



Saving Truth and Beauty: The Destruction of Nature and the Islamic Solution

RHAMIS KENT

YAQVEEN™
INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

Author Biography

Rhamis Kent

Rhamis Kent is a consultant with formal training in mechanical engineering (University of Delaware, B.S.M.E. '95) and permaculture-based regenerative whole systems design serving as a registered certified Permaculture Design instructor with PRI Australia. He is a former co-director of the [Permaculture Research Institute \(PRI\)](#). Rhamis has taught Permaculture Design (formal certification and short intensive courses) in Palestine/Occupied West Bank, Greece, Ethiopia, Yemen, Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and The United States. He has also performed additional consultancy work on projects in Spain, Colombia, Somaliland, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Western Sahara, and Iraq.

Mr. Kent currently serves as a consultant with [United Designers International](#), a Supervisory Board member of The Netherlands-registered non-profit [Ecosystem Restoration Camps Foundation](#), and as a Trustee and Implementation Team member at [Plant for Peace Foundation \(UK\)](#). He is also a co-founder of the [IGE-PEARL](#) (Islamic Gift Economy - Program for Ethical Appropriate and Regenerative Livelihoods).

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Introduction

The destruction of nature can be understood as a running indictment of the collective character and state of the human species. The ecological health of a given place mirrors the true ethical, spiritual, and psychological condition of its inhabitants. The connection between our moral failings and the destruction of the Earth is affirmed by Allah in the Qur'an when He tells us, "Corruption has appeared on the land and sea, by reason of what your hands have earned. That Allah may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return."¹

History is strewn with catastrophes rooted in the application of erroneous cosmological and epistemological assumptions, and a failure to properly translate what is being perceived into appropriate responses to the world—and the reality—humans find themselves occupying. This delusional misunderstanding of one's self and one's surroundings produces repeatable and predictable consequences. This paper examines some of these misunderstandings, using the Islamic tradition as a reference point, in an attempt to identify solutions for a clearly persistent human problem. Our objective is to highlight the clear moral and ethical injunctions found in the Qur'an and Prophetic Traditions, which together comprise a distinct framework of comportment towards nature that offers a practical alternative to the ruinous path humanity finds itself traversing.

The Qur'an, referring to the role designated for Adam and his kind, recounts, "And [mention] when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make upon the Earth a steward (*khalīfa*).'"²

The angels' response indicates an awareness, even at the moment of humanity's genesis, of this species' potential for profound evil: "They (the angels) said, 'Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare your praise and sanctify You?'"

¹ Qur'an 30:41.

² Qur'an 2:30.

To this, Allah gives a decisive rebuke: “I know that which you do not know.” And then, we are told: “He taught Adam the names—all of them.”³

According to broad scholarly consensus, the *names* are the Divine Names or *Attributes of Allah* reflected in His creation—including human beings: “We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is a Witness over all things?”⁴

These verses provide a cosmological, cosmogonical, epistemological, and teleological explanation for how human beings should orient themselves in relation to the abode they’ve been situated within. If the world is indeed an expression of Divine Attributes—or, as some have said, meanings rendered into objects and images—belief in and reverence for Allah demands that it be dealt with in a manner that ensures its preservation and nurtures its ability to thrive. That is what would qualify as a sincere display of gratitude for the gifts bestowed—and gratitude, ultimately, is the key to saving the Earth and ourselves.

A dilemma of history and humanity

In his book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*,⁵ Dr. Jared Diamond identifies five factors that have historically contributed to civilizational collapse: climate change, hostile neighbors, collapse of essential trading partners, environmental problems, and failure to adapt to environmental issues.

He also lists 12 environmental problems facing mankind today, the first eight of which have historically contributed to the collapse of past societies:

1. Deforestation and habitat destruction
2. Soil problems (erosion, salinization, and soil fertility losses)
3. Water management problems
4. Overhunting

³ Qur’an 2:30–31.

⁴ Qur’an 41:53.

⁵ Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin Books/Penguin Group, 2011).

5. Overfishing
6. Effects of introduced (invasive) species on native species
7. Overpopulation
8. Increased per-capita impact of people

Furthermore, he says four new factors may contribute to the weakening and collapse of present and future societies:

1. Anthropogenic climate change
2. Accumulation of toxins in the environment
3. Energy shortages
4. Full human utilization of the Earth's photosynthetic capacity

Interestingly, the top three factors listed (deforestation and habitat destruction, soil problems, and water management problems) share the same origin: all are products of the sustained degradation of landscapes due to human mismanagement.

Even the COVID-19 global pandemic—along with a number of other relatively recent viral outbreaks such as Ebola, SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV, H1N1 aka “swine flu,” Nipah, even malaria—is directly linked to increasing rates of deforestation (particularly in tropical regions like Southeast Asia).⁶ These phenomena are so closely correlated that the rate of deforestation in a given area was found to be the number one predictor **of where the next pandemic will most likely emerge**. Approximately 60 percent of new infectious disease outbreaks over the past few decades were animal-borne—or zoonotic—diseases, including the aforementioned viral outbreaks. Climate change is anticipated to multiply this threat.

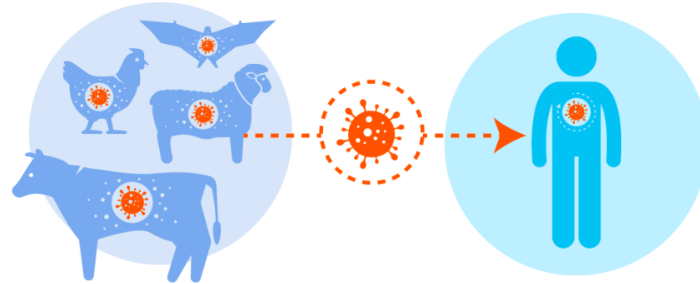
⁶ Gus Fisher, “Deforestation and Monoculture Farming Spread COVID-19 and Other Diseases,” Truthout, May 12, 2020, <https://truthout.org/articles/deforestation-and-monoculture-farming-spread-covid-19-and-other-diseases/>.

Figure 1:

The following information is from 

What are Zoonoses?

Zoonoses are diseases transmitted from animals to humans.



Source: UNEP Frontiers 2016 Report

Zoonoses make up

60%

of all infectious diseases in humans

Zoonoses are responsible for

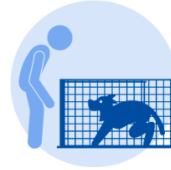
75%

of all emerging infectious diseases

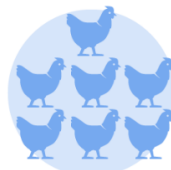
What's causing the increase in zoonosis today?



