



METAPHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF MUSLIM ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS



Jihad Hashim Brown

TABAH ESSAYS SERIES

NO. 3, 2013



Metaphysical Dimensions
of Muslim Environmental
Consciousness

Metaphysical Dimensions of Muslim Environmental Consciousness



JIHAD HASHIM BROWN

TABAH ESSAYS SERIES | NUMBER 3 | 2013
ISSN: 2077-4850

Metaphysical Dimensions of Muslim Environmental Consciousness
ISBN: 978-9948-20-276-9

© 2013 Jihad Hashim Brown
Tabah Foundation
P.O. Box 107442
Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.
www.tabahfoundation.org

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or distributed in any manner without the express written consent of the author, except in the case of brief quotations with full and accurate citations in critical articles or reviews.

Cover Image © Sukharevskyy Dmytro

Summary

Much of the contemporary Muslim discourse surrounding the environment takes place at the level of ethical duty—juristic commands and prohibitions. The present essay seeks to complement and underpin this necessary ethical discourse by offering considerations as to the metaphysical dimensions of a Muslim environmental consciousness. Through a beautiful and lucid engagement with the Qur'an, the Prophetic sunnah, and the insights of some of Islam's greatest mystical poets, a vista unfolds in which the natural order is perceived as a locus of the theophany of the divine names. In light of this connection, the Shari'ah's teachings as to man's relationship with creation as steward (*khalifah*) may be both better understood and experienced.

About the Author

Jihad Hashim Brown is a Senior Research Fellow at Tabah Foundation. After receiving degrees in Psychology and Near East Studies from Rutgers University, New Jersey, he went on to pursue Islamic Studies with prominent religious authorities in Syria and Morocco for a decade. He also holds a graduate degree from the University of Cambridge in Philosophical Theology. Brown has appeared frequently on numerous media outlets in the Middle East and the US, and has served as a consultant to various governments and institutions on issues relating to Islam and international relations. He lives with his wife and children in Princeton, New Jersey.



Much discussion of “Muslim environmental consciousness” takes place at the level of “ethical duty”; namely, in the discourse of juristic injunction and divine fiat. I wish however, in the essay that follows, to contend that there exists a broader and deeper dimension to Muslim environmental consciousness—a dimension that at once fills out and undergirds the *deontic* ethical level and deepens it with a corresponding richness.

While the ethical discourse is core, being where the rubber meets the road as it were, it would better be termed environmental “conscientiousness” than “consciousness”. It is affiliated with personal *dhimmah*, or the individual’s “record of accountability” for the voluntary actions undertaken during one’s lifespan. It may be located in the Qur’anic dictum, “and the devotees of the All-Merciful tread lightly upon the earth”.¹ Perhaps this may contain a veiled allusion to the scope of carbon “footprints”. It is further echoed in the injunction that prohibits the uprooting of fruit-bearing trees; or the duty to maintain the original integrity of the earth as environment.²

Consciousness, on the other hand, is concerned with non-material mental events. While mental events may or may not

1. Qur’an 25:63.

2. In the Qur’an, “And do not bring about devastation to the earth after its [original] rectification” (Qur’an 7:85).

supervene upon the physical (e.g., grey matter and its “circuitry”), they continue to insist on recognition as possessing an emergent life of their own. Consciousness in Muslim cosmology remains the purview of the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nātiqah*).

The metaphysical vision to which we allude is connected to the ontological constitution of the earth itself. This spiritual connection, however, is far from pre-Christian European shamanism, namely, the “mystification of nature” so intensely opposed by European modernity. Instead, it is a metaphysical philosophy (or systematic theology) reified in experiential engagement with the world.

The metaphysical discourse of Muslim environmental consciousness is constituted by an over-arching universal principle (*kullī*), within which are subsumed two pervading threads of meaning (*ma‘ānī*).

BALANCE

The universal principle is that of balance (*tawāzun*, or *ittizān*), a state in which opposing forces or influences are maintained in even distribution, and so enabling some other thing or person to remain upright or stable. The principle of balance is concerned with the equilibrium of “systems” whether they be geological or physiological, or otherwise. An example of this in personal behavior is the mean between two extremes of behavior. For example, the virtue of courage is a mean between the two extremes of recklessness and cowardice. While this has its roots in Aristotelian thought, it was later brought on board by Muslim scholarship when it was recognized as harmonious with primordial truth.³ Aristotle would employ this principle to critique the constitution of Sparta as contain-

3. See Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-‘amal*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1964).

ing disproportionate elements. They trained only the men of their society and not the women, and when they trained, they trained for war and not peace.

