



## Un-masking Environmental Problems in a COVID World: Exploring Possibilities through “Transcendent Nature” in the Quran, Medieval Islamic Thought and “The Sufi Way”

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### **Abstract:**

The environmental problems we face today because of the COVID-19 pandemic have their roots in irreconcilable perceptions of nature that pervade our modern culture. In the past few decades, literary ecocriticism has leaned towards the perception of the concept of transcendent nature as an expression of unequal power relationships, in which the authority of a subject is endorsed against an intimidating other. Different ancient cultures and belief systems have placed different emphasis on the place of nature in their lives and arts. Ecocritics argued that the problem at the heart of such approaches lies in their insistence on dichotomous thinking, which severs the human world from the natural world. Islamic perceptions of nature in the Quran and the writings of medieval Islamic sages can be interpreted as displaying the roots of a concept of an interrelated cosmos which supports the viability of a transcendent perception of Nature.

The environmental problems we face today as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have their roots in irreconcilable perceptions of nature or wilderness that pervade our modern culture. In the past few decades, literary eco-criticism has leaned towards the perception of a transcendent nature as an expression of unequal power relationships, in which the authority of a subject is endorsed against an intimidating other. Different ancient cultures and belief systems have placed different emphasis on the place of nature in their lives and arts. The Greeks themselves were divided in their perceptions of nature; while Plato and Socrates considered it as a world of imperfect images, (since true knowledge of the world depends on the forms beyond nature) Aristotle believed in an animate nature in which change is a consequence of the essence of natural objects themselves (Oelschlaeger 56-59). As a result of increasing environmental crises and their persistent lack of acknowledgement in humanities departments eco-critics felt the need to study certain perennial ideological binaries (Bellarsi 6). These eco-critics argued that the problem at the heart of such approaches lies in their insistence on dichotomous thinking, which severs the human world from the natural world (though Aristotle was closer to a more holistic conception of nature). Muslim philosophers, who transferred to us the works of Plato and Aristotle, also pondered upon our relationship to nature developing this argument further, as they suggested an integrated human/nature relationship. Islamic perceptions of nature in the Quran and the writings of medieval Islamic sages like Ibn Sab'in with their proliferations in Islamic arts, such as Sufi mystical poetry, can be interpreted as displaying the roots of a concept of an interrelated cosmos. It is my purpose in this paper to point out some of the differing perceptions of Islam regarding nature and how they are exemplified in one of the most prolific forms of Islamic thought, Sufism. However, I find it necessary first to discuss the perception of transcendent nature in contemporary eco-criticism.

Contemporary eco-critics tend to scorn the concept of a transcendent nature, as an unequal relationship between humans and nature. They argue that this unequal relationship is proliferated in the context of the human/nature relationship and how it is played out on male/female levels and conqueror/oppressed levels. Historically inclined critics, suggest a relationship between the notion of a transcendence and British imperialism. Marxists perceive the notion of transcendence as a tool of the bourgeois subject to further their materialistic plans. Moreover, psychoanalysts argue that the experience of transcendence in nature is designed to secure an operative notion of self. Finally, feminist eco-critics suggest that a discourse that encourages transcendence endorses masculine power. Such critics believe that the ecological implications of such a power-driven relationship between humans and nature has lead to the environmental crisis of our time, which demonstrates the broader impulse to dominate any other. The eco-feminist Val Plumwood sums up this dualistic tendency in human/nature relationships saying:

Dilemmas surrounding the concept of wilderness arise in part from the dualistic choice between on the one hand an excessive emphasis on continuity and community with nature denying the possibility of difference between the nonhuman and the human (incorporation), and on the other hand retaining the gulf between the human and natural, thus denying the possibility of continuity and community on the other (alienation). To escape the dilemma, we must be able to recognize and value both continuity and difference with the other. (Feminism 162)

Though one cannot help but partially agree with these eco-critics, regarding the dangers of dichotomous thinking on our perception of nature, one cannot completely disregard transcendent nature as they do. Though, the concept of a transcendent nature, on the surface level, seems to suggest a gulf between the life we humans lead in the material world and a mystical world of natural transcendence, as Barbara Freeman argues, in *The Feminine Sublime*, it is not the notion of transcendence itself, which is at fault but rather the human response to that otherness. Freeman posits:

Unlike the masculinist sublime that seeks to master, appropriate, or colonize the other, I propose that the politics of the feminine sublime involves taking up a position of respect in response to an incalculable otherness. (11)

