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## THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN SHAPING SOCIAL MINDSETS FOR CLIMATE CRISIS MITIGATION

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### ABSTRACT

Modern industrial practices and consumer-driven economies have disrupted the balance between humanity and nature, undermining the harmony that once characterised their interdependence. This anthropocentric worldview has generated profound ecological imbalances and accelerated the dynamics of climate change. Considering the severe implications of this crisis of humankind, raising awareness and aligning consumption with ecological parameters has become an urgent prerequisite for a sustainable future. Within this context, the insights of Islamic philosophers—particularly on nature, humanity, and economic ethics—remain highly relevant. This study employs content analysis to three major works of Islamic moral philosophy—Ibn Miskawayh’s *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, and Kınalızāde ‘Alī’s *Akhlāq-i ‘Alā’ī*—to examine how Islamic virtue ethics can inform and reshape individual and collective attitudes toward the climate emergency. The findings

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demonstrate that Islamic moral philosophy offers vital guidance for harmonising environmental behaviour with ethical values, demonstrating that this integration can meaningfully address the global climate crisis. Rooted in the core virtues of justice (*‘adl*), contentment (*qanā‘ah*), and compassion (*rahmah*), it provides a strong ethical foundation for sustainable environmental practice. Integrating these virtues into contemporary climate strategies can enhance community engagement and strengthen broader efforts to mitigate the climate crisis.

**KEYWORDS:** Islamic Moral Philosophy, Climate Crisis, Social Mindset Transformation, Justice (*al-‘adl*), Contentment (*al-qanā‘a*), Compassion (*al-rahma*).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Existing within a framework of physical laws and moral values grounded in natural balance, human beings—understood as bio-psycho-social entities—engage in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship with the natural world, mutually shaping and being shaped by it. The contours of this relationship reflect broader social attitudes and belief systems.<sup>2</sup> As active participants in the ecosystem, human beings, like all other living organisms, exert a transformative influence on the environment.<sup>3</sup> While historical records attest to millennia-long climatic fluctuations, contemporary global warming is predominantly

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew S. Goudie and Heather A. Viles, *The Earth Transformed: An Introduction to Human Impacts on the Environment* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammet Caner Ilgaroglu, “Money-Hedonism from Ibn Khaldun’s Notion of Morality,” *Cumhuriyet Theology Journal* 23, no. 3 (2019): 1337, doi:10.18505/cuid.615224.

anthropogenic, driven by industrialisation and a consumerist ethos.<sup>4</sup> Although political and economic factors often dominate climate discourse, underlying these are individual habits and lifestyle choices that substantially impact ecological well-being. The prevailing societal mindset—driven by comfort and self-gratification—constitutes a core driver of environmental degradation and the ensuing climate crisis.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the contemporary climate crisis assumes an existential dimension, disrupting not only the natural equilibrium but also economic systems and consumption patterns. Addressing this multifaceted crisis, therefore, requires more than technological or political solutions; it demands a moral awakening grounded in ethical reflection and individual responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

Humanity thus faces an unprecedented ecological crisis brought about by its own actions—one that fundamentally threatens the conditions for sustainable life on Earth. This global emergency has led many religious traditions, including Islam, to engage more directly in discourses on environmental responsibility and ethics.

In this context, seminal contributions in Islamic environmental thought provide valuable insights for addressing these challenges. Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasises the spiritual and cosmological dimensions of nature, critiquing the desacralisation of the natural world in modernity and offering an Islamic framework grounded in metaphysical harmony, divine order, and ethical responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120>; Taciano L. Milfont, “Global Warming, Climate Change, and Human Psychology,” in *Psychological Approaches to Sustainability: Current Trends in Theory, Research and Practice*, ed. Victor Corral et al. (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Abid Rashid Gill, Muhammad Abrar Ul Haq, Afrasiyab Arshad, Farheen Akram. "Pro-Environmental Habits and Ecological Responsibilities." 2022 International Conference on Decision Aid Sciences and Applications (DASA) (2022): 1737-1742. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1109/dasa54658.2022.9764986>.

<sup>6</sup> Allen Thompson, “Anthropocentrism: Humanity as Peril and Promise,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, ed. Stephan M. Gardiner and Allen Thompson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 79.

