics that regard nature as a vast resource for human use. In conservationism, components of the environment should be preserved due to their economic value. Preservationism, however, rejects the purely economic valuation of nature and emphasizes safeguarding nature to ensure species diversity, the beauty of natural systems, and the present or future use of nature by humans (Abaidoo, 1997: 305).

Social ecology argues that all environmental problems stem from social issues, and without a serious commitment to resolving these underlying social problems, ecological challenges cannot be properly understood or effectively addressed (Bookchin, 1995: 245-259).

In the animal rights approach, moral rights and duties are extended to animals based on the biological hierarchy, grounded in animals' possession of consciousness, self-awareness, and reasoning capacity (Oughton, 2003: 3-18). Some proponents of this approach argue that the moral rights of animals are in no way inferior to human rights.

For land ethics, the role of humans shifts from a conqueror to a mere member of the ecological community, necessitating respect for other members and reverence for the entire ecosystem (the Earth). Land ethics seeks to expand societal boundaries to encompass soil, water, plants, animals, and the land as a whole. According to this approach, an action is morally right if it

1. The approach can be considered a method of action within a system that embodies its philosophy.

contributes to the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community (Leopold, 2001: 119-126).

Deep ecology categorizes current environmental conservation efforts into two movements: shallow ecology and deep ecology. The former focuses on combating pollution and resource depletion to enhance the health and prosperity of developed nations. Deep ecology claims to be more effective than shallow ecology and views the shift toward deep ecology as an ethical obligation. The slogan of deep ecology is "simple in means, rich in results" (Naess, 2001: 147-149).

Deep ecology seeks the evolution of the self through unity with all entities, achievable through the individual's integration with others, species, ecosystems, and landscapes. It posits that the ultimate fulfillment of self-evolution lies in experiencing identity within diversity, which stands in opposition to alienation.

Ecofeminism examines the connections between feminism and ecology, critiquing the parallel structures of domination in male-female and human-nature relationships. It asserts that both forms of domination must be abolished. In this approach, the oppression of women by men and the exploitation of nature by humans are inseparable and must be analyzed simultaneously (Pojman, 2001: 189). Any environmental ethic that overlooks the intertwined oppression of women and nature is, at best, incomplete and, at worst, illegitimate (Warren, 2001:189-199).

Stewardship ethics emphasizes human responsibility toward other creatures as a divine trust. This approach rejects the notion that humans are absolute owners of the Earth. Instead, it holds that human dominion over nature is never absolute but rather a responsibility entrusted to them. Humans are seen as caretakers, expected to treat creation with reverence and wisdom, as God desires. When they fail to do so, the Earth suffers (Rshm, 2000: 109).

Though sustainability and sustainable development are not typically framed as ethical approaches, they can be articulated through ethics (Gue, 2004: 53-69). Sustainability represents international, interdisciplinary efforts to harmonize economic and environmental goals (Guertin, 1996: 373-375), which must include what is termed intergenerational justice (Cairns, 2006: 211-216). Sustainable development, meanwhile, is a process of change in which resource exploitation, investment direction,

technological innovation, and institutional reform are coordinated to enhance the ability of current and future generations to meet human needs and aspirations (Jacob, 1994: 237-252). Sustainable development is anthropocentric. This is evident in its modern interpretation, which adopts an instrumental view of nature and upholds an ontological separation between humans and the natural world (Gallagher, 2006: 74-83).

Table 1 – Comparison of Environmental Ethics Approaches Based on the Two Fundamental Ethical Questions

Value Center	Consequentialism (Outcomes)	Deontology (Duties)	Virtue Ethics (Being)
Anthropocentric	Conservationism	Preservationism	Environmental Sociology; Sustainable Development
Biocentric		Animal Rights; Earth Ethics	
Ecocentric	Profound ecology	Ecofeminism	Proper care; Sustainability

Another reason for sustainable development's human-centered approach is its emphasis on humans as the ultimate goal of development and its consideration of environmental dimensions primarily for the benefit of present and future generations. However, sustainability, in a broader sense, extends beyond the anthropocentric foundations of sustainable development, approaching an ecocentric theory that is not unlike stewardship ethics (Gue, 2004: 53-69).

