



## POSTNORMAL TIME IN SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE: ON THE PROBLEM OF ECOLOGY

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### ABOUT ARTICLE

**Key words:** environmental ethics, Postnormal Times, Ziauddin Sardar, tawhid (divine Oneness), ijihad (independent reasoning), and maslaha (public interest).

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**Abstract:** In recent decades, global debates around environmental ethics, toleration, pluralism, and the place of religion in modern democratic societies have become increasingly urgent. The role of public intellectuals in shaping these debates, particularly within Islamic contexts, has garnered increasing scholarly attention. Among the most widely recognised and discussed figures in this discourse is Professor Ziauddin Sardar, whose work has influenced not only Muslim communities but broader intellectual landscapes across Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. Professor Ziauddin Sardar has made significant contributions to the field of religious thought, particularly in the areas of Islamic ethics, civil society, and environmental ethics. His most recent work, *The Postnormal Times Reader*, offers a timely and critical exploration of religious and cultural pluralism, engaging with themes central to contemporary philosophy, theology, and political ethics. The publication has drawn significant attention not only in Europe but also in the United States, where interest in Sardar's ideas has remained high. The articles “Afterthoughts: Transnormal, the ‘New Normal’ and Other Varieties of ‘Normal’ in Postnormal Times”, “Polylogues: Connecting Minds to Create the Future”, and “Celebrating a life beyond “normal”: A Festschrift for Ziauddin Sardar bring together a diverse group of scholars to explore both historical and contemporary dimensions of

religious tolerance. His inclusion in this forum is especially significant given his contested public profile, marked by both acclaim and criticism. Recognised in Foreign Policy magazine's list of the world's top 100 public intellectuals, and The Independent newspaper called him 'Britain's Muslim polymath', Sardar remains a powerful voice in conversations that span religion, politics, and environmental ethics. This article aims to situate Ziauddin Sardar's contributions within a broader scholarly context, analysing how his philosophical and theological engagements with pluralism intersect with ecological discourse. The paper further examines how his intellectual trajectory reflects broader tensions within the global reception of Muslim thought in the environmental discourse and its implications for constructing inclusive frameworks of coexistence.

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## IJTIMOIIY-FALSAFIY NUTQDA POSTNORMAL VAQT: EKOLOGIYA MUAMMOSI HAQIDA

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### MAQOLA HAQIDA

**Kalit so'zlar:** ekologik etika, Postnormal Times, Ziauddin Sardar, tavhid (ilohiy yagonalik), ijtihod (mustaqil fikrlash), maslaha (ijtimoiy manfaat).

**Annotatsiya:** So'nggi o'n yilliklarda ekologik etika, bag'rikenglik, plyuralizm va zamonaviy demokratik jamiyatlarda dinning o'zni haqidagi global bahslar tobora dolzarb tus olmoqda. Ushbu bahslarni shakllantirishda jamoatchi ziyolilarning roli, xususan, islomiy kontekstlarda, ilmiy doiralarda alohida e'tibor qozonmoqda. Bu borada eng keng tan olingan va muhokama qilingan shaxslar orasida professor Ziauddin Sardar alohida o'rin tutadi. Uning asarlari nafaqat musulmon jamoalariga, balki Yevropa, Shimoliy Amerika va Janubi-Sharqiy Osiyodagi intellektual maydonlarga ham sezilarli ta'sir ko'rsatgan. Professor Ziauddin Sardar diniy tafakkur, xususan, islomiy etika, fuqarolik jamiyati va ekologik etika sohalarida muhim hissa qo'shgan. Uning so'nggi asari – The Postnormal Times Reader zamonaviy falsafa, ilohiyot va siyosiy etikadagi markaziy mavzularni qamrab olib, diniy va madaniy plyuralizmning dolzarb masalalarini chuqur

