

THE INNER DIMENSION OF GOING GREEN:  
ARTICULATING AN ISLAMIC DEEP-ECOLOGY

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Our interaction with nature is clearly constrained and directed by such foundational ethical precepts as mercy, moderation, and gratitude, which, when systematically understood and applied, result in ecological health. But ethical precepts refer ultimately to human nature, and therefore ecological health is rooted in psychological health. From this deep-level perspective, environmental degradation is less a resource-problem than an attitude-problem. This psycho-ecological approach toward preserving and enhancing environmental health is explored by considering some pertinent aspects of Islamic socio-intellectual history and their relevance for re-articulating and re-applying authentic Islamic environmental ethical values in today's world.

**Keywords:** Deep-ecology; psychology; human nature; resource-problem; attitude-problem; greed as growth; prodigal consumption; stewardship of nature; *ḥimā*; *ḥarīm*; mercy; gratitude; moderation; contentment.

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**Introduction: Resource-problem or attitude-problem?**

Muslims' interaction with nature (*mu'āmalah 'alam al-ṭabī'ah*)<sup>1</sup> is clearly constrained and directed by such foundational religio-ethical precepts<sup>2</sup> as *rahmah* (mercy/kindness/compassion),<sup>3</sup> *mīzān/tawāzun* (balance/moderation/equilibrium/harmony)<sup>4</sup> and *shukr* (gratitude/thankfulness/appreciation).<sup>5</sup> These precepts and the operative principles derivable from

1. Here it is proposed that the ethico-juridical principles in *fiqh al-mu'āmalah* governing transactions between humans, such as the concept of *lā ḍarār wa lā ḍirār* (no harming and no reciprocating harm) be extended to govern human politicoeconomic and technoscientific interactions with nature. For a preliminary outline of a contemporary *fiqh* of the environment, see Mustafa Abu Sway, "Fiqh al-Bī'ah: Towards an Islamic Jurisprudence of the Environment," lecture presented at Belfast mosque, February 1998, <<http://www.iol.ie/~afifi/Articles/environment.htm>>; and Sheikh Muhammad Ridwan Gallant, "The Objective (*Maqāsid*) of the *Sharī'ah* in the Protection of the Environment" in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Maqasid al-Sharī'ah and Its Realization in Contemporary Societies* (Kuala Lumpur: IUM, 2006), English Papers, 416-440. S. Waqar Ahmed Husaini, *Islamic Sciences* (New Delhi: Goodword, 2002), has written on the importance of applying the systematic axiology of *fiqh*, especially as encapsulated in the theory of the objectives of the Divine Law (*Maqāsid* of the *Sharī'ah*) to technoscientific interaction with the environment. His thought is critically well articulated with many useful insights, albeit with a palpable modernist slant. For some contemporary studies of the systematic axiology of *fiqh*, see Ahmad al-Raysuni, *Imam al-Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and Intents of Islamic Law*, trans. Nancy Roberts (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006); Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Shāṭibi's Philosophy of Islamic Law* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2000); Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *Treatise on Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah*, trans. Mohamed al-Taḥer al-Messawi (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006).
2. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts of the Qur'an* (repr. Kuala Lumpur: IBT, 2004).
3. *al-Anbiyā'*: 107. For a beautiful exposition of the cosmic mercy of the Prophet, *ṣallallahu 'alayhi wassalam*, see Umar Faruq Abdullah, "Mercy, the Stamp of Creation," Nawawi Foundation Paper, <[www.nawawi.org/downloads/article1.pdf](http://www.nawawi.org/downloads/article1.pdf)>.
4. *al-Raḥmān*: 7-9, and the commentary of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī thereof (*Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, 10: 342 ff) in which he relates the balance to justice (*'adl, i'tidāl*); references are to the Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Tūrāth al-'Arabī, 1997 edition.
5. On the meaning of gratitude see Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Ṭalḥah al-Qushayrī, *Principles of Sufism*, trans. B. R. von Schlegell

them, when systematically understood and implemented through the ethico-juridical discipline of *fiqh al-bi'rah* (jurisprudence of the environment),<sup>6</sup> result in ecological health of the socio-natural environment. But ethical precepts refer ultimately to human nature (*ṭabī'at al-nafs* as opposed to *ṭabī'at al-kawn*) and therefore ecological health is ultimately rooted in the psychological health of the human soul.<sup>7</sup> From this deep-ecological perspective, environmental degradation is less a resource-problem than an attitude-problem. This attitude-problem results from the general failure of the human ego (*al-nafs al-ammārah bi al-sū'* = the evil-commanding soul)<sup>8</sup> to forgo short-term gratification for long-term prosperity, hence its short-sighted inclination for the proximate and the fleeting at the expense of the ultimate and lasting: *Nay, but you covet what is immediate and abandon what is later to come,*<sup>9</sup> and hence forget to *prepare and send forth provision for the morrow.*<sup>10</sup> This psycho-ecological approach<sup>11</sup> toward preserv-

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(Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2004), 109-113. On gratitude in relation to scientific appreciation of nature, see Adi Setia, "Taskhīr, fine-tuning, intelligent design and the scientific appreciation of nature," *Islam & Science* (Summer 2004), 7-32.

6. Mustafa Abu-Sway, "Toward an Islamic Jurisprudence of the Environment."
7. Al-Attas, *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990); idem, *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).
8. Ego or *nafs*, understood in Ghazalian spiritual psychology as the evil-commanding soul; see also T. J. Winter, trans. and intro. with notes, *Al-Ghazālī on Disciplining the Soul* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2001); Yasein Mohamed, *The Path to Virtue: The Ethical Philosophy of al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2006); idem., *Human Nature in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: A. S. Noordeen, 1998); idem., *Fitrah: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta Ha, 1996); Hamza Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart: Signs, Symptoms, and Cures of the Spiritual Diseases of the Heart*, translation and commentary of Imām al-Mawlūd's *Matharat al-Qulūb* (Starlatch Press, 2004).
9. *al-Qiyāmah*: 20.
10. *al-Baqarah*: 110, 223; *al-Hashr*: 18; *al-Muzammil*: 20. Cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1999), especially the psychological Chapter Two on "Man as Individual," 37ff.; see also Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002).
11. Alternative terms include ecopsychology, organic psychology, humanistic psychology pertaining to alternative trends in modern psychology that seek achieve a holistic understanding of human nature with

ing and enhancing environmental health is explored in thematic outline by considering some pertinent aspects of Islamic socio-intellectual history and their relevance for a systemic rearticulation and reapplication of authentic Islamic environmental ethical values in today's world at both the communal and governmental levels of socio-political organization.

### **To walk lightly on the earth**

*The faithful servants of the Beneficent are they who tread upon the earth gently...*<sup>12</sup>

To walk lightly (*hawnan*) upon the earth is the attitude of spiritual humility enjoined by the Qur<sup>3</sup>ān on believers in regard to their temporal sojourn in the world. Thus reflective, thinking Muslims today can critically appropriate the secular, quasi-paganistic Gaian<sup>13</sup> notion of reducing one's 'ecological footprint'<sup>14</sup> and *re-ground* it into an authentic Islamic eco-spiritual ethos of the environment. As elaborated by al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), this is an ethos that is imbued with the religio-spiritual and ethico-moral qualities of mildness (*riḥq*), gentleness (*līn*) and serenity (*sakīnah*) combined with reverential humbleness (*tawāḍuʿ*) and emotional fortitude (*qārr*). These are the people who are not arrogant (*la yatakabbārūn wa lā yatajabbārūn*), nor are they who would seek to spread

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a view toward reharmonizing it with the natural environment. A serious comprehensive project in this regard is [organicpsychology.com](http://organicpsychology.com). Another but complementary approach is deep-ecology or ecosophy which is concerned about the metaphysical dimensions of ecology and environmentalism. See, for instance, W. Devall and G. Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1985), which is applied in the eco-educational approach and manual of Thom Henley and Kenny Peavy, *As if the Earth Matters: Recommitting to Environmental Education* (Bangkok: Linmark, 2006). There are many overlaps between these largely western secular ecological approaches and the traditional theocentric Islamic ecological outlook, so a good book on a critical comparative environmentalism will be most welcome, especially for getting more Muslims to be ecologically engaged and contribute substantially to a systemic re-greening of the world.

12. *al-Furqān*: 63. All translations of the Qur<sup>3</sup>ān are based on Muhammad Mamarduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: Text and Explanatory Translation* (Makkah: Muslim World League, 1977).
13. James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
14. William Rees, "Ecological footprints and appropriated carrying capacity: what urban economics leaves out," *Environment and Urbanisation*, vol. 4, no. 2 (October 1992).

desolation (*fāsād*) in the land, or who would seek domination by imposing themselves upon others on earth out of a false sense of superiority (*‘azāmah, fa hum la yurīdūna ‘uluwwan fī’l-ard*).<sup>15</sup> This positive psycho-spiritual demeanour is contrasted with that of those who would *walk with pertness (maraḥan) in the land*,<sup>16</sup> in haughtiness and wanton abandon, as if they own the earth, indifferent to any sense of self-restraint or accountability to the Creator, the True Owner of all.

