

Human-Nature Relationship and the Contemporary Ecological Crisis: An Eco-Ethical Paradigm from *Al-Ghazālī's* philosophy

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Abstract

The existing contemporary ecological crisis, often referred to as the “triple planetary crisis” of climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution, has increased global concern about the relationship between humans and nature. In this paper I argue that ecological degradation is not merely a technical or political problem, but a moral and spiritual crisis rooted in excess, disordered desire, and diminished accountability toward creation. This research aims to examine the ethical philosophy of Al-Ghazālī as a paradigm for the reframing of the human-nature relationship in the contemporary ecological and environmental discourse. The paper reconstructs an eco-ethical paradigm drawing on selected texts from Al-Ghazālī’s works based on key Islamic concepts such as Tawhīd, Āyāt, Fiṭrah, Tazkiyyah, Tafakkur, Khilāfah, Amānah, Mīzān, ‘Adl, Adab, Zuhd and Iqtiṣād. Also discusses moderation, self-discipline, humility, contemplation and ethical responsibility for nature. Al-Ghazālī’s virtue-oriented moral psychology, along with Qur’ānic principles of stewardship, balance, anti-wastefulness, and accountability for fasād, presents a theocentric and responsibility-oriented ecological ethic, the study shows. This paper uses a qualitative conceptual approach, using textual analysis and philosophical reconstruction. It concludes that Al-Ghazālī’s ethical framework has much to offer to Islamic environmental ethics and the larger field of ecological virtue ethics, for it shifts the emphasis of humanity from domination to trust, restraint, and contemplative coexistence with creation.

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Introduction

Ecological degradation has become one of the most pressing concerns of the contemporary world. Climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, pollution, desertification, and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption together point to a deepening crisis in the relationship between human beings and their natural world (UNFCCC, 2022; UNEP, 2025). Contemporary international discourse increasingly recognizes that these interconnected problems form a systemic ecological and environmental emergency rather than a series of isolated technical issues (UNFCCC, 2022). Yet the ecological crisis is not merely scientific, technological, economic, or political. It is also moral and civilizational in character, because it raises fundamental questions about how human beings understand the world, their place within it, and the limits of their power over it (Lynn White 1967)

Much of modern ecological destruction is sustained by assumptions that legitimise domination, instrumentalism and endless consumption. Nature is frequently approached as a stock of resources to be extracted, managed, and consumed in the service of human desire and economic growth. Such attitudes reduce the natural world to utility and obscure wider ethical questions concerning responsibility, restraint and the integrity of creation (Brennan, A., & Lo, Y. S., 2021). For this reason, the ecological crisis cannot be adequately addressed by technological innovation or policy reform alone. While such responses are indispensable, they remain insufficient unless accompanied by a deeper rethinking of the ethical vision that governs human-nature relations (White, L., Jr., 1967; Nasr, S. H., 1968). Ecological degradation is therefore also a crisis of moral imagination, a crisis rooted in how humanity has come to perceive, value, and inhabit the earth.

This recognition has given rise to the field of ecological ethics, which seeks to investigate the normative dimensions of human interaction with the non-human world. Ecological ethics has challenged not only anthropocentric approaches that assign value to nature only insofar as it serves human interests but also opened important debates on intrinsic value, ecological justice, interdependence, sustainability, and responsibility to future generations. (Brennan, A., & Lo, Y. S., 2021). More recently,

scholars have emphasised the relational and virtue-orientated dimensions of ecological ethics, arguing that ecological and environmental responsibility depends not only on principles and regulations but also on the cultivation of dispositions such as humility, moderation, attentiveness, and care (Sandler, R. L., 2007). The shift is especially significant for studies of human-nature relations, as it suggests that the ecological crisis is inseparable from the moral formation of the human subject.

In this broader discourse, religious traditions are increasingly important of Sources for Moral thought. Although ecological ethics has largely been shaped by secular and Western philosophical disciplines, a growing body of scholarship on religion and ecology has demonstrated that religious worldviews offer rich ethical, moral and philosophical resources for rethinking humanity's Place in the Natural Order. (Foltz, R. C., Denny, F. M., & Baharuddin, A., 2003). Islamic thought is particularly relevant in this regard. The Quran repeatedly presents the natural world should not be seen as a morally neutral domain, but as a meaningful and divinely organized creation, available for unrestrained exploitation. Concepts such as *Khilāfah* (stewardship), *Amānahh* (trust), and thus, *Mīzān* (balance) and the condemnation of *israf* (waste) have become central to Islamic environmental ethics (Izz al-Din, M. Y., 2000). These themes are ecological responsibility in Islam is not only rooted in utility or prudence, but also in accountability, in dealing with God and with creation with proper moral conduct. Environmental ethics in Islam should be rooted in Quranic teachings rather than secular epistemological traditions. Environmental ethics is a set of moral principles derived from the Quran, the concepts of *al-Tawḥīd* (Oneness of God) and *Al-akhlaqiyyah al-bi'ah* (environmental ethics). Ecological accountability is a duty inherent in these Islamic principles. Without this moral foundation, environmental actions become ineffective or superficial. They lose their spiritual and intellectual motivation (Osman, B., 2025).