A second illustration of a balancing principle could be the concept of homeostasis. In the life and natural sciences it is generally considered to be the maintenance of a dynamically stable state within a system by means of internal processes that tend to counterbalance disturbances from external influences. Marshall McLuhan would apply the idea to an urban polity in 1964, “the city, as a form of the body politic, responds to new pressures and irritations by resourceful new extensions—always in the effort to exert staying power, constancy, equilibrium, and homeostasis.”⁴

Systems are either internal or external to persons (or, perceiving subjects). Systems external to the person as a perceiving subject may be environmental, social, technological, or interpersonal. These systems tend to have physical properties and are located in what Muslim scholars refer to as “extra-mental reality” (*mā fi al-khārij*). Systems internal to persons are either “bodily”, and so, still to be considered an aspect of the physical dimension, or “mental”, or “spiritual”, being an aspect of the soul (*nafs*).⁵ Every system has a corresponding set of principles that govern its own states of equilibrium and dis-equilibrium.

The Islamic cosmological paradigm considers equilibrium to be the original state of the natural world, “As for the earth, We have spread it out, set firm mountains upon it, and made everything grow there in due balance.”⁶ However, we have

4. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994), 98.

5. The technical meaning of *nafs* here is not that of the Sufis (i.e. the ego), but rather that of the scholastic theologians (*al-mutakallimīn*), as defined in the *Taʿrīfāt al-Jurjānī*: “The *nafs* is that subtle, vaporous substance which comprises the powers of life, sense and volition.” See al-Sharif al-Jurjānī, *al-Taʿrīfāt*, ed. Gustav Flügel (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1969), s.v. “*al-nafs*”.

6. Qurʾan 15:19.

referred to balance as a universal principle (*qā'idah kulliyyah*) and not a first principle (*mabda' awwalī*) because it is potentially disruptable, whereas a first principle is constant and incorruptible, and so termed an *arché*.

The frailty of the balance is part of the greater scheme of “deen”, frequently translated as religion but inherently meaning “transaction”. Key to this transaction is the maintenance of balance, which is a responsibility (*amānah*) that human persons have been entrusted with. “And the heavens He has lifted and placed the Balance; that you not exceed the Balance. So establish just measure and do not upset the Balance.”⁷ This is an aspect of stewardship (*khilāfah*) in accordance with the Qur’anic injunction “and measure with a just balance (*al-qistās al-mustaqīm*).”⁸ This aspect of equilibrium-maintenance is a mandate of stewardship that predates the appearance of the first person on earth. It is a *deontic* ethical duty admixed with her genetic make up. Furthermore, the Arabic term in Qur’an 26:182, *al-qistās al-mustaqīm*, is considered by exegetes to be an allusion to the discipline of logic, defined by al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī as “a principial instrument, the [rules] of which protect the mind from making mistakes in thought”.⁹ Logic becomes one of the principles instrumental to the internal equilibrium of the perceiving subject who has been charged with the maintenance of the external equilibrium of the environment. The mind, or intellect, is referred to in Arabic as *‘aql*. The etymological root of *‘aql* means a “restraint that maintains balance or moderation”.

However, the intellect is only one of a group of internal systems that require equilibrium-maintenance. There are the internal “physical” systems—the respiratory, circulatory, neurophysiological, and so forth. There are also the “non-physical”,

7. Qur’an 55:7–9.

8. Qur’an 26:182.

9. Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta’rifāt*, s.v. “*al-mantiq*”.

which influence personal disposition and character. Character is defined as: a deep-seated bearing within the self from which actions proceed with ease and effortlessness and without need for forethought or pause.¹⁰ When those actions are handsome—being rational and licit—it is called *good* character. When they are otherwise, so too is the character named: “otherwise”. Good character, further, has four pillars and four matrices.¹¹ The four pillars are: the faculty of knowledge, the faculty of anger, the faculty of passion (desire), and the faculty of justice or equity among the previous three. When these four pillars are even, balanced, and harmonious, good character obtains. The “balance” in the faculty of knowledge is between cunning and foolishness and it is termed *wisdom*. The balance in the faculty of anger is between recklessness and cowardice—as mentioned earlier—and it is termed *courage*. The balance in the faculty of passion (desire) is between greed and apathy and it is termed *temperance*. Balance in the faculty of equity, however, does not have two extremes of excess and deficiency. It has only an opposite, tyranny (abuse). When this faculty is balanced it remains *equity*; it is either present or lost. It is the balance. These, then, are the four matrices of goodness in character: wisdom (*hikmah*), courage (*shajā’ah*), temperance (*‘iffah*), and equity (*‘adl*).¹² In addition to character and disposition, psychological constitution, reason, and rational acumen (i.e., logic and general intelligence), there are beliefs, convictions, hopes, intentions, and emotions. These are factors and states of mind and soul.¹³ They are patently internal.

