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"Beyond the Cosmos : Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Ecotheology and Global Sustainability"

DYNAMIC HIERARCHIES OF VULNERABILITY IN THE QUR'ANIC WORLDVIEW: AN ECOCRITICAL AND INTERTEXTUAL DIALOGUE

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Abstract

This study emerges from growing concern over the ecological crisis shaped by humanity's worldview of the earth. Within the mechanistic paradigm, the earth is frequently reduced to a vast extractive machine that may be exploited without restraint. In response to this problem, this article examines the Qur'anic worldview as part of the broader Abrahamic scriptural tradition concerning cosmic relations. The study employs a qualitative-descriptive method based on library research, combining intertextual and ecocritical approaches. The findings reveal the limitations of singular paradigms, such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, and theocentrism, in fully explaining the Qur'anic worldview. As in the Bible, the Qur'an presents a fluid and non-monolithic spectrum of relations between humans, nature, and the divine. Rather than focusing solely on who occupies the centre of the universe, the Qur'anic cosmology emphasizes which beings are most vulnerable and therefore most deserving of protection. This perspective gives rise to a hierarchy of vulnerability in which non-human creatures, alongside vulnerable human groups such as orphans and the poor, are entrusted to humanity as khalīfah responsible for maintaining earthly balance. God, by contrast, is portrayed as the Absolute and All-Powerful, beyond all vulnerability and in no need of protection. Yet this hierarchy remains dynamic, as the Qur'an depicts humans simultaneously as khalīfah and mustaq'afūn: righteous yet oppressive, entrusted yet ignorant, and at times even lower than animals. At the same time, the Qur'an repeatedly condemns fasād, including oppression and excessive exploitation (isrāf). The study ultimately identifies three foundational pillars: entrusted power and responsibility (khalīfah), protection of vulnerable beings, and the prevention of greater fasād.

Keywords: *Dynamic Hierarchies of Vulnerability; Qur'anic Worldview; Ecocriticism; Intertextuality.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berawal dari keresahan atas krisis ekologi akibat cara pandang manusia terhadap bumi. Dalam paradigma mekanistik, bumi kerap direduksi sebagai mesin ekstraktif raksasa yang dapat dieksploitasi tanpa jeda. Sebagai respons atas persoalan tersebut, tulisan ini bertujuan untuk meneliti worldview Al-Qur'an sebagai bagian dari tradisi kitab suci Abrahamik tentang relasi kosmik. Metode yang diaplikasikan berupa kualitatif-deskriptif berbasis studi pustaka dengan dua pendekatan, yakni pendekatan intertekstual dan ekokritik. Hasil penelitian menampilkan kegagalan paradigma tunggal, seperti antroposentrisme, biosentrisme, ekosentrisme, dan teosentrisme dalam membaca worldview Al-Qur'an. Sebagaimana Bible, karakter ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an menampilkan spektrum relasi yang cair dan tidak monolitik. Relasi kosmos dalam Al-Qur'an tidak semata bertumpu pada siapa pusat semesta, melainkan pada siapa entitas paling rentan yang membutuhkan perlindungan. Dari sini muncul hierarki kerentanan: makhluk non-manusia serta kelompok manusia rentan seperti anak yatim dan fakir miskin diposisikan sebagai amanah tanggung jawab penjagaan bagi



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manusia secara general selaku khalifah untuk menjaga keseimbangan bumi. Sementara itu, Tuhan ditempatkan sebagai entitas Mahakuasa yang tidak membutuhkan perlindungan apa pun dari makhluk-Nya. Hierarki tersebut bersifat dinamis karena Al-Qur'an menggambarkan manusia sekaligus sebagai khalifah dan mustaḍ'afūn, saleh namun zalim, penerima amanah namun bodoh dan sesat, bahkan dapat lebih rendah daripada binatang. Pada saat yang sama, Al-Qur'an berulang kali mengecam fasad, termasuk penindasan dan eksploitasi berlebihan (iṣrāf). Penelitian ini akhirnya mengidentifikasi adanya tiga pilar utama: amanah kekuatan dan tanggung jawab (khalifah), perlindungan terhadap makhluk rentan, serta pencegahan fasād yang lebih besar.

Kata Kunci: *Heerarki Dinamis Kerentanan, Worldview Al-Qur'an, Ekokritisisme, Intertekstual*

1. INTRODUCTION

The ecological crisis is fundamentally not merely a technological crisis, but a crisis in the way humanity constructs the world and positions the earth within its civilizational imagination. Modernity has introduced a new configuration in which the earth is increasingly reduced to a vast extractive machine operating without restraint. Since the invention of electric power generation in 1882 (Kennedy & Delargy, 2026, p. 64) and its mass distribution throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, human activity has gradually ceased to follow the rhythm of the sun (Endres, 2023, p. 1785). Cities remain illuminated twenty-four hours a day, machines rarely rest, while servers, the internet, digital industries, air-conditioning systems, and global production networks together form a civilisation that has almost entirely lost its spaces of rest.

Within this context, global energy consumption has continued to accelerate since the Industrial Revolution. In 2023, global primary energy consumption reached 620 exajoules annually (Ritchie et al., 2024), with fossil fuels still maintaining overwhelming dominance (Miciuła et al., 2024, p. 1). Ironically, despite hundreds of climate conferences, numerous environmental ethical theories, and decades of ecological activism, the earth continues to be systematically exploited every day. Alternative technologies have not necessarily resolved the problem. Electric vehicles still depend upon large-scale lithium extraction (Arancibia et al., 2025, pp. 2-3), solar panels require rare metals, while Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data centres consume vast amounts of energy (Chen & Ji, 2026). At this point, green capitalism often merely relocates exploitation into forms that appear more environmentally friendly (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022).

The ecological crisis therefore cannot be reduced solely to individual behaviour, such as waste disposal or energy-saving habits. Rather, it operates within broader structures of capitalism, consumerism, industrialisation, and the logic of limitless growth (Zhang, 2013, p. 71). Even when individuals attempt to live minimally, modern social systems continue to generate new desires through the industries of fashion, e-commerce, social media, shopping malls, hotels, and continuously reproducing cultures of consumption. It is within this context that ecological thinkers such as Arne Næss, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Murray Bookchin, and Aldo Leopold understand ecological destruction not merely as a technical failure, but as both a spiritual crisis and a crisis of humanity's worldview toward the earth (Muannas et al., 2025, p. 52; Santono et al., 2026, p. 21).



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Debates concerning the relationship between humanity and nature possess a long genealogical history. In classical Greek cosmology, nature was understood as a sacred realm inhabited by divine forces. Later philosophical traditions, however, introduced different configurations. Through his idealism, Plato regarded the physical world as less significant than the world of ideas, while Aristotle developed a hierarchical structure that positioned humans above other beings (Hughes, 2009, p. 356). Modern rationalism, particularly through René Descartes and the principle *cogito ergo sum*, further reinforced the supremacy of human reason. Meanwhile, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel still acknowledged the rationality of nature, although beneath that of humanity. By contrast, Arthur Schopenhauer argued that all living beings are driven by the "will to live", making the exploitation of nature part of humanity's own existential struggle (Pratt, 2009, p. 364).

From this long dialectic emerged two major poles within environmental ethics: hierarchical perspectives inclined toward anthropocentrism and egalitarian perspectives associated with ecocentrism. Anthropocentrism positions humanity as the centre of value and the highest hierarchy within the universe (Kopnina et al., 2018, p. 113), whereas ecocentrism views humans as merely one entity within an ecological network equal to other non-human beings (Frantz et al., 2025, pp. 449-450). Each generates distinct ethical consequences in relation to the earth. Anthropocentrism risks reducing nature to an instrument for satisfying human interests, while ecocentrism at times positions humanity merely as a tool for ecological stability.

