

# Arguing for Religious Values as the Foundation of Environmental Ethics an Islamic Perspective

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## Abstract

This article argues for the adoption of religious values (*al-qiyam al-diniyya*) as the theological-metaphysical foundation of environmental ethics (*akhlāqīyya al-bi'a*) in the light of the teachings of the Quran. It briefly discusses the basic meaning of environmental ethics viewed as a branch of the traditional science of ethics (*ilm al-akhlāq*) and in the light of the semantic field of the Arabic word *al-bi'a* (environment). Significantly, the semantic of *bi'a* allows us to speak of a comprehensive concept of environment embracing the biophysical and built kinds. This article also discusses the basic meaning of religious values, which it identifies with the tawhīdic values embodied in the divine attributes and qualities that are abundantly displayed both in the Quran and in the Book of Nature. It argues that in the Islamic perspective it is these tawhīdic values that shape man's understanding of and practical conduct towards the environment, which is what environmental ethics all about. Environmental ethics is defined in this article as that branch of knowledge which deals with ecological, both natural and cultural, and moral-ethical principles governing man's treatment of the natural environment and his organization of the built environment with the view of ensuring ecological health. Accordingly, the article discusses some of these ecological and moral-ethical principles, especially the concept of a multidimensional utility of nature. Without spiritual, moral, and intellectual motives, human beings will be deprived of most of the good justifications for wanting to protect the natural environment.

## 1. Introduction

The main purpose of this essay is to discuss the topic of how the religion of Islam envisages relationships between environmental ethics and religious values in both theoretical and practical terms. In other words, the key issue that is sought to be addressed here is how environmental ethics may be formulated in the light of Islamic values. This is the same as saying that religious values are judiciously intended to serve as the foundation of environmental ethics. At the outset, it is necessary to explain the precise meanings of the two key terms in the topic, namely *environmental ethics* and *religious values*. There is a good reason why this prior explanation needs to be given. It is the meanings given to these two terms that will determine the scope of relationships between them that require discussion. And we know very well that these two terms are understood rather differently by different cultures and civilizations, although certainly there are points of similarity between them on quite a good number of issues. However, even within the same culture or civilization, there exist different understandings of what *environmental ethics* and *religious values* mean. For this reason, we encounter different schools of ethics and different schools of axiology (*science of values*) in both Western and Islamic thoughts. These differences could either be regarding the scope of their meanings or the issue of what ought to be the core priorities in the viewing of ethical problems and what are not. In this essay, our understanding of the two terms is largely influenced and shaped by the main understanding and usage of their equivalent terms in the history of Islamic thought.

Since we are interested in viewing the relationship between religious values and environmental ethics from the Islamic perspective, it is to ideas and concepts pertaining to the subject in question, first formulated in the Arabic language, that we need to turn for guidance. This is because Islam's fundamental

views of environmental ethics and religious values are contained in the Quran and the Prophetic hadiths, both of which are in Arabic, as well as in the classical writings of some Muslim scholars, most of which are also in Arabic.

## 2. Environmental Ethics and *Akhlāqīyya al-Bi'a*: Conceptual Issues

The corresponding term in contemporary Arabic to the term *environmental ethics* is *akhlāqīyya al-bi'a*. The word *akhlāqīyya* is derivative of the word *akhlāq*, the plural of *khuluq* (or *khulq*), a key idea and concept in the spiritual and moral-ethical teachings of Islam. It is used to signify a part or an aspect of ethics, more particularly applied ethics. In the present case, it is used in relation to the environment, itself a term that requires explanation, which will be given later. However, the singular *khuluq* or the plural *akhlāq* is used to signify ethics and morality in its widest sense.<sup>1</sup> The vastness of the semantic field of *akhlāq* may be best appreciated if we ponder into the meaning of the hadith that says, “the Prophet’s character or moral is none other than the Qur’an.”<sup>2</sup> Given the comprehensive nature of the content of the Quran and the divinely ordained Prophet Muhammad’s moral status as the excellent exemplar of human conduct,<sup>3</sup> equating the semantic content of the two statements would mean the vastness of the domain of ethical-moral (*akhlāqīyya*) values and issues with which the human mind is called upon to deal, including environmental ethics. Rather interestingly, it may be pointed out that the idea of an all-embracing ethical content of the Quran provides a good justification of the title of this essay itself.