Modern ecology emerged in the West as a reaction to the environmental damage caused by the Industrial Revolution and modernity. However, Islam had already provided a strong environmental philosophy as early as the seventh century. According to Islamic ecological theory, humans are not dominators over nature; rather, they are stewards with the freedom, authority, and responsibility to protect society and the environment. While modern ecology responds to ecological crises, IEP was founded from the beginning to promote ecological justice, social justice,

and harmony between humans and nature. The Quran also warns that environmental destruction is caused by human error (Islam, M. D. S., 2012)

Despite this growing literature, classical Islamic moral thought has not been adequately explored as a systematic resource for ecological thought. Most studies of Islamic ecological ethics focus on broad Qur’anic themes, legal principles, or general theological statements; and they do not consistently engage with a single major ethical or moral thinker who can provide a unified moral framework (Foltz, R. C., Denny, F. M., & Baharuddin, A., 2003). This is a significant limitation, since ecological degradation is not just a matter of theory or law, but also of character, self-discipline, and the moral regulation of will. Thus, a robust Islamic ecological morality requires close engagement with thinkers who write about the virtues necessary for the formation of the self and responsible action.

Among classical Muslim scholars, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) is considered one of the most important moral thinkers of the Islamic tradition. He is widely recognized for his contributions to the fields of ethics, morality, spirituality, theology, and moral psychology; in particular, he is best known for his contributions to self-reform, the control of desires, and the development of virtue (Griffell, F., 2009; Kassem, M. E., 1975). His moral thought emphasizes the transformation of inner natures and the alignment of human behaviour with divine wisdom, rather than limiting morality to outward conformity to rules. This makes al-Ghazālī particularly relevant to ecological ethics. If environmental destruction is associated with greed, overuse, neglect, and an instrumentalist view of the world, al-Ghazālī’s focus on self-control, moderation, critical reflection, and moral accountability provides important resources for reconstructing human-nature relations.

At the same time, al-Ghazālī did not write an environmental treatise in the modern sense; nor did he formulate a formal ecological ethic in response to contemporary crises such as climate change or industrial pollution. The value of his thought for ecological discourse, therefore, lies in its reconstruction rather than in its direct historical equivalence. His works provide concepts, moral guidelines, and anthropological insights that can be re-articulated for current concerns without distorting the distinctions between medieval and modern contexts (Griffell, F., 2009). His ideas on moderation, self-purification, contemplation of creation, proper conduct, and accountability to God make possible a framework in which the natural

world is not merely a passive object of use, but part of a divinely ordered moral universe in which humans act as responsible and accountable agents.

This article argues that in an era of ecological degradation, al-Ghazālī's ethical thought can be reconstructed as a coherent framework for ecological ethics. It proposes that his ethical philosophy offers a unique way of rethinking human-nature relations by situating ecological responsibility in stewardship, faith, moderation, critical awareness, and commitment to creation. In doing so, this article contributes to contemporary environmental ethics by expanding the range of ethical resources available to ecological thought; and it also contributes to Islamic ethical scholarship by moving beyond general debates on stewardship and toward a more conceptually integrated al-Ghazālīian account of ecological responsibility. In this sense, al-Ghazālī's importance is not merely historical. His ethics speak to a contemporary world that not only reflects environmental degradation, but also a profound breakdown in human will, moral vision, and understanding of what it means to live well on Earth.

Methodology

The paper follows a qualitative conceptual approach that combines textual analysis and philosophical reconstruction. It examines selected works of al-Ghazālī, their related Quranic verses, and secondary studies on ecological science and Islamic ethics. The analysis identifies key ethical themes in al-Ghazālī's thought, including responsibility, faith, moderation, self-control, reflection, and moral accountability, and proceeds to establish these themes as a contemporary framework for ecological ethics. The paper advocates interpretation and ethics over empiricism. The aim of this study is to show how al-Ghazālī's moral philosophy can reconstruct human-nature relations in the context of ecological degradation.