This attitude of respect for nature- that walks the fine line between (incorporation) and (alienation)- can help to establish a more ecologically sane conception of nature. In my opinion, the study of sublime or transcendent nature as portrayed in medieval Islamic thought and Sufi poetry can help scholars to understand the epistemology of nature within medieval Islamic culture and its attempts to achieve the delicate balance between (incorporation) and (alienation). Eco-critics such as Christopher Hitt propose the transcendent view of nature as the solution to contemporary environmental problems: “Ultimately I am advocating an attitude of wonder: the humbling recognition and acceptance of nature’s alterity. We are part of nature, but we are not identical to it” (275).

More recent eco-critical research argues for the establishment of a spiritual ecology as a leading component which can play a role in establishing “adaptive, peaceful and just responses to the proliferating ecological emergencies pervading the planet” (Mickey 1). In his article, “Spiritual Ecology: On the Way to Ecological Existentialism” Sam Mickey attempts to add a tangible perception to spiritual ecology with the hope of making it more discernible. He distinguishes it from a selfish, apathetic, intellectually lazy attitude towards intervention in environmental problems. He argues that the prevalent mode of spirituality is anti-intellectual, individualistic and consumerist (5). However, a more well-rounded approach to spiritual ecology could be based upon an inclusivity that embraces, “multiple ways of knowing [...] multiculturalism and interreligious commitments” (5). Along these lines, an animistic perception of nature (common in Aboriginal thought) imposes itself and is one where “country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imaged or represented, it is lived in and lived with [...] country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart’s ease” (Rose 7). Nature in this sense becomes imbued with a life-source that connects it to transcendence as an experience.

Yet the transcendent view of nature (with its arguably exclusionary tactics) has often been held responsible for the dichotomization of nature into the sublime and beautiful (which must be preserved) and the ordinary (which can be corrupted without limitation) because it lacks the awe-inspiring characteristics that would justify its preservation. The contemporary eco-critic/poet Gary Snyder sees the solution to our post-modern environmental problems in the conception of nature as a network of nature/culture, nature/human. Michael Zimmerman defines Snyder’s concept of interrelatedness as “an alternative to modernity’s atomistic-anthropocentric paradigm (where) Me-first and Earth-first become inseparable” (40). Snyder’s own definition of nature seems to echo the basic gist of the previous statement: “The greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open and conditional” (Kern 8). Medieval Islamic philosophers and sages like Ibn Sab’in also argued for a similar perception of a transcendent nature. However, Snyder’s perception of integration with a transcendent nature is connected to the Buddhist concept of re-incarnation, while the Islamic concept springs from a belief that all creation is equal in its submission to a divine reality.

Ibrahim Ozdemir, a contemporary scholar of Islamic studies, argues that it is the very lack of the metaphysical in conceptions of nature that has caused contemporary environmental problems. He proclaims that due to the arguments of positivists and scientifically minded philosophers, in the second half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, who argued that religions and metaphysical propositions were meaningless, “modern man lost his awareness of the sacred dimension of nature and alienated himself from it” (4). In this, we can glean the importance of the study of the concept of transcendence in relation to nature.

The representation of nature in Sufi poetry draws upon two major sources: the Quran and the theosophical and philosophical thought of medieval thinkers and sages. The Quran, which is considered by Muslims to be the last of the divine revelations, abounds with references to nature. Within the Quran itself, as

Ozdemir argues, nature is referred to in several contexts that are summarized as follows: nature from a metaphysical dimension and nature in submission to the Creator. Within the metaphysical framework a Muslim’s perception of nature is intricately connected to the first order given by God to the Prophet: “Read” (Quran 96:1). Though the Prophet was illiterate and there was not yet any written text for him to read God asked him to read because reading in this context refers to a completely different way of looking at the world (6-7). Hence, the primary principle “is that this reading should be in the name of our Sustainer. So, at the very beginning it is taught that God, as the Sustainer and Creator, gives existence and meaning to everything else... Hence all reality should be seen and read with this point of view in mind” (7). Though many eco-critics, like Michael Mcdowell, argue that any attempt “to listen to voices in the landscape or to ‘read the book of nature’ is necessarily anthropocentric” (372). In the case of the Quran, Muslims do not seek an image of themselves within nature but rather that of the Creator, a metaphysical power beyond them, and nature. The Quran hence stresses the concept that “God is the very meaning of reality; a meaning manifested, and clarified, and brought home by the universe”(9). The following verse from the Quran highlights the order of nature and the power of the Creator of that order:

You see the mountains and think them firmly fixed: but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away: (such is) the artistry of God, who disposes of all things in perfect order: for He is well-acquainted with all that you do. (Quran 27:88)

Moreover, due to the fact that the Quran encourages people to interpret the universe as signs of God: “On the earth are Signs for those of assured Faith,” it is perceived as possessing intrinsic value beyond what humans attribute to it (Quran 51:20). Hence, nature does not merely exist for humanity’s pleasure, but is also a moral obligation. Such a notion of obligation is necessary because it plays a role in developing our perception of nature from a mere means, to a trust which we are obligated to protect. Ozdemir clarifies that the main purpose behind the Quran’s stress on a transcendent nature was not only to ponder the Creator’s existence through creation, but also to have a moral feeling of obligation towards God, a transcendental being. If we should consider the contrary argument (that there is no meaning and purpose in human life) then there would be no meaningfulness of the natural order and of humankind’s conduct in life and as Albert Camus argued all would be allowed since God does not exist and man dies (Ozdemir 9-21).

Nature in the Quran is also referred to as Muslim, since Muslim comes from the Arabic word *yoslim*, which means to submit. In this sense, the Quran applies the term to the entire universe because all of the processes, which take place within it, are a form of submission and glorification to the Creator. The Quran directly refers to this in the following verse:

The seven heavens and the earth, and all beings therein, declare His glory: there is not a thing but celebrates His praise; and yet you don’t understand how they declare His glory! (Quran 17:44)

Thus, it seems that humans who have the unique privilege to submit or not, have a lesson to learn from nature which exists in complete submission to its Creator (not to humans). Ozdemir refers to the Islamic scholar, Muhammad Hamidullah’s, explanation of the significance of Islamic prayer in relation to the prayer of nature as a whole. According to Hamidullah’s argument, “A Muslim purifies himself/herself like water, praises God aloud like thunder, remains erect like hills, bends himself like animals, and prostrates like plants” (17). From this Ozdemir deduces that through the actions of Muslim daily prayers, Muslims participate in the call of all creation and perceive the integration of their selves with all reality. We must point out though that this is not the complete integration that Plumwood attacks, but rather an integration that acknowledges the difference of nature while attempting to emulate it at the same time. The Quran encourages the realization of an integrated and holistic selfhood (Ozdemir 17-18). The Quran hence stresses that the world is alive, meaningful, purposeful and submissive to the Creator. Therefore, the result is a sense of unity with creation, an interconnectedness that

the medieval Muslim Sage Ibn Sab'in alludes to as (*wahdat al-wujud*). This is very similar (though not exactly the same) to the concept of interrelatedness that the contemporary Eco-critic Gary Snyder heralds.

Ibn Sab'in a medieval Hermet/Sage discusses humanity's relation to nature, in terms of the concept of (*wahdat al-wujud*). Vincent Cornell argues that the teachings of Ibn Sab'in, the thirteenth century spiritual Sage, are often misunderstood and conflated. Though Ibn Sab'in is responsible for first coining the term (*wahdat al-wujud*) or "oneness of existence," Islamic scholars claim that Ibn Arabi is the one who coined it. However, as a follower of Hermetic mysticism, Ibn Sab'in's view of existence was different from the philosophical Ibn Arabi. Ibn Sab'in's view of nature is unique in its "monistic, emanationist, and integrative (quality which) [...] was based on the premise that the unifying factor which underlies all of creation is the Intellectual-Principle"(Cornell 64). Ibn Sab'in stresses the centrality of the intellect in the universal scheme of things. This Intellectual-Principle, according to Ibn Sab'in, is a reality that exists within all human beings and creatures. Moreover, this Intellectual-Principle has a spiritual dimension. Hence, according to his Islamic Hermeticism: "despite the apparent multiplicity of forms, the unique and unitary Intellectual-Principle underlies all forms equally" (Cornell 71). Cornell quotes Ibn Sab'in:

What I wish to counsel you is this: that you firmly believe that the universal and the particular and the material and the spiritual are all one...and do not believe that the primordial order of the universe is internally differentiated (71).

