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(Review Article)

Moral Eco-theism; A Study and Explanation of the Impact of Ethics on Nature

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Abstract

Background: Eco-theism is a science that studies the relationship between natural phenomena and problems of religious knowledge, e.g. "infidelity and belief". The current study has been conducted in order to assay the relationship between the religious problems like "belief and infidelity" and nature and is a subcategory of environmental ethics. We intend to answer the question that whether there is a negative or positive relationship between belief and nature or not? According to Islam, some of natural and material events or in other words, natural actions and reactions are the result of individual vision and action. While materialistic perspective opposes this view and interprets this type of action and reactions in materialistic terms. Studying Quranic verses and prophetic traditions one reaches the conclusion that there is a relationship between people's vision and degree of belief, on the one hand, natural problems, on the other hand.

Conclusion: The present study is composed of two parts: first, we provide an explanation of the concepts of infidelity and faith and then in the second part we proceed to explain and analyze the relationship between the type of action of people and nature as well as the impact of the type of people's belief. The method is descriptive-analytic. Thus, first religious texts will be discussed and next we will analyze its relationship with natural phenomena. The results suggest that although natural developments take place through their natural course, these natural developments do not have merely material color rather natural events evolve within a metaphysical context.

Keywords: Eco-theism, Ethics, Society, Nature, Infidelity, Faith

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Introduction

In contemporary era, which is called the age of information explosion, natural sciences have experienced a considerable growth and as a result of it the founders of materialistic ideas in the world seek to prove the material nature of the world and denial of metaphysically grounded ideas and study and analyze environmental evolutions and developments based on material causes and factors. While in Islamic teachings (as a revealed religion) external and material categories are of metaphysical aspect which are influential on the developments of matter and nature and according to Islamic sources, all creatures in the world are influenced by each other. Particularly, human action and vision can bring about certain developments in the nature in the same way that occurrence of natural disasters is considered to be influenced by human belief and behavior. Today, however, little researches has been done in the West on the impact of religious beliefs on natural disasters, But its circle is not pervasive. (1) Meanwhile we intend to assay the problem that whether there is any relationship between the behavior and belief of people and natural changes (either positive changes like raining or affluence or negative changes like earthquake and deluge)? Eco-theism is composed of two terms, i.e. Eco in the sense of nature and theism in the sense of belief in God. This term is originally derived from Greek word ἄθεος (atheos) which means "Godless". This term in past, with a negative connotation, was used to refer to those who did not believe in any deity and were challenged in the society in a widespread fashion. (2) Following the expansion of freedom of thought and skeptical questioning and as a result, ever-increasing criticisms of religion, the application of this term became more limited and purposeful. Through reviewing the works that have been published inside and outside the country regarding this issue the author did not find any similar study that would be overlapping.

This research is of descriptive-analytic type (qualitative content analysis) and theoretical deduction. Content analysis consists of identification and highlighting the main axes of a text or a written text aiming at a descriptive analysis. (3) Moreover, qualitative content analysis can be described as a research method for mental interpretation of the content of textual data through the processes of systematic classification, codification or designing known patterns.

Therefore, this qualitative content analysis method is a method for searching the relationship between various notions and identification of the conceptual relations and networks and theorization is one of the fundamental features of qualitative researches which is compared with theory test. (4) Since the author of this essay deals with written sources of Holy Quran and traditions of Immaculate Imams (peace be upon them) and classification of relevant sentences and themes concerning the relationship between belief/infidelity and nature, thus the method in this research is of qualitative content analysis type. Of course, conceptual content of the terms used in the problem is understood via conceptual interpretation method.

On the other hand, since by explanation of the philosophy of the natural disasters and developments and conceptual analysis of infidelity and belief we seek to infer the scale of impact of religious belief on nature, the method of theoretical deduction has been used. Deductive approach is grounded on the hypothesis that in the light of universal abstract epistemological, metaphysical, moral and theological theories of philosophical perspectives and schools one can deduce logical relations in terms of the scale of influence of belief on natural passions. (5).

Problem Statement

The epistemic scope of eco-theism is founded on two fundamental notions of belief and infidelity. Then we need to provide a conceptual clarification of these two. Belief is a key word in the domain of religious knowledge which serves as the touchstone of religiosity and infidelity, source of happiness and prosperity and origin of value of human actions. Iman (Arabic word for belief or faith) means trust and confirmation (6), confidence (7) and surrender

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and humbleness. (8) Allameh Tabatabaei also defines belief as follows: "Belief consists of silence and peace, a particular knowledge in soul concerning whatever in which one has belief and this peace requires to be associated with one's practical commitment to what to which one trust" (9).