The singular *khuluq* is used to convey a wide range of meanings embracing such fundamental notions as natural or innate disposition, temper, morals, morality, personal character, the soul’s qualities and attributes that determine or generate a person’s actions, and habit (“second nature”) all of which are closely interrelated and some of which are almost synonymous.<sup>4</sup> In Western thought, these notions and meanings form the subject matter of its classical ethics viewed as a science or as an academic discipline. In Islamic thought, these notions and meanings comprise the subject matter of *‘ilm al-akhlāq*, which is often referred to as the science of ethics and morality or simply ethics. It is quite clear from its subject matter that this science is partly theoretical and partly practical or applied. Furthermore, the subject matter covers the concern of both personal and communal or public ethics.

We know that, in the English language, the word *ethics* is usually defined as the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles governing a person’s behaviour or the conducting of an activity either at the individual or collective level. This definition of ethics fits well into the epistemological framework of *‘ilm al-akhlāq* that we have just described. From the perspective of classification of knowledge, we may view *akhlāqīyya al-bi'a* (environmental ethics) as a branch of *‘ilm al-akhlāq* (ethics) that results from the application of principles of the latter science to the domain of environmental issues. This means that although *akhlāqīyya al-bi'a* may be treated as an independent science with distinctive practical applications and public policy implications, we could hardly do full justice to its discussion if we fail to mention that many principles of ethics and conceptual issues embodied in *‘ilm al-akhlāq* are highly relevant to environmental ethics not only when viewed as a science but also as a set of advisory guidelines and public policies, rules and regulations. It is quite clear that personal ethics is a core component of *‘ilm al-akhlāq*. In the Islamic perspective, however, personal and public ethics are basically shaped by the same set of religious values, although within the domain of public ethics itself different subsets of ethical values are known to come into prominent play in different public sectors. For example, different ethical values are being emphasized in each of the domains of medical ethics and public health, business ethics and environmental ethics. The implication is that personal ethics has an important role to play in the realization of good public environmental ethics.

<sup>1</sup> But it is the plural *akhlāq* that is often used as signifying character, morals, and ethics.

<sup>2</sup> Both words, the singular *khuluq* and the plural *akhlāq*, are used in reference to the Prophet’s character. As for the word *khuluq*, it is found in both the Quran and the Prophetic hadiths. For example, in one verse the Quran says: “And verily you [O Prophet] are on an exalted standard of character (*khuluq ‘azīm*)” (68:4). And a hadith says: “Verily the character (*khuluq*) of the Messenger of Allah was the Qur’an” (Sunan Abu Dawud 1342). As for the word *akhlāq*, it is used in hadiths but not in the Quran. A hadith says: “I was only sent to perfect good character (*ḥusn al-akhlāq* or *ṣalīḥ al-akhlāq*)” (Muwaṭṭā, no. 1614).

<sup>3</sup> The Quran, 33:21.

<sup>4</sup> See Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 2:801.

As asserted earlier, the word *environment* itself needs some explanation. Environment is usually understood as being of two kinds. One is natural environment, which existed prior to man and which continues to exist unless it is altered or transformed by a continuous process of human interventions over a considerable period of time. In religious terms, this environment is believed to be part of God's *khalq* (creation). Another kind is the built environment, which human beings created to surround themselves with out of various and diverse needs, primarily and necessarily out of objects available in the natural environment itself, including numerous kinds of buildings and transportation infrastructures. But central to the built environment are the living homes which humans have built to protect themselves from dangers inherent in the natural environment. Indeed, man's home is his first and most immediate environment and by virtue of it also his most important. The rest of the built environment is the varied human constructions that have been put in place in the pursuit of civilization. To be more conceptually precise, however, some philosophers of civilization posit a third kind of environment, which is viewed as intermediate in nature between the virgin natural environment and the built environment. This third kind of environment is understood as intermediate in the sense that it is the product of the natural and human roles combined. The oldest, the most important, and also the most well-known of such "natural-human" products, is agriculture. The very word agriculture, derived from a combination of agro ("soil") and culture ("human nurture") displays proof of it as a product of natural and human roles.

