



ISLAMIC ECOTHEOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF *KHALĪFAH* AND THE ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstrak

Kata kunci:

Ekoteologi
Islam, *khalifah*,
Antroposentrisme,
Lingkungan.

Tulisan ini membahas hubungan antara teologi Islam dan etika lingkungan. Berdasarkan perkembangan wacana masalah lingkungan yang muncul di ruang publik, maka teologi Islam sebagai wacana ketuhanan dituntut untuk turut serta mengatasinya pada tataran konseptual mulai dari hubungan manusia dengan lingkungan. Konsep manusia (insan) dalam wacana teologi Islam didefinisikan sebagai pusat kesadaran universal melalui konsep khalifah Allah di muka bumi (khalifah Allah fi al-Ard). Konsep seperti itu sering disalah artikan sebagai legitimasi supremasi kekuasaan manusia atas makhluk lain di muka bumi (antroposentrisme). Oleh karena itu, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk memperkaya kajian tentang Ekoteologi Islam, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan konsep khalifah dan kaitannya dengan tanggung jawab terhadap alam. Untuk melakukan penelitian, tulisan ini menerapkan pendekatan intertekstual untuk mengekstraksi dan mengungkap makna khalifah dan kaitannya dengan tanggung jawab dalam karya-karya tafsir, filsafat, teologi, tasawuf, dan teosofi Muslim klasik. Hasil pembahasan menunjukkan bahwa pemaknaan manusia sebagai khalifah Tuhan di dunia bukanlah legitimasi penguasaan total melainkan tanggung jawab yang harus dipenuhi.

Keywords:

Islamic
Ecotheology,
Khalifah,
Anthropocentrism,
Environment.

Abstract

This paper discusses the relationship between Islamic theology and environmental ethics. Based on the development of the discourse on an environmental problem that arises in the public sphere, Islamic theology as the divine discourse is required to participate in overcoming it at the conceptual level starting from the relationship between humans and the environment. The concept of humans in Islamic theological discourse is defined as the center of universal consciousness through the concept of the vicegerent of God on earth (khalifah Allah fi al-Ard). Such a concept is often misunderstood as the legitimization of the supremacy of human power over other creatures on earth (anthropocentrism). Therefore, the objective of the study is to enrich studies on Islamic Ecotheology, especially related to the concept of khalifah and its relation to responsibility towards nature. To conduct the research, this paper applied an intertextual approach to extract and reveal the meaning of khalifah and its relation with responsibility in classical Muslim works of Tafsir, philosophy, theology, Sufism, and theosophy. The result of the discussion shows that the meaning of humans as the vicegerent of God in the world is not the legitimacy of total mastery but a responsibility that must be fulfilled.

Introduction

The development of environmental conservation discourse in the public sphere is increasingly being realized by the wider community. This discussion actually sparked in 1960 when White Jr wrote an article that sparked a discussion on environmental issues in “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” where he criticized Judaeo-Christian dogma for having an anthropocentric view that causes environmental destruction. It was derived from the teaching of “man was made in the image of God”.¹ This proposition is used as the basis and justifies the truth. Anthropocentric view and believes that all creations in this world are objects for humans and they negate or ignore the presence and existence of nature.² This dogma

¹ Lynn White Jr , “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1205.

² Ben A Minter and Robert E. Manning, “An Appraisal of the Critique of Anthropocentrism and Three Lesser Known Themes in Lynn White’s: The Historical Academic Journal of Islamic Principles and Philosophy | Vol. 3, No. 1, November - April 2022

is used as human justification and legitimacy to justify exploitative and arbitrary behavior as a driven force of ecocide and environmental crisis. Even some opinions state that this tendency was also adopted by Islam.³ As for the Qur'anic verses that are accused of having anthropocentric tendencies, they are:

“And when God said to the Angels I shall appoint a *kehalifah* on earth, they said, ‘How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?’ but He said, ‘I know things you do not.’”(al-Baqarah, 2:30)

At first glance, one can easily misunderstand the verse and associate Islam with the anthropocentric view that threatens the environment. Also, one can easily be perceived that the concept of a *kehalifah* or vicegerent is similar to the concept of the image of God criticized by White. At this stage, it is important for Islamic ecotheology to provide clarification and response to the accusation of anthropocentrism on *kehalifah*.

However, before discussing the accusation of anthropocentrism a *kehalifah*, it is important to describe and explain the concept of anthropocentrism. In environmental ethics discourse, anthropocentrism is considered the main problem that causes environmental damage. Therefore it is identical to the negative image of egocentrism. Also, it is contrasted with non-anthropocentrism visions such as ecocentrism which argues that nature is the center of life and that it must always be protected in order to preserve and prevent the environment from being damaged. According to Kopnina et. al, there are two attitudes towards anthropocentrism: 1) anthropocentrism is unavoidable and even has benefits for environmental protection. 2) anthropocentrism is inadequate for environmental conservation. In this case, they support the second and

Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”, *Organization Environment* 18 (2005): 163 - 164.