Literature Review

The ecological crisis of today is one of the main global problems of our time. Climate change, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, pollution and over-exploitation of resources are a profound manifestation of the imbalance in the relationship between human beings and nature. The modern industrial civilisation, born of anthropocentric and materialistic philosophies, has converted nature into an object of domination and

economic exploitation from a sacred trust that called for ethical responsibility. Consequently, scholars of various philosophical and religious traditions have been searching for alternative ethical paradigms that can restore ecological balance and redefine human-nature relationship. In this discourse, Islamic environmental ethics has become a major area of inquiry, especially considering a renewed engagement with classical Muslim scholars such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (www.Ghazali.org)

Environmental philosophers are increasingly asserting that ecological destruction is not simply a technological or economic problem, but fundamentally a moral and spiritual crisis. Nasr argues that the ecological crisis is the outcome of the desacralisation of nature in the modern secular civilisation. In the traditional Islamic cosmology, Nasr explains, nature is not seen as inert matter that has no spiritual meaning, but as a manifestation of the divine signs (āyāt). The alienation of humanity from the sacred order of creation has thus engendered an exploitative attitude towards the environment. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1997) Nasr’s critique remains highly influential because it situates ecological collapse within a larger epistemological and metaphysical crisis. His analysis offers an important theoretical framework for understanding the potential of Islamic spirituality to contribute to contemporary environmental ethics.

Similarly, White Jr.’s seminal essay “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967) has greatly influenced contemporary environmental discourse by claiming that anthropocentric religious beliefs have led to ecological damage. White’s critique was directed mainly at traditions of Western Christianity, but his thesis provoked wider debate on religion and environmental ethics (White Jr., 1967) In response, Muslim scholars such as Özdemir and Izzi Dien have stressed that the Islamic teachings fundamentally reject the unrestricted human domination over nature (Ibrahim Özdemir ,2003; Mawil Izzi Dien 2000). They argue that the Qur’ānic terms *khilāfah* (stewardship), *amānah* (trust), and *mīzān* (balance) create a duty for humans to maintain ecological balance. These studies are important because they challenge the assumption that religion necessarily legitimises environmental exploitation.

Theological Foundations of Islamic Ecological Ethics Recent scholarship on Islamic ecological ethics has increasingly emphasised the theological underpinnings of environmental responsibility . The article “Freedom that is not Absolute: Ecological Ethics and Human–Nature Relationship in the Qur’an” (2024) argues that human freedom in Islam is

conditioned by moral accountability to God and creation. The research highlights that humans are not the sole owners of nature, but rather the stewards appointed to preserve the ecological balance (Muhammad, M., at el., 2024) Similarly, “Islamic Philosophy’s Approach to Environmental Ethics” notes that Islamic environmental ethics is founded on the principle of *tawhīd*, which emphasises that all creation is one and interconnected (Zuhdi, A., at el., 2024) This research shows that Islamic ecological thought is not limited to legal prescriptions, but is based on theological and cosmological foundations. In this larger Islamic ecological discourse, Sufism and spiritual ethics have received more attention as alternative responses to ecological crises. Eco-Sufism explores the ways in which Islamic spirituality can cultivate ecological awareness and ethical responsibility. Al-Ghazālī holds a unique place among classical Muslim thinkers due to his synthesis in theology, spirituality, ethics and social philosophy. Today, increasingly more scholars are realising that al-Ghazālī’s ethical paradigm provides a comprehensive ecological model that can help tackle the spiritual causes of environmental destruction.

One of the most important recent contributions is Ahmad Zain Sarnoto, “Islamic Holistic Approach to Ecology: An Examination of Al-Ghazali’s Thought in the Context of Contemporary Environmental Ethics” (2026). Sarnoto argues that al-Ghazālī’s philosophy provides a holistic ecological worldview based on *tawhīd*, moderation, and ethical self-discipline. The study concludes that the roots of ecological degradation lie in uncontrolled human desires and excessive materialism, both key concerns in al-Ghazālī’s ethical writings.⁷ Sarnoto argues that al-Ghazālī’s concept of *i’tidāl* (moderation) provides an ethical grounding for sustainable living and environmental responsibility. However, this study is of considerable relevance. Yet it is largely descriptive and does not critically engage with structural dimensions of ecological crisis such as capitalism, industrial modernity and environmental injustice.