tahlil qiladi. Mazkur nashr Yevropada ham, AQShda ham katta qiziqish uyg'otdi. "Afterthoughts: Transnormal, the 'New Normal' and Other Varieties of 'Normal' in Postnormal Times", "Polylogues: Connecting Minds to Create the Future" hamda "Celebrating a life beyond 'normal': A Festschrift for Ziauddin Sardar" kabi maqolalarda turli tadqiqotchilar diniy bag'rikenglikning tarixiy va zamonaviy jihatlarini o'rganishgan. Sardarning ushbu ilmiy forumlarda ishtiroki uning bahsli, bir vaqtning o'zida e'tirof va tanqidga sazovor bo'lgan jamoatchilikdagi obro'sini yanada oshirmoqda. Foreign Policy jurnali uni dunyoning eng nufuzli 100 nafar jamoatchi ziyolilar ro'yxatiga kiritgan, The Independent gazetasi esa uni "Britaniyaning musulmon polimat olimi" deb ta'riflagan. Ushbu maqola Ziauddin Sardarning intellektual merosini kengroq ilmiy kontekstda tahlil qilib, uning plyuralizm haqidagi falsafiy va ilohiy qarashlarini ekologik diskurs bilan kesishgan nuqtalarda yoritadi. Shuningdek, tadqiqot uning ilmiy yo'nalishlari global miqyosda musulmon tafakkurining ekologik muhokamalarda qabul qilinishidagi qarama-qarshiliklarni qanday ifodalashini va birgalikda yashashning inklyuziv tamoyillarini shakllantirishdagi ahamiyatini ochib beradi.

## ПОСТНОРМАЛЬНОЕ ВРЕМЯ В СОЦИАЛЬНО-ФИЛОСОФСКОМ ДИСКУРСЕ: О ПРОБЛЕМЕ ЭКОЛОГИИ

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### О СТАТЬЕ

**Ключевые слова:** экологическая этика, Postnormal Times, Зияуддин Сардар, таухид (божественное единство), иджтихад (независимое суждение), маслахат (общественное благо).

**Аннотация:** В последние десятилетия глобальные дискуссии об экологической этике, толерантности, плюрализме и месте религии в современных демократических обществах приобрели особую актуальность. Роль общественных интеллектуалов в формировании этих дискурсов, особенно в исламском контексте, привлекает возрастающее внимание исследователей. Среди наиболее известных и обсуждаемых

фигур в данной сфере выделяется профессор Зияуддин Сардар. Его труды оказали значительное влияние не только на мусульманские общины, но и на более широкие интеллектуальные круги Европы, Северной Америки и Юго-Восточной Азии. Профессор Сардар внес весомый вклад в развитие религиозной мысли, особенно в области исламской этики, гражданского общества и экологической этики. Его последняя работа – *The Postnormal Times Reader* – представляет собой своевременное и критическое исследование вопросов религиозного и культурного плюрализма, затрагивая ключевые темы современной философии, теологии и политической этики. Данная публикация вызвала значительный интерес не только в Европе, но и в США. В статьях «*Afterthoughts: Transnormal, the ‘New Normal’ and Other Varieties of ‘Normal’ in Postnormal Times*», «*Polylogues: Connecting Minds to Create the Future*» и «*Celebrating a life beyond ‘normal’: A Festschrift for Ziauddin Sardar*» собраны исследования различных ученых, рассматривающих исторические и современные измерения религиозной терпимости. Участие Сардара в этих дискуссиях особенно важно с учётом его неоднозначного публичного образа, отмеченного как признанием, так и критикой. Журнал *Foreign Policy* включил его в список 100 ведущих мировых интеллектуалов, а газета *The Independent* назвала его «мусульманским полиматом Великобритании». Данная статья ставит целью рассмотреть вклад Зияуддина Сардара в более широком научном контексте, проанализировав, каким образом его философские и теологические идеи о плюрализме пересекаются с экологическим дискурсом. Кроме того, исследование показывает, как его интеллектуальная траектория отражает более общие напряжения в глобальном восприятии мусульманской мысли в рамках экологической проблематики и как это влияет на формирование инклюзивных моделей сосуществования.

