
‘LEVELS OF EXISTENCE’ IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE MORAL DIGNITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Saeid Nazari Tavakkoli*

University of Tehran, Faculty of Theology and Islamic studies, Motahari Street, Tehran, Iran

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Abstract

Ethical concerns within applied ethics pertain to the behaviour of individuals, social groups and organizations in relation to the natural environment. Given the subjective nature of ethical behaviour in applied ethics rooted in the notion of upholding individual rights, we are confronting with the fundamental question of how to extend ethical consideration to encompass human beings and other sentient beings, which aims to establish a moral imperative for humans to honour the rights of these entities. The current study delves into the perspective of philosophers of transcendent wisdom (‘al-Ḥikmat al-Muṭa‘āliya’) who reject the inherent divisions among existents. Instead, they embrace the principles of principality and unity of existence by considering all creatures as tangible reflections and facets of God’s own existence. Consequently, this worldview posits a shared yet distinctive sanctity and value across the spectrum of existence. Embracing such interconnectedness among all entities inherently assigns value to each individual entity. In this light, humans bear not only a legal responsibility but also a moral duty to uphold the rights of every creature.

Keywords: environmental, ethics, ethical dignity, degrees of existence, existence

1. Introduction

Environmental ethics constitutes a pivotal domain within applied ethics, where the demarcation between moral and immoral behaviour hinges upon an individual’s perception of the broader system of existence, commonly refers to their worldview. Our worldview inherently shapes our interactions with the elements of the world, effectively dictating how we engage with Nature. Consequently, the substantiation of a moral theory or directive becomes intrinsically tied to the enigmatic dilemma of ‘Deduction of Ought from Is’, a profound inquiry within moral philosophy [1].

There exists a dichotomy among scholars regarding the legitimacy of deriving ethical imperatives from factual observations. Those who discredit the notion of deducing ‘ought’ from ‘is’ perceive it as a misconception, akin to a

*E-mail: sntavakkoli@ut.ac.ir

fallacy or ‘*Mughāliḥa*’. From their standpoint, they maintain that worldview and ethics remain disparate entities, devoid of any substantial interconnection. Thus, establishing an ethical framework through the foundations of ontology or inferring ethics from a worldview becomes implausible. Just as based on the foundations of traditional logic in the Islamic era, ‘concept (‘*Taṣawur*) cannot be deduced from ‘judgment’ (‘*Taṣdīq*) in both directions [2].

Conversely, the proponents of the ‘Deduction of Ought from Is’ assert the feasibility of deriving morally binding or non-binding ethical imperatives through propositions grounded in reality (the Universe). Therefore, it becomes crucial to discern between these two schools of thought - the argument for fallacy versus justification of the ‘Deduction of Ought from Is’ proposition - particularly within the ethical discourse concerning environmental matters. This dichotomy is highly pertinent due to the diverse ethical quandaries that emerge from humanity’s relationship with the environment, spanning inanimate nature, flora and fauna [3, 4]. Consequently, since the various theories of normative ethics, encompassing consequentialism (hedonism, utilitarianism), deontology, and virtue ethics [5] are transposed onto the environment, they illuminate the core ethical dilemmas inherent to this realm, yet often fall short of providing exhaustive explanations or resolutions for these ethical quandaries [6]. With the exception of adherents to the ‘anti-green economy’ perspective, who advocate unrestricted exploitation of natural resources, environmental philosophers offer responses to the question of ‘Why should we protect the environment?’ that fall within the categories of ‘superficial ecology’ and ‘deep ecology’. These categories sometimes colloquially refer to as the ‘light green economy’ and the ‘very green economy’ [7]. Proponents of the ‘light green economy’ espouse an instrumental ethics approach, wherein the ethical principle of ‘the environment possesses rights, and we bear responsibility towards it’ is considered as inapplicable. However, this model remains valid in other domains of applied ethics, where moral obligations guide human behaviour. According to the proponents of this perspective, safeguarding human life and well-being serves as the paramount rationale for protecting the environment. They maintain that treating animals with violence is impermissible, as it can breed cruelty within humans themselves and towards others.

Conversely, the advocates of the ‘very green economy’ contend that preserving the environment necessitates minimal utilization of its resources [8].

