

## Qur'ānic Worldview and the Environment: The Prophet Muḥammad as an Environmental Ethicist

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### Abstract

*This article analyses the prophethood of Muḥammad (peace be on him) as the Creator's environmentally balanced strategy to achieve a secure and sustainable future for humanity. In line with the principles of innovating on the margins, this article foregrounds the purpose, need, and rationale for presenting such an altruistic environmental ethicist to the world. Negotiating through the environmental ethical debates of utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and the Qur'ānic worldview, the article argues that a study of the rationale for the Prophet Muḥammad's prophethood brings an acute awareness of intrinsic environmental ethics and allows Muslims to understand why the Qur'ānic weltanschauung underscores the importance of such a complete human benefactor or a perfect environmental ethicist for the world. It also puts forth the relevance of such a study for navigating the mayhem of contemporary social affairs.*

### Keywords

Muḥammad, environment, ethics, Qur'ān, worldview, ecology.

### Introduction

Environmental ethics emerged as an important lens of inquiry in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is “environmentally responsible behavior” and a theoretical concern considering environmental, social, and economic justice.<sup>1</sup> While environmental ethics may be a recent theoretical underpinning, this article seeks to combine the Islamic epistemological worldview with environmental ethics, engaging with the

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<sup>1</sup> Bron R. Taylor, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, 2 vols. (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 1:vii; Rabia Aamir, *Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir & Palestine* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2023), 5.

“classical Islamic scholarship in a modernist form.”<sup>2</sup> This is done under the belief that “as Islam provides a comprehensive guide for human conduct, it might be thought that all writing about Islam and nature is, in some way, about environmental ethics.”<sup>3</sup>

Contextualizing the Islamic worldview into the affairs of the modern human condition, this article foregrounds the importance of sociological aspects in environmental ethics debates. For instance, in Bron R. Taylor’s *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (2005), many studies explored the environmental ethics contained within the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). As some scholars pointed out, “In the Qur’an and various Hadith traditions (sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad), Muslims are enjoined to appreciate without exception all God’s creation and to grow gardens on Earth. . . . Revelation and revolution begin in the true wilderness.”<sup>4</sup> The protection of life in Islam is also extended to inanimate objects, seeing them as also worthy of protection.<sup>5</sup> This article argues that a society’s well-being pivots around healthy ethical morals. Therefore, more than any ecological discussion, this article focuses on understanding the social implications that enhance the human element for a sustained environment, the best steward and guide for this process being the Prophet Muḥammad.

The implication of environmental ethics and what it entails may become more understandable by consulting *Lisān al-‘Arab* by the lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr. Drawing from a Prophetic tradition related by the Prophet’s wife, ‘Ā’ishah,<sup>6</sup> Ibn Manẓūr gives three meanings of the word “*khuluq*”: 1) nature; 2) charter of life (the adorning virtues of balanced and harmonious behaviour; Innate faculty; virtues that unveil your inner nature); and 3) eloquence. Quoting this Prophetic tradition, Ibn Manẓūr clarifies the meaning of disposition, ethics, manner, and morals. Therefore, the word *khuluq* may be understood as abiding by a charter of life that is inherently imbibed in human nature by the Divine, with which one may discover one’s innate nature of constantly adorning one’s virtues to achieve a balanced and harmonious behaviour, with the

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Masterston, “Translator’s Note,” *The Moral World of the Quran*, ed. M. A. Draz, trans. Danielle Robinson and Rebecca Masterton (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), ix.

<sup>3</sup> James L. Wescoat Jr., “Islam and Environmental Ethics,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron R. Taylor, 2 vols. (London: New York, 2005), 1:866.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Heath, “Eden and Other Gardens,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron R. Taylor, 2 vols. (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 1:571-72.

<sup>5</sup> Md. Abu Sayem, “Islam and Environmental Ethics: A Qur’anic Approach,” *Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (2021): 160.

<sup>6</sup> Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1986), 4:193-94.

added attribute of eloquence. Allah declares that the person of the Prophet Muḥammad was the embodiment of the epitome of all these virtues. When 'Ā'ishah said, "His *khuluq* was the Qur'ān," she meant that the Prophet bound himself unwaveringly to the Qur'ān with the purest of intentions, its revered dos and don'ts. Ibn Manẓūr writes how this Prophetic tradition is an explanation of the Qur'ān's verses which address the Prophet Muḥammad and endorses him as a man "of outstanding character."<sup>7</sup> Contemporary theorists like Ozdemir also argue that the Prophet exemplified, "in his personality the Qur'ānic viceregency, . . . and was aware of the integrity of the ecosystem and the importance of water, greenery, and forests."<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Prophet was an embodiment of all the qualities of a great character, exemplary moral convictions, mercy, and love that the Qur'ān states. There was not a speck of feint or pretence in anything that he did.

Studying his life, everyday Muslims and scholars find the Prophet Muḥammad's disposition to be a whetting stone for the quintessential epitome of manners, ethics, and morals.<sup>9</sup> Even those who criticized him, such as Thomas Carlyle, had to admit:<sup>10</sup>

Our current hypothesis about Mahomet, that he was a scheming Imposter, a Falsehood incarnate, that his religion is a mere mass of quackery and fatuity, begins really to be now untenable to anyone. The lies, which well meaning zeal has heaped around this man, are disgraceful to ourselves only.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, whether it is the criteria of truthfulness or trustworthiness, mercy or altruism, nobility or servitude, generosity or giving others preference over oneself, humility or adopted scarceness, patience, and reliance on God, and a sense of duty or decisions with wisdom, the Prophet Muḥammad is at the pinnacle of any possible

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'ān 68:4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibrahim Ozdemir, "Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam (570–632)," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron R. Taylor, 2 vols. (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 2:1125.