In the context of our discussion of environmental ethics, this way of classifying environments may prove to be more advantageous or more fruitful. In this case, we would be able to see two different qualitative impacts of human activities on the natural environment, namely the impact of the built environment and the impact of the intermediate environment. In the light of this observation, we will be moved to make extra efforts to ensure that all the three kinds of environment are ecologically sound. The practical implication here is clear. We need, for example, to put in place policies on agriculture and built environment, including town and city planning that would meet the best standard of environmental ethics as insisted by Islamic ecology itself.

As for the use of the word *bi'a* as the Arabic equivalent of the word *environment* to be used in the term "environmental ethics" (*akhlāqīyya al-bi'a*), it seems acceptable, although it raises some conceptual issues that need clarification. It is to be noted that in the context of our threefold classification of environments, the whole meaning conveyed by the word *bi'a* may not be broad enough to allow it to be used as a term that would comprehend all the three kinds of environment in question. If the word is meant to refer to all the three kinds of environment, then this would be a modern usage. In its classical usage, the word *bi'a* was meant to basically refer to the built environment. A substantive noun from the phrase *banwa'ahu manzīlan*, or its equivalent, meaning "he lodged him in an abode," the word *bi'a* conveys the basic meaning of "a mode or manner of taking for oneself a place of abode."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the word *bi'a* refers to the state or condition of man's response to natural surroundings in the act of securing a home or place of dwelling for himself. The verb forms *banwa'a* and *tabanwa'a* that are etymologically related to *bi'a* have as their objects such spatial entities as *manzil* (home, abode), *bayt* (house), *dār* (residence, dwelling, home), and *makān* (place).<sup>7</sup>

Linguistically as well as conceptually, there is thus a sound basis for taking the word *bi'a* as signifying not just the place of abode but rather the whole built environment. The use of the compound term *akhlāqīyya al-bi'a* to signify *environmental ethics* is also legitimate, since man's increasing response to, and ever more demanding treatment of the natural environment dictated by the creation of a more crowded built environment necessarily raise issues of environmental ethics. In modern times, however, issues of environmental ethics do not just arrive from human activities related to the built environment. Wars with their weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, chemical, and biological – and agricultural technology are also important sources of issues of environmental ethics. Biotechnological activities also pose a new challenge to environmental ethics. One may wish to subsume all of these issues of environmental ethics under the notion of *akhlāqīyya al-bi'a*, but one wonders if the semantic field of the word *bi'a* is wide enough to comprehend the rich meanings conveyed by the idea of the multi-layered natural environment as signified by the term *al-'ālam al-ṭabī'i* (literally: the natural world). The position we are adopting here right now is that while maintaining the validity of the term *akhlāqīyya al-bi'a* to signify environmental ethics pertaining to all

<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:272.

<sup>6</sup> Both forms of the verbs are used in the Quran. See The Qur'an, 10:87 and 59:9. The former verse refers to houses (*bayūt*) and the latter to homes (*dār*) in the city of Medina.

<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:271.

the three kinds of environment earlier discussed – in the absence of a better term – we need to deepen our understanding of environmental ethics in the broadest sense by accessing the various conceptions of natural environment found in Islamic tradition.

### 3. Religious Values and *qiyam dīniyya*: Conceptual Issues

Religions are structured differently and accordingly, their respective value-systems are differently structured as well. In Islamic perspectives, values are not structured according to the religious and non-religious dichotomy. In the context of the overall teachings of the religion of Islam, it would be viewed as problematic if one were to maintain a clear distinction between religious values and values that are not religious. In accordance with its central doctrine of *al-tawhīd* (“unity”), which interrelates and unifies all domains and all levels of cosmic life, in particular human life, Islam prefers to classify values according to the structure of the human constitution itself. Metaphysically and theologically, the ultimate source of all values is God with His many Attributes and Qualities. What we call human values is none other than the reflection or the projection of the Divine Attributes and Qualities on the plane of human existence. This affirmation is based on the teaching that God created man in His image. In this particular way of looking at values, we may say that there is no real value that could not be traced back to its Divine source.