At the same time, economic modernity demonstrates how anthropocentrism intertwines with capitalism and market logic. The earth ultimately becomes valued primarily through exchange value and economic profit. Under such conditions, the earth is scarcely granted space to "breathe", since the primary orientation of modern systems lies not in the intrinsic value of nature but in endless growth. It is therefore unsurprising that global warming, deforestation, and species extinction continue to intensify amid the world's obsession with economic expansion. Such critiques were further sharpened by Lynn White Jr., who argued that certain theological paradigms also contributed to the emergence of anthropocentrism as one of the roots of the modern ecological crisis (Minteer, 2009, p. 59).

Within this context, this study seeks to examine the Qur'anic worldview of cosmic relations through intertextual and ecocritical approaches. The Qur'an does not emerge as a text existing in isolation, but rather as one that dialogues with other Abrahamic scriptural traditions. Accordingly, the intertextual approach is employed to trace these relational landscapes, while ecocriticism is used to analyse the construction of relationships among humanity, nature, and God within the Qur'anic worldview. The primary concern of this study, therefore, is to investigate how the Qur'an positions cosmic relations amid the contestation of modern ecological paradigms.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive method grounded in library research to examine how the Qur'an conceptualizes cosmic relations. Two principal approaches serve as the methodological foundation of the study: ecocritical dialogue and intertextual analysis. The theoretical framework adopted in this research is multi-theoretical in nature, integrating anthropocentric, biocentric, ecocentric, and theocentric paradigms within a broader ecocritical analytical structure.



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The primary sources of the study consist of Qur'anic verses related to cosmic relations, with *al-Ard* (the earth) functioning as the central keyword. Additional Qur'anic terms representing various dimensions of the cosmos are also examined, including *al-shams* (the sun), *al-qamar* (the moon), *al-mā'* (water), *shajar* (trees), and other cosmological elements frequently referenced in the Qur'anic text. These terms are analyzed not merely as linguistic units, but as conceptual indicators that reflect the Qur'an's broader worldview concerning humanity, nature, and existence.

Secondary sources include Biblical passages employed as the basis for intertextual analysis, alongside ecological encyclopedias, scholarly works on environmental ethics, ecocriticism, theology, and other writings relevant to ecological paradigms and interdisciplinary religious studies. Through this intertextual framework, the study positions the Qur'an within a broader Abrahamic textual conversation concerning the relationship between humanity and the natural world.

The combination of ecocritical and intertextual approaches enables this research to investigate the Qur'anic worldview of cosmic relations in a more holistic manner. At the same time, the methodology demonstrates how the Qur'an may be critically interpreted through an ecocritical lens grounded in interdisciplinary studies, particularly at the intersection of Qur'anic studies, theology, philosophy, and environmental humanities.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. The Genealogy of Human Worldviews of Nature: From Classical to Contemporary Perspectives

The history of the human worldview toward nature did not emerge abruptly within the modern period; rather, it was shaped through a long trajectory of civilization extending from ancient Greek cosmology to contemporary thought. The modern ecological crisis, marked by the large-scale exploitation of natural resources, massive industrialization, and global environmental degradation, is frequently understood as the culmination of a profound transformation in humanity's perception of nature. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, for instance, argues that the deepest root of the crisis lies in the disappearance of the sacred dimension of nature within modern Western civilization (Muannas et al., 2025, p. 52). In this regard, environmental problems cannot be sufficiently addressed merely through scientific or technological approaches; they also require a genealogical inquiry into the philosophical development of humanity's understanding of the natural world.

In the earliest phase of ancient Greek civilization, nature had not yet been conceived as a mechanistic object to be dominated by human beings. Early Greek society inhabited a cosmological horizon that was deeply mystical and religious. Mountains, rivers, forests, springs, and animals were perceived as possessing sacred dimensions because of their association with divine beings (Berens, 1880, p. 17). The world was understood as permeated by divine forces manifested through natural phenomena. The notion of *hubris* referred to human arrogance that transgressed cosmic boundaries, while *nemesis* represented divine punishment for such excesses. Within this framework, humanity had not yet fully separated itself from nature, since the natural world remained embedded within a sacred cosmic order deserving reverence and restraint (Hughes, 2009, pp. 355-358).

Greek mythology further illustrates this intimate relation through the figure of Gaia, the earth goddess and mother of all life. Nature was understood as a living organism governed by



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its own intrinsic laws. Likewise, the presence of Artemis as the goddess of wilderness and animals reflects an early ecological ethic within Greek culture, including restrictions on killing certain animals and reverence toward sacred natural spaces. Caves, forests, springs, and mountains were often treated as sanctified territories that could not be exploited freely. Human relations with nature, therefore, remained participatory and spiritual in character. This perspective was reinforced by the Orphic tradition, which emphasized the unity of the cosmos (*the oneness of nature*). Nature was perceived as an organic and harmonious whole. The symbolic figure of Orpheus, whose music harmonized animals and trees, represented the interconnectedness of all existence within a cosmic order.

Such cosmological assumptions later became foundational for the emergence of Greek natural philosophy. A significant shift occurred when the pre-Socratic philosophers gradually moved from mythological explanations toward rational inquiry. Nature began to be interpreted through *logos*, observation, and philosophical speculation. Thales identified water as the primordial substance of the universe, while Heraclitus introduced the concept of *logos* as the universal rational principle governing cosmic change. Anaxagoras, meanwhile, proposed *nous* as the cosmic intellect ordering the world. Despite their rational orientation, many Greek philosophers still maintained an organic conception of nature. Pythagoras and the Pythagorean tradition, for example, understood the cosmos as a living and harmonious organism structured according to mathematical proportion. Natural harmony was expressed through numbers and cosmic music. This worldview also generated an ethic of nonviolence toward living beings. Pythagoras famously prohibited the killing of animals and advocated vegetarianism because all creatures were believed to originate from the same source of life. Such perspectives demonstrate that early Greek rationality was not necessarily synonymous with the domination of nature (Cantor, 2022, pp. 734-735).

The conception of the earth as a living organism continued to resonate into modern thought. James E. Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis in the twentieth century, for instance, bears notable similarities to ancient Greek cosmology in its understanding of the earth as a self-regulating living system capable of maintaining ecological equilibrium. Other philosophers, such as Empedocles, argued that all beings originate from the same elemental substances and continuously undergo transformation through natural cycles. Nothing truly disappears; rather, it changes form. Nature was thus understood as an ongoing process of cosmic recycling. This perspective cultivated an ecological awareness that all forms of life are interconnected within cycles of existence.

Subsequent developments emerged through the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. In the *Timaeus*, Plato described the cosmos as a living being endowed with soul and intellect. He also expressed concern regarding environmental degradation, particularly deforestation and water management. Nevertheless, Platonic philosophy began to exhibit an anthropocentric tendency by positioning the world of ideas as the highest reality, while the material world occupied a lower ontological status (Feke, 2024, p. 95). This hierarchical tendency became more systematic in Aristotle's philosophy. Through the concept of *telos*, Aristotle maintained that every being possesses a particular purpose within the natural order. Nature was understood as a rational and well-ordered system. Aristotle pioneered empirical biological observation, yet simultaneously introduced a hierarchical understanding of living beings. In modern interpretations, such hierarchies have often been employed to justify human domination over nature and other creatures. Nevertheless, Aristotle himself still viewed all beings as interconnected within an integral ecological system (Feke, 2024, p. 93).



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Aristotle's student, Theophrastus, even rejected the assumption that all existence exists solely for human purposes. Plants and other living beings, he argued, possess their own intrinsic ends. His thought is therefore frequently associated with an early form of biocentrism. At the same time, Greek philosophy also gave rise to an atomistic materialist tradition through figures such as Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius. Nature came to be understood as a collection of atoms moving mechanically without spiritual purpose. The world emerged through material processes rather than divine will. Here one can observe the early seeds of the mechanistic worldview that would later flourish within modern science. Even so, certain Epicurean traditions continued to reject extreme anthropocentrism and criticized human arrogance toward nature.

Ancient Greek philosophy thus produced two major and often conflicting intellectual legacies. On the one hand, it articulated an organic and harmonious vision of the cosmos as a living unity. On the other hand, it generated forms of rationalism, hierarchy, and materialism that later contributed to the foundations of modern anthropocentrism. These two legacies would continue to shape the subsequent history of Western philosophy.