Deforestation and other land use changes



Illegal and poorly regulated wildlife trade



Intensified agriculture and livestock production



Antimicrobial resistance



Climate change

Source: UNEP Frontiers 2016 Report

Unsurprisingly, the economist E. F. Schumacher, citing *Topsoil and Civilization* by Tom Dale and Vernon Gill Carter,⁷ argues that the outcomes of empires and civilizations throughout human history have been largely dictated by how well—or poorly—the resource base that makes their existence possible has been managed. For those that have ultimately failed, the means and modes of failure are repeatable and predictable. According to Dale and Carter, between 10 and 30 civilizations have followed the same self-destructive pattern of behavior. As cited, this pattern involves:

- The cutting and burning of most usable timber from forested hillsides and valleys
- Mismanaged grazing of domesticated livestock, resulting in large areas of denuded and overexposed land
- The widespread destruction of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife
- Excessive soil erosion and removal of productive topsoil, and the subsequent silting of streams, reservoirs, irrigation canals, and harbors
- Mismanaged extractive industries resulting in the wasting of easily mined metals and minerals
- The loss of adequate resources and functional land necessary to support dense sedentary populations, forcing the pursuit of new land

Our modern crisis, then, in many ways reflects humanity's eternal dilemma: How do we create a life for ourselves that is dignified, pleasant, and free from undue pain without undermining the ecosystem within which our species has been situated?

History has a great deal to teach us about how well we've been able to accomplish this task in the aggregate. It also communicates what kind of people we are—a true, unfiltered reflection of the quality of our collective character as manifested by the condition of the lands we dwell in, and a world that responds reciprocally to

⁷ Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

what we do to it. As W.C. Loudermilk wrote in his book *Conquest of the Land Through Seven Thousand Years*:

In a very real sense the land does not lie; it bears a record of what men write on it. In a larger sense a nation writes its record on the land, and a civilization writes its record on the land—a record that is easy to read by those who understand the simple language of the land.⁸

Examining what has been documented within the annals of history—and, more critically, on Earth’s landscapes—leaves us with a damning verdict. Again and again, history and nature have borne witness to humanity’s inability to moderate its most destructive tendencies.

According to many conventional accounts, the advent of agriculture introduced us to the common crises that have marked human life on Earth for the past 7000 years. Dr. Jared Diamond, for instance, reckons that agriculture was the worst mistake in the history of the human race.⁹ The environmental degradation that marks this current period was initiated with the development of agriculture as the basis for state formation—not to be confused with “civilization.” Its emergence brought malnutrition, starvation, epidemic diseases, deep class divisions (i.e., a small, mostly non-productive consumer elite class and a comparatively large producer, peasant and working class), tyranny, and warfare.

The food surpluses generated by intensive agriculture led to the development of a variety of new “labor-saving” technologies and fields of specialization including segments of the population serving in policing and military capacities (i.e., the development of standing armies and professional militaries)—mostly to protect the relatively rich along with their property from the poor and destitute, as well as from invading bands of itinerant raiders making a living by plundering the accumulated wealth of sedentary societies.

⁸ Walter Clay Loudermilk, *Conquest of the Land Through Seven Thousand Years* (U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service, 1948), 1.

⁹ Jared Diamond, “The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race,” *Discover* 8, no. 5 (1987): 64–66, <https://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/materials/Diamond-TheWorstMistakeInTheHistoryOfTheHumanRace.pdf>.

James C. Scott, a professor of political science and co-director of the Agrarian Studies Program at Yale University, documents similar findings, asserting that agriculture was made possible by way of what he calls “the four domestications”: plants, animals, fire, and people.¹⁰ He suggests one of the ways people have been domesticated is through a gradually progressive process of “de-skilling,” making them more dependent on goods and services provided by others who possess them or the means to produce and supply them. This, in part, marks humanity’s transition from communities of relatively independent producers to an increasingly dependent, captive population of consumers.

Diamond’s and Scott’s assessments are neither flawless nor universally agreed upon. The history of Muslims’ engagement with agriculture and cultivation of land, as relayed through the *Filāḥa*¹¹ texts, stands in stark contrast to their narratives. Guy Theodore Wrench’s book *Reconstruction by Way of the Soil*¹² chronicles a markedly different set of outcomes—as told mostly by European historians—on the basis of the formidable skill, knowledge, and acumen employed by Muslim cultivators:

The Arabs had even a greater aptitude for agriculture than for letters and arts. What means of irrigation are now found in Andalusia were made by them.¹³

In short, they had irrigated and cultivated the land so excellently that it was befitting to call Andalusia a garden.¹⁴

Agriculture and horticulture were developed to an extent never heard of before.¹⁵

The agricultural system of the Moors in Spain, writes [American] historian S. P. Scott, was:

¹⁰ James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

¹¹ The Filaha Texts Project, <http://www.filaha.org/>.

¹² Guy Theodore Wrench, *Reconstruction By Way of the Soil* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), 262.

¹³ Monsieur Gustav le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes*, 1884, as quoted in Wrench, 169.

¹⁴ Monsieur Sédillot, *Histoire Générale des Arabes*, 1877, as quoted in Wrench, 169.

¹⁵ Martin Hume, as quoted in Wrench, 169 (referring to “the farming art of the Spanish Arabs”).

... the most complex, the most scientific, the most perfect, ever devised by the ingenuity of man. Its principles were derived from the extreme Orient, from the plains of Mesopotamia, and from the valley of the Nile—those gardens of the ancient world where, centuries before the dawn of authentic history, the cultivation of the earth had been carried to a state of extraordinary excellence. To the knowledge thus appropriated were added the results obtained from investigation and experiment, from the introduction of foreign plants; from the adoption of fertilizing substances; from the close and intelligent observation of the geographical distribution and climatic influence.

No cultivators had a more profound knowledge than these people of the value of water. They, like the great riverine peoples, from whom they derived so much knowledge, realized that the proper use of water was civilization. Without its just and conservative distribution, the true justice and magnanimity of civilization do not really exist.¹⁶

Wrench explains that this was made possible by prioritizing and acting in accordance with Islam's ethically-based cosmological, epistemological, and metaphysical framework. It is to this framework that we now turn.