This attitude of *gentleness* to the earth, to nature, to the natural environment is complemented by the true believers’ attitude of *peacefulness* to people, to societies, to communities, to cultures, for when the foolish (or ordinary folks) address them, they response with “peace” (*qālū salāman*) They pass by senseless play with *noble dignity (marrū kirāman)* for they are not drawn to vanity (and would much less partake thereof), and their nights are spent in quiet solitude of *prayerful devotion* to their Lord, prostrating and standing (*sujjadan wa qiyāman*). And in what they spend of their wealth, they are neither extravagant nor miserly, for temperance is their path of choice between the two extremes (*wa kāna bayna dhālika qawāman*). Thus the qualities of gentleness to nature, peacefulness to people, moderation in consumption and devotion to the Lord of all things are integrated in their personality as a single harmonious whole.<sup>17</sup>

Deep reflection and contemplation<sup>18</sup> on the meaning of these verses from the *Chapter of the Criterion* that separates truth from falsehood will bring the honest and clear-sighted among us to the following irrefutable conclusions about many aspects of modern life: we are harsh toward the natural environment; we are aggressive toward the cultural environment;<sup>19</sup> we are indulgent in play and vanity hence we are mean and debased; we waste our nights in wanton heedlessness; and we are profligate in material living. In particular, we are also led to the following conclusions, for these are merely the unavoidable external outcomes of our uneven, anti-

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15. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1995), 8: 480-481.

16. *Luqmān*: 18; *Mafātīḥ*, 9: 122.

17. *al-Furqān*: 63-64, 72-75; *Mafātīḥ*, 480 ff.

18. Malik Badri, *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study* (Kuala Lumpur: Medeena Books, 2000).

19. For instance, the systematic destruction of historical religio-cultural sites in, of all places, Makkah and Madinah as reported by Mohamed Zakariya, Yusef Meri, Shafiq Morton, and Irfan Ahmed in the Dossier on “Protecting Historical Sites”/“Preserving Heritage,” *Islamica Magazine*, no. 15 (2006), 67 ff.

Qurʾānic attitudes:

(i) modern economic development powered by science and technology desolates the land for the sake of material growth, even though we are not to be seduced by *rivalry in worldly increase*;<sup>20</sup>

(ii) the so-called “liberal” modern economy imposes its ways (hence not strictly liberal), either directly or insidiously, on communities who opt for remaining faithful to their traditions, thus disrupting their communal peace and their way of life, even though there should be *no compulsion in the way of life*;<sup>21</sup>

(iii) the economic wealth accumulated thereof feeds our addic-

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20. *al-Takāthur*, 8; *al-Humazah*: 1-4. One viable alternative to conventional growth economics is zero-growth or steady-state economics, in which the ideal is not the accumulation of wealth for its own sake, but the realization of human intellectual, moral and spiritual potential; see Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish* (Pluto Press, 2004); J. Matthew Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet* (Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2006); Mark A. Burch, *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2000); Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1998); Cecile Andrews, *The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1998). In practical terms, these “greener” economic alternatives have resulted in actual economic “downshifting” in which ordinary people voluntarily reduce their consumption and hence their incomes and expenditures, which would not have been possible unless on the psychological level the downshifTERS succeeded in inculcating an attitude of detachment from the material aspects of life. In short, downshifting implies a degree of that ethico-spiritual state of the heart called *zuhd* (detachment, abstinence); on *zuhd*, see al-Qushayrī’s *Principles of Sufism* (Kuala Lumpur: IBT Press, 2004), 40-46.

21. *al-Kāfirūn*: 6; *al-Baqarah*: 256. As far as Muslims are concerned, the fact is that *if* we are not to impose even the true religion of Islām on non-Muslims, *then* why should it be allowed for the West to impose the patently false religion of economic neo-liberalism on the world through the guise of globalization and free trade agreements? On neoliberalism as a modern pseudo-religion see, for instance, Nik Heynen et al. (eds.), *Neoliberal Environments: False Promises, Unnatural Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Noam Chomsky, *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999).

tion to ever new debased forms of sports, entertainment, and pastimes, even though we are *to turn away from senseless play*;<sup>22</sup>

(iv) our nights are dissipated in mind-numbing dance beats of nightclubs, empty chatter in cafes or with eyes wide open glued zombie-like to the idiot boxes of televisions<sup>23</sup> and computers,<sup>24</sup> even though for us *He has made the night a covering and sleep a repose*;<sup>25</sup>

(v) developmental rhetoric co-opts Islamic values and clueless Muslims to serve its monolithic, tunnel vision of “growth, progress and the good life,” thus vulgarizing spirituality by secularity, even though we are *to barter not the signs of God for a trifling gain*;<sup>26</sup>

(vi) western technoeconomic efficiency is realized in the drive toward monoculturization of both the mental and physical landscapes<sup>27</sup> and global uniformity,<sup>28</sup> even though diversity in nature and culture is among the signs of God.<sup>29</sup>

In the perceptive reflection of many honest thinkers and observers East and West, today’s global ecosystemic desolation of both the cultural and the natural has been the consequence of a relatively recent history of human beings’ haughty, aggressive attitude toward both nature and culture—a greed-as-growth motivated conceit that is further reinforced by the marvels of modern, western, euro-ameriocentric science and technology now permeating all parts of the world.<sup>30</sup> But the fact is that most

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22. *al-Mu’minūn*: 3; *al-Furqān*: 72.

23. Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (London: Harper Perennial, 1978).

24. M. Shotton, *Computer Addiction? A Study of Computer Dependency* (Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis, 1989).

25. *al-Furqān*: 47; *al-Nabā’*: 9-10.

26. *al-Baqarah*: 41; *al-Mā’idah*: 44.

27. Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind* (Penang: Third World Network, 1995).

28. Serge Latouche, *The Westernization of the World: The Significance, Scope and Limits of the Drive toward Global Uniformity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

29. *al-Nūr*: 45; *al-Rūm*: 22; *al-Naḥl*: 11, 13; *al-Zumar*: 21; *al-Fāṭir*: 27-28; *al-Ḥujurāt*: 13.

30. “Mother Nature in Crisis: Economics of Greed and Power is lead-

people, Muslims especially, are not conscious of being haughty at all, so conditioned are their thinking by ideas of progress, growth, and development. This blunt statement comes as an unpleasant surprise for them (particularly businessmen, politicians, technocrats and scientists) and elicits the standard response, “What, me haughty? But I’ve been working all the while for the economic well-being of all!”<sup>31</sup>—a response of self-denial which brings to mind the verse concerning *those whose effort goes astray in the life of the world, and yet they reckon that they do good work*.<sup>32</sup>

For, with regard to environmental crises such as global warming, these technocrats, economists (*homo economicus*), and businesspeople tend to think only in technoscientific and political economic (and hence prestige-generating and money-making) terms of renewable resources (renewable

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ing us to an environmental catastrophe” in *Aliran Monthly*, vol. 25 (2005), issue 2. See also Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 331 ff.

31. For deconstructing and debunking the modern-day political economic myths of development, growth and progress, see, among many others, Giovanni Monastera (ed.), *Science and the Myth of Progress* (World Wisdom, 2004); Majid Rahnema (ed.), *The Post-Development Reader* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 2000); Wolfgang Sachs (ed.), *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed Books, 1999); Serge Latouche, *The Westernization of the World: The Significance, Scope and Limits of the Drive towards Global Uniformity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), 37 ff; idem., *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993); idem., *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future* (London: Mansell, 1985), 127 ff on “The Dewesternization of Knowledge.” See also Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish* (Pluto Press, 2004); and Donella Meadows et al, *Limits to Growth: The 30-year Update* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2004).

32. *al-Kahf*: 104.



energy,<sup>33</sup> recycling, etc.), carbon-credits trading<sup>34</sup> or ‘natural capitalism’,<sup>35</sup> and even geoengineering,<sup>36</sup> but we conveniently forget to think more seriously and deeper in terms of re-viewing, re-visioning and deconstructing our core attitude toward nature with a view toward a systemic *radical reform* of that attitude if it should be found wanting, self-contradictory, or even hypocritical. In short, what is needed is a renewal of our spiritual rather than physical resources.

### The case of the car<sup>37</sup>

To clarify the above somewhat obscure point let’s take a closer, analytical, and systemic look at the hydrocarbon car-fuel problem,<sup>38</sup> for it will show how the obviously negative attitudes of haughtiness, aggression and greed can be so insidiously sublimed and hence rendered positive (greed rationalized as growth; haughtiness as self-confidence and aggression as go-gettingness):

Most of us would not see why anyone should be dead set against the car since its benefits are obvious. However, important thinkers like Seyyed

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33. Ted Trainer, *Renewable Energy Cannot Sustain Consumer Society* (New York: Springer, 2007); see also the important, thought provoking article by the same author, “Renewable Energy No Solution for Consumer Society” at <[http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3\\_no1\\_Trainer\\_renewable\\_energy.htm](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3_no1_Trainer_renewable_energy.htm)>, accessed October 9 2007.
34. Emily Flynn Vencat, “The Carbon Folly: Policymakers have settled on ‘emissions trading’ as their favorite global-warming fix. But it isn’t working,” *Newsweek International*, March 12, 2007. For further critical discussions of the carbon credits trading issue, see <<http://risingtide.org.uk/about>>.
35. Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins, *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution* (London: Earthscan, 1999).
36. David G. Victor, “Hot Air is Not Enough: As Global Warming Flummoxes Politicians, the Air Engineers will Rise,” *Newsweek* (June 25, 2007).
37. For the definitive study of the political economy of the car see Matthew Patterson, *Automobile Politics: Ecology and Cultural Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
38. Adi Setia, “Civic Society, Car-Culture don’t Mix,” *Brunei Times*, Features section, July 2007.

