

Divine Ownership and Resourcefulness as the Basic View of Islamic Eco-Imagination

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Abstract. If we consider the relationship between the triangle of man, nature, and God, we may say that the secular imagination of nature is its imagination of nature directly as a tool for its benefit. In my paper, I explain the secular ecological view that is summarized in Mario Bunge's statement. In his view, the technological process as human activity based on a kind of ecological view has usually been guided by five maxims that justify the unlimited exploitation of natural and social resources. He adds that today, all these principles have been rejected and largely modified.

However, in the Islamic perspective of nature, this relationship is through God. God in the Islamic view is not only the creator of Nature but also, He is the owner and resource of everything in nature. This view is about everything in the ecological system of the world like men, animals, plants, and stones. I will analyze this ecological view from Quranic teachings. In this kind of ecological view, we have no right to do what we want in nature. Before every kind of intervention in the ecosystem, we must examine rulings, and due to those rulings, we can do our actions.

Keywords: ecology, Islamic view, Divine ownership, Divine resourcefulness, eco-
imagination

1. Cosmological view in the history of Islamic thought

There have been some cosmological views among Muslim thinkers like *Ikhwan As-safa* (Brothers of Sincerity) some centuries ago. They tried to introduce a comprehensive view of the universe and man in a kind of similarity. They imagined that man is a small Universe and the Universe is a great man. All the philosophical principles and concepts of *Ikhwan al-Safa* (Brothers of Sincerity) regarding the creation of the world and the *ratio* of its different levels are gathered in two philosophical principles, which are the similarity between the small and big world (as man and universe) and the hierarchy of the world, which is connected with each other (Nasr, 1978). These two concepts are not limited to Islamic cosmology, but can also be found in the beliefs of the Greeks, Christians, Chinese, and ancient Indians, and contain allegories that with their power and beauty can draw the human soul to meanings beyond the world of the senses, and therefore limited to cosmology and it is not a natural science, but also includes a part of theology.

In the science of cosmology, these theories are also of special importance because they are considered important ways to show the unity of nature and the inner relations between man and nature. As a result of the similarity between the small world and the great world, the ancient

natural sciences are considered a basis for the supernatural sciences, and reflection on nature and investigation in the natural sciences play an important role in the journey of man toward the realm of the kingdom, and on the other hand, science. In fact, man himself is the key to the reservoir of the secrets of creation.

Based on this eco-imagination they tried to explain other phenomena in the world like industries, music, art, mathematics, the goal of the world, and so on. This imagination was not an imagination of a thinker that was, in that situation, the only kind of introducing scientific view but this collective view was written by a collection of friend scholars that named themselves as brothers in kindness, in 53 treatises. The importance of this work was of two things: first, the treatises refer to an overview of all things and phenomena in the material and spiritual world in their relation. Therefore, it is named the first philosophical encyclopedia. Second: the work was written in cooperation with some scholars for the first time.

The idea of the great universe and the small universe as man has been influential ideas among Muslim thinkers especially among mystics in the history of Islamic thought until now. This is a kind of comprehensive view, for explaining all material and spiritual things in relation to the Divine.

2. The consequences of secular imagination about nature

However, although some Islamic teachings were their origin inspired by their imagination, this overview could not account for an Islamic view that might be compatible with the structure of Islamic teachings. If we want to introduce an eco-imagination from an Islamic viewpoint based on Islamic teachings in Quran, this imagination will be different from secular imagination.

If we want to explain Eco-imagination from a secular point of view it may be summarized in Mario Bunge's statement about the character of modern man's view about nature which must be used for the benefit of humankind by technology (Bunge, 2003). He states that in the modern era, the technological process as human activity based on a kind of eco-imagination, has usually been guided (or misguided) by the following maxims:

- 1- Man is separate from and more valuable than nature.
- 2- Man has the right (or even the duty) to subdue nature to his own (private or social) benefit.
- 3- Man has no responsibility toward nature: he may be the keeper (or even the prison warden) of his brother, but he is not the nanny of nature.
- 4- The ultimate task of technology is the fullest exploitation of natural and human resources (the unlimited increase in GNP) at the lowest cost without regard for anything else.
- 5- Technologists and technicians are morally irresponsible; they are to carry on their tasks without being distracted by any ethical or aesthetic scruples. The latter is the exclusive responsibility of the policymakers.

Although Bunge's explanation is for the introduction of the role of technology in the modern era, it gives a very good picture of the secular imagination of ecology as well.