Rediscovering our role

In his book *Al-Dharī'a ilā makārim al-sharī'a* (*The Path to the Noble Qualities of the Sacred Law*), the Persian scholar Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad, better known as al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. c. 1108), wrote about what he understood to be the existential role of the human being per the Islamic tradition. He stated:

Man has three specific functions. The first is to cultivate and prosper in the earth (*'imārat al-arḍ*), which is stated in the verse “He brought you out from the earth and made you inhabit it” (Qur'an 11:61). He should obtain his livelihood from earth, for himself and others. The second is to worship God as is stated: “I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me” (Qur'an 51:56). This means man should obey God's commands and prohibitions. The third is his vicegerency, which is mentioned in: “... and [I will] make you successors in the land and, then, [I will] observe what you

¹⁶ Wrench, 170.

will do” (Qur’an 7:129). This [vicegerency] is the imitation of God in accordance with man’s ability to rule by applying the noble qualities of the Law, which are wisdom, justice, forbearance, beneficence, and graciousness. Their purpose is to gain Paradise and proximity to God.¹⁷

What is particularly fascinating about this quote is that two of the three purposes noted (*‘imārat al-arḍ* and *khalīfa*) deal with the manner in which humanity comports itself in relation to the creation. Worship (*‘ibādāt*) accounts for only one of the three and even seemingly mundane acts—such as planting a tree—could count as worship if that is the intention in performing them. The famous hadith of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ confirms this: “Actions are according to intentions, and everyone will get what was intended...”¹⁸

The dangers accompanying the corruption of the creation are unequivocally communicated within the Qur’an and hadith literature:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

Corruption has appeared on the land and sea, by reason of what your hands have earned. That Allah may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return.¹⁹

‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās understood this verse to mean:

Corruption has appeared through the death of cattle, drought, lack of food and vegetation in the plains, mountains, countryside, and wilderness as well as in townships and cities because of the transgressions committed by people, (that He may make them taste) that He may make them be seized by (a part of that which they have done) of transgressions, (in order that they may return) in order that they may repent of their sins and thus be relieved.²⁰

¹⁷ Abū’l-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, “*al-Dhari’a ila makarim al-shari’a* (The Path to the Noble Qualities of the Sacred Law),” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54e6208ee4b05860a4600103/t/595a4c9a9f74562cf8fb1225/1499090076162/Raghib+Path+to+Virtue+Translation.pdf>.

¹⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, no. 1, bk. 1, hadith 1, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:1>.

¹⁹ Qur’an 30:41.

²⁰ Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas and Ibn Ya’qub al-Firuzabadi, *Tafsir Ibn ‘Abbas: The Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur’an (Volume II)*, ed. Yousef Meri, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Amman, Jordan: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought: Fons Vitae, 2008).

The Qur’anic and hadith references are clear and unambiguous in communicating the importance of humanity’s conduct with creation—and how nature’s resulting condition reveals the true quality of a person’s character.

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِّنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُو عَن كَثِيرٍ

And whatever misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned. And He pardons much.²¹

The world is sweet and verdant, and verily Allah has made you stewards in it, and He sees how you acquit yourselves.²²

Yet another clear warning provided in hadith: ‘Beware of the earth for it is your mother/unavoidable abode/home. No one does good or evil on her except that she will speak of it (on the Day of *Qiyāma*).’²³

Nature’s ability to expose falsehood is often underappreciated. In many ways it manifests truth, and does so elegantly and beautifully. Plato is famously quoted to have said that “beauty is the splendor of truth.” We should also be familiar with the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stating: “Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty.”²⁴ Indeed, Truth and true beauty are indissoluble.

Nature—with the intrinsic beauty and truth it embodies—cannot be corrupted without the corruptor eventually experiencing the consequences of doing so. Human beings are not exempt from this reality. We often forget that the human species is also a part of nature—a vital organ placed within the corpus of the terrestrial body comprising the Book of Creation. This terrestrial body forms what can be described as an ecological system or ecosystem—a biological community of organisms interacting with each other and with their physical environment. Ecological harmony depends on the establishment and recognition of rules of

²¹ Qur’an 42:30.

²² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2742, bk. 49, hadith 12, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2742>.

²³ *Faydul Qadir*, Hadith: 3260, *As-Sirajul Munir*, vol. 2 pg. 158, *Al-Mu’jamul Kabir*, Hadith: 4596, *Majma’uz Zawaid*, vol.1 pg.241. Also see *Targhib*, Hadith: 312; Grade: Hasan Li Ghairihi. <https://hadithanswers.com/beware-of-sinning-on-the-earth/>; Also refer to Qur’an 99:1-8.

²⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 91a; *al-Mu’jam al-Awsaṭ*, no. 6906.

engagement, the violation of which could endanger the system's operational integrity.

System failures are likely if breaches of protocol are permitted. This failure occurs not as an exogenous phenomenon, but as internal feedback arising from the system's misuse. In that respect, system failure is not unexpected—or at least it shouldn't be. For example, the function of physical pain is to alert the body that some error needs to be addressed. Pain prevents further injury only if it is acknowledged. Acknowledgment assumes the understanding and good judgment required to respond appropriately.

Faith traditions have been gifted to us to explain the Truth of Reality, the purpose of our existence, supplying a metaphysical map for navigating the human condition. If taken seriously, they should affect the way we think and how we behave in the world—determining if we decide to serve as divinely sanctioned exploiters or nurturers.

Recall that our father, Adam, was taught “the names” of everything, a privilege which rendered our status higher than that of the angels:

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

And He taught Adam the names—all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, “Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.”²⁵

Consider the significance of knowing what to call things. These designations provide insights into the existential reality, and right, of creation. Endowed with that knowledge, we are also equipped with an understanding of how to properly transact and conduct our lives.

William Chittick addressed the importance of this point in his piece *Ibn 'Arabi on the Benefit of Knowledge*, and it is worth quoting at length:

All of creation makes demands upon man, because he is created in God's form and has been appointed His vicegerent (*khalifa*). He has the God-given

²⁵ Qur'an 2:31.

duty, woven into his original created nature (*fitra*), to recognize the *haqq* [right] of things and to act accordingly. It is this *haqq* that must be known if his knowledge is to be true, right, worthy, and appropriate, for this *haqq* is identical with the *khalq* [creation] that God has established.

In short, beneficial knowledge is knowledge of ‘the what’ and ‘the why’ of ourselves and of things. In order to know a thing truly and benefit from the knowledge, we need to know what it is—its reality (*haqīqa*), which is nothing but its *khalq* and its *haqq*—and we need to know how we should respond to it. What exactly does it demand from us, rightly, truly, and appropriately? To put this into a formula, *tahqīq* means knowing the *haqīqa* of God and things and acting according to their *haqq*; Realization is to know things as they truly are and act appropriately in every circumstance.²⁶

Knowledge acts as a safeguard against unconsciously transacting our lives as oppressors and destroyers—violators of an order deservedly expecting its right and reality to be recognized and honored. With knowledge comes *adab*, and it is from *adab* that we develop the noble character and ethical comportment (*akhlāq*) needed to conduct human affairs in a manner consistent with our Reality. Having access to true knowledge prevents us from being subject to the conjecturing, hypothesizing, and theorizing of our own selves and other people—or stated another way, true knowledge liberates us from the tyranny of mankind’s ideas.