Hossein Nasr,<sup>39</sup> Jerry Mander,<sup>40</sup> Ivan Illich,<sup>41</sup> Theodore Roszak,<sup>42</sup> and Jacques Ellul<sup>43</sup> have argued that the beneficial façade of much of modern technology like the car is just that, a façade that tends to conceal its less beneficial, destructive, even dehumanizing aspects. Despite their criticisms, it is arguably conceivable that the gas-guzzling car could have been much less destructive to the general health of the social and natural environments *if* its use had been moderate (*tawāzun/tawassul*) instead of excessive (*isrāf/ifrāt*), and hence, wasteful (*tabdhīr*).

For instance, if the car had been the product of a political economic system premised on contentment (*qanāʿah*<sup>44</sup>) and temperance instead of greed/covetousness (*tamʿ*) and growth (*takāthur/jamʿ māl* = “rivalry in worldly increase”/wealth accumulation), its use and hence its abuse would have been limited. But as things seem to stand now, one can only argue that the only viable long-term solution to the hydrocarbon car-fuel problem (i.e., rising petrol consumption in tandem with diminishing oil reserves) is simply systematic reduction, even elimination, of car use altogether (especially in urban areas) instead of opting for cheaper, renewable biofuels.

Biofuels may be renewable and cheaper (although that is debatable<sup>45</sup>),

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39. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968).
40. Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1992).
41. Ivan Illich, *Energy & Equity, Le Monde*, 1973; idem., *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
42. Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1989).
43. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964; London: Jonathan Cape, 1965); see also rev. ed. (New York: Knopf/Vintage, 1967).
44. On the psycho-spiritual ethics of contentment and its relation to the realisation of the “life that is good,” see, for instance, the chapter on *qanāʿah* in al-Qushayrī, *Principles of Sufism*, trans. B. R. von Schlegell (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2004), 109-113.
45. On this debate, see, for instance, the study by EMPA, “Biofuel does not necessarily mean ecologically friendly,” accessible at <<http://www.empa.ch/plugin/template/empa/3/60542/—/l=2>>. Another concern is the threat to water and food security; see the Associated Press news release by Michael Casey, “Biofuels Plans may cause Water Shortages,” accessed at <[http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20071011/ap\\_on\\_sc/asia\\_biofuel\\_tough\\_choices\\_1;\\_ylt=AlHtgjtiBZH0WxDjub8jW2QE1vAI](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20071011/ap_on_sc/asia_biofuel_tough_choices_1;_ylt=AlHtgjtiBZH0WxDjub8jW2QE1vAI)>, October 11, 2007. An intimate overall evaluation of biofuels is Joel

but cars not only use fuel, they also use roads and highways, thus foreclosing other uses of large areas of precious land in the process. Land is certainly not renewable, especially once it is solidly paved over in concrete, and it certainly not getting cheaper by becoming scarcer. When a road cuts deep into a pristine verdant landscape, it doesn't only bring in cars but also all other cancers and viruses associated with the political economics of the car: loggers, land speculators, developers, miners, hunters, poachers, and planters with alien genetically modified crops and chemical intensive plantations. Hence we should view the car-problem as less a resource-problem than an *attitude-problem*.

This means that, at a personal level, the first thing to consider is whether the car is really needed. Maybe a good mountain bike will do instead. At the public policy level, cities, even old ones, can be systematically restructured so that public transport (buses, trams, trains, LRT=light rail transport, etc.) becomes the norm, as in the large city of Curitiba, Brazil.<sup>46</sup> The car not only pollutes the air, it wastes precious open spaces and lands given over to multi-lane highways cutting through pristine forests, verdant mountains, and fertile farmlands. It has been conservatively estimated that in the United States 100,000 square kilometres of land are already covered in roads. Imagine all the wildlife snuffed out in concrete, and this is without accounting for roadkills, year in and year out—deer, *biawaks*,<sup>47</sup> tapirs, and other hapless creatures too slow or too startled to get out of the way of these roaring, fuming speedsters.<sup>48</sup> Phillip Rush highlights this daily roadkilling disaster in a graphic, moving poem:

*A startled look, a sudden dash  
To try and miss the impending crash;  
But all too late, a sullen thump,  
And yet another lifeless lump.*

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K. Bourne, Jr., "Biofuels: Boon or Boondoggle," *National Geographic*, vol. 212, no. 4 (October 2007).

46. Donella Meadows, "The Best City in the World: Making a Solid Case for Better Urban Planning," *Good Medicine* (Fall 1994), 8, accessible at <<http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC39/Meadows.htm>>.
47. Monitor lizards is a species of large lizard commonly found in Malaysia.
48. Yin-da Edward Hseih, "Roads—Nature's Blight," <[fubini.swarthmore.edu/~ENVS2/S2006/yhsieh1/Paper3.htm](http://fubini.swarthmore.edu/~ENVS2/S2006/yhsieh1/Paper3.htm)>, accessed October 29, 2007; Liz Prize, "New highways cause roadkills," *Pencinta Alam: Branch Newsletter of the Malaysian Nature Society* (July 2007), 7.

*We race along the roads at night,  
And stun the beasts with blinding light;  
We don't slow down, a solid thud,  
The corpse lies in a pool of blood.  
Possum, 'roo, and, now and then,  
Wallaby and native hen,  
Bandicoot and pretty quoll  
Are added to the mounting toll.  
On the road all that remains  
Are flattened bodies, blackened stains;  
Rotting flesh, a pungent smell—  
A common scene we know too well.  
Is it too much to ask of us  
To slow our car, or truck, or bus?  
To stem the slaughter all too rife  
That decimates our wildlife.<sup>49</sup>*

Seeing roads criss-crossing the land, even in the most remote of regions, also brings to mind the beautiful song “Born Free,” so evocatively sung by Matt Monro, and a line therein: “stay free where no walls divide you.” So much for staying free where no highways divide you and the fruit trees on the far side of the forest. And of course more roads mean more people, more development, and, as John Denver would lament, “more scars upon the land.”<sup>50</sup> Cars generate roads, and roads in turn generate cars, and many other environmentally destructive things as well. It’s a vicious circle no amount of biofuel will ever unravel.

The problem here is underlying and systemic, as we will see if we look into the political economic history of the car and how it was and still is closely tied up with promoting the oil business.<sup>51</sup> Business people find oil, lots of it, and they want to sell lots of it, which is only possible if all people think that each and every person in the family (including the high school kid) must have a car to go anywhere, including to the *roti canai* stall across the street, and this is only possible if roads, miles and miles of them, are built for those cars to roar on. All this, in turn, is only possible if in the political economic decision-making process, private transport is emphasized (even subsidized!), and public transport marginalized. Furthermore, cars

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49. <[http://asauthors.org/web\\_of\\_poets/Rush/poems/roadkills.html](http://asauthors.org/web_of_poets/Rush/poems/roadkills.html)>.

50. In John Denver’s country song *Rocky Mountain High*.

51. Johann Hari, “Big Oil’s Vendetta Against the Electric Car,” *The Independent*, April 7, 2007, accessible at <<http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/04/07/377/>>.

are socially alienating. People who like to go about in their neighborhood in their cars tend to forget to appreciate the gift of their legs and have few opportunities to say hello to each other, much less shake hands, even if they wanted to. Thus civic community and car culture, like water and oil, don't mix.

All that and more are considered and yet one still need a car, preferably a green-concept car like the much touted Toyota Prius,<sup>52</sup> if one can afford it. Right now, the only zero-waste green concept cars I'm aware of are those powered by hydrogen fuel cells (in hydrogen out water, assuming the manufacturing process for those fuel cells is also green). Bio-petrol is not a good solution, because that means wasting food-plants like corn for fuel, and this criticism does not even approach its production process. In the case of the oil-palm agroindustry in Malaysia and Indonesia, bio-petrol will definitely entail devastation of more pristine jungles for oil-palm plantations to feed our greed (or the greed of China, India, or the European Union) for new cars every couple of years. It's much better in the short term to convert to LPG (liquified petroleum gas) by putting a gas tank in the trunk, if you have space to spare.

Flying carpets are one answer to the car problem, for those who can manage it like the legendary Aladdin. But for most of us, as private citizens or policy makers, the answer is to reflect and think through things systematically. If we do that, we may come to realize that cars ultimately are not a civilizational necessity. Great, greater, and longer-lasting civilizations (and more sustainable ones too) have come and gone before us without running on cars. As a matter of fact, the many incredible high civilizations of pre-Columbian America did not even run on wheels!<sup>53</sup>

In short, the only way to solve the car-problem is to think out of the car-box, nay, out of the hydrocarbonic box altogether. Bio-petrol, fuel cells, etc., are only a stop-gap, ad hoc measure to buy us time in order that we may reflect on our true ethical values in relation to ourselves, to nature, to culture and to our Creator, and revive them in concrete practical

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52. But Toyota is still very much in the very much more profitable gas-guzzling SUV business, e.g., the Highlander SUV, and so it turns out that the much hyped hybrid Prius is a glaring aspect of what the Greenies would call "corporate greenwash"; see George Monbiot and Merrick Godhaven, "Greenwash Exposed: Toyota," <<http://www.celcias.com/2007/09/19/greenwash-exposed-toyota/>>.

53. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *500 Nations: An Illustrated History of North American Indians* (New York: Gramercy, 1994).

life both in private and in public. In this particular case, all of us should reflect on the Qur<sup>ā</sup>nic ethico-spiritual value of “treading lightly on the earth” in relation to the extent to which our modern car-culture (or other aspects of megatechnoculture) realizes or subverts this value. This means that we all have to carefully consider our lifestyle choices, whether in private or in public life, and their long term consequences for better or worse, so that we may make the best choice (*ikhhtiyār*) and hence change our way of life for the better,<sup>54</sup> *inshāʿaʿllāh*.

The starting point is Reality, and it is precisely how we respond (i.e., be *respons-ible*) to that (ultimate/absolute) Reality in the temporal life of this world (*dunyā* = proximate/relative reality, the reality that is brought near to sensible experience<sup>55</sup>) that will determine our solution to the car-problem and other problems regarding precisely how we should go about re-harmonizing our culture with nature, and hence with God, the Creator of nature.<sup>56</sup> For indeed, on that awesome day we shall all be asked concerning both our legitimate and illegitimate enjoyment of the fleeting pleasures of this world.<sup>57</sup> But as usual, only the people of intelligence (*qawmin yaʿqilūn*<sup>58</sup>) will take heed, for the signs of God are not meant for the fools *who know only the outer aspects of the life of this world while of the next life they are heedless*.<sup>59</sup> For them, the Genting Highland (or Disneyland) of heedless amusement is better than the Taman Negara (or Yellowstone) of remembrance and reconnection with nature, and hence, with God.<sup>60</sup>

*Crazy Horse dreamed  
and went into the world  
where there is nothing*

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54. al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 2 ff.

55. al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 329.

56. On this theme see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also S. C. Rockefeller and J. C. Elder, *Spirit and Nature* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); and Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Muzaffar Iqbal, *Islam, Science, Muslims and Technology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Conversation with Muzaffar Iqbal* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007).

57. *al-Takāthur*: 8. The word “*al-takāthur*” is translated by Pickthall as “rivalry in worldly increase.”

58. *al-Baqarah*: 164.

59. *al-Rūm*: 7.

60. Allusion to Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1989), 24-27.

*but the spirits of all things.  
That is the real world  
that is behind this one,  
and everything we see here  
is like a shadow  
from that world.*

Black Elk<sup>61</sup>

### Stewards, guardians, and trustees of the earth

In the third part of Professor J. R. R. Tolkien's engrossing trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, we are brought to the realm of Gondor ruled by a long line of stewards who could only govern in the name of the true heir to the throne, awaiting the eventual "return of the king" to his rightful rule over the land of the free. The last Steward of Gondor was overtaken by a false sense of superiority to lay claim to a royal right that was not his to claim. He could not bring himself to accept and submit to the imminent return of the king and hence plunged himself into a fiery death from the lofty height of his presumptuousness.

Though the author himself denied it, in many ways *The Lord of the Rings* can be read as an eloquent and captivating allegory of the sorry state of western civilization in the world war decades of the twentieth century, rendered compellingly real to the reader's imagination by one who had himself fought deep in the foul, muddy trenches of the Western Front and survived to express his experience of those dark and bloody years in the novel of the century.<sup>62</sup>

What concerns us here is the twin notions of stewardship (*khilāfah*)<sup>63</sup>

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61. Cited in Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, xxxvi. For similar and other pointers to the car enigma, see Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, 16-18, 43-44.

62. Daniel Grotta, *The Biography of J. R. R. Tolkien, Architect of Middle Earth* (Philadelphia: Rummy Press, 1992).

63. *al-Baqarah*: 30; *Yūnus*: 14; *al-Aʿrāf*: 69; *Ṣād*: 26. According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, a *khilāfah* is one who succeeds another and stands in his place. In this particular context, the term is taken to refer to the prophet Ādam, peace be on him, and his progeny is considered as Allāh's representatives or viceroys or vicegerents on earth, charged with implementing the sacred law (*al-ḥukm*) amongst those of His creatures who are of legal responsibility (*mukallafīn*). For further elaboration, see *Mafātīḥ* 2: 388 ff.

and trusteeship (*amānah*)<sup>64</sup> and the manner of creative as opposed to dogmatic understandings of their meaning and significance in a way that can have real, immediate impacts on improving our private and public interaction with nature. If man is considered the vicegerent of God on earth, then it should follow that he is not only a steward responsible for safeguarding the rights of man but also the rights of nature, and especially so if preserving nature impacts, either directly or indirectly, human welfare. Human stewardship of earth cannot only be about rendering judgement of truth (*al-ḥukm bi'l-ḥaqq* = to judge by the truth)<sup>65</sup> to humans but it is also, by extension, about being just to all inhabitants of earth, for “the earth He has spread out for His creatures (*al-anām*).”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the earth is not only for man but also for nature and all things in their natural or *fiṭrī* state, and hence true stewardship means to maintain and preserve the primordial equilibrium between the needs of man and the rights of other creatures to live out their lives on this earth, for *He has set the balance that you exceed not the balance, and therefore observe the balance strictly and do not fall short thereof*.<sup>67</sup>

To press home this point, one can cite, for instance, the example of Sayyidina ‘Umar, may God be pleased with him. He certainly did not see himself as a steward (*khalīfah*) responsible only for implementing the Divine Law of justice with regard to human interactions with humans (*mu‘āmalat al-nāsi anfusahum*) but also with regard to human interactions with animals (*mu‘āmalat al-nāsi al-anāma*):

Caliph Omar, one of the most distinguished of the Prophet’s Companions, demonstrated exceptional compassion towards animals. In fact he would deal strongly with those who overloaded their ‘beasts of burden’. He would actually go to the extent of concealing himself from view and check that people were treating animals well. On one occasion he passed his hand over the wound of a camel intending to help heal the beast,

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64. *al-Aḥzāb*: 72.

65. *Ṣād*: 26.

66. *al-Raḥmān*: 10. The term *al-anām* can be taken in certain contexts to refer specifically to human beings, and in certain other contexts, like this one, to mean all earthly creatures; for an interesting discussion, see *Mafātīḥ*, 10: The latter reference is evident in Shaykh al-Islām ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 660 H.), *Qawā’id al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* (Cairo: Maktabah Kulliyat al-Azhariyyah, 1968); the title of the work can be roughly translated as *Legal Principles Pertaining to the Wellbeing of All Creatures*.

67. *al-Raḥmān*: 7-9.



saying, “I fear God may seek retributions from me for the pain you suffer.”<sup>68</sup>

How many kings, presidents, ministers, and high officials of the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) today can claim to have shown such heartfelt personal concern for animal or wild-life welfare as an integral, inseparable part of their public duties as stewards (*khalāʿif*) over the inhabitants, both human and non-human, of their realms? If there is among them even one such, he should immediately write about it that others may learn from him and set aside more lands as inviolable wildlife refuges, and thus revive the traditional Islamic environmental conservation institutions of *ḥimā* (reserves) and *ḥarīm* (inviolable zones).<sup>69</sup> “The *Ḥimā*, as a system, is possibly the oldest known organized form of conservation [in] the world,” according to Peter Vincent of Lancaster University.<sup>70</sup> This is a primary, direct, and one of the more effective ways to upgrade from the *maqām* of “Oh, I see” to the *maqām* of “Yes, I do,” to go from *words* to *works*, at least in the domain of conservation of the natural heritage of member countries of the OIC.

One of the great paradoxes of the modern age is that in many instances peace and war are not what they seem. In war nature is left in peace, whereas in peace nature is attacked. During the long fight against the communist insurgents, the Malaysian Belum-Temengor region<sup>71</sup> was a

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68. See “Animal Care” at <[www.muslimheritage.com](http://www.muslimheritage.com)>, accessed August 12, 2007, which shows that traditional Muslim communities before the encroachment of Western “civilizing” norms had generally been imbued with the example of ‘Umar in the way they interact with animals. For more on the treatment of animals in Islam, see Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006); and Al Hafiz B. A. Masri, *Islamic Concern for Animals* (Petersfield, UK: The Athene Trust, 1987).

69. For an account of the practical revival of these twin concepts of agromatural conservation, especially in the case of Lebanon, see Assad Serhal and Amer R. Saidi, “The Hima: An Ancient Conservation System for the Future,” Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon, 2005, <[http://www.iucn.org/places/wescana/documents/hima\\_spl\\_position\\_paper.pdf](http://www.iucn.org/places/wescana/documents/hima_spl_position_paper.pdf)>.

70. Ibid., 1. See also Abubakr Ahmed Bagader et al, *Environmental Protection in Islam*, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper No. 20, 2nd rev. ed., 1994, <<http://www.islamset.com/env/index.html>>.