<sup>7</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*

Osman Bakar further develops this perspective through the classical concept of *al-tawhīd*, highlighting nature as al-Qurʾān *al-takwīnī* and advocating for a moral-spiritual order in ecological thinking.<sup>8</sup> Mawil Izzi Dien systematically links Qurʾānic and Prophetic teachings to ecological ethics, stressing *al-amānah* (trust) and *al-mīzān* (balance) as foundational principles for sustainable practices.<sup>9</sup> Fazlun Khalid complements this work by demonstrating practical applications of Islamic environmental ethics in Muslim communities.<sup>10</sup> Other scholars, including Lisa Wersal, Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, and Odeh Rashed Al-Jayyousi, emphasise Islamic moral principles for environmental stewardship, underscoring the sacredness of nature and human responsibility.<sup>11</sup>

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(Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 1997); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., 1976); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis," *MAAS Journal of Islamic Science* 6, no. 2 (1990): 31–51; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis, Temenos Academy Papers*, no. 12 (London: Temenos Academy, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Osman Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997); Osman Bakar, *Qurʾanic Pictures of the Universe: The Scriptural Foundation of Islamic Cosmology* (Brunei Darussalam: UBD Press and IBT, 2016); Osman Bakar, *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The Islamic Heritage* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya and Islamic Book Trust, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Mawil Izzi Dien, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2000); Mawil Izzi Dien, "Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law, and Society," in *Islamic Perspectives on Science and Society*, ed. (London: Routledge, 1996); Mawil Izzi Dien, *Islamic Law: From Historical Foundations to Contemporary Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Fazlun Khalid, *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Crisis* (Markfield: Kube, 2019); Fazlun Khalid, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Wersal, "Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges," *Zygon* 30, no. 3 (1995): 451–59; Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, "Islamic Ecotheology Based on the Qurʾān," *Islamic Studies* 37, no. 2 (1998): 151–81; Odeh Rashed Al-Jayyousi, *Islam and Sustainable Development: New Worldviews* (Gower, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315589947>

Building on this foundation, this study explores the potential contribution of Islamic moral philosophy to climate crisis mitigation by analysing three classical texts: Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, and Kinalizāde 'Alī's *Akhlāq-i 'Alā'ī*. These texts offer layered moral insights relevant to individual conduct, economic attitudes, and social relationships. At the heart of this inquiry lie three core virtues: justice (*al-'adl*), as an ontological principle sustaining equilibrium; contentment (*al-qanā'a*), as a normative guide in ethical consumption; and compassion (*al-rahma*), as a moral disposition shaping the human–nature relationship. By foregrounding these values, the study examines how Islamic moral philosophy can contribute to transforming societal mindsets and promoting sustainable environmental practices.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of climate change, as articulated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, encompasses “a change in climate that occurs, directly or indirectly, as a result of human activities that alter the composition of the atmosphere, in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.”<sup>12</sup> Discussions surrounding a potential global climate crisis have been sparked by the problems arising from climate change and the pervasive threats it poses worldwide.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the emergence of activist discourse on the climate crisis aims to underscore the gravity and urgency of climate-related changes induced by natural disasters precipitated by anthropogenic global warming.<sup>14</sup> Termed as a “climate

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, UN Doc. FCCC/INFORMAL/84 (1992); Belemir Şengül and Gökhan Murat, “Küresel İklim Krizinin Sosyal Boyutu ve Sosyal Politika Önlemleri,” *Süleyman Demirel University Visionary Journal* 15, no. 41 (2024): 344, <https://doi.org/10.21076/vizyoner.1310015>

<sup>13</sup> David Archer and Stefan Rahmstorf, *The Climate Crisis: An Introductory Guide to Climate Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Diana Stuart et al., “The Climate Crisis as a Catalyst for Emancipatory Transformation: An Examination of the Possible,” *International Sociology* 35, no. 4

emergency” by *Oxford Languages*, the concept denotes a situation necessitating immediate action to mitigate or halt climate change and forestall potential irreversible environmental degradation.<sup>15</sup>

The surge in global carbon emissions, serving as the primary environmental driver of the climate crisis, poses a shared challenge to humanity. Investigations into its underlying causes reveal a rapid escalation in global carbon emissions in the mid-twentieth century, accompanied by a stark rise in numerous socio-economic indicators.<sup>16</sup> Termed the “Great Acceleration”, this phenomenon reflects the tripling of the world’s population from approximately 2.5 billion to nearly 7.5 billion today, alongside a GDP per capita growth rate that far outpaces population increase.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to its environmental ramifications, the climate crisis engenders profound socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political repercussions. Socially, it precipitates health challenges stemming from food and water scarcity, exerting direct impacts on the physical and emotional well-being of communities, and causing subsequent economic hardship and displacement due to livelihood disruptions.<sup>18</sup> Compounding these concerns, projections from the World Bank indicate that between 35 and 122 million individuals may fall into poverty by 2030 as a result of climate change.<sup>19</sup>

The anthropogenic climate crisis thus represents the paramount challenge confronting both the planet and humanity. The endeavour to combat this crisis entails a multifaceted struggle,

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(2020): 436, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580920915067>.

<sup>15</sup> Şengül and Murat, “Küresel İklim Krizinin Sosyal Boyutu,” 345.