Considering the various approaches to environmental ethics discussed, they can be summarized based on how they address the two fundamental ethical questions, as outlined in Table 1.

Theocentrism: An Intrinsic Value Rooted in Religion

Many scholars believe that the environmental crisis is fundamentally spiritual and religious (Motavalli, 2002: 2-11). The separation of religion from worldly life is considered one of the most significant factors contributing to environmental crises, as human ecology is profoundly shaped by one's beliefs about human nature and existence, which are

closely tied to religion (Tucker, 2001: xv-xxxii).

Given the increasing recognition of the influence of moral beliefs and religious values on human behavior towards others, including their relationship with other creatures and plants (Dwivedi, 2001: 250-256), the emphasis is on seeking solutions to environmental crises through a renewed engagement with the traditions of religions (Muḥaqqiq Dāmād, 1380 Sh: 7-30).

In this context, interfaith environmental dialogues are noteworthy. For instance, international gatherings of religious and political leaders were held in Oxford (1988), Moscow (1990), Rio (1992), and Kyoto (1993), where leaders from various religious traditions, politicians, and heads of state convened (Tucker, 2001: xv-xxxii). These summits stressed resolving environmental crises by integrating science and religion (Aminzadeh, 2002, 97–106). Other notable examples include the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago (1993) and Cape Town (1999), the Tehran Seminar on Environment, Culture, and Religion (2001) (Tucker, 2002: 12-14), the United Nations World Summit of Religious Leaders (2000) (Shahvali, 2006), and the First Conference on Islam and the Environment (1999) in Tehran.

The aforementioned evidence indicates a growing readiness among humanity to embrace religious teachings compared to the past. The global perspective on religion has shifted, with increasing recognition of its potential as an influential factor in resolving environmental crises (Aminzadeh, 2002, 97–106).

These events reflect a global shift towards recognizing religion as a significant factor in addressing environmental challenges. Compared to the past, there is greater openness to religious teachings, as the global perspective on faith has evolved to acknowledge its role in resolving ecological crises.

Given this reality, it is time for humanity to return to the historical traditions of religion in seeking solutions to environmental challenges. This approach leads us to another core ethical perspective: theocentrism. Theocentrism offers a God-centered worldview, grounded in the religious conviction that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the Earth (Bryant, 2005: 240).

In this context, it should be noted that not all religions share the same conception of theocentrism. For example, some Eastern religions such as Hinduism or Buddhism view nature or its

components as divine, which can be referred to as pantheism. However, Abrahamic religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism believe in one God and consider the entire universe to be the creation of this singular divine being.

Table 2 – Environmental Ethics in Abrahamic Religions Based on the Two Fundamental Ethical Questions

What is intrinsically valuable?

Theocentric	All living and non-living creatures (the whole of existence) are God's creations and thus inherently valuable and worthy of consideration.

What makes an action right or wrong?

Theological (Deontological)	Following divine commandments regarding how to live.

Although the worldview of non-Abrahamic religions regarding nature includes teachings that could apply to the protection of the natural environment, they are not the focus of this article. As mentioned earlier, in the theocentric view of Abrahamic religions, God is considered the creator and sustainer of the Earth. Therefore, the care of the environment is seen as caring for what belongs to God. While some critics argue that this perspective is human-centered, asserting that it places humans in a different rank compared to other beings, it should be defended by stating that although humans are distinct from other creatures in Abrahamic religions, due to their responsibility toward God, they also have a special responsibility toward the environment. This responsibility entails ensuring that when making decisions about the environment, the potential consequences for other living beings are not overlooked (Ibid).

Thus, in Abrahamic religions, the question of what holds intrinsic value is presented according to a theocentric perspective. In this view, intrinsic value in the universe belongs to God, and the value of other creatures is defined based on this. Consequently, all elements of nature are considered valuable because of this connection, and humans are tasked with their protection. Therefore, it can be said that the moral criteria for actions in this perspective are based on

fulfilling the duties entrusted to humans by God[1].

Following God's commandments on how to interact with the natural environment is a clear example in Abrahamic religions where humans are obliged to carry out these actions, and their behavior toward nature can be ethically evaluated based on these commandments. Hence, the environmental ethics of Abrahamic religions can be illustrated according to the two fundamental ethical questions, as shown in Table 2.

