

Cosmocentric Food Ethics in the Light of *Tashkik al-Wujūd*: A Metaphilosophical Reconstruction of Naess, Singer, and Regan

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Abstract: Contemporary food ethics that seeks to move beyond anthropocentrism draws on three principal sources: Peter Singer's utilitarianism, Tom Regan's deontology of animal rights, and Arne Naess's deep ecology. Attempts to integrate these three into a single cosmocentric model of food ethics have yielded juxtaposition rather than integration, since the three positions operate with criteria of moral considerability that are logically mutually exclusive, namely sentience, subject-of-a-life, and membership in the biosphere. This article argues that the resulting impasse is epistemological, even ontological rather than ethical and cannot therefore be resolved at the level of normative ethics. Employing hermeneutic and comparative methods applied to scholarly sources, the study proposes Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine of *tashkik al-wujūd* (the gradation of being) as the ontological foundation of such an integration. The Sadrian principle that what differentiates entities is identical with what unites them permits the formulation of an intrinsic value at once universal and graded. Naess's cosmocentric claim can thus be sustained without the flattening of value, while Singer's sentience and Regan's subject-of-a-life are read as markers of degree along a single scale of existence rather than as competing criteria. The doctrine of *ḥarakah jawhariyyah* further reinterprets Christian Coff's tragedy of eating as *istiḥālah*, the elevation of being, which yields a model of food ethics grounded in accountability: the sacrifice of a lower degree of being is legitimate only insofar as the higher degree genuinely realizes its elevation. Cosmocentric food ethics thereby acquires its metaphysical foundation from the tradition of *ḥikmah muta'aliyah*, a tradition hitherto absent from global discourse on food ethics.

Keywords: Food ethics; cosmocentrism; *tashkik al-wujūd*, Mullā Ṣadrā, Arne Naess, Peter Singer, Tom Regan.

1. Introduction

Since the second half of the past decade, global attention has turned to the deteriorating state of food security and food availability. A United Nations report records that the number of people affected by hunger worldwide rose to approximately 828 million in 2021, an increase of some 46 million over the previous year and of 150 million since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ The World Food Programme reports that food crises affected approximately 333

¹ World Health Organization, UN Report: Global Hunger Numbers Rose to as Many as 828 million in 2021, joint press release with FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, and WFP, 6 July 2022.

million people across 78 countries in 2023, and that roughly 70 percent of these crises originated in violence and conflict rather than in resource scarcity.² The war between Russia and Ukraine has disrupted supply chains for commodities such as wheat, while climate change has rendered agricultural systems increasingly vulnerable, with 2024 projected to be the hottest year on record.³

These figures disclose something deeper than a technical problem of distribution. If the greater part of world hunger originates in conflict and in patterns of consumption rather than in any absolute shortage of food, then the question at issue concerns the way human beings position themselves in relation to nature and to their fellow creatures, and only secondarily their productive capacity. That question is philosophical, and more precisely ethical and metaphysical.

Food ethics concerns the moral principles and values that govern the production, distribution, consumption, and management of food. Paul Thompson maintains that food ethics belongs at the centre of bioethics, since food is the foundation that sustains all life and is integrative by nature, connecting ethics with biology and the social sciences.⁴ Most studies in food ethics nevertheless remain within an anthropocentric framework that treats human interests as the sole basis of moral consideration. Several environmental ethicists have identified precisely this framework as the root of the ecological crisis.⁵

A cosmocentric approach has emerged in response to these limitations, one that regards the universe and everything it contains, biotic and abiotic alike, as an interconnected web possessing intrinsic value. The term *cosmocentric food ethics* links food ethics to this cosmocentric worldview. Cognate terms circulate with differing emphases, among them holistic, ecocentric, and multidimensional food ethics. The term *cosmocentric* is preferred here because it names directly the relation between food ethics and the worldview that underwrites it.

In the literature, cosmos-centred approaches to food ethics rest almost invariably on three sources. Arne Naess proposed deep ecology as a philosophical response to the ecological crisis, one that demands a transformation of outlook and of way of life rather than technical remedies for environmental damage.⁶ Peter Singer, working from utilitarian premises, argues for the moral consideration of animals on the basis of their capacity to suffer.⁷ Tom Regan,

² World Food Programme, *A Global Food Crisis*, situation report, 2023.

³ Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), *Market Monitor*, December 2024.

⁴ Paul B. Thompson, And Don't Forget Food Ethics, *The American Journal of Bioethics* 17, no. 3 (2017): 22-24.

⁵ Helen Kopnina, Haydn Washington, Bron Taylor, and John J. Piccolo, Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem, *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2018): 109-127.

⁶ Arne Naess, The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary, *Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (1973): 95-100.