Another significant study is “Al-Ghazali’s Eco-Sufism for Environmental Preservation” (Khikamuddin et al., 2024). This article looks at how al-Ghazālī’s Sufi ethics can help promote environmental awareness through spiritual virtues such as *zuhd* (ascetic moderation), *shukr* (gratitude), and *maḥabbah* (love).⁸ The authors claim that saving the environment demands a spiritual transformation, not external solutions such as laws or technology. al-Ghazālī’s spirituality provides an ethical response to consumerist culture and environmental exploitation by

fostering self-restraint and diminishing excessive attachment to material consumption. Yet, the study tends to romanticise spirituality without sufficiently engaging with the political and economic systems that perpetuate ecological destruction.

In addition, in “Integrasi Tasawuf Akhlaki Al-Ghazālī Dalam Keberlanjutan Lingkungan” also talk about the relevance of al-Ghazālī’s ethical Sufism for environmental sustainability. This research connects al-Ghazālī’s moral philosophy with contemporary environmental issues such as consumerism, culture of waste and ecological imbalance (Al-Hakim et al, 2026). The authors assert that sustainability requires moral discipline and spiritual consciousness that are at the heart of al-Ghazālī’s ethical philosophy. Importantly, the study seeks to bridge al-Ghazālī’s teachings with contemporary sustainability discourse including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the metaphysical and cosmological dimensions of al-Ghazālī are only given limited attention in the article, despite their importance for understanding his conception of nature and creation. In the paper "Manusia, Alam dan Tuhan dalam Ekosufisme Al-Ghazali." Also discuss the relation of humans, nature and God in al-Ghazālī's philosophy. The authors argue that for al-Ghazālī nature is a manifestation of divine wisdom, not merely a physical resource for human use (Gufron and Hambali, 2022). This sacred understanding of creation imposes ethical obligations on the environment, as the destruction of nature is ultimately an expression of spiritual and moral decay. This is an important study especially as it situates al-Ghazālī in the context of wider conversations of spiritual ecology and anti-anthropocentric ethics.

Al-Ghazālī’s ecological relevance is more visible when examined in his primary texts. Al-Ghazālī in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* repeatedly condemns greed, extravagance, and excessive attachment to worldly pleasures. His discussions of *zuhd* and moral purification suggest that ethical corruption is a product of unchecked desires and material excess (Al-Ghazālī, A. H., 2015). But these ethical issues have immediate ecological consequences. The current environmental crises are directly linked to overconsumption and exploitative economic models. More importantly, in *Mīzān al-‘Amal* al-Ghazālī stresses the principle of balance as the key to moral and spiritual life (Al-Ghazālī, 1989). The concept of balance is very applicable to ecological sustainability. Environmental degradation is often a result of imbalance between human activities and natural systems. Besides ethical moderation, al-Ghazālī’s cosmology offers a significant ontological basis

for ecological ethics. His view of the world is that of a creation, an interconnected and meaningful order sustained by divine wisdom. Thus, nature is not only material existence but a part of a sacred cosmic reality which mirrors the unity of God (Al-Ghazālī, 1952). Such a metaphysical view is at odds with the modern mechanistic view of nature as inert matter, without intrinsic value. Thus, al-Ghazālī's philosophy constitutes a vital alternative to secular materialism and instrumental rationality.

Despite a growing literature on Islamic environmental ethics and eco-Sufism, there are several important gaps. First, much of the scholarship on al-Ghazālī and ecology is descriptive rather than analytical. Although many studies have found ecological values in al-Ghazālī's writings, they have not been able to systematically reconstruct a coherent eco-ethical paradigm from his philosophical framework. Second, existing studies tend to focus on spirituality and personal morality but tend to overlook larger structural issues such as extractive capitalism, industrial modernity, and ecological injustice. Contemporary environmental crises are deeply rooted in political and economic systems that foster unlimited growth and exploitation (Vandana Shiva, 2005). A full eco-ethical paradigm on al-Ghazālī must therefore deal with both individual ethics and the structural dimensions of environmental destruction.

Third, the current literature does not often engage seriously with the contemporary environmental philosophy. In the literature on Islamic environmental ethics, there is no or little discussion of ideas such as deep ecology, ecological justice, and posthumanism. Consequently, Islamic ecological discourse is sometimes viewed as being divorced from the broader global debates on the environment. Thus, the integration of al-Ghazālī's philosophy with contemporary ecological theories can help to form a more comprehensive and globally relevant environmental ethic. Finally, many studies center on ethical teachings and neglect al-Ghazālī's metaphysical and cosmological foundations. But his understanding of the human-nature relationship is inseparable from his understanding of divine unity, cosmic harmony, and spiritual ontology. If we ignore these dimensions, we risk reducing the ecological significance of al-Ghazālī to a form of moral advice rather than an all-encompassing philosophical worldview.