Regardless of the standpoint taken, if the theory of the ‘Deduction of Ought from Is’ is deemed valid, a fundamental query emerges: to what extent do the theories posited within Islamic philosophy - notably, the Peripatetic school (*Ḥikmat al-Mashā*), Illuminationism (*Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*), *al-Ḥikmat al-Yamānī*, and *al-Ḥikmat al-Muṭa’ālīya* - concerning the world and the interconnectedness of existents influence the recognition of ethical worth in Nature? How do these theories propel human acknowledgment of Nature’s rights and compel a moral engagement with the broader ecosystem?

Among these philosophical theories, the concepts of 'Unity of Existence' (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*) and 'Levels of Existence' (*Marātib al-Wujūd*) assume paramount significance. These notions are pivotal within transcendent philosophy, representing the culmination of philosophical thought within the Islamic world, and have been explored extensively by prominent Muslim mystics preceding Mullā Ṣadrā. The present study embarks on an analysis of the 'Unity of Existence' theory within transcendent wisdom and probes its potential impact on embracing ethical worth (dignity) within the natural world.

2. Literature review

Numerous studies have delved into the 'ethical stance of the environment' [9-12]. In this regard, certain writers have underscored the inherent dignity and sanctity that envelop all forms of existence - encompassing humans, animals, plants and even inanimate elements - drawing inspiration from religious viewpoints and positing a creator-creature rapport between God and all entities [13-16]. Osman Bilen, for instance, endeavours to elucidate the elevated status of beings and their ethical dignity based on Quranic verses [17]. He refers to the presence of plants and animals on the Day of Resurrection, as expounded in the treatise *Ḥashr al-'Ashyā'* authored by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī [18]. Although this perspective on the afterlife presence of flora and fauna finds its roots in Quranic verses and Islamic ḥadīths [19, 20], it has been emerged as a subject of philosophical (ontological) exploration [21]. Additionally, Lynn White stands as an early scholar who, in 1967, examined the environmental ethics through the lens of teachings from Judaism and Christianity [22].

Furthermore, certain studies have explored the environment from the vantage point of philosophical teachings [23, 24]. However, the analysis of environmental ethical paradigms through the lens of Islamic philosophical principles has received comparatively less attention. Leveraging insights from peripatetic philosophy, illuminative philosophy and Islamic mysticism, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (*Mullā Ṣadrā*) introduces a fresh conceptualization of existence and the intricate tapestry of interrelations between entities and their connection to the Divine - a perspective heretofore unexplored by preceding philosophical systems. Within the framework of transcendent wisdom, a distinct existential hierarchy exists among entities, endowing each with inherent ethical dignity and an autonomous position within the cosmic fabric. Regrettably, this facet has received less attention within previous philosophical explorations, which attempt to connect the tenets of transcendent philosophy with the environmental discourse [25-28].

3. Definition of key terms

A comprehensive comprehension of ethical behaviour concerning the environment necessitates a firm grasp of the fundamental terminology involved.

3.1. Ethics

In Arabic, the term ‘*Akhlāq*’ (ethics) stems from ‘*Khulq*’ (temperament). The literal connotation of ‘*Khulq*’ encompasses “human disposition and internal attributes” [29], much like ‘ethics’ in English derives from the Greek word ‘*ethikos*’, denoting ‘character’ [30]. According to Aristotle’s taxonomy of knowledge, ‘*Hikmat*’ (wisdom) is categorized into theoretical and practical domains. Theoretical wisdom (*al-Ḥikmat al-Nazarī*) explores the ‘is’ of existence, while practical wisdom (*al-Ḥikmat al-‘Amalī*) delves into the realms of what ought and ought not to be [31]. Among the facets of practical wisdom, ethics constitutes one of its tripartite divisions.

Muslim philosophers diverge in their definitions of ethics. For instance, Avicenna defines ethics as the discipline that instructs individuals on how to cultivate their inner attributes and interact with themselves, ultimately leading to happiness (*sa‘ādatmand*) in both the present life and the hereafter [32]. In Rāzī’s perspective, ethics (*al-Ḥikmat al-Khulqī*) stands as a realm of knowledge whose acquisition enables the comprehension of sensual virtues and vices [33]. Yet, such an interpretation faces critical scrutiny, as sensory attributes only manifest significance when translated into action, bestowing them with efficacy.