It is when the inner constitution of the steward (*khalīfah*) is in a state of imbalance and disequilibrium that disruption,

10. Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011), 5:190.

11. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, 5:192-94.

12. *Ibid.*, 5:194.

13. See note 5 above.

disharmony, and disaster appears in the extra-mental environment. And this is the only cause of environmental disaster or decay. Geological or meteorological “disturbances”, or macro-systemic shifts are cyclical and part of the natural order. They are sometimes called “natural” disasters. But “environmental” disasters are solely the result of a spiritual disaster going on within man. “Corruption has appeared in the earth and the ocean due to what the hands of men have wrought.”¹⁴

Some scholars have defined the human as a being that is directed from its interior, meaning his convictions and beliefs—these convictions being the thoughts and ideas that he takes as a way of life, taking up residence in his heart, and reflected in his actions and behavior. This implies that the actions of the limbs, often effecting balance or imbalance in an extra-mental environmental space, are directly influenced by internal states. Those internal states are either in equilibrium or disequilibrium.

TWO THEMATA

As for the two themata alluded to earlier, they appear in the conception of the environment as both a *source* of analogy and a *site* (i.e., locus) of spiritual consciousness. The natural environment is a source from which to draw lessons or *‘ibar*, aspects of nature provide a bridging conduit (*‘ubūr*), or point of departure for an analogy (*qiyās*).¹⁵ Lessons, understandings, and inferences are drawn from examples in nature.

14. Qur’an 30:41.

15. Evidence for the authority of *qiyās* is considered to be found in the Qur’anic references to the words *‘ibrah* (pl. *‘ibar*) and *‘tibār* to consider or draw a lesson from something (e.g., Qur’an 59:2); the meanings of which have their source in the idea of crossing a bridge (*‘ubūr*); i.e., from the understanding of a familiar thing to a new understanding of something previously unfamiliar.

This is one of the most prevalent motifs in the Qur’anic style. In fact, the word for “verse”, *āyah*, is the same word for “sign”, in the natural world. Both usages are employed in the text. It is from this consideration that Muslim scholars have formulated the idea of a “written book” (*al-kitāb al-masṭūr*), and a “visual book” (*al-kitāb al-manzūr*). The verses are meant to be “witnessed”¹⁶ and the signs and events in the natural environment are meant to be “read”. Both are modes of revelation. In this way, the natural world is a source of further understanding. In Qur’an 41:53, we are presented with Allah’s intent to show mankind His *āyāt* (signs) on the natural horizon with the purpose of bringing about enlightenment as to the truth of the Qur’anic or Prophetic message.¹⁷

We are further encouraged to journey through the natural environment in order to engage in something the Qur’an refers to as *nazar*, or investigation. “Investigate (*unzurū*) all that is in the heavens and the earth”;¹⁸ and, “travel through the earth and ‘investigate’ how Allah did originate the creation.”¹⁹ The word *nazar* (investigate) takes on a technical connotation akin to “analysis” (*tahlīl*) in the “instrumental” sciences of the Shari‘ah disciplines (*‘ulūm al-ālah*).

According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *nazar* is more prevalently used to denote “looking with the eyes (*baṣar*)” amongst the general populace, and to denote “insightful investigation of the mind (*baṣīrah*)” amongst specialist communities (*al-khāṣṣah*).²⁰ In the instrumental sciences, *nazar* (investigation), is defined as: the ordering of matters known in such a way as to arrive at matters previously unknown. For example,

16. The verses of the Qur’an and its textual structure are themselves considered signs of the book’s inimitability.

17. “We will show them our signs on the horizons and in their very selves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth” (Qur’an 41:53).

18. Qur’an 10:101.

19. Qur’an 29:20.

20. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, ed. Ṣafwān ‘Adnān Dāwūdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1997), s.v. “*nazar*”.