Therefore, realization of the concept of belief requires to be preceded by commitment and practice. Kufr (infidelity) is also an Arabic term. Arabic dictionaries show that this word refers to lack of belief, godlessness, denial and hiding (8). It has also been interpreted as the opposite of belief and denial of God's bounties. Night, sea and river are referred to as infidelity because they hide something in some way (10). Given the aforementioned meanings Kufr (infidelity) implies hiding or covering and has numerous features. Each one of the features of Kufr opposes one feature of belief. Since Kufr is a popular term in Islamic Sciences and has countless uses particularly in jurisprudence and theology, one can consider Kufr as a term an expression of the act of denial of God and His oneness as well as prophecy and resurrection or one of the other articles of Islamic faith (9-11). Given the aforementioned definitions, in the current research which is a subcategory of environmental ethics, we seek to study the scale and type of impact of belief and infidelity on the events of natural genesis and corruption through our efforts for finding an answer for the question whether there is a relationship between belief and benefiting from natural advantages and likewise between infidelity and natural disasters.

Moral Nature

Nature according to religious doctrines is neither a mere matter rather a manifestation of Divine Names and Attributes. Quran, Islamic mysticism and wisdom endorse the fact that the essence of nature is mystical. The totality of Quranic verses suggests that the warp and woof of universe is purposefully and consciously moving towards a transcendent goal. "*He established Himself above the Throne and made subject the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term. He arranges [each] matter; He details the signs that you may, of the meeting with your Lord, be certain*" (Raad, 2). Dynamicity and conscious life of nature has led it outside the circle of lifeless beings and forced man to respect its environmental rights. " *Then He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, "Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion." They said, "We have come willingly.*" (Fusillat, 11)

He is not merely praised by mankind alone
Each nightingale perching on a branch is praising Him

In other place God describes this attachment using the beautiful attribute of praising of the Creator by the Creature: *Do you not see that Allah is exalted by whomever is within the heavens and the earth* (Noor, 41). Even he goes so far that he describes the elements of nature as praying God: *and [by] the birds with wings spread [in flight]? Each [of them] has known his [means of] prayer and exalting [Him], and Allah is Knowing of what they do* (ibid). It is also noteworthy that Quran has made human specific attributes like "fear" something that can be generalized to the stones and rivers: *Then your hearts became hardened after that, being like stones or even harder. For indeed, there are stones from which rivers burst forth, and there are some of them that split open and water comes out, and there are some of them that fall down for fear of Allah. And Allah is not unaware of what you do* (Baqara, 74). The idea of nature's consciousness is neither a myth nor a baseless notion rather it is a reality that has been uncovered by Quran according to which the nature is thoroughly murmuring and clamor.

If your eyes become opened to the invisible
The elements of the world would tell you their secrets
The language of water, the words of soil and mud
Are known to the senses of the men of heart

Conclusion

A) Traditional Proof

1- Impact of Belief on Nature

In his planning man always pays attention to natural factors and roots and make plans in view of them in order to overcome such problems as poverty and deficiencies. However, Quran opens a higher horizon as to evil along with natural factors and refers to other nobler causes to which one

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cannot reach via science and experience. According to the content of these verses, one of the significant ways of benefiting from divine bounties is belief in God. This has been clearly endorsed by God: "And if only the people of the cities had believed and feared Allah, We would have opened upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth; but they denied [the messengers], so We seized them for what they were earning." (Araaf, 96). This is a divine tradition and does not merely belong to Islamic doctrines, rather it is an inter-religious fact. Insofar as God suggests that the People of Book can get benefited from heavenly and earthly bounties if they believe in Torah and Bible and act according to them as well as other revealed doctrines. "And if only they upheld [the law of] the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to them from their Lord, they would have consumed [provision] from above them and from beneath their feet. Among them are a moderate community, but many of them - evil is that which they do." (Maedah, 66). In other words, if someone wants to get benefited from divine bounties more he should act to the revealed doctrines which have been dispatched in the form of religious laws.

