

## The Unity of Existence: Al-Bustami's Sufism and Environmental Thought

Zein Muchamad Masykur <sup>a,1,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Banyumas, 53126 Indonesia  
1 zein@uinsaizu.ac.id

\* corresponding author

---

### ARTICLE INFO

**Article history**  
Received: Dec 18, 2024  
Revised: Jan 30, 2025  
Accepted: Jan 30, 2025

---

**Keywords:**  
Sufism  
Abu Yazid Al-Busthami  
Unity of Existence  
Environmental Ethics  
Spiritual Ecology

---

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the mystical philosophy of Abu Yazid Al-Busthami, a renowned Sufi known for his concepts of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of existence) and *fana* (self-annihilation). His teachings promote a unitive relationship between humanity and the Divine, positing that creation reflects a single, interconnected reality. This perspective offers a foundation for an Islamically-based environmental ethic that transcends anthropocentrism by fostering reverence for nature. Al-Busthami's emphasis on *fana* encourages transcending ego-driven desires, cultivating a sense of responsibility toward the environment as part of God's creation. This article contextualizes Al-Bustami's teachings through textual and hermeneutic analyses, relating them to ecocentric and deep ecological ethics. This framework positions his philosophy as a spiritual basis for modern environmental stewardship within Islamic communities. While relying on historical texts, which may not fully reflect contemporary understandings, future research could explore practical applications of Al-Bustami's teachings and examine similar ideas among other Islamic mystics. Ultimately, Al-Bustami's spiritually-grounded philosophy, rooted in Islamic values, can inform the development of sustainable environmental practices.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY 4.0](#) license.



---

### 1. Introduction

Abu Yazid al-Busthami, also called Bayazid Bastami, was one of the greatest Sufi mystics, and his name stands in the frontline of personalities who influenced the shaping of Islamic spirituality. This great mystic lived during the early 9th century in the town of Bastam, in modern-day Iran, and his life and teachings played an important part in the development of Sufism—the mystical tradition within Islam.

Al-Busthami is just an unstoppable force in his attempts to find as intimate contact with Allah. He is famous for his extreme and sometimes paradoxical utterances on the relations between man and the divine. Of his most famous utterances, one was that he had said, 'I am the Eternal, the True'. (Salamah-Qudsi, 2020) This utterance has been seen by many to claim divine unity or even divinity, which turned into a highly debated and controversial issue within the Islamic community. Al-Busthami's followers maintained that his sayings did not have to be interpreted in a literal manner but as an expression of the mystical experience of the annihilation of the self in the Divine.

Indeed, the doctrine and practice of al-Busthami were deeply influenced by the concept of fana, that is, the annihilation of the self in the divine. In fact, at the center of his spiritual way was the transcendence of ego for the attainment of a state of union with the divine. Through the rigorous spiritual disciplines, which included extensive periods of seclusion, fasting, and meditation, al-Busthami aimed at purifying his soul and getting as close to Allah as possible.

Apart from his emphasis on fana, al-Busthami also deals with the concept 'the hidden treasure', which is a common theme in Sufi literature. According to this tradition, the ultimate aim of creation is knowledge of God; the human soul is thus a mirror in which the divine qualities or attributes are reflected. As a matter of fact, this whole idea of divine self-disclosure and man's quest for knowledge of the divine comprised the spiritual teaching of al-Busthami. His legacy continues in the Sufi tradition, with Abu Yazid al-Bustami giving one specific perspective on the human-divine relationship and insisting on the transforming possibilities of spiritual practice.

While the Quran and the Sunnah are full of appropriate guidance, the Muslim world has not done much in solving the environmental problem that plagues our world today. This section seeks to trace any possible links between the mystic thought of this great Sufi master, Abu Yazid al-Busthami, and pressing environmental issues facing humanity today.(Ariyadi, 2018; Bsoul et al., 2022; Muhamad et al., 2019)

More importantly, the spiritual insights of Al-Busthami hold profound implications for how Muslims approach environmental stewardship, especially his emphasis on unity in all creation and the inherent sacredness of the natural world. Al-Busthami wasn't specifically talking about environmental issues. It's modern scholars who are using his spiritual views to inform and improve how Muslims understand and manage the environment today. They are building a bridge between his mystical philosophy and current ecological challenges. Central in Islamic environmental ethics, the principle of monotheism, expressed as tawhid, together with the concept of humankind as the khalifah or vice-regent on Earth, can be more illuminated by the mystical worldviews of Al-Busthami.(Kula, 2001)

In fact, the noted scholar Iqtidar Zaidi has shown just how classical Islamic thought on responsible land management and protection of the common good applies directly to modern environmental concerns. To cite one example, according to Wersal (1995), the Quran and Sunnah are replete with instructions on natural resource conservation, land reclamation, and sanitation, paralleled by the mystical precepts of Al-Busthami.(Bsoul et al., 2022; Wersal, 1995)

Further, the Quranic messages on environmental sustainability researched in Quranic exegesis provide a robust basis for constructing an integrated Islamic theory of ecological preservation. Al-Busthami's mystical philosophy is an embodiment of the Quranic emphasis on moderation, avoidance of extravagance, and respect for the intrinsic value of all creation.