In Islam, similar to Christianity and Judaism, God's ownership over His creations and the obligation to act under God's commandments when evaluating human behavior toward the natural environment is firmly established. However, one of the distinguishing features of the Islamic worldview in theocentrism can be linked to the concept of "God's sovereignty over all things."

The explanation of environmental ethics based on this concept can provide a more comprehensive approach to the proper interaction between humans and the natural environment, which is discussed below.

The Quran contains numerous verses that affirm God as the sole Creator of existence. Examples include Surah Al-A'rāf (7:185), Surah Al-An'ām (6:101), Surah Al-A'rāf (7:54), Surah An-Nūr (24:45), and Surah As-Sajdah (32:4). This reality is underscored by Islamic teachings, which emphasize that God is not only the Creator of the universe but also encompasses all existence, with everything being subsumed within His divine presence. For instance, Surah Hūd (11:92), Surah An-Nisā (4:126), and Surah Fuṣṣilat (41:54) explicitly highlight God’s all-encompassing dominion over creation[2].

1 . Theology entails acquiring knowledge of that which God has made obligatory for people. Chittick, William C.1372Sh: 51-63. (45)

2 . Muḥaqqiq Dāmād considers the term al-Muḥīṭ in the Qur’an to be one of the expressions closely related to the concept of the environment (moḥīṭ-e zīst) and refers to it as the starting point for any effort to understand Islam’s perspective on the environment and human interaction with it. Muḥaqqiq Dāmād,1373 Sh: 78-89. (47)

Figure 1 - Interventionist Worldview Concerning Nature

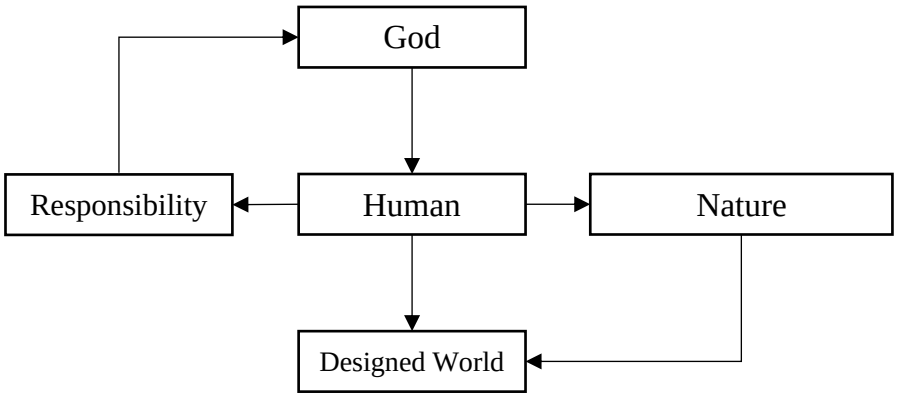
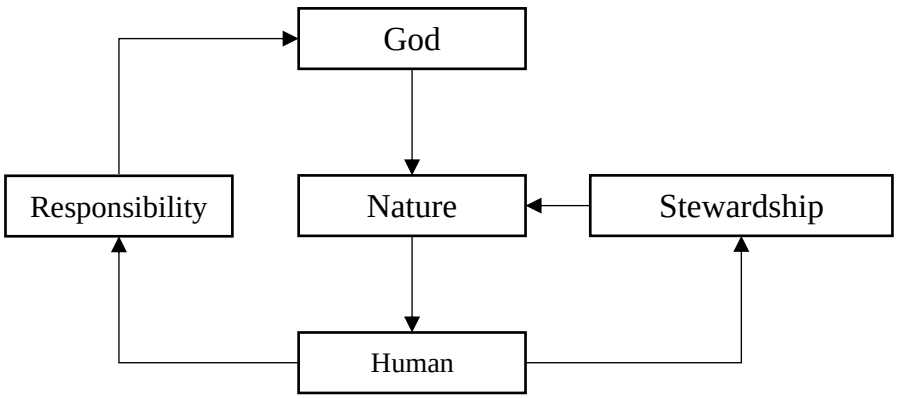


Figure 2 - Educational Worldview Concerning Nature



To contrast this Islamic viewpoint with prevailing perspectives on the relationship between God, humanity, and nature, we can examine O'Riordan's framework, which proposes two environmental worldviews: Interventionist Mode or Technocentrism and Nurturing Mode or Ecocentrism. In the first worldview, human intelligence and competitive spirit dictate ethical principles and guide behavior, while the second posits that nature itself determines ethical norms (how to act) and informs behavioral imperatives (why we should act). These two worldviews can be illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 (Gought & Scott, 2000: 36-47).