<sup>9</sup> See Michael H. Hart, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1993), 3–10; Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time* (New York, NY: Harper Collins: 2013); Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London: Islamic Texts Society, 1983); Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheequl Makhtum): Biography of the Noble Prophet* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008); Mahatma Gandhi, "Gandhi's Inspiration from the Prophet Muhammad," *Gandhi Memorial Center*, accessed March 22, 2024, <https://www.gandhimemorialcenter.org/the-gandhi-message/2023/3/22/gandhis-inspiration-from-the-prophet-muhammad>.

<sup>10</sup> See Simon Ockley, *The History of the Saracens (Arabs): Comprising the Lives of Mohammed and His Successors, to the Death of Abdalmelik, the Eleventh Caliph* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004 [1870]), 1–78.

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman & Hall, Strand, 1842), 68.

human quality. Similarly, if people seek the best messenger, the kindest teacher, an expert in economics, the best general of the army, the wisest statesman, a pragmatic leader, or the best juryman, they will find the Prophet Muḥammad at the top. In his own words, he declared: “I have been sent to perfect the all-embracing character traits (that may be worthy of human disposition).”<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, this article argues that with the qualities mentioned above, the Prophet Muḥammad can be understood as the epitome of the Grand Plan of the Creator to function as the most profound environmental ethicist and an altruistic benefactor for humanity. The paper also argues that an engagement with Eastern epistemology relating to a study of his prophethood and disposition may lend some extended definitions to the theoretical debates of environmental ethics.

### **Literature Review**

An engagement with contemporary Muslim scholars who have contributed to the debates of environmental ethics from an Islamic perspective will be helpful to contextualize the thrust of this study. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, a brief review of some of the works by eminent contemporary Muslim thinkers will help discover the gap this study fills through two broad perspectives: the Islamic worldview and conditional anthropocentrism.

#### ***Islamic Worldview***

A worldview is an outlook or approach to human-cosmos interaction. In German, the term was first coined by Kant as *weltanschauung*, and became “a standard item in the vocabulary of the educated German, denoting a global outlook on life and the world.”<sup>13</sup> Wolters, in “On the Idea of Worldview and Its Relation to Philosophy,” believes that the “history of a concept” is significant because it allows us to observe the matrix in which an important idea first arose, and the ideological company it has since kept.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in this history of ideas, some scholars have put forth a Qur’ānic *weltanschauung*/worldview.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 4:194.

<sup>13</sup> Albert M. Wolters, “On the Idea of Worldview and Its Relation to Philosophy,” in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, ed. Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, Richard J. Mouw (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Toshihiko Izutzu, *God and Man in the Qur’an: Semantics of the Qur’anic Weltanschauung* (Jalan Othman: Islamic Book Trust, 2008 [1964]), 3.

However, others believe that Qur'ānic teachings are "far from being adequately described as a *Weltanschauung*."<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, taking a cue from the nineteenth and twentieth-century models where the world outlook/worldview crowns, flanks, yields, or is at par with philosophy as dialectical materialism or a "truly scientific *Weltanschauung*," or has an "unavoidable tension" that exists between existentialism and worldview, this article presents the Qur'ānic worldview that is not "restricted to a particular time and place."<sup>17</sup> If a worldview is "eminently suitable for Christian appropriation" as Wolters would argue, then this article puts forth the worldview that it is equally sufficient for the Islamic context.

Many scholars of divinity, Islam, and the Qur'ān believe that the natural world, natural environment, and the human condition are bound up with the concept of God. This forms the basis of the definition of an Islamic or Qur'ānic worldview. For them, it is an "organic unity [or a] holistic worldview based on the unity of reality (*tawhīd*)."<sup>18</sup> These same scholars also believe that the modern world that constitutes both the "world system and world view" has largely been dominated by the Western world. Our social, cultural, scientific, and educational worldviews, or "Weltbild," as S. Noumanul Haq would argue, are built through coerced implementations of colonial policies of the last two to three centuries. With an increasingly heavy reliance of developing societies on the Western world, we are seeing institutional deaths of local, Eastern, and indigenous worldviews, as well as the reduction of religion.<sup>19</sup> However, it is a matrix of "complicated forces and patterns that the role of religion in the West must be understood today" because the metaphysical propositions and speculations are considered meaningless and are thrown off the stage of the life of the modern human being.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, to have a balanced worldview, it will be helpful if observers can rise above Western/Eastern debates and be

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<sup>16</sup> Fazlur Rahman, review of *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, by Toshiko Izutsu (Tokyo: Keio University, 1964), *Islamic Studies* 5, no. 2 (1966): 222.

<sup>17</sup> Wolters, "On the Idea of Worldview," 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibrahim Ozdemir, "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective," in *Islam and Ecology*, ed. R. C. Foltz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>19</sup> S. Noumanul Haq, "Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction," *Dadaelus* 130, no. 4 (2001): 141-77.