In general, the literature shows an increasing recognition among scholars of al-Ghazālī's relevance for contemporary ecological ethics. His synthesis of spirituality, ethics, cosmology and moral responsibility

contains key resources for responding to the ecological crisis of modern civilisation. But the scholarship that does exist is fragmentary and not sufficiently systematic. Thus, further studies need to be conducted to reconstruct a comprehensive eco-ethical paradigm from al-Ghazālī’s philosophy, which can respond to both current environmental issues and broader debates in environmental ethics.

Discussion And Analysis

Al-Ghazālī in the Ethical Scholarship

Al-Ghazālī occupies a central place in Islamic intellectual tradition and is among the most influential thinkers in the development of Islamic ethics. He is studied as a theologian, jurist, philosopher, and Sufi. But his enduring importance lies particularly in the integration he creates between science, spiritual discipline, virtue, and accountability (Griffel, F., 2009). His ethical writings are concerned not only with external actions but also with the state of the soul, the purification of thoughts, and the development of a properly organised self through morality. For al-Ghazālī, morality is inseparable from a person’s inner formation, since external behaviour ultimately reflects internal states of balance or disorder (Hourani, G. F., 1976).

A key aspect of al-Ghazālī’s ethics is his analysis of the moral dangers of desire and the unbridled appetite of the self. He repeatedly warns that greed, gluttony, arrogance, conceit, and indifference distort moral reasoning and lead people astray from the path of virtue (Al-Ghazālī, 1995, T. J. Winter, Trans.). Thus, the ethical struggle for a moral life requires *tazkiya al-nafs*, the purification of the self through moderation and the cultivation of virtuous habits. These themes are clearly relevant to ecological ethics. Much of contemporary ecological destruction is driven by the same kinds of attitudes that al-Ghazālī criticizes excessive appetite, unlimited accumulation, and the denial of control. Thus, his ethical thinking provides a powerful conceptual bridge between personal vices and environmental harm.

Another important aspect of al-Ghazālī’s thought is the importance he places on contemplation and awareness. In his discussions of the ideas of creation, he argues that the natural world should never be approached as an inanimate object but rather as a symbol of symbols that help humans to understand divine wisdom and order (Al-Ghazālī, 2021; M. I., Waley, Trans). Such contemplation is not merely speculative or aesthetic but has

moral significance, as it develops habits of attention, humility, and respect. In a modern context where nature is often treated as a commodity, al-Ghazālī's contemplation creates an alternative moral stance. It opens the possibility of a more respectful or moral relationship with creation, opposing abstractionism.

However, despite these strengths, the ecological significance of al-Ghazālī has not been extensively explored in most existing studies, which generally focus on his theology, epistemology, Sufism, or ethics, while his potential contribution to the ecological discourse has been explored only superficially (Griffel, F., 2009). Even within Islamic ecological ethics, scholars often cite Quranic verses or broader Islamic principles rather than reconstructing al-Ghazālī's model in detail. This leaves a significant gap in research in this field. If al-Ghazālī's ethics is seen as an integrated account of the self, responsibility, moderation, and a contemplative relationship with the world, his thought can provide a conceptual resource of considerable depth for ecological and environmental ethics.

Al-Ghazālī's Eco-Ethical Paradigm for Human-Nature Relations

Although al-Ghazālī did not compose an ecological philosophy in the modern systematic sense, his ethical framework still provides a powerful conceptual paradigm for reconstructing human-nature relations today. His ethical thought is not limited to legal permissibility or individual piety in the narrow sense; it is an integrated explanation of how man should live in a divinely ordered world. In that framework, ecological responsibility is not understood as an additional aspect of individual 'greenness' but is understood based on the principles of Tawhīd, Āyāt fitra, Khilāfah Amānah, Mīzānah, 'Adl, Tazkiyyah, Tafakkur, Adab, Iqtiṣād, at-tawli, etc. The reconstruction proposed here is therefore interpretative and constructive: it draws on al-Ghazālī's ethics and the Quranic concepts central to Islamic ethics and reveals al-Ghazālī's framework for a contemporary ecological science.



1. *Fundamental Existential Principles*

Tawḥīd and Āyāt

The concept of Tawḥīd, the oneness of God, shapes the Islamic faith. Tawḥīd is at the heart of Islam and affirms that God is one. Al-Ghazālī teaches that Allah is the creator and sustainer of all creation, including nature, in the universe, and that everything in nature is a sign of God’s attributes and power (Al-Ghazālī, 2021).