³ Ibrahim Ozdemir, “Environmental Ethics from a Quranic Perspective” in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. Eds. Rihard C. Foltz et. Al (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 25.

categorically reject the notion of anthropocentrism and instead emphasize the importance of ecocentrism.⁴

Moreover, Hayward argues that there are two senses in which anthropocentrism is usually criticized, namely from an ontological and axiological or ethical point of view. From an ontological perspective, anthropocentrism is a misunderstanding that holds that humans are the center of the world. Meanwhile, from an ethical perspective, anthropocentrism is a mistake in giving exclusive or arbitrary preference to human interests without paying attention to the interests of other creatures. In looking at the relationship between anthropocentrism and ecology, Hayward has the opposite view to Kopnina et. al. According to Hayward, anthropocentrism cannot be understood superficially with human-centeredness because there are times when it is unavoidable because human interests can not be separated from speciesism or respect for one another. Besides, on the other hand, excessive criticism of humans can lead to human chauvinism.⁵ In other words, conservation values cannot be separated from the centrality of humans.

Furthermore, regarding the accusation or attribution of anthropocentrism to the *kehalifah*, there are several things that must be explained, one of which is the studies of the *kehalifah*. Many of the previous studies on the meaning of *kehalifah* were carried out by tracing the beginning of the meaning carried out by exegetes. It is reasonable to observe the evolution of meaning and how surrounding elements impact the formation of meaning. In this case, one of the most studied aspects of *kehalifah* is how it is related to the political context, and therefore, *kehalifah* is widely studied in the sphere of political power or institution. An example

⁴ Helen Kopnina, Haydn Washington, Bron Taylor et al “Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 31, 2018, 109–127. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-018-9711-1>.

⁵ Tim Hayward, “Anthropocentrism: A Misunderstood Problem,” *Environmental Values* 6, no. 1 (1997): 49–63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30301484>.

is the study of *Qāḍī* applying the exegetically historical approach to trace the interpretation of the *khalīfah* in the early generation of *Mufasssīr*, who lived during the Umayyad period, and whether they made a connection between political reality and the word of God.⁶

Following *Qāḍī* 's attempt to apply an exegetically historical approach, Liew expanded the scope of his study. The difference is that *Qāḍī* discusses the interpretation of the *khalīfah* in the interpreters of the early pre-Tabari period, and Liew examines the post-Tabari and looks at the development of the context of the intersection between the interpretation and the political context. He also broadens the scope of the study by referring to works of Islamic theology (*kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).⁷ In addition, a study of the *khalīfah* has been conducted in the context of contemporary political issues. One of them is Djidin and Syamsuddin who examine how the interpretation of the verse of *khalīfah* 2:30 and its relationship to the political context of HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) in Indonesia.⁸

These studies seek to investigate the *khalīfah* and its relationship to the legitimacy of political institutions. Then, the focus of the study is to seek the relationship between the word of God and the political institution in Islam. While this study aims to understand *khalīfah* in the scope of environmental discourse. If in the interpretation of political power, the *khalīfah* is questioned whether it provides a basis for the institution of government power in human relations. So, in environmental discourse, some questions have broad implications such as whether humans really

⁶ Wadād Al-Qāqī, "The Term 'Khalifa' in Early Exegetical Literature," *Die Welt Des Islams* 28, (1988): 392–411.

⁷ Han Hsien Liew, "The Caliphate of Adam: Theological Politics of the Qur'ānic Term Ḥalīfa," *Arabica* 63, no. 1–2 (2016): 1–29, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-12341381>.

⁸ M. Djidin and Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Indonesian Interpretation of the Qur'an on Khilāfah: The Case of Quraish Shihab and Yudian Wahyudi on Qur'an, 2: 30-38," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 57, no. 1 (2019).

hold a central value in the world and thus have full power over other non-human beings? And does it get ontological legitimacy from God's word and become anthropocentric legitimacy? at least, the question has sparked discussion among Muslims to answer these questions.

Afrasiabi argues that Islam is an anthropocentric and utilitarian religion because it places human interests as its foundation, as well as giving a mandate to humans and making them vicegerent (*khaliifah*) of God on earth. According to him, this is a consequence of the understanding of Islamic humanism which places humans at the center of history and makes humans special creations on earth. Based on this assumption, he insisted that Islamic Humanism and Western secular humanism share the anthropocentric core. Therefore, to situate it within the vision of environmental ethics, he calls for deconstructing the concept of Islamic humanism.⁹

In contrast to Afrasiabi, Rizvi emphasized that Islamic environmental ethics is non-anthropocentric. He insists that Islam is not an anthropocentric but theocentric religion, because the purpose of Islam is the fulfillment of God's Will. In this case, Rizvi highlighted the axiological aspect of intrinsic and extrinsic values. He questioned whether non-human beings have intrinsic value. Axiologically, Islam rejects the idea that value is attached to the objects themselves, without giving up the objectivity of value. That's because values come from God's will, not from the subjective preferences of humans or non-humans. In other words, value is neither intrinsic nor extrinsic.