“the world is given to change,” coupled with, “all things given to change are occurrences in time.” These are items previously known and comprehended. When ordered together, they yield the following outcome, “the world is an occurrence in time.” Given that an occurrence is a time-bound event, and the world being an event, and given that all time-bound events require a cause; therefore, the world requires a cause.

One might observe that this definition of investigation (*naẓar*) is very closely related to the standard definition of “thought” (*fikr*).²¹ However, in the *Ḥudūd al-aniqah* of Shaykh al-Islām Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī, we find the two concepts virtually equated with one another, “investigation (*al-naẓar*) is thought (*fikr*) that leads to conclusive knowledge (*ilm*), belief (*i’tiqād*), or supposition (*ẓann*).”²²

Some examples of the Qur’an’s use of nature as a source of analogy to be obtained through this instrument of investigation include the following vignettes. The “fecundating winds” (*al-riyāḥ al-lawāqih*) that carry the pollen to produce blossoms, fruit, and other produce once the rains irrigate the crop. Just as this is an arrangement—the foundations of which, are not engineered by people—so too does Allah reserve the terms of giving life and rescinding it.²³ The favorable sowing and harvesting of crops, the suitability of fresh rainwater, and the utility of fire as a source of light and heat are employed to demonstrate the nature of rational possibility in the probability that, things could very easily have been otherwise.²⁴ The date palm is employed in the parable of the whole-

21. See for example, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Munāwī, *al-Tawqīf ‘alā muhimāt al-ta’arīf*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍwan al-Dāyah (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1990), s.vv. “*naẓar*” and “*fikr*”; and al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta’rīfāt*, s.vv. “*naẓar*” and “*fikr*”.

22. Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī, *al-Ḥudūd al-aniqah*, ed. Māzin al-Mubārak (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu’āshir, 1991), 69.

23. Qur’an 15:22-23.

24. Qur’an 56:63-74.

some tree as an analogy for both the believer²⁵ as well as the testimony of divine unicity and the finality of prophecy. Its roots are deep, its branches extend skyward, and it delivers its fruits in every season.²⁶ The ephemeral nature of the world is the lesson to be drawn from the lush fields in spring that will inevitably yellow and dry by fall and be blown away by the wind. Just as the farmer realizes that this is a temporary state of affairs, so too should people be under no illusions as to the temporary nature of worldly life.²⁷ Rain is a frequent motif in the Qur'an. It is used by Allah to illustrate the doctrine of occasionalism. People are not the authors of their own actions. Instead, they "acquire" (*kasb*) accountability for them through their faculty of intention.²⁸ Just as the rain does not cause the vegetation to flourish; it is Allah that is the creator by means of (*bi-hī*) the rain.²⁹ The wind and rain clouds provide an analogy for divine mercy also. He speaks of His sending the winds before the rains which carry the floating clouds upon them until they reach a barren (dead) space of earth so that it vibrates once more with vegetation. In this is an analogy for the resurrection, but within it is a metaphor for God's wont to bring dead hearts back to life.³⁰ A final example is how the lote tree (*al-sidrah*) is symbolic of the demarcation of the boundary between the physical and the meta-physical.³¹

Given the centrality of natural phenomena as a source for revelatory communication in the "visual book", *al-kitāb al-manzūr* (also from the root *naẓara*), it would seem to behoove

25. As reported by Ibn Kathīr on the authority of al-Bukhārī in the narration of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar.

26. Qur'an 14:24-26.

27. Qur'an 57:20.

28. "Actions are only (*innamā*) by intentions" (al-Bukhārī and Muslim), and "Allah creates every artisan and his craftsmanship" (al-Ḥākim in *al-Mustadrak*). See also Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Khalq af'āl al-'ibād*.

29. Qur'an 35:27 and 78:14-16.

30. Qur'an 7:57 and 35:9.

31. Qur'an 53:13-18.

people of faith to recognize their own profound intimacy with the natural environment.