وَإِنْ تُطِيعْ أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ

And if you were to obey most of those on earth, they would lead you away from Allah’s Way. They follow nothing but assumptions and do nothing but lie.²⁷

Improperly interfacing with the creation guarantees certain repercussions. Human history is littered with an extensive catalog of civilizational collapses, disasters, and catastrophic events. These episodes are not random or without cause, as human error in the form of ignorance, intemperance, and hubris was more often than not the catalyst. Distinct, manifestly discernible patterns await our observation of

²⁶ William C. Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabi on the Benefit of Knowledge,” in *The Essential Sophia*, ed. Seyyid Hossein Nasr and Katherine O’Brien (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006).

²⁷ Qur’an 6:116.

them. This cyclical rising and falling—exaltation and abasement—follows a narrative arc that is both comforting and frightening in its predictability.

Our inability to read and decipher the proverbial Book of Creation—and the critical messages it communicates about our behavior—imperils us. Our apparent reluctance to learn this language, our dismissal of it as undeserving of deliberation, is all the more disappointing given that we are beings designed to read and decipher patterns.

The Qur'an reminds us of this:

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ سُنَّةُ الْأَوَّلِينَ أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ قُبُلًا

When guidance came to the people, nothing prevented them from believing and asking forgiveness from their Lord but the fact that the pattern of previous peoples did not occur to them or that the punishment did not appear before their eyes.²⁸

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا وَنَسِيَ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ ؕ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا ۖ وَإِنْ تَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ فَلَنْ يَهْتَدُوا إِلَّا أَبَدًا

And who could do a greater wrong than someone who is reminded of the Signs of his Lord and then turns away from them, forgetting all that he has done before? We have placed covers on their hearts, preventing them from understanding it, and heaviness in their ears. Though you call them to guidance, they will nonetheless never be guided.²⁹

Partake of [the Earth] gladly, so long as you are a benefactor, not a despoiler; a cultivator, not a destroyer.³⁰

²⁸ Qur'an 18:55.

²⁹ Qur'an 18:57.

³⁰ 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, related by Yahya ibn Adam al-Qurashi in *Kitab al-kharaj* on the authority of Sa'id ad-Dabbi.

The human species as producer-cultivator or consumer-destroyer

Most of us function in the world as consumers rather than producers. If we're honest, this is what we've been conditioned to be since birth in an age dominated by industrial consumerism—especially within the context of so-called “first world” nations and economies. Nothing less is required of us if this particular system is to continue to function.

We are defined and valued more as consumers than as citizens. This is all but confirmed by the practice of measuring the health of nation-states by their Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a metric overwhelmingly determined by consumer activity. Producing and consuming our own goods and services within a self-contained, independent community (describing an autarky or autarkic system) would fail to register as “productive economic activity” from the standpoint of the consumer-driven GDP metric. The operational logic of modern economies thus *demand*s ever-expanding consumption of products and services. If consumers became their own producers of goods, either as individuals or communities, consumer-based economies would crater. This system is logically suspect and ethically bankrupt. According to modern economics, taking responsibility for our own lives and that of our communities by providing ourselves with what we need is an activity without value.

Our era is marked by the presumption that technology has made us more efficiently and effectively productive, generally speaking—which it has in many respects. It has also made us more efficiently and effectively destructive, and more oblivious of this fact due to the way technological convenience distances us from its deleterious impacts.

With modern technology comes an endemic opacity that mediates our direct experience of the outside world. The real world is easily confused with the one that has been reconfigured for us based on our preferences as consumers. Protracted, thoughtless action has never been so easily enabled—nor the volume of distraction

and misinformation so overwhelming. This opacity compounds our blindness to the ways in which our inability to moderate our behavior is ravaging the world we inhabit.

The 14th century historiographer and historian Abū Zayd ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn al-Ḥaḍramī, more popularly known as Ibn Khaldūn, warned that pursuing the pleasures of civilization³¹ has repeatedly led to civilizational destruction through the corruption of human beings—rendering them susceptible to moral, ethical, spiritual, social, physical, political, and economic decay.

The places such degraded people inhabit merely reflect their collective state. This seemingly insatiable appetite for constantly expanding levels of wealth, luxury, comfort—and, for some, power—has been the primary driver of the destruction wrought by human beings on Earth and its living systems from time immemorial.

As argued by the British soldier, scholar, and author Lieutenant-General Sir John Bagot Glubb in his seminal essay, *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival*,³² human history consists of an identifiable and reasonably predictable progression of phases. He states that we fail to learn from history because our studies of it are brief, prejudiced, and atomized, with the intertwined events that comprise overarching patterns often taught as discrete and unrelated.

Sir Glubb claims that a regular patterned length of national greatness emerges, lasting approximately 250 years. This average has not varied for 3000 years, by his estimation. The stages characterizing the rise and fall of great nations are seen in Table 1.

Sir Glubb concludes that the life histories of great states are very similar and primarily driven by internal factors. Their falls are diverse mostly due to their being heavily influenced by external causes. He feels that history should be taught

³¹ Alice Bolton, “Ibn Khaldun on Luxury and the Destruction of Civilizations,” *Fountain* 117 (May–June 2017), <https://fountainmagazine.com/2017/issue-117-may-june-2017/ibn-khaldun-on-luxury-and-the-destruction-of-civilizations>.

³² Sir John Glubb, *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival*, 1976, <http://people.uncw.edu/kozloffm/glubb.pdf>.

as a comprehensive account of the human species with an emphasis on identifying these overarching phenomena within the context of one's own national history.

Wendell Berry's classic book *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* masterfully covers all of these points in the specific case of the United States. The topics of exploitation, consumption, victimization, and destruction are placed front and center:

If there is any law that has been consistently operative in American history, it is that the members of any established people or group or community sooner or later become “redskins”—that is, they become the designated victims of an utterly ruthless, officially sanctioned and subsidized exploitation. The colonists who drove off the Indians came to be intolerably exploited by their imperial governments. And that alien imperialism was thrown off only to be succeeded by a domestic version of the same thing; the class of independent small farmers who fought the war of independence has been exploited by, and recruited into, the industrial society until now it is almost extinct... The only escape from this destiny of victimization has been to ‘succeed’—that is, to ‘make it’ into the class of exploiters, and then to remain so specialized and so ‘mobile’ as to be unconscious of the effects of one's life or livelihood. This escape is, of course, illusory, for one man's producer is another's consumer, and even the richest and most mobile will soon find it hard to escape the noxious effluents and fumes of their various public services.