<sup>16</sup> Albert J. Gabric, “The Climate Change Crisis: A Review of Its Causes and Possible Responses,” *Atmosphere* 14, no. 1081 (2023): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos14071081>

<sup>17</sup> Gabric, “The Climate Change Crisis,” 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Gasper et al., “Social and Economic Impacts of Climate Change on the Urban Environment,” *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 3, no. 3 (2011): 154, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2010.12.009>

<sup>19</sup> Stephane Hallegatte et al., “Poverty and Climate Change: Introduction,” *Environment and Development Economics* 23, no. 3 (2018): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355770X18000141>

encompassing biological, ecological, industrial, geographical, astrophysical, economic, and sociological dimensions. While macro-level interventions by states through energy, industrial, and economic policies, constitute pivotal aspects of this struggle, the responsibility ultimately rests with individuals, highlighting the socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions of the crisis.<sup>20</sup>

Human behaviour and lifestyle represent social factors that exert long-term, cumulative effects on the sustainability of ecological systems. Climate change has therefore become a central focus within the social sciences, since human activities—through unsustainable behavioural patterns—form the foundation of the crisis. Accordingly, addressing the global climate crisis requires a profound transformation of the social mindset.<sup>21</sup>

Such a transformation necessarily encompasses the moral dimension of the crisis, because individuals' interactions with the ecosystem are directly shaped by their social and ethical orientations. Meaningful progress can thus be achieved only through a broad-based transformation of social mentality.<sup>22</sup>

By reshaping perspectives on nature, the world, life philosophies, consumption habits, and the broader relationship with the universe, a process of socio-economic and socio-cultural renewal may emerge—gradually mitigating, and ultimately reducing, the adverse effects of the climate crisis.

In this context, morality, as the cornerstone of the social mindset, stands out as a dynamic cognitive attribute that enables individuals to regulate their reflexive mechanisms, to comprehend themselves and the universe, understand nature and social dynamics, and organise their practical lives effectively in accordance with ethical and ecological awareness.

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<sup>20</sup> Parul Rishi, “Behavioural Transformation for Sustainability and Pro-Climate Action,” in *Managing Climate Change and Sustainability through Behavioural Transformation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 140.

<sup>21</sup> Rishi, “Behavioural Transformation for Sustainability,” 141.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Newell et al., *Changing Our Ways: Behaviour Change and the Climate Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Morality, as conceptualised in Islamic thought, encompasses both social relations and the natural essence of humanity. The root of the word, “*khulq* (moral character)”, signifies both creation, and serves as the origin of the term “*khalq* (creation)”, indicating social phenomena.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, ethics is twofold: first, it is grounded in relations with nature; and second, it is rooted in social relations.

Prominent figures in Islamic moral philosophy, including Ibn Miskawayh, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde ‘Alī, delineate the concept of *al-‘ilm al-akhlāq* (the study of morals) as encompassing *tadbīr al-naḥs* (individual moral discipline), *tadbīr al-manzil* (management of household and familial ethics), and *tadbīr al-mudun* (governance of societal and political morality).<sup>24</sup> Their moral principles, organised under these three main headings, offer significant contributions to the transformation of the social mindset essential for addressing the climate crisis.

The review of the literature highlights how societal mindset transformation may be achieved, emphasising the need for a balanced, harmonious, and just social order in both the inner and outer worlds. It also underscores compassionate attitudes towards nature and other beings, alongside an economic life shaped by *qanā‘a* (contentment). These works are selected for their comprehensive treatment of morality, defining it as “a state of the *naḥs* enabling action without conscious deliberation, partly innate and partly acquired through habit,” and acknowledging its malleability through education.<sup>25</sup>

Significant progress against the climate crisis can be made by transforming consumption patterns and lifestyles through moral attitudes and behaviours that reshape the socio-economic orientations.

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<sup>23</sup> al-Rāghib al-Iṣḥāhānī, *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Ṣafwān ‘Adnān Dāwūdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1992), s.v. “ḥ-l-q.”

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tartīb al-Sa‘adat (The Order of Happiness)*, ed. al-Suyuti (Cairo, 1928), 59.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, ed. Hasan Temim (Beirut: n.p., 1398 [A.H.]); Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlāk-i Nāṣiri/The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. George Michael Wickens (London: Routledge, 1964); Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Akhlāq-i ‘Alā‘ī*, ed. Mustafā Koç (Istanbul: Turkish Manuscripts Association Publications, 2014).

The findings provide valuable insights into fostering such transformation in contemporary society through virtues such as justice (*al-‘adl*), contentment (*al-qanā‘a*), and compassion (*al-rahmah*).