⁷ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, first Ecco paperback ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 7, 159.

working deontologically, argues for the recognition of animal rights on the basis of their status as *subjects-of-a-life*.⁸

Several studies have applied these three sources to the field of food ethics. Bart Gremmen argues that food ethics must take account of the impact of production on ecosystems and must respect the claims of non-human living beings.⁹ Michael Pollan examines a modern food system that has severed the relation between human beings and nature.¹⁰ Jacqueline Wilkins and Joan Hillers show that consumer food choices ought to incorporate considerations of sustainability.¹¹ Gary Francione advances veganism as a moral imperative rather than as a lifestyle preference.¹² Gonzalo Villanueva defends Singer against his critics,¹³ while Nina Witoszek and Martin Lee Mueller argue for the continued relevance of Naess's deep ecology in the twenty-first century.¹⁴

Two features of this body of literature stand out. First, attempts to supply cosmocentrism with a metaphysical foundation have drawn exclusively on traditions outside Islam. Anna Frammartino Wilks grounds it in Kantian ethics.¹⁵ Cinderella Sequeira turns to the encyclical *Laudato Si'* amid the dominance of the technocentric paradigm.¹⁶ Pranay Deb draws on the metaphysics of the Upaniṣads, according to which all things possess value because they carry divine potential and are rooted in Brahman as primordial consciousness.¹⁷ Naess himself grounded his ecosophy in Spinoza's monism.¹⁸

The tradition of Islamic philosophy is absent from this list. The absence is puzzling, since the *ḥikmah* tradition commands a wealth of ontological concepts devised to answer precisely the question at issue, namely how the diversity of existents may be understood as a unified whole without the loss of hierarchical structure. Studies of Islamic environmental ethics have concentrated on the normative and juridical levels, as in the work of Mawil Izzi

⁸ Tom Regan, *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 77-80.

⁹ Bart Gremmen, Ethics and Sustainable Agriculture, *Agriculture and Human Values* 21, no. 4 (2004): 421-432.

¹⁰ Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

¹¹ Jacqueline L. Wilkins and Joan Hillers, Influences of Pesticide Residue and Environmental Concerns on Organic Food Preference, *Journal of Nutrition Education* 26, no. 6 (1994): 290-294.

¹² Gary L. Francione, Reflections on Tom Regan and the Animal Rights Movement That Once Was, *Between the Species* 21, no. 1 (2018): 1-41.

¹³ Gonzalo Villanueva, Against Animal Liberation? Peter Singer and His Critics, *Sophia* 57, no. 1 (2018): 5-19.

¹⁴ Nina Witoszek and Martin Lee Mueller, Deep Ecology: Life after Life?, *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 21, no. 3 (2017): 209-217.

¹⁵ Anna Frammartino Wilks, Kantian Foundations for a Cosmocentric Ethic, in *The Ethics of Space Exploration*, ed. James S. J. Schwartz and Tony Milligan (Cham: Springer, 2016), 181-194.

¹⁶ Cinderella Sequeira, *Laudato Si'* beyond Limits with a Cosmocentric World Vision, *Theology* 122, no. 6 (2019): 427-434.

¹⁷ Pranay Deb, Cosmocentrism: A Paradigm of Environmental Ethics, *Journal of Applied Research in Humanities, Language and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2021): 36-41.

¹⁸ Arne Naess, Spinoza and Ecology, *Philosophia* 7, no. 1 (1977): 45-54.

Dien,¹⁹ Ibrahim Özdemir,²⁰ and Fazlun Khalid,²¹ without deriving that normativity systematically from the ontological structure of being. In the field of Islamic animal ethics, Richard Foltz and Sarra Tlili have opened an important path,²² though both proceed from textual sources rather than from metaphysics.

Second, and more consequentially, none of the studies cited above explains on what basis the positions of Naess, Singer, and Regan may be combined. The three are commonly presented as complementary contributions, as though the weakness of one were offset by the strength of another. As the discussion below demonstrates, the three rest on criteria of moral considerability that stand in logical conflict with one another. To combine them is to juxtapose them and thereby conceal the contradiction. Kemi Anthony Emina goes so far as to argue that cosmocentrism and deep ecology are excessively metaphysical and ontological, which renders their relevance to applied environmental ethics difficult to accept.²³ The present study takes up that charge from the opposite direction. Cosmocentrism has stalled through the absence of adequate metaphysics, and not through metaphysics as such.

The problem addressed here may accordingly be stated as follows. The integration of these three non-anthropocentric ethical positions into a single cosmocentric model of food ethics cannot be accomplished at the level of normative ethics, because the impasse is epistemological and ontological in character. So long as no single scale of being permits sentience, *subject-of-a-life*, and membership in the biosphere to be construed as indicators of degree rather than as competing criteria, every integrative model will amount to a list of mutually exclusive demands.

The research question follows from this. On what ontological basis can an integrative cosmocentric model of food ethics be constructed out of the thought of Arne Naess, Peter Singer, and Tom Regan, and how does Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine of *tashkīk al-wujūd* supply that basis?

The study pursues four aims. The first is to demonstrate by argument the nature and character of this integrative impasse. The second is to propose the doctrine of *tashkīk al-wujūd* as an ontological foundation on which intrinsic value can be at once universal and graded. The third is to reformulate cosmocentric food ethics as an ethics of ontological accountability by means of the doctrine of *ḥarakah jawhariyyah*. The fourth is to derive the normative implications of that reformulation.

¹⁹ Mawil Y. Izzī Dien, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2000).

²⁰ Ibrahim Özdemir, Toward an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective, in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3-37.

²¹ Fazlun M. Khalid, *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Crisis* (Markfield: Kube Publishing, 2019).

²² Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); Sarra Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²³ Kemi Anthony Emina, Cosmocentric and Deep Ecology Movement: An Extreme Web of Valuing Nature, *Jurnal Ilmu Sosiologi Dialektika Kontemporer* 12, no. 2 (2024): 1-19.