What we are seeing now is not a new phenomenon. It's an old story dressed in new clothes. The demolition of nature is simply being accomplished with more sophisticated technology capable of amplifying our character flaws in ways we've never imagined possible. This destruction is harder to recognize, or deem worthy of our attention, in a world offering endless methods of keeping us entertained, distracted, titillated, and made comfortably numb—all while being so satisfied and impressed with what our hands have created.

We are the octopus congratulating itself for becoming fat by eating its own legs.³³

³³ Masanobu Fukuoka, *Sowing Seed in the Desert: Natural Farming, Global Restoration, and the Ultimate Food Security* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing: September 3, 2013).

Table 1:

Stages Characterizing the Rise and Fall of Great Nations

The Age of Pioneers (outburst)
The Age of Conquests
The Age of Commerce
The Age of Affluence
The Age of Intellect
The Age of Decadence
Decadence is marked by:
• Defensiveness
• Pessimism
• Materialism
• Frivolity
• An influx of foreigners
• The welfare state
• A weakening of religion
Decadence is due to:
• Too long a period of wealth and power
• Selfishness
• Love of money
• The loss of a sense of duty

Forgetting our role

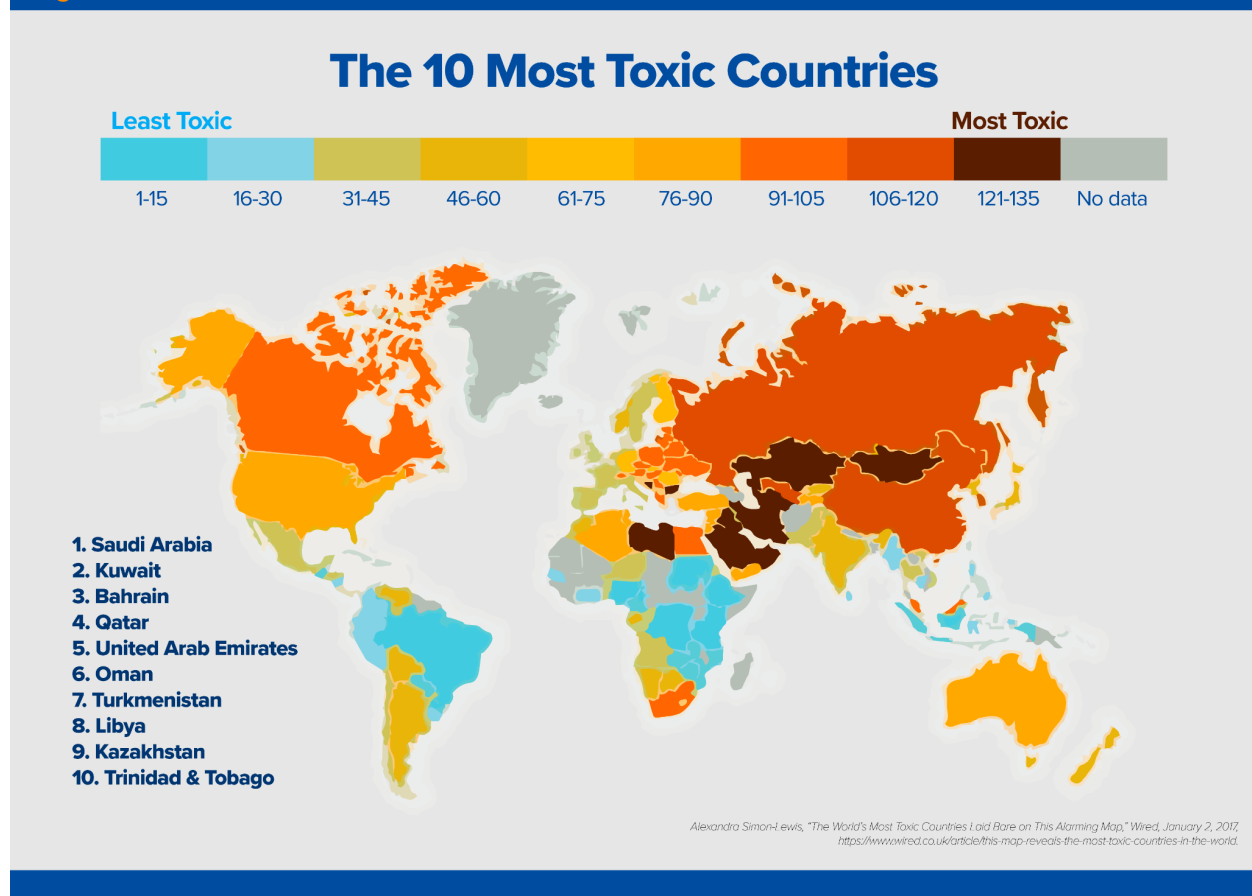
Consider the following list of The Most Toxic Countries in the World,³⁴ published by The Eco Experts. Nine of the top 10 are nominally majority Muslim nations. When examining lists of countries also suffering from problems associated with environmental and ecological degradation, including food and water insecurity, we unfortunately find much of the same. This has serious implications concerning prospects related to regional stability, civil unrest, refugee populations, internally displaced people, etc. Again, we find that among the most challenged nations, those classified as Muslim-majority are at or near the top of the list:

The 10 Most Toxic Countries³⁵

1. Saudi Arabia
2. Kuwait
3. Bahrain
4. Qatar
5. United Arab Emirates
6. Oman
7. Turkmenistan
8. Libya
9. Kazakhstan
10. Trinidad & Tobago

³⁴ Pam Wright, “Map Reveals World’s Most and Least Toxic Countries,” The Weather Channel, July 7, 2017, <https://weather.com/science/environment/news/maps-toxic-countries>; Charles Clark, “This Map Shows the Countries with the Most ‘Toxic’ Environments on Earth,” *Insider*, February 9, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/map-of-the-most-polluted-and-toxic-countries-2017-2>; Alexandra Simon-Lewis, “The World’s Most Toxic Countries Laid Bare on This Alarming Map,” *Wired*, January 2, 2017, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/this-map-reveals-the-most-toxic-countries-in-the-world>.

