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The Theoretical and Aesthetical Representations of Islamic Environmental Ethics (with a Focus on Iranian Academicians and Cinematography)

Today, the environment has become one of the most significant problems in almost all theoretical fields, especially in ethics. Within the realm of ethics, debates have formed in two major sub-fields: ecocentric and anthropocentric ethics. These two branches of ethics explore the relationship between the environment and religion.

Recently, the debate was enflamed by the publication of Lynn White's article "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis." In his article, White contemplates the causal link between the destruction of the environment and theological views and asserts that our current environmental crisis was essentially caused by the Judeo-Christian view of the environment.

This argument provoked criticism that can be divided into three main groups: 1) those coming from the Judeo-Christian tradition that believe that White's understanding of the topic is prejudiced and that he neglects exhortations and commands in Christianity and Judaism that demand the protection of nature, 2) opponents who try to depict Islam as an exception among the religions; these critics have attempted to provide an alternative to White's theory by emphasizing and highlighting the environment-friendly commands of Islam, 3) those traditionalists who believe in perennial wisdom and assert that the solution to this modern crisis is to copy the spiritual core of religion in general.

All three groups of opponents agree that the proper human interaction with nature and the solution to the crisis is to return to religious and spiritual foundations. Muslim scholars have had an active role in the development of this kind of religious foundation to an environmental ethics. Beyond the reactions to White's paper during the last 50 years, numerous scholars throughout the Islamic world have attempted to present a coherent Islamic approach under the title of Islamic Environmental Ethics.

Since there are different formats of environmental ethics within the Islamic world, I have restricted myself to study Iran: a region in the Islamic world with a remarkable position in Islamic cultural history. In my dissertation, I will analyze two aspects of cultural representations of Islamic environmental ethics: theoretical and aesthetical. I will specifically focus on the cinematic representations, since Iranian cinema has a rich capacity to be studied with regards to almost all cultural topics, and many academic and scholarly books and papers have been published on this subject over the last fifty years.