Entering the medieval period, the human worldview toward nature underwent a synthesis between Greek philosophy and the Abrahamic religious traditions. Nature was no longer understood merely as a rational cosmos, but also as *creatio*, the creation of God. The world possessed spiritual significance because it manifested divine wisdom and glory. This paradigm established a relationship between the physical and metaphysical realms, between the visible and the unseen. Within this framework, nature acquired symbolic and spiritual value.

Augustine of Hippo emphasized that the earth is fundamentally good because it is created by God. Nature functioned as a sign pointing toward divine reality. Medieval thought frequently regarded the world as the "language of God," in which the orderliness of the cosmos served as evidence of divine existence. Islamic philosophical traditions also played a crucial role in this synthesis. Thinkers such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes developed an intellectual bridge between Greek rationality and Islamic spirituality. Nature was understood simultaneously as rational and sacred divine creation. Consequently, studying nature was not merely a scientific activity, but also a form of contemplation upon divine wisdom (Foltz, 2009, p. 360).

Thomas Aquinas subsequently developed a grand synthesis between Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology. Through his cosmological arguments, Aquinas understood nature as a rational order that points toward the existence of God through chains of causality. Nature was therefore not perceived as meaningless inert matter, but as part of a purposeful cosmic order. Modern critiques of the medieval worldview later emerged from thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, both of whom emphasized that humanity itself remains inseparable from nature (Doyle, 2025, pp. 1280-1288; Zwart, 2020, p. 387). They argued that medieval Christian traditions excessively subordinated the physical world to spiritual reality. The most influential criticism was articulated by Lynn White Jr., who contended that literal interpretations of the Book of Genesis, particularly the mandate to "subdue the earth", became one of the intellectual roots of the modern Western ecological crisis.

Nevertheless, such critiques have not been universally accepted. Many scholars maintain that modern ecological destruction emerged precisely when modern civilization began to strip nature of its sacred dimension. Throughout the medieval period, nature was still regarded as possessing intrinsic spiritual value. The ecological crisis intensified only when the



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natural world was reduced to a material object subject to control and exploitation. A decisive transformation occurred in the early modern era through the nominalism of William of Ockham, which gradually severed the metaphysical relationship between nature and spiritual reality. Nature was no longer understood as a manifestation of divine symbolism, but rather as an empirical object accessible through observation. This shift laid the groundwork for modern empiricism.

Modernity subsequently evolved alongside the rise of modern science. Francis Bacon argued that knowledge should serve the improvement of human life and material comfort. Nature, therefore, had to be investigated through experimentation and observation. Knowledge increasingly functioned as an instrument for mastering the natural world. This intellectual shift proved highly consequential, as nature gradually came to be perceived as a technical object open to manipulation and control. The mechanistic worldview was further reinforced through the dualism of René Descartes (Brown, 2023, p. 8). Descartes sharply separated mind (*res cogitans*) from matter (*res extensa*). Consciousness belonged exclusively to humans, whereas the material world operated mechanically like a machine. Such a framework contributed to the perception of nature as lifeless matter devoid of soul and therefore freely exploitable. Similar assumptions were strengthened by Isaac Newton through his formulation of mechanical laws and cosmic determinism. The universe came to be understood as a gigantic machine governed by mathematical causality; once natural laws were known, the world itself could theoretically be controlled (Pratt, 2009, p. 364).

From this intellectual background emerged the modern paradigm of nature as an object of exploitation. The Industrial Revolution accelerated this process through technological expansion, capitalism, mass production, and the global extraction of natural resources. Nature gradually lost its sacred status and was increasingly reduced to an economic commodity. Yet modernity was never entirely homogeneous. Within it also emerged strong critiques of mechanism and anthropocentrism. Immanuel Kant, for instance, emphasized human freedom while simultaneously acknowledging humanity's embeddedness within nature. Kant's ideas were later developed in different directions by Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Fichte argued that humanity must master nature in order to achieve freedom (Valexsta et al., 2024, p. 445). In contrast, Schelling developed *Naturphilosophie*, which conceived nature as a living, dynamic, and creative system rather than a dead machine. Schelling's thought later became an important intellectual foundation for modern ecological philosophy and significantly influenced Ernst Haeckel in formulating the concept of ecology (Barentsen, 2019, p. 96).

At the same time, Arthur Schopenhauer formulated an *ethics of compassion* grounded in the assumption that all living beings possess a *will-to-life*. Since all creatures are capable of suffering, humans are morally obligated to cultivate compassion toward all forms of life. This perspective profoundly influenced modern environmental ethics, including Albert Schweitzer's notion of *reverence for life*. Nietzsche, meanwhile, criticized conventional morality and developed the concept of the *will-to-power* (Stone, 2009, p. 369). He rejected traditions that demeaned the physical world and instead called for a "loyalty to the earth." On the one hand, Nietzsche celebrated power and domination (Doyle, 2025, pp. 1280–1288); on the other hand, he rejected rigid dualisms between spirit and nature while criticizing human arrogance toward the natural world. Consequently, his thought remains deeply ambivalent within contemporary environmental ethics.

Entering the contemporary era, the global ecological crisis stimulated the emergence of new intellectual approaches such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, biocentrism, and ecocriticism.



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Concern for nature no longer remained confined to philosophy alone, but expanded into literature, culture, politics, psychology, and spirituality. Ecocriticism, in particular, developed as an interdisciplinary approach connecting literary studies with ecological concerns. Lawrence Buell explains that ecocriticism cannot be reduced to a single methodology because environmental problems themselves are inherently complex and multidisciplinary. Contemporary environmental thought has also become increasingly receptive to non-Western ecological wisdom, including Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and various Asian indigenous traditions emphasizing harmony between humanity and nature. Thinkers such as Gary Snyder and David Abram were deeply influenced by Eastern spiritual traditions that perceive humans not as absolute rulers of nature, but as participants within a broader ecological network. In this context, environmentalism evolved into a global movement seeking to restore humanity's ecological consciousness (Brennan, 2009, p. 373).

The genealogy of humanity's worldview of nature therefore reveals an exceptionally complex intellectual history. Philosophical history does not progress linearly from "good" to "bad"; rather, it is characterized by continuous contestations between competing paradigms. Since ancient Greece, nature has been understood ambiguously, at times as a sacred living organism, and at other times as a rational object subject to control. Medieval thought largely preserved the spiritual dimension of nature, whereas modernity transformed nature into a mechanistic system. Contemporary thought, in turn, attempts to critically reassess this paradigm and construct a more holistic ecological consciousness.

Ultimately, the modern environmental crisis is not merely a technological or economic problem, but fundamentally a crisis of worldview. The manner in which humanity understands nature profoundly shapes how it treats the natural world. For this reason, tracing the genealogy of philosophical reflections on nature becomes essential for constructing a new ecological paradigm, one that no longer perceives the earth merely as an object of exploitation, but as a shared habitat endowed with intrinsic, spiritual, and moral value.

b. Cosmic Relations in the Qur'an: An Ecocritical and Intertextual Reading

1) A Brief Description of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism did not emerge in an intellectual vacuum. Rather, it arose from the prolonged anxiety of modern humanity when nature ceased to be treated as a "shared home" and was instead reduced to an object of exploitation, mined, deforested, exhausted, and commodified without ethical limits. Etymologically, the term *ecocriticism* derives from two roots: *oikos* in Greek, meaning home, dwelling, or habitat, and *criticism*, which denotes critique, evaluation, or reflective analysis. In this sense, ecocriticism is not merely a form of literary criticism in the conventional sense, but a mode of reading that seeks to re-evaluate humanity's relationship with its ecological home. In more academic terms, ecocriticism is generally understood as the study of the relationship between literature and the environment through an interdisciplinary approach. Consequently, the field extends far beyond literary studies alone and intersects with philosophy, ecology, anthropology, cultural studies, environmental politics, as well as the broader humanities and social sciences.