³⁵ Simon-Lewis, “World’s Most Toxic Countries.”

Figure 2:

Regardless of the worldly causes that may have brought about this situation, Allah is ultimately in control, and we must ask ourselves honestly, with deep introspection, why we are facing this situation. As evidenced by the above,³⁶ Muslims have tragically underperformed in offering a more comprehensive and broadly beneficial Islamic alternative capable of obsoleting the current dysfunctional arrangement. Collectively, many Muslims have also come to endorse a “misenchanted way of life” that tacitly—if not explicitly—approves of the generation of riches and profit at the expense of beauty and truth.

The credibility and sincerity of those claimants professing a love for Allah, but showing little regard for what Allah has created, should be called into question. To participate in the careless handling and cavalier destruction of things that are

³⁶ Anusuya Datta, “Maps Reveal Top ‘Toxic’ Nations in the World,” *Geospatial World*, February 18, 2017, <https://www.geospatialworld.net/blogs/maps-reveal-top-polluted-countries-world/>; “Most Polluted Countries 2022,” World Population Review, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-polluted-countries>.

manifestations of Divine Attributes—Signs of The Divine—serves as an indictment against us. Need we be reminded where this motivation to corrupt what Allah has made perfect emanates from?

وَلَا ضِلَّائُهُمْ وَلَا مَنِّينَهُمْ وَلَا مَرْتَهُمْ فَلْيَبْتَكَنْ آذَانَ الْأَنْعَامِ وَلَا مَرْتَهُمْ فَلْيَغَيِّرَنَّ خَلْقَ اللَّهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَّخِذِ الشَّيْطَانَ وَلِيًّا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ خُسْرَانًا مُّبِينًا

[Satan said]: “And I will surely lead them astray, and arouse desires in them. I shall command them and they will slit the ears of cattle; I shall command them and they will change the creation of Allah.” Whoever takes Satan as a protector in place of Allah has clearly lost everything.³⁷

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَىٰ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ
وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِالْإِثْمِ ۖ فَحَسْبُهُ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَلَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ

Among the people there is someone whose words about the life of this world excite your admiration, and he calls Allah to witness what is in his heart, while he is in fact the most hostile of adversaries.

When he leaves you, he goes about the earth corrupting it, destroying crops and animals. Allah does not love corruption. When told to have *taqwā* of Allah, he is seized by pride which drives him to wrongdoing...³⁸

If the creation consists of Allah’s Signs, and those Signs serve as reminders of the Divine, what happens when those Signs are removed from the Earth or allowed to be continually corrupted, distorted, degraded, or destroyed altogether? If these corrupted Signs become the basis of our reflection and remembrance, how would our perspectives not also grow corrupted, distorted, and degraded? What precarious world do we produce by substituting for those Signs a mirror of humanity’s basest desires, whims, and caprices?³⁹

³⁷ Qur’an 4:119.

³⁸ Qur’an 2:205–6.

³⁹ One of the interesting lessons learned from observing nature is that insects typically considered to be pests starve on healthy plants—they don’t offer anything to eat such as simple sugars and amino acids. This is explained by trophobiosis theory. (“Earth Repair: A Unified Theory,” World Permaculture Association, <https://worldpermacultureassociation.com/earth-repair-unified-theory/>.) Similarly, locusts are found to plague landscapes in regions that have become degraded mostly due to human mismanagement (for example, from destructive agricultural practices or overgrazing of domesticated livestock). Our societies, too, once weakened and diseased, are prone to “pest attacks”—diagnostic indicators of the absence of something crucially important. To

This destruction of nature is perpetrated and tolerated in the pursuit of economic interests—a state of affairs seemingly accepted, largely, by people who identify themselves as Muslim (likewise by self-identified Christians and Jews, or “People of the Book”). As noted by the Malaysian scholar Dr. ‘Adi Setia,⁴⁰ a properly Islamically-oriented cosmological, cosmogonical, and epistemological worldview sees the natural and cultural resources provided by our Merciful Creator as blessings and bounties that are, in truth, unlimited in principle. A functional worldview tethered to reality would regard these resources as abundant, and the material needs, wants, and desires of human beings as limited—and rightfully so. This particular understanding has been inverted, and its inversion has apparently been legitimized and accepted by people who ought to know better.

Building on this premise, Dr. Setia argues that our beliefs demand that these resources be considered favors from the realm of transcendence, eliciting an ethical and cognitive response rooted in gratitude and ultimately bringing about contentment. Therefore, the human being—if properly oriented and aligned—will take according to his or her needs, but not his or her greed and ambition to accumulate. Gratitude then becomes an existential and psychological state of being that demonstrates this observed reality of abundance in both the material and spiritual sense.

We are provided for abundantly if we acknowledge the biophysical limits of the planet, and we acknowledge those limits by living our lives according to metaphysical realities. In fact, the planet’s living systems will over-deliver. The problem for the human species is that we tend to consistently underperform—and it still delivers in spite of us.⁴¹

escape such attacks, communities require a habitat and a means of sustaining the people who comprise them. As put by Bill Mollison: “We lay waste to our lives in proportion to the way in which the systems we support lay waste to the environment. Although societies for *social* responsibility are rapidly forming, we need to expand the concept to *social and environmental responsibility*, and to create our own financial and employment strategies in those areas.” See Bill Mollison, *Permaculture: A Designer's Manual* (Tyalgum, Australia: Tagari Publications, 1988).

⁴⁰ ‘Adi Setia, “Mu’amalah and the Revival of the Islamic Gift Economy,” *Islam and Science* 9, no. 1 (Summer 2011).

⁴¹ This is principally the charge, for example, made by the animals against the humans in the court of the jinn king, referring to the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’s famous text: “Once given words, the animals have much to say, both about their own plight and about the human condition. They present themselves not as mere objects of study but as subjects

According to Dr. ‘Adi Setia,

Desires are in fact limited by various dimensions of objective biophysical realities—and ultimately by death... Sound desire is self-limiting, but the consumerist rendering of the world isn’t particularly fond of that idea—so we’re constantly artificially stimulated through perpetual ubiquitous marketing and advertising. We do not exist in a neutral milieu in that regard.

The paradox of ‘earthly life’ is that we simply need to respect the biophysical ‘limits’ of nature—which essentially consists of having proper *adab* (manners, etiquette, adherence to protocol) with creation—if we are to enjoy ‘unlimited’ bounties.