If by ‘religious’ we mean that which is connected in some way or other to God, then from Islamic theological perspective there is no value that could not be regarded as religious. In this sense, all religious values are real, true and useful, and all real, true and useful values are religious. If for some particular purpose certain values are omitted for consideration, then it can be assured that the real reason for the omission is not because those values are deemed as not religious – or for that matter because they are religious – but rather because they are viewed not as relevant as the other values for the purpose at hand. This approach to the treatment of values, particularly their prioritization for application to solve problems helps avoid marginalization of relevant values or even their omission altogether.

In our present case, namely applying religious values for the formulation of environmental ethics and their realization, there is one key question that needs to be answered. From the long list of religious values that are in our possession how do we know which ones are to be singled out as the most relevant? We do not think that we are in a position to provide a good answer to this question unless we have sufficient knowledge of a number of things. These things include Divine Qualities, human qualities and values, and the natural order or environment, all of which happen to be closely interrelated. It is necessary for us to know these interrelationships if our understanding of environmental ethics is to be solidly grounded. Another important thing to know is the ranking of values and their classification. However, it is not possible to provide detailed knowledge of these fundamental things within the scope of this essay, but some essential points will be provided regarding them in the later sections.

One of these essential points will be identification of the religious values embodied in the notion of *al-qiyam al-dīniyya*. What precisely are the values that are categorized as *qiyam dīniyya*? Where can we access them? On our part, we will attempt through our discussion to furnish some of the most important values that are relevant to the shaping of environmental ethics.

### 4. The Meaning of Environmental Ethics: Search for Principles

As we see it, to speak of environmental ethics is essentially to speak of appropriateness and worthiness in man’s practical conduct understood in the collective sense in his treatment of the environment. Man’s practical conduct towards the environment is primarily guided and shaped by what he believes to be the right relationship that he should have with it. At the most fundamental level, different cultures are clearly seen to have different views and beliefs about nature and the environmental setting it provides for man and about the interrelationship between man and the environment. In the Islamic perspective environmental ethics is to be governed and shaped both by the theology of nature and the higher purposes of the Divine Law (*maqāṣid al-sharī‘a*) that have been developed out of the teachings of the Qur’an.

As we already discussed, environmental ethics may be viewed both as a science and as a duty-centered moral conscience about environmental and ecological health. Thus, a currently popular definition of environmental ethics reads: *Environmental ethics is defined as an ecological conscience or moral that reflects a commitment and responsibility towards the environment, including plants and animals as well as present and future generations of people.* If we were to come up with an Islamic synthesis of the essential things that have been said about environmental ethics, then we would define it as follows: *Environmental ethics is that branch of knowledge which*



*deals with ecological, both natural and cultural, and moral-ethical principles governing man's treatment of the natural environment and his organization of the built environment with the view of ensuring ecological health.* To be sure, because of the way the definition is worded, different religious contents could be given to the definition to suit one's own religious worldview. What is important to be observed is that this definition takes into account Islam's deep concern with both natural and human ecologies, both natural and built environments, and both ecological and moral-ethical principles when it comes to the issue of environmental ethics. It is Islam's principle of *al-tawhid* that inspires our definition of environmental ethics and furnishes us with a natural theology or theology of nature and an all-embracing philosophy of sacred law (*maqāṣid al-shari'a*) from which are to be derived the ecological and moral-ethical principles for our environmental ethics.

#### 4.1 Ecological principles

In the Islamic perspective, what is called natural theology may be better termed *tawhid of nature*, which strongly conveys the idea of the unicity of nature with its constituent ideas of interrelatedness and interdependence of all parts of nature. The idea of the interrelated and interdependence of all parts of nature may perhaps be viewed as the most important ecological principle for Islamic environmental ethics considering that it is more inclusive than any other ecological principle in its scope of meaning and applications.<sup>8</sup> Another important ecological principle for environmental ethics is the principle of ecological balance and equilibrium. Yet another important ecological principle is the idea of the limits (*hudud*) of natural forms, laws and relations, which implies the limits of the use of technological forms in man's harnessing of natural resources. Other ecological principles, which are less fundamental but still very important for environmental ethics, are the ideas of the planet Earth as a life-supporting planet, the life chain, and the absence of waste in nature<sup>9</sup> in accordance with the dictates of the divine economy.<sup>10</sup>

The ecological principles of environmental ethics that we have just mentioned are by no means exhaustive. Only the most fundamental of them are mentioned. There are many more, but these are less fundamental and they can be formulated through the help of the biological sciences, particularly ecology. However, we wish to emphasize that all these ideas and principles are necessary conditions for ecological health in its entirety. If the purpose of environmental ethics is indeed to help preserve ecological health for the wellbeing of human beings, then it would be its role and function to regulate man's utilization of nature in such a way as to not undermine its ecological health.