The novelty of the research lies in three claims. The first is the diagnosis that the integrative impasse is epistemological and ontological in character, a fact long obscured by the rhetoric of mutual complementarity. The second is the use of *tashkik al-wujūd* as a foundation for food ethics, an application that, to the authors' knowledge, has not previously been attempted. The third is the reinterpretation of Christian Coff's tragedy of eating through *ḥarakah jawhariyyah*, which displaces the governing question of food ethics from permissibility to accountability.

2. Methods

This study is a qualitative literature review in the field of philosophy, conducted through hermeneutic and comparative approaches. Hermeneutics serves to interpret and to disclose the meanings latent in texts that carry teachings, rules of life, and worldviews.²⁴ The comparative procedure sets data drawn from the literature against real-world problems as the ground of analysis,²⁵ and examines those problems from a philosophical perspective.²⁶

The material object of the study is cosmocentric food ethics. Its formal object is the ontology of being in Mullā Ṣadrā's *ḥikmah muta'āliyah*, which is used to reinterpret the ethical thought of Arne Naess, Peter Singer, and Tom Regan. Comparison here does not terminate in the identification of similarities and differences. It proceeds to a metaphilosophical step, namely an inquiry into the ontological conditions that must be obtained if these three ethical frameworks are to speak a common language.

The primary sources for Naess are *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* and *Ecology of Wisdom*, supplemented by the article "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement." For Singer, *Animal Liberation* and *Practical Ethics* are used, and for Regan, *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs* and *The Case for Animal Rights*. For Mullā Ṣadrā, the study draws on *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'āliyah fī al-Asfār al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah* and *Kitāb al-Mashā'ir*, read with the commentaries of Fazlur Rahman, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ibrahim Kalin, and Sajjad Rizvi. Supporting sources include the twenty-second epistle of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' together with contemporary Islamic literature on environmental ethics.

3. Results and Discussion

Why Food Ethics Must Move beyond Anthropocentrism

Christian Coff describes eating as the process by which living beings take in elements of nature from outside the body, process them, and assimilate them into their own flesh.²⁷ Eating is

²⁴ F. Budi Hardiman, *Seni Memahami: Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015), 11.

²⁵ Stephanus Djunatan et al., *Kiat Sukses Menulis Karya Ilmiah bagi Mahasiswa* (Bandung: Gunung Djati Publishing, 2023), 61-62.

²⁶ Anton Bakker and Achmad Charris Zubair, *Metodologi Penelitian Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1990), 107-108.

²⁷ Christian Coff, *The Taste for Ethics: An Ethics of Food Consumption* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 6.

therefore the union of what lies outside the body with the body itself, an act proper to living beings and directed toward the sustaining of life. Elizabeth Telfer adds that for human beings eating carries symbolic and cultural significance beyond its biological function, and that it is oriented toward a pleasure realized through the exercise of choice.²⁸ That freedom brings responsibility with it.

Three considerations render this responsibility unavoidable. First, eating is a process that every living creature must undergo to survive, and it therefore bears directly on food justice. No one is entitled to eat to excess and thereby deprive other creatures of their claim to life. Second, eating is a risky process, since it is irreversible and issues in permanent change.²⁹ Food that has been digested and absorbed cannot be restored to its prior form. Coff names this the tragedy of eating, the killing that sustains living.³⁰ Third, human beings can deploy their rational faculties in choosing what, when, where, and how to eat, and their freedom is accordingly bounded by the freedom of others.

None of these three considerations can be met within an anthropocentric framework. An ethics centred too narrowly on the human neglects respect for the existence of other beings and for the sustainability of ecosystems, since it serves human self-interest alone. Kopnina and her colleagues maintain that the rejection of anthropocentrism does not amount to a rejection of human interests. What it rejects is self-love as a sufficient ground for environmental concern and responsibility.³¹

Three Routes out of Anthropocentrism

Peter Singer's utilitarian argument

Utilitarianism was developed by Jeremy Bentham and popularized by John Stuart Mill. For Bentham the highest standard of moral action is *utility*, the consequence of achieving the greatest happiness through the avoidance of suffering and the pursuit of pleasure, and moral decisions are taken according to the principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number.³² Mill subsequently added a qualitative dimension that Bentham had left out of account. What matters for animal ethics is the shift of criterion that Bentham affected, from rationality to the capacity to suffer. James Rachels observes that in traditional ethics animals lack moral standing because they lack the rational capacity to think or to speak as human beings do, whereas utilitarianism furnishes a reasoned justification for not harming animals precisely by abandoning that criterion of rationality.³³

²⁸ Elizabeth Telfer, *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food* (London: Routledge, 1996), 36-39.

²⁹ Rudi Setiawan, *Makan Sebagai Aktivitas Produktif: Tinjauan Filosofis tentang Makan dari Perspektif Foucaultian*, *Melintas* 31, no. 3 (2015): 306-307.

³⁰ Coff, *The Taste for Ethics*, 12.

³¹ Kopnina et al., *Anthropocentrism*, 109-127.

³² Kees Bertens, *Etika*, 8th printing (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2004), 247.

³³ James Rachels, *Filsafat Moral*, trans. A. Sudiarja from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2004), 177-181.