In his book ‘Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn’, he argues that these signs bring us closer to God’s sovereignty and worship by realising His power and turning to Him. This is a foundational element of Al-Ghazālī’s ecological ethics. The following Quranic verse reinforces Al-Ghazālī’s view: “Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that sail the sea carrying what they need, there are signs for those who understand” (2.64). This Quranic verse emphasises that nature is God’s creation and that it must be protected.

Fiṭrah

Al-Ghazālī defines Fiṭrah as a natural disposition or innate nature that aligns humans and other creatures with God’s divine order. This concept is central to his ecological ethics, as it states that all living things, including humans, have an inherent tendency to follow divine laws. This establishes an intrinsic relationship between humanity and nature. Al-Ghazālī’s concept is consistent with the verse in the Quran in Surah Ar-Rum (30:30), which states: “So incline towards the truth and set your faces towards the religion. Follow the Fiṭrah upon which Allah has created all people.” This implies that the ecological harmony inherent in nature reflects the divine will, and

that humans should respect and preserve this balance (Al-Ghazālī 1995). As Ozdemir (2002) points out, this intrinsic connection with nature through the *Fiṭrah* emphasizes the moral responsibility that arises from it.

Tazkiyyah

Tazkiyyah refers to the purification of the soul; it is a process by which humans strive to align their actions with divine guidance. Al-Ghazālī argues that ecological and environmental harms, such as greed and wastefulness, result from an impure soul. This concept of spiritual purity and ecological harmony is reflected in the Quranic Surah Al-A'raf (7:31), which states, 'O Children of Adam! Adorn yourselves at every mosque; eat and drink, but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not love the transgressors.' This verse emphasises the importance of avoiding wastefulness and superfluous actions. This is consistent with Al-Ghazālī’s belief that overcoming negative traits such as greed and wastefulness purifies the soul and improves the ecological balance (Al-Ghazālī 2015).

Tafakkur

For al-Ghazālī, Tafakkur is not just contemplation but a transformative cognitive process that bridges the gap between knowledge and spirituality. Al-Ghazālī encourages the appreciation of nature, both scientifically and aesthetically. In his *Kitab al-Tafaqur*, al-Ghazālī argues that the diversity of creations in nature, including the human body, plants, and animals, is a sign that leads our knowledge to the Creator (al-Ghazālī 2021). The view of the world as a resource only exacerbates ecological degradation. Meditation breaks down that limiting view. It trains moral and spiritual awareness by making creation meaningful and orderly and calling people to the One who is worthy of worship. The Quran says so. “They glorify Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides. And they contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth (Tafakkur) and say, ‘Our Lord! You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You. So, protect us from the torment of the Fire.’” (31:91). The ecological value that is developed through Tafakkur can be described in contemporary terms as an “ecological consciousness” rooted in a cultured awareness that is free from emotional attachment. The ethical significance of Tafakkur lies in the habits it creates. Contemplation on creation fosters humility, gratitude, and acceptance: it weakens the

illusion that the world exists only to satisfy human hunger and desire (al-Ghazālī 2021). Meditation involves contemplating creation with a keen eye and a heart of reverence. In that environment of remembrance, where knowledge and devotion are combined, ethics not only regulates behaviour but also seeks to reform one’s inner self and perception.

2. Human Roles

Khilāfah and Amānah

The concept of Khilāfah holds that Allah has entrusted humans with the responsibility of preserving and administering His creation, making them the guardians or vicegerents (caliphs) of the earth. Al-Ghazālī, in his book ‘Ihya Ulum Ad-Din’, explains this role as the fact that although humans have been given authority over the natural world, they must exercise it in accordance with God's commands (Al Ghazali, 2015). This is further confirmed by the verse in Surah Al-Baqarah 2:30 of the Quran. "Your Lord said to the angels, 'I am going to create mankind as vicegerents on earth.' " This verse ensures that creation is protected and respected in accordance with divine laws, highlighting the sacred responsibility of humans to act as guardians of the earth (Al-Ghazālī, 2015).