In the two aforementioned worldviews—considered as

competing perspectives on environmentalism—God, human beings, and nature are regarded as three distinct essences whose relationship is hierarchical. Therefore, it may be argued that the interventionist worldview is subject to the critique of anthropocentrism. Meanwhile, the nurturist worldview seeks to compel humans to derive ethical principles from their natural surroundings- that is, from nature. However, this perspective is also subject to a critique similar to that directed at proponents of the separation of religion from worldly life. In contrast, the Islamic perspective redefines these relationships by emphasizing God's all-encompassing presence over creation. This framework offers a radically different and holistic worldview that addresses the need for integrated environmental stewardship. The significance of this approach becomes evident in response to postmodernism's attempts to advance a non-human-centric worldview. Rather than resolving the dualities that fragment humanity from nature—as environmentalists often advocate—Islam grounds its vision in the dissolution of human-nature divisions, urging humanity to rediscover unity with all creation (Marshall, 1998: 137-164), including the natural world[1].

The concept of God's encompassing presence over all creations signifies a form of connection and unity between humanity and nature. This unity is understood in the sense that God has complete dominion and authority over all existence and its components, and therefore, both humanity and nature, existing within this domain, all rely on the same ultimate origin. Consequently, the relationship between humans and nature in the Islamic God-centric perspective should be understood with the awareness that God is not only the Creator of all existence but also has complete dominion over all His creations[2].

1. This perspective also stems from the Islamic monotheistic worldview (Aminzadeh, Behnāz, 2002, 97–106), in such a way that the Qur'an presents the outcome of inclination toward tawḥīd (monotheism) as unity, comprehensiveness, and closeness to God whereas the consequence of inclination toward shirk (polytheism) is multiplicity, division, disharmony, disintegration, dissolution, and remoteness from God. Chittick, William C.1372Sh: 51-63. (45)

2. One must never assume that God's encompassment (iḥāṭah) of all beings is similar to the way the atmosphere surrounds the earth, for such a notion implies limitation. What is meant by God's encompassment of all things is that all beings are ontologically dependent on His sacred existence. In other words, within the→

Thus, the concept of the unity between humans and nature, which is deemed essential for environmental protection, is outlined within a more comprehensive framework. To highlight the superiority of the God-centered value system in environmental protection, it can be compared with the common value systems in environmental ethics (Table 3). The significance of this comparison is better understood when we recognize that God-centeredness reinforces key factors that have the greatest impact on environmental protection, such as the unity of humanity and nature, human responsibility toward the environment, enforceability, and inclusivity.

A pertinent question may arise as to what approach can be adopted for environmental protection within Islamic environmental ethics, which is grounded in theocentrism and theological principles. This article proposes the approach of Self-Ecology as a viable framework.

Self-Ecology: An Environmental Ethics Approach

In the monotheistic tradition of Islam, the human self (*nafs*) is considered a unified entity, comprising both material and spiritual dimensions[1]. The ethical actions of humans stem from the spiritual aspect of their self. In other words, what leads to ethical behavior in humans originates from their spiritual self (Motahhari, 1383 Sh: 254). A critical insight here is that all moral vices arise from the unreal or animalistic self, while the real or celestial self encourages virtues and righteous deeds. There is a constant struggle between the real self and the unreal self, with each trying to govern the human's actions and direct their behavior.