71. Malaysian Nature Society, “Next Steps for Belum Temengor Campaign,” <<http://64.91.240.155/bt/>>; ibid., “Why Belum-Temengor,” <<http://64.91.240.155/bt/why.htm>>.

security area off-limits to all forms of “civilizational” encroachment and hence its wildlife and the indigenous Orang Asli were left alone. But now, with the communists defeated for good, the area is exposed to all sorts of encroachment in the name of development and economic progress. As an unexpected consequence of war, the Ho Chi Minh Trail<sup>72</sup> in Cambodia has now become a refuge for tigers and elephants, and Korea’s demilitarized zone<sup>73</sup> a sanctuary for flora and fauna not found elsewhere on the peninsula. Because of years of civil war resulting in the depopulation of the region, southern Sudan is now teeming with antelopes, eland, gazelles, giraffes, elephants, lions, and leopards, so much so that that part of the country is said to be “Africa’s new Serengeti.”<sup>74</sup> I believe that the OIC has a role to play in encouraging and helping the Sudanese people to appreciate, conserve, and manage this invaluable natural heritage in a naturally and culturally sustainable manner, based on the Islamic concept of *ḥimā* (protected area).

To resume, one has to say that the terrestrial desolation of the natural world is a clear indication of the spiritual desolation within—the “wasteland about us” is but a reflection of the “wasteland within.” Having failed in the stewardship of his soul, man has now, through the pursuit of illusory progress, given up on the stewardship of the earth and of its inanimate, animate, and human inhabitants. He has clearly betrayed the Divine trust (*amānah*) which has been placed upon him and which he freely accepted by virtue of being endowed with a rational soul (*nafs nāṭiqah*) capable of choice (*ikhtiyār*), i.e., capable of seeing in advance the consequences of his actions and hence capable of acting accordingly and being responsible for them before God. The word *amānah* is intricately connected with the notion of *amān* = security, in both its physical and spiritual dimensions. By betraying the duties of trusteeship, man not only endangers the security of those entrusted to his care, but he also forfeits the right to his own physical and spiritual security in this world and in the next. So is it any

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72. Jerry Harmer, “Ho Chi Minh Trail Area Safe for Wildlife,” *CBS News*, March 3, 2007, <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/03/03/ap/tech/mainD8NKSEJ00.shtml>>.

73. Donald Smith, “Peace Prospects Imperil Korea’s Wildlife Paradise,” *National Geographic News*, June 23, 2000, <[http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2000/06/0623\\_korea.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2000/06/0623_korea.html)>.

74. Alexander Polier, “Sudan, Africa’s New Serengeti: against all expectations, conservationists have found a vast migration of antelope, lions, leopards, eland and many other animals—some thought to have gone extinct,” *Newsweek*, June 25, 2007, 36-37.

wonder that the age of economic growth coincides so nicely with the age of insecurity and anxiety—the age of “unyielding despair” so stoically proclaimed by Bertrand Russell?<sup>75</sup> Modern man has despaired of paradise and therefore has to create hell on earth.

This is one reason why a secular and ultimately nihilistic (because it can never answer the question of individual death and hence is bereft of any real eschatological import) Gaian ethics of the environment is going to fail to compel true heartfelt caring for nature, at least among the majority of mankind, for to whom or to what shall the mortal transgressing and already despairing man be answerable or responsive? To an abstract, impotent judgment of history, even though it is doubtful whether there’s much of a future left for someone in that future to write that history? To his children and grandchildren though he be long gone? How can he care for the opinions or even the sufferings of those who are seen only, and even now trained (through, *inter alia*, advertisements targeted at children), as future recruits into the religion of economism? To his own dead non-existent self? Hardly. Does it really matter to him how posterity will judge him when he is long dead and gone and not very likely to return (even through reincarnation) to *personally* face the music? One answer to that question is that man can be answerable to his conscience while he is still alive in this world, but the fact is that man simply does not *fear* his conscience. What is his astral conscience going to do? Whack his overly indulgent body? Shut down his overly rational, self-interested brain? Regardless, the pull of the immaterial conscience is not very strong in most people and hence can be ignored, for the attraction of the sensual pleasures of the material body is stronger still and more immediate, and what is more immediate is more real, so to hell with the future, since “in the long run we are all dead”<sup>76</sup> anyway. The religion of nihilism (a.k.a. secularism) simply has no stomach for a wishy-washy future, especially if it is too far into the future, and more especially if it is *transfutural*.<sup>77</sup>

Hence the general tendency in Gaian ethics (as in the “think Gaia” approach of multinational corporations like Sanyo) is for superficial tech-

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75. “A Free Man’s Worship” in Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (New York: Dover, 2004).

76. Attributed to John Maynard Keynes, one of the most influential architects of the modern economic system.

77. The definitive Islamic critique of secularism is to be found in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

no-fixes in order to sustain the economics of prodigal consumption, now colored green (or greenwashed) with (more or less) recycleable consumer goods (such as rechargeable batteries).<sup>78</sup> One can only envisage the recycling loop getting longer and wider. Natural resources from which consumer goods are produced can be depleted to exhaustion, but that's okay since the manufactured products themselves will not be depleted, thanks to the magic of recycling. Thereby linear open-ended progress is still safeguarded by simply doing the same thing over and over again! If only things were that simple, for "as public policy analyst and recycling expert James DeLong has noted, *recycling is a manufacturing process*. And it can take just as much energy and create just as much pollution and waste—or even more—to disassemble something in the recycling process as to assemble it the first time around."<sup>79</sup> And, as Liza Featherstone points out, it is also very labor and stench intensive for trash sorters:

People are supposed to separate their garbage: recyclables in one bin and the other, usually far more gruesome, items in another. A lot of people can't seem to grasp this, hence the need for the Materials Recovery Facility, in which salvageable items are retrieved from unsorted garbage. Sorting through other people's trash to retrieve bottles and cans is such a nasty job that it should be handsomely paid. But it isn't—for just above minimum wage, these workers sift through dirty diapers, dead animals, used tampons and condoms, hypodermic needles and rotting meat. Many newcomers to the job vomit from the stench.<sup>80</sup>

We dull over our senses with the mantra of recycling instead of truly aiming to restore and sustain environmental health by means of a thorough, radical rethinking of political economics, social culture, and per-

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78. Jed Greer & Kenny Bruno, *Greenwash: The Reality Behind Corporate Environmentalism* (Penang: Third World Network, 1996); Peter Utting (ed.), *The Greening of Business in Developing Countries: Rhetoric, Reality and Prospects* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Joshua Karliner, "A Brief History of Greenwash," CorpWatch, March 22, 2001, <<http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=243>>.

79. Betsy Hart, "The Waste of Recycling," *Jewish World Review*, November 5, 1999, <<http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/hart110599.asp>>; see also Harvey Black, "Rethinking Recycling," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 103, no. 11 (November 1995), <<http://www.ehponline.org/docs/1995/103-11/focus2.html>>. Emphasis mine.

80. "The Ten Worst Jobs in America," *Alternet*, September 13, 2005, <<http://www.alternet.org/story/24927/>>.

sonal attitude. Most businesses hop onto the green bandwagon simply because they see it as a growing social trend that could generate new markets for old products in new garb. It is still going to be business as usual (thank God!) but now under the banner of green or ecocapitalism, of which ‘natural capitalism’<sup>81</sup> is a rather compelling, and, I must say, even fruitful offshoot. But suppose going green turns out to be seeing red instead of improving the bottom line—then what happens? Sack the greenish CEO and get a new one who can go all the way back to pitch black by hook or by crook. Without digging deeper into the soul to find out what it truly aspires for, the greening of the world will be less than skin deep. The “rite of atonement for the sin of excess”<sup>82</sup> begins not with sorting out the garbage about us but the garbage within us.

The rise of ecological psychology in the West is in recognition that the superficial, even hypocritical, free market and techno-scientific approaches (such as carbon trading) are not going to work. The solution is to be found at a deeper level by rekindling the innate human affinity and respect for nature that have been suppressed by two centuries of consumerist industrial civilization premised on indefinite growth, development, and progress. Instead of the present-day dogmatic economic mantra of limited resources chasing after unlimited wants,<sup>83</sup> a new economics of the future will have to be formulated, namely, one that is premised on the unlimited bounties of nature more than fulfilling the very limited needs of man, “for if you count the blessings of Allah, you will not exhaust them.”<sup>84</sup>

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81. Paul Hawken et al, *Natural Capitalism* (London: Earthscan, 1999). For a very critical review of the book, see Malcolm Slesser, “Misleading Us or Deluding Themselves,” <<http://www.feasta.org/documents/feastareview/slesser.pdf>>.
82. John Tierny, “Recycling is Garbage,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1996, <<http://www.williams.edu/HistSci/curriculum/101/garbage.html>>.
83. Lionel Robbins: *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1932). His definition of economics as insatiable wants chasing after scarce resources is, with various modifications, standard in mainstream economics as represented in the (overly) popular, multieditioned textbook of Paul Samuelson, *Economics*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973); see the very critical review by Murray N. Rothbard, “Sizing Up Samuelson,” <<http://www.mises.org/story/1542>>. The textbook is now in its 18<sup>th</sup> edition.
84. For a discussion of the meaning of this verse in relation to the Qur’an concept of *tashhīr* as elaborated by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, see Adi Setia, “*Taskhīr*, Fine-tuning, Intelligent Design and the Scientific Appreciation of Nature.”

Man, by nature (*fiṭrah*), is inclined to gratitude (*shukr*), to giving thanks for favors shown, but how can he be grateful and hence be contented (*qanā'ah*) if he is brainwashed by the economics of consumerism to believe that his material needs, wants and desires shall, nay, should, always grow and outgrow ever diminishing resources? If all his time is spent on material growth (*takāthur*), how can there be time for spiritual purification (*tazkiyah*), and how can nature be given time to regenerate its bounties for itself and for man? If this material growth is realized at the expense of nature, how can he be a true steward (*khalīfah*), a true trustee (*amīn*) of the natural, *fiṭrī* order? How can he keep and fulfill his solemn oath of trusteeship (*amānah*)? And if he betrays his trust, how can he be secure in his conscience and in his spirit, be immune from Divine punishment, and hence be at peace with himself, with fellow humans, with nature, and with God?