Moreover, he explained that Islam recognizes the objectivity of values; however, it cannot be understood that values reside in the things themselves. He links it with the discussion about freedom of choice which in this case is the basis of human responsibility and the provision of certain

⁹ Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, "Toward an Islamic Ecotheology," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. Eds. Rihard C. Foltz et Al (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 281.

rights. He emphasized that in fact the system of rights is based on God's will and is revealed in His word. This moral system provides rights and responsibilities that govern the relationship between God and humans, among humans, and between humans and all other creatures. Therefore, he concludes that from an Islamic perspective, the relationship between humans and non-humans is neither anthropocentric nor misanthropic. Humans have obligations to God, fellow humans, and other creatures. These basic obligations are proclaimed in divine law in the form of specific principles and law.¹⁰

The two discussions above demonstrate the anthropocentric *vis-a-vis khalifah* relationship, even though each of them has contrasting views. However, the author realizes that there is an understudied issue regarding how classical Muslim scholars interpret the verse that became the source of gravity led to the debate on the issue of anthropocentrism, namely: "I (God) shall appoint a *khalifah* on earth, 2; 30. In this consideration, this research aims to investigate *khalifah* in numerous works of tafsir, philosophy, theology, Sufism, and theosophy using the intertextuality method. The selected figures are Al-Tabari, Ikhwan al-Safa, Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn 'Arabi, and Mulla Sadra. These figures were chosen to obtain various interpretations and understandings of *khalifah* from different disciplines. This also implies that the sources uncovered are drawn from both within and beyond the book of *tafsir* that giving an interpretation of the *khalifah* verse. This step is taken in order to obtain a variety of perspectives and meanings from each field in presenting *khalifah*. Also, It's interesting to understand how classical Muslims perceived the concept of *khalifah*, whether they saw it as anthropocentric legitimacy or it has an ethical value that might be an invaluable insight into ecological discourse in the contemporary era.

¹⁰ A. M. Rizvi, "Islamic Environmental Ethics and the Challenge of Anthropocentrism," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 27, no. 3 (2010): 53–78.

Interpretations of *Khalifah*

Al-Tabari (d.923), in his *tafsīr Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, argues that *khalifah* comes from the verb of *khalafa* which means “someone who succeeds another”. Therefore a king (*al-sultan al-a'dzam*) is called a caliph because he succeeds the one who went before him. Moreover, Al-Tabari provides three forms of interpretation: 1) it refers to someone who replaces the *Jinn* to inhabit the earth; 2) it also means the descendants of Adam because they replace Adam and will pass on to the next generation; 3) whenever God told the angels that He made on earth a vicegerent of Him, He was referred to appoint as a successor which in this case was referred to the human as the vicegerency who would judge justly among creatures according to His Commandments and Rules.¹¹ Thus, in his last interpretation, Al-Tabari explains that *khalifah* has an ethical dimension and has a responsibility to act justly towards God's creatures on earth.

Moreover, an interesting interpretation of *khalifah* is presented by an Islamic group of philosophers known as Ikhwan al-Safa (The Brethren of Purity)(10 C) through the story of an ecological fable. In one of *Rasā'il's* chapters, “The Case of the Animal versus Man before the King of the *Jinn*”, they present an ecological fable between the animal kingdoms that sues humans in court because the animals feel that humans have abused their superior position. In front of the court, the representatives of the animals began to declare their claim that they had been enslaved and mistreated by humans. They argue as follows:

“Ages later God created Adam, the ancestor of humankind, and made him His vice-regent on earth. His offspring reproduced, and his seed multiplied, spreading over the earth, land and sea, mountain and plain. Humans encroached on our ancestral lands. They captured sheep, cows, horses, mules, and asses from among us and enslaved them, subjecting them to the exhausting toil and drudgery of hauling, ploughing,

¹¹ Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami' Al-Bayan 'an Ta'wīl Al-Qur'an*, Ed. Abdullah Ibn 'Abd Al-Muhsin Al-Turki, Vol. 1, (Dar Hijr, n.d.): 477–80.

drawing water, turning mills, and being ridden. They forced us to these tasks with beatings, bludgeonings, and every kind of duress, torture, and chastisement throughout our lives.”¹²

To respond to animals, humans argue that their actions are justified in religion as some verses of the Qur’an had revealed (16:5-7, 40:80, 16:8, 43:13). Even according to humans, there are more verses in the Qur’an, Torah, and Gospel showing that humans are masters and animals are slaves that were created for human sake.¹³ Animals argue that the earth created by God is intended for all creatures, including animals and plants, and humans. And therefore, humans should care for the animals and profit from them in their life, not abuse them. Moreover, the verses that humans refer to are verses that show God’s Blessings and Kindness bestowed on mankind, not to support the opinion that humans are masters and animals are slaves. In this case, animals assume that humans have misinterpreted *kehalifah* as an absolute or indiscriminate mastery of other creatures.¹⁴

Humans give one argument after another to legitimate their superiority over animals. The debate continued from two sides to defend their respective arguments. The subjective argument presented by humans is demolished in turn by animals by giving the counter examples of the uniqueness of animals and insisting on the divine wisdom behind every creature. Human arguments come successively in arrogant and self-serving forms. While the animals answer the claims of humans with more rational arguments one by one.¹⁵

¹² Ikhwan Al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan Al-Safa*, Vol. 2 (Qom: Markaz al-Nasyr-Maktabah A’lam Islami, 1984), 208. The translation from The Brethren of Purity, *The Case of Animals Versus Man Before the King of Jinn: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22*, eds Lenn E. Goodman & Richard McGregor, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 107.