It is within this intellectual context that Cheryl Glotfelty is frequently recognized as one of the central figures in the emergence of modern ecocriticism. Through the influential volume *The Ecocriticism Reader*, as cited by Noushad (Noushad, 2018, p. 67), Glotfelty sought to move literary criticism beyond the confines of anthropocentric discourse that had long revolved exclusively around human conflicts and social relations. For her, literature is not



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merely a space for examining human interactions, but also a medium through which humanity imagines, engages with, and even destroys the natural world. In a similar vein, Lawrence Buell, through *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), likewise cited by Noushad (Noushad, 2018, p. 67), demonstrated how ecological imagination operates within literary texts and how literature itself can shape modern environmental consciousness.

Long before the term gained widespread recognition, William Rueckert had already employed the term *ecocriticism* in his 1978 essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Rueckert appeared to suggest that literature could be read analogously to an ecosystem, composed of interrelations, tensions, energies, and interconnected networks of life. Such a perspective significantly departed from traditional literary criticism, which had been overwhelmingly centered upon human experience alone. Unlike conventional literary criticism, ecocriticism expands its field of concern to encompass the entire ecosphere: forests, rivers, oceans, climate, animals, trees, and even landscapes that had previously functioned merely as narrative "backgrounds." Nature is no longer positioned as a passive decorative setting within literary texts, but rather as an entity possessing its own agency, presence, and significance. In this respect, ecocriticism developed rapidly in the United States from the late 1980s onward, while in Britain a closely related discourse emerged under the term *green studies* during the early 1990s.

Interestingly, the intellectual roots of ecocriticism can be traced even further back to the American transcendentalist tradition, which regarded nature as a source of spirituality and as a critique of modern materialism. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, through his essay *Nature*, attempted to articulate the spiritual relationship between humanity and the natural world, suggesting that nature is not merely inert matter, but a space through which humans rediscover the deepest dimensions of the self. As a critical paradigm, ecocriticism is fundamentally employed to analyze how nature is represented within literary texts. It therefore constitutes an intersection between ecological philosophy, literary criticism, and cultural studies. During its early phase, often referred to as the first wave of ecocriticism, the field remained strongly oriented toward *nature writing*, pastoral literature, wilderness narratives, and harmonious relations between humans and nature. Scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Jonathan Bate largely operated within this intellectual horizon (Oppermann, 2006, pp. 106-109). Nature, during this phase, was frequently imagined in romantic terms as a realm of purity standing in opposition to the industrialized modern world.

However, this form of ecological romanticism gradually came under criticism. The second wave of ecocriticism shifted toward more explicitly political concerns, including ecological capitalism, ecojustice, environmental colonialism, race, gender, urbanization, and global ecological destruction. Nature was no longer understood naively as a harmonious space, since environmental degradation was increasingly recognized as deeply entangled with structures of power, economic exploitation, and global political domination. Within this framework, *postcolonial ecocriticism* emerged as an important approach seeking to demonstrate that colonialism did not merely colonize human populations, but also ecological landscapes. Nature, therefore, was never entirely neutral; it remained inseparable from struggles over power and the distribution of resources.

Entering its third wave, ecocriticism developed in increasingly transnational and cosmopolitan directions. Its focus expanded beyond nature writing or critiques of industrialism toward issues such as climate change, ecological migration, global disasters, and post-humanism. At this stage, humanity was no longer positioned as the sole center of existence. Concepts such as *eco-cosmopolitanism* emerged to emphasize that ecological crises are



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fundamentally global problems transcending national boundaries, race, and cultural identity. In contemporary developments, moreover, the objects of ecocritical inquiry are no longer limited to poetry or novels, but also encompass film, digital media, popular culture, advertisements, and even video games. In other words, nearly all forms of human cultural production can now be interpreted through ecological sensibilities (Oppermann, 2006, pp. 106-109).

It is precisely at this point that ecocriticism becomes visible not merely as a literary theory, but as an intellectual response to the global ecological crisis itself. Deforestation, pollution, global warming, species extinction, and the relentless exploitation of natural resources have generated a new awareness that literature is never entirely neutral toward the environment. William Rueckert, as cited by Scott Slovic, explains that literary texts may be read through ecological paradigms because literature ultimately reveals how humans perceive the universe. Cheryll Glotfelty, likewise cited by Slovic, criticized older literary traditions for their excessive anthropocentrism, in which humans were consistently positioned as the center of all narratives while nature functioned merely as background scenery rather than as a subject possessing intrinsic value. Ecocriticism therefore seeks to move beyond this anthropocentric horizon by reinserting nature into the analytical space of literary interpretation (Slovic, 2009, p. 226).

At the same time, Scott Slovic, in the *Encyclopedia of Ecology*, further expanded the scope of ecocriticism in a more radical direction. According to him, almost all literary texts can potentially be interpreted ecologically, even when they do not explicitly discuss nature. Human consumption patterns, modern lifestyles, economic systems, and social structures all contain latent ecological dimensions. For this reason, ecocriticism remains highly flexible and open to engagement with various other theoretical approaches, including feminism, Marxism, identity theory, postcolonial studies, and even media and technology studies. It is precisely this methodological openness that has enabled ecocriticism to develop so extensively within contemporary humanities scholarship (Slovic, 2009, p. 227).

Nevertheless, ecocriticism does not possess a single fixed methodology in the manner of semiotics or classical structuralism. It functions more accurately as a *mode of reading* than as a rigid set of technical procedures. In practice, however, ecocritical studies generally operate through several recurring analytical patterns: identifying representations of nature within texts, examining the relationship between humans and the environment, determining the ecological paradigms employed, uncovering the ecological ideologies underlying the text, and finally drawing conclusions regarding the forms of ecological consciousness constructed by the work itself (Herdiana & Najma, 2019, p. 28). Accordingly, ecocriticism ultimately transcends the boundaries of a purely academic project concerned only with literary interpretation. More fundamentally, it constitutes an ethical effort to reconsider humanity's position amid the ongoing global ecological crisis.

2) Critiquing the Reductionist Paradigm: An Intertextual Analysis of Cosmic Relations in the Scriptures of the Abrahamic Traditions

Any attempt to examine the relationship between humanity and nature in the Qur'an cannot be undertaken in isolation, as though the text emerged independently from other scriptural traditions. Within the broader framework of the Abrahamic religions, the Qur'an exists within a shared discursive universe that also includes the Bible as a foundational text shaping religious cosmologies and conceptions of existence. Accordingly, an intertextual approach becomes essential for understanding how these scriptures construct, negotiate, and



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reorient conceptions of the cosmos, humanity, and the Divine. From the perspective of ecocritical inquiry, which is inherently interdisciplinary and methodologically flexible, intertextuality enables scholars to investigate not merely narrative parallels between texts, but also the theological and ideological assumptions underlying humanity's position within the natural order.

Within the discourse of religious ecology, the Bible has long occupied a central and contested position, particularly following the influential critique advanced by Lynn White Jr. in his seminal essay *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis* (1967), as cited by Minter. White argued that the Western Christian tradition, especially in its medieval development, contributed significantly to the emergence of an anthropocentric worldview that positioned humanity as the center and ruler of nature. His criticism primarily targeted interpretations of the Book of Genesis that were understood to provide theological legitimacy for human domination over the earth. According to White, the notion of humanity as *imago Dei*, created in the image of God, generated an ontological separation between humans and the rest of creation, thereby elevating humanity above all other beings. In White's historical analysis, this paradigm later evolved into a moral foundation for the large-scale exploitation of nature within modern Western civilization (Minter, 2009, p. 59).

White's critique did not remain confined to academic discourse; rather, it stimulated a broader wave of ecological reinterpretations of biblical texts. Biblical scholars began revisiting creation narratives, particularly those found in Genesis, to reconsider whether such passages were intrinsically exploitative or merely subjected to reductionist readings throughout history. Even within the Christian artistic tradition, human superiority has often been symbolically represented. One notable example is *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, which visually emphasizes Adam's intimate proximity to God in comparison with other creatures. Such symbolism has frequently been interpreted as reinforcing humanity's privileged status within the cosmic order (Horrell, 2009, p. 94).