Ecopsychology is in a way a deep-level perspective on going green by transforming people's outlook toward the meaning of life and happiness through reconnecting them with the primordial rhythms of nature. But unless it involves a heartfelt certainty of personal responsibility before a personal God of justice and mercy, the Creator of both man and nature (as exemplified in the case of 'Umar above), it is unlikely to be truly transformative for most people over the long term. It will be too abstract, too speculative or too emotive and sentimental rather than cognitive, intellectual, and spiritual. It will go the way of other forms of modern holistic psychology like gestalt, humanistic, and transpersonal psychologies. Already it is reported that Ken Wilber, a prominent proponent of transpersonal psychology, has detached himself from the field to move on to what he thinks to be a more "integral" psychological approach.<sup>85</sup> It certainly will not be compelling to Muslims who sincerely believe in personal responsibility before a personal God of justice and mercy whom they will most certainly meet on *that day when wealth and children avail none save him who brings to Allāh a sound heart*.<sup>86</sup> For environmental concerns to engage the active involvement of more Muslims (especially Malaysian Muslims),<sup>87</sup> a

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85. Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology* (Boston: Shambala, 2000).

86. *al-Shu'arā'*: 89.

87. Austin Arensberg, an independent researcher in applied Islamic environmental ethics, has noted the general lack of awareness among Malaysian Muslim environmentalists of the importance of knowing, relating, and extending Islamic ethical precepts to tackling and solving environmental problems arising in their own communities. See

contemporary Islamic deep-ecology will have to be systematically formulated by drawing upon the rich and still very much alive spiritual psychology of the Ṣūfīs which is premised on the concept and practice of *iḥsān*, which is what *taṣawwuf* is all about, namely, the beauty, excellence, and perfection of one's actions, inwardly and outwardly, with respect to one's own self, to others, to nature, and to God.

To concretely illustrate this point one may invoke the psycho-spiritually touching story of the sixteenth century Turkish Sufi, Sunbul Efendi, who “sent out his disciples to bring flowers to the *zāwiyah*. While all of them returned with fine bouquets, one of them, Merkez Efendi, offered the master only a little withered flower, for, he said, ‘all the others were engaged in the praise of God and I did not want to disturb them; this one, however, had just finished its *dhikr*, and so I brought it.’” Needless to say, he went on to become his master's successor as head of the *zāwiyah*.<sup>88</sup>

This story, among countless other similar ones gleanable from our rich socio-intellectual history, goes to show to the heedless, environmentally indifferent Muslims of today how traditional Islamic spiritual training and discipline has succeeded in imbuing believers' hearts with a very palpable sense of the transcendent reality of the meaning implicit, nay, even explicit in verses such as *There is not a thing but hymns His praise*;<sup>89</sup> *The stars and the trees adore*;<sup>90</sup> *All that is in the heavens and earth glorify Him*;<sup>91</sup> and *He is Whom all who are in the heavens and earth praise, and the birds in their flight (praise Him too)*.<sup>92</sup> With regard to the last verse, those of us who have watched and been touched by the beautiful film documentary on the 300,000 hectare Belum-Temengor rainforest complex<sup>93</sup> will remember forever afterwards the graceful flight of the hornbills, veritable poetry in motion, inviting us to share in their freedom and reach for the heavens and strive for “what we can be instead of what we are.”<sup>94</sup>

Sadly, only the northern part of the forest complex is officially pro-

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his “A Handbook for Environmentalists in the Muslim World,” accessible at <[www.austinarensberg.com/?page\\_id=237](http://www.austinarensberg.com/?page_id=237)>.

88. Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (New York: SUNY, 1994), 21.

89. *al-Isrā'*: 44.

90. *al-Raḥmān*: 6.

91. *al-Ḥaṣhr*: 24.

92. *al-Nūr*: 41.

93. *Temengor: Biodiversity in the Face of Danger*, a DVD film documentary by Novista Sdn. Bhd., 2004 ([www.novista.tv](http://www.novista.tv)).

94. From the song “The Eagle and the Hawk” by John Denver.



tected while the southern half, where most of the ten species of hornbills make their homes, is still left wide open for desolation through the ‘developmental process’ of logging, both legal and illegal, and acacia plantation for pulp to feed our paper-pushing, paper-trashing lifestyle. Isn’t it amazing that despite our much vaunted natural and social sciences and our so-called “knowledge economy,” we still haven’t attained the liberating wisdom of thinking out of the conventional, western-inspired “development-in-tandem-with-destruction” box? As Dato’ Seri Azmi Khalid, the Malaysian minister for the environment, puts it, “If Belum Temengor can be gazetted, it will be a big milestone for Perak and for Malaysia...it will be for the good of Perak and for the good of the nation...”<sup>95</sup> And, I dare say, for the good of the *Ummah* too.

If there are to be any positive outcomes of this august gathering of intellectual luminaries from all corners of the Islamic world,<sup>96</sup> then surely one of them must be the immediate gazetting, on the part of the highest political authorities of the realm, of *all* of the Belum-Temengor rainforest complex as a national park, a national *ḥimā*, or, better still, as an international *ḥimā* of the *Ummah*, to be held inviolate for all posterity, from now till doomsday. For surely we cannot allow ourselves to be among those who say *what they do not*,<sup>97</sup> and *who would want to be praised for what they have not done*,<sup>98</sup> and especially so when the Creator Himself has designated Muslims, His vicegerents, His *khulafā’*, to be “Guardians of the Natural Order.”<sup>99</sup>

So the choice lies before us as people of free choice: either we act humbly in the name of the Lord, the True King, or we act haughtily in our own names as usurpers of the Royal Right and of the rights of His creatures entrusted to our care, in which latter case we shall be cast down from the lofty heights of our arrogance, *reduced to the lowest of the low*,<sup>100</sup> and the fiery doom of the Steward of Gondor shall be our lot!

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95. As interviewed in *Malaysian Naturalist*, vol. 60-1 (2006), 29.

96. Reference to the international conference in which this paper was presented; see page 117.

97. *As-Ṣaff*: 3. The recent OIC Summit Declaration issued in Putrajaya, Malaysia, specifically mentions commitment to conservation of the natural environment.

98. *Al ‘Imrān*: 188.

99. Fazlun Khalid, “Guardians of the Natural Order,” *Journal of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), Our Planet*, vol. 8, no. 2 (July 1996).

100. *al-Tīn*, 5.



*...but they are peoples like unto you*<sup>101</sup>

The problem of the conflict between man and nature has been one of the intellectual concerns of the remarkable group of independent thinkers in the public interest called the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Fellowship of the Pure-Hearted), a veritable Club of Baṣrā comparable in their self-critical altruistic idealism to the present-day Club of Rome, which commissioned the much maligned report *Limits to Growth*.<sup>102</sup> They lived ten long centuries ago yet their thoughts remain inspiringly fresh and alive to us who seek a light out of the present dark age of the Ummah and of Humanity in general.

They penned an ecological fable entitled *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn*.<sup>103</sup> Here we find elaborate classical allusions to the modern concepts of the “balance of nature,” of “ecosystems” and “ecotones,” of “biodiversity” of the communities of plants and animals greater than the diversity of the races and nations of man, of “ecological successions,” and of “nature’s economy” manifested in the symbiotic “web of interdependencies” between species as reflective of “Divine economy and plan.” They deem it “self-evident that it would be an evil for any species, even snakes, to be obliterated from the earth”<sup>104</sup> before its ecological life-span has run its course.

After an elaborate and fair trial in which long, passionate, and eloquent arguments were delivered, heard, and considered from both parties, the King of the Jinn passed judgment, in the end, in favor of mankind, but only because among them were “saints of God, the choice flower of his creation, the best, the purest, who are God’s elect, and that these folk have noble attributes, fair characters, pious acts, diverse sciences, sovereign insights, royal traits, just and holy lives, and wondrous ways...,”<sup>105</sup> who fulfill their duties of stewardship over nature under the overseership of God, to whom they “will be accountable when [the] epoch of steward-

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101. *al-Anʿām*: 38.

102. Donella H. Meadows et al, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

103. Translated from the Arabic with introduction and commentary by Lenn Evan Goodman (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 1 ff, 202, 258. See also the version trans. Rabbi Anson Laytner, *The Animal Lawsuit against Humanity* (Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2005).