The second of the two themes presents in the idea of the natural environment as a site of spiritual consciousness. When seen from this vantage point, nature becomes a locus for the activities of remembrance (*dhikr*) and reminding (*mudhākarah*). A live network of communication is initiated between the individual's consciousness (as rational soul, i.e., *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) and divine purpose in the effective relationship between divine omnipotence (*al-qudrah al-ilāhiyyah*) and the natural world. One is reading and gaining from the unfolding visual revelation of the *al-kitāb al-manzūr*. Through active remembrance (personal initiative) and passive reminding (being receptive) the person is attentive to the active workings of divine purpose in the cosmos. This is an empowering vantage point for one's spiritual consciousness. This vantage point is of course for those who are attentive to viewing the world in this way: "There truly is a reminder in this for whoever has a heart, whoever listens attentively, and is a witness."³²

Nature as site further presents in two modalities: that of (a) remembrance *of* nature, and (b) remembrance *in* nature. Remembrance "of" refers to instances in Muslim tradition where inanimate or "not-typically-conscious" objects are imbued by God with a "type" of "awareness". For example, the pebbles that sing the praises of God in the hands of the Prophet ﷺ. In the compendia of al-Ṭabarānī, al-Bayhaqī, Ibn 'Asākir, and al-Haythamī, the Prophet ﷺ takes a handful of pebbles that begin to invoke Allah's praises in his hand which could be heard clearly by the narrator and those along with them. He then passes them on to the first Caliph, Abū Bakr ibn Abī Quḥāfah (d. 634), where they continued to do the same, and then likewise to the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-

32. Qur'an 50:37.

Khaṭṭāb (d. 644), and to the third, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (d. 656). From there, the narrator—Anas ibn Mālik—says, “they were passed to us, where they ceased to do so.” Even mountains can be imbued with a form of emotional awareness if Allah wishes to demonstrate a lesson therein. Uḥud, “is a mountain that we love, and that also loves us,” the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ tells his companions. At least two separate incidents are highlighted in the traditions literature where trees respond to the presence or absence of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. In the first well-known episode, we have the tree that had been accustomed to supporting him in the mosque when he would deliver his sermons. How it cried when he replaced it with a formal pulpit. This tree expressed its sense of loss at losing its regular proximity to the Prophet ﷺ but chose, however, to be compensated with being re-planted in Paradise in the eternal neighborhood of its beloved. In a second but similar incident, we have a tree responding to the summons of the Prophet ﷺ and immortalized in the words of the poet Muḥammad ibn Sa‘īd al-Būṣīrī:

Trees would respond compliantly to his summons
 walking toward him upon their trunks without feet,
 As if their stalks wrote lines
 in exquisite calligraphy along the middle of the path

In the narration of Abū al-Dardā’ at Damascus, we are told that even the flora and fauna might express themselves. “Whosoever pursues a path seeking knowledge, Allah facilitates him in a path to the Garden. Indeed, the angels lay down their wings for the student of knowledge, in expression of their approval for what he seeks. Verily, everything in the heavens and the earth seeks forgiveness for the scholar, even the fish in the depths of the sea.”³³

33. See *Musnad Ibn Abi Shaybah*.

The scenes above—and others like them—refer to objects in nature engaging in the remembrance of Allah in a way that is perceptible to human persons. Otherwise, we are told that every object in the cosmos extols Allah’s praises, either with the tongue of its state—inaudible—or by a specially endowed capacity—as in the narrations above: “The seven heavens and the earth, and all things in them celebrate Him; and there is nothing except that it sings His praises, it is only that you do not perceive their celebration.”³⁴

The second modality of nature as *site* of spiritual consciousness is: remembrance in nature. Implied by the notion of remembrance “in”, is that aspects and events in the physical environment possess a special capacity to induce spiritual consciousness within the human perceiving subject. This transpires by way of the natural environment constituting a “horizon” for the *tajallī* (manifestation) of Allah’s names and attributes.

Everything other than Allah (His essence and attributes) is cosmos (or universe) and a “direct object” of His omnipotence (*qudrah*). Every event, every happening or occurrence, is the effect of this attribute of *qudrah*. The entire world (*‘ālam*), as contingent “Other”, is an effect of the divine omnipotence, whether that other is animate or inanimate. As a contingent “event” or “occurrence”, all have a starting point in time, having been preceded by non-existence.

From here emerges the idea of an “Islamic theophany of divine disclosure”. The attribute of *qudrah* (divine omnipotence) performs the task of executing in accordance with, and as specified by the attribute of, *irādah*, or divine volition. Both omnipotence and volition are attributes of effect; while the effect of *qudrah* is one of “inception” (*ījād*), that of volition is one of “specification” (*takhṣīṣ*). The vocation of the

34. Qur’an 17:44.

divine will is to specify or designate a single configuration of possibility among a range of rationally possible outcomes. Furthermore, this *takhṣiṣ* transpires in accordance with the content of divine omniscience (*al-‘ilm al-ilāhī*), which is timeless and eternal in both directions of past (*azal*) and future (*mā lā yazāl*).

Furthermore, of the celebrated “Most Beautiful Names” of Allah, many from among the names of beauty (*jamāl*) and even of majesty (*jalāl*) are subsumed—hierarchically—within the “jurisdiction” of divine volition (will, or *irādah*).³⁵ When we look to the horizons we may witness the effect of *qudrah* as governed by the “Sustainer” (*al-Razzāq*) when we see fields of grain being harvested or an orchard reaching maturity; or even a supermarket truck going through EZ-Pass, or people emerging from a check cashing office on an urban street corner at the end of a long hard week. When a policy is enforced, or an incursion repelled, or even when receiving a parking ticket; or the realizing that the defining boundaries of the arena of life have been preset beyond our own cleverness—date and place of birth, ethnicity and parentage—we behold the “Compeller” (*al-Jabbār*). When a constriction (*al-Qābiḍ*) is lifted from a heart at the receipt of some good news it is the beholding of an effect of the “Expander” (*al-Bāsiṭ*). When some windfall occurs it is the effect of the “Opener” (*al-Fattāḥ*). When some politician falls from grace we behold the effect of the “Abaser” (*al-Khāfiḍ*); and when some peoples

35. Namely, there is no compulsion upon Allah to be generous, gentle, or clement; or for that matter to create or sustain anything. This is His free will and discretion which makes it all the more special when He *is* gracious and relenting. Juxtaposed with this are the attributes of which He has no choice in the matter, where Allah is compelled by necessity; e.g., perfection, life, absolute omnipotence and omniscience, as well as eternity, timelessness, uniqueness, etc. Interestingly, and as an aside, equity and justice are not from the realm of free choice for Allah. Anything the *absolute* sovereign does, wills, or decrees, is necessarily just. It is not rationally possible for it to be otherwise; as injustice is, “to dispose with the property of another without the other’s permission”.

find a new ascendancy and a new day for civil society, they have enjoyed the outcomes of the “Exalter” (*al-Rāfi‘*). But from the regions of more subtle matters (*al-Laṭīf*), when an infant is placed to its mother’s breast, it is another manifestation of the “Gentle” (*al-Ra’ūf*). But when it is in the middle of the night and she is worn out, fatigued, yet enlivened by love and duty, it is the “Forebearing” (*al-Ḥalīm*).

These vignettes are all aside from our uninterrupted witness of the effects of the “Creator” (*al-Khāliq*), the “Shaper of Forms” (*al-Muṣawwir*), the “Giver” (*al-Wahhāb*), the “Protector” (*al-Ḥāfiẓ*), the “Generous” (*al-Karīm*), the “Resurrector” (*al-Bā’ith*), the “Powerfully Strong” (*al-Qawī*), the “Originator” (*al-Mubdi*), the “Restorer” (*al-Mu’id*), the “Giver of Life” (*al-Muḥyi*), the “Taker of Life” (*al-Mumīt*), the “Expediter” (*al-Muqaddim*), the “Delayer” (*al-Mu’akhkhir*), the “Enricher” (*al-Mughnī*), the “Creator of Harm” (*al-Ḍārr*), the “Creator of Benefit” (*al-Nāfi‘*). And so we have the beginnings of a theophanic vision in the Islamic worldview.

This view-point is further teased out in subtle fashion in the poetry of more than a few Muslim scholars that dabbled in verse. For example, the eighteenth-century jurist, ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, signals the emergence of an event that reminds one of the activity of the names of Allah in, on, from, and at the “horizon” of creation:

A moon rising from beyond the tree branch [before my window] resplendent
it manifests, glory to the One who created it
This creation is [the horizon of] His sunrise
everyone who devotes his self to Him finds ascension
O subtle bolt of lightning at the edge of the valley: for a moment, pause
you have captivated the heart and the eye
If you pass some day by [the precincts of] Dhū Salam
say to them: “Be generous with even a brief meeting”
Say to them, O Sa’d, “This desperate lover of yours,
how often has he painfully suffered tears and sleeplessness

He has melted away due to longing for you
once, from you, a lightning bolt shimmered forth”
O gentle breeze diffusing by night
from its fragrance the entire creation emerged³⁶

In the above verses, nature and the natural environment is the familiar device. It is metaphoric yet literal all at the same time.

In still another poem, Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235) intimates the “disclosure” of divine activity—recognized as divine activity—in the now recurrent motif of the flash of lightning at the edge of a valley gorge:

Has a bolt of lightning flashed at the edge of the gorge
or is it merely that Layla has lifted the veil from her face

Al-Nābulusī once more suggests the *theophanic vision* as a religious objective, perhaps echoing the refrain of the famed Prophetic tradition “that you worship Him as though you are seeing Him”.