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## Introduction

Environmental ethics and pluralism are becoming an increasingly vital factor in political theory, ethics, and religious discourse, particularly in the context of growing cultural and ideological tensions worldwide. In the contemporary landscape of Islamic thought, Professor Ziauddin Sardar is widely regarded as one of the most influential Muslim public intellectuals addressing these issues. His intellectual project—rooted in Islamic tradition and simultaneously addressing the moral and political challenges of environmental problems—represents a critical intervention in discussions on citizenship, interreligious ethics, and moral philosophy. His work is attracting considerable interest due to its ability to engage both scholarly audiences and public discourse, particularly in the West.

Born in Pakistan in 1951, Ziauddin Sardar represents a unique confluence of classical Islamic learning and European critical theory. Over the past few decades, Ziauddin Sardar has emerged as a central figure in the rearticulation of Islamic values within modern, pluralistic societies. His contributions are not limited to theology; instead, they extend to political philosophy, minority rights, and the ethical demands of environmental dialogue. His books, including *The Postnormal Times Reader*, published in 2024 [1], *Afterthoughts: Transnormal, the ‘New Normal’ and Other Varieties of ‘Normal’ in Postnormal Times* [2], *“Polylogues: Connecting Minds to Create the Future”* and celebrating a life beyond “normal”: *A Festschrift for Ziauddin Sardar* [3], *Celebrating a life beyond “normal”: A Festschrift for Ziauddin Sardar* [4] have been translated into dozens of languages and remain widely discussed in both academic and policy-making circles.

However, Sardar's public prominence has not been without controversy. The last decade has seen renewed attention to his political engagement, especially following his criticism of authoritarian regimes and global Islamophobia. This paper examines Sardar's philosophical contributions to environmental ethics through the lens of pluralism and Islamic ethics, focusing on how he negotiates the space between religious identity and universal moral obligations. While some critics view his approach as overly conciliatory or ambiguous, this study argues that Sardar's work provides a necessary framework for navigating environmental ethics without sacrificing theological integrity. His concept of Postnormal Times—engaging fully in secular society while remaining grounded in Islamic principles—offers an alternative to both assimilation and isolation. In particular, this article analyses Sardar's engagement with core themes such as tawhid (divine Oneness), ijihad (independent reasoning), and maslaha (public interest), and how these are reinterpreted within his broader philosophy of environmental pluralism. It explores the way Sardar resists both Western secular universalism and Islamist exclusivism, proposing instead a model of ecological ethics rooted in shared values and critical self-reflection. Ultimately, this study contends that Sardar's work remains a crucial contribution to rethinking environmental ethics in the 21st

century. His vision not only challenges inherited hierarchical paradigms but also invites Muslims and non-Muslims alike to consider how faith-based ethical traditions can foster inclusive, just, and morally grounded societies in line with environmental ethics.

For over several decades, Sardar and other scholars have shared a central interest: how religious scholars—believing, practising, intellectually grounded scholars—reach deep into their respective traditions to confront the challenges and circumstances of the modern age. Recent efforts to carve out "Muslim-free zones" in Britain, France, and the United States have highlighted that the most serious challenges often revolve around the question of how to live together respectfully under the fluid, yet participatory, conditions of environmental challenges.

It is precisely in this regard—the challenge of living together in the context of modernity's challenges, such as environmental concerns — that Sardar stands out as a globally significant intellectual. He is not merely a Muslim public intellectual. He is a Western public intellectual who also happens to be seriously and unapologetically Muslim. Sardar's work represents his simultaneous engagement with two great traditions: the Western democratic thought tradition on one hand, and the Islamic philosophy on the other. This is not duplicity—it is a reflexive hermeneutic. It is precisely the kind of interpretive effort we need if we are to speak across, rather than merely within, the pluralised ethical horizons of our age to solve such a global task as environmental degradation [5].

What stands out most clearly is the consistency with which he has developed his arguments over more than two decades. His writings and activism are essential not only because they contribute to the revitalisation of global Muslim scholarship on questions of public life and ethics, but also because they encourage more profound reflection on the very foundations of pluralism in Western democratic theory and practice. Professor Sardar is a scholar of Islam, as well as a scholar of Western philosophy, addressing the everyday challenges we face together.