Furthermore, the theology of nature in question furnishes man with knowledge of the broad purposes of nature that would help him meet his overall needs. On the basis of data provided by the Qur'an we may affirm that Nature has been created by God to at once serve man's material, educational (both moral and scientific), intellectual-rational, and spiritual needs. In conformity with Islam's *tawhīd*ic perspective, this plurality of human needs that nature provides has to be seen in a holistic and not segmented or fragmented way. If the various purposes of the natural environment are to be reduced to just its material utility, as in fact have been done over the past century or so, then there will be far reaching consequences in a negative way for humanity. Without spiritual, moral, and intellectual motives, human beings will then be deprived of most of the good justifications for wanting to protect the natural environment. To put another way, there will then be no more higher motives to restrain man from exploiting the planet's natural resources to the fullest.

To illustrate Islam's idea of a multipurpose natural environment we may produce many verses that are relevant to each type of its utility:

##### 4.1.1 Multidimensional Utility

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion of ecological principles in Islam, see Osman Bakar, *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The Islamic Heritage* (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya and Islamic Book Trust, 2022), revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>9</sup> In contrast, it was the Darwinian theory of biological evolution that popularized the idea of waste in the natural world.

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these four ecological ideas or principles, see Osman Bakar, "Environmental health and welfare as an important aspect of civilizational Islam," *Al-Shajarah Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)* 11, no. 1, (2014), 27-52.

The Quran says, "It is He who has created for you all things that are on earth; moreover, His design comprehended the heavens, for He gave order and perfection to the seven firmaments; and of all things He has perfect knowledge."<sup>11</sup> This verse emphasises in the most general term that the whole earth has been created to serve humankind without giving any specific example of utility that the earth is intended for. Since the Quran mentions various kinds of resources and utilities, physical or otherwise, that God has made available on earth for humankind, as made clear in the cited verses in the following sections, we may interpret the verse to mean that it is speaking of a multipurpose natural environment that is inclusive of all dimensions of utility.

In another verse the Quran says, "Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith the earth becomes clothed with green? For Allah is He who understands the finest mysteries and is well-acquainted [with them]?"<sup>12</sup> This verse underlines the Quranic principle of biodiversity as symbolised by the earth's greenery and made possible by the centrality of water as the ecological agency. It is quite clear that in mentioning water as a heavenly gift and the earth's green ecology that it generated it is referring to their numerous forms of utility, potential and actual. The phrase in the verse "Allah is He who understands the finest mysteries" implies that there are many things about the natural environment that are still not known to man. Accordingly, it is only proper that man strives to at once study and protect the natural environment.

#### 4.1.2 Material and Psychological Utility

The Quran says, "And cattle He has created for you: from them you derive warmth and numerous benefits, and of their [meat] you eat."<sup>13</sup> While this verse speaks of cattle as a source of food, the verses that follow speak of these and other animals as creatures that may address human needs for transportation purposes and that may cater to man's psychological, aesthetic, and entertainment needs. The verses read:<sup>14</sup> "And you have a sense of pride and beauty in them as you drive them home in the evening, and as you lead them forth to pasture in the morning." "And they carry your heavy loads to lands that you could not [otherwise] reach except with souls distressed: for your Lord is indeed Most Kind, Most Merciful." "And [He has created] horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for show, and He has created [other] things of which you have no knowledge."

Unfortunately, many modern people are for various reasons deprived of the opportunity to directly experience encounters with the animal world, domesticated or wild, such as the phenomenal encounters poetically described in the above verses.