Bunge explains that these maxims justify the unlimited exploitation of natural and social resources. He says that in recent years secular man has come to distrust these maxims and

rejects them through his instrumental rationality; because he has realized that they ignore the dark side of technology. He stipulates that up to the present time, man has not offered an alternative ethical code and that it is high time we tried to create alternative ethics of technology. These alternative ethics should have different desiderata and be constructed based on our improved knowledge of both nature and society. Bunge states that man must design and enforce an ethical code for technology that includes every technological process and its implications at both the individual and the social levels.

Today, all these principles have been rejected except the second principle. Although adherence to these principles is still practiced in many cases, at least theoretically, they have been largely modified. For example:

- 1- We know that man is not separate from nature (Glaser et al., 2008, 14).
- 2- This clause is still valid.
- 3- Man is responsible to nature (36).
- 4- Side effects should be considered in technology development (37).
- 5- Technology stakeholders, such as users, designers, and policymakers, have a moral responsibility (Jonas, 2014, 37).

This is a secular treatment based on man's own rationality for escaping from those disasters that man encountered through the last view that had at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although the first five principles have been rejected theoretically, their second five alternatives are often controversial. However, it must be noted that both the first five principles and the second five principles that reject the first ones are based on secularity. This kind of secular eco-imagination shows that secular rationality is so narrow that cannot give a thoroughly suitable imagination that can continue to be dominant for all mankind at all times.

Taqavi and others examined the fifth first maxims of secular eco-imagination with some Islamic teaching that he named Islamic alternatives (Taqavi et al., 2021, 1-10). He stated that in Islamic teaching the fundamental view about nature is different from the first five maxims as well as the second five maxims. His attempt is to show a different approach toward using technology in our life based on the different worldviews of qur'anic teachings that do not treat by emphasizing morality in benefitting from technology for escaping from disasters of modern attitude toward technology. He classifies these teachings in some views that Quran teaches us about God, nature, and mankind. Although his classification is introduced for a different proposal as an alternative instead of ethical consideration in using technology it is a good introduction to the Islamic worldview that can overlap with my introduction of the Islamic view of eco-imagination.

I am going to introduce an Islamic eco-imagination and show the total difference between an Islamic eco-imagination from a secular one in the following explanation.

3. Divine Lordship as the central view of Islamic teachings on eco-imagination

If we consider the relationship between the triangle of man, nature, and God, we may say that the secular imagination of the relation between man and nature is man's imagination of nature directly as a tool for its benefit. But in the Islamic perspective of nature, this relationship is *through* God. God in the Islamic view is not only the creator of Nature but also, He is **the owner and resourceful** of everything in nature, in its widest meaning. This is the meaning of *Rabb* in qur'anic terminology.

We have seen that in the modern era, most thinkers believe in God. The secularity is not in belief or disbelief of God but is the belief in *Robubiyyat* or ownership and resourcefulness of God. If we believe in God but do not believe in His ownership and resourcefulness, which is the basic view of secularity, then the only instrument for mapping man's relation to nature is man's own rationality. But in an Islamic view, this rationality is due to God.

Divine ownership and resourcefulness mean that His permission makes us owners of something. By His permission and order, we may intervene in nature including ourselves. We will be the owner of something because He permits us to intervene in that thing, and we cannot do anything by that thing other than those ranges that God has determined. We are not the owner of ourselves because of ourselves, but because of the permission of God. Therefore, we cannot do everything with our bodies and souls. Suicide is forbidden because He is the owner of our bodies and suicide is out of the range that God has permitted us to intervene.

Likewise, this Imagination is about everything in the world like men, animals, plants, and stones. *Halal* (legit) is what we can do within the range of Divine permission, and *Haram* (forbidden) is what we cannot do because it is out of the range of God's permission.

In this kind of eco-imagination, we have no right to do what we want in nature. Before every kind of intervention in the ecosystem, we must examine the rulings that we have from God, and due to those rulings, we can do our actions. The reason that we must tongue the name of Allah in slaughtering sheep or hens is that God is the owner of the life of every animal and we remember that we can slaughter them because Allah has permitted us to slaughter them only for our eating (and we have not any permission to slaughter them for some other reasons).

This eco-imagination compels us to investigate God's orders for any kind of intervention in any part of the environment. Through this investigation, we will be able to know the true eco-imagination that we must have through God's guidance. This view can be introduced as the most important kind of Islamic eco-imagination.