Based on this understanding and the God-centered value system in Islamic theology, the concept of Self-Ecology can be introduced as an approach to Islamic environmental ethics.

realm of existence, there is only one true and self-subsistent being, while all other beings are reliant and dependent upon Him. If this relationship were to be severed, all creatures would perish and be annihilated. (Tafsīr al-Nemūneh, vol. 20, p. 336)

1. The human being possesses two "selves" or two aspects of the "I," which together constitute the human nafs as a "unified existence." One is the "true self," and the other is the "false self" or "non-self." This division, however, does not imply the existence of two genuine or essential selves within the human being. Rather, the individual possesses one authentic self, while the other is a non-self or inauthentic self, which may be mistakenly identified as the true self. Motahhari, Morteza, 1383 Sh: 254.

Self-Ecology in environmental ethics is rooted in self-awareness, as the key to improving the human ethical state lies in understanding one's true nature or Ego. In this way, by recognizing one's own soul, an individual becomes aware of the internal obstacles that prevent them from acting freely in alignment with ethical principles. This concept applies equally to the relationship between humans and the natural environment. The choice of the name "self-ecology" reflects the idea that, without understanding the true nature of the self, one cannot have a solid ethical justification for improving their actions or behavior concerning the environment.

In self-ecology, the effort to protect the environment is only successful when a person struggles against the unreal self and nurtures their real self. The real self of a person, which has a celestial or divine nature, can flourish through nurturing so that its potential is expressed through the manifestation of divine attributes. In other words, if a person's real self is nurtured, they will be able to achieve God-centeredness through knowledge of God. In this way, the two criteria of Islamic environmental ethics, namely God-centeredness and the knowledge of God in behavior toward nature, are realized. This process can unfold as a person reaches the knowledge of God through self-awareness, which means recognizing and nurturing the real self.

Therefore, self-awareness leads to the knowledge of God and God-centeredness, whose characteristics were discussed earlier. Thus, self-ecology deals with a concept referred to as the preservation and dignity of the self, which is only possible through the remembrance of God (Arfa', 1362 Sh: 102).

Axial Values	Basis of Comparison			
	Unity between Humans and Nature	Responsibility toward the Environment	Enforcement Mechanism	Inclusiveness
Anthropocentrism	Human and nature are two distinct substances	Responsibility toward nature derives from responsibility toward humans	To the extent that human interests are endangered	Limited to humans

Biocentrism	Humans merely share characteristics with living beings	Humans are only responsible toward some living beings	To the extent that the welfare of some animals is endangered	Limited to living species
Ecocentrism	Humans are interconnected with the ecosystem	Humans are responsible for the entire ecosystem	To the extent that the stability and integrity of the ecosystem are endangered	Limited to the components of an ecosystem
Theocentrism	Humans are interconnected with all of God's creations	Humans are responsible toward God and His creations	To the extent that God's creations are endangered	Infinite

Source: Research findings

Concerning the environment, it can be stated that self-preservation and self-dignity lead to a proper interaction between humans and the natural environment, ultimately resulting in its protection. This is because a person who, through self-awareness and safeguarding their true self, attains knowledge of God will also be guided by their spiritual soul—an innate divine trust—in their interactions with other creatures (Figure 3).

Conversely, an individual who forgets their true self and instead chooses to follow their animalistic soul will lack an internal restraint to regulate their behavior. Consequently, their approach to nature will be dictated by base desires, perceiving it merely as a tool for fulfilling personal ambitions and material comfort. This phenomenon can be seen as a fundamental cause of environmental crises, characterized by humanity's unrestrained domination over nature and its exploitation for increased production and economic growth.

The achievements of self-ecology, with an emphasis on recognizing and preserving the true self, provide appropriate means for environmental protection. Self-ecology strengthens the internal belief that environmental conservation and its optimal utilization should align with the knowledge of God and a respectful attitude toward all of His creations, including nature. Moreover, as God's vicegerent on Earth, humans must embody divine attributes to ensure the preservation of their true selves. Thus, individuals who strive to safeguard their true selves will interact with the environment in a manner that yields the following outcomes:

1. **Rejection of Irresponsible Human Domination Over Nature** – Since humans are God's vicegerents on Earth, they are entrusted with divine stewardship and cannot exercise authority over nature without responsibility.
2. **Coexistence with the Environment** – Humans recognize themselves as part of God's creation, sharing a common origin with all other beings. Thus, they are not separate from nature but exist within an interconnected network of living and non-living entities.
3. **Prevention of Nature's Exploitation and Resource Waste** – Humans are commanded to refrain from corruption on Earth, which includes environmental destruction and the devastation of ecosystems.
4. **Accountability for One's Conduct Toward Nature** – Just as humans are the noblest of creation, they are also entrusted with the greatest divine responsibility—free will and moral agency. The fact that all existence is at their service reinforces their duty to act responsibly toward the environment.
5. **Protection and Improvement of the Environment** – Humans are not only obligated to safeguard God's creation but also to enhance its condition. Therefore, self-ecology is founded on the principle of improving environmental conditions to ensure their continued development and sustainability.
6. **Sanctity of the Environment Due to Its Connection with God** – As the soul evolves and a person realizes the unity of all creation, the environment, as a divine creation, becomes worthy of respect and reverence. This concept serves as a crucial internal deterrent against environmental harm.
7. **Forgetting Oneself Leads to Environmental Crises** – Such crises arise when humans abandon the remembrance of God, forget their true selves, and become enslaved by their base desires and materialistic impulses.

Thus, environmental destruction reflects the neglect of God and, consequently, the neglect of one's true self. This leads humans to succumb to animalistic tendencies, disregarding their

place in existence and their inability to recognize the interconnectedness of all creation and God's encompassing presence. As a result, self-centeredness drives them to pursue their desires—even at the cost of environmental degradation.

The self-ecology approach, in terms of determining the rightness or wrongness of actions, initially resembles a deontological theory. In this framework, through the remembrance of God and the cultivation of the true self, a person adheres to divine commandments and obligations regarding interaction with the natural environment. However, over time, as the true self matures, these moral imperatives gradually transform into virtues that shape specific attributes in human behavior.

These attributes foster stable and enduring character traits, referred to as virtues. Consequently, the foundational principles and obligations governing human interaction with nature—originating from the preservation of the true self and the knowledge of God—eventually cultivate virtues within the individual through the continuous remembrance of God. These virtues then become the ultimate criteria for evaluating one's conduct toward nature.

Conclusion

To protect the environment, human behavior toward nature and lifestyle choices must change. Therefore, establishing a set of behavioral guidelines to govern human interaction with nature is essential. In this regard, ethics—concerned with defining moral obligations, prohibitions, and the correctness or incorrectness of human actions based on a system of values—has expanded into environmental ethics to regulate human conduct toward nature. The role of environmental ethics is to define the principles and criteria that govern human-nature relationships, aiming to prevent harm to the environment and ensure its preservation.

These principles function by fostering internal moral deterrents to correct harmful human behavior toward nature. A spectrum of perspectives exists in this domain: at one end are views that attribute intrinsic value solely to humans, asserting that the environment should serve human needs. At the other end are perspectives that recognize intrinsic value in all beings, both living and non-living, and advocate for their preservation regardless of their utility to humans.

Given the need for holistic perspectives in defining human-nature relationships and the inadequacy of conventional environmental protection strategies, religious and spiritual discussions have gained importance in shaping human interaction with nature. Religions play a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward nature and constructing worldviews and ethical frameworks that underpin cultural values. They help individuals evaluate and reassess their current relationship with nature, guiding them toward more environmentally harmonious behaviors.

Religious environmental ethics offers distinct answers to two fundamental ethical questions: What possesses intrinsic value? And What determines the rightness or wrongness of an action? The answers, respectively, are God-centeredness and knowledge of God. Among religious teachings, Islam provides a comprehensive perspective on intrinsic value, rooted in the fundamental belief in God's encompassing presence. This belief fosters a profound understanding of the unity of existence, wherein the relationship between humans, nature, and God is uniquely interconnected. Consequently, environmental destruction is perceived as a violation of the integrity of existence and an affront to the divine signs (āyāt). This perspective cultivates more enduring internal deterrents against harming the environment.

Self-ecology is an attempt to present a God-centered approach to environmental ethics, drawing inspiration from Islamic anthropology and emphasizing the spiritual dimension of the human soul. It establishes a framework for proper human-environment interaction based on self-awareness and self-discipline. Given its unique characteristics, this approach can be regarded as a response to the contemporary human need for a sense of unity with all of God’s creation in interactions with nature.