In addition, several eschatological biblical texts have also been considered influential in shaping particular attitudes toward the environment. Books such as Joel, Amos, and 1 Thessalonians contain recurring depictions of the end times and cosmic destruction. In modern history, these themes were repopularized through widely circulated works such as *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and the *Left Behind* novel series. Consequently, certain Christian fundamentalist groups have often been perceived as less attentive toward ecological concerns due to an eschatological understanding that the world is destined for imminent destruction. In some contexts, such communities have even rejected aspects of modern environmentalism altogether (Horrell, 2009, p. 95).

Nevertheless, an intertextual reading demonstrates that neither the Qur'an nor the Bible can be simplistically reduced to anthropocentric texts. Both emerge from a shared Abrahamic horizon that fundamentally understands nature as divine creation. Genesis 1:1 declares:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

This cosmological affirmation is further reinforced in Genesis 1:31:

"God saw all that He had made, and it was very good."



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A parallel paradigm is also articulated in the Qur'an, for instance in QS. al-A'rāf [7]:54, which emphasizes that God created the heavens and the earth, as well as in QS. al-Zumar [39]:5:

خَلَقَ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ

"He created the heavens and the earth in truth."

Thus, both the Bible and the Qur'an reject the notion that nature exists independently from God. The cosmos is not an autonomous reality detached from transcendence, but rather a created order imbued with purpose, harmony, and meaning. In the biblical narrative, creation is described as "very good," while the Qur'an characterizes creation as existing *bi al-haqq*, with truth, purpose, and rightful order. This theological framework is significant because it positions nature neither as an object of unrestricted human exploitation nor as a reality to be absolutely sacralized (Siahaya & Manuputty, 2024, p. 78). One of the most debated passages in biblical environmental studies remains Genesis 1:26-28, which states:

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

The passage continues:

"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it."

Historically, these verses have often been interpreted as legitimizing human domination over nature. However, contemporary ecological hermeneutics increasingly argues that such interpretations emerge less from the text itself than from the ideological frameworks through which the text has been read. In this respect, the ecological crisis may not solely originate from scripture, but from reductionist theological paradigms that detach humanity from the broader relational structure of creation.

In the history of medieval Western interpretation, the terms *dominion*, derived from the Hebrew words *radah* and *kabash*, were frequently understood as theological legitimations for humanity to rule over and subdue nature (Wright, 2007, p. 69). It was precisely this mode of interpretation that Lynn White Jr. identified as one of the principal roots of Western anthropocentrism. Nevertheless, contemporary biblical scholarship has demonstrated that within the context of ancient Hebrew thought, such "dominion" did not necessarily imply destructive exploitation, but rather a form of representative governance exercised on behalf of God and accompanied by moral responsibility toward creation. Interestingly, this formulation bears a notable resonance with the Qur'anic concept of *taskhīr*, particularly in QS. al-Jāthiyah [45]:13:

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُم مَّا فِي السَّمُوتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مِّنْهُ

He has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth."



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Although both scriptural traditions address the relationship between humanity and nature, their theological nuances differ significantly. In Genesis, humanity appears to receive a direct mandate to "subdue" the earth, whereas in the Qur'an, God remains the primary subject who subjugates nature for human benefit. In other words, the Qur'an preserves a more explicit theocentric orientation, since human authority is never autonomous but always operates under divine sovereignty. Ecological responsibility is, however, also clearly articulated within the Bible itself. Genesis 2:15 states:

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."

This verse contains two important Hebrew terms: 'abad (to cultivate, serve) and shamar (to guard, preserve) (Maulana, 2022, p. 104). For this reason, many contemporary scholars interpret the passage as a foundational basis for *creation care theology*, namely a theological understanding that emphasizes humanity's responsibility to protect and nurture God's creation. This notion bears certain similarities to the Qur'anic concept of *khalīfah*, although the two are not entirely identical. The Bible tends to portray humanity as a steward entrusted with caring for God's garden, whereas the Qur'an develops a broader conception of cosmic trust (*amānah*) through the terminology of *khalīfah* (Siahaya & Manuputty, 2024, p. 78). At the same time, the Bible cannot simply be characterized as exclusively anthropocentric. In Romans 8:19-22, for example, creation itself is portrayed as participating in ecological suffering:

"The whole creation has been groaning in labor pains..."

This passage suggests that cosmic suffering forms part of a larger spiritual drama encompassing all creation, not humanity alone. Likewise, Revelation 11:18 declares:

"for destroying those who destroy the earth."

This verse strongly resonates with the Qur'anic concept of *fasād*, particularly in QS. al-Rūm [30]:41:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ

"Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what human hands have done."

In this regard, both the Bible and the Qur'an frame ecological destruction not merely as a technical or economic issue, but fundamentally as a moral and spiritual crisis of humanity. The principle of God's ultimate ownership over the earth is also explicitly affirmed within the biblical tradition. Leviticus 25:23 states:

"The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine..."

Similarly, Psalm 24:1 proclaims:

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it..."



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This paradigm closely parallels QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:109:

وَلِلّٰهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ

"To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth."

Accordingly, both the Qur'an and the Bible reject the absolutization of human ownership over nature. Human possession remains relative and provisional, whereas ultimate ownership belongs solely to God. Despite these numerous points of resonance, however, both scriptures continue to develop distinct cosmological orientations. The Bible constructs a detailed, chronological, and historical account of creation in Genesis, particularly through the narrative structure of the six days of creation. The Qur'an, by contrast, does not present creation in a single linear narrative; rather, cosmological fragments are dispersed across different passages. QS. al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 describes the heavens and the earth as once united, while QS. al-Dhāriyāt [51]:47 refers to the expanding heavens. Consequently, the Bible tends to formulate a historical narrative of creation, whereas the Qur'an develops a more reflective and cosmological worldview concerning the universe.

These differing textual characteristics have naturally generated diverse ecological interpretations. Prior to the modern era, certain interpretations of the Bible indeed tended toward anthropocentrism, as criticized by White. Yet developments in contemporary biblical studies demonstrate an increasingly robust ecological reinterpretation. Many modern Christian scholars now understand *dominion* not as a license for exploitation, but as an ethical responsibility toward creation. A similar phenomenon may also be observed within Qur'anic interpretation. Certain verses, such as QS. al-Baqarah [2]:30 concerning *khalīfah* and QS. al-Jāthiyah [45]:13 concerning *taskhīr*, have occasionally been interpreted in anthropocentric terms. Nevertheless, a holistic reading of the Qur'an demonstrates that such notions are consistently balanced by theocentric verses emphasizing God's ownership over nature, as well as by cosmic passages portraying the natural world as a spiritual reality engaged in glorification of God. QS. al-Ḥadīd [57]:1 states:

سَبَّحَ لِلّٰهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ

"Whatever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah."

Based on this intertextual analysis, cosmic relations within the Abrahamic scriptures cannot be reduced to a single ideological framework such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, or even theocentrism in isolation. The relationship between God as Creator, humanity as moral agent, and nature as creation forms a far more intricate relational network than the simplified dichotomies often produced by modern ideological categories. Once any single paradigm is imposed absolutely, the holistic dimension of scripture risks being fundamentally obscured (Askar & Aziz, 2024, pp. 56-59).

Within this context, the Qur'anic concepts of *khalīfah* and *taskhīr* indeed share certain affinities with the biblical notion of stewardship. Yet these concepts cannot be understood independently from other scriptural passages emphasizing the sacredness of the cosmos, divine ownership over the earth, and the spirituality of all creatures. Consequently, the cosmic worldview of the Abrahamic scriptures ultimately moves beyond modern reductionist



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paradigms. The relationship between God, humanity, and nature is not constructed upon a singular logic of domination, but rather through a complex structure of trust, interconnectedness, and cosmic moral responsibility that exceeds the conventional ecological categories shaped by modern Western historical experience.