<sup>20</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Frederick M. Denny, Azizan Baharuddin, and Richard C. Foltz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 85-105; Ozdemir, "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics," 4.

informed by sustainable mores for an equitable environment. Because “environmental problems cross cultural boundaries,” the world has to be “correspondingly multicultural.”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the three realms of the divine, of nature, and of humanity are intermeshed with each other in the Qur’ānic worldview and there is “no ontological separation between the divine and natural environments.”<sup>22</sup>

Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains this communion with Allah’s attributive name, *al-Muḥīṭ*, as the entire “environment” of our universe.<sup>23</sup> To understand the implications of *al-Muḥīṭ*, people only need to look around to see how today, more than ever, “there is a greater interest in religion in the West than there was a few decades ago, mostly due to the breakdown of many Western ideologies and idols of the mind which had grown out of eighteenth and nineteenth-century European thought and which had taken the place of religion.”<sup>24</sup> Nasr considers “modern industry as a cancer in the body of nature . . . lead[ing] to the destruction of the harmony and balance of the natural world.”<sup>25</sup>

### ***Contained Anthropocentrism***

Islam imbibes an understanding of humanity as Allah’s selected stewards with moral, ethical, and environmental sensibilities and standards.<sup>26</sup> In eco-Islamic epistemology, a human being is created as an “‘abd or servant of Allah, his grandeur coming not from himself but from his position as Allah’s slave or steward and from being able to carry out the Will of the Supreme Master of the universe.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, more than any “Titanic and Promethean nature which rebels against the Will of Heaven in a heroic manner,”<sup>28</sup> humanity made a primordial pact or *mīthāq* with Allah, and owing to this covenant many scholars believe that religion is inbuilt in the human psyche and not a luxury but a “*raison d’être* for human existence.”<sup>29</sup> Abu Sayem believes that being human is a sacred responsibility (*amānah*). He exhorts that “humans should interact with other parts of the environment in a very responsible way” because when this “*amānah* is related to the environment, it means that humans are

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<sup>21</sup> Riham R. Rizk, “Islamic Environmental Ethics,” *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* 5, no. 2 (2014): 194-204.

<sup>22</sup> Nomanul Haq, “Islam and Ecology,” 146.

<sup>23</sup> Nasr, “Islam,” 106.

<sup>24</sup> Nasr, *A Young Muslim’s Guide to the Modern World* (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications, 2003), 146.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>26</sup> See Ozdemir, “Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics”; Nomanul Haq, “Islam and Ecology”; Nasr, “Islam”; Abu Sayem, “Islam and Environmental Ethics,” 157-72.

<sup>27</sup> Nasr, *Young Muslim’s Guide*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

entrusted with the task of taking care of every component of the natural world on God's behalf as His stewards on earth." The Qur'ānic terms *amānah* and *khilāfah* put a heavy burden of responsibility on human beings, especially as humans accepted this responsibility "without fully recognizing its implications."<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, according to eco-religious scholars like Nasr, "human ethical responsibility embodied in *khilāfah*, *'abd*, and *amānah* can serve for environmental sustainability.<sup>31</sup> They "contend that the Islamic concept of *khilāfah* never endorses an anthropocentric approach unconditionally"<sup>32</sup> but is qualified by this steward's righteous disposition. Nasr views Islam as "a society of married monks, each person being directly responsible to Allah and participating in religion not by withdrawing from the world but by participation in it through many means including the institution of marriage."<sup>33</sup> This anthropocentric approach is not unconditional but is grounded in a deep sense of responsibility.<sup>34</sup>

Draz's book *The Moral World of the Qur'ān* (1951) and the works of Nasr, Ozdemir, Nomanul Haq, and other critics discussed in this article are pivotal for the morality and obligation of a human being in the light of Islamic ethics of the Qur'ān. While adapting these theoretical insights, this article is an attempt to bring an Islamic perspective to the debates of Western and secular tenets of environmental ethics. This objective combination of a Western episteme of environmental ethics to study an Islamic perspective offers a unique medium of inquiry for the modern reader. This will help us appreciate the inherent sacrificial moral responsibility of the privileged position of humans as stewards towards all living entities, irrespective of their religious disposition. Only then can one be called a "perfect human (*insān kāmil*)" and "continue to serve all living forms in a sustainable way."<sup>35</sup> A Qur'ānic perspective of environmental ethics is a perfectly balanced sensible blend between the anthropocentric and bio-centric approach, something we witness through the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. As it will be impossible to purview the complete life of such a perfect human being, this article studies the rationale of the prophethood of Muḥammad to demonstrate how his anointing by Allah was mandatory for humanity's sustenance.

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<sup>30</sup> Abu Sayem, "Islam and Environmental Ethics," 165-66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Nasr, *Young Muslim's Guide*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Abu Sayem, "Islam and Environmental Ethics," 167.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

### Purpose and Rationale of Prophethood

Since antiquity, communities, cultures, and philosophies have put forth different vocabularies for the purpose of life, including the Japanese concept of *Ikigai* “the happiness of always being busy” or “the art of staying young while growing old,”<sup>36</sup> the Costa Rican idea about the soul’s purpose as *plan de vida*, or the ancient Native Indian tradition of young going to pray and fast at a sacred place.<sup>37</sup> However, as some believe, “if we still choose to formulate our problems in the modern Western way, we are bound to conclude that we face modern problems for which there are no modern solutions.”<sup>38</sup> Tom Greaves argues: “Values are not stand-alone principles, they form part of a ‘hermeneutic framework’, that is, a dynamic worldview and hierarchy of purposes.”<sup>39</sup>

History shows that eudaimonic (pursuing happiness by finding meaning and purpose) theories of well-being assert the importance of achieving one’s full potential through engaging in inherently meaningful endeavours. Many centuries before the development of Greek philosophy, the Abrahamic legacy of seeking the light of truth was seen as a eudaimonic endeavour that culminated in the Prophet Muḥammad, believed to be the last prophet on Earth by the Muslims. In this section, the article argues that making his teachings and life principles an integral part of human intellectual, practical, and philosophical lives will allow Muslims to reclaim the lost glory of humanity in the most informed environmentally ethical manner.