Ibn Sab'in's concept of 'oneness of existence' (*wahdat al-wujud*) echoes the Quran's realization of an integrated and holistic selfhood within nature. If the particular, the material and spiritual are all one then there can be no dichotomous relationship that severs nature from culture. Moreover, such a concept would further strengthen the argument that we practice a moral obligation towards nature, since we are all governed by the same unitary Intellectual-Principle. However, this Intellectual-Principle while linking us to all existence at the same time separates us, since it takes different forms within different creatures. This explanation of *wahdat al-wujud* undermines claims that Ibn Sab'in was a pantheist a stance which places him at odds with Islamic orthodoxy (Cook 105). Hence, it is not the complete incorporation, which denies the difference between the human and non-human. Ibn Sab'in was not the only Muslim medieval thinker to deal with humanity's relation to nature and its consequences.

The compilers of *World Eras: Rise and Spread of Islam* state that in premodern Islam the study of nature complemented the study of religion. There was no randomness in nature because everything that existed was thought to have meaning. In this sense, both humans and nature were considered to be subject to the ultimate plans of a divine force. Hence, humans were not raised above all other creatures but were first and foremost subject to the power of the Creator. Within medieval Islamic theological and philosophical schools, nature was defined in many ways.

The systematic form of theology in Islam, *Kalam*, raised several arguments regarding the position of man, within nature before God. The methodology of *Kalam* depended a great deal on logical argument, as well as scriptural passages from the Quran. According to the Mu'tazila School of *Kalam*, God granted indemnity to innocent people as well as animals for their suffering. This hints at a degree of equality between nature and human beings, in their submissive position before a divine force. However, the Mu'tazila do not completely erase all differences between the human and non-human since they stress that humans are endowed with free will. The Ash'arite school of *Kalam* like the Mu'tazila stressed the omnipotence of God in all their speculations. Hence, according to their atomic theory:

Every event may be analysed into discrete moments, completely independent of each other, which have been brought together solely by means of God's will. Qualities exist only for a single instant. Substances persevere only by being continually recreated at every instant: *khalq fi kull waqt*. Implicit in this is the rejection of any natural order. (Pines 2)

The Ash'arite occasionalistic model of the Universe presents a very post-modern perception of creation, in which everything consists of tiny particles that are related together only through divine agency. There is no logical relation between events that exist only for a single instant. Such events continue to exist, only by being created over and over again by the Creator. Hence, according to this school, both nature and we exist in an illusory reality, which is constantly being created by God. Due to this constant state of flux, an ethical subjectivism is born which centers on the view that people should act in a manner ethically appropriate to where they find themselves. This subjectivism could seem on the surface level to be detrimental to a sense of ethical obligation towards nature; however, in reality it is not because the Quran is regarded as the touchstone for advice on all ethical matters. Hence, ethical decisions never really become subjective in the anarchic sense one would imagine.

On the other hand, Al-kindī, who was also known as “The Philosopher of the Arabs”, believed like Aristotle in the laws of cause and effect and denied the occasionalistic, atomistic model proposed by the Ash'arites. This is proliferated in his belief in Astrology, so that movement of the celestial spheres above the earth is thought to affect life on earth (Douglass 371). His views regarding astrology can be seen as reflecting a united-ness within nature according to which humans and heavenly bodies are codified to affect one another by a divine agency. Moreover, he highlights the strong connection between external surroundings and human affairs, which lies at the heart of an ethical obligation to nature. However, this interconnectedness does not suggest complete incorporation because the relation between the universe and humans is one of cause and effect- controlled by the superior force of the Creator- not complete incorporation. Ibn Sina takes the theory of inter-connectedness with nature to a different level, by relating it to the concept of love.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the medieval Islamic scientist and philosopher, bases the relation between humans and nature on the concept of Love. He states that God alone is pure Truth and Goodness. The world itself is an object of His Love and all things return to God out of this Love. Moreover, through his combination of the study of philosophy and medicine, we can trace the complementary relation between the study of nature and religion. There was no conception of randomness in nature because everything that existed was thought to have a meaning. The reason and the senses both had important roles to play, in understanding God's plan. By closely studying nature, the philosopher could learn God's plan for the world (Douglass 376). In this respect, Ibn Sina's views were quite influential on Sufi thought because of his stress on the notion that the study of nature, through absolute devotion to the Creator, leads us to God's ultimate plan. This seems to echo the naturalistic conceptions of later European thinkers like Jean Jaques Rousseau, who stressed the importance of reading brooks not books. Ozdemir posits that Muslim scholars look on nature as a book, even calling it “the book of the universe” which highlights the fact that like the Quran, the universe makes known to us the Creator” (3). Sufism, an attempt to interpret the world, is deeply rooted in this holistic perception of creation.