Peter Singer takes up the concept of suffering in *Animal Liberation* in order to criticize human treatment of animals.³⁴ He extends the scope of equality beyond the human, emphasizing the capacity of animals to suffer and to experience enjoyment.³⁵ He criticizes the livestock industry for treating animals as objects of production alone and for rearing them by methods that maximize yield while inflicting severe suffering.³⁶ From this position Singer advocates vegetarianism as a means of reducing animal suffering and of lightening the burden borne by the environment.³⁷

Singer's vegetarianism should be recognized as a permissive one. He does not rule out the eating of animals altogether, provided that their suffering can be reduced or eliminated. In a moral dilemma between human and animal life he continues to give priority to the human.³⁸ A form of gradation is thus already operative within Singer's own framework, though it receives no ontological justification. It enters as an intuition.

Tom Regan's deontological argument

Deontological ethics assesses actions by reference to fundamental duties rather than to ends. Immanuel Kant held that an action counts as good when it proceeds from a good will arising out of duty,³⁹ and that moral obligations are categorical imperatives binding unconditionally.⁴⁰

For Kant, human beings must be treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means, whereas animals are not moral agents possessed of inherent dignity. Animals may be treated as means for human ends, and the prohibition against tormenting them serves to protect human beings from cruel dispositions that would then be turned upon their fellows, rather than acknowledging any value that animals possess in themselves.⁴¹

Regan extends this Kantian framework to animals. On his account Kant confines intrinsic value to human beings on the ground of their capacity for autonomy and reason, so that human beings count as people while animals count as things. For Regan animals also possess rights, by way of the concept of the *subject-of-a-life*, that is, a being possessed of beliefs, desires, memories, feelings, and a welfare that can fare better or worse for it.⁴² Regan documents the exploitation of animals in their treatment as food, clothing, and instruments.⁴³

³⁴ Paul B. Thompson, Ethical Perspectives on Food Biotechnology, in *Acceptable Genes? Religious Traditions and Genetically Modified Foods*, ed. Conrad G. Brunk and Harold Coward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 46.

³⁵ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 1-23.

³⁶ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 95-100.

³⁷ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 159.

³⁸ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 48-70.

³⁹ Bertens, *Etika*, 255.

⁴⁰ Rachels, *Filsafat Moral*, 235.

⁴¹ Rachels, *Filsafat Moral*, 234-235.

⁴² Regan, *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs*, 77-80; Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 243.

⁴³ Regan, *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs*, 8-21.

The killing of healthy animals violates their rights even when it is carried out in research that benefits human beings.⁴⁴

Regan's vegetarianism is accordingly strict. Since animals hold a right to life as human beings do, animals are in principle not to be killed. The *subject-of-a-life* is a threshold criterion rather than a gradational one. It divides the world into those with rights and without, and it draws the line at mammals of a year or more. Everything beneath that line, plants, molluscs, soil, and water among them, forfeits moral standing altogether.

Arne Naess's ecological argument

Naess distinguishes two movements that arose in response to the ecological crisis. The shallow ecology movement concentrates on repairing a damaged environment, while the deep ecology movement concentrates on transforming human outlook and ways of life, shifting from a human being as the centre and sole locus of value to a view of nature as possessing intrinsic value.⁴⁵

Influenced by Spinoza's monism, which identifies God with nature, Naess held that human and non-human realities alike must be respected as bearers of intrinsic value. Ecological balance and sustainability require that human beings live more simply, repair environmental damage, and take active part in concrete efforts at conservation.⁴⁶ The root of the ecological crisis lies in an anthropocentric worldview, and the remedy therefore lies in a change of outlook rather than in technical adjustment. The human being, as microcosm, is a small part of nature, the macrocosm.⁴⁷

A food ethics built on deep ecology accordingly calls for changes of attitude and of way of life in the production, distribution, and consumption of food, including simplicity of living and moderation in eating. Naess does not specifically advocate vegetarianism, since his concern is the welfare and equilibrium of ecosystems, which for him extend beyond questions of animal suffering and animal rights. His ethics also takes account of pollution, soil degradation, and climate change, matters that fall outside the scope of animal ethics.

The Integrative Impasse: Why the Three Cannot Be Summed

All three thinkers have indeed departed from anthropocentrism, and all three treat food as a focal point of the moral relation between human beings and reality beyond them rather than as a mere commodity. This convergence is evident, and it is frequently cited in support of the conclusion that the three positions complement one another. That conclusion is premature.

J. Baird Callicott, in what has become a classic article, argues that animal liberation and environmental ethics are adversaries rather than allies. Animal ethics protects sentient individuals, whereas environmental ethics protects the integrity and stability of biotic

⁴⁴ Clifford J. Sherry, *Animal Rights: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 12.

⁴⁵ Naess, *The Shallow and the Deep*, 95-100.

⁴⁶ Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. and ed. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 29.

⁴⁷ Arne Naess, *Ecology of Wisdom*, ed. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008), 233-237.

communities and, for the sake of that integrity, is prepared to sacrifice individuals, as in the culling of deer populations that damage vegetation.⁴⁸

Mark Sagoff presses the point by describing the marriage of animal liberation and environmental ethics as a bad match ending in a quick divorce. If animal suffering must be prevented, human beings are obliged to intervene in predation in the wild, which is an ecologist's nightmare.⁴⁹

Telfer records an early version of this objection. If human beings are obliged to protect animals from being eaten, they are equally obliged to prevent carnivores from preying on other animals, which is impossible short of exterminating the carnivores themselves.⁵⁰ Telfer further notes that utilitarian arguments grounded in suffering leave a loophole open, namely the permission to eat animals killed painlessly under anaesthesia.⁵¹ Jan Deckers adds that neither Regan nor Singer can explain whether it is permissible to kill plants or animals of low consciousness such as molluscs.⁵²