What we said that God is the owner and respectful of all things such as man, nature, and the universe is the fundamental teaching of the Islamic view about nature and man. This view has been elaborated on many Quranic teachings in detail. Some of these main teachings are as follows:

- 1- *The oneness of God alongside His greatness and omnipresence.* He is the One, the Absolute, and the Infinite; the Infinitely Good and All-Merciful. He is the One who is at once transcendent and immanent. Although He is transcendent He is Immanent which means He is greater than all we can imagine, yet, as the Quran stipulates, He is closer to us than our jugular vein.

We did indeed create man, and We know what his soul whispers to him,
and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (Qaf/16)

All the facets of Islam are directly influenced by this unrivaled God, and attesting to this oneness is the axis around which all that is Islamic revolves. The importance of the Oneness of God in Islam is such that, according to the Quranic verses, the greatest sin in Islam and the only sin that God does not forgive is shirk, which means denying the Oneness of God, or *tawhid*.

Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomsoever He will, for whosoever ascribes partners unto God has surely fabricated a tremendous sin (Al-Nisa/48)

Allah is beyond all duality and relationality, beyond the differences of gender and all attributes that differentiate beings in this world. Allah is the source of all existence and all cosmic and human attributes and all things ultimately return to Him.

Islamic teachings emphasize the belief in the oneness of God alongside His greatness and omnipresence. *Allahu akbar*, which is usually translated as “God is the greatest,” is an accurate term meaning that God is greater than anything we can conceive of Him. In the Quran, God is omnipresent which is pointed to His nearness to man, and the fact that He is closer to man than himself and is present everywhere has been greatly emphasized, as stated in the following verse:

Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God (Al-Baqarah/ 115).

According to Islamic doctrine, the measure of a successful Islamic life is the degree to which one can realize *tawhid*. This means the integration of multiplicity into Unity (Nasr, 2002, 5–6).

God is absolute and infinite. The absoluteness of God means that He is devoid of otherness and relationality. There is no reality but the Divine Reality. And beyond all becoming and relativity, God is the only everlasting Reality. To say that God is infinite means that He is the origin of all cosmic reality. God is the root of all cosmic manifestation. And yet a stage of Divine reality can be found in all cosmic manifestations. Nature, in the light of the Absolute Reality of God, is the manifestation of the Divine, but it is not divine.

The root of the sin of modernism is that it attributes to nature an independent reality that is distinct from the higher order of being. This has caused modern man to treat nature as a purely material reality and exploit and plunder it as he pleases (Nasr, 2017, 3-11).

Based on Islamic metaphysics, the entirety of Creation is the theophany of the Names and Attributes of God (Ibid).

- 2- *Nature is conscious and is praising God.* According to the Quranic verses, all beings in nature, including animate and inanimate, are conscious and praise God. Numerous verses in the Quran explicitly state this; for example:

The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise. Truly He is Clement, Forgiving. (Al-Isra/44)

They will say to their skins, “Why did you bear witness against us?” They will reply, “God, Who makes all things speak, made us speak. (Fussilat/21)

The thunder hymns His praise, as do the angels, in awe of Him. (Al-Ra'd/13)

- 3- *God is the Creator of nature.* According to the verses of the Quran, God is the sole Creator and owner of the heavens and the earth, He has no partner in protecting and guiding them, and is the Creator of all that exists.

Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. All are devoutly obedient to Him, the Originator of the heavens and the earth. (Al-Baqarah/116–117)

In fact, nature is God's creation and if we are to speak of the value of the universe, we cannot overlook the fact that the Creator of nature is the source of all values and perfections.

- 4- *God created the earth in a way that is suitable for human life.* Some of the verses of the Quran stipulate that God has made the earth a repose and a cradle for man. This metaphor means that God created the earth in a way that is suitable for human life. Below are some of the verses that mention this point

He Who made for you the earth a place of repose and the sky a canopy, and sent water from the sky by which He brought forth fruits for your provision. So do not set up equals unto God, knowingly. (Al-Baqarah/22)

The One Who made the earth a cradle for you, and threaded paths for you therein. He sent down water from the sky, wherewith We brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation (Ta-Ha/53)

He it is Who made the earth a cradle for you and made paths for you therein, that haply you may be guided (Al-Zukhruf/10)

- 5- *God has created everything on earth for man as well as its beauty.* Some of the Quranic verses assert that everything on earth has been created for man. For instance:

He it is Who created for you all that is on the earth. (Al-Baqarah/ 29)

He made subservient unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth-all together. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect. (Al-Jathiyah/13).⁷

These verses demonstrate that in the Quranic worldview, nature has been created to serve mankind, it praises God, and God dominates it and swears by it. Some verses of the Quran state that the beauties of creation are for man. For instance:

And cattle has He created for you, in which there is warmth and [other] uses, and whereof you eat. And in them, there is beauty for you, when you bring them home, and when you take them out to pasture. (An-Nahl/5–6)

- 6- *Man is superior to other creatures.* Some of the Quranic verses point out human superiority over other creatures.