The concept of Sufism al-fana, or annihilation, explained by the famous mystic Abu Yazid al-Busthami, has deep implications for environmental sustainability. Monotheistic principles in the Quran and the role of humans as the khalifah, or stewards of the earth, give a substantial theological grounding for environmental sustainability in Islam. The Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad-peace be upon him-promise to conserve natural resources, protect the environment from pollution, and check consumption in the circle of basic needs. These Islamic values strongly correspond to the concept of al-fana', which calls for transcendence from the individual ego and recognition of the inner connectedness between self and natural world. That is, as Bsoul et al. (2022) and Kula (2001) established that.(Bsoul et al., 2022; Kula, 2001)

The perspective of al-fana' dissolves the sense of self, thus the individual enables themself to appreciate and show reverence for the divine creation. This will be able to help engender an integrated, responsible attitude toward taking care of the environment, whereby the degree of humility, submissiveness, and feeling intensely aware of one's place as a caretaker takes precedence.

This research on the spiritual teachings of Abu Yazid Al-Busthami holds immense potential to inform contemporary discussions on environmental sustainability. His prominence in Islamic mysticism positions his philosophical perspectives on the human-nature relationship as a valuable

contribution to the intersection of religion, philosophy, and environmental science. Several studies have begun exploring this intersection, examining the connections between Sufi thought and ecological ethics. For example, some scholars have highlighted the resonance between Wahdat al-Wujud (the unity of being) and deep ecological principles, emphasizing the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of all creation (e.g., Akamani, 2020; Mickey, 2007). Others have focused on the concept of fana (self-annihilation) as a potential framework for transcending anthropocentrism and fostering environmental responsibility (e.g., Scoville, 2002). Furthermore, research has explored the broader Islamic environmental ethic, drawing on Quranic teachings and Prophetic traditions to articulate principles of stewardship and balance within creation (e.g., Foltz, 2006). This research aims to build upon these existing studies by specifically examining Al-Busthami's unique contributions to Sufi environmental thought and exploring the practical implications of his teachings for contemporary environmental challenges. It seeks to move beyond theoretical connections to consider how Al-Busthami's mystical insights can inspire concrete actions and inform the development of sustainable practices within Muslim communities and beyond. This includes considering potential divergences between Al-Busthami's contemplative approach and the more interventionist strategies advocated by some environmental movements, as well as the challenges and opportunities presented by cross-cultural dialogue on these issues.

The particular value of this research consists in completing a much-needed bridge between orthodox Islamic knowledge and modern environmentalist discourse. There is a great number of instructions and principles that might be found in the Quran and Sunnah and which are related to the protection of the environment, but modern Muslim societies either neglect or inadequately use them. This analysis of Al-Busthami's teaching in the light of these Islamic environmental ethics may therefore help revive and reinvigorate the imperative for sustainable practices anchored in that tradition.

Furthermore, the mystical philosophic stance of Al-Busthami sheds light on the human-nature relationship in relation to the unity of creation and the necessity of humility before the creator. This might have significant implications for environmental policy decisions and practical conservation initiatives, as this would foster a more integrated and respectful attitude toward environmental governance.

### **Abu Yazid al-Busthami's Thoughts**

Abu Yazid al-Busthami has been one of the most discussed figures of the Sufi tradition by scholars, mainly because his theory on al-fana' [annihilation] and al-baqa' [subsistence] became one of the main topics. These two central concepts respectively denote the annihilation and the subsistence or persistence of the self in the divine. The key concepts of annihilation and persistence in the divine play an important role in Abu Yazid's mystical philosophy and have far-reaching implications for his perception of the nature of existence and the human being's relationship to the Divine.(Faqihuddin Assafary, 2020)

In fact, the consideration of Abu Yazid's idea of al-fana' and al-baqa' should be placed within the greater ambient of his thought, which once was labelled as representing a sort of "philosophical Sufism".(Quasem, 1993) Al-Ghazali, probably the most famous Sufi theorist and critic of his era, played an important role in configuring the academic type in which Abu Yazid's teaching was discussed for he both proclaimed the former's brilliant spiritual insight and manifested critical skepticism regarding certain aspects of his mystical doctrine.(Quasem, 1993)

Al-Fana' is the central concept in Sufi thought, meaning the annihilation or dissolution of the individual self in the divine. Abu Yazid understands this concept in a great sense of mystical union wherein the seeker's consciousness is submerged into the absolute reality of the divine. Such an "annihilation" level is also not only metaphorical but real from a mystic's situation when the boundaries of individual identity are gone and joined with the very essence of divinity.

The term al-Baqa', however, denotes the state of "subsistence" or "persistence" subsequent to the experience of al-fana'. According to Abu Yazid, this state is one wherein the mystic goes on existing

in the divine, and there is not the total erasure of the individual self but rather its absorption into the infinite ocean of the divine.

Al-fana' is, inextricably and very complexly, intertwined with al-baqa'-the two states seemingly being the two different sides of one coin in Sufi spirituality. The mystic journey is characterized by a circular motion between these two states, the ultimate achievement of which is to realize an harmonious unity between the individual and the divine.