104. Goodman, 11.

105. *Ibid.*, 202.

ship is at end.”<sup>106</sup>

It is made clear, then, that, though nature serves the needs of mankind, it also in its own way serves a higher end, an end which they partake of in communion with mankind, for *there is not an animal in the earth nor a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are peoples like unto you,*<sup>107</sup> and *unto Allah pays adoration whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is in the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the hills, and the trees, and the beasts, and many of mankind...*<sup>108</sup> namely, the common end of adoring God and hymning His praise. And as for those others of mankind who desire otherwise, *unto them the doom is justly due.*<sup>109</sup>

*What is man without the beasts?  
If all the beasts were gone, man would die  
from a great loneliness of the spirit.  
For whatever happens to the beasts  
soon happens to man. This we know.  
All things are connected.  
Man does not weave the web of life.  
He is merely a strand in it.*

Chief Seattle<sup>110</sup>

### **Neither in jest nor in vain**

A greener approach that goes beyond old-fashioned recycling as a strategy for renewing resources is to eliminate waste altogether (“zero-waste”)<sup>111</sup> and even transforming waste to wealth.<sup>112</sup> The last approach is really interesting, not only from the pragmatic technoeconomic point of view but, more importantly, from the intellectual, ontological point of view. If waste can be transformed into something useful that can generate wealth, then it must mean that the concept of “waste” is just that, a mental construct

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106. *Ibid.*, 258 n. 308.

107. *al-An‘ām*: 38.

108. *al-Ĥajj*: 18.

109. *Ibid.*

110. Cited in “How to conserve our wildlife,” *The Star*, June 12, 2007, Star Special III.

111. See Zero Waste Alliance, <<http://www.zerowaste.org/>>.

112. “Waste Equals Wealth,” *Iran Daily*, October 28, 2004, <<http://www.iran-daily.com/1383/2125/pdf/i6.pdf>>; see also Institute for Local Self-Reliance, *Waste to Wealth Program*, <[http://www.ilsr.org/recycling/WtW\\_2006\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ilsr.org/recycling/WtW_2006_Report.pdf)>.

that does not correspond in any way to any physical reality in the extramental real world. Waste is purely a matter of subjective thought, not objective fact. In other words, what we call waste is merely a product of an arbitrary, short-sighted judgement on our part. Let's cite a simple, actual and very personal example to press home this profound, and yet, self-evident point:

I was lecturing on aspects of Islamic Science in a hotel in Jakarta early last year. In front of me on the table was a glass of water covered by a nice round piece of paper boldly inscribed with the hotel's logo, *Hotel Shari'ah*, in graceful cursive lettering. So very good, Islamic Science in an Islamic hotel—what can be better? To illustrate a point I was trying to make, I told my audience that as long as I did not uncover the glass and drink from it, that nice piece of paper would be considered “useful” because it would continue to perform its assigned function of covering the glass. But once the water in the glass was drunk, there would no longer be any need to cover the glass and hence that (still very nice) piece of paper would be deemed “useless” and cast away into the “waste”-paper basket. But was there any actual physical change in the paper? Was it soiled by the mere action of me removing it from the glass and putting it on the table? No, of course not, but the cleaners would nevertheless come and discard that (still nice) piece of “waste”-paper.

Another very personal yet rather common example: when we print on only one side of the paper by not setting the printer or copier to duplex mode, we arbitrarily condemn the other side to waste, though physically there's simply nothing wasteful or useless about that side. It was merely unlucky enough to escape being printed on. The computer age which rendered obsolete the old fashioned typewriter was supposed to usher in a bright new world of paper-less office management culture, but it did not reckon with problematic aspects of human nature. The computer and the printer allow people to write carelessly without facing the daunting prospects of manually retyping the whole thing from scratch. Mistakes are considered just so many preliminary drafts to be printed out, checked and corrected in ink, and these inked corrections, and these alone, can then be easily be keyed into the body of the original draft to produce, after God-knows-how-many-drafts, the final copy. With the typewriter, people at least had to realize and respect the fact that typing is an artful skill and paper precious, so the typists of yore normally got it right the first time. Today most of the “waste”-papers produced by “efficient” offices consist of draft copies of shoddy typing, writing, and spelling skills. When

something is made too easy for people (overly user-friendly), they take it for granted, and when they take it for granted, they waste it. Another reason people don't like to read and store stuff in soft copies; they like it hard, solid and filed in real metal cabinets, where the temptation to go from soft to solid to waste (of paper and space) is always present. Is it any wonder that computer makers are also printer makers? Computers create soft copies which are printed into hard copies which use up paper which is discarded as waste. The paper trail doesn't end in the computer age; if anything, it only grows longer, wider, and deeper.

And that is actually downstream of the problem. If we take the trouble to follow the paper trail upstream all the way to its very source then we'll see the energy and chemical-intensive pulping factories, and then the loggers logging in plantation or virgin forests. Wasting paper is good for business because it makes the paper and pulp industry grow in double digit figures annually, which leads to the wasting away of biodiversified rainforests transformed to monoculturized, chemical-intensive plantation forests for making pulp for tissue paper, paper sachets, paper cups, and paper plates, of all things. Can't people learn to do with washable cotton handkerchiefs, sturdy ceramic cups and plates, and to take sugar the old-fashioned way from proper ceramic bowls of sugar? With the ubiquity of the internet, they can also learn to read the news online for free instead of buying newspapers. If they learn to do that, then they will contribute to the eventual scrapping of the acacia plantation project along the East-West Highway bisecting the Belum-Temengor rainforest.<sup>113</sup> We see how the paper and pulp industry as a whole feeds into the vanity and nihilism of consumer culture and the economics of prodigal consumption, which in turn is the biggest factor in the desolation of nature and the resulting depletion of its resources for man and wildlife.

This is how "waste" papers and how other types of "waste" are created, in hotels (including "Shar'ī" ones), in offices, in universities (including Islamic ones—I should know, I'm working in one), in conferences (including Islamic ones, but hopefully not in this one if that's not too much to hope for!), namely, created from a sterile, insensitive imagination that is heedless of the Qur'ānic truth that nothing in nature is created in vain (*mā khalaqta hādihā bāṭilan*),<sup>114</sup> nor in jest (*lā'ibīn*),<sup>115</sup> but everything in truth

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113. "Belum-Temengor: The Dollars and Sense in Logging," *Malaysian Naturalist*.

114. *Āl 'Imrān*: 191.

115. *al-Dukhān*: 38.

(*bi'l-ḥaqq*)<sup>116</sup> and perfection (*aḥsana/atqana kulla shay'*).<sup>117</sup> If that is the reality in nature, then why do we find so much that is in vain and in jest and wasted in the reality of our culture? Aren't we supposed to imitate the Divine attributes (*al-takhalluq bi akhlāqiLlāh*), that is, to harmonize our personal ethics with the Divine ethics manifested in the cosmos, in the biosphere and in our very own selves? So there is a real need for the ethics of the psyche to be in tune with the ethics of the cosmos.

Not only is the modern economy predicated on profligate consumption, but also on prodigal flippancy, i.e., on the art of making container loads of money from the perpetual creation of ever-new ways of generating and having fun, of indulging in multifarious entertainments of heedless abandon. *Do you deem then that We had created you in frivolous play, and that you would not be returned to Us?*<sup>118</sup> Let's take the multibillion dollar Formula One racing franchise (in Malaysia it's financed by Petronas, the national oil company, which is largely run and managed by Muslims). It is a sporting industry, but one that thrives by convincing millions of essentially non-sporting spectators that passively watching cars roar about in circles is fun. Let's take the multibillion cell-phone industry which makes billions by brainwashing people into believing that endless chatter is fun, even though the believers are those *who shun vain conversation*.<sup>119</sup> One big Malaysian telecommunications company, TMNet, actually promotes the joys of non-stop 24-hour chatting on its numerous supersized billboards. Or let's take the multibillion dollar advertising industry, without which newspapers, magazines, television stations, and even the internet would have to close shop. What is advertised? A lifestyle of dissipative consumption and vanity, with not a thought about the physical and spiritual garbage left behind. It's incredible how much money can be made out of a vacuum, the spiritual vacuum in the hearts of people who *know only what is manifest of the life of this world, while of the Other Life they are heedless*,<sup>120</sup> oblivious, clueless, indifferent. Just take a look at the economic underbelly of Dubai, then you'll get the idea.<sup>121</sup>

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116. *al-Dukhān*: 39.

117. *al-Sajdah*: 7; *al-Naml*: 88.

118. *al-Mu'minūn*: 115.

119. *al-Mu'minūn*: 3.

120. *al-Rūm*: 7.

121. Afshin Molavi, "Sudden City: A feverish dream of the future springs from the sands in Dubai," *National Geographic* (January 2007), 94-113.

Thus the life of this world for the heedless is nothing but play and pastime,<sup>122</sup> but Muslims are commanded to transcend that situation by being remindful of the fact that the world is the seedbed of the Hereafter (*al-dunyā mazraʿat al-ākhirah*). It is the lifestyles of the prodigal and the heedless—the economics of keeping-up-with-the-Joneses writ large, generating the fever of “affluenza”<sup>123</sup>—which we have slavishly copied, either out of envy or admiration or both, from the West—that produces so much waste and flippancy in Muslim societies. Muslims should disentangle themselves from that physical and psychological morass. For us, it will have to be a counter-economics of spiritual mindfulness of the fact that the cosmos and the earth were created neither in vain nor in jest. The word economics originally refers to the norms, the standards, and the rules of the home, and these are meant to preserve the physical and spiritual welfare of the household and all its members. The earth is in a way our household writ large and our duty as stewards of the natural order/norm/standard of the earth is to promote the welfare of *all* its inhabitants, inanimate, animate, and human, for the Prophet, *ṣallaḷlāhu ʿalayhi wa salām*, was sent as a mercy to all the worlds (*rahmatan liʿl-ʿālamīn*),<sup>124</sup> and we are followers of this august Prophet, not of the nihilistic West. The world, including the conscientious of the West, is looking to us for a way out of the maelstrom of self-destruction, for we are the *nation of the golden mean bearing witness over all mankind*,<sup>125</sup> and we shall surely be answerable for our neglect of this civilizational duty.