Before dealing with a brief example of Sufi poetry and its transcendental portrayal of nature, I feel it necessary to introduce a concise history of this term. Sufism is a difficult term to define; Dr. Carl Ernst devotes a whole book to the descriptive analysis of this term. People often have a very vague and blurred notion of the term Sufism. Images of (*Halaqat thikr*) sessions of remembrance and the twirling dervishes of Egyptian folk dance (*tanoura*) constitute part of that superficial conception. Moreover, exercises of extreme asceticism, the philosophy of Muhammad Abou Hamed Al-Ghazaly and the poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi are famed Sufi icons that also invite deliberation. Between such polar images of Sufism, one wonders how a comprehensive definition of this movement could ever be attained. Yet like so many intellectual enterprises, one discovers that there is no definitive definition but rather multifarious ways and by-ways under the patronage of this term, which themselves are included under the wider patronage of Islam. Ernst clarifies- in his comprehensive study of Sufism- that the reason behind the difficulty defining this term is its highly contested nature. Through his in-depth study of the term, he reaches the conclusion that “Sufism is not a thing that one can point to; it is instead

a symbol that occurs in our society, which is used by different groups for different purposes” (xvi). Along these lines, Ernst clarifies how Orientalists towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century used this term to refer to the portions of Orientalist culture attractive to Europeans, such as their poetry and fondness for music and dance (all of which were interpreted out of their religious context). Sufis defined themselves as a way or *mathhab*, through which certain people (who choose the mystical path) can experience ethical and spiritual ideals. Finally, secular modernists object to Sufism as medieval superstition. For my purpose in this paper, I will be using the term Sufism to refer to an epistemological form of knowledge, through which one can acquire better comprehension of God by acquiring knowledge about the world and nature. The contentiousness around the term itself is transferred to Sufi poetry, which on the surface level refers to love and intoxication, while on a deeper level refers to mystical experience.

Umar Ibn al-Farid, the thirteenth century Egyptian Sufi poet, expresses sentiments towards nature in his poetry that echo those of the Quran, Ibn Sab'in as well as Islamic philosophers. Several sections of his poem “Poem of the Sufi Way” (*Nazm al-suluk/al-Ta'iyah al-kubra*) portray this. Ibn al-Farid embodies a holistic perception of nature, which refers to it as a web of interrelatedness. In “Poem of the Sufi Way” lines 679-706 the mystical poet Ibn al-Farid compares human beings's and animals's lives on earth to a shadow theater whose screen is illuminated from behind by the same source: “You see the shapes of things/in every display/disclosed before you/from behind the veil's disguise,” (269). Hence, whether humans, birds, or camels, they are all illuminated with the same singular Source, which unites them. This is stressed in the following lines “All that you witnessed/was the act of one/alone within/ the cloistering veils” (275). It is worthy to note here that though all forms of creation are endowed with the same source of divine light, this does not suggest complete incorporation because they still have the unique qualities that differentiate one species from another through their different shapes.

The lover (the one seeking the Sufi way to God) is veiled from creation's inner unity through the five senses, which during the Sufi's gradual spiritual purification become more attuned to the unifying principle within the beloved's (the Creator's) creations that manifests itself throughout time and space: “My eye is blessed/when a lightening flash/relays to it from her/thought of her in the evening,”(195). Finally, when the Sufi achieves gnosis and becomes able to see things from the perspective of the Creator the unity within all things becomes evident. This is described in the following lines:

That I could hear my acts  
With a seeing ear  
And witness my words  
With a hearing eye.

So when the nightingale mourns  
In the tangled brush,  
And birds in the trees  
Warble in reply,

.....  
Then I delight in my works of art  
Declaring my union  
And company free  
Of the idolatry of difference. (281)

We notice in these lines how at the stage of gnosis, the senses assume different roles than they usually perform. The Sufi who achieves gnosis hence sees with his ears and hears with his eyes. It therefore seems necessary to assume a revolutionary perspective with regards to our relationship to nature, in order to comprehend the unifying force that connects us to it. Only through this can we begin to understand the nightingale's mourning

and the replies of birds. A divine web connects us to them, while still differentiating us at the same time. However, this difference is not the dichotomous human/nature difference that categorizes creation on an ascending level with humans at the top. Ibn al-Farid refers to this limiting sense of difference as an idolatrous relationship to nature. The sense of difference he advocates is that of the circle of unity, in which we respect the uniqueness of creation and also time realize the inherent unity which joins all of us.