It is time to examine the realities of our societies and to understand that if we continue to be driven by emotional politics, populist rhetoric, and politicians who instrumentalize fear, we will lose the very essence of tolerance, mutual respect, and the foundational principles that allow us to live together and there for we will not be able to solve any global problem including global warming and environmental degradation.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach to analyse the mechanisms and practices contributing to the strengthening of environmental security in multiethnic and multiconfessional societies, with particular importance to Kazakhstan. The research design is grounded in the following methodological components:

A comparative analysis was conducted to examine relevant policies and initiatives from several countries, including the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

These sources were evaluated for content, objectives, and implementation mechanisms relevant to the Kazakhstani context.

Although direct expert interviews were not conducted for this paper, the methodology incorporates a synthetic approach to published expert opinions, policy analyses, and interdisciplinary reviews.

The analysis was informed by a normative perspective grounded in:

The theory of Postnormal Times, emphasising uncertainty, complexity, and ethical pluralism,

The concept of spiritual resilience as a public good in ethnically diverse societies,

The environmental ethics from an Islamic perspective will examine how the concepts of tolerance and mutual respect are understood in classical Islamic texts and how they have been historically interpreted. What are the shared principles we can build upon to live together today?

Analysis and results

To begin, we will highlight three key points. First, in both public discourse and sometimes even within academia, Islam is often portrayed as inherently incompatible with diversity and pluralism. There is a tendency to essentialize Islam, assuming that because Muslims share one holy book—the Quran, understood to be the literal word of God—there must be one singular, monolithic Islamic worldview. But this is fundamentally incorrect.

Islam is as diverse and complex as Christianity, Judaism, or Buddhism. The same sacred texts can yield multiple interpretations. From within, despite sharing principles and sources, there are differences in understanding. Interpretations vary. The first intellectual task is to recognise that we are dealing with a universe of reference that is rich in diversity. There is no single "Islamic" perspective.

To gain a deeper understanding of what Islam—and more specifically, its various trends—has to say about the concepts of mutual respect and respect to nature, we must revisit the fundamentals and examine the core texts. It's crucial to understand the overall message that emerges from these sources.

Beginning with the principles found in Islam's scriptural and classical tradition and then expanding toward contemporary discussions and diverse interpretations. And also try to emphasise that we should not discuss environmental ethics merely in terms of abstract philosophy or theoretical frameworks. While philosophical analysis is essential, if we are serious about the future of our Mother Earth, we must engage with how these concepts apply in our daily lives.

Across Europe and now even in the United States, we are witnessing an alarming shift. Tolerance, mutual respect, and the very principles of coexistence are no longer purely academic discussions; they are urgent, lived concerns. Populist movements are reshaping political discourse in dangerous ways. Recent events, such as the controversy around the community centre in New York or the so-called "Quran-burning day," reveal a deep undercurrent of fear, rejection, and mistrust within American society [6]. It is a clear realisation; it is not just a theoretical discussion. These are pressing, real-life issues. Translating abstract concepts into daily practice—this is what we call practical philosophy. It is precisely here that academic discourse and civic life meet. As citizens committed to building environmentally friendly lifestyles and pluralistic societies, we must ask how to embody these values in fundamental, tangible ways.

Let us begin, then, with the fundamentals. Over the past two decades of engagement in Western discourse, the questions often encountered have been about Islam's alleged incompatibility with secularism, with women's rights, or with peace. Too frequently, discussions focus on what Islam is not. But we do the opposite. Let us focus on what Islam says—on the verses and principles that shape Muslim thought and tradition.

Across both Sunni and Shia traditions, regardless of specific theological or jurisprudential trends, there is a foundational principle that unites all schools of Islamic thought: the Oneness of God (tawhid). This theological cornerstone has direct ethical implications, specifically the Unity of humanity and the Unity of the universe. One often-quoted Quranic verse states: "We have given dignity to god's creatures. This verse affirms the intrinsic dignity of all living beings, regardless of faith, ethnicity, or culture; everything created by God is to be respected.