Deep ecology faces difficulties of its own. Naess's biospherical egalitarianism holds that all forms of life have, in principle, an equal right to live and to flourish. The qualification "in principle" registers Naess's own acknowledgment that killing is unavoidable in practice, since any realistic form of life entails some degree of exploitation.⁵³ Naess supplies no principle for determining which forms of exploitation are legitimate and which are not. Warwick Fox observes that the fundamental difficulty of biospherical egalitarianism lies precisely in this absence of criteria of evaluation.⁵⁴ Richard Sylvan goes further and judges' deep ecology to be a position that is not philosophically well defined.⁵⁵

The true character of the problem now becomes visible. These three thinkers do not offer three parts of a single structure. They offer three structures resting on different foundations. Singer works with the criterion of sentience, the capacity to suffer. Regan works with the criterion of the *subject-of-a-life*, the possession of a subjective life. Naess works with the criterion of membership in the biosphere. The three criteria trace three circles of moral considerability that differ in extension and, more consequentially, in logic. Sentience admits of degree yet halts at sentient beings. The *subject-of-a-life* admits of no degree at all, being a

⁴⁸ J. Baird Callicott, Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair, *Environmental Ethics* 2, no. 4 (1980): 311-338.

⁴⁹ Mark Sagoff, Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce, *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 22, no. 2 (1984): 297-307.

⁵⁰ Telfer, *Food for Thought*, 77-78.

⁵¹ Telfer, *Food for Thought*, 74.

⁵² Jan Deckers, Vegetarianism, Sentimental or Ethical? *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 22, no. 6 (2009): 573-597.

⁵³ Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 28, 166-170; Naess, The Shallow and the Deep, 95-96.

⁵⁴ Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), 220-224.

⁵⁵ Richard Sylvan, A Critique of Deep Ecology, *Radical Philosophy* 40 (1985): 2-12; continued in *Radical Philosophy* 41 (1985): 10-22.

threshold criterion. Membership in the biosphere encompasses everything and, for that very reason, can rank nothing.

Combining the three yields mutually exclusive demands. If inanimate objects possess intrinsic value equal to that of animals, as biospherical egalitarianism requires, Regan's animal rights collapse, since no ground remains for granting animals a special status. If Regan's animal rights are upheld, Naess's holism collapses, since the interests of the ecosystem may never override individual rights. If Singer's calculus is applied, both collapse at once, since rights and ecosystemic integrity alike may be sacrificed to a more favourable balance of suffering.

No normative compromise can resolve this impasse, because the clash occurs among premises rather than among conclusions. What is required is an ontology satisfying two conditions at once, conditions that appear at first sight incompatible. The first condition is that the ontology assign intrinsic value to everything that exists, the abiotic included, so that Naess's cosmocentric claim is met. The second is that the ontology still admits a gradation of value, so that Singer's sentience and Regan's *subject-of-a-life* are not dissolved into a uniform plane. An ontology meeting the first condition ordinarily fails the second, and conversely. Spinoza's monism, on which Naess relies, meets the first and fails the second, since Spinozist substance is univocal and admits no intrinsic gradation. The Cartesian dualism that survives in Regan's Kantian inheritance fails the first, since it divides reality into subjects and object with no gradation between them.

An ontology meeting both conditions has existed in Isfahan since the seventeenth century, and it has never entered this discussion.

Tashkīk al-wujūd as an Ontological Foundation

Aṣālat al-wujūd: that which is truly real

Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā, founded *ḥikmah muta'ālīyah* on a single fundamental thesis, *aṣālat al-wujūd*. What is truly real is existence, while *māhiyyah* or quiddity is a concept abstracted by the intellect from a determinate existence.⁵⁶ A stone and a cow are not two distinct kinds of reality. There are two aspects of one and the same reality, namely existence.

The consequences for the problem at hand are considerable. If what is truly real is existence, then what all existents share is existence itself, and not a genus, an empirical property, or a psychological capacity. Sentience, rationality, and subjective life are manifestations of something more fundamental than themselves rather than the foundation of reality. An ethics grounded in sentience or in the *subject-of-a-life* is grounded in phenomena and thus stands at one remove from the foundation.

⁵⁶ Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'ālīyah fī al-Asfār al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1981), vol. 1, 38-42; Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 27-34.

Tashkīk: the differentiating factor identical with the unifying factor

Ṣadrā does not construe existence univocally, since univocity would reduce everything to a single level. Nor does he construe it equivocally, since equivocality would serve every connection among existents. Existence is construed as *mushakkak*, that is, as admitting of degrees. Al-Suhrawardī had applied this doctrine to light and its varying intensities;⁵⁷ Ṣadrā transfers it to existence itself. Existence is a single reality extending across differing degrees (*marātib*) of intensity and weakness (*shiddah wa ḍaʿf*) and of priority and posteriority (*taqaddum wa ta'akhkhur*).⁵⁸

The most decisive formulation of the doctrine holds that what differentiates existents is identical with what they share (*mā bihi al-imtiyāz ʿayn mā bihi al-ishtirāk*).⁵⁹ That formulation cannot be accommodated within the Aristotelian logic of genus and differentia, where the unifying factor and the differentiating factor are always two distinct things. In existence the two coincide. A stone and a cow are alike in that both exist, and they differ precisely in that their degrees of existence differ. Likeness and difference issue from one and the same source.