#### 4.1.3 Scientific-mathematical and social utility

The Quran says, "They as you concerning the new moons. Say: they are but signs to mark fixed periods of time in [the affairs of] men and for pilgrimage."<sup>15</sup> Another astronomical phenomenon described in the Quran concerns the solar planetary and lunar motion: "And the Sun runs his course for a period determined for him: that is the decree of [Him], the Exalted in Might, the All-knowing. And the Moon – We have measured for her mansions [to traverse] till she returns like the old [and withered] lower part of a date-stalk. It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the Moon, nor can the Night outstrip the Day: each [just] swims along in [its own] orbit [according to Law]."<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Medical utility

The Quran says, "And your Lord taught the Bee to build its cells in hills, on trees, and in [men's] habitations; then to eat of all the produce [of the earth], and find with skill the spacious paths of its Lord: there issues from within their bodies a drink of varying colours, wherein is healing for men: verily in this is a sign for

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<sup>11</sup> The Quran, 2:29.

<sup>12</sup> The Quran, 22:63.

<sup>13</sup> The Quran, 16:5.

<sup>14</sup> The Quran, 16:6-8.

<sup>15</sup> The Quran, 2:189.

<sup>16</sup> The Quran, 36:38-40.

those who give thought.”<sup>17</sup> While the core message of this verse is about medical benefits and healing derived from drinking the bee honey, there are other noteworthy messages that are either explicitly or implicitly stated in the verse for the attention of men. These include the Bee's skills in civil engineering and navigation. But central to the Bee's possession of these natural skills is its instinctive intelligence and knowledge that put AI current achievements to shame!

#### 4.1.5 Spiritual education

No other sacred book puts as much emphasis as does the Quran on the role of Nature in man's spiritual education. Guided by the Quran it is argued here that there is a visible divine pedagogy in the world of Nature. Man needs to be reminded of this pedagogy. In the Quran God teaches man spiritual lessons through understanding of natural phenomena viewed as symbols, analogies, parables, and similitudes that point to higher orders of reality. The most widely used word in the Quran for this purpose is *āyāt*, meaning sign. As a doctrine and as a concept, this word of course refers to the signs of God. Theologically speaking, the whole of creation is a vast theatre displaying divine signs as objects for human learning. Knowing the scientific meaning of a natural phenomenon may be quite helpful to the understanding of its spiritual analogy. From the perspective of Islamic epistemology there is, in principle, no contradiction between scientific and symbolic meanings. Then, there is the Quranic word *mathal* (plural *amthāl*), meaning similitudes and parables which are created from physical phenomena to enable us to infer spiritual parallels.

The following passage in the Quran appeals to the world of human embryology and more generally to human biology as a source of arguments to put to rest doubts about the Resurrection, a future spiritual event: “O mankind! If you have a doubt about the Resurrection, [consider] that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest [our power] to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then [foster you] that you may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known [much], and [further], you see the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred [to life], it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth [in pairs]. This is so because Allah is the Reality: it is He who gives life to the dead, and it is He who has power over all things.”<sup>18</sup> This passage clearly provides an excellent example of an instruction in spiritual lesson that utilises scientific knowledge of natural phenomena.

The following parable is spiritually instructive: “Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, God took away their light and left them in utter darkness. So, they could not see. Deaf, dumb, and blind, they will not return [to the path]. Or [another similitude] is that of a rain-laden cloud from the sky: in it are zones of darkness, and thunder and lightning; they press their fingers in their ears to keep out the stunning thunderclap, the while they are in terror of death. But God is ever round the rejectors of Faith!”<sup>19</sup>

#### 4.2 Moral-ethical and legal principles

In the search for principles of environmental ethics ecological principles are to be complemented by moral-ethical-legal principles, which are furnished by the Shari'a understood in its comprehensive sense. The significance of the ecological principles is that these appeal to the ecological conscience of man, which is essentially intellectual-rational-scientific in nature. Moral-ethical-legal principles on the other hand would appeal to his moral conscience by virtue of him being a moral being with duties and responsibilities to both God and fellow human beings being spelt out by God Himself and by extension to the natural environment. Both categories of principles are rooted in Islam's revealed teachings, particularly in the Divine Attributes and Qualities that are relevant to each case, but at a more detailed level each category is informed, conceptualised, and articulated differently. In their details, ecological principles are informed by the natural sciences, whereas moral-ethical-legal principles are informed by *fiqh* and its branches and the social sciences.

<sup>17</sup> The Quran, 16:68-69.

<sup>18</sup> The Quran, 22:5-6.

<sup>19</sup> The Quran, 2:17-19.