¹³ Ikhwan al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan Al-Safa*, Vol. 2, 206 - 207.

¹⁴ Ikhwan al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan Al-Safa*, Vol. 2, 210.

¹⁵ Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006): 51.

Ikhwān al-Safā presents the relationship between humans as *khalīfah*, and his responsibilities are unique because it is not shown in the form of a conventional interpretation *khalīfah* conducted by al-Tabari. This can be understood because they are shown in a philosophical work, not *tafsīr*. However, this does not reduce the essence of the message and the interpretations of the Ikhwān al-Safā related to the verse of *khalīfah*, which they present in an ecological fable. This provides a new perspective on the interpretation of *khalīfah* because it does not just come from a human perspective or subjective. Still, they also try to see the position of *khalīfah* from another perspective, which comes from other creatures on earth, which refers to animals. Both humans and animals argue with reference to the authority of Scripture. It demonstrates that both humans and animals must know God's objective values. As a result, each side must live by it and comprehend the link between rights and duties.

The important point that should be highlighted is that by telling the story of animals that sue for men's lack of responsibility, Ikhwān al-Safā presents an ecological vision that is ahead of their time through the depiction of animals that speak to defend their rights in court that are violated by man. In other words, animals are considered as subjects who have voiced their rights and resist the arbitrariness of man who posits them as merely an object and slaves.

A further opinion on *khalīfah* came from Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) who interpreted his argument through the emphasis on linguistic analysis. According to Ibn Taymiyya, *khalīfah* means "one who succeeds another", just like Abu Bakr is *khalīfah* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) because he succeeds on Ummah after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) passed away. Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah criticizes the idea that *khalīfah* is interpreted as a deputy or vicegerent of God on earth.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu' Fatawa*. Eds. 'Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn Qasim and His Son Muhammad, Vol 35 (Riyadh: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyya , n.d.), 43.

Ibn Taymiyyah argues that God cannot have a *khalifah*. That is why when it was said to Abu Bakr: “O *khalifah* of God”, Abu Bakr replied ‘I am not a *khalifah* of God: but I am only a *khalifah* of God’s Messenger.’ This opinion is used as the basis for Ibn Taymiyyah to understand the meaning of *khalifah*. For him, one can become *khalifah* of someone else if he/she is absent or dead or because he/she is in need of a *khalifah*. This principle cannot be associated with God, especially in the interpretation of God’s vicegerency. God is Living and Present, neither Dead nor Absent. Moreover, it is impossible for God to have partners, and hence, the idea of a *khalifah* as a God’s deputy or viceregent is a mistake. Ibn Taymiyyah says God is above them all. And hence, no one can be His viceregent, or take His place; because no one is like Him nor is equal to Him. In this context, Ibn Taymiyyah firmly stated that if someone attributes a *khalifah* to Him, he would deviate from the true path.¹⁷

For Ibn Taymiyyah, It is a mistake to think of the *khalifah* of God as a God’s deputy or vicegerent. Because God cannot be represented by anyone, especially by humans as his creation because God is Present and has Power over all his creatures in the world. This opinion, in fact, emerged in the context of Ibn Taymiyyah’s criticism of Ibn ‘Arabi. Ibn Taymiyyah accused Ibn ‘Arabi of falling in error because he perceived the meaning *khalifah* of god as the deputy of God (*naib Allah*). Also, he accused Ibn ‘Arabi has been influenced by the thoughts of philosophers who stated that human is a microcosm (*‘alam ṣagħīr*) and God is a macrocosm (*‘alam kabīr*). This opinion for Ibn Taymiyyah is un-Islamic because it is based on the principle of *wahdah al-wujūd* meaning that God is identical with his creation.¹⁸

From the explanation above, it is clear that Ibn Taymiyyah is discussing in the theological realm the emphasis on the absolute power of

¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu’ Fatawa*. Vol 35, 45.; Jaafar Sheikh Idris, “Is Man The Vicegerent of God,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 35, 45 (1990): 99–110.

¹⁸ Taymiyyah, *Majmu’ Fatawa*, Vol 35, 44.

God and his non-necessity for a successor for His presence and power in the World. It cannot be separated from his linguistic approach to support the argument. In this respect, Ibn Taymiyya's literal reading of *khalīfah* is not surprising because he was known for taking a literal approach to the interpretation of scripture. The implication of such understanding is to perceive the concept of *khalīfah* in a dry sense and seems to lack normative consequences of man's responsibility. This is because, in addition to confirming its literal meaning, he has another purpose, which is to criticize Ibn 'Arabi's thinking. However, Ibn Taymiyya's opinion can be useful for providing treasury and interpretation of the meaning of *khalīfah*.

Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), in his magnum opus *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, argues that *khalīfah* has two meanings: 1) *khalīfah* refers to Adam and his descendants.¹⁹ 2) *khalīfah* as deputy of God (*nāib al-Haqq*) on earth.²⁰ The second meaning is the one that Ibn Taymiyyah strongly criticized. Also, the elaboration of Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of *khalīfah* and its relation to the concept of *Wahdah al-Wujūd* as criticized by Ibn Taymiyyah is clearly reflected in his work *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (Bezels of Wisdom)* in the discussion of Adam. Ibn 'Arabi states that God wanted to see the Essence of His most Beautiful Names or to see His own Essence in a concrete object so He gave existence to the whole cosmos. But, at this stage, the cosmos does not yet have a spirit in it or is like an unpolished mirror.²¹ And then, God created a new being called a human or *khalīfah* who polisher of that mirror that gives life in the world. According to Ibn 'Arabi, human is special creations of God and on that basis, He bestows His mercy on them. God called him a *khalīfah* because it is through him that God will preserve His creation, as the seal preserves the king's treasure. The world will always be preserved as long as the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is in it.

¹⁹ Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, ed. Ahmad Syams al-Din, Vol. 7, (Beirut-Lebanon Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1999), 228.

²⁰ Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Vol. 3, 102 & 192.

²¹ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam*. ed. Abu Al-'Ala 'Afifi, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, n.d), 48 - 49.

In this case, Adam, as a symbol of humans, was made a *khalifah*, because he was endowed with comprehensive qualities namely the synthesis of divine reality and cosmos. All the Divine Names constituting the Divine Image are manifest in his formation. It was on this basis that Allah refuted the argument of the angels who protested to Allah when they were ordered to prostrate to Adam. According to Ibn 'Arabi, this is because the angels did not grasp the meaning of the formation of *khalifah* and they also did not understand the decision of essential servitude (*al-'ibadah-al-Dzātiyah*). Also, the angels do not have the comprehensiveness of Adam due to their limited knowledge of the Reality of God.²² Ibn 'Arabi argues that God has described Himself as being the Manifest (*Dābir*) and Hidden (*Bāṭin*). He brought the cosmos into being by creating an unseen realm and a sensory realm in which the Hidden is perceived through the unseen and the Manifest through the sensory aspect. At this point, God unites the polarity of qualities of Adam to make a difference to him.

Therefore, when Lucifer was refused to prostrate before man, God said to him: “*What Prevents you from prostrating to one whom I have created with my two hands?*”. The hadith according to Ibn 'Arabi has a message that human has special qualities that distinguish them from other creatures because they originate from two qualities, namely from the cosmos (*al-'ālam*) and Reality (*al-Haqq*). In addition, this quality distinguished him from Lucifer because he is only part of the cosmos and has no share in the human quality of synthesis. Thus, it is only Adam who has the right to become a *khalifah*. Moreover, According to Ibn 'Arabi, to become a *khalifah*, Adam had to have these two elements for two essential reasons: first, if he did not present the nature in the image he represented, then he would not be a *khalifah*, and second, he also could not become a *khalifah* if he does not have all the needs of the subject to whom he is appointed *khalifah*. To become a *khalifah* he must be able to provide for all their needs, otherwise, he cannot become a vicegerent.

²² Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus Al-Hikam*, 50 - 51.

Moreover, Ibn ‘Arabi argues that *khalīfah* is only appropriate for the Perfect Man. In this virtue, God made man’s external image (*al-Ṣūrah al-Zāhirah*) like that of the world, and internal image (*al-Ṣūrah al-bāṭinah*) just like that of His own. It also makes *khalīfah* superior to all other beings because there is no other being who has the synthesis of divine realities and cosmos possessed by *khalīfah*.²³ The above argument reveals the link between *khalīfah* and the perfect man.²⁴ In another work, Ibn ‘Arabi argues that not all humans are vicegerents. In this case, there are two kinds of people. The first is *Insān Kāmil* who has the image of his Lord who is the real vicegerent. While the second is an animal man (*al-insān al-bayawān*) who has no right of vicegerency (*khalīfah*).²⁵ From this statement, it is clear that Ibn Arabi considered that only those who attained the stage of perfect man had the right to become a vicegerent.

Thus, in reviewing the concept of *khalīfah*, Ibn ‘Arabi presents it through the aspect of Sufi metaphysics which is related to his concept of the Unity of Being (*Wahdah al-Wujūd*), that man consists of cosmic and Divine qualities as reflected in *Insān Kāmil*, in the sense that man must behave and act in accordance with the manifestations of Divine Names and Attributes. In addition, man must realize that part of himself consists of the cosmos so that nature destroying is the same as hurting oneself and violates the Divine trust.

The next interpretation of the verse of *khalīfah* came from Mulla Sadra (d. 1640), a founder of the *al-hikmah al-muta’alīyah* (transcendent theosophy) school of philosophy. His ideas are written in his *tafsīr* which

²³ Ibn-‘Arabi, *Fusus Al-Hikam*, 55.