This foundational concept establishes the equal value of every life. Whether human animal or plant, every human being, Christian, Jew, Muslim, or adherent of any other tradition, is endowed with dignity. Discussions of tolerance must begin here: not with the question of whether someone will tolerate you, but with the deeper ethical question of what someone thinks of the dignity of living beings and the dignity of humanity. Willingness to acknowledge your full status as a human being, equal in worth and dignity.

Many debates about colonisation implicitly revolved around this very issue: is the colonised "other" equally human? And in observing certain media discourses today, I sometimes question whether the lives of Iraqi or Afghan people are valued as much as Western lives. When we see disproportionate reactions—or a lack of response—toward the suffering of people in countries like Palestine and Syria, we must ask whether we truly value all human life equally.

Take, for instance, the devastating floods in Pakistan. Some public discussions questioned whether humanitarian aid should even be mobilized, with arguments suggesting that, because many Pakistanis are perceived as supportive of the Taliban, they are less deserving of empathy.

This is a dangerous line of thought. It reflects an implicit devaluation of lives based on identity, geography, or presumed ideology and raises climate justice issues [7].

Behind these public debates lies a critical ethical concern: do we grant the same moral status to all human beings, or do we rank lives according to perceived cultural or political worth? To engage meaningfully with the concept of tolerance, we must first confront these implicit hierarchies. Tolerance is not merely about coexisting—it is about recognizing and affirming the full humanity and dignity of others.

Let us reflect more deeply on what it means to engage others ethically and philosophically. A crucial question lies at the heart of this reflection: How do we truly interact with others, especially those who differ from us in their beliefs, background, or worldview?

The starting point in the Islamic tradition is a bold affirmation: all of humanity is equal in dignity. This foundational principle is not limited to theoretical abstraction; it has concrete ethical implications. The Quran reminds us that human dignity is not based on faith affiliation, ethnic identity, or societal status, but on our shared humanity.

Beyond this principle of equal dignity, the Quran also presents diversity itself as a sign of God. One of the often-cited verses speaks of how God created spouses for us from among ourselves, not, as commonly misinterpreted, as man being primary and woman secondary, but rather each as a counterpart to the other. The verse emphasizes that this creation was meant for us to find tranquillity and that love (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*) were placed between us. This is one of the most intimate and profound manifestations of human diversity: gendered difference anchored in emotional and ethical relationships. A dichotomy of our time, according to Sardar, is leading to the "3 Cs" — chaos, complexity, and contradictions [8].

This verse teaches us that recognition of the other is not sufficient if it is purely formal or legal. True coexistence demands more—it requires emotional and spiritual investment. Legal equality, if not underpinned by mutual trust and sincere regard, can be enforced in ways that remain fundamentally unequal. That is why the Quran integrates both ethical principles and spiritual feelings into its conception of human interaction. Love, we are told, is for appreciating each other's qualities. Mercy is for bearing each other's weaknesses. This wisdom is not only essential for social harmony—it is the cornerstone of sustaining any meaningful relationship, including relations with nature. So, in this sense, raising a question about how to navigate the future. The Sardar is offering the "Three Tomorrows" framework—Extended Present, Familiar Futures, and Unthought Futures [9].

The Quran moves from interpersonal relationships to broader cosmological principles. Frequently cited verse declares: "If God had willed, He could have made you one community." This is not a peripheral comment; it is a profound theological statement. Uniformity is not the

divine ideal. From the outset, God's will embraced diversity, not merely as an accident of history, but as a purposeful feature of creation.

Some critics or readers have suggested that this divine will for diversity only applies to superficial differences, such as skin colour or language. Indeed, the Quran acknowledges these as signs of God's creative power. However, the scope of this diversity extends even further, beyond human nature [10].