The field of environmental ethics has emerged as a critical domain of inquiry into the moral obligations and ethical considerations that dictate our relationship with the natural world. This paper discusses the religious ethics, deep ecology, and utilitarian ethics approaches to environmental ethics. Most of the world's great religions have long traditions and principles that are susceptible to use in elaborating an environmental ethics. Hinduism perhaps respects nature and a principle of "Mother Earth," whereas Buddhism considers the interdependence of all living things and a principle of not harming. Christianity, and Catholicism specifically, have a complex and evolving view on the management of nature and the environment. Christianity, particularly in its Catholic expression, is increasingly emphasizing the importance of environmental stewardship and the need to address climate change and other environmental challenges. This is rooted in the belief that creation is a gift from God that must be cherished and protected, and that humans have a moral responsibility to care for it and for all of God's creatures. It's important to note that there is a diversity of views on environmental issues within Christianity. However, the themes of stewardship, interconnectedness, and responsibility are becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary Christian environmental thought. In Islam, for example, the Quran puts forward an argument to maintain balance in the natural world and to consider restraint in wasteful practices (Snyder, 2006). It is from these religious worldviews that a premise can be deduced towards a more ecocentric attitude in the way humans approach the stewardship of the environment and decision-making within it. One important thinker in that tradition, of course, is Alan Watts, who proclaimed the inseparability of humans from nature as early as 1956 in his book "Nature, Man and Woman". Indeed, Alan Watts' ideas on the unity of man and nature laid a premise upon which later in time deep ecology was developed.

Deep ecology attributes intrinsic value to all life forms and their ecosystems, including its abiotic components. This was a response against the anthropocentrism that believes nature exists only in relation to human needs and interests. Deep ecologists raise the intrinsic value of nature independently of human purposes and argue that humans need a more holistic and ecocentric approach if there is to be any real attempt at solving environmental problems. The approach that stresses most to their ecological milieu and its preservation and sustainability, in this ethics, the well-being of the whole biosphere is the primary concern, not the well-being of humans alone. The thinker who contributed to this perspective did much to change our way of thought in many very important ways is Arne Naess, who proposed deep ecology should form the basis for environmental ethics and policy. Arne Naess contended that what was needed was a fundamental change in human consciousness and values if sustainability and the natural world were to be maintained.

Utility ethics, on the other hand, also stand useful in informing decisions taken with respect to environmental concerns. These ethics deal with overall wellbeing and avoidance of harm. This view takes into consideration impacts that human actions have on the environment and seeks to promote maximum benefit to human and non-human categories. Utilitarian approaches can also involve the use of cost-benefit analysis and other quantitative measures to evaluate the effects of environmental policies and decisions. Among thinkers who have contributed a great deal in this field is Peter Singer, who has argued for the expansion of the moral circle to include not only non-human animals but also the natural environment. Peter Singer has suggested that the interests of all sentient beings, including animals, should be given equal consideration in our moral deliberations.

### Contemporary Interpretations of Sacred Texts

More contemporary methodologies, however, have made the interpretation of sacred texts a field of much academic controversy. As a philosophical framework for conducting interpretive research, hermeneutics has received considerable attention within the discipline of communication studies for dealing with and understanding the complex interplay between text, context, and reader.(Deetz,

1977) The hermeneutical perspective underscores the importance of understanding the historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts that delineate the meaning of a text in concert with the role of one's own preconceptions and horizons in the interpretative process. These ideas were reaffirmed by Evola (2005) and later by Oliverio (2020). (Evola, 2005; William Oliverio L., 2020)

Religiously, some new understandings of sacred texts are now developed through a more informed application of hermeneutical principles to religious studies. The Pentecostal hermeneutics, for instance, have sought to balance the experiential and charismatic nature of Pentecostal theology with the rigors of an academic biblical interpretation by recognizing the influential role that historical and social factors play in shaping the way we reason and understand religious texts. (William Oliverio L., 2020) The deconstructive approach, drawing especially on the work of thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, called into question the fixed and stable meaning within the text and underlined instead the inherent ambiguity and plurality of meaning. (Deetz, 1977; William Oliverio L., 2020)

On this matter, the field of exegesis—perhaps best described as the systematic, scholarly investigation of sacred texts—moves to incorporate these lenses imposed by contemporary hermeneutical and deconstructive thought. It is complex issues of language, culture, and the biases and presuppositions that one brings as a reader to the text that the exegete makes use of in order to unlock the deeper significances and nuanced meanings in the sacred texts.

The complex and often intricate relation of human beings with nature has been a long-standing aspect of the struggle that has faced humanity. The interrelatedness and tensions between humanity and the environment have been debated for a long period of time from perspectives emanating from a variety of religious traditions, with huge implications for environmental ethics.

One is the very popular anthropocentric view where humans take center stage in the moral and ecological universe, while nature is a resource to be used to serve humankind. Ecological thinking, on the other hand, places humans not separate from the more-than-human world. Such a perspective calls for reimagining human-nature relationality beyond a strict binary between human exceptionalism and environmental objectification. (Xu & Ge, 2024)

Some religious traditions give very specific insights that run entirely contrary to the anthropocentric worldview. Along this line, Judeo-Christian eco-theological models, such as Environmental Stewardship, Neighbourship, and Caretakership, have evolved in an effort to surmount the so-called tension between the Dominion Mandate and environmental protection. As pointed out by Twumasi-Ankrah et al. (2023), one model builds a harmonious and responsible relationship with nature, often rooted in the concept of man as a steward or caretaker of Earth. (Twumasi-Ankrah et al., 2023)

Similarly, "anthropocosmic ethics" deals with the study of religion and ecology, which tells that the values of humanity and of the environment are not separated but so intimately merged. From this point of view, the relationship between humanity and nature becomes holistic, for which the conventional division between the two must be rejected.

These ecological models, scholars have indicated, are in need of review in light of the unabated environmental crisis. The continued environmental degradation and the failure of such models to uproot the prime causative elements of the environmental problem—that is, human attitudes and behaviors—emphasize the necessity for a more holistic and transformative approach toward environmental ethics.

## 2. Research Method

The research design adopted in this paper is qualitative, focusing on textual analysis, hence exploring the teachings of Al-Busthami in the light of environmental ethics. The sources drawn upon are the recorded sayings of Al-Busthami and relevant classical Sufi literature, interpreted through interpretive and hermeneutic methods, situating his philosophies within a modern environmental discourse. This is further complemented by secondary sources on contemporary interpretations of

wahdat al-wujud and ecological studies with the aim of developing connections between mystical philosophy and environmental responsibility.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### "I am the Truth" (Ana al-Haqq) by Abu Yazid Al-Busthami

This utterance, which is ascribed to the great Sufi mystic Abu Yazid Al-Busthami, has been the focus of much scholarly and textual debate and rigorous examination. What follows is an attempt at looking into this controversial assertion through a multifaceted analysis based on semantic and contextual underpinnings of this statement in its relation to the concept of wahdat al-wujud, the unity of existence.

First, let us consider the semantic implications of what Al-Busthami has stated in the wider framework of Islamic theology. The Quranic conception of knowledge upholds the notion of unity in the perspective of God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This very basic belief in the absolute oneness of the Divine forms one of the cornerstones of Islamic epistemology and axioms of ontology. But here, it would appear that the very idea of man claiming to be God utterly contradicts this very fundamental principle. Here, the apparent paradox needs to be reconciled by an explanation of the more detailed understanding of the Sufi tradition where the concept "unity of existence" or wahdat al-wujud occupies the central place.(Alam Choudhury & Akram Nadwi, 1992)

The latter is an Arabic concept of "wahdat al-wujud" - the unity of existence wherein the divine and human are not different but manifest aspects of a single reality. It is in this context that Al-Busthami's utterance can be seen as a most mystical articulation by the person who realizes his own divinity, a realization of the oneness at the root of existence. This idea of unity in multiplicity means, according to one of the great Islamic philosophers, Mulla Sadra, that the divine essence manifests itself at higher and lower levels of being. At the higher level, there is multiplicity within unity; at the lower one, unity within multiplicity. This conceptual framework would enable a somewhat deeper appreciation of the statement made by Al-Busthami so that the apparent claim of being God would not be taken literally but only as a way of expressing the mystical experience with regard to the ultimate unity of existence. This is also supported by the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, as reflected in the Quran, in that there seems to be some desire from the divine to be known unto the universe. Such a desire for self-disclosure lies at the heart of any conception of how the divine engages the human and can be said to ground the Sufi conception of unity of existence.(Agha, 2021)

In fact, the utterance by Abu Yazid Al-Busthami, "I am the Truth," does call for an in-depth analysis of its semantic and contextual shades in the wider perspective of Islamic theology and Sufi metaphysics. When this statement is put into the concept of unity of existence, a far-reaching understanding touching on the basic interconnectedness between the divine and the human can be arrived at.

Unity within existence or the oneness of being has been one of the essential tenets in Islamic mysticism, especially as depicted by one of the most popularized Sufis, Abu Yazid al-Busthami. Such a philosophical and spiritual tenet carries deep implications for how we come to perceive and understand the world around us and our place therein.

The teaching of al-Busthami is, however, at the center of the idea of the unity of existence—that there is something basically one that underlies the multiplicity of the phenomenal world. This conveys that everything in creation—from the tiniest particle to the vast celestial body—is actually a manifestation of the Divine itself, a reflectively essential unitary reality that is the Absolute.(Unus & Caldwell, 2018)

In al-Busthami's perception, human beings stand at a privileged juncture in this single cosmos and act as microcosms of the macrocosm. It is through spiritual purification and the development of mystical perception that the individual can transcend the illusion of separation and directly realize the underlying unity of all being.(Agha, 2021)

This understanding of unity entails great implications for the way in which we view and reflect upon the natural world. That would suggest the world is not made up of discrete, separate, unrelated entities but rather a seamless tapestry of interconnected phenomena, all manifestations of the divine. The study of nature in this light is not an academic exercise but one of deepening the insight into the ultimate reality that lies at the base of all creation. Such a concept of unity in existence finds its resonance and expansion in the writings of Mulla Sadra, a leading Islamic philosopher.

Sadra does have a theory of the "Simple Reality" that posits a more transcendent level of unity where multiplicity is integrated into one undivided essence. And this thought does carry resonance with al-Busthami's teaching, hence showing one strand within the Islamic intellectual tradition committed to the harmonization of the evident multidiversity of the natural world with the essential unicity of being. Ultimately, unity about existence, expressed by al-Busthami and others, insists on a deeper and wider view in both the nature and our place inside it. This process of identification with the unity underlying all things better equips us to respond to the most pressing environmental and social questions of our time and to contribute towards the unfolding process of spiritual and moral development that so characterizes the Islamic intellectual tradition.(Agha, 2021; Alam Choudhury, 2011)

### Implications for Anthropological Views

The relationship between human and nature is at the heart of anthropological inquiries; however, the discipline has yielded a few opposing lines of thought. Traditional West consolidates humans as the focal point of the universe, segregating them from and elevating them above nature. It is an anthropocentric approach wherein nature is viewed as an object of utilization and domination by humanity. In contrast, however, the traditional and indigenous worldviews are narrating a very different reality: one in which humans were viewed as being inextricably entwined within a complex ecological web, actively involved in a rich tapestry of interspecies communications and interactions.(Sepie, 2017)

The anthropocentric view, being the one mostly supported by principles of reason and rationality, has dominated modern westernized societies and, as such, has carved ways through which humans interact with other species and their natural environment. According to Sepie (2017), such mentality gives rise to a human-ecology relationship that centers around resource and knowledge extraction on end, often at the expense of environmental crises arising from unsustainable means. Other cultural ideas, really underpinning ecological thinking, outline connectedness between humans and more-than-human worlds.(Xu & Ge, 2024)

The fact is that indigenous and traditional societies are often deeply adapted to the surrounding environment. Their cosmology, belief systems, religious, and cultural practices are, in essence, intertwined with nature. These societies are conscious of the pervasive nature of the human-nature relationship, wherein culture and nature are mutually constitutive. Such societies are mired in a state of flux against globalization processes and developmental programs, when the ecological crisis threatens to upset this delicate balance that they have always managed to keep.

The concept of sustainability has surged nowadays, given that evidence for the effects of unsustainable practices on the environment and society is becoming increasingly visible. Indeed, the

world societies find themselves grappling with a threshold question of sustainable development due to a range of sustainability-related challenges such as poverty, climate change, environmental degradation, and urban overcrowding faced throughout the world. The core reasons for these challenges start with a development model based on economic growth at the expense of environmental and social development. In contrast, the Islamic worldview of sustainable development offers an alternate vision of consumption, emphasizing responsibility, concern for others, and a simpler lifestyle.(Qadir & Zaman, 2019)

Abu Yazid al-Busthami was among the early important Sufi mystics of the 9th century who held principles and provided teachings well applicable to the achievement of sustainable development. One can notice from his teaching the importance of interconnectedness, call for moderation and balance, and appeal for a harmonious life with nature that have an important lesson for addressing complicated sustainability challenges of contemporary times.(Muhamad et al., 2019) By way of example, the concept of "al-'imāra" to restrain, build up, and populate the earth signifies that Al-Busthami's teachings speak volumes about the obligation of human beings to ensure that natural resources are exploited in a manner that does not disturb the balance existing in the natural environment. Similarly, the Prophetic traditions and teachings discussed in Islamic texts have dealt comprehensively with aspects of the environment, which include preserving natural resources, land reclamation, and maintaining cleanliness of the environment. For example, as in the hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim which reads, "*Do not damage nature, because it is an act that is forbidden by Allah and His Messenger.*" (HR. Bukhari and Muslim). Also in the hadith narrated by Tirmidhi which reads, "*Whoever loves what is on earth, then what is in the sky will love him.*" (HR. Tirmidhi). Also in many other hadiths in which the Messenger of Allah emphasized that Islam is a religion that cares deeply about the environment.

Then, by criticizing over-consumption, where Prophet Muhammad forbade extravagance in consumption or any form of luxury, urging for moderation in all aspects of life, sustainable behavior is promoted.(Bsoul et al., 2022) This is in line with the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW as in the hadith narrated by Bukhari which reads, "*Eat, drink and give alms without excess and without arrogance.*" (HR. Bukhari).

### **Spirituality and Environmental Activism**

Spirituality and environmental activism: The interest and discourse of the complicated relationship between spirituality and environmental activism have grown over recent years. A new wave of environmental consciousness has emerged from these diverse religious and spiritual traditions, where the vital role that spirituality can play in engaging pressing environmental challenges has increasingly been taken up by individuals and communities.(Biviano, 2012)

The emergence of this new phenomenon, which has been termed "spiritual ecology," is based on the recognition that environmental problems cannot be resolved through secular approaches alone. Instead, spiritual and religious worldviews are being considered a robust addition to ongoing environmental strategies, offering insights into the ethical condition of life interdependence and moral obligation in the care for the natural world.(L. Sponsel, 2020; L. E. Sponsel, 2014)

This shift in perspective has found manifestations in various forms of religious environmental activism, where spiritual leaders and their communities have taken tangible steps toward the betterment of the environment. The Green Belt Movement, which began in Kenya, was founded by the late Wangari Maathai; it combined environmental conservation with a strong spiritual component, drawing inspiration from traditional African beliefs and practices. His All Holiness Bartholomew I, the Green Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church, has emerged as one of the most outspoken religious voices on environmental protection and eloquently elaborated theological and

spiritual bases of environmental stewardship. In addition to individual efforts, there has also been work in the way of collective efforts toward the bridge between religion and spirituality with environmentalism. The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, a partner of the World Wide Fund for Nature, has engaged a variety of faiths into taking active interest and working for global environmental challenges, realizing the vital role spiritual and religious worldviews can play in shaping environmental consciousness and action.

Individual level: Research has also indicated how spiritual and religious worldviews instigate and motivate environmental activism. Spiritual and religious attitudes can instill in one a sense of being part of something much greater than the self alone, and they can elicit a deep reverence for all of life on this planet. For these reasons, spiritual and religious attitudes can imbue environmental efforts with a deep sense of purpose and urgency.

For a very long time, general trends in the field of environmental ethics have been divided by two major schools of thought: anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric. An anthropocentric ethic focuses on human interests and values, while for non-anthropocentric ethics-say, deep ecology-the environment has value in and of itself beyond its usefulness to humankind. Of the non-anthropocentric schools of thought, perhaps one of the most popular has been deep ecology, initially proposed by the Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess.

Interestingly, some parallels may be drawn between deep ecology of Naess and mystical Islamic thought of Abu Yazid al-Busthami - one of the most important Sufis. Both of them stress intrinsic value of nature and overcoming human chauvinistic worldviews. His idea of "unity of being," wahdat al-wujud, wherein everything in existence is seen to be a manifestation of the Divine, amazingly resonates with the deep ecology principle of the "ecological self".(Akamani, 2020) However, there also exist many differences between these two positions. Deep ecology has its ideological underpinning in Western philosophy and science, while that of al-Busthami is steeped in the spirit-metaphysical universe of Islamic mysticism.(Mickey, 2007) Deep ecology is more interventionist in approach in the protection of the environment, while in the teachings of al-Busthami, it is harmonious and contemplative regarding relations with nature.(Scoville, 2002) These underlying similarities and divergences from the two positions hold some useful implications for contemporary environmental movements.(L. E. Sponsel, 2014) While in the convergence of deep ecology with Islamic mysticism, the potential seems evident for cross-cultural alliances to be built and environmental ethics to become more appealing, at the same time, however, the clearly distinct philosophical and spiritual bases upon which each approach takes its stand may require an exercise in careful translation and adaptation in order to bridge these divergent cultural and religious contexts.(Akamani, 2020; Kula, 2001; Mickey, 2007)

Al-Busthami's teachings, though rooted in Eastern mysticism, hold universal relevance. While bridging his mystical approach with Western philosophies like deep ecology presents challenges due to differing philosophical and practical approaches to nature, these differences don't preclude Western application. Growing Western interest in spirituality makes his emphasis on interconnectedness and nature's intrinsic value highly pertinent. The key lies in translating and adapting his ideas, understanding their context, finding shared values (interconnectedness, intrinsic value, transcending anthropocentrism), and making mystical language accessible. Thus, while application may vary, Al-Busthami's core principles are universally applicable, significantly contributing to environmental thought and action East and West. This potential for cross-cultural dialogue makes exploring these connections invaluable.

## Critique of Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism, or the doctrine of humankind as central and most important in the universe, is the dominant paradigm in Western thought for many centuries. The view has filtered down into other discourses, even scientific ones, in which the non-human world is discussed along instrumental lines, with the benefit to humanity uppermost. According to Frigo & Ifanger (2021), such a limited view has increasingly been subject to critique, however, with the recognition of the need to take a far more holistic and inclusive view of our relationship with the natural world.(Frigo & Ifanger, 2021)

Most major criticisms of anthropocentrism raise its inability to recognize the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities. This aspect confines most forms of anthropocentric ethics to ascriptions of moral significance to human beings, setting aside the intrinsic value of other species and the wider ecosystem. Such an approach not only fails to account for the interdependence of all forms of life but also serves to propagate a harmful hierarchy that places human beings over all other things.

Anthropocentrism has also been linked with the exploitation and degradation of the environment.(Burchett, 2016) The instrumental view of nature is that resources are not ends in themselves but only means to human ends, and this has been the cause of the present environmental crisis.(Frigo & Ifanger, 2021) By increasingly focusing on the extraction of value from the natural world, the geosciences have embedded an underlying assumption of anthropocentrism, and a corresponding limited understanding of our responsibilities vis-à-vis the Earth, into geoethics.

This is contrary to the anthropocentric lesson brought by Sufi mystic Abu Yazid al-Busthami. Al-Busthami's notion of "fanā"-self-annihilation-opposes the idea of human exceptionalism with humility, with relation to the divinity and with nature. Al-Busthami invites us to stir the practice of spiritual annihilation to transcend the bonds of the ego in order to realize our common origin with all of creation.(Grey, 1993)

This holistic perspective is in line with the tenets of deep ecology that emphasize the intrinsic value of all life forms and are calling for a relational understanding of the human-nature relationship. Deep ecology, instead, is an essential call to the shifting of our collective consciousness regarding the intrinsic worth of all beings and not the natural world as a resource to be exploited; it is about feeling related to our non-human counterparts. Through the teachings of al-Busthami and the lessons of deep ecology, the eyes are opened toward the deconstruction of an anthropocentric worldview, moving into a relationship with nature that is both inclusive and sustainable.

Introduction of environmental education to the school program is one sure way to instigate the development of sustainable practices and response awareness among its student populace. As environmental education should be better integrated, perhaps a very good avenue for this would be through the insight of the great Sufi mystic Abu Yazid al-Busthami, whose philosophy could bind together all creation. To date, the ideas of Al-Busthami on the holistic relationship of humans to nature can provide certain insights toward the development of a comprehensive framework in environmental education.

The literature developed so far underlines that sustainability should not only be superficially integrated into regular course curricula; it truly needs to be integrated. Integration seen in a multidisciplinary manner needs an upgrade to the transdisciplinary approach, where lessons of sustainability become embedded within subjects.(Boks & Diehl, 2006) One of the famous approaches is going in the direction of pervasiveness, where the environment and ethics subjects are included at all levels of higher education.(Hoats, 2001) Consequently, related practices, and learning processes, besides other influences, the evolving concepts of "environmental" and "sustainability" in education seem to set the stage for an integrative approach, including the complexities of

sustainability and of the individual and collective agents pursuing this concept (Agirreazkuenaga, 2020; Boks & Diehl, 2006; Hoats, 2001)

The concept at Abu Yazid al-Busthami, to some degree, contributes toward providing a diverse and rich environmental education. Al-Busthami's emphasis on the interconnectedness of all creation, the importance of "annihilation" in the Divine, and the concept of "passing away" itself can be integrated into curriculum for deepened understanding of the human-nature relationship. This might integrate a holistic approach to life in which the learners consider themselves caretakers who have a responsibility to coexist with nature in harmony.

Abu Yazid al-Busthami teachings could be integrated into environmental education curricula by using some strategies. First, there will be the incorporation of al-Busthami's basic philosophical conceptions-the unity of all existence, the concept of the "passing away," and the idea of human-nature interconnectedness-in science, social studies, and ethics courses. These themes can be dealt with through discussions, case studies, and reflective activities aimed at letting students reflect upon their attitude to the natural world.

Abu Yazid al-Busthami was such a significant figure in Sufism; he remained distinguished by such profound insight and experience of the divine in his thoughts, which had set their mark on Islamic spirituality. On the contrary, the place of his philosophy in the contemporary setting cannot be easily defined, especially under the conditions of religious pluralism and accelerated globalization processes.(Amir, 2020; Arjomand, 2020; Seesemann, 2009)

The main challenge to be ironed out lies in the reconciliation of al-Busthami's uncompromising insistence on tawhid, or the unity of God, with the pluralistic realities of today. While his doctrine of tawhid, or the oneness of God, is of paramount importance and constitutes the core of his teaching, the present situation requires more openness and tolerance towards religious variety. The radical nature of al-Busthami's monotheism presents a problem for scholars seeking a more constructive engagement with other faiths. The Sufi master's discourse on the annihilation of the self (*fana'*) and the attainment of mystical union with the Divine may appear inaccessible or even esoteric to modern audiences steeped in individualism and materialism.(MAHMOUD, 2007; Seesemann, 2009) In Sufism, *fana* has symbolic and interpretive meanings. Symbolically, *fana* is the spiritual path and self-transcendence, namely the release of the ego to reach the divine self. Interpretatively, *fana* is the process of transformation, namely transcending egoism, realizing dependence on God, and achieving spiritual union. *Fana* is not physical destruction, but rather a change in consciousness.

Another important issue is how to cope with globalization. The social and religious panorama changed so much with the rapid flow of ideas, cultures, and values that a serious process of rethinking was urged in relation to how Sufi teachings could keep their relevance and impact. The contextualization of al-Busthami's teaching using ecological care, social justice, and interfaith dialogue became some of the areas where the Sufi thinkers and practitioners tried to contextualize.(al-Azami, 2014; Seesemann, 2009)

In the face of such challenges, it is the universality of al-Busthami's spiritual insights and the potential of Sufism to change with the times that have granted continued relevance to his teachings. It is through embracing the dynamism and fluidity within the Sufi tradition that modern scholars and practitioners alike can determine a course to cull out al-Busthami's timeless wisdom and convey an application relevant to today's world.(al-Azami, 2014; Amir, 2020; MAHMOUD, 2007; Seesemann, 2009)

#### 4. Conclusion

This thus concludes that the mystic philosophy of wahdat al-wujud of Abu Yazid Al-Busthami evidently offers a much deeper realization toward cultivating an ecocentric approach to environmental stewardship. His perception underlines the interrelation of the whole created world, which therefore infers that human beings are part of unified divine reality and must take responsibility for caring for nature with due respect. Accordingly, such perspectives fit comfortably into contemporary ecological ethics, providing spiritual motives toward humility in approaches to environmental issues and recognition of the intrinsic value in nature.

The present study, however, cannot catch the practical relevance of Al-Busthami's philosophy in contexts of varying cultural orientations, limited as it is to a textual and conceptual analysis based on historic Sufi texts and secondary sources. This work also focuses on Al-Busthami alone, so therefore covering other Sufi thoughts on environmental ethics that could offer pluralist insights is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is well worth undertaking further empirical work to understand how the teachings of Al-Busthami on environmental ethics are received and put into practice in contemporary Muslim communities. A comparison of his views with those of other Sufi masters and various Islamic philosophical schools could form a basis for a wider interpretation of the Islamic contribution to ecological thought. Indeed, inter-disciplinary studies that bring together Islamic mysticism and environmental science may seek in spiritual values a source of new inspiration for sustainable development.

#### 5. References

Agha, S. H. (2021). Unity in multiplicity: The mystical unity of existence in Mulla Sadra's Al-Shawahid Al-Rububiyyah. *Kom: Casopis Za Religijske Nauke*, 10(3), 39–75. <https://doi.org/10.5937/kom2202039S>

Agirreazkuenaga, L. (2020). Education for Agenda 2030: What Direction do We Want to Take Going Forward? *Sustainability*, 12(5), 2035. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12052035>

Akamani, K. (2020). Integrating Deep Ecology and Adaptive Governance for Sustainable Development: Implications for Protected Areas Management. *Sustainability*, 12(14), 5757. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12145757>

al-Azami, U. (2014). Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 25(1), 129–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2013.840076>

Alam Choudhury, M. (2011). Chapter 1 Introduction: A Technical Insight. In B. H. Baltagi, E. Sadka, & M. Alam Choudhury (Eds.), *Contributions to Economic Analysis* (Vol. 291, pp. 3–13). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Alam Choudhury, M., & Akram Nadwi, M. (1992). A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES. *Humanomics*, 8(3), 60–107. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb006133>

Amir, H. (2020). Shi'a mystical theology: Notes on Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī's "Jāmi‘ al-Asrār wa Manba‘ al-Anwār." *Kom: Casopis Za Religijske Nauke*, 9(3), 65–80. <https://doi.org/10.5937/kom2003065A>

Ariyadi, A. (2018). Al-Qur'an Views Relating to Environmental Conservation. *Daun: Jurnal Ilmiah Pertanian Dan Kehutanan*, 5(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.33084/daun.v5i1.319>

Arjomand, S. A. (2020). The Emergence and Development of Persianate Sufism: Khorasan, Ninth to Twelfth Centuries. *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 13(1), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18747167-BJA10005>

Biviano, E. L. (2012). Worldviews on Fire: Understanding the Inspiration for Congregational Religious Environmentalism. *CrossCurrents*, 62(4), 495–511. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cro.2012.a782538>

Boks, C., & Diehl, J. C. (2006). Integration of sustainability in regular courses: experiences in industrial design engineering. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 14(9–11), 932–939. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2005.11.038>

Bsoul, L., Omer, A., Kucukallic, L., & Archbold, R. H. (2022). Islam's Perspective on Environmental Sustainability: A Conceptual Analysis. *Social Sciences*, 11(6), 228. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11060228>

Burchett, K. L. (2016). *Anthropocentrism as Environmental Ethic*. University of Kentucky.

Deetz, S. (1977). Interpretive Research in Communication: A Hermeneutic Foundation. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 3(1), 53–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019685997700300106>

Evola, V. (2005). Cognitive Semiotics and On-Line Reading of Religious Texts: A Hermeneutic Model of Sacred Literature and Everyday Revelation. *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:21980>

Faqihuddin Assafary, A. (2020). Model of Soul in the Shadian Episteme. *International Journal of Asian Education*, 1(1), 9–14. <https://doi.org/10.46966/ijae.v1i1.19>

Frigo, G., & Ifanger, L. A. (2021). A Critique of (Weak) Anthropocentric Geoethics. In M. Bohle & E. Marone (Eds.), *Geo-societal Narratives* (pp. 67–80). Springer International Publishing.

Grey, W. (1993). Anthropocentrism and deep ecology. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 71(4), 463–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048409312345442>

Hoats, A. S. (2001). Toward a new era for chemical engineering education: making environmental and ethical issues fundamental. *International Symposium on Technology and Society*, 244–251. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ISTAS.2001.937746>

Kula, E. (2001). Islam and environmental conservation. *Environmental Conservation*, 28(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0376892901000017>

MAHMOUD, M. A. (2007). Quest for divinity: a critical examination of the thought of Mahmud Muhammad Taha. *Choice Reviews Online*, 44(11), 44–6190. <https://doi.org/10.5860/CHOICE.44-6190>

Mickey, S. (2007). Contributions to Anthropocosmic Environmental Ethics. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, 11(2), 226–247. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853507X204941>

Muhamad, A., Syihab, A. H., & Achour, M. (2019). Quranic Messages on Environmental Sustainability: an Expository Study of Its Relevance. *Al-Bayān – Journal of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Studies*, 17(1), 38–59. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340069>

Qadir, J., & Zaman, A. (2019). Sustainable development viewed from the lens of Islam. *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education*, 10(1), 46. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJPEE.2019.098181>

Quasem, M. A. (1993). Al-Ghazālī's evaluation of abu yazid al-bistāmī and his disapproval of the mystical concepts of union and fusion. *Asian Philosophy*, 3(2), 143–164.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09552369308575380>

Salamah-Qudsi, A. (2020). *Abū Ja‘Far Ibn Yazdānyār’s Rawḍat al-Murīdīn*: an Unknown Sufi Manual of the Fifth/Eleventh Century. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 30(3), 541–560. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186320000048>

Scoville, J. N. (2002). Fitting Ethics to the Land: H. Richard Niebuhr’s Ethic of Responsibility and Ecotheology. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 30(2), 207–229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9795.00104>

Seesemann, R. (2009). Three Ibrāhīms: Literary Production and the Remaking of the Tijāniyya Sufi Order in Twentieth-Century Sudanic Africa. *Die Welt Des Islams*, 49(3–4), 299–333. <https://doi.org/10.1163/004325309X12458504137789>

Sepie, A. (2017). More than Stories, More than Myths: Animal/Human/Nature(s) in Traditional Ecological Worldviews. *Humanities*, 6(4), 78. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h6040078>

Sponsel, L. (2020). Introduction to “Religious Environmental Activism in Asia: Case Studies in Spiritual Ecology.” *Religions*, 11(2), 77. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11020077>

Sponsel, L. E. (2014). Spiritual Ecology as an International Environmental Movement. In L. Leonard & S. B. Kedzior (Eds.), *Advances in Sustainability and Environmental Justice* (Vol. 15, pp. 275–293). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Twumasi-Ankrah, E., Antwi, E. K. E., & Wiafe, F. (2023). Re-Examining the Christian Ecological Models in Light of Eco-Theology and the Old Testament. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 879–892. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2023478>

Unus, I., & Caldwell, C. (2018). Ethical Principles of the Islamic Faith – Insights for the Modern World. *Business and Management Research*, 7(3), 27. <https://doi.org/10.5430/bmr.v7n3p27>

Wersal, L. (1995). ISLAM AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: TRADITION RESPONDS TO CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES. *Zygon®*, 30(3), 451–459. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.1995.tb00083.x>

William Oliverio L. (2020). Contours of a Constructive Pentecostal Philosophical-Theological Hermeneutic. *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 29(1), 35–55. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02901003>

Xu, C., & Ge, X. (2024). AI as a Child of Mother Earth: Regrounding Human-AI Interaction in Ecological Thinking. *CHI '24: CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3613905.3644065>