Like many other appointed stewards of Allah before him, the Prophet was a manifestation of the Qur’ānic worldview and did not say anything of his own accord.<sup>40</sup> Naturally, if a person is bringing down the message of the One Who Created this world, it will be the blueprint for bringing any sort of amelioration to the existing environment. If “humans in the Anthropocene era are gaining the special status of geological agents from being mere biological agents,”<sup>41</sup> or are stewards

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<sup>36</sup> Héctor García and Francesc Miralles, *The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 8, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Rabia Aamir and Zainab Younus, “Contemporary Native American Literature and the World: Issues, Debates and Representation in Selected Literary Texts,” *Pakistan Journal of American Studies* 36, no. 2 (2018): 39-61.

<sup>38</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Decolonising the University: The Challenge of Deep Cognitive Justice* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholarly Publishing, 2017), 8.

<sup>39</sup> Tom Greaves, “Nature Breaks through Our Worldviews,” *Environmental Values* 32, no. 2 (2023): 119-25.

<sup>40</sup> Qur’ān 53:3.

<sup>41</sup> Karpita Bhar Paul, “Two Challenges of the Anthropocene,” *Environmental Values* 32, no. 4 (2023): 379-84, <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327123X1680013706021>.



of the Creator as many Islamic eco-ethicists may argue, then Muslims may remind themselves of the promise that the Creator made:

Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good that He will certainly make them successors in the land, as He did with those before them; and will surely establish for them their faith which He has chosen for them; and will indeed change their fear into security—(provided that) they worship Me, associating nothing with Me. But whoever disbelieves after this (promise), it is they who will be the rebellious.<sup>42</sup>

The claim that the Prophet Muḥammad was one of the messengers of Allah should be understood as one of the many Eastern epistemological inquiries that flourished before being brushed aside only because they fell under the banner of religion. This claim, that the Prophet was only a mouthpiece of the Creator, with the Absolutely Trustworthy seated in his heart (as Emerson would argue),<sup>43</sup> is important because the execution of the commands of a superior can only be carried out by someone worthy of their trust. The superior head will choose a specific employee because he knows his subordinate's intrinsic capabilities. Therefore, it will be helpful to put aside prejudice and study the rationale of presenting the Prophet as an environmental ethicist because "our environmental actions flow from our characters."<sup>44</sup>

To begin with, the Creator's rationale for sending His last messenger may be understood better if juxtaposed with the purpose of life. In the preface of his book *Payam-e Mashriq*, Muhammad Iqbal wrote: "No revolution can occur in the status of life unless it does not take place in the deep recesses of the human soul. And no new world can establish its external existence until it is securely wrought in the depths of human consciousness."<sup>45</sup>

This seer derived this understanding from the Qur'ān: "Allah would never change a people's state (to a favorable one) until they change (bring a revolution) in their own state (of faith and attitude towards life)."<sup>46</sup> So it follows naturally that if I can understand the reason for my existence and the reason for my being in the environment of this world, I may be able to understand the aim and rationale of the prophethood of Muḥammad and

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<sup>42</sup> Qur'ān 24:55.

<sup>43</sup> Rabia Aamir, "Praxis of Perenniality: Emerson's 'Self Reliance' and Iqbal's Concept of 'Khudi,'" *Iqbal Review* 61, no. 2 (2020): 21-40.

<sup>44</sup> Clare Palmer, "Contested Frameworks in Environmental Ethics," in *Linking Ecology and Ethics for a Changing World: Values, Philosophy and Action*, ed. Ricardo Rozzi et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 201.

<sup>45</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Payam e Mashriq*, trans. Hamidullah Shah Hashmi (Lahore: Maktabah-i Dāniyāl, 1977 [1923]), 10. <https://archive.org/details/PayamEMashriqByAllamahMuhammadIqbalr.a/page/n1/mode/2up>.

<sup>46</sup> Qur'ān 13:11.

why he can be seen as an environmental ethicist. Allah has designed human beings to fulfil a purpose as they are individual stakeholders and eventually work to become collective stakeholders in the grand scheme of the universe. Allah gives the rule for these stakeholders when He says: “I did not create jinn and humans except to be My slaves (*‘ibād*, sing. *‘abd*) only.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, Allah emphasizes the fact that “My slaves need to submit their will to My Will, and like slaves, they need to carry out and implement whatever commands I give them without whining because every command is not only in line with the ultimate objective of My Great Grand Plan but also to give a balanced sustenance for every living organism on this planet.”<sup>48</sup> This argument of Allah’s Great Grand/Eco-Aesthetical Plan speaks for the purpose of prophethood for a consistent flow of balanced human traits through history and is validated by this verse: “Do you really think that We had created you without purpose and that you would never be returned to Us?”<sup>49</sup> In other words, humans must carry themselves with an acute deontic awareness of responsibility, or mindfulness of their being His slaves or *‘ibād*, for everything and the milieu that they live in. This environmental ethicist gave a golden principle to understand humanity’s deontic duty by understanding the environment as capital in which humans are answerable for their actions: “Every one of you is a shepherd (guardian) and everyone will be questioned for his/her charges.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 51:56. An important observation needs to be clarified here. The Arabic word “*‘abd*” or “*‘ibād*” or any other derivative of this root word of “-b-d” needs to be understood in its Arabic context. The word “*‘abd*” means slave. However, the terms slavery, post-slavery, or any other contemporary connotations need to be shed off in order to appreciate the actual meaning of this word. As Allah says, “Human beings are created weak” (4:28), so everyone needs support. From day one humans are in search of that support. So, they take as support whatever they see as stronger than themselves. That is why, the “sun,” because of it being the strongest energy provider, was the most worshipped natural object in history. Humanity worshipped it as slaves and likewise worshipped some other deities like earth goddess, moon goddess, etc. Today human beings have become the slaves of wealth, status, fame, and pomp and show of this worldly life. They have forgotten to take Allah as their supporter and be His slaves only. Interestingly, since Allah knows the human psyche more than any other psychologist or psychiatrist, by giving an open challenge, He roots out the rationale of our hesitations by openly stating, “Maseeh (ibn Maryam) would definitely never be too proud and disdain to be a slave of Allah, nor would the angels (who are the) nearest to Allah. (However,) those who are too proud, arrogant, and disdainful to be His slaves (then they) will be brought before Him all together (for a real accountability)” (4:172).