Before delving into this inquiry, reflecting on the human-induced causes of climate change and their roots in human nature is beneficial for understanding the subject. Human beings are multidimensional entities, and human subjectivity constitutes a realm of tension. Instinct, emotion, and cognition create an existential struggle within the human psyche amidst, their differing demands shaping the nature of the mind through dialectical processes. Even in rational decision-making, the human mind cannot escape the influence of this tension and the effects of different faculties. Essentially, all of these faculties play an active role in the complex processes of the mind and moral judgments.

In the Qur’ānic context, there exists a juxtaposition between *hawā* (whim or desire) and *‘aql*. The concept of *hawā*’s assertiveness is governed by rational processes, manifesting as a consciousness of “*taqwā*”. According to this perspective, while *hawā* may incline individuals towards certain desires, *‘aql* serves to regulate and restrain these inclinations. The desires of *hawā*, under the supervision of *‘aql*, transform into virtues. Conversely, when *hawā* when disciplined by *‘aql*, are transformed into virtues; conversely, when *hawā* dominates without the governance of *‘aql*, it disrupts balance and leads to vice.<sup>26</sup>

As such a being, humanity's excessive consumption habits and use of natural resources as if they were unlimited have disrupted natural balance and accelerated climate change. Natural balance constitutes a nuanced equilibrium encompassing multifaceted processes, often complex and occasionally chaotic, shaped not only by natural phenomena but also by the active participation of living organisms. For instance, microorganisms are critically influential in maintaining ecological balance.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Abdallah Rothman, Adrian Coyle. "Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Nafs." *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 5 (2018): 1737-1739. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x>

<sup>27</sup> Richard L. Gruner and Damien Power, “Mimicking Natural Ecosystems to Develop

All contemporary evidence clearly demonstrates the magnitude of human impact on nature and the potential peril it poses for the planet's future. There is therefore, a growing need to reassess Islamic philosophers' ideas about justice, contentment, and compassion within both ontological and ethical contexts.

The following section will, accordingly, consider how these concepts appear and are interpreted in the works of the philosophers examined in this study.

### 3. ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Justice (*al-‘adl*)

In Islamic thought, justice (*al-‘adl*) is regarded as a fundamental principle forming the central axis of all cosmic, moral, and legal order. Rooted in the Arabic trilateral root ‘*a-d-l*, the term conveys meanings such as balance, order, harmony, and placing things in their proper position.<sup>28</sup> The Qur’ān employs this concept especially to describe the nature of divine action: “Indeed, Allah does not wrong even as much as an atom’s weight”<sup>29</sup>; “Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.”<sup>30</sup> In this context, justice is not merely a moral ideal but also a divine attribute (*ṣifah ilāhiyyah*) that manifests God’s will through a universal order (*mīzān*): “And the heaven He raised, and He set up the balance—that you do not transgress within the balance.”<sup>31</sup>

In the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), justice is also presented as a supreme moral position. He states, for example: “The most beloved of people to Allah on the Day of Judgment will be the just ruler.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the Qur’ān describes the Prophet as a

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Sustainable Supply Chains: A Theory of Socio-Ecological Intergradation,” *Journal of Cleaner Production* 149 (2017): 258, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.02.109>

<sup>28</sup> al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt fī Ghariḅ al-Qur’ān*, s.v. “‘-d-l.

<sup>29</sup> *The Qur’ān*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4:40.

<sup>30</sup> *The Qur’ān*, 60:8.

<sup>31</sup> *The Qur’ān*, 55:7-8.

<sup>32</sup> Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Ḥadīth no. 1827.

messenger who establishes justice: “We sent Our messengers with clear proofs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that people may uphold justice.”<sup>33</sup>

As contemporary thinkers such as Toshihiko Izutsu and Khaled Abou El Fadl have pointed out, justice in Islam is primarily an ontological principle—embedded in the very structure of existence.<sup>34</sup> In this respect, justice is a foundational order ensuring the internal harmony of creation and the coherence of human action.

Islamic philosophers—especially al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and later Ibn Miskawayh—did not conceive of justice merely as social equality but as a metaphysical equilibrium among the parts of the *nafs*, the classes of society, and the degrees of existence. According to al-Fārābī, justice is the state in which everything is in its proper place according to its nature and merit (*li-yu ‘īā kulla shay’ in ḥaqqahu*).<sup>35</sup> This understanding corresponds directly with Qur’anic admonitions to maintain proportion, balance, and restraint. As Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas articulates, the Islamic worldview defines justice as “a state of affairs wherein everything is in its right and proper place.”<sup>36</sup> This understanding reflects divine wisdom and human moral responsibility.

Balance, order, and harmony constitute the foundational principles of justice. When justice is understood as a pure, abstract concept independent of its particular manifestations, the unity of these principles becomes clear.<sup>37</sup> In Islamic thought, justice extends beyond

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<sup>33</sup> *The Qur’ān*, 57:25.

<sup>34</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 45; Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 32.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Farabi, *Ara’ Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila*, ed. Ali Bu Mulhim (Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat al-Hilal, 1995), 85-94; Richard Walzer, *On the Perfect State (Mabadi’ Ara’ Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 155-168; Al-Farabi, *Ideal Devlet*, trans. Muhammet Caner Ilgaroglu (Istanbul: Divan Publications, 2023), 67-68.

<sup>36</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization [ISTAC], 1993), 25-27.

<sup>37</sup> Morris Ginsberg, “The Concept of Justice,” *Philosophy* 38, no. 144 (1963): 101,

narrow ethical concerns to encompass metaphysical and theological dimensions, serving not only as a moral ideal but also as a structural principle governing both the cosmos and human society, as Majid Khadduri emphasises.<sup>38</sup> In this way, *al-‘adl* offers a comprehensive framework for reorienting humanity’s relationship with the environment in accordance with divine order.

From this perspective, Islamic thought prioritises the establishment of justice as its fundamental aim; the virtues intersect with the justice, for moral actions inherently seek to establish it. For example, moderation, which we will be addressed later, signifies temperance, and is likewise rooted in justice. Moderation entails upholding justice in action and intention. Similarly, contentment embodies a form of economic justice, where one should neither indulge in excess nor fall short for what is sufficient. This principle explicitly adheres to the equilibrium that justice demands.

Approached in relation to contemporary climate issues, this perspective constitutes a robust philosophical and ethical framework offering profound solutions. Despite revolutionary changes in modern social, political, and economic structures, human nature, inclinations, internal conflicts, and desires remain constant. While the external form of the world may change, the underlying principle of order persists.

Morality is central to this understanding because it makes theoretical justice visible through human agency. Moral principles become tangible through human action. In this regard, the human being represents the transitional passage between the static nature of theory and the dynamism of the natural world. Therefore, principles and values depend on human entactment for their realisation.

Ibn Miskawayh’s conception of justice is articulated through the functioning of the *nafs*, which he regards as the source of human action. Justice is realised through the harmonious operation of the rational faculty alongside the bodily faculties of anger and desire.

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<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100060101>

<sup>38</sup> Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 6-8.

Emphasising the doctrine of the mean, Miskawayh defines justice as the capacity to maintain a balanced course, avoiding both deficiency and excess, and as a state of proximity to unity. Within this framework, justice manifests in individual virtue and in measured, balanced social behaviour. A just person consistently demonstrates fairness in all situations. Ibn Miskawayh categorises justice into divine, natural, and conventional forms, while also highlighting voluntary justice, referring to the regulation of human relations in accordance with balance.<sup>39</sup>

According to al-Ṭūsī, justice is the most perfect, achieved through balanced and measured conduct in both social and individual action, while other virtues are secondary in relation to it. This view is supported by Ibn Miskawayh's "circle and centre" metaphor: the central point represents virtue, while the countless surrounding points represent vice. Virtue is limited and focused; vice is boundless. Kınalızāde also endorses this perspective. This framework is especially relevant in transforming social consciousness in response to the climate crisis. A just-centred ethic requires maintaining balance in environmental decisions and behaviours, avoiding excessive consumption and unjust use of resources. Adherence to virtue resembles movement along a single straight line; whereas deviations are limitless, illustrating how a justice-centred approach can offer stability, and ethical clarity in addressing contemporary social and environmental challenges.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2. Contentment (*al-qanā'a*)

In Islamic thought, contentment (*al-qanā'a*) is a principled virtue that

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<sup>39</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq wa Tathrīb al-A'rāq*, ed. Ibn al-Haṭīb (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-'Asriyya, 1398/1977), 125; Ibn Miskawayh, *Risāla fī Maḥiyyat al-'Adl* (An Unpublished Treatise of Miskawayh on Justice), ed. M. S. Khan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), 11-13.

<sup>40</sup> Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Ahlāq-i Nāṣirī*, ed. Ali Rıza Haydarı and Mücteba Mīnovī (Tehran: Şirket-i Sīhamī, 1373 [A.H.]), 108-09; Kınalızāde 'Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alāī*, trans. Fahri Urhan (Ankara: Turkish History Association Publications, 2014), 123-28.

reflects an individual's spiritual maturity, ethical moderation, and alignment with divine balance. Derived from the Arabic root *qani'a*, meaning "to be satisfied" or "to accept sufficiency," the term describes the *nafs*'s voluntary restraint from excess and its inclination to be satisfied with what is necessary. Although *al-qanā'a* does not appear explicitly in the Qur'ān, its essence is embedded in verses promoting moderation, discouraging extravagance, and encouraging reliance upon God: "Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, He does not love the extravagant"<sup>41</sup>; "Whoever places their trust in God, He will suffice for them."<sup>42</sup>

The Prophetic tradition affirms this principle. The Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) said: "Wealth is not in the abundance of possessions; true wealth is the richness of the *nafs*."<sup>43</sup> This inner richness is understood as the foundation of a dignified and fulfilled life. Contentment, therefore, is not a passive resignation to poverty, but an active moral safeguard against greed, extravagance, and spiritual imbalance.

Islamic moral philosophers such as Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde developed this Qur'ānic and Prophetic ethos into systematic moral frameworks. Ibn Miskawayh identifies contentment, particularly regarding food, drink, and adornment, as the practical expression of justice and chastity. He writes, "Contentment means not being excessive in food, drink and decorations"<sup>44</sup>. For him, this virtue should be cultivated from early childhood. He advises that children be taught that food is not for indulgence, but for maintaining health: "All foods are created solely for our physical health and survival. They are like medicine used to alleviate hunger. Just as medicine is not taken for pleasure, neither should food be. It should be consumed in sufficient quantities to sustain health and prevent illness"<sup>45</sup>.

Miskawayh's moral vision offers a compelling response to the

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<sup>41</sup> *The Qur'ān*, 7:31.

<sup>42</sup> *The Qur'ān*, 65:3.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Bukhārī. *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Cairo: Dār al-Hadīth, 1931–1932, Ḥadīth no. 6446.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 30.

excesses of consumerist societies. He maintains that moderation remains a viable solution to the moral and environmental crises of modern life. According to him, pleasure-seeking, ignorance, and unchecked desire are key obstacles to moral excellence. His framework advocates a transformation of collective consciousness, essential for addressing ecological imbalance. In affluent societies, individuals often struggle to regulate their desires, leading to the overconsumption of resources and disruption of natural equilibrium.

Al-Ṭūsī, echoing this concern, identifies four moral flaws that corrupt economic behaviour: miserliness, extravagance, ostentation, and ill intention. All these behaviours undermine the virtue of contentment, which he associates with ethical moderation in spending.<sup>46</sup>

Kinalizāde furthers this discourse by warning against conflating genuine contentment with concealed avarice. He argues that some individuals appear modest in their lifestyle yet hoard wealth—an act he classifies not as virtue but as miserliness. True contentment, he explains, consists in the *nafs*'s graceful acceptance of basic needs—food, drink, and clothing—without seeking more than suffices. He describes it as: “the *nafs*'s easy acceptance of food, drink, clothing and similar things, and of all things that come one's way and meet one's needs,” emphasising a minimalist ethic rooted in humility and gratitude. This outlook, he argues, is not about accumulating goods but about willingly renouncing excess.<sup>47</sup>

In this sense, contentment becomes a moral posture of active patience, self-regulation, and disciplined sufficiency. It is an inward orientation that acknowledges divine apportionment, resists the compulsion for more, and sustains ethical balance. Within the broader cosmic and natural order, contentment emerges as a virtue of consumption that governs humanity's relationship with the environment. The harmony between the human biological structure

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<sup>46</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri / The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. George Michael Wickens (London: Routledge, 1964), 196.

<sup>47</sup> Kinalizāde 'Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alāī*, 387–397.

and natural balance is disrupted by hedonism and excess—leading not only to health issues such as obesity, but also to climate disturbances, including abnormal temperature and precipitation patterns.

In today’s world, characterised by excess and ostentation, the virtue of contentment stands as a guiding principle for a meaningful and sustainable life. Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde converge on the notion that moderation in consumption, guided by reason and ethical restraint, is essential for both moral flourishing and environmental stewardship. Their shared insight invites a reassessment of humanity’s relationship with material goods and promotes an ethic of sufficiency. By embracing contentment as a lived principle—anchored in moderation, gratitude, and restraint—humanity may recover the spiritual and ecological balance necessary for a virtuous and sustainable existence.

### 3.3 Compassion (*al-raḥma*)

In Islamic thought, compassion (*al-raḥmah*) is regarded not merely as an emotional inclination or a form of human kindness, but as a foundational principle that encompasses all existence and constitutes the essence of both creation and divine action. This concept is intrinsically linked to two of the most frequently mentioned divine names in the Qur’ān—*al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*. The phrase “*Bismillāhi’r-Raḥmāni’r-Raḥīm*”, which opens nearly every *sūrah*, illustrates the universal scope of compassion as both a divine attribute and an active metaphysical force. The Qur’ān states, “My mercy encompasses all things”<sup>48</sup>, affirming that compassion is not merely a quality of God, but the very ontological foundation of existence. The Prophet Muḥammad is similarly described as “a mercy to the worlds”<sup>49</sup>, while his statement “Those who do not show mercy will not be shown mercy”<sup>50</sup> frames compassion as a moral imperative at both

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<sup>48</sup> *The Qur’ān*, 7:156.

<sup>49</sup> *The Qur’ān*, 21:107.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 6013

individual and societal levels.

Classical Islamic philosophers and ethicists—most notably Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde—systematised these Qur’ānic and Prophetic foundations within a comprehensive philosophical framework, treating compassion as both an ontological principle and an ethical virtue. In their view, compassion manifests across several interconnected domains: in God’s act of creation, in the harmony of the cosmos, in the preservation of life, and in human relations with other beings and the natural world.<sup>51</sup> Thus, *al-rahmah* is understood as a cosmic force of cohesion that sustains both metaphysical order and ethical balance.

Accordingly, in Islamic thought, *al-rahmah* is considered the softening dimension of justice, the affective side of wisdom, and the sustaining force behind the continuity of the existential order. It is simultaneously a manifestation of God’s absolute benevolence and a moral responsibility entrusted to humanity as free and rational agents. In this respect, compassion serves as a comprehensive ethical framework that bridges the realms of the individual and society, God and humanity, and nature and morality.<sup>52</sup>

This understanding positions *al-rahmah* as a foundational principle that integrates metaphysical cosmology with ethical stewardship. Within the context of climate ethics, compassion emerges as a guiding virtue, urging reverent care and moral responsibility toward all forms of life and the delicate balance that sustains them.

Viewed in this light, Kınalızāde’s assertion—“According to philosophers, all beings exist and survive thanks to compassion. Compassion pervades everything. No being is deprived of unity, nor is it devoid of inclination or compassion”<sup>53</sup>—encapsulates the ontological dimension of compassion. For him, compassion is not merely a divine method of governance but an essential, immanent divine attribute that permeates all levels of existence. In this view,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 53-54; Al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, 118-119; Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alâi*, 188-190.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā), 370-373.

<sup>53</sup> Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alâi*, 491-492.

existence finds its meaning through the compassion that imbues it, and utilising existence in the service of compassion aligns with the ultimate purpose of creation. Kınalızāde further asserts, “Even plants and inanimate objects possess a form of compassion and affection. All ores and accidents are nourished by it”<sup>54</sup>, reinforcing the idea that compassion is a constitutive metaphysical principle.

He also argues that actions devoid of compassion contradict the very nature of existence. The act of cursing, which signifies the absence of compassion, is, in his view, a distortion of one’s ontological role. He warns: “Cursing humans and animals is something believers must avoid strictly; it is clearly prohibited by the supreme Sharī‘a”<sup>55</sup>. For Kınalızāde, as vicegerents (*khalīfa*) on earth, humans are divinely tasked with extending compassion not only to fellow humans but to all living beings. His stance is grounded in both the foundational teachings of Islam and the ethical worldview derived therefrom.

Ibn Miskawayh offers a complementary yet distinct approach. He defines compassion as a voluntary inclination of the *nafs*, arising spontaneously rather than through coercion. It reflects humanity’s capacity for empathy, solidarity, and social cohesion. In his words: “Compassion is the state of agreement that the *nafs* shows towards others spontaneously, not by force.”<sup>56</sup> This interpretation highlights the spiritual nature of compassion while also situating it within the framework of social harmony and moral responsibility.

Given Ibn Miskawayh’s broader emphasis on justice as both an individual virtue and the overarching principle connecting all virtues, compassion can be seen as a manifestation of justice.<sup>57</sup> Unlike Kınalızāde’s ontological focus, Miskawayh positions compassion within the realm of horizontal human relationships—as an extension of ethical empathy. He writes: “Charity is helping friends and those who deserve it, sharing goods and food with them, and it arises from compassion.” Furthermore, he warns: “An unmerciful person is unjust

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<sup>54</sup> Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alâi*, 474.

<sup>55</sup> Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alâi*, 498.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 440.

to himself, his friends, and everyone around him,” and “The worst of people is the one who does injustice to himself, then to his friends and tribe, and finally to all people and living beings”.<sup>58</sup> These statements underscore compassion’s essential role in realising justice and preventing harm at every level of human interaction.

Al-Ṭūsī frames compassion not merely as a personal sentiment but as a reflection of divine justice and a fundamental principle of cosmic balance. He explains that the natural order—exemplified by the proportional relations between the elements—is made possible by God’s wisdom and mercy. For instance, although water and air differ in quantity, they are equal in quality. Were this balance disturbed, one element would overwhelm the other, and the harmony of the universe would collapse. Yet, “thanks to the wisdom and mercy of the Creator,” he writes, “everything has been created in such a way that the four elements are compatible and equal in strength and quality so as not to destroy one another. A slight excess in one causes a proportional diminution in the other”.<sup>59</sup>

Al-Ṭūsī associates this balance not only with divine knowledge but also with moral intentionality. Compassion, in this sense, becomes a moral model for human action. His statement—“Compassion is the deepest emotion that strengthens social bond” — captures this understanding. For Ṭūsī, the same compassion that preserves cosmic harmony should govern social relations and interpersonal conduct. Thus, compassion is not merely an individual virtue but a social force that fosters solidarity, equilibrium, and cohesion within human communities.<sup>60</sup>

In conclusion, the writings of Kınalızāde, Ibn Miskawayh, and al-Ṭūsī converge to present *rahmah* as a multi-dimensional concept: a reflection of divine justice, a metaphysical principle sustaining creation, and a moral imperative underpinning social harmony. This layered understanding reinforces the centrality of compassion in

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<sup>58</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 115-117.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, 196.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, 196-197.

Islamic ethical and cosmological thought, offering a timeless framework for aligning individual conduct with universal balance.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of Islamic moral philosophy, both justice and morality are not confined to abstract ethical ideals, but are intimately rooted in the material, embodied, and cosmological dimensions of existence. Unlike many strands of modern Western ethical thought that often separate the moral from the physical, Islamic thought maintains a principled continuity between the ontological order and moral action. This integration allows for a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of human existence (*al-insān*) and its relationship with the broader environment (*tabī'a*), including the natural world and all its living systems.

The interweaving of moral and metaphysical concepts in Islam enables a distinct vantage point from which to address global ecological crises, such as climate change. In Islamic thought, morality is conceptually connected to the dual notions of *khalq* (creation/form) and *khulq* (character/disposition), reflecting the intrinsic link between how the human being is fashioned and how he or she ought to act. Similarly, justice is linked with the Qur'ānic notion of *mīzān* (balance), a concept that conveys ontological harmony, proportionality, and ethical equilibrium. This nexus of creation, character, and balance furnishes Islamic ethics with a robust framework to evaluate not only interpersonal relations, but also the human role as a steward (*khalīfa*) of the Earth.

Within this intellectual and ethical structure, contentment (*al-qanā'a*) and compassion (*al-rahmah*) emerge as the practical and emotional extensions of justice and morality. Contentment, as the moral embodiment of moderation (*i'tidāl*) in the economic sphere, offers an alternative to the insatiable consumption patterns that dominate modern consumer societies. Compassion, on the other hand, extends the principle of justice beyond formal fairness, incorporating dimensions of mercy, care, and love in both human and ecological

relations. These values, deeply rooted in Qur'ānic and Prophetic teachings, represent more than individual virtues—they are guiding principles that foster balance and moral sensitivity in the relationship between humanity and nature.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the inner equilibrium of the *nafs* within Islamic virtue ethics provides fertile ground for rethinking climate ethics from a person-centred perspective. As highlighted throughout this article, drawing on thinkers such as Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde, the cultivation of individual virtues—especially justice, contentment, and compassion—is seen as the key to collective moral transformation. While technological solutions to climate change may evolve, the fundamental nature of the human being, along with their inner moral struggles, remains constant. Therefore, the human-centred approach found in Islamic ethics retains enduring relevance and applicability.

It is precisely this emphasis on moral responsibility, grounded in the ontological reality of *al-'adl*, that underpins a theological imperative to preserve the natural order. The Qur'ān explicitly warns against upsetting the balance of creation. In light of this, the preservation of the equilibrium between humans and nature—and, by extension, the safeguarding of the habitats of other creatures—is not merely an environmental concern, but a moral obligation tied to the very structure of creation.

The Islamic notion of *al-qanā'a*, when viewed through this lens, offers a moral paradigm that resonates with the growing appeal of minimalist and sustainable living. Rather than promoting ascetic withdrawal, it encourages a conscious limitation of desire, which is both ethically sound and environmentally sustainable. It confronts the excesses of consumerism not through legal prohibition, but through spiritual refinement and ethical interiority.

Compassion (*al-rahmah*) in this framework is not limited to emotional empathy or interpersonal kindness; it is a metaphysical principle that reflects divine mercy and manifests as moral responsibility toward all beings. It builds a bridge between the human and the natural, the divine and the worldly. As one of the core

meanings of Islam itself is "peace," this peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but a positive harmony rooted in justice and compassion. Establishing such peace with nature demands not only rational management but also the cultivation of virtues such as mercy, forbearance, and love.

In this expanded moral horizon, compassion surpasses the bounds of interpersonal ethics and becomes a virtue that frames human interaction with the natural world. It promotes a vision of social and ecological harmony that is anchored in the sacred, offering an integrated ethic that transcends utilitarianism and policy-based solutions. Within this vision, Islamic moral thought presents a spiritually infused and philosophically robust path toward environmental stewardship, urging a transformation in both lifestyle and worldview in response to the climate crisis.