

Arsht Research on Ethics and Community Grant

The Eco-Islam Project: Islamic Environmental Health Ethics and its Applicability to Contemporary Environmental Health Challenges

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Abstract:

Environmental health challenges arising from human choices continue to have significant effects on the global human family as well as on the ecosystem as a whole. As we embark on a new millennium, a new approach is needed that will be bold enough to tackle these challenges in unconventional ways. Historically, environmentalists and scientists have approached problems from a predominantly scientific point of view. However, in this new millennium, science will need to be coupled with a traditionally “unfriendly” yet powerful partner: religion. Specifically, Islamic principles are firmly established and strongly adhered to as a source of guidance and motivation for the 1.2 to 1.5 billion Muslims across the world today. This relatively untapped resource may either advance or de-rail positive environmental health programs, practices, and ideas. The Islamic tradition contains a rich source of resources and tools, which can serve to provide a necessary connection between Muslims and their environmental health decisions, as may be shown in both historical and limited modern examples. The areas of the world populated predominantly by Muslims today continue to have some of the most severe environmental health problems with global impacts. This study will investigate the fundamentals of Islamic environmental ethics, and its ability to tackle the environmental health challenges faced by the world today. Specifically, this study will address whether and how Islam may be used to achieve a paradigm shift in the way Muslims currently interact with their environment and therefore provide a safer environment for the global community at large. Finally, the necessary steps to re-frame relevant Islamic environmental health ethical concepts and use them in an effective and modern manner will be explored. In addition to publication in a peer-reviewed journal, the results will be disseminated in a comprehensive Eco-Islam Handbook to be used by scientists, communities, and governmental and non-governmental agencies to promote positive environmental ethics in their communities. Other grassroots outreach and education materials based on the Handbook will also be designed to be more widely used by individuals of lower literacy and age. The goal of this study is not only to understand Islamic environmental ethics, but also to place it in a usable form that will result in positive change on both the local and global levels. This study may then be used as a model to apply to other faith-based traditions in their environmental health ethical practices.

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