3) The Relationship between Earth and Humanity in the Qur'an: An Ecocritical Reading

The ecocritical paradigm employed in this study is neither singular nor monolithic. Rather, it adopts a multi-theoretical framework approach. Such an approach is necessary because the cosmological relationship articulated in the Qur'an cannot be adequately understood through only one modern ecological paradigm, whether anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, or theocentrism, in isolation, as demonstrated in the previous intertextual analysis. Consequently, the Qur'anic verses examined in this section exhibit several distinctive ecological characteristics.

The first category concerns anthropocentric verses. Within ecocritical discourse, verses that appear anthropocentric are generally understood as those that seemingly position humanity at the center of the cosmos. This centrality is reflected in the Qur'anic portrayal of human beings as honored creatures, recipients of cosmic provisions, subjects of divine revelation, and entities granted a particular degree of authority over the earth. One of the verses frequently cited as the basis for an anthropocentric reading is QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 29:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا

"He is the One who created all that is on earth for you..."

The expressions *lakum* (for you) and *jami'an* (all of it) may initially suggest that the earth and everything within it were created solely for human benefit. Under a dominative reading, this verse can be interpreted as a theological legitimation for humanity to control and exploit nature. The natural world is thereby reduced to an instrumental object whose existence serves human interests. However, an ecological reading rejects such an exploitative interpretation. The term *lakum* does not necessarily imply "absolute ownership"; rather, it may signify a divinely entrusted provision accompanied by moral responsibility. In this sense, the instrumental function of the earth does not negate its intrinsic value. Instead, it indicates that humanity has been entrusted with an ethical mandate to utilize nature proportionally, justly, and without destruction. A similar nuance can also be observed in the concept of *taskhir* as articulated in QS. al-Jathiyah [45]: 13.

The phrase *sakhkhara lakum* (subjected for you) literally indicates a hierarchical relationship between humanity and the cosmos. Nature is described as something made subservient so that humans may benefit from it. Similar formulations appear in QS. Luqman [31]: 20 and QS. Ibrahim [14]: 32-33, particularly regarding the subjugation of the sun, moon, rivers, seas, and other cosmic phenomena. Within classical anthropocentric paradigms, these verses are often interpreted as affirmations of human supremacy over nature. Yet from an ecological perspective, *taskhir* does not signify absolute domination; rather, it refers to a form of cosmic order that enables human life to flourish. The subjugation of nature is thus understood as an expression of divine mercy that sustains human existence, not as a justification for disrupting the balance of creation.

Beyond the notion of *taskhir*, anthropocentric tendencies also appear in the Qur'anic concept of *khalifah*, as mentioned in QS. al-An'am [6]: 165, where human beings are described as *khala'if al-ard* (vicegerents on earth). Textually, the concept of *khalifah* grants humanity a



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distinctive cosmic status in comparison with other creatures. Under a political-dominative interpretation, the term is often understood as conferring upon humans the authority to rule the earth and exercise control over other beings. Ecological readings, however, reinterpret *khalifah* not as ownership of the earth, but as representation and trusteeship under God. Human beings function as divine trustees entrusted with preserving balance (*mizan*), preventing corruption (*fasad*), and managing the earth in accordance with divine will. Human authority in the Qur'an is therefore neither absolute nor autonomous, but delegated and ethically accountable. Another category of anthropocentric verses concerns those emphasizing human dignity and honor. QS. al-Isra' [17]: 70 states:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

"Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam..."

Likewise, QS. al-Tin [95]: 4 declares:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

"Indeed, We created humankind in the best form (*ahsani taqwim*)."

Both verses affirm the distinctive status of humanity in relation to other creatures. The terms *karramna* and *ahsani taqwim* indicate that human beings possess unique intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities. Nevertheless, such honor does not automatically render humanity absolutely superior in the sense of possessing unrestricted rights to exploit the environment. Within the Qur'anic worldview, the higher the status granted to humanity, the greater the ethical responsibility it bears. Human dignity therefore demands self-restraint, moral consciousness, and ecological responsibility toward all creation.

More broadly, the Qur'an does devote greater attention to human beings than to other creatures. This is evident in the predominance of legal, social, political, and moral verses concerning human life, such as inheritance laws in QS. al-Nisa' [4]: 11-12, the political narrative of Queen Bilqis, the leadership of Talut, family regulations, economic transactions, warfare, and related social matters. Compared to discussions concerning interspecies relations among animals or plants, the Qur'an places far greater emphasis on human social relations. Yet this anthropological focus does not imply that non-human beings lack significance. Rather, it reflects the fact that human beings bear the greatest moral and legal responsibility among creation. Humanity is positioned as an ethical subject accountable for its actions not only toward fellow humans, but also toward the natural world. This responsibility is further emphasized in QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 185, which describes the Qur'an as *hudan li al-nas* (guidance for humankind).

In addition to verses with anthropocentric nuances, the Qur'an also contains passages that may be interpreted through an ecocentric framework. Ecocentric verses refer to those that portray nature as an integrated, harmonious, and interconnected cosmic system without positioning humanity as the sole center of existence. Within this paradigm, non-living entities, such as the heavens, the earth, mountains, seas, the sun, the moon, winds, and other cosmic structures, possess meaning and significance within the divine order of creation. Accordingly, the Qur'an does not merely value biological life, but also the integrity of the broader ecological and cosmic system. One of the primary verses reflecting an ecocentric orientation is QS. al-Rahman [55]: 7-9:



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وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ

أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ

وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ

"And the heaven He raised, and He established the balance (mizan), so that you may not transgress the balance. Therefore uphold the balance with justice and do not violate that balance."

In this passage, *mizan* (cosmic balance) becomes the central theme. The emphasis is no longer exclusively directed toward humanity, but toward the order and harmony of the universe itself. The concept of *mizan* indicates that the cosmos was created in a precise equilibrium that must not be disrupted. From the perspective of modern ecology, this notion closely parallels the principles of ecosystem balance and ecological sustainability. Human beings are therefore not portrayed as absolute rulers of nature, but as moral agents obligated to preserve cosmic harmony. An ecocentric nuance is likewise evident in verses prohibiting ecological destruction, such as QS. al-A'raf [7]: 56:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا

"And do not cause corruption upon the earth after it has been set in order..."

This verse implies that the earth possesses an inherent order that can be damaged through human action. Ecological destruction is thus understood as a violation of the cosmic order established by God. Within ecocritical discourse, this verse resonates strongly with modern ecological critiques concerning environmental exploitation, pollution, and the global ecological crisis. The Qur'anic conception of cosmic spirituality is also not limited to living beings, but extends to non-living entities. This is explicitly articulated in QS. al-Hajj [22]: 18:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَسْجُدُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَالشَّجَرُ

وَالْدَوَابُّ وَكَثِيرٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ

"Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, as well as the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures, and many among humankind..."

This verse is particularly significant because it textually includes non-living entities such as *al-shams* (the sun), *al-qamar* (the moon), *al-nujum* (the stars), and *al-jibal* (the mountains) as participants in prostration before God. The Qur'an, therefore, does not restrict spirituality solely to humans or biologically living creatures, but extends it to the entirety of cosmic reality. The universe is portrayed as a spiritual entity existing within a relationship of devotion to God. The notion of cosmic unity is also reflected in QS. al-Hadid [57]: 1:

سَبِّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ



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"Whatever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah..."

Similar formulations appear in QS. al-Hashr [59]: 1, QS. al-Saff [61]: 1, QS. al-Jumu'ah [62]: 1, and QS. al-Taghabun [64]: 1. Significantly, these verses are placed at the openings of their respective surahs, suggesting that the Qur'an presents cosmic unity as a foundational framework for understanding reality itself. The entire universe is represented as a single existential order revolving within the orbit of divine sovereignty. Even within the *Umm al-Kitab*, namely Surah al-Fatihah, which Muslims repeatedly recite in prayer, this cosmic orientation is evident from the very beginning: *"alhamdulillah Rabb al-'alamin"* (All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all worlds). The use of the term *al-'alamin* (all worlds or all realms of existence) indicates that God in the Qur'anic worldview is not merely the God of humanity, but the Lord of all existence. No exclusive privilege is granted to humans alone. Consequently, the Qur'anic conception of cosmic relations is universal, comprehensive, and all-encompassing.

4) Qur'anic Ecological Consciousness: A Dynamic Hierarchy of Vulnerability

The ecological consciousness articulated in the Qur'an is inherently multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a single ecological paradigm, whether anthropocentrism, biocentrism, or ecocentrism alone. Such complexity emerges from the Qur'anic portrayal of a dynamic relationship between God, humanity, non-human beings, and the cosmos within an interconnected ontological structure. Consequently, ecological readings of the Qur'an require a non-reductionist approach, since a particular verse may simultaneously reflect anthropocentric, biocentric, ecocentric, and even theocentric tendencies. From this complexity, several ethical foundations may be identified as constituting the Qur'anic paradigm of the human-nature relationship.

First, the Qur'an establishes an ethical foundation grounded in the responsibility of the powerful toward the vulnerable. This principle is particularly evident in the concept of *khalifah* (vicegerency). The significance of this concept does not merely lie in human superiority as the noblest creature, but rather in humanity's capacity to bear moral responsibility. In the continuation of the Qur'anic narrative, humans are endowed with knowledge that is not granted to other beings. It is precisely this knowledge and consciousness that constitute the ethical basis of the vicegerential trust. The greater the capacity and power possessed by a being, the greater its moral responsibility to protect and preserve those who are more vulnerable.

This principle may also be observed in the concept of *taskhīr* (the subjugation of nature to humanity). The subjection of nature to human benefit creates an asymmetrical relationship in which humans occupy a more powerful position, while nature becomes increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. Accordingly, *taskhīr* should not be understood as legitimizing unlimited domination, but rather as establishing the ethical foundation for ecological protection. Within such asymmetrical relations, the stronger party bears a moral obligation to ensure the continuity and well-being of the vulnerable. This ethical orientation is reinforced in QS. Al-Ahzab [33]: 72:

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ

"Indeed, We offered the Trust (amānah) to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared betraying it; yet humanity undertook it..."



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This verse is highly significant because it suggests that humanity accepted a responsibility that even cosmic entities refused to bear. Human power within the framework of *taskhīr* therefore simultaneously generates an ethical burden through the concept of *amānah* (trust). The greater human authority over nature becomes, the greater humanity's moral obligation to prevent ecological destruction.

Second, the Qur'an consistently demonstrates solidarity with vulnerable beings. Throughout the Qur'anic discourse, strong ethical concern is directed toward marginalized groups within the social order. QS. An-Nisa' [4]: 36 commands believers to act benevolently toward parents, relatives, orphans, and the poor. Likewise, QS. At-Taubah [9] regulates the distribution of zakat to socially vulnerable communities. These passages indicate that Qur'anic ethics consistently directs social power toward the protection of vulnerability. This orientation appears particularly explicit in QS. Al-Mā'ūn [107]: 1-3:

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ
فَإِنَّكَ الَّذِي يُدْعُ الْبَنِينَ
وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ

"Have you seen the one who denies religion? It is he who repels the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor."

Here, the protection of vulnerable individuals becomes a primary indicator of religiosity itself. Spirituality in the Qur'anic worldview is therefore not measured solely through ritual devotion, but equally through ethical conduct toward the weak and marginalized. The same ethical pattern recurs throughout Qur'anic injunctions and prohibitions: the prohibition of corruption on earth, the prohibition against oppressing orphans, the prohibition of infanticide, the condemnation of slavery and injustice, the obligation to feed the poor, and the institutionalization of zakat and charity. Collectively, these commands reveal a coherent ethical structure centered upon protecting vulnerable beings from the domination of stronger powers. Within an ecological framework, this ethical orientation extends beyond vulnerable humans to include non-human beings and the natural world, both of which are susceptible to human exploitation. Third, the Qur'an recognizes the moral and spiritual value of non-human beings. Animals and other non-human creatures are not portrayed merely as biological objects. QS. Al-An'am [6]: 38 states:

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَيْرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَّمٌ أَمْثَالُكُمْ

"There is no creature that crawls upon the earth nor bird that flies with its wings except that they are communities like yourselves."

The use of the term *umam* (communities or nations) for animals signifies Qur'anic recognition of the moral and spiritual existence of non-human beings. Animals are thus understood as living communities that maintain a relationship with God, rather than merely functioning as instruments for human interests. This perspective is further reinforced in QS. An-Nur [24]: 41:



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...وَالطَّيْرُ صَفَّتْ كُلُّ قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُ وَتَسْبِيحَهُ

"And the birds with wings outspread, each knows its prayer and glorification."

Verses such as these challenge extreme forms of anthropocentrism that position humanity as the sole bearer of value within the universe. From the Qur'anic perspective, non-human beings also possess spiritual dimensions and participate within the same cosmic community devoted to God.

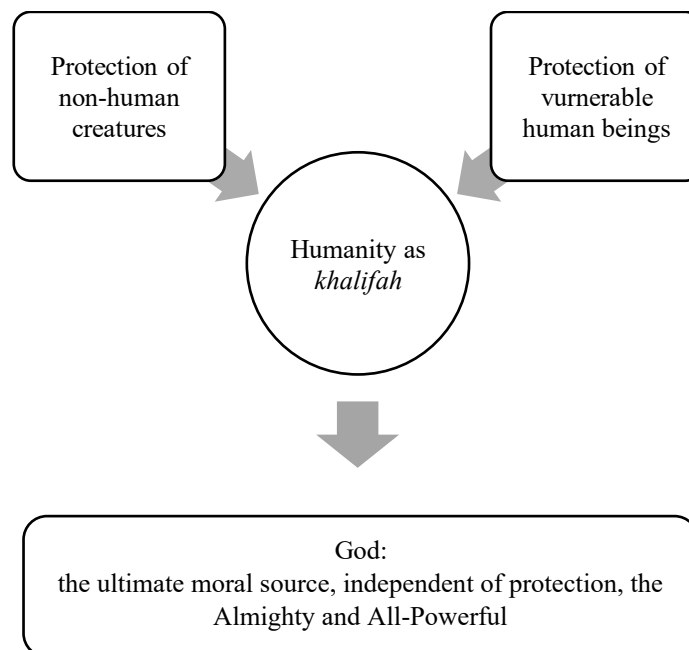
Fourth, God occupies the position of absolute reality and the highest moral source. Unlike all created beings, which are finite and vulnerable, God in the Qur'an is presented as the absolute ontological and moral center of existence. God does not require protection from humanity, for He is the owner and sovereign of all creation. This principle is affirmed in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 284:

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمُوتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

"To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth..."

Within this structure, God occupies the highest position as the ontological and moral source of the cosmos. Ecological protection in the Qur'anic worldview is therefore not directed toward "protecting God," but toward safeguarding vulnerable beings within His creation. Based on this framework, the hierarchy of vulnerability in the Qur'an may be understood as a dynamic and layered structure, as illustrated in the following scheme.

Figure 1. The Structure of the Dynamic Hierarchy of Vulnerability





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Based on the structure illustrated above, the first level consists of non-human beings and vulnerable human groups that are most susceptible to exploitation and therefore require ethical protection. The second level is occupied by humanity as *khalīfah*, endowed with moral capacity and authority to preserve and sustain the earth. At the highest level stands God as the Absolute Reality who is entirely beyond vulnerability and in no need of protection. Through this paradigm, the concepts of *khalīfah* and *taskhīr*, which at first glance may appear anthropocentric, undergo a significant transformation in meaning. Humanity is no longer understood as the sovereign ruler of the earth in a dominative sense, but rather as the bearer of a moral trust tasked with maintaining the continuity of life. In the modern context, human beings possess immense technological, industrial, and ecological power. Consequently, rivers, forests, animals, and entire ecosystems increasingly occupy vulnerable positions in relation to human exploitation. This condition intensifies humanity's moral responsibility to protect ecological balance and preserve the integrity of creation.