Here the two apparently incompatible conditions identified at the close of the previous section are satisfied simultaneously, and by a single principle. Intrinsic value is universal, since every entity possesses existence and no existence is zero. Intrinsic value is at the same time graded, since existence is graded. What Spinozist monism cannot achieve because it levels everything, and what Cartesian dualism cannot achieve because it separates everything, *tashkīk* achieves without surrendering either requirement. Christian Jambet observes that this is why Ṣadrā's ontology is neither monism nor pluralism, but a unity whose diversity is internal to it.⁶⁰

Sentience and subject-of-a-life as markers of degree

Within this framework the three previously conflicting criteria admit reinterpretation. The *ḥikmah* tradition has long recognized the hierarchy of *jamād*, *nabāt*, *ḥayawān*, and *insān*, understood as four bands on a single continuous spectrum of existence rather than as four separate compartments. Each higher level encompasses (*iḥāṭah*) the lower and adds to it without negating it.

Sentience, which is Singer's criterion, does not appear arbitrarily. It is a phenomenon that manifests when an existent attains a certain intensity, namely the *ḥayawānī* level, at which the soul possesses the faculties of perception (*idrāk*) and volition (*irādah*). The *subject-*

⁵⁷ Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, trans. John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), 77-86.

⁵⁸ Al-Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār*, vol. 1, 36-37, 427-436; Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London: Routledge, 2009), 33-51.

⁵⁹ Al-Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār*, vol. 1, 36-37; Ibrahim Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 61-70.

⁶⁰ Christian Jambet, *The Act of Being: The Philosophy of Revelation in Mullā Ṣadrā*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 87-104.

of-a-life, which is Regan's criterion, is a phenomenon that appears when this intensity increases further, so that the soul possesses memory, anticipation, and a welfare experienced as its own. Membership in the biosphere, which is Naess's criterion, is another name for the spectrum.

The three are therefore three markers on one scale, read at three different heights, rather than three criteria competing for a single position. Singer reads the scale at the lower band and takes that band for the whole. Regan reads it at a higher band and draws his line there. Naess reads the entire scale without a rule, so that he can indicate the whole while remaining unable to indicate a direction. The integration of the three is accomplished by subsumption rather than by compromise. Each is correct in what it sees and mistaken in supposing that what it sees is the entire picture.

This framework is not anthropocentrism in disguise, and the point deserves emphasis. In anthropocentrism the superiority of the human being functions as a licence, so that everything beneath it exists to serve humanity. In gradational cosmocentrism a higher degree functions as a burden. Within the structure of *ihāṭah* a higher degree encompasses the lower and thus contains it, standing in no opposition to it. Human beings do not occupy the summit as proprietors. They occupy it as those who carry the heaviest burden. The more intense a being's existence, the wider the circle contained within it and the greater its responsibility. The same premise, namely the higher standing of the human being, yields a conclusion contrary to that of anthropocentrism, and it does so because the underlying ontology differs.

Ḥarakah jawhariyyah and the reconsideration of the tragedy of eating

The second doctrine required is *ḥarakah jawhariyyah*, substantial motion. Ṣadrā holds that motion occurs in substance itself and not in accidents alone, as the Peripatetics maintained. Every substance stands in a continuous renewal of existence, and the universe is an unceasing intensification of existence (*tashaddud al-wujūd*).⁶¹ From this doctrine Ṣadrā further concluded that the soul is corporeal in its origination and spiritual in its subsistence (*jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth rūḥāniyyat al-baqā'*), which is to say that the soul is not implanted in the body from without but emerges from matter through that intensification of existence.⁶²

The consequences of these two doctrines for food ethics are direct, and so far as the authors' investigation shows they have never been drawn. Eating is the concrete mechanism of that intensification. Minerals are assimilated into plants, plants into animal flesh, flesh into the human body, and the human body becomes the site from which the thinking and worshipping soul emerges. This sequence is not a metaphor. Within the framework of *jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth*, food literally becomes the matter through which the human soul ascends.

⁶¹ Al-Shirāzī, *al-Asfār*, vol. 3, 61-110; Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 94-113.

⁶² Al-Shirāzī, *al-Asfār*, vol. 8, 330-347; Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, 195-201; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sadr al-Din Shirazi and His Transcendent Theosophy*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997), 88-97.

What Coff calls the tragedy of eating, the killing that sustains living, is accordingly reinterpreted as *istiḥālah*, a transformation from a lower state to a higher one. What is eaten is elevated rather than annihilated. The irreversibility that Coff notes, and that within his framework is the source of the tragedy, becomes within the Sadrian framework a sign that the event is an ascent. Substantial motion cannot be reversed.

This interpretation yields a debt rather than a justification. The sacrifice of a lower degree of existence is valid only if the higher degree genuinely accomplishes its ascent. If a person eats an animal and nothing emerges from that body but greed, cruelty, and waste, then the ascent that furnished the reason for the sacrifice has not occurred. What has taken place is the taking of a form without the granting of an elevation, and that is *ẓulm* in its most literal sense, the placing of something where it does not belong. The question of food ethics accordingly shifts. It no longer asks whether human beings are permitted to eat animals. It asks whether human beings who eat animals genuinely ascend.