The study of Islamic medieval conceptions of nature and their proliferation in the Sufi poetry of Arab poets like Ibn al-Farid, play an important role in the animation of a new environmental ethics. In order to understand how we have reached the critical environmental problems we face today, we need to re-conceptualize our relationship with nature. The concept of a transcendent nature is not of and in itself destructive, but it is rather our interpretation of it from our own worldly perspectives that is. We need to re-conceptualize our definition of transcendent nature. To do this, we must take into consideration as many traditional cultural interpretations of our relationship with nature as possible, in order to formulate a holistic base from which we can draw. For a long time, anthropocentric religious beliefs have been held accountable for ecological problems. However, this view is quite biased since it is unfair to oversimplify and dub all religions as responsible for environmental degradation. This is why “[m]oving between and across different traditions is imperative for coordinating collective responses to the global environmental crisis” (Mickey 10). An in-depth study of religious perspectives of nature is needed, before reaching such conclusions. Moreover, in Islam, though humans are considered to have a unique place in the chain of being, that chain is not organized in an ascending order, where some creatures are at the top while others are at the bottom. The Islamic chain of being takes the shape of an unending circle, where all beings are interconnected and interrelated. A purely secular approach, fails in defining the limits of an environmental ethics because it lacks the spiritual correlative and is itself guilty of the materialistic perceptions that have played a role in the ravishment of our natural surroundings. This is why Lawrence Buell argues:

Unless ecocriticism can squarely address the question of *how* nature matters for those readers, critics, teachers, and students for whom environmental concern does not mean nature preservation first and foremost and for whom nature writing, nature poetry, and wilderness narrative do not seem the most compelling forms of environmental imagination, then the movement may fission and wane. (Buell, 113)

Finally, what is needed is an interdisciplinary, transcultural approach to our ecological problems in a COVID-19 world. Such an approach ensues a conceptual understanding which bridges religion, philosophy, literature and the sciences. As I have attempted to argue in this paper Islam, a religion often connected only with human rights, also has a lot to offer on the ecological front. I am sure that all other religions whether monotheistic or polytheistic would also provide us with many ideas, to facilitate our understanding of nature and our relationship to it. I hope to have clarified through my previous arguments the particular contribution Islam has to offer on this front. We are in need of a new environmental ethics that is based on a unified commitment to realize sustainable development. What has ushered the environmental crisis we face today is our decadent relationship with nature. We need to redefine our perception of transcendent nature in order to achieve a sustainable relationship to our surroundings. COVID-19 has shown us that insular thought is detrimental and that we must think in terms of trans-border solutions. Religion with its spiritual aspect can work to delegate people to work together in awareness for the common cause of alleviating the adverse effects of environmental problems.

**المستخلص:**

إعادة النظر في فكرة الطبيعة المتسامية في قصيدة "الطريق الصوفي" لابن الفارض و النص القراني من خلال النقد البيئي  
سمية صبري

في عالمنا الحديث و بالخاص خلال فترة وباء الكوفيد ظهر لنا ارتباط مشاكلنا البيئية بعدم الوفاق بين مفاهيم البيئة عبر العصور الماضية، وكان مفهوم الطبيعة المتسامية يعد مفهوم غير بناء في خلق علاقة سليمة بين البشر و الطبيعة لعدم تكافؤ علاقات القوة بين البشر و البيئة، فكانت تتمثل البيئة ككيان يثير الرهبة و علاقة البشر تجاهها تشكل خلال تلك العلاقة و تصبح مرتبطة بكل ما هو مثير للرهبة و الخوف وهذا يجعل العلاقة تتسم بالمواجهة بدلا من التفاهم ، و يرى النقاد ان هذا بسبب الثنائية الفكرية التي تقطع الصلة بين عالم البشر و الطبيعة، و لكن نستطيع ان نستخلص من كتابات الحكماء الصوفيين في العصور الوسطى و القران جذور لعلاقة اكثر تشابكا بين البشر و الطبيعة من خلال فكرة الطبيعة المتسامية.

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