²⁴ Masataka Takeshita, “The Theory of the Perfect Man in Ibn Arabi’s *Fusus Al-Hikam*,” *Orient* 19, 1983, 91.

²⁵ Ibn Arabi, *Rasail Ibn Arabi: Al-Qutb Wa Al-Naqba’wa Uqlat Al-Mustawfiḥ*, Ed. Said ‘Abd Al-Fatah (Muassasah al-Intishar al-‘Arabi, n.d.), 75.; See also Ibn ‘Arabi, *al-Futubhat al-Makkiya*, ed. Ahmad Syams al- Din, Vol. 6, (Beirut-Lebanon Dar al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1999), 7-8.

has been published in the book entitled *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*.²⁶ The content of Mulla Sadra's *tafsīr* is known to be philosophical and mystical-gnostic based on his transcendent theosophy.²⁷ This is reflected in his attempt to interpret the verse *khalīfah* 2:30, where he presents it in a philosophical-esoteric manner and linked it into a complex metaphysical-philosophical discussion about knowledge of human essence and how humans appear on earth and the secrets behind human viceregency.

Sadra defines *khalīfah* as “a person who takes the place of another and acts on his behalf in a complete fashion, and the right to that deputyship cannot be found in anyone else.” Regarding the relationship between Adam and *khalīfah*, a question arises: what makes Adam entitled to the divine vicegerent? In this case, according to Sadra, there are several answers: 1) because of carrying *taklīf*, 2) obedience and 3) the synthesis of angelic and animal qualities. 4) has *asma'iyya* manifestations.²⁸ Moreover, he argues that Adam is referred to as God's vicegerent on earth, or as a successor who inhabits the earth, either he or his descendants because they replaced those before them. The singular reference to Adam is a symbol of his offspring, just like mentioning a tribal chief as a representation of his people.²⁹

Sadra explained that God has *khalīfah* in all universe. In this case, he emphasized the importance of the existence of the vicegerent. It is His decree (*sunnatih*) not because God is in need of someone who acts on his actions.³⁰ This is of course contrary to Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion

²⁶ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al-Shirazi, *Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān Al-Karīm*, Vol. 2, ed. M.Khwajami, (Qum: Bidar Press, 1363 H/1945 C.E).

²⁷ Latimah-Parvin Peerwani, Introduction, in Mulla Sadra Shirazi, *On the Hermeneutics of the Light Verse of the Qurʾān (Tafsīr Ayat Al-Nur)*, Trans. Latimah-Parvin Peerwani (London: ICAS Press, 2004), 30.

²⁸ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān Al-Karīm*, Vol.2, 300.

²⁹ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, Vol. 2, 301.

³⁰ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, Vol. 2, Academic Journal of Islamic Principles and Philosophy | Vol. 3, No. 1, November - April 2022

who refused to interpret *khalīfah* as God's viceregent. Sadra explained that it was God's will, among other things, to expand the kingdom of God (*mamlakah al-ulūhiyyah*), spread the ensign of divinity (*liwā' rubūbiyyah*), and maintain the ranks of being (*marātib al-wujūd*). Therefore, God appoints humans as *khalīfah* to act on His behalf of conduct (*al-taṣarruf*), trusteeship (*al-wilāyah*), maintenance (*al-hiṣṣ*), and protection (*al-ri'āyah*).³¹

Here, Sadra expands the meaning of the concept of *khalīfah* and linked it to the discussion between *Insān Kabīr* and *Insān Saghīr*. The former is the *khalīfah* of the heavens and the earth, referring to the prophet Muhammad. While the latter is referring to Adam, the vicegerent of earth. *Insān saghīr* is the chosen version of *al-insān al-kabīr al-Ilāhī*. The parable between them is that of a small child and a big child. In this case, the human, in general, is the result of the image of Adam and Eve.³²

Moreover, Sadra discussed at length the opinion of angels who doubted the humans' vicegerency on earth, as expressed in the verse: 'How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?'. According to Sadra, angels do not know the secret behind human vicegerency because it is the secret of deputyship.³³ The secret of human vicegerency is something that is only known through God's knowledge and it is His prerogative right.³⁴ Moreover, regarding the doubts of angels towards humans, according to Sadra, this happens because of two reasons: *firstly*, they use a heavenly world perspective in understanding conflicting traits in humans such as humanity (*basyariyyah*),

301.

³¹ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 302.

³² Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 303 - 304.

³³ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 307.

³⁴ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 309.

bestiality (*babīmiyyah*), and ferocity (*sab'iyyah*).³⁵ This is due to the fact that the angels have not yet reached the level of divine presence. Here, Sadra explained that humans have corporeal images as well as souls coming from the heavenly world. Humans also have the potential to get the emanation of divine light without intermediaries, namely by self-cultivation (*tarbiyah*), one can ascend from the *syahādah* realm to the unseen (*ghaib*) realm called the heavenly world (*Malakūt*). And with continuous effort, he can ascend from the *Malakūt* realm to the world of domination (*Jabarūt*) known as the ultimate unseen (*ghaib al-ghayūb*) in which he can reach the light of God's Beauty and Majesty. According to Sadra, this is a hidden secret in human preparation that angels do not know.³⁶

Secondly, the angels perceive themselves as more deserving of vicegerency than humans because they always praise God and are free from the carnality and anger possessed by human beings.³⁷ In this case, the angels see that humans who will become vicegerent on earth have three opposing powers: namely carnality (*Shahwiyyah*), anger (*al-ghadhabiyah*), and rationality (*al-'Aqliyyah*). They argue that the power of *Syahwiyyah* and *Ghadhabiyah* can bring and plunge humans into destruction (*fasad*) and bloodshed. Meanwhile, the power of rationality calls for knowledge and obedience. According to Sadra, the angels have misunderstood these powers because they regard the three powers as partial and divided, not as complementary or as unity. Sadra revealed that with this assumption, the angels ignore the primacy of each of these powers because if the powers of *shahwiyyah* and *al-ghadhabiyah* are arranged and submitted to reason and trained then they will produce good qualities such as temperance (*'iffah*) and courage (*shajā'ah*), especially if it is added by maintaining moral

³⁵ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 306.

³⁶ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 307.

³⁷ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 314.

excellence (*insāf*). The synthesis of these efforts will be useful to complete the shortcomings and produces benefits to become a vicegerent.³⁸ Thus, it can be seen that Mulla Sadra understands *khalīfah* in a theosophical manner which is discussed from the linguistic, metaphysical, and philosophical realms.

From the discussion above, it can be said that although early Muslim scholars have their own approaches and perspectives that influence the interpretation of the *khalīfah*, there are, at least, two points that can be discussed: *First*. The meaning of *khalīfah* is “to succeed/to replace, to govern, and *khalīfah* as deputy of God”. *Second*, *khalīfah* must have certain qualities.

First, as al-Tabari pointed out that *khalīfah* can be understood as “to succeed or to replace or to govern. In other words, to simply argue, all humans can be referred to as *khalīfah* since they are descendants of Adam who “replaced” the *Jinn* or previous creatures that inhabited the earth. Furthermore, it is also connected to the meaning of “to govern” because *khalīfah* will govern the universe. As pointed out by al-Tabari and also Mulla Sadra. However, the two have very different approaches where Sadra then elaborates on the *khalīfah* in a metaphysical discussion where he distinguishes between the prophet Muhammad as the *khalīfah* in the heavens and the earth, and Adam who is only a *khalīfah* on earth. In this case, it is clear that Sadra understands *khalīfah* in the sense of ruling or governing. Moreover, Ibn ‘Arabi interprets the *khalīfah* as a deputy of God (*naib Allah*) who acts on behalf of God to govern his creatures. Further, in Ibn Taymiyya’s view the interpretation of the *khalīfah* as “to succeed” and “to govern” if taken literally and linked to the deputy of God, can have serious theological problems because to think that God needs a deputy to govern, theologically, for him is unacceptable, especially the interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabi which considers humans as deputy of God. In addition, In

³⁸ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 315.

this case, although Ikhwān Ṣafā's unconventional interpretation of *khalīfah* seems to unmatch any categorization, however, their elaboration of the ecological story provides a unique interpretation. With a philosophical approach, they put the *khalīfah* in an issue, of human arbitrariness over other creatures, especially animals. They depicted that Humans who have been appointed by God "to govern" by the principle of justice, can become "oppressive" creatures. therefore it leads to the second point about the attributes or qualities of a person that a *khalīfah* must possess.

Second, the understanding that *khalīfah* acts as God's vicegerent to govern the earth carries the implication that he must have certain qualities or qualifications. It is true that humans have distinguishing characteristics from other creatures. But among humans themselves, there are qualities that distinguish one another to become the true vicegerent of God. For example, Ibn 'Arabi said that those who have the right to become vicegerent of God are perfect men while animal man has no right. Because God wants someone who acts as his vicegerent to have complete qualities. Ikhwān Ṣafā argues that the absolute universal man will act according to moral conduct, and he is a different ethical understanding from that of the partial man. Also, Mulla Sadra explained that those who have the right to become *khalīfah* are those who can manage the power of anger, carnality, and rationality. In other words, a *khalīfah* must have noble qualities and ethical understanding reflected in his actions. This is because being a *khalīfah*, as a ruler, will have relationships and implications with other creatures that establish an ethical relationship. In this case, with *khalīfah's* qualities and privileges, a question arises whether *khalīfah* has arbitrariness or responsibility?

***Khalīfah*: A Tyrant or a Responsible Ruler?**

Despite the differences in arguments and points of view, classical Muslim scholars are well-perceived that vicegerency is about responsibility. The aspect of the *khalīfah*'s responsibility is clearly reflected in Tabari's thought arguing that a *khalīfah* has to judge justly among creatures according to His Commandments and Rules.³⁹ Regarding the angel's accusation that humans will destroy and shed blood, in al-Tabari's view, this action was not done by the vicegerent of God, Adam, or those who replaced him among God's servants. He argues that those who commit corruption and bloodshed are descendants of his *khalīfah*, not the *khalīfah* himself.⁴⁰ Thus, a person who becomes the vicegerent on earth will not commit destruction and bloodshed because he will justly act in managing the world.