This shift has roots in the tradition. Al-Ghazālī regarded restraint in eating as a precondition for the pursuit of higher ends rather than as an end in itself, so that eating is judged by what follows from it.⁶³ The table manners set out in the *Iḥyāʾ* extend beyond outward etiquette and constitute a discipline binding the table to the spiritual elevation of those who eat at it.⁶⁴

Two Forgotten Precedents

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and the case of the animals

The claim that animal ethics originated in the 1970s, recorded by Erwin Lengauer in his study of Regan,⁶⁵ holds only for the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. In the tenth century the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ composed an epistle depicting a trial in which the animals' sued human beings before the King of the Jinn. The animals contested human claims to superiority and to the right of enslavement, and the human arguments were refuted one by one.⁶⁶

The way the trial ends is more striking than the existence of the text itself. Humanity ultimately prevails, though not on grounds of strength, utility, or intelligence, all of which the plaintiffs had refuted. Humanity prevails because among human beings there are those capable of returning to God, which is to say by virtue of an eschatological capacity for ascent to a higher plane.⁶⁷

⁶³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *On Disciplining the Soul and on Breaking the Two Desires: Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. T. J. Winter (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995), 105-135.

⁶⁴ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on the Manners Relating to Eating: Kitāb Ādāb al-Akl, Book XI of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2000).

⁶⁵ Erwin Lengauer, Tom Regan's Philosophy of Animal Rights: Subjects-of-a-Life in the Context of Discussions of Intrinsic and Inherent Worth, *Problemos* 97 (2020): 87-100.

⁶⁶ Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22*, ed. and trans. Lenn E. Goodman and Richard McGregor (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2009).

⁶⁷ Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *The Case of the Animals versus Man*, 313-320; see also Lenn E. Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 71-91.

The structure of this argument is identical with the one derived in the preceding section. Human superiority is a responsibility rather than a licence, and that responsibility takes the form of an actual accent. Eight centuries before *Animal Liberation*, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' had formulated a position that is neither anthropocentric nor egalitarian. Ian Netton situates the epistle within Muslim Neoplatonism, which regards the entire cosmos as a hierarchical order of emanations,⁶⁸ a framework already structurally developed long before Ṣadrā supplied its technical articulation.

A textual basis is available as well. Sarra Tlili argues that Qur'anic cosmology resists anthropocentric interpretation, since animals are described as communities like human communities (Q 6:38) and since all beings without exception glorify their Creator (Q 17:44).⁶⁹ The latter verse carries weight, because the glorification it mentions is not confined to living beings. At precisely the point where Singer and Regan exhaust their reasons for respecting earth, water, and air, the Islamic tradition still has reasons to offer.

Nasr and the critique of the desacralization of nature

The second precedent is nearer in time. In 1968, four years before Naess formulated the distinction between shallow and deep ecology, Seyyed Hossein Nasr had already argued that the environmental crisis is spiritual in character and cannot be resolved by technical means, since its roots lie in the desacralization of nature by modern civilization.⁷⁰ Nasr subsequently extended the thesis by showing that the order of nature can be respected only when it is understood as a sign rather than as a thing.⁷¹

Naess's distinction between shallow and deep ecology is, on the reading advanced here, a secular version of Nasr's thesis. Both assert that what must change is our outlook and not our instruments. The difference lies in what follows. Nasr has a transcendent source of value, and respect for nature therefore has a ground. Naess, working with a Spinozist substance that is immanent and univocal, lacks such a source, and the respect he demands can be grounded only in psychological identification and an expanded experience of self. Emina's objection concerning the abstractness of deep ecology arises from this and from nothing else,⁷² as does Fox's objection concerning the absence of ranking criteria. Deep ecology is not excessively metaphysical. It is insufficiently metaphysical, and that deficiency appears as abstraction.

A Gradational Cosmocentric Model of Food Ethics

Based on the foregoing discussion, the cosmocentric model of food ethics may be reformulated as an ethics of ontological accountability governed by five axioms.

⁶⁸ Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 32-51.

⁶⁹ Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an*, 88-118, 169-208.

⁷⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), 17-50.

⁷¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3-30, 235-269.

⁷² Emina, *Cosmocentric and Deep Ecology Movement*, 1-19.

The first axiom, the universality of value. Every entity possesses existence and therefore possesses intrinsic value. No entity has zero value, land, water, and air included. This axiom fulfils Naess's cosmocentric claim ontologically, and it does so precisely at a point beyond the reach of Singer and Regan alike.

The second axiom, the gradation of value. Reality is graded, and intrinsic value is therefore graded. This axiom dissolves the impasse raised by Callicott and Sagoff. The conflict between individual rights and ecosystemic integrity ceases to be a conflict between two incompatible systems of value and becomes a question of locating both on a single scale.

The third axiom, obligation is proportionate to the degree of the bearer. The extent of moral responsibility is determined by the degree of existence of the agent, and not by the degree of the object acted upon. This axiom forecloses an anthropocentric reading of the second axiom. The higher standing of the human being confers no right to take. It imposes an obligation to bear.

The fourth axiom, eating as conditional istiḥālah. Eating elevates a being from a lower degree to a higher one. The sacrifice is valid only to the extent that the higher degree genuinely accomplishes that elevation. This axiom shifts the burden of proof from the one eaten to the one eating.

The fifth axiom, exploitation is taking without elevation. Any appropriation of material form unaccompanied by elevation is *ẓulm*. Cruel industrial husbandry, excessive consumption that ends as waste, and the destruction of land for short-term gain all fall under this heading, and all three are prohibited by one principle rather than by three.