Truly We created man in the most beautiful stature. (Al-Teen/4)

Then of the drop, We created a blood clot, then of the blood clot We created a lump of flesh, then of the lump of flesh We created bones and We clothed the bones with flesh; then We brought him into being as another creation. Blessed is God, the best of creators! (Al-Mu'minun/14)

We have indeed honored the Children of Adam, and We carry them over land and sea, and provide them with good things, and We have favored them above many We have created. (Al-Isra/70)

- 7- *Nature is an "ayah" or sign.* Several verses of the Quran mention that the earth and the heavens as well as many of the creatures are "*ayat*" or signs of God for wise, faithful, and pious people.

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth; and the variation of the night and the day; and the ships that run upon the sea with what benefits mankind; and the water God sends down from the sky whereby He revives the earth after its death, scattering all manner of beast therein; and the shifting of the winds; and the clouds subdued between the sky and the earth are surely signs for a people who understand. (Al-Baqarah/164)

Truly God is the Cleaver of the grain and the fruit stone. He brings forth the living from the dead, and He is the One Who brings forth the dead from the living. That is God—how, then, are you perverted — Cleaver of the dawn. He has made the night for repose, and the sun and the moon for reckoning. Such is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. He it is Who has made for you the stars, that you might be guided by them amid the darkness of land and sea. We have expounded the signs for a people who know. And He it is Who brought you into being from a single soul, and then [has given you] a dwelling place and a repository. We have expounded the signs for a people who understand. And He it is Who sends down water from the sky. Thereby We bring forth the shoot of every plant, and from it, We bring forth vegetation, from which We bring forth grain in closely packed rows; and from the date palm and from its sheaths, [We bring forth] clusters of dates hanging low, and gardens of grapes, olives, and pomegranates, like unto one another and yet not alike. Look upon their fruits, as they grow and ripen! Truly in that are signs for a people who believe. (Al-An'am/95–99)

These verses show us another aspect of the significance of nature in the Quranic view. Nature is a sign of God; it is an arrow pointing in the direction of the Divine, which can remind us of God. The point that is noteworthy in verse 164 of Al-Baqarah is the focus on the ship in this verse. The ship is an artifact made by man and it does not exist in virgin nature. In this verse, God considers the ship, as a human artifact, to be a sign for those who think and reason.

- 8- *God has subjugated nature for man.* Several Quranic verses explicitly assert that God has subjugated nature for man. Among these verses are the following:

He made subservient unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth—all together. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect. (Al-Jaathiyah/13)

Have you not considered that God has made whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you and has poured His Blessings upon you, both outwardly and inwardly? (Luqmaan/20)

Hast thou not considered that God has made whatsoever is on the earth subservient unto you—and the ship sails upon the sea—by His Command? And He maintains the sky lest it falls upon the earth, save by His Leave. Truly God is Kind and Merciful unto mankind. (Al-Hajj/65)

God has subdued nature to man so that man can manipulate it to his benefit.

- 9- *God does not permit any way of treating nature and the universe and has introduced guidelines for the way men should treat nature.* In the Quranic worldview, as mentioned previously, God has created nature and everything that exists in the heavens and earth for mankind and subjugated them for him. This view gives high status to man in the universe. Thus, the question that arises is: Can men treat nature and the world in whatever way they choose?

In brief, it should be stated that the Holy Quran does not permit any way of treating nature and the universe and has introduced guidelines for the way men should treat nature.

In the Quran, it is stated that the appearance of corruption throughout the land and sea is the result of sins men have committed, Quran says:

Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of that which men's hands have earned, that He may let them taste some of that which they have done, that haply they might return. (Al-Rum/ 41).

- 10- *Using nature for satanic purposes is prohibited.* The exploitation of nature is the result of satanic temptations. It is inferred from the content of An-Nisa 119 that some of the ways of treating the creation of God are the result of satanic temptations and these ways

of treating the creation of God will lead to nothing but a clear loss. Thus, the exploitation of nature with a satanic approach is forbidden. Therefore, it can be concluded that man should not develop technology in any arbitrary way. Man is responsible toward nature for making it inhabitable and improving its condition:

He brought you forth from the earth and commanded you to make it inhabitable. (Hud/61)

According to this verse, mankind has been ordered to make the earth inhabitable and improve it so he can benefit from it. According to some of the interpreters of the Quran including Muhammad Hussain Tabatabai, refusing to exploit the earth for the purposes for which it was created or using it for purposes other than what God intended is ingratitude for God's blessings. Apart from the fact that the aforementioned verse asserts the necessity of making the earth inhabitable, the prohibition of its opposite, that is, the destruction of the environment, can also be deduced from it (Mohaghegh Damad, 2014, 220–1).

In several Quranic verses, man is explicitly forbidden from extravagance. For instance:

Do not squander wastefully. Truly the wasteful are the brethren of satans. (Al-Isra/26–27)

Eat and drink, but be not prodigal. Truly He loves not the prodigal. (Al-A'raf/31)

Be not prodigal. Truly He loves not the prodigal. (Al-An'am/141)

The prodigals are the inhabitants of the Fire. (Ghafir/43)

- 11- *Man is God's caliph and vicegerent.* Man's duty towards nature and the strategies that God has provided to man in this regard are not limited to making earth inhabitable and refraining from extravagance. In a broader approach, God introduces man as His successor on earth. Thus, Man's treatment of nature should be such that it would be compatible with man's high status in the universe as God's successor. Several Quranic verses assert that man is God's caliph and successor on earth. These include:

And when thy Lord said to the angels, "I am placing a vicegerent upon the earth," they said, "Wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood, while we hymn Thy praise and call Thee Holy?" He said, "Truly I know what you know not." (Al-Baqarah/30)

He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth and raised some of you by degrees above others, that He may try you in that which He has given you. Truly thy Lord is Swift in retribution, and truly He is Forgiving, Merciful. (Al-An'am/165)

He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth. So whosoever disbelieves, his disbelief is to his detriment. The disbelief of the disbelievers increases them with their Lord in naught but odium. And

the disbelief of the disbelievers increases them in naught but loss.
(Faatir/39)

Raghib Isfahani (1992, 293) states that the caliphate means vicegerency and the caliph is the vicegerent. Man's caliphate is one of the concepts that determine man's status in the universe as well as his responsibility toward nature. The fact that God has appointed man as His vicegerent on earth indicates that mankind has an elevated status in the universe. Man's role as God's vicegerent also implies that the principles governing human interaction with nature must be proportionate to his position as God's vicegerent.

12- *Man does not own nature.* According to the Quranic verses, God is the real owner of Creation and everything is under His control. This ownership is exclusive to God and cannot be transferred to man or any other being.

Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. All are devoutly obedient to Him (Al-Baqarah/116)

Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and God is Powerful over all things. (Al Imran/189)

Man has only relative ownership of what God has subjugated for him and any manipulation of it must be based on the criteria set by the Real Owner. In other words, according to Islamic teachings, nature and man belong to God, and to manipulate nature, man must have permission from the Real Owner. Obtaining permission is subject to the following of the Divine commands that have reached man through the prophets and in the form of religion (Mohaghegh Damad, 2014, 32).

As Mohaghegh Damad (Ibid) puts it, according to verses such as Al-Baqarah/107

Dost thou not know that unto God belongs Sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and that you have neither protector nor helper apart from God?

and Al Imran/26

'Say, "O God, Master of Sovereignty. Thou givest sovereignty to whomsoever Thou wilt, and wrestest sovereignty from whomsoever Thou wilt. Thou exaltest whomsoever Thou wilt, and abasest whomsoever Thou wilt. In Thy Hand is the good. Truly Thou art Powerful over everything.

God is not only the owner of the heavens, the earth, and man, but also the owner of the Kingdom, Monarchy, and Dominance, and bestows them on whomever he wishes and takes them away from whomever he wishes. It means that He is the resourcefulness of all things in the world and their inhabitants in the world.

Javadi Amoli (1999, 48), citing verses such as Al-Hadeed/7

Believe in God and His Messenger and spend from that over which He has appointed you as trustees.

And Al-Nur/33

Give unto them from the Wealth of God, which He has given you.

argues that, apart from nature, man's personal assets and possessions also belong to God and man cannot use them without God's permission and consent. He believes that man must vicariously safeguard and exploit what God has bestowed on him.

Conclusion

Eco-imagination driven by Islamic teachings like what we showed in many verses of the Quran must be perceived in the light of the relationship between God, nature, and man. The most important feature of this relation is Divine ownership of all things especially man and His respectfulness.

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