Mīzān and ‘Adl

Al-Ghazālī’s understanding of ‘Adl (justice) is closely tied to the concept of Mīzān (balance). In his book Al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm (The Perfect Balance), he explains that God created the world in perfect balance and that humans must maintain it by acting with justice (Al-Ghazālī, 1995). In al-Ghazālī’s view, ecological degradation is a form of injustice because it disrupts this divine balance. The Quran reinforces this in Surah Sūrah al-Raḥmān, which states: "He raised the heavens and established them in balance" (55:7). In this way, al-Ghazālī explains that the balance of the earth is an essential part of divine justice and that humans must work to maintain and preserve the balance of the earth by maintaining ecological harmony. (Al-Ghazālī, 1995)

3. *Ethical Constraints* **Iqtiṣād and Suhd**

Al-Ghazālī proposes moderation (Iqtiṣād) and asceticism (suhd) as essential pillars of a moral life. In his book *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, he emphasises moderation in consumption and lifestyle to reduce ecological damage and avoid resource depletion (Al-Ghazālī, 2015). He advises people to consume only what is necessary for survival and spiritual well-being and to promote a simple, sustainable lifestyle. This is in line with the hadith of the Prophet (PBUH): "Eat and drink, but do not be extravagant. Indeed, Allah does not love the extravagant." (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadeeth, 3319). This hadith paves the way for the concept of "monastic ecology" in the intellectual tradition of al-Ghazālī, which prevents the excesses of modern consumption, connects ecological protection with spirituality, and promotes self-control and a moderate consumption culture necessary to live in harmony with nature without exploiting it.

Lagun Nafs and At-Tawāḍu‘

The concepts of Lub al-Nafs (self-control) and At-Tawāḍu‘ (humility) are integral parts of al-Ghazālī’s ecological ethics. Al-Ghazālī teaches that the human soul must be trained to control its desires, especially in matters related to food and material things (Al Ghazali, 1995). This is supported by the advice of Sūrah al-A‘rāf in the Quran. "Eat and drink, but do not waste by extravagance. Indeed, Allah does not love the wasteful." Al-Ghazālī believes that humility is essential to understanding humanity's smallness in comparison to the vastness of God's creation, thereby reducing the arrogance that leads to the exploitation of natural resources. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also strongly emphasised humility. "Whoever is humble for the sake of Allah, Allah will exalt him" (Ḥadīth Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 2588). Al-Ghazālī states that practising self-control and humility can help humans avoid ecological destruction and live in harmony with nature.

Adab

Adab (civilised character and good conduct) is not just an outward characteristic but rather an outward manifestation of a spiritual state, as al-

Ghazālī argues in his book *Adab al-Aqil* (al-Ghazālī, 2021). This concept is particularly relevant to ecological ethics. It teaches what kind of behaviour should be adopted towards the natural world. *Adab* towards creation, in al-Ghazālī’s view, includes restraint in use, dignity in consumption, attention to consequences, and avoidance of corruption. It calls for a way of life in the world shaped by respect rather than a sense of entitlement. This is where all the pillars of al-Ghazālī’s ecological science framework come together. All of these are brought together in *Adab* as a way of life. As a result, Al-Ghazālī’s paradigm for ecological sciences is not just theoretical but a reliable and practical way of living in the world.

All of this together forms a coherent al-Ghazālī paradigm for ecological ethics. Its unique contribution is to re-establish ecological responsibility within the broader moral and spiritual formation of man. Through this, ecological degradation is interpreted not only as damage to nature but also as a symptom of distorted management, betrayal of trust, a culture of excessive consumption, unpurified will, careless vision, and defective orders. Such a framework articulates an ethical anthropology grounded in sustained ecological responsibility as an alternative to legal or policy approaches to the ecological crisis. In other words, it offers a way to reconstruct human-nature relations from the inside out.

Contemporary relevance and Discussion

In today’s era of ecological degradation, al-Ghazālī’s ecological ethics are particularly relevant. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and its related UN agencies now consistently describe the global situation as a “triple global crisis” involving climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. They emphasise that ecological degradation is not individual or sectoral, but rather systemic (UNEP, 2024; UNEP, 2026). The value of al-Ghazālī’s thought in this context lies not in formulating technical ecological policy but in providing a profound moral anthropology of ecological responsibility. His ethics address the human nature of modern ecological destruction. It is created by excessive consumption, carelessness, and uncontrolled greed. Al-Ghazālī’s framework is therefore particularly relevant because it primarily addresses the moral conditions that enable ecological damage.