The appearance of the beloved is the ultimate goal
whoever has witnessed will know and the “other” is blinkered
His countenance is manifest in a most extraordinary way
as an illuminated tablet inscribed in creation itself

He speaks to these “understandings” (*wāridāt*) and signals the outcomes of intimate knowledge and religious experience that obtain from this witness:

36. Of course, the “tree branch” and the “valley edge” are indicative of any natural site serving as a horizon for the manifestation of the effects of the interplay of the names and attributes. The “lightning bolt” and the “moon” are metaphors for the effects of the divine attributes. The “precincts of Dhū Salam” are a metaphor for a space—whether physical or spiritual—where you expect to find nearness to the beloved. Here, the “gentle breeze” is a metaphor for the activity of the divine omnipotence (*qudrāh*); and Allah and the author know best.

O you who arise from the Eastern
 orbits of the unseen
 O you who descend into the tents
 and illumine the hearts
 The countenance of my beloved has appeared
 and so all “other” has been erased
 and He “alighted” upon the throne of my heart
 without any weariness or fatigue³⁷

He then playfully addresses the divine essence, but in reference to the disclosure of the real-time activity of the names and attributes:

Leave the beauty of the countenance to show
 don't cover up, my beloved
 All night long I lay awake thinking of you
 my aching and longing only increases
 In this way the beloved prevails
 over the heart of the heartbroken with aloofness
 Everything is a jewel in the necklace
 the adornment of an intimidating beauty
 O thou named by names
 all of them, while He is transcendent
 In everything you are my ardent aim
 in you my eye finds its excursion

The impetus for this *theophanic witness* may be found emerging from a subtle nuance identified in verse 45 of Sūrat al-Furqān, “Do you not see your Lord, as He extends the shadows.” Nothing in the Book of Allah is arbitrary. While the uncreatedness of the Qur’an in terms of its eternal meanings is a familiar *doxa*, the structure and order of the Arabic letters and words are also revealed. Meaning, the syn-

37. The appearance of the countenance again, is a metaphor indicating the conscious witnessing of the activity of the attributes of the divine essence. [“Countenance” or “face” is often used to indicate “essence” (*al-dhāt*) or “existence” (*al-wujūd*)]. Whereas, “alighting upon the throne of the heart”, while a clear nod to the creation narrative, may be a reference to the verse of the Qur’an indicating overwhelming dedication to a single object of devotion, “Allah has not made two hearts in the breast of a single man” (Qur’an 33:4).

tactical structure and order is part of the revelation, not set by any prophet or angel. In the verse under consideration, Allah very well might have said, “do you not see the shadow, as your Lord extends it.” However, He did not. Instead He asks whether we have beheld the ever-present author of events at the moment of their occurrence. In syllogistic fashion, when we conjoin this observation with the doctrine of “unicity of action” (*tawhīd al-af‘āl*), we are led to extrapolate the *theophanic vision* we have been referring to. In Sūrat al-An‘ām (verse 102), and again in Sūrat al-Ra‘d (verse 16), we have the phrase “Allah (or He) is the creator of everything”. The use of the word “*kull*” in the Arabic phrase “*khāliq kulli shay*” is one of the formulae of the “general reference” (*ṣīghat al-‘umūm*). Taken at face value without any extenuating evidence to the contrary (e.g., a *qarīnah*), it leaves no exception. And so, any event or occurrence transpiring in the universe, no matter how subtle (like the extension of shadows) is a direct (and live) effect of the omnipotent faculty of the divine (i.e., *al-qudrah al-ilāhiyyah*). In the supernal schemata of theistic attributes, we are beholding the “real-time” interplay of divine will and eternal knowledge.

The craft (*techne*) of extrapolation is termed *istinbāt* in sacred knowledge. It has a very environment-bound etymology. The trilateral root *nabaṭa* (*n-b-ṭ*) means the outflow of water from a source. The form *istanbaṭa*, then, means to intently seek water, or to purposively draw it out from its natural source. Extrapolation is, then, the methodical application of principles or algorithms based upon known states of affairs to outcomes or conclusions regarding previously unknown states of affairs. Just as water is a source that keeps the physical aspect of our persons in a state of health and well-being, “meaning”, whether revealed or extrapolated through *ijtihād* or interpolation, is a source that keeps the mental and spiritual aspects

of our persons in a state of health and well-being. “And We made every living thing from water, will they not believe.”³⁸

This *theophanic perspective* on the natural environment, however, is not immediately available to every person. It is achievable for those who are especially alert to it; to someone who, “has a heart, who listens attentively, and is a witness.”³⁹ This verse provides three qualities that shape the posture of this person toward the types of “messaging” that have been referred to above; whether by means of formal revelation or indirect communication, whether textual or environmental, whether “theophanic” or symbolic, whether *mastūr* (written) or *manzūr* (visual).