Moreover, Ikhwān Ṣafā explained that *khalīfah* is closely related to the ethical dimension. He explained it in the context of human qualities, namely that the absolute universal man (*al-insān al-mutlaq al-kullī*) who transforms morality into actualization is different from that of partial man (*insān juz'ī*). Here, the Absolute man is the true vicegerent of God on earth where his actions reflect noble character. These qualities exist in every human being.⁴¹ So what does this have to do with Ikhwān Ṣafā's ecological fable that was previously described? Ikhwan Safa explained that the best human reflects the noble angel as the best creature, while the worst kind of human will become the worst creation. It is what lies behind the story of the debate between humans and animals to show how humans should behave⁴². In other words, the arbitrary representation of

³⁹ Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' Al-Bayan 'an Ta'Wil Al-Qur'an*, 479 - 480.

⁴⁰ Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' Al-Bayan 'an Ta'Wil Al-Qur'an*, 481.

⁴¹ Ikhwan Al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan Al-Safa*, Vol. 1, 305 - 306.

⁴² Ikhwan al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan Al-Safa*, Vol. 2, (Qom: Markaz al-Nasyr-Maktabah A'lam Islami, 1984), 179.

humans is a reflection of a bad creation, while the *khalīfah* is one who acts on the principle of morality.

Moreover, in reviewing the *khalīfah* relationship and responsibility, Ibn ‘Arabi explained that it is closely related to the principle of “All of you are guardians and responsible for your wards and the things under your care.” This principle is built on the concept of the true justice that is entrusted by God to be enforced among his creatures through the intermediary of the *khalīfah* and God the All-Guiding. And hence, *khalīfah* must act according to God’s commands and not follow his lust because it is the will of the soul that is contrary to God’s laws and commands.⁴³

Sadra explained that God’s purpose in making humans as vicegerent is to act of conduct (*al-taṣarruf*), trusteeship (*al-wilāyah*), maintenance (*al-hifẓ*), and protection (*al-ri’āyah*).⁴⁴ Thus, contradictory traits such as tyranny, corruption, and destruction are something that is contrary to the nature of vicegerency. In addition, Sadra emphasizes that to become God’s vicegerent one must be able to control and master the qualities that can lead to destruction such as anger and carnality.

From the arguments above, it can be said that arbitrary behavior is contrary to the true purpose of *khalīfah* which has an aspect of responsibility. However, can this be the answer to the *khalīfah* *khalīfah*’s accusations of anthropocentrism? It is difficult to refute the religious teachings which state that God has appointed humans as his vicegerent who will govern other creatures and protect them. This means that, ontologically, the position of humans is central and dominant to other creatures. This leads to another question, how does the domination of humans and other creatures take place? In this case, there is an important point that is well explained by Haq: “*adam’s superiority over other creatures and*

⁴³ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futūḥat Al-Makkiyya*, Ed.Ahmad Syams Al-Din. Vol. 3, (Beirut: Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-’ ilmiyya, 1999), 144.

⁴⁴ Sadr al-Din Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi, *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-Karim*, Vol. 2, 302.

his regency over nature arise in a context that is highly complex, with its interdigitating metaphysical, moral, and naturalistic dimension".⁴⁵ In other words, the concept of *khalifah* is interconnected with other things such as understanding himself as ruler of other creatures as well as servants of God who must act according to His trust. In this case, the relationship between himself and other creatures must be based on ethical principles.

Moreover, axiologically, the values that guide *khalifah* are not produced by himself but come from God. In other words, the *khalifah* is an agent of transformation of values derived from God since he is God's vicegerent. None of the figures we have studied above legalize arbitrariness or contradict nature and humans. Because they well-perceived that all creatures are God's creation, including humans. This implies that humans are part of creation and must comprehend the divine manifestation in every creature. Thus, even though in interpreting the *khalifah*, classical Islamic scholars have never been directed or linked directly to the emphasis on environmental issues, the values conveyed are very relevant to the current ecological crisis. Especially how humans should be responsible for the environment and other creatures.

Conclusion

Based on the exploration and analysis above, the researcher concludes that the classical Muslim scholars had perceived that the concept of *khalifah* of God has a relationship with responsibility, even though they differ in their perspectives and way of presenting. In relation to Islamic Ecotheology, it insisted that the accusation of Islam as being an anthropocentric, utilitarian that allows humans to arbitrarily exploit nature is a misunderstanding and cannot be justified. It is true that in Islam, man is depicted as the vicegerent of God. But, this does not mean

⁴⁵ Nomanul Haq, "Islam", in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, Ed. Dale Jamieson (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 112.

that it is legitimate to enslave other creatures or exploit nature. One should understand his ontological and metaphysical state of existence and perceive the meaning of man as the vicegerent of God in the world, not as the legitimacy of total mastery but a responsibility that must be fulfilled.

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