<sup>48</sup> Nusrat Mahmood Qureshi, *Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh ﷺ Kaisē thē?* (Lahore: Wasif Printers 2019), 53.

<sup>49</sup> Qur’ān 23:115.

<sup>50</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, kitāb al-‘itq, bāb al-‘abd rā’in fī māl sayyidih.

Since “only a historical approach can do justice to the evolution of concepts, particularly the concept *Allāh*,”<sup>51</sup> it follows that through the Prophet Muḥammad, Allah makes humans realize that the universe couldn't have come into being on its own! Human beings are precious, as He made them with both His hands and then made the angels give their respectful prostration to His creation.<sup>52</sup> He then made the moon, the sun, the rivers, the seas and oceans, and the mountains subservient to human beings and gave them preference over other creations, as Allah says, “Indeed, We have dignified the children of Adam, given them mastery over land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions (for their benefitting), and privileged them far above many of Our creatures.”<sup>53</sup>

The Prophet as an environmental ethicist brought this message to the living community of his time, endorsing their moral or deontic sense of duty towards each other and to their environment. This duty becomes more imminent today “as individuals face risks like climatic disasters, chemical disasters, nuclear disasters or ecological disasters, and find themselves vulnerable to time and space, [while] the moral community [is] shrink[ing increasingly].”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the Planner of this universe created a limit to this precious life in the form of death and laid out the final principles of existence through His last messenger/environmental ethicist. Allah, Who is All-Wise and All-Knowing, has not done all this without any purpose.

It is through this environmental ethicist that Allah makes us understand that “He is the One Who created death and life in order to test which of you is best in deeds.”<sup>55</sup> No one has ever understood this absolute metaphor of death or this phenomenon and yet there is no escaping from this harsh reality. This way, humanity understands this “absolute metaphor that ‘allows the transfer of ideology and value judgments on socially relevant issues without having any rational or empirical support.’”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, instead of trying to understand His Great Eco-Aesthetical Plan, which is an impossible feat given human limitations, humanity needs to realize the purpose of life and consequently the rationale of being bestowed with a perfect guide to get through this mayhem of life on this planet. A simple analogy of an

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<sup>51</sup> Fazlur Rahman, review of *God and Man in the Koran*, 223.

<sup>52</sup> Qur'ān 38:75.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:70.

<sup>54</sup> Paul, “Two Challenges,” 379.

<sup>55</sup> Qur'ān 67:2.

<sup>56</sup> Cati Torres, “Revisiting the Thoughts of José Manuel Naredo, a Pioneer of Ecological Economics in Spain: A Contribution to the Debates on the Need for a Radical Societal Change,” *Environmental Values* 32, no. 5 (2023): 645-64. <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327123X16702350862782>.

ordinary soldier not understanding the intricacies of the commander's plans, nor questioning his command because it is beyond his/her understanding can be enough to realize that humans must give their best while accomplishing orders. By doing so, humans come to realize that "human potentialities correspond to divine attributes, and the imperative to actualize them is based on the saying of the Prophet Muḥammad: "Assume the character-traits of God."<sup>57</sup>

This mode of understanding may seem difficult to comprehend, but it avoids environmental ethical actions taking a back seat, as only "one's pro-environmental actions can change the socio-ecological reality of this present globalised world."<sup>58</sup> Humans may carry out pro-environmental actions if they understand the gift of life and the rationale for a limit to our time on this earth. "This fact is without doubt that our lives and our existence are for (putting our shares for the Grand Plan of) Allah and (after we have played our role) we will all return to Him."<sup>59</sup> The Prophet Muḥammad brought to humanity the realization of death as a reality, and that, in Allah's army, every soldier will adopt a strategy to do and die. Allah is the Knower of all hidden realities. He alone knows best about His Plan. He states, "(He is the) Knower of the unseen, disclosing none of it to anyone."<sup>60</sup> And "this does not behoove Allah that He reveals His Veiled Plan to anyone. But [instead], Allāh chooses of His messengers whom He wills,"<sup>61</sup> the way a commander may tell about his war plans to his second in command.

This second in command for Allah is His Prophet who makes the inhabitants of this world internalize the purpose of their existence and consequently, this validates the rationale of prophethood. Any machine comes with an instruction manual to allow benefit from the machine in the best possible way. If a 110-volt machine is plugged into a socket of 220 volts, it will get destroyed, but plugging it into the right socket will make the machine give its maximum output. Allah says,

And they did not estimate the real value of Allah in His rightful estimation when they said, (that though Allah created a human being), in no way has Allah sent down any on any (instructions for) human being. (They say a very inappropriate thing because they have not understood Allah's Might and Power in their true perspective).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ahmed Afzaal, "Ibn Al-'Arabi, Shaykh Muhyiddin (1165– 1240)," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron R. Taylor (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 1:817.

<sup>58</sup> Paul, "Two Challenges," 379.

<sup>59</sup> Qur'ān 2:156.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 72:26.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3:179.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 6:91.

If a human being can be intelligent enough to give the right instructions for their invention, then how is it possible that Allah, Who created this complex machinery and knows His creation inside out, has not given any instructions to run this complex machinery?<sup>63</sup>

Another important rationale for sending the Prophet as an environmental ethicist may be observed in history. Time and again Allah has sent down messengers for a “complete metamorphosis of society” according to the cultural settings and general understanding level of a particular people.<sup>64</sup> Adam (peace be on him) was sent with a cardinal principle applicable to all messengers of God. Therefore Allah declares, “Then whenever guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows it, there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve.”<sup>65</sup> While there are twenty-five messengers mentioned by name in the Qur’ān, Allah states, “There are messengers whose stories We have told you already and others We have not.”<sup>66</sup> All these messengers were sent down with the same purpose of amelioration and they all perpetuated the same message: that, for their good, they need to be a part of Allah’s Grand plan by being his staunch servants.

All messengers were altruistic environmental ethicists because they gave preference to their duty and the people of their nations rather than themselves. Noah (peace be on him) said, “I am truly a trustworthy messenger sent to you. So be conscious of Allah, and obey me. I do not ask you for any reward for delivering this (message to you). My reward is only with Allah, Lord of all worlds (who has given me this responsibility).”<sup>67</sup> Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shu‘ayb (peace be on them) used almost the same words and delivered the same message. The words that most of the messengers used were: “And I am nothing but only a (warner) sent with a clear warning (about the consequence of the wrong actions that humanity may indulge in).”<sup>68</sup> Messengers are whistleblowers for the consequences of humanity’s bad actions, and they do not seek any reward. Therefore, “instead of decoupling environmental virtue ethics and the notion of the good life, environmental virtue ethics needs to be reconceptualised in light of the definition of the good life. The definition of good life emerges from a dialogical process between society

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 15:86.

<sup>64</sup> Tom Greaves, “Finding Ways and Means to Love Nature,” *Environmental Values* 32, no. 5 (2023): 517-23, <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327123X16800137060267>.

<sup>65</sup> Qur’ān 2:38.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 4:164.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 26:107-9.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 26:125-27; 26:143-45; 26:162-64; 26:178-80; 46:9.

and self.”<sup>69</sup> That is why Allah reminds the Prophet Muḥammad: “Say, ‘I am not the first messenger to bring this message’” and now you are “the (binding) seal of the prophets.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the Prophet Muḥammad may be seen as the last one in the long line of the earlier environmental ethicists who were sent down by Allah.

### **Making an Altruistic Environmental Ethicist**

The main purpose of the prophethood of all the messengers was to establish the Oneness of Allah for the ultimate benefit of humanity. That is why they all gave the same message: “So do not invoke any other god with Allah. There is no god (worthy of worship) except Him;”<sup>71</sup> “And do not set up another god with Allah.”<sup>72</sup> Allah tells the Prophet Muḥammad, “Say, (O Prophet,) ‘I am only a man like you (with the only difference that), the revelations are sent to me. (So be always mindful of the fact) that your God is only One God.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, being a deontic environmental ethicist, the Prophet knew his moral duty to carry out the morally required actions for a balanced environment.

For the greater benefit of humanity, the second critical rationale of prophethood is that “the messengers (are to) deliver good news and warnings so that after (the coming of) the messengers, humanity should have no excuse before Allah.”<sup>74</sup> Otherwise, human beings have the uncanny tendency to deny outrightly that neither any message of Allah nor His messengers came to them. The Creator knows His creation inside out and therefore He knows that “the love of nature would require both a sense of what is lacking in our relations to nature and the ability to continually move towards better relations.”<sup>75</sup> If human beings do not strive to make their relations better with their Creator, nature, or with each other, Allah exposes their words and their arguments, as He says, “Nor can you say, ‘If only the Scriptures had been revealed to us, we would have been better guided than they (any former people on whom the scriptures were revealed).’”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, Allah says categorically, “They swore by Allah their most solemn oaths that if a warner were to come to them, they would certainly be better guided than any other

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<sup>69</sup> Paul, “Two Challenges,” 379.

<sup>70</sup> Qur’ān 46:9 and 33:40.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 28:88.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 51:51.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 2:163; 4:171; 6:19; 41:6.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 4:165.

<sup>75</sup> Greaves, “Finding Ways,” 517.

<sup>76</sup> Qur’ān 6:157.

community.”<sup>77</sup> This way Allah corners the deniers of Truth by saying, “Now there has come to you from your Lord a clear proof (the Qur’ān) a guide and mercy,”<sup>78</sup> and “Yet when a warner did come to them, it only drove them farther away.”<sup>79</sup>

Another important aspect of the environmental ethics of the Prophet is the elimination of all differences and the inculcation of peaceful coexistence and harmony among all beings, as Allah says, “We have revealed to you the Book only to clarify for them what they differed about,” and “He has revealed to you (O Prophet) the Book in truth to guide the people, confirming Torah and the Injeel that came before it. And then (due to the alterations made in these earlier scriptures) He revealed the *furqān* (the Standard to distinguish between right and wrong). Surely those who reject Allah’s revelations will suffer a severe torment. For Allah is Almighty for retributive justice.”<sup>80</sup>

This *furqān* is “a supreme touchstone for them (the written material sent down in the forms of earlier scriptures).”<sup>81</sup> And, due to the propensity of mixing truth with falsehood or hiding the truth<sup>82</sup> that prevailed in earlier books, Allah sent the Prophet Muḥammad to clarify the ambiguities that arose due to the intermingling of true and false narratives.