*Only after the last tree has been cut down  
Only after the last river has been poisoned  
Only after the last fish has been caught  
Only then will man find that money  
cannot be eaten.*

Cree Indian prophecy<sup>126</sup>

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122. *Muḥammad*: 36; *al-Anʿām*: 32; *al-ʿAnkabūt*: 64.

123. Clive Hamilton, *Affluenza: When Too Much is not Enough* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2006).

124. *al-Anbiyāʾ*: 107.

125. *al-Baqarah*: 143.

126. Cited in Andy Paul, “Can’t take the wild out of this boy,” *Malaysian Naturalist*, vol. 60-4 (June 2007), 6.

### Conclusion: Reactive or Proactive Ethics?

As is quite evident from the foregoing, the Islamic ethico-moral attitude towards nature is an intrinsic, proactive one, i.e., an essential, inseparable aspect of Islamic axiology or value system. In their daily interaction with the natural and social environments, Muslims are commanded from the very beginning in the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān and Sunnah to keep clean, to moderate consumption, to be merciful, considerate, and gentle, to avoid waste and to prevent harm, long before pollution, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation became palpable large-scale civilizational crises. The whole earth is viewed as a mosque,<sup>127</sup> and hence the ethics applicable to the mosque are also applicable to the earth. The whole universe, including the earth, is to be read as a Divine book of creation, corresponding to the Divine book of revelation, and hence the ethics applicable to the latter are also essentially applicable to the former, namely, the ethics of respect and reverence (*ih̄tirām*, *h̄urmah*, and *adab*). The very dust of the earth is viewed as pure and purifying and hence a full substitute for water for use in ritual ablutions.<sup>128</sup>

These general ethico-moral injunctions are not merely “feel-good” abstract notions in the mind to assuage sentiments, but rather they are to be imbued into the heart, comprehended in the mind, and expressed in concrete action on the ground. Hence we find their implications explicated in great detail into objective operative juridical rules of conduct and behavior in the classical books of *fiqh*, the whole purpose of which are to maintain and promote a healthy socationatural environment through a harmonious balance between private and public interests.<sup>129</sup> In practice,

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127. *Ḥadīth* no. 323 in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (juʿilat li al-arḍu masjidan wa ṭahwiran* = “the earth has been made for me a place of prostration and a means of purification”).

128. *Ibid.*; for more on the ethico-juridical precepts pertaining to the mosque, see Badr al-Dīn bin Muḥammad bin Bahadır al-Zarkāshī, *ʿIlam al-Sājīd bi Ahkām al-Masājīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995).

129. As shown with numerous citations from the classical *fiqh* sources by Mohd Dani Muhammad, “*Unsur Perancangan Bandar dalam Pandangan Hidup Islam*” (“Elements of Urban Planning in the Worldview of Islam”), paper presented in the Seminar on Development without Disrupting the Environment: The Islamic Perspective, organized by the Institute for Islamic Understanding (IKIM), Kuala Lumpur, September 19-20, 2006. See also S. Waqar Ahmed Husaini, *Islamic Sciences*, 72 ff. This theme of reviving the environmental jurispru-

this means that the pursuit of private interests are never allowed to supersede the preservation of public interests, and public interests here include the interests of the natural environment and of those, especially pastoral communities and wildlife, whose livelihood depends on it. Contemporary Islamic environmental legislation should creatively draw its precepts from this rich tradition of ecological *fiqh*. Only then can Muslims be compelled *from within* to take on a greater share of the responsibility of caring for culture and nature.

In view of the foregoing, conscientious Muslims will have to reject the reactive ethics of the naughty boy who begins to reform himself, if ever, only after being whacked severely. For, if we delay reformation until whacking time, it may be far too late to initiate reforms, much less for them to take effect, to arrest and reverse the cascade of environment calamities now befalling the globe with increasing frequency and intensity. *Corruption doth appear in the land and sea because of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return.*<sup>130</sup>

On the whole, one can characterize western secular ecological ethics, or ecosophy, as reactive, i.e., extrinsic to the secular humanistic and utilitarian worldview, or, as Arne Naess terms it, “shallow,”<sup>131</sup> since the emphasis is on technics and resources rather than values and virtues. How can it be otherwise, when the utilitarian ideal and “promise” is “to interrogate nature with power”?<sup>132</sup> Even though that worldview is now a few centuries old, it is only very lately in the last five decades or so that any serious, systematic thought has been given by secular humanists to the ethics of human-nature interaction. If not for Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*,<sup>133</sup> there

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dence of traditional *fiqh* shall be taken up again in greater detail in a forthcoming article, *inshāʾaʿlLāh*.

130. *al-Rūm*: 41. According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* in his commentary on this verse, corruption of the land at the hands of man is a result of their shirk or polytheism, and so in the modern context one may certainly point to the many polytheistic “isms” of the day driving the ecological desolation of the earth: scientism, economism, neoliberalism, progressivism, etc.

131. For a succinct description of the ecosophy of Arne Naess, see Alan Drengson, “Ecophilosophy, ecosophy and the deep ecological movement: an overview,” <<http://www.ecospherics.net/pages/DrengEcophil.html>>.

132. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, 192 ff.

133. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962). For the influence of *Silent Spring*,



would not now be much talk of green engineering or green chemistry.<sup>134</sup> If not for global warming, there would not have been any Kyoto Protocol on climate change.<sup>135</sup> If not for the Club of Rome's warning of natural limits to economic growth, not much thought would have been given to the possibility, much less desirability, of economic downshifting or zero-growth or steady-state economics.

Therefore, much of the sophisticated ecoethical thinking (or, rather, speculation) that arose in the wake of *Silent Spring* is a hastily improvised, *ad hoc* reactive ethics, more or less arbitrarily and reluctantly grafted onto an inherently unnatural (un-*fitrī*) utilitarian ethos that had never really anticipated the ethical dimension of human economic and technoscientific impact on "nature's economy." The mainstream approach is still one of tacit or explicit technoeconomic co-option of ecological ethics into the "higher" ethics of the free market to generate the awkward hybrid of eco-capitalism, most exemplified perhaps in Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*,<sup>136</sup> and in the focus on carbon trading (by means of which the recent Hollywood Academy Award ceremony, was for the first time certified carbon-neutral). In short, eco-capitalism is, in the final analysis, still old-fashioned capitalism, only now armed and greened (or rather, green-washed) with the eco-economic tools of green accountancy,<sup>137</sup> corporate social responsibility, natural capitalism, etc. But how can one truly green something that is at heart red in tooth and claw?

While by all means we can and should work with the West in tackling environmental problems, including appropriating and integrating

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see Priscilla Coit Murphy, *What A Book Can Do: The Publication and Reception of Silent Spring* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

134. P. T. Anastas and T. C. Williamson, *Green chemistry: designing chemistry for the environment* (Washington, D.C.: American Chemical Society, 1996). See also David T. Allen and David R. Shonnard, *Green Engineering: Environmentally Conscious Design of Chemical Processes* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001).

135. <<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf>>.

136. *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Rodale Books, 2006). *An Inconvenient Truth* can be considered the sequel to his earlier *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), which was also a bestseller.

137. Or, environmental accountancy which aims to incorporate both economic and environmental information into its report. It is also called full-cost accounting.

some of their eco-techniques into our socioreligious contexts, we have to: (1) be frank in emphasizing the radical ethico-spiritual shift rather than the superficial technoeconomic approach and thereby propose and implement solutions accordingly; and (2) systematically ground all our environmental work on authentic Islamic eco-ethical principles as outlined above<sup>138</sup> instead of submitting passively to alienating secular eco-philosophical categories (like the so-called Gaia hypothesis or the evolutionary “geologist” ecosophy of Thomas Berry<sup>139</sup>) incompatible with the metaphysics and worldview of Islam. Step number two is important if only to convince Muslims that environmental concerns are authentic Islamic concerns rather than merely a new-age green fad foreign to the Islamic ethos. Moreover, a heightened eco-consciousness can contribute to a more selective attitude toward the technoscientific and political economic aspects of western civilization. That way, hopefully, we can encourage more Muslims to be intellectually and actively engaged in local and regional environmental issues and thereby to contribute creatively and fruitfully to the global environmental debate in today’s world at both the communal and governmental levels of socio-political organization.

The world is sweet and verdant green, and Allah appoints you to be His regents in it and will see how you acquit yourselves.<sup>140</sup>

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138. See also Abubakar Ahmad Bakadar et al, “Islamic Principles for the Conservation of the Natural Environment,” in A. R. Agwan (ed.), *Islam and the Environment* (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997); Isma’il Hobson, “Principles into Practice: Islamic Tradition,” in Harfiyah Abdel Haleem (ed.), *Islam and the Environment* (London: Ta Ha, 1998), 90-102. Osman Bakar, *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The Islamic Heritage* (Kuala Lumpur: Center for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya, 2007).

139. Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* (Sierra Club, 2006). For Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s comments on Berry, see <<http://www.crosscurrents.org/islamecology.htm>>.

140. *Hadith* cited by Isma’il Hobson, “Islam’s Guiding Principles for a Solution to Environmental Problems,” *op. cit.*, 34.