The intrinsic linkage between character and consequent behaviour has prompted certain Muslim philosophers to employ both terms in defining ethics. Building upon Aristotle’s partition of knowledge into theoretical and practical spheres, Fārābī underscores that theoretical knowledge serves cognition solely, while practical knowledge, which encompasses ethics, is a discipline that leads to the management of human behaviour [34].

In addition, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (*Mullā Ṣadrā*) defines practical wisdom (*al-Ḥikmat al-‘Amalī*), of which ethics constitutes one of three branches - alongside household management (*tadbīr al-manzil*) and governance of societies (*sīāst al-mudun*) - in the following manner: “Practical wisdom, distinct from theoretical wisdom, denotes understanding one’s own temperament and its consequences” [35]. In accordance with this view, ethics extends beyond mere recognition of virtuous and malevolent temperaments; conversely, ethics demands the cognition of temperaments, which facilitates an appropriate behaviour [36]. In essence, Ethics represents a segment of human sciences that scrutinizes the value of human attributes and actions (characters and behaviours) [37].

3.2. Environment

The term ‘environment’ encompasses living organisms and the interconnected elements that exert mutual influence. This concept possesses a correlative extension (additional concepts), such as the environment of an individual or a specific animal. Diverse units of terrestrial expanses, such as ecosystems, biomes, landscapes, bioregions and the biosphere, are differentiated based on the distinct fields and components constituting the environment.

However, the field of Environmental science governs the intricate interplay between human beings and their surroundings. Regarding the comprehension and examination of the elements constituting biodiversity, this realm of knowledge rests on four pillars including protection, sustenance, continuity and benevolence towards Nature, the primary objective of which is to infuse dynamism into biodiversity by scrutinizing relationships within the life cycle, thereby constructing strategies for sustained existence within ecosystems.

3.3. Bioethics

In 1970, Rensselaer Potter, an American biologist and cancer researcher, introduced the term 'bioethics' with the connotation of the 'science of survival', and employed this term to delineate a novel interdisciplinary field of inquiry which seeks to safeguard Earth's biosphere and, by extension, enhance human survival and elevate the quality of human life. In essence, bioethics functions as a conduit between biological science and human value systems, bridging the divide between empirical and human-focused disciplines. The purview of bioethics encompasses the ethical analysis of quandaries arising from the application of biological disciplines, which includes domains like Medicine, healthcare professions, as well as other biological sciences such as Environmental sciences, Demography, and Social sciences [38]. Therefore, the term 'bioethics' aptly suits when delving into ethical principles within the realm of Environmental sciences. Nevertheless, Bioethics extends its scope beyond Environmental science, encompassing the ethical foundations governing various other biological disciplines.

Moreover, when engaging in discussions about moral behaviour, the discourse encompasses conscious behaviours directed towards oneself, fellow humans, and other entities, spanning animals, plants and the inanimate elements. This lens reveals three levels of behavioural interactions including intra-personal (a person's interaction with themselves), inter-personal (a person's interaction with other humans), and extra-personal (a person's behaviour towards animals, plants and inanimate nature). While most realms of applied ethics address inter-personal communication behaviours, the realm of environmental ethics scrutinizes the extra-personal interactions of individuals or organizations with environmental constituents. This differentiation amplifies the complexity of comprehending ethical behaviour in relation to the environment. Central to ethical behaviour is the adherence to the rights of communication participants, encapsulated in the principle 'others have rights and I am responsible'. However, this principle raises a fundamental question: does the environment possess rights to which moral agents are obligated to accord respect? Answering this inquiry necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the rights attributed to animals, plants and other natural entities.

Numerous ethical imperatives underpin human interactions with the environment, stemming from the notion that humans bear responsibility for safeguarding natural resources, rejuvenating depleted resources, mitigating

pollutants, cultivating green spaces, optimizing energy usage, curbing waste generation, devising waste management strategies and ensuring proper disposal practices. These responsibilities culminate in the formulation of both national and global standards for environmental exploitation and enhancement, thereby elevating the benchmarks of environmental protection.