Additionally, desires are limited because enjoyments are limited, or bounded; that’s an objective fact since we know experientially that unbounded enjoyments and desires degenerate into suffering and humiliation by way of addiction.⁴²

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ عَلَىٰ بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً
فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

Have you seen [O Prophet] those who have taken their own desires as their god? [And so] Allah left them to stray knowingly, sealed their hearing and hearts, and placed a cover on their sight. Who then can guide them after Allah? Will you [all] not then be mindful?⁴³

A desire or an enjoyment, beyond a certain limit or boundary, ceases to be so. That’s the nature of mortal life (i.e., it becomes self-destructive and hence not

with an outlook and interests of their own. That casts the essay into a moral mode: the animals warmly appreciate the bounty of Creation but passionately criticize human domination and systematically indict its underlying rationales as the products of human arrogance The ingenious and insightful design of every creature, say the animals, testifies to God’s creative and providential beneficence. But the natural piety, generosity, courage, and trust of the animals model virtues that human beings too often lack. The animals become living, speaking rebukes of human waywardness, faithlessness, negligence, and insensitivity.” See Lenn E. Goodman and Richard McGregor, eds. and trans., *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 696.

⁴² Correspondence via WhatsApp with Dr ‘Adi Setia, August 29-30, 2021.

⁴³ Qur’an 45:23. As put by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in his *Al-Fawa’id* (see footnote 51): “Whoever loves this worldly life will [overestimate] its value and make themselves a slave to it - and it will humiliate them. And whoever neglects it will notice their own great value - and it will serve them and it (this world) will humiliate itself for them.”

really a true desire, for no person desires self-destruction). Hence, greed (or ‘pathological desire’) is the desire of the insane.

Greed is, at its core, wastefulness—a quintessentially “Iblisian” quality and behavioral archetype. As such, it is also essentially self-destructive. As indicated by the following hadith:

Ka’b ibn ‘Ujra reported: A man passed by the Prophet ﷺ, peace and blessings be upon him, and the companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ saw his endurance and vigor. They said, “O Messenger of Allah, if only this man was in the way of Allah!” The Prophet ﷺ said, “If he goes out striving for his small children, he is in the way of Allah. If he goes out striving for his elderly parents, he is in the way of Allah. If he goes out striving for himself to abstain from wrongdoing, he is in the way of Allah. **If he goes out vainly and boastfully, he is in the way of Satan.**”⁴⁴

In an alternate wording of the same hadith:

The Prophet ﷺ—Allah bless and give him peace—was sitting one day with his Companions, and they observed a strong, sturdy youth setting out early to work. They said, “Woe unto this man; would that his youth and strength were spent in the path of Allah.” The Prophet—Allah bless and give him peace—said, “Do not say this; for if he works for himself in order to restrain himself from begging and to be independent of people, then he is in the path of Allah. If he works for his impoverished parents or for his impoverished children so as to enrich and suffice them, then he is in the path of Allah. **If [however] he works for the sake of showing off (*tafākhuran*) and accumulation (*takāthuran*) [of wealth], then he is in the path of Satan.**”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr lil-Ṭabarānī*, 19:129, <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2022/08/26/jihad-supporting-family/> (translation modified); *al-Ṭabarānī, al-Mu’jam al-kabīr* (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymīyah, Dār al-Ṣumay‘ī, 1983), 19:29, no. 282; authenticated by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi’ al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1969), 1:301, no. 1428; al-Haythamī also said the narrators were reliable in *Majma’ al-Zawā’id* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsī, 1933), 4:325, no. 7708. Translated by Abu Amina Elias.

⁴⁵ *Al-Ṭabarānī, al-Mu’jam al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), 2:148, no. 940.

That the earning of wealth for selfish, self-aggrandizing purposes puts one on the path of Satan is unsurprising, as such behavior is wasteful and thus demonic:

إِنَّ الْمُبَذِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيَاطِينِ ۖ وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِرَبِّهِ كَفُورًا

Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful.⁴⁶

Setia goes on to highlight that the ecological desolation we see within both the cultural and natural landscape is consistent with the ingratitude that stems from secular disbelief, where scarcity is perceived as the default condition. Accompanying this assumption is a crippling fear of insufficiency and paucity. Competition and hoarding logically follow. Without belief in a Merciful and Generous Creator who provides abundantly, anxiety fuels the greedy and wasteful depletion of resources while blinding one to its True Source, reinforcing a negative feedback loop marked by perpetual ingratitude and unending yearning. It is within this state that the “pathology of consumption”—where satisfaction is ephemeral, and disillusionment and ennui are all too familiar—leaves its signature upon us and upon our world.

Imam Al-Ghazālī stated that Allah has made the afterlife the abode of reimbursement and chastisement, and this world the abode of struggle, deception, and tribulation.⁴⁷ Our struggle in the *dunyā* is not, and should not be, confined to concern about the afterlife. Imam Al-Ghazālī saw our worldly livelihood as a means of return to the afterlife, viewing the world as a seedbed for the Hereafter. There is a clear incentive to live Islam’s ethics for both worldly and otherworldly benefits. Our livelihoods depend on the manner in which we transact our lives with Allah’s creation and our ability to render what is rightfully due to everything comprising it. This is one of the most significant and practical expressions of sincere gratitude.

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ ۖ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

⁴⁶ Qur’an 17:27.

⁴⁷ Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The Book of the Properties of Earning and Living (Kitab Adab al-Kasb wa al-Ma’ash)*, trans. with introduction and notes by ‘Adi Setia (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2013).

And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed, “If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely My punishment is severe.”⁴⁸

In the words of 19th-century British writer John Ruskin, wealth is the possession of the valuable by the valiant. Its opposite—“*illth*”—are the wages proffered through waste, death, destruction, and discord. Those either unwilling to, or incapable of, making this distinction are clear impediments on the path leading to wealth in its truest sense.

There is no wealth but life. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest numbers of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.⁴⁹

Concluding thoughts and solutions

The epistemology, cosmology, and cosmogony of the Islamic intellectual tradition pellucidly explains the importance of transacting with the natural world as a means of manifesting one’s moral and ethical goodness. A famous and oft-cited saying tells us:

He who knows himself knows his Lord.⁵⁰

The Qur’an also informs us:

لَهُ مُعَقَّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ ۚ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ ۚ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهِ مِنِّ وَّالٍ

For each one there are successive angels before and behind, protecting them by Allah’s command. Indeed, Allah would never change a people’s state [of favor] until they change their own state [of faith]. And if it is Allah’s Will to

⁴⁸ Qur’an 14:7.

⁴⁹ John Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Classics, n.d.).