Allah knows that the environment is capital, therefore, it is Allah’s altruism towards His creation that He sent this environmental ethicist as an envoy for humankind. This is explained in Sūrat al-Jumu‘ah where Allah states:

He is the One Who raised for the illiterate (people) a messenger from among themselves—reciting to them His Ayāt (Allah’s wondrous signs), purifying them (from all foul and negative thoughts), and teaching them the Book and (imparting the embedded) wisdom (in this sacred text), for indeed they had previously been clearly astray.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, the Prophet Muḥammad as an altruistic benefactor taught society how the self-proclaimed “fathers of wisdom” may be on the road to becoming the “fathers of ignorance.”<sup>84</sup> “Altruism is a moral

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 35:42.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 6:157.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 35:42.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 16:64; 3:03-4.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 5:48.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 2:42.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 62:2.

<sup>84</sup> The Prophet Muḥammad used to pray to Allah that He may give guidance to either or both of the two very powerful personalities, i.e., ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Amr b. Hishām. The latter was known as “Abū ‘l-Ḥakam” (father of wisdom) because he was a

quality developed through suppression of selfishness, through sacrifice of one's "own" interests in favor of those of others,"<sup>85</sup> deputing an altruistic well-wisher of humankind, not only for their own selves (anthropocentric) but also to their environment, reflecting the generous quality of the Lord Almighty towards His creation.

In the Prophet's time, society indulged in all sorts of negative ritualistic traditions and looked down upon Allah's altruistic environmental ethicist because he was preaching virtue ethics. The poets of the society to whom he was sent were so eloquent that their work was considered worthy of being hung on the House of God. However, Allah makes it very clear, that though they thought themselves superior linguistically and culturally, they were groping in the dark because they were completely lost. In the Qur'ān, the sequence of major tasks assigned to the Prophet Muḥammad was as follows: reciting (the Book), purifying minds and souls, teaching the Book, and imbibing wisdom. Therefore, this environmental ethicist took it upon himself to show and teach the corrupt society of his time that "while selfishness is a human trait, so are cooperation, empathy, altruism, and helpfulness."<sup>86</sup> However, a different sequence in the execution of tasks comes in the prayer of Prophet Abraham (peace be on him) in Sūrat al-Baqarah.<sup>87</sup> In this prayer, the sequence is recitation, teaching the book, teaching wisdom, and purifying the souls.

By changing the order of Prophet Abraham's prayer to the order mentioned in Sūrat al-Jumu'ah, Allah endorses the purpose of prophethood understood with the analogy this verse invokes. First, a gardener announces that once he puts a particular seed on a particular land, in a particular season, it will yield the best possible fruit (this can be seen in the selection of the Companions and the prayer for 'Umar). Then, to execute his plan, he clears the land of all kinds of harmful weeds and pebbles (the different modes of Allah's negation and the concept of only one God). Then, he puts the seed of "no god but Allah." Then, he clarifies the wisdom of this to all around so that they may understand that the ones to whom that land belongs (their land or playing field of their lives)

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very intelligent person. However, when he did not accept the truth brought by the Prophet Muḥammad his title became "Abū Jahl" (father of ignorance).

<sup>85</sup> Arne Naess, "Ecosophy T: Deep Versus Shallow Ecology," in *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*, ed. Louis P. Pojman, Paul Pojman, and Katie McShane (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2017), 226.

<sup>86</sup> Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster, "What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism" in *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*, ed. Louis P. Pojman, Paul Pojman, and Katie McShane (Boston MA: Cengage Learning, 2017), 474.

<sup>87</sup> Qur'ān 2:129.



and those who would like to gather its yield/fruit may not have any kind of doubt that they will get the reward of their hard work. Therefore, they may remain steadfast in aiding the gardener in the execution of his plan, which will benefit all ultimately because “unless and until environmental good aligns with human flourishing and understanding of a good life, avoiding environmental harms or increasing environmental good would depend on altruistic actions.”<sup>88</sup>

When the Prophet Muḥammad was chosen for prophethood, the hearts and minds of the Arabs were replete with the weeds of associating partners with Allah and the stones of enmity. The Prophet Muḥammad was tasked with purifying this land and planting the tree of *tawḥīd* (Oneness of Allah) and had to plant the tree of the purest word (*kalimah*) whose “root is firm, and its branches reach the sky, (always) yielding its fruit in every season by the Will of its Lord.”<sup>89</sup> The Prophet may be called a gardener, an agricultural expert, or an altruistic environmental ethicist who, despite all hardships and oppression, fulfilled his duties in the best possible way. He knew how important it was for humanity to realize their rationale for being in this world, know their Creator, and worship Him unconditionally, not for Him but for their own sustainability.

The analogy of the Prophet Muḥammad’s prospering harvest, the happiness of seeing one’s profitable produce, and the enemies’ reactions at this point are beautifully captured by Allah in the following verse:

A seed that sprouts its (tiny) branches, (and due to being watered regularly) is made strong. Then it becomes thick, standing firmly on its stem, to the delight of the planters (who made possible its growth through all the stages of planting, watering, and caring) —in this way Allah makes the believers (the planters who in spite of all hurdles thrown their way remain steadfast to their cause of getting their harvest get to the last stage of reaping its benefits, which becomes) a source of dismay for the disbelievers (who are always bent on denying the truth).<sup>90</sup>

Another rationale of the Prophet Muḥammad’s prophethood is also given here: “He commands them to do good (that they also know in the depths of their hearts) and forbids them from (that) evil (which, any person, who has a critical understanding, knows to be so).”<sup>91</sup> In other words, like any deontic and virtue ethicist, the Prophet had to tell about the sacred *amānah*, the right, the wrong, good, or bad, and what makes them that way, and then explain the rationale for the same.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Paul, “Two Challenges,” 379.