While the extent of ethical comportment towards Nature relies on recognizing human actions' ethical value concerning the environment, the lasting transformation of inappropriate behaviours into virtuous ones necessitates a cycle of repetition and skill development. Muslim philosophers introduced 'art' (*fan*) and 'technique' (*ṣanā'at*) to expound the domains of practical wisdom (*al-Ḥikmat al-'Amalī*) and Ethics [39]. Ethics behaviour embodies a 'technique', signifying that agents acquire proficiency through practice and repetition. Simultaneously, it embodies an 'art', as it is used as an instrument to achieve moral excellence [40]. This perspective traces its origins back to Latin literature, where the term 'Ethic' derives from the Greek expression 'Ethike tekne', connoting 'ethical art' [41].

3.4. Transcendent Wisdom (*al-Ḥikmat al-Muṭa'ālīya*)

Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī, renowned as Mullā Ṣadrā and Ṣadr al-Muta'alihīn (980-1045 AH), charted an original philosophical path distinct from peripatetic philosophers like Farābī and Ibn Sīnā, as well as the illuminative philosophical framework of Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī. His innovative system termed *Al-Ḥikmat al-Muṭa'ālīya* (Transcendent Wisdom) is derived from his seminal philosophical work *Al-Ḥikmat al-Muṭa'ālīya fī al-Asfār al-'aqlīyah al-arba'a* (The Transcendent Wisdom in the Four Journeys of the Intellect). The phrase *Al-Ḥikmat al-Muṭa'ālīya* (transcendent wisdom) also finds usage in the works of earlier philosophers and mystics, such as Avicenna, Mīr Dāmād, 'Alavī 'Amilī, and Qaysarī, who respectively employed variations like "*Al-Rāsikhīn fī al-Ḥikmat al-Muṭa'ālīya*" [42], "*'Asrār al-Ḥikmat al-Muṭa'ālīya*" [43], "*Kunūz al-Falsafa al-Muṭa'ālīya*" [44], "*Al-Ḥikmat al-Ilāhīyah al-Muṭa'ālīya*" [45]. Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī contends that the principles of transcendent wisdom are acquired through mystical revelations, complementing Avicenna's peripatetic wisdom rooted in theoretical discourse [42, vol. 3, p. 401].

Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical framework is based on four foundational sources including: 1) The Qurān and Ḥadīth, 2) Islamic theology, 3) Islamic mysticism and 4) antecedent philosophical systems. The methodology employed is a fusion of Qurānic, rational, and intuitive knowledge [46, 47]. This innovative paradigm captures insights from these diverse resources, facilitating the development of a unique philosophical system that synthesizes various intellectual currents.

4. The ontological foundations of transcendent wisdom

The underpinning ontology of transcendent wisdom rests upon several fundamental principles: the principiality of existence (*'Aṣālat al-Wujūd*), the unity of existence (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*), the gradation of existence (*Tashkīk fi al-Wujūd*), and the dependency of all beings on the existence of God. These principles collectively establish the foundation for recognizing the inherent status and ethical dignity of entities for their own sake, independent of serving human interests. In parallel, this perspective engenders a moral obligation for humans to respect the rights of these creatures, akin to how the concept of human dignity invokes responsibility towards fellow humans. Nature, possessing life (*Ḥayāt*) and consciousness (*'Ilm*), has a tangible reality intrinsically linked with the existence of God (divine essence), thus endowing it with a divine and sanctified identity, analogous to that of human beings. This viewpoint concerning Nature emanates from three pivotal tenets within Ṣadra's philosophy.

4.1. The principiality of existence (*'Aṣālat al-Wujūd*) and the unity of existence (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*)