The first quality is to be in possession of “a heart”. To have a heart, according to the exegete Abū al-Su‘ūd, is to have a sound heart (*qalbun salīm*) that comprehends what it observes, contemplating its deeper meanings. For al-Baghawī it is to be imbued with higher intellectual capacity. Al-Bayḍāwī would sum this up, in that, to have a heart is to have a perceptive mind that contemplates the realities (*ḥaqā’iq*) of the messages, lessons, and events that it witnesses.

The second quality is “to be attentive”: to be listening and not be heedless or preoccupied. Abū al-Su‘ūd will suggest that the structure of the verse implies that the first quality is not sufficient without this second one. To be attentive suggests presence of heart and mind, or *ḥudūr*. Presence of heart is a gathered-ness (*jam‘*) of one’s focus. “So the degree to which a person is ‘absent’ from the ‘other’ is the degree to which he is ‘present’ to reality (or truth).”⁴⁰ *Ḥudūr* is a “wakefulness” (*yaqāzah*) to the object of focus. ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf al-Munāwī further defines “wakefulness” as “understanding the intent

38. Qur’an 21:30.

39. Qur’an 50:37.

40. Al-Kāshānī, *Rashḥ al-zulāl fī sharḥ al-alfāz al-mutadāwalah bayna arbāb al-adḥwāq wa-al-aḥwāl*, ed. Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li-al-Turāth, 1995), 78.

and purpose (*al-maqṣūd*) of Allah in His proscriptions and enjoinders.”⁴¹

The third quality is that the person be a “witness” (*shahīd*) to the event under observation. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī will note that witnessing may be an action of the visual sight (*baṣar*) or one of insight (*baṣīrah*).⁴² It is the latter, as a response to the former, with which we are concerned here. In English, a *witness* is someone who, having been a present observer to an event, remains prepared to give formal testimony to its facts and evidences from his or her inward conscience, when called upon to do so. Upon analysis of the exegetical literature available, the quality of being *shahīd* (a witness) in this verse, is to bring together the first two qualities in a single individual: meaning, to be present with one’s intellect, for the purpose of comprehending the deeper meanings and lessons to be drawn from an event.⁴³

Given these three qualities, a person who is “plugged in” and “switched on” in this way is able to engage with the natural environment around her from an ontological position of the *theophanic vision* or *witness*. This vision comprises the two themata presented above. It is the meta-dimension of the environmental consciousness that informs the microeconomics of the *deontic* environmental conscientiousness. In this way, the “duty-ethics” of action—i.e., movement in the physical environment—is infused with a type of *élan vital* from a corresponding meta-physical environment. This *sentiential lens* that is forged from the two themata is governed by the operating principle: *for any system comprising the potential for imbalance, the maintenance of that balance constitutes an imperative*.⁴⁴ This operating principle may be seen to be ex-

41. Al-Munāwī, *al-Tawqīf ‘alā muhimmāt al-ta’arīf*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1410/1990), 347.

42. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, s.v. “*shahida*”.

43. See the exegeses of Abū al-Su‘ūd, al-Baghawī, al-Bayḏāwī, and al-Qurṭubī.

44. As indicated in Qur’an 55:7–9, “He has raised up the sky. He has set the

trapolated (*mustanbat*) from the Prophetic narration censuring the abuse and misuse of the very means upon which one's own sustainability depends; "The *munbatt*⁴⁵ never reaches his destination. He covers no distance nor does he leave any riding mount alive." With a fuller, more expansive view toward environmental accountability, Muslim consciousness may help to avoid outcomes on our shared environmental horizon that need not be so tragic.

balance so that you may not exceed in the balance: weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance".

45. The *munbatt* is a term coined by the Prophet ﷺ for a person who unwisely depletes his resources and therefore never attains his objectives. The hadith is found in al-Bayhaqī, *al-Jāmi' li-shu'ab al-īmān*.