References

1. Abaidoo, S. (1997). Human-Nature Interaction and the Modern Agricultural Regime: Agricultural Practices and Environmental Ethics. PhD diss., Department of Sociology, University of Saskatchewan.
2. Aksin, George A. C. (1991). *Rāhnamā-yi Rahīāft-hā-yi Goonāgon Tārwij*. Translated by Alireza Kashani and Javad Mir. Center for Rural Issues Research and Studies, Ministry of Jihad for Construction.
3. Aminzadeh, Behnaz. "Jahānbīnī-yi Dīnī va Muḥīṭ-i Zīst: Daramadī bar Nigash-i Islām." *Nature, Environmental Studies* 30 (2002).
4. Arfa, Seyyed Kazem. (1983). *Iṣlāh-yi Nafs*. Penguin Publications.
5. Bejerke, T., and B. P. Kaltenborn. "The Relationship of Ecocentric and Anthropocentric Motives to Attitudes Towards Large Carnivores." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 19 (1999).
6. Benson, John. (2004). *Akhlāq-i Muḥīṭ-i Zīst: Muqaddamāt va Maqālāt*. Translated by Abd al-Hossein Wahabzadeh. Jahad University Press.
7. Bookchin, Murray. (1995). "What Is Social Ecology?" In *Earth Ethics*, edited by P. Sterba. Prentice Hall.
8. Bourdeau, Philippe. "The Man-Nature Relationship and Environmental Ethics." *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity* 72 (2004).
9. Brennan, A., and Yeuk-Sze Lo. (2002). "Environmental Ethics." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. http://www.plato.stanford.edu.
10. Bryant, J., L. B. La Velle, and J. Searle. (2005). *Introduction to Bioethics*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
11. Caims, R. D. "On Accounting for Sustainable Development and Accounting for the Environment." *Resource Policy* 31 (2006).
12. Chittick, William. *Teolojī va tose'e*. Translated by Seyyed Mohammad Avini. *Nāmeh-ye Farhang* 3, no. 4 (1993).
13. Corral-Verdugo, V., R. B. Bechtel, and B. Fraijo-Sing. "Environmental Beliefs and Water Conservation: An Empirical Study." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 23 (2003).
14. Dwivedi, O. P. (2001). "Satyagraha for Conservation: Awakening the Spirit of Hindurum." In *Environmental Ethics: Reading in Theory and Application*, edited by L. P. Pojman. Thomson Learning.
15. Edmund Penkafs. (2003). "Muqaddimah-yi Mutarjimān." In *Az Mas'aleh-yi Mahwī tā Fazīlat-garā'ī: Naqdī bar Tahwīl-garā'ī dar Akhlāq*, translated by Seyyed Hamid Reza Hasani and Mahdi Ali Pour. Daftar-i Nashr-i Ma'āref.
16. Ehrlich, Paul R. "Human Nature, Nature Conservation, and Environmental Ethics." *BioScience* 52, no. 1 (2002).
17. Fricker, A. "The Ethics of Enough." *Futures* 34 (2002).
18. Gaertin, J. D. "Feature Section: Tunneling and Underground Space for Sustainable Development." *Tunnelling and Underground Space Technology* 11, no. 4 (1996).
19. Gallagher, M. (2006). "The Importance of Traditional Knowledge for Sustainability: An Analysis of Equitation." In *Sharing Wisdom for*