Although bounties in this context include numerous goods like security, welfare, health, wealth and child, there are still other bounties like rain, snow, heat and coldness in their proper time and in an appropriate scale as heavenly bounties while plants, fruit, security and welfare are earthly bounties. The door of these bounties is opened as a result of faith and piety of all or the majority of the inhabitants of villages and cities (9). Therefore, one can say that rain, affluence and the like, are the result of belief in God and the requirement for realization of the desirable effect of faith on nature is acting according to religious beliefs.

2- Impact of Infidelity on Nature:

Infidelity is a type of violation and disobedience of the natural course of the material world. Therefore, in Islamic doctrines this issue is discussed as follows: *God does not bring about any change in the situation of a particular nation until this ideological, ethical and behavioral situation is already modified by the nation itself.* This verse suggests a general idea and simultaneously includes the negative and positive impact of the belief and action of people in the sense that God has decided it to be a maxim that the occurrence of bounties and hardships and goods and evils in the life of nations and human societies to be contingent on their belief, ethics and action. Whenever they take the path of primordial nature they are getting benefited from divine bounties and as a result of thanks-giving that increases divine bounties but if they leave the path of primordial nature and neglect the divine bounties hardships and evils will engulf them (9-12). Therefore, the relationship between the type of action and vision of people with natural actions and reactions becomes clear.

This world is a mountain and our action the shout When we shout there will be repercussions (Rumi, Book One, 215); According to Holy Quran, it is God's decisive tradition that whenever a bounty is endowed upon a nation it will continue to serve them unless they change the course with their actions: *That is because Allah would not change a favor which He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is within themselves. And indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing* (Anfaal: 53). In Quranic ideology, sins and extensive disasters are the outcomes of sins that are committed by men: "Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]." (Roma: 41). Corruption in this verse refers to the widespread calamities like earthquakes, draught, poverty, pandemics, wars, murder and plundering, insecurities, and in a nutshell, those events that destroy human life, no matter if they are brought about by natural factors or by humans (9). People's behavior is born out of their belief and vision and the type of behavior and action is one of the effective factors that determines the course of natural affairs: "*And whatever strikes you of disaster - it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much.*" (Shura: 30). There are two probabilities of the addressee of this verse: first, one speculation suggests that the addressee is the mankind as a whole. The second probability refers to

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human individuals. Therefore, both speculations argue that there is a relationship between human behaviors and natural reactions. Of course, Allameh Tabatabaei has chosen the first probability and believes in "social address". Thus conceived, calamities refer to all-embracing disasters like draught, rise of prices, pandemics, earthquakes and etc. Therefore, this verse suggests that it is due to human sins that the society becomes swamped by calamities (9). Accordingly, Quranic verses show that there is a specific relationship between human actions and the universe order. If the belief and action of human society are based on human primordial nature, goods will be given to him and the doors of divine bounties will open to him but if his belief and action are corrupted his life will be corrupted.

Moreover, there are numerous traditions regarding the impact of the ethics on heavenly and earthly events some of which will be outlined here:

- No people would ever commit fornication in the day light unless pest and other diseases plague them which had no record among them earlier and they would never betray the scales unless they suffer hunger and hardship and oppressions of the king and likewise they would never refuse to give their alms unless they are deprived of the rain of skies and if there was not because of the livestock no single droplet of rain would ever reach them and likewise they would never betray God and His prophet unless they are defeated by their enemies and see their properties are plundered by them(13).

-Imam Baqer (peace be upon him) states that I was informed by the Book of Prophet of God that whenever fornication takes place after me sudden death will become increasing and whenever the people betray the scales God will punish them by draught and hunger and whenever they refuse to pay their alms their lands will turn barren and fruits will stop to grow and mines will lose their richness … (13) The totality of verses and numerous prophetic traditions suggests that nature understands the language of ethics well and reacts to it.