Within our cognition, external objects give rise to 'existence' (*Wujūd*) and 'quiddity' (*Māhīyat*). While encountering an object termed 'chair', two questions may be suggested: 'Does a chair exist?' and 'What constitutes a chair?'. However, the external world's constituents are undoubtedly not a composition of quiddity and existence. Hence, a philosophical quandary surfaces: is it existence from which quiddity is abstracted, or quiddity from which existence is extracted? While Suhrawardī (*Sheikh-e-Ishrāq*) posits 'quiddity' as actualized in the external world and 'existence' as an abstract notion [48], Mullā ṣadrā, along with philosophers of the transcendent wisdom tradition, influenced by mystics like Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Fanārī, Ibn Turkah, and Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnavī [49], asserts that it is 'existence' that is actualized in the world, with the 'quiddity' of entities being derived from their existence. In other words, what exerts an effect in the external world is the existence of objects. For instance, what burns in the external world is the existence of fire, not its quiddity; thus, envisioning fire mentally does not result in combustion [50]. Embracing the principiality of existence (*'Aṣālat al-Wujūd*), Mullā ṣadrā strives to establish (prove) the unity of existence (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*). He posits that when addressing the existence of various entities - like 'There is God', 'There is an angel', 'There is a man', 'There is an animal', 'There is a plant' and 'There is water' - the term 'existence' carries the same meaning across all cases. Consequently, existence possesses a shared, consistent connotation employed universally. As such, the realized aspect in the world is an existence that permeates all entities. The principiality of existence and unity of existence lead Mullā ṣadrā to transcend traditional theological and peripatetic philosophical interpretations when elucidating the relationship between the world and God. He postulates that entities are effects (*Ma'lūl*), positioning their existence beneath

God, who stands as the cause (*‘illat*) behind the creation of the world. This rationale leads him to describe them as ‘*Ḥaqq -e- Makhḷūqun bih*’ [35, vol. 7, p. 5]. “All existents have a single origin or a single root, which is the reality, and the others are its affairs, and it is the essence and others are its names and attributes, and it is the origin and other than its moods and affairs, and it is the existent and beyond it is its aspects and its implications ... It is revealed that everything which named existence in any way, is nothing rather than the affairs of the Eternal One (*al-Wāhid al-Qayyūm*), and it is a eulogy of His essence and a gleam of His attributes.” [35, vol. 2, p. 300]

4.2. Beings and lack of independent identity

Mullā Ṣadrā advances the concept of transcendent wisdom as a more potent and advanced paradigm compared to earlier God-centered philosophies, achieved through distinguishing between ‘copulative being’ (*al-Wujūd al-Rābiṭ*) and ‘inherent being’ (*al-Wujūd al-Rābiṭī*) [35, vol. 1, p. 329].

‘Inherent being’ (*al-Wujūd al-Rābiṭī*) within peripatetic philosophy pertains to entities possessing independent existence despite their dependency on another existent (*Wujūd fī nafseh wa li ghayreh / existence in itself and existence for other than itself*). For instance, colours maintain their own existence but rely on a substrate. In contrast, ‘copulative being’ (*al-Wujūd al-Rābiṭ*) refers to existence reliant on another (*Wujūd fī ghayreh wa li ghayreh / existence in something else and existence for other than itself*), akin to the relationship between waves and the sea [51].

In prior God-centred philosophies, like peripatetic philosophy, essentialism prevails, characterizing an entity’s quiddity as a distinct reality apart from its existence [35, vol. 1, p. 330]. This outlook perceives a causal link between existents and God as their origin. Mullā Ṣadrā, subscribing to the principiality of existence and viewing quiddity subjectively, emphasizes the inseparable bond between beings and the Divine Essence. For him, creatures are solely related to their Creator, devoid of independent existence juxtaposed with the Creator [35, vol. 1, p. 65, 330]. By renaming ‘inherent being’ to ‘copulative being’ and extending it to all possible existences, he not only advances a monotheistic perspective but also introduces a novel interpretation of Nature. Although this approach might not capture the attention of his philosophical commentators, it could significantly affect human interactions with Nature.

4.3. Objectivity (*‘Eynīyat*) of existence and perfection

Each entity, be it human, animal, plant, water, soil or more, possesses specific attributes such as power, knowledge and life, contingent upon its mode of existence. This collection of attributes refers to the ‘perfection of existent’ (*Kamāl al-Mujūd*). Philosophers endeavour to discern whether an entity’s perfection is distinct from the entity itself, thereby yielding a duality like human

and knowledge or animal and power. Alternatively, these attributes might lack independent existence, being inseparable from the entity's own existence.

Mullā Ṣadrā introduces the concept of 'existence' akin to 'light', with varying degrees from strong to weak (The Existence as Light Metaphor). For instance, while both the existence of God and angels are immaterial (*Mujarrad*), one serves as the cause while the other stands as an effect.