Our Future Environmental Education in Action, edited by S. Woolhorion and D. Marinova. Australian Association for Environmental Education.
20. Gought, S., W. Scott, and A. Stables. "Beyond O'Riordan: Balancing Anthropocentrism and Ecocentrism." *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* 9, no. 1 (2000).
21. Gue, L. "The Case for Ethical Inquiry in Science and Technology Policy." *EcoAction Journal* 2 (2004).
22. Hatcher, Tim. "Environmental Ethics as an Alternative for Evaluation Theory in For-Profit Business Contexts." *Evaluation and Program Planning* 27 (2004).
23. Holden, Andrew. "In Need of New Environmental Ethics for Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research* 30, no. 1 (2003).
24. Jacob, M. "Toward a Methodological Critique of Sustainable Development." *The Journal of Developing Areas* 28 (1994).
25. Jenkins, T. N. "Analysis, Economics and the Environment: A Case of Ethical Neglect." *Ecological Economics* 26 (1998).
26. Kaltenborn, B. P., and T. Bjereke. "Associations Between Environmental Value Orientations and Landscape Preference." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 59 (2002).
27. Kortenkamp, K. V., and C. F. Moore. "Ecocentrism and Anthropocentrism: Moral Reasoning About Ecological Commons Dilemmas." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 21 (2001).
28. Leopold, Aldo. "Ecocentrism: The Land Ethic." In *Environmental Ethics: Reading in Theory and Application*, edited by L. P. Pojman. Thomson Learning, 2001.
29. Marshall, A. "A Postmodern Natural History of the World: Eviscerating the GUTs from Ecology and Environmentalism." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 29, no. 1 (1998).
30. Minteer, B. A., E. A. Corley, and R. E. Manning. "Environmental Ethics Beyond Principle? The Case for a Pragmatic Contextualism." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 17 (2003).
31. Miser, Chris. (2004). *Jāygāh-e tanavv'o-ye ekolujiki dar tose'e-ye pāyidār*. Translated by Alireza Kochaki and Abdulmajid Mahdavi Damghani. Ferdowsi University Press.
32. Motahhari, Morteza. (2004). *Falsafah-yi Akhlāq*. Sadra Publications.
33. Motavalli, J. "Stewards of the Earth." *The Environmental Magazine* 13, no. 6 (2002).
34. Muḥaqqiq Dāmād, Seyyed Mustafa. "Ilāhiyāt-i Muḥīṭ-i Zīst." *Nāmeh-yi Farhangistān-i ʿUlūm* 6, no. 17 (2001).
35. Muḥaqqiq Dāmād, Seyyed Mustafa. "Ṭabīʻat va Muḥīṭ-i Zīst az Nigāh-i Islām." *Nāmeh-yi Farhang* 3, no. 13 (1994).
36. Naess, Arne. (2001). "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecological Movement." In *Environmental Ethics: Reading in Theory and Application*, edited by L. P. Pojman. Thomson Learning.
37. Newton, Lisa H. (2002). Ethics and Sustainability: Sustainable

Development and the Moral Life. Prentice Hall.
38. O'Neill, Onora. (2002). *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics*. Cambridge University Press.
39. Oughton, D. "Protection of the Environment from Ionizing Radiation: Ethical Issues." *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity* 66 (2003).
40. Paterson, B. "Ethics for Wildlife Conservation: Overcoming the Human-Nature Dualism." *BioScience* 56, no. 2 (2006).
41. Pojman, L. P., ed. (2001). Environmental Ethics: Reading in Theory and Application. Thomson Learning.
42. Robinson, Dave, and Chris Garratt. (1999). *Akhlāq: Qadam-e Awwal*. Translated by Ali Akbar Abdol Abadi. Shirazeh.
43. Rshm, S. M. K. (2000). Care for Creation: Human Activity and the Environment. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
44. Sesin, V. (2003). "Environmental Ethics and Human Interests: Problems of Mutual Relations.". http://www.fondazionelanza.it/epa/abstract/sesin_full.pdf.
45. Shahvali, M. "A Research Epistemology and Time Scale for the Conservation of Environment." Paper presented at the *International Conference on Research Methodologies in Science, Engineering and Technology*, Imam Hossein University, 2006.
46. Tucker, Mary Evelyn. "Religions Enter an Ecological Phase." *The Environmental Magazine* 13, no. 6 (2002).
47. Tucker, Mary Evelyn, and John Grim. (2001). "Series Foreword." In *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology*, edited by John A. Grim. Harvard University Press.
48. Warren, Karen J. (2001). "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism." In *Environmental Ethics: Reading in Theory and Application*, edited by L. P. Pojman. Thomson Learning.
49. Zelezny, Lynn C., and P. Wesley Schultz. "Values as Predictors of Environmental Attitudes: Evidence for Consistency Across 14 Countries." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 19 (1999).