⁵⁰ Abu Nu’aym al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-awliya’ wa-tabaqāt al-asfiyā’*, 2nd ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kotob Illmiyah, 2018), 10:208, <https://kitaabun.com/shopping3/hilyat-awliya-tabaqat-asfiya-arabic-asfahani-p-3430.html>.

torment a people, it can never be averted, nor can they find a protector other than Him.⁵¹

This may, in part, be understood as an exhortation to remember and reflect upon our human origins—the reasons we were brought into existence and the functional role we were tasked with fulfilling. To know ourselves is to realize that we weren't made to serve our own selfish pursuits and desires. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya affirms this point when he states in his *al-Fawā'id*:

Whoever desires to purify their heart, then let them prefer Allah to their own desires.⁵²

We were not endowed with our capabilities for the purpose of leading a life of constant entertainment and self-indulgence. Humans aren't here to remake the world in the image of our personal preferences. The Creation—of which we comprise one of many aspects—was made to manifest the Majesty and Beauty of The One that brought it out of nothingness so that He may be known by means of it.

This world was made as a test to prove our mettle and display our qualities of character. It will either testify as a proof for us, providing a vehicle to reflect Divine attributes bestowing benefit on everything we come into contact with—or it will mirror the disorder, dysfunction, and evil residing in our hearts and made manifest by our limbs. Our inability to rein in and sublimate our worst tendencies is on trial. Yet this is the real fight too many of us have run away from—the battle against ourselves:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهُ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ
شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

⁵¹ Qur'an 13:11.

⁵² Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Al-Fawa'id: A Collection of Wise Sayings*, trans. Bayan Translation Services (Mansoura: Umm Al-Qura, 2004), <https://www.kalamullah.com/Books/Al-FAWAID.pdf>.

Fighting has been made obligatory upon you [believers], though you dislike it. Perhaps you dislike something which is good for you and like something which is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know.⁵³

This is the deception we have tragically fallen prey to: not applying the call to fight, first and foremost, to our own selves against our own selves. Our failure has lost us much truth and beauty in this world.

As stated previously, to know yourself is to know Allah. To know Allah is to know Majesty and Beauty, so that we, too, may serve as signposts for these qualities through our daily conduct—not only through our worship, but also by the manner in which our worship conditions and inspires us to be majestic and beautiful in our worldly transactions, understanding that they have otherworldly consequences.

As explained by Dr. Othman ‘Abdur-Rahman Llewellyn,⁵⁴ a methodological approach to utilizing, and transacting with, nature may be detailed in light of the goals and objectives of the Sacred Law. Everything in existence was created and imbued with a unique and innate value. The purpose of all created things is to serve The Creator by playing their designated role in maintaining balance and order, ensuring the functional integrity of Creation as a whole. All sentient beings are bound together in this endeavor. Human beings are tasked with the special responsibility of trusteeship and stewardship of the earth.

To show magnanimity towards the entirety of Creation is to embody *iḥsān* (excellence), as exemplified by its resulting practical benefit, moral rectitude, and holistic beauty. If the central aim of Islamic law is to facilitate the manifestation of excellence, and to ensure comprehensive well-being, it could be said that environmental stewardship is an expression of *iṣlāḥ* (improvement, betterment), as manifested in the revival of degraded land and the enrichment of the earth.

⁵³ Qur’an 2:216.

⁵⁴ Othman ‘Abd Ar-Rahman Llewellyn, “Islamic Jurisprudence and Environmental Planning,” *Journal of King Abdulaziz University: Islamic Economics* 1, no. 2 (1404/1984), <http://www.iefpedia.com/english/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Islamic-Jurisprudence-and-Environmental-Planning-by-Othman-Abd-Ar-Rahman-Llewellyn.pdf>.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ clearly indicates that the fructification and beautification of the earth is a thoroughly ethical act:

Whoever revives dead land, for him is [to be found] reward in it; and whatever any creature seeking food eats of it shall be reckoned as charity from him.

There is no Muslim who plants a tree or sows a field, and a human, bird, or animal eats from it, but it shall be reckoned as charity from him.⁵⁵

Shaykh Abdul-Hakim Murad (Dr. Timothy Winter) made these points central to his ‘Īd al-Fiṭr *khuṭba* titled “[Sultan of the Heart](#).” In it, he outlined what attitude we need to adopt and what practical steps we need to take to begin rectifying our collective situation, not only as people of faith but as a human species. He first declares Islam “the religion of nature” (*al-dīn al-fiṭra*), the Qur’an “the book of nature” and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ “the prophet of nature.” All clearly command us to be cultivators and greeners of Allah’s creation through planting, sowing, and repairing what has been damaged and destroyed. This is highlighted by Book 41 of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī—The Virtue of Planting and Sowing (Muzāra‘a)* and Sūrat Al-A‘lā.⁵⁶

Just as importantly, Shaykh Murad eviscerates the “solutions” to modernity’s ecological crisis put forward by the likes of Elon Musk, who wishes to save humanity by taking us to Mars—“a hell,” in Shaykh Murad’s words, of dust, carbon dioxide, and radiation that, even after billions of dollars’ worth of Mars expeditions, has not yet yielded “one single organic particle...not even the tiniest fragment of something that exists in its trillions within any human body.”⁵⁷

To abandon our home is to save neither the Earth nor ourselves. We will have to solve our problems right here, in the world that has sustained us for so long—and the solution will demand more than more technology. As Shaykh Murad so eloquently put it:

⁵⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2320, bk. 41, hadith 1, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:2320>.

⁵⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2320, bk. 41, hadith 1, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/41>.

⁵⁷ Abdul Hakim Murad, “Sultan of the Heart – Abdal Hakim Murad: Eid Sermon,” YouTube video, May 2, 2022, <https://youtu.be/5JuAERjKy6Y>.

It seems to be the function of the secular world to destroy while boasting of progress. But it must be the function of the religious majority of mankind, and not just the *ummah* of Islam, to repair. Where they pull up, we must plant. Where they gorge, we must fast. It is the function of Bani Adam in his role as *khulafa* of Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* in His Earth to heal. To fix things. To be those who put [things] right.

How strange is the mentality of so many secular people [on] the Earth. Where they see science and technology as leading us into some kind of paradise on Earth. [It's] not happening. Look at the state of the Earth. Look at the state of people's minds. Look at the depression and the anxiety. Look at the collapsing planet beneath our feet. This is not progress.

So what do we do? Every one of us has this answer within reach. We have this blessing way, this way of living in a natural and restrained way within the world which is called the Sunnah of the Chosen One ⁵⁸ صلى الله عليه وسلم.

⁵⁸ Murad, "Sultan of the Heart."