Similarly, angels and humans both are effects, yet their existence varies - one immaterial, the other material. Analogous distinctions exist between animals and humans or animals and plants. Despite humans and animals being material, effects, and living, humans possess knowledge whereas animals lack it. In another comparison, observe the existence of animals and plants; both being material, effects, and alive, yet lacking in knowledge. Nevertheless, animals possess senses while plants do not. Extending this analogy, consider the existence of a plant alongside that of a stone. Both are material, effects, devoid of knowledge and senses, but a plant exhibits movement (growth) while a stone remains stationary.

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, an entity's perfections (attributes) are the same as its existence. Despite words like 'life', 'knowledge', 'power', 'sense', or 'movement' contrasting with the concept of 'human', the existence of these attributes is the same as the existence of a human being. Consequently, an entity's existence is the same as knowledge, power and life [35, vol. 6, p. 139, vol. 8, p. 164], and all existents are the same in knowledge, power, and life with varying degrees [35, vol. 6, p. 347]. This perspective leads us to recognize that just as existence permeates beings, so does life in all of them - affirming that all entities possess life. Hence, mystical texts refer to the world of Nature as 'Ḥayawān', signifying 'animate existent' [35, vol. 7, p. 150]. Moreover, the actualization of these attributes and perfections across different entities fosters a profound connection between God and these entities. God perceives their existence and perfections as a reflection of His own existence, thus cherishing and loving them [35, vol. 7, p. 159].

5. The ethical position of the environment

Based on the principles of principality and unity of existence, all entities, regardless of their material or immaterial nature, are considered as a part of an interconnected system. Every existing thing is, in essence, existence itself. As effects, they manifest God's existence (*Maẓāhir Ilāhī*) rather than being autonomous entities to which God merely granted existence - much like sunlight is inseparable from the Sun. Just as sunlight is originated from the Sun, it exists with the Sun and ceases without it. If we envision existence as a spectrum of light, its intensity diminishes with distance from the source, yet it remains light. Similarly, as we move away from the pure existence of the Divine essence towards immaterial and then material entities, the degree of existence decreases, but it remains existent.

All perfections are stemmed from existence and are inseparable from it. The absence of existence results in non-existence, which lacks the potential for perfection. Therefore, discussing entities inherently involves discussing perfections, which are as objective as existence itself. This objectivity and the gradation of existence lead to the conclusion that all entities - humans, animals, plants and inanimate nature - possess perfections corresponding to their degree of existence.

This perspective asserts that the differences among entities do not lie in possessing or lacking life, power, or knowledge. Instead, the differences lie in the intensity and gradation of these attributes. Every entity - whether human, animal, plant or inanimate nature - is alive by virtue of its existence. While humans possess a higher level of life than plants, the distinction is one of degree, not in kind. Similarly, the distinction between humans and what we perceive as inanimate entities is not consciousness but its intensity and gradation. All beings, whether animals or seemingly inert, possess life and inherent perfections. The distinction lies only in their levels [35, vol. 7, p. 149, vol. 9, p. 258]. The Quran encapsulates this view by stating, “whatever is in the heavens and on Earth, doth declare the Praises and Glory of Allah” (Qurān 64:1).

Embracing ethical dignity for all entities, by their level difference, humans become responsible for their well-being. This shared ethical dignity arises from inherent perfection. Consequently, a human’s moral responsibility extends to all levels of existence beyond oneself - animals, plants and inanimate nature.

For instance, Islamic teachings and the legal system emphasize various ethical obligations towards animals such as protecting their lives, supporting their physical and sexual health, refraining from harassment and punishment, and providing them with emotional support. Humans must offer food, healthcare, medicine, treatment and shelter for animals. In utilizing animals, humans are duty-bound to consider their physical well-being, welfare and health. They must avoid using derogatory language and provide emotional care to instil a sense of safety, reduce anxiety and alleviate stress [19, p. 117-167].

6. Ethical considerations for all beings and natural resources

The recognition of life and consciousness in all entities, including animals and plants, along with their ethical dignity and the acknowledgment of ethical rights, leads Muslim philosophers to address the continuation of their existence in the hereafter. They propose that the lives of plants and animals, much like humans, persist after their worldly existence ends, enabling them to seek justice for the mistreatment they endured from humans. Consequently, animals and plants possess an independent ethical dignity, and their oppression is deemed so unjust that humans will be held accountable and punished in the afterlife [21].