The relation between this model and its three sources may be summarized as follows. Singer contributes a sensitivity to suffering, preserved here as attention to the *ḥayawānī* degree, without reliance on a calculus that permits anything whatever to be sacrificed so long as the balance is favourable. Regan contributes a firm commitment to rights, preserved here as recognition of the intensity of existence in sentient beings, without the drawing of a threshold that consigns everything beneath it to worthlessness. Naess contributes breadth of scope, preserved here in full, without the uniformity that renders decision impossible. What is set aside in each case is the claim to represent the whole.

Normative Implications

Emina's objection that cosmocentrism resists application holds only for cosmocentrism that lacks a normative layer. The Islamic tradition possesses such a layer, and it can be derived directly from the five axioms set out above.

The principle of *mīzān* (Q 55:7-9) states that balance has been established in the natural order and that human beings are forbidden to disturb it. This principle is the Qur'anic formulation of the second and third axioms, namely that the natural order is hierarchical and that human beings are entrusted with its preservation. The principle of *isrāf* (Q 7:31) prohibits excess in eating and drinking. Read through the fourth axiom, that prohibition forbids consuming more than one can bear, and its force exceeds that of a recommendation of health.

Naess's call for simplicity of life finds its normative formulation here, together with its theological sanction.

The principles of *ḥalāl* and *ṭayyib* (Q 2:168) yield a food ethics with two axes. The *ḥalāl* axis concerns legality, while the *ṭayyib* axis concerns goodness, and that goodness cannot be reduced to nutritional quality. Within the framework of the fifth axiom, meat produced on farms that inflict cruelty and degrade the land satisfies the first axis and fails the second. This reading restores to *ṭayyib* the ethical weight that practices in the modern food industry have reduced to a matter of certification.⁷³

At the institutional level, *fiqh* has long recognized *ḥimā* and *ḥarām*, protected zones exempt from exploitation, which Othman Llewellyn identifies as operational instruments of Islamic environmental law.⁷⁴ 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām went so far as to define the claims of livestock upon their owners as legal obligations rather than as voluntary acts of kindness.⁷⁵

At the level of policy, contemporary discourse on the *maqāṣid* has proposed *ḥifẓ al-bī'ah*, the preservation of the environment, as an objective of the Sharia, a proposal developed by Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī⁷⁶ and situated by Jasser Auda within the framework of an open and interconnected system.⁷⁷ Anna Gade observes that in Indonesia such mechanisms have been implemented effectively, through environmental fatwas among other means, so that the difficulty lies in the absence of a unifying framework rather than in the absence of instruments.⁷⁸

Tashkīk al-wujūd supplies that framework. Without it, *mīzān*, *isrāf*, *ṭayyib*, and *ḥimā* remain a collection of norms in mere coexistence. With it, all four become derivations from a single principle, namely that whatever exists has value because it exists, holds differing degrees of value because it holds differing degrees of existence, and demands accountability from whoever takes it up during an ascent.

4. Conclusion

This study began from a suspicion, namely that the cosmocentric models of food ethics commonly constructed out of Naess, Singer, and Regan constitute juxtaposition rather than integration. The suspicion has been confirmed. The three thinkers employ criteria of moral considerability that are logically mutually exclusive, and the resulting impasse is

⁷³ Cf. Febe Armanios and Boğaç Ergene, *Halal Food: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 143-175.

⁷⁴ Othman Abd-ar-Rahman Llewellyn, The Basis for a Discipline of Islamic Environmental Law, in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 185-247.

⁷⁵ 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *Qawā'id al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), vol. 1, 167-168; see also Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition*, 25-40.

⁷⁶ Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Ri'āyat al-Bī'ah fī Sharī'at al-Islām* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2001), 39-72.

⁷⁷ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 189-247.

⁷⁸ Anna M. Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 97-134.

epistemological and ontological in character, which places it beyond resolution by compromise at the level of normative ethics. The following conclusions may be drawn.

Anthropocentric food ethics is inadequate, and its inadequacy cannot be repaired by widening the scope of moral consideration. Widening without an ontological foundation merely displaces the problem, since every widening requires a criterion and every criterion draws a new and arbitrary line.

Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine of *tashkīk al-wujūd* satisfies two conditions that no ontology hitherto employed in environmental ethics has satisfied simultaneously, namely the universality of intrinsic value and the gradation of intrinsic value. The principle that what differentiates one entity from another is identical with what unites them allows both to issue from a single source.

Singer's sentence and Regan's *subject-of-a-life* are markers of degree on the same scale of being, and they do not compete with Naess's holism. The three are integrated by subsumption rather than by compromise.

The elevated standing of the human being, within the framework of *iḥāṭah*, is a burden and not a licence. Gradational cosmocentrism is therefore not anthropocentrism in disguise, although both proceed from the same premise concerning human standing.

Through *ḥarakah jawhariyyah*, Coff's tragedy of eating is interpreted as *istiḥālah*, the elevation of existence. That interpretation yields a demand rather than a justification, and the central question of food ethics shifts from the permissibility of eating to accountability for the elevation that furnishes the rationale for sacrifice.

Islamic cosmocentrism is not a new idea. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' had articulated a non-anthropocentric position that did not reduce everything to the human as early as the tenth century, and Nasr had formulated a critique of the desacralization of nature four years before Naess distinguished shallow from deep ecology. What is new is the intersection of that tradition with food ethics.

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