<sup>89</sup> Qur’ān 14:24-25.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 48:29.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 7:157.

<sup>92</sup> Abu Sayem, “Islam and Environmental Ethics,” 165-66.

Another example of the Prophet Muḥammad's altruistic prophethood is, as Allah declares, "(The Qur'ān) is a remedy and cure for wrong or disease that may be in the centers (heart and mind) of human beings."<sup>93</sup> This was a major purpose of his prophethood because it was to give, altruistically, an ability to human beings with the help of which they may be able to sense if someone may be trying to pillage their intellect and wisdom. This analogy is stated in the Qur'ān in the following way: "So that He brings them out of darkness and into light who believe in Him and His guidance and if any wrong is committed, they mend it."<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, with the approval of Allah, this "(altruistic messenger) permits for them what is lawful, most suitable, and useful in the best possible way, and forbids them from what is impure and malicious, and relieves them from their bounding burdens and the shackles that (they had unduly brought upon themselves)."<sup>95</sup> Consequently, these corrective measures help root out the undue injunctions that humanity binds itself to its detriment. The Prophet Muḥammad was put on the rank of prophethood and given the *furqān* in his hands to give the right direction to all such self-inflicted bindings.

Another need and rationale to provide such an altruistic environmental ethicist was what Allah describes identically in three different places in the Qur'ān: "He is the One Who has sent His Messenger with (true) guidance and the path of truth to be adopted, making it emerge over all others (ways, adopted paths, mythologies, and isms due to the power of truth)."<sup>96</sup>

The greatest purpose of prophethood is explained when Allah states for all times to come: "Today I have perfected your faith for you (to adopt it duly), (and with the accomplishment of this mission) I have completed My favor upon you (by showering all the blessings on you), and (I have) chosen Islam (submission) as your way (for following), (a way of submitting your wills to Me because it will lead you to find the purpose of your life and ultimate salvation)."<sup>97</sup> This is so because "He does not approve of negation from His slaves,"<sup>98</sup> for the simple reason that this negation and disbelief is detrimental to their own beings.

This phenomenon may be elucidated through another example. If a well-known and reputed company had made a road, it naturally would

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<sup>93</sup> Qur'ān 10:57.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 65:11.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 7:157.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 61:9; 48:28; 9:33.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 5:3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 39:7.

have used the best material and abided by all the rules and specifications. That road would be such that it gives proper grip to a car while driving. Safety measures are also catered for, and the rest areas and motels are also made for the public's convenience. Now, if the company implements some rules and regulations, anyone who would like to reach their destination safely will abide by the implemented rules and regulations. The way, the road, or the *dīn*, was chosen by Allah, the Greatest Environmental Ethicist, with the help of which we can reach our destination safely while enjoying all the bounties Allah has given en route. Is not it His right to ask that His instructions be followed for safety? He dislikes it deeply that, while using the road of life, human behaviour is opposite to what He approves of. Therefore, the greatest purpose of the Prophet Muḥammad was the completion of the mission of ameliorating the environment for the complete span of life, not just the part that humanity spends on this planet. Allah, the Ultimate Environmental Ethicist, gives humanity a way to salvation by saying: "Flee (run) to Allah"<sup>99</sup> and tells His emissary: "(O Muḥammad) continue reminding. For certainly, those who will follow Allah's words (with the conviction that these reminders are the only way to acquire peace, then your reminders will certainly) benefit those believers."<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion

The Prophet Muḥammad's purpose was to establish a new world, reverting the consciousness of human souls to their original selves through purification and personal transformation. When the human consciousness accepted these new social realities, the state of Madina was founded, all according to the injunctions of Allah. Echoing the words of Said Nursi (d. 1960) and Iqbal, life's observations may only be fully understood through the practical implementation of the Qur'ānic worldview and the *sunnah* of the Prophet. The "excessive and reckless exploitation of natural resources, the ecological catastrophe, the nuclear threat, the destruction of the ozone layer, and the emergence of biotechnology, of genetic engineering and the consequent conversion of the human body into the ultimate commodity," threaten every aspect of our lives.<sup>101</sup> To face these circumstances, we feel the moral duty to devise a hierarchy of purposes based on a hermeneutical worldview. The acute awareness of intrinsic environmental ethics is "part and parcel of the web of life" and allows us to extend our modes of understanding and achieve this unity of the created universe with the help of eco-Islamic

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 51:50.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 51:55.

<sup>101</sup> Santos, *Decolonising the University*, 18.

epistemology and a steward's righteous disposition.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, by bringing the Qur'ānic worldview into conversation with environmental ethics, we not only appreciate God's plan but also understand the inherent sacrificial moral responsibility of the privileged position of humans as stewards towards all living entities. When we realize that the environment is capital, we can implement a more inclusive environmental policy by extending the implications of the theoretical lens of environmental ethics. This article has argued that divine ethics, human ethics, and social ethics—when considered holistically—constitute the environmental ethics that the person of the Prophet Muḥammad manifested for all living beings.<sup>103</sup> By eliminating differences and bringing humanity to understand that the key to realizing their full potential is in environmentally balanced altruism, viewing the Prophet Muḥammad as an altruistic environmental ethicist can act as an important catalyst to reform and change, reorienting humanity to the commands of the Creator of all worlds.

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<sup>102</sup> Ozdemir, "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics," 4.

<sup>103</sup> Izutzu, *Ethico-Religious*, 17-18.