Such an attitude is readily apparent in the context of the exploitation of other vital natural resources, most notably water. The Qurān employs the term ‘Ṭahūr’ (purity) to characterize water, conveying its dual nature of being inherently free from impurities while serving as a means for purifying and

cleansing other substances (Qurān 25:48). Consequently, the contamination of water sources stands as an ethical transgression, lacking any acceptable legal rationale for its occurrence.

The adverse consequences of polluting significant water bodies such as rivers, seas and oceans are manifested in the destruction of numerous aquatic habitats, the eradication of diverse life forms, and the deprivation of a crucial human food source. This act aligns with the concept of 'corruption on the world' (Iḥsād fī al-'Ard) and carries severe repercussions (hard punishment), reflecting the gravity of the offense. Moreover, excessive consumption of water resources, leading to ecological disruption and depletion, is observed as extravagance (*Isrāf*) and is against divine justice (*'Adl Ilāhī*). Humans are responsible for these acts of cruelty (ẓulm) towards nature, and they will be held accountable in the hereafter, in addition to any worldly consequences.

These ethical considerations have influenced some Muslim jurists to categorize water as a public asset (*Anḡāl*), preventing individual ownership of water resources under any circumstances [52]. This prohibition fosters a sense of collective ownership, motivating individuals to protect these resources and take action against excessive consumption or pollution [53]. Consequently, the recognition of Nature's divine essence raises its ethical status to a sacred dignity, irrespective of whether it is animate or inanimate. This outlook erases the distinction between humans and Nature regarding ethical consideration. This elevated ethical dignity bestows rights upon nature, making humans responsible for their protection and well-being. However, to make this ethical treatment towards Nature - both living and non-living - consistent and enduring, it must be incorporated into a behavioural model. Achieving such a model hinges on the cultivation of human skills to perpetuate ethical behaviour towards Nature [54].

7. Conclusions

Regarding environmental ethics based on the principles of Muslim philosophy, the findings were as follows:

Ethics and behaviour: Ethics extends beyond merely understanding ethical values; it also encompasses guiding patterns of behaviour rooted in these values across three levels such as behaviour with oneself, behaviour with other humans, and behaviour with both animate and inanimate nature.

Rights and responsibilities: Describing ethical behaviour towards Nature establishes the ethical rights of Nature and outlines the corresponding ethical responsibilities of humans towards these rights. Environmental ethics involves defining the rights of the environment - animals, plants and other entities - and the moral obligation of humans to uphold these rights.

Worldview and behaviour: A person's comprehension of existence and the world influences their behaviour towards Nature. Muslim philosophers' worldview dictates the valuation of Nature in their intellectual framework and prescribes how humans should ethically interact with Nature.

Transcendent wisdom and existence: According to the principles of transcendent wisdom, the quiddity of objects is a subjective matter, while their existence is objective - tied to their external existence. The term 'existence' holds the same meaning across all beings; their variations lie in the intensity and gradation of their existence's degree. Thus, all entities possess all perfections, differing only in the extent of those perfections.

Principality and unity of existence: Within the framework of the principality, unity and gradation of existence, entities are not independent of God. They are instead a manifestation of God's attributes, possessing these attributes in varying degrees. This interconnectedness grants entities ethical dignity, which does not rely on human existence.

Ethical obligations: Since all beings possess inherent ethical dignity independent of human influence, humans are obligated to recognize and respect the rights of beings. This responsibility demands a lasting ethical commitment to upholding these rights for all entities.

8. Suggestions for further research

While the ethical responsibility of humans towards the environment and their commitment to its well-being are considered as vital achievements within the realm of bioethics and environmental ethics, it is necessary to delineate the rights inherent to every creature and facet of Nature, which encompasses the rights applicable to avian species, insects, aquatic organisms, reptiles, rodents, flora, forests, meadows, oceans and more. The deficiency in humans' accurate and comprehensive understanding of environmental rights has paved the way for ignoring these rights. While environmentalists emphasize Nature's rights and human responsibility, this alone falls short of establishing a resilient, sustainable ethical rapport with the natural world. Cultivating ethical expertise among individuals necessitates a continual process of education and the formulation of behavioural paradigms attuned to the unique characteristics of each constituent of the natural realm.

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