Moral-ethical-legal issues are about limits to be observed in man's conduct in dealing with both the world of nature external to him and his inner nature. We have already referred to the fact that ecological awareness is basically about observing the limits divinely imposed on natural forms, laws, and relations of interdependence. The challenge before man, however, is that, of all creatures, he alone has the capacity to transgress these limits as ordained in the doctrine of divine *qaḍā'* and *qadar*.<sup>20</sup> In fact, ecological transgression has taken place on a large scale in the modern period. As informed by the natural sciences, the worrying thing is that man's transgression of these limits has now reached a point of danger that threatens the proper functioning of our once well protected planetary home as our protector. While science is in a position to tell us about the ideal limits of human technological interventions in the working of nature beyond which a healthy human life on the planet Earth could hardly be sustained, it can hardly restrain man from violating those limits.

Islam's response to the above challenge is twofold. One is to address the issue of man's destruction (*fasād*) of the natural environment through the introduction of both public environmental ethics and environmental laws. Since environmental and ecological health strongly deserves to be viewed as one of the higher purposes (*maqāṣid*) of the Shariah it becomes necessary for society to legislate environmental laws and regulations and more generally to introduce public environmental ethical guidelines to ensure its preservation. It is within the domain of the philosophy of Islamic sacred law or *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* that we need to identify moral-ethical-legal principles of environmental ethics and the true common ground between ethics and law. However, as in the case with all other societal laws and regulations, the efficacy of environmental laws and ethics could only be assured if their public enforcement is to be complemented by the strengthening of the moral conscience of each individual citizen regarding his responsibility toward the environment. This brings us to Islam's other approach to the problem of environmental destruction. The approach is to address the problem of management of human nature itself primarily through education, formal and informal, by appealing to spiritual and moral values that would help man realize a life of moderation both at personal and societal levels. The inculcation of the spiritual and moral values in question in a human being pertains to his twin role and function as God's servant (*'abd*) and vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth. Man's responsibility toward the environment is embedded in this twin human role. In other words, environmental ethics would be anchored on the idea of man's duty towards God and his fellow human beings and the natural world.

#### 4.3 Al-qiyam al-dīniyya: tawḥīdic Values

In conformity with the theological-metaphysical concept of Divine Attributes and Qualities as signified by God's Beautiful Names and the structure of the human constitution as explained by Islamic spiritual anthropology and psychology it might more pertinent if we were to identify *al-qiyam al-dīniyya* (religious values) with the tawḥīdic values. By virtue of the fact that *ruh*, *'aql*, and *nafs* are major components in the human constitution, we may classify tawḥīdic values into the spiritual, intellectual-rational, moral-ethical, and artistic. We contend that each of these types of values is relevant to the task of formulating our desired environmental ethics.

Serving as the foundation of Islamic theology and/or philosophy of nature are the tawḥīdic values of unicity (interrelatedness and interdependence), balance, order, and harmony, which significantly also serve as the ultimate goals of the sciences of nature and the technology that it created and as the source of environmental ethical principles it prescribes. These particular tawḥīdic values may also be described collectively as ecological values, and these are subsumed under the broader category of intellectual-rational values. There is, therefore, a profound conceptual relationship between the tawḥīdic values in question and principles of environmental ethics. In this perspective then, the main role of science and technology and the main objective of applied environmental ethics are to preserve unicity, balance, order, and harmony in the natural world, which alone could help sustain a healthy societal life. It is the natural and mathematical sciences that can provide us with detailed knowledge of ecological relationships (unicity), balance, order and harmony existing in the natural world. By observing these limits in our use of natural resources we are, in fact, protecting the environment so that it can protect us.

Artistic values are especially relevant to the built environment and its accompanying ethics. Moral-ethical values pertain to solutions to human behaviour and conduct that is destructive to the environment,

<sup>20</sup> This doctrine refers to the sixth article of faith in Islam.



which is motivated by greed, and other desires in the human soul that are considered in Islam as morally faulty.

### **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, we would maintain that we need to detail out our discussion of the tawḥīdic values underpinning Islam's theology of nature as well as its theology and philosophy of law that we argue are so instrumental to the formulation of a comprehensive environmental ethics that is so much needed by our contemporary world.