B- Rational Proof

The role of human action and vision in nature is along with the impact of natural means and factors. In other words, natural means and factors lie within human power and human action which is based on his belief becomes effective through natural means and causes in natural events. For example, emergence of hunger is an effect of its specific natural means and factors but these latter means and factors are in turn a function of human actions. Accordingly, hunger would occur in proper time and place in a useful scale or even in an improper time and place in a harmful degree and also other natural reactions. In this case, natural goods and evils not only are based on natural causes they also are related to human causes without any one of the two to be replaced with the other or neutralizes its role. In this regard, Allameh Tabatabaei states: "Good or bad human actions which are followed by natural goods and evils neither render nullify natural causes nor they share anything with them. Thus the impact of divine will on natural events – including goods and evils – neither nullifies the law of causation nor it provides the ground for randomness in the world or considers God part of natural causes in the sense that some events are the effect of divine will while some others have natural causes rather the monotheists intend to prove a cause along with other cause as well as the impact of a spiritual factor beyond material causes. As a result, the impact is dependent upon both causes in an existential order (hierarchical), e.g. writing which is both contingent upon human soul and at the same time his hand" (9) Reason has no inconsistency with this evolutionary law which is based on divine revelation. However, whether the reason can prove it without resorting to revelation? The answer to the latter question is positive and one can note the following points as evidence:

1.Man is one of the effective species in the natural world and not only he enjoys certain features as well as specific genetic laws he is not outside the general laws of natural world;

2. The creatures of natural world not only are of independent essence and identity they are also interrelated and influence each other. The type and quality of life, the effects and actions of each one

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depends on harmony and interaction of other creatures;

1. Upon the interrelation of creatures of world one can conjecture that the natural world despite its diversity is of a type of unity like human body which is composed of various members and despite its diversity has a type of unity. This is why the world is called Macro-Man while the man is called the Micro-World. "Do you think that you are a small body while a huge world is hidden inside you?" (14)

2. Health and corruption of some of the members of a creature (particularly the significant and basic members) influences the transcendence and weakness of other members. Consequently, this influences the behavior of other members. Therefore, if a member perishes other members struggle to repair it and if it does not work they will destroy it because creation always seeks after life and health and escapes corruption and annihilation. Then, health and corruption of other members directly influence the existence of each other.

3. Fundamental and philosophical analysis of the existing hierarchy in the order of material world within the framework of monotheistic worldview suggests that natural world and trans-physical realm are creatures of All-Knowledgeable and All-Powerful God. Therefore, existing creatures have been created based on a sagacious and intelligent design. Divine wisdom requires the creatures not to be left alone after their creation and the Creator is not indifferent to their continuation. Rather he continuously supervises them and provides the means and factors required for its existence and evolution and if by accident a creature or a member of it is not capable of reform destroys it.

4. Human enjoyment of the faculty of reason, free will and creativity has made his position distinguished among the creatures in the natural world. Thus, he is known to be the noblest part of the natural world. As a result, his health and illness have a decisive role in the destiny of other phenomena in the world. Thus, he shows a particular reaction to his type of life. Needless to say, human health is desirable for them and his corruption is undesirable for them.

5. Human specific soundness and corruption is that of belief and behavior which are measured with the touchstone of primordial nature and Sharia. When man takes his steps according to primordial nature and harmonizes his own movement with Sharia he enjoys soundness and health and the course of nature is in harmony with him and offers its bounties and goods to him but when he violates the laws of primordial nature and Sharia he becomes ill and corrupted and thus the joint chain of the world turns inconsistent with him and he will be exposed to calamities and hardships.

Generally speaking, the universal law of the world is not restricted to the physical affairs rather such metaphysical affairs as ethics, infidelity and belief play a key role in natural events. Although reason as such and without revealed presuppositions is not informed of it when it becomes enlightened by revelation it can explains and analyzes it using the rational and scientific principles of it.

Based on revealed and traditional sources we can conclude:

6. Nature as conceived according to religious doctrines is a living and conscious being. Then, all existential levels of nature enjoy perfection attributes like knowledge, cognition, power, purposefulness, care and fear.

7. There is a strong causal relationship between human ideological beliefs and the events of genesis and corruption. In other words,

A) Faith knowledge and righteous actions provide the ground for positive natural events;

B) Infidelity and vicious actions lead to the emergence of bad and diabolic natural events.

8. Nature's reaction to human beliefs and actions is concerned with social aspect. To put it otherwise, nature does not show any reaction before individual beliefs. Rather when people's religious knowledge – whether faith or infidelity – is of public and social aspect, nature will act based on consciousness and knowledge.

9. Beliefs and actions of individuals in human society do not deny the natural course of natural phenomena and events rather they prove the hierarchical relationship of phenomena.

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Ethical Consideration

Ethical issues (Including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, redundancy, etc.) have been completely observed by the authors.

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