Nevertheless, this hierarchy of vulnerability is neither fixed nor essentialist. Vulnerability is contextual and may shift according to particular ecological situations. In the wilderness, for instance, humans themselves may become weak and vulnerable before predators or natural disasters. Under such circumstances, moral positioning and relations of power may be reversed. Vulnerability in the Qur'anic perspective, therefore, is not permanently attached to any species; rather, it depends upon configurations of power, capability, and existential circumstance. The Qur'an portrays humanity simultaneously as a powerful being (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 30) and as *mustaḍ'afūn* (the vulnerable or oppressed), as noble yet capable of corruption (*fasād*), and as entrusted with responsibility while also described as ignorant and unjust (QS. Al-Ahzab [33]: 72). Moral value thus emerges not from ontological status, species hierarchy, or metaphysical superiority, but from relations of power, the capacity to inflict harm, conditions of vulnerability, and the consequences of destruction.

Based on this structure, the Qur'an cannot easily be reduced to the ideological categories commonly developed within modern Western environmental philosophy, such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, or even theocentrism in their rigid and singular forms. Anthropocentrism generally positions humans as the center of value; biocentrism emphasizes the equal value of all living beings; ecocentrism prioritizes the integrity of ecosystems as wholes; while theocentrism places God at the center of all reality. The Qur'an, however, presents a relational structure that is more dynamic, contextual, and grounded in moral trust (*amānah*), thereby resisting complete identification with any one of these paradigms in an absolute sense.

On the one hand, the Qur'an indeed acknowledges the distinctive position of humanity through the concept of *khalīfah fī al-arḍ*. On the other hand, it also grants spiritual recognition to nature and non-human beings. This complexity indicates that the Qur'anic worldview moves beyond the dichotomous ecological categorizations often found in modern environmental discourse. Concepts such as *khalīfah*, *amānah*, and the prohibition of *fasād* emphasize moral responsibility rather than ontological supremacy over nature. Humanity is therefore not the absolute center of value, but a moral subject entrusted with responsibility within a broader cosmic relationship.

Consistently, the Qur'an repeatedly condemns *fasād* (destruction), *isrāf* (excessive exploitation), and various forms of injustice. The Qur'anic notion of corruption is closely associated with the abuse of power and the disruption of relational balance. Consequently, those who possess greater power also bear greater moral responsibility. In the contemporary ecological context, humanity possesses unparalleled technological, industrial, and ecological



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capacities, making humans the species most capable of inflicting destruction upon the earth. Therefore, the protection of vulnerable beings and the prevention of ecological destruction may serve as key hermeneutical principles for understanding concepts such as *khalīfah fī al-ard* and *taskhīr*, which have often been interpreted in excessively anthropocentric and exploitative ways.

The ethical imperative to protect the vulnerable is also strongly reflected in the Prophetic tradition. The Prophet Muhammad repeatedly connected religiosity with the protection of marginalized and vulnerable beings. In a hadith narrated by Suwayd ibn Muqarrin RA, the Prophet said to a man who slapped his servant: "*Set him free!*" (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim). This narration demonstrates that social authority and power must never be employed to oppress those in weaker positions. The same ethical logic may be extended into ecological relations: the greater humanity's power over nature, the greater its moral responsibility to avoid destruction and exploitation. In summary, this framework may be conceptualized through the three Qur'anic pillars illustrated in the following figure, which synthesizes various characteristics of the Qur'anic cosmic discourse.

Figure 2. Qur'anic Pillars in Cosmic Relations

Pillar 1: the trust of power (*amanah al-quwwah*)

The greater the power, the greater the moral responsibility entrusted to it

Pillar 2: protection of vulnerability

All vulnerable beings are entitled to protection

Pillar 3: prevention of greater *fasad*

In situation of moral dilemma, the preferable ethical choice is the one that prevents greater destruction and injustice

Accordingly, the central concern of the Qur'an does not primarily revolve around the question of "who stands at the center of the universe," but rather around "who is in need of moral protection." Based on the previously discussed hierarchy of vulnerability and the three foundational pillars outlined above, the Qur'an essentially advances two major ethical principles. The first principle is the responsibility of the stronger party to protect those who are more vulnerable. This principle applies not only within social relations among human beings, but also within ecological relations between humanity and the natural world. The second principle is the obligation to minimize *fasād* (destruction) and prevent relational collapse within the cosmic order. Together, these two principles give Qur'anic ethics a distinctive character that differs significantly from both modern anthropocentric and ecocentric paradigms. The primary concern of the Qur'an is therefore not the supremacy of a particular being, but rather relational protection, moral responsibility, and the prevention of destruction within the totality of God's creation. In this sense, the Qur'an does not seek to determine which entity occupies the center of the universe, as emphasized respectively in anthropocentrism or ecocentrism, but instead focuses on how power ought to be exercised in order to protect vulnerable beings and prevent greater forms of destruction and injustice.



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4. CONCLUSION

Based on an intertextual reading, the Qur'an, as part of the broader Abrahamic scriptural tradition, cannot be reduced to a single ideological category derived from modern Western discourse, whether anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism, or theocentrism. Both the Qur'an and the Bible contain diverse and multilayered portrayals of humanity, nature, and the cosmos. Certain passages appear anthropocentric, such as the concept of *stewardship* in Genesis 1: 26-28, the notion of *khalifah* in QS. Al-Baqarah: 30, and *taskhīr* in QS. Al-Jathiyah:13, all of which emphasize humanity's authority or responsibility over the earth. Other passages reflect ecocentric tendencies, including Romans 8: 19-22 with its recognition of ecological suffering, and QS. Al-Hadid: 1 which portrays the cosmos as participating in divine glorification. At the same time, both scriptures remain fundamentally theocentric insofar as God is presented as the ultimate owner and sovereign of creation. These findings suggest that reductive attempts to interpret the Qur'an exclusively through one ecological ideology inevitably obscure the complexity and plurality of its worldview.

Accordingly, the ecocritical framework employed in reading the Qur'an cannot remain singular or reductionist. The Qur'an repeatedly employs the term *al-Ard* (earth), which appears approximately 425 times, indicating the central significance of the earth within the Qur'anic cosmological imagination. The diversity of Qur'anic verses concerning humanity and nature ultimately reveals what this study identifies as a dynamic hierarchy of vulnerability. At the first level stand non-human creatures and the natural world, particularly through the concept of *taskhīr*, which implies an asymmetrical relationship in which humanity possesses greater power and therefore greater responsibility toward nature. The second level includes vulnerable human communities (*mustad'afūn*), such as orphans, the poor, widows, and other marginalized groups consistently defended by the Qur'an. The third level concerns humanity in general as *khalifah*, entrusted with preserving balance, justice, and prosperity on earth. Above all stands God as the Absolute and All-Powerful, whose transcendence places Him beyond vulnerability and dependence.

This hierarchy of vulnerability, however, is not fixed but dynamic and relational. The Qur'an simultaneously portrays human beings as noble yet weak, entrusted yet ignorant, righteous yet capable of oppression, and at times even lower than animals. Such complexity reflects contemporary ecological realities in which humans often occupy positions of superiority within urban-industrial civilization, while non-human beings become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. Yet in other contexts, such as wilderness environments, human beings themselves may become the vulnerable party. Vulnerability in the Qur'anic worldview is therefore contextual rather than absolute. Consequently, the ethical center of the Qur'an is not determined by identifying who stands at the center of the universe, but rather by recognizing which beings most urgently require protection. Alongside this concern for vulnerable beings, the Qur'an repeatedly condemns *fasād* (destruction), injustice, and excessive exploitation (*isrāf*). From this analysis emerge three foundational ethical pillars: the trust of power and responsibility embodied in *khalifah*, protection of vulnerable beings, and the prevention of greater destruction. In situations of ethical tension or ecological dilemma, the prevention of greater *fasād* ultimately becomes the primary moral imperative within the Qur'anic worldview.



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