One of the most powerful contributions of Al-Ghazālī’s paradigm to contemporary ecological ethics is its close relationship with ethical

approaches. Ecological ethics argues that ecological responsibility is not simply a matter of following rules or calculating consequences but also depends on the development of sustainable traits such as moderation, humility, restraint, and mindfulness (Sandler, R. L., 2007). It is here that al-Ghazālī makes a unique contribution. His moral psychology explains that ecological degradation is not just a failure of institutions but also a failure of moral interests. When desire is restrained, good laws and good principles are undermined by habits such as greed, arrogance, and transgression. In contrast, al-Ghazālī’s ethics, which includes responsibility, moderation, and self-purification, places ecological protection within the framework of a rational person. In this way, al-Ghazālī enriches ethics in the contemporary context by showing that sustainability is not just a matter of institutional design but also of moral construction.

This paradigm also advances ethics in the Islamic context by moving beyond broad thematic claims and toward a more integrated ethical framework. Most existing studies advocate concepts such as the *Khilāfah*, *Amānahh*, *Mīzān*, and anti-wastefulness (Helfaya, A., Kotb, A., & Hanafi, R., 2018). However, important studies have also shown that Islamic ecological thought must move from theories of “why” and “what” to practices of “how” (Abdelzاهر, D. M., Kotb, A., & Hefaya, A., 2019). The reconstruction of al-Ghazālī developed in this article helps meet that challenge. It does this by linking stewardship to accountability, trust to answerability, moderation to resistance against a culture of overconsumption, contemplation to ecological consciousness, and *Adab* to everyday behaviour with the natural world. In this way, al-Ghazālī does not simply restate established Islamic ecological themes; he deepens them by producing a systematic account of himself and his virtues.

Another strength of this paradigm is its ability to link internal change with external ecological practice. Contemporary sustainability discourses often advocate law, institutions, technology, and policy instruments. These are essential but not the only explanations for why individuals and societies repeatedly fail to operate within ecological boundaries. Al-Ghazālī’s paradigm suggests that when internal life is shaped by transgression and carelessness, external reform remains weak. For this reason, this paradigm is relevant to ecological and environmental ethics education, faith-based context formation, and moral discourse in Muslim communities. It argues that ecological responsibility can be fostered not only through information or regulation but also through

practices such as self-discipline, respect, and proper behaviour. In practice, this model would be particularly relevant to contexts such as religious education, mosque-based ecological initiatives, Muslim business ethics, and moral discourse on sustainable consumption.

Moreover, this paradigm has clear limitations. First, al-Ghazālī did not write under the conditions of industrial capitalism, climate science, or contemporary ecology and environmental governance. Therefore, any ecological reading of his work is necessarily reconstructionist, rather than directly historical (Griffel F., 2021). Second, al-Ghazālī’s moral model cannot alone address the practical questions of carbon regulation, biodiversity law, environmental and ecological justice, or transnational ecology and environmental justice, although its contribution is essential. It clarifies a moral anthropology that ecological reform can be shallow or contradictory. In other words, al-Ghazālī helps to explain how any kind of human being can live responsibly on earth, even if additional legal, political, and scientific frameworks are needed to manage specific environmental and ecological problems.

The final point of this discussion concerns the concept of ‘Adab’. Modern scholars argue that ‘Adab’ supports duty-based reasoning by validating one’s moral formation and the development of appropriate behaviour (Padela, A. I., & Sartell, E., 2015). ‘Adab’ and its importance in Islamic medical ethics [Journal of Medical Ethics, 41(9), 756-61]. When extended to ecological ethics, that perspective is particularly useful. It constructs environmental and ecological responsibility not only as a matter of compliance with constraints, but also as a measured, respectful, trustworthy, and controlled way of living in the world. This is one of the most promising aspects of al-Ghazālī’s framework outlined here. It suggests that ecological ethics must eventually become habitual, embodied, and character-forming if they are to be sustained. From this perspective, ecological responsibility is not always a moral act, but rather an integral part of a moral way of life.

Conclusion

This article examines how al-Ghazālī’s ethical and moral philosophy offers a meaningful paradigm for reconstructing human-nature relations amid ecological degradation. By highlighting faith, inner purity, responsibility and accountability, trust, moderation, self-control, deep contemplation, and

orderly behaviour, al-Ghazālī offers a moral vision in which humans are understood not as absolute masters of nature but as morally responsible agents within a divinely ordered creation. The article argues that ecological degradation is not just an environmental or technological problem but also a moral and spiritual crisis rooted in excess, carelessness, and uncontrolled desire. In this perspective, al-Ghazālī’s thought contributes to the dialogue on Islamic ecology and environmental ethics in the broader contemporary context by showing that sustainable ecological responsibility requires both external reform and a moral transformation of the self. Although his work does not provide direct modern environmental policies, it can be said to provide a fundamental moral basis for addressing the deeply human causes of ecological destruction.

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