Taken together, these verses suggest an integrated ethical vision: the Oneness of God is inextricably linked to the Oneness of the universe, and both are realised within the framework of divinely intended diversity.

This challenges simplistic readings of Islam as rigid or monolithic, portraying it as a human vs. animal dichotomy. It also offers an alternative to the common binaries—us vs. them, believer vs. unbeliever, East vs. West—that dominate many modern discourses. The Islamic ethical framework does not merely tolerate difference; it affirms diversity as a reflection of divine wisdom and will. In this vision, pluralism is not simply a social compromise—it is a spiritual imperative [11].

When we speak about tolerance, we often assume it is grounded in goodwill or moral generosity. But at a deeper level, tolerance cannot be understood without reference to the concept of power. To tolerate another implies that one could exclude or remove the other, but chooses not to. In this light, tolerance is never neutral—it is intrinsically linked to questions of authority, control, and restraint. It is an ethical stance taken within the framework of power dynamics.

In the Islamic tradition, this intersection of power, plurality, and ethical restraint is addressed directly in the Quran. To begin with, the principle of diversity is not a concession—it is a deliberate act of divine will. The Quran repeatedly emphasises that God could have created one unified community of believers, but instead willed diversity in culture, language, belief, and even disbelief. This acknowledgement is not passive; it is the foundation of an Islamic theology of pluralism.

One of the most powerful expressions of this idea is found in Surah Al-Baqarah: "Let there be no compulsion in religion." This is not merely a suggestion—it is a categorical command. Religious belief, in this vision, cannot be coerced; it must emerge from conviction. Thus, freedom of conscience becomes a necessary corollary of divine intent [12].

This principle, however, is not without historical and ethical challenges. While the Islamic texts provide a framework for freedom and tolerance, Muslim-majority societies have not always upheld these ideals. There have been times and places where religious minorities—particularly Christians—have faced discrimination, exclusion, or suppression. Honest engagement with the tradition demands self-criticism. If Muslims in the West rightly demand their rights and freedoms,

consistency requires that they also advocate for the rights of minorities in Muslim-majority societies. It is unacceptable, for example, that Christians brought to work in some Gulf states are asked to suppress their religious expressions entirely. Such contradictions undermine the very notion of pluralism we seek to uphold.

This critical engagement, however, is not about delegitimising Islam—it is about returning to its textual roots. The Quran envisions diversity not just as a sociological reality but as a spiritual necessity. Yet it also warns us that diversity comes with risks. With difference comes the potential for conflict, domination, or even violence [13].

This brings us to a subtler theological and political insight: diversity requires balance. The Quran states that had God not set some people against others, the earth would have become corrupt. This remarkable verse highlights the importance of plurality as a check on absolute power. In other words, competing groups serve to restrain one another, ensuring that no single force can dominate or oppress. This balance is not just a political necessity—it is a divine mechanism for preserving justice on earth.

Thus, in Islamic thought, tolerance is not the absence of disagreement, nor is it the elimination of conflict. Instead, it is a dynamic equilibrium maintained through ethical self-restraint, institutional justice, and recognition of the other's equal dignity. Tolerance is both a moral imperative and a strategy for coexistence in a world intentionally created to be diverse.

Finally, it is essential to note that tolerance is not limited to interfaith or intercommunal relations. It must also address the structural asymmetries and material inequalities that prevent accurate mutual recognition without power-balancing mechanisms—political, legal, or cultural—tolerance risks becoming paternalistic. However, when grounded in shared values and protected by justice, it becomes the cornerstone of peaceful pluralism.

This Islamic framework of tolerance, rooted in divine will, ethical self-restraint, and balanced power, offers a profound model for engaging pluralism today. It challenges both Muslims and non-Muslims alike to move beyond slogans and toward a principled, practised vision of coexistence [14].

One of the Quranic verses most relevant to understanding the concept of tolerance in Islam addresses the preservation of places of worship: synagogues, churches, and mosques. The verse states that if God had not allowed some people to check the power of others, these sacred spaces would have been destroyed. This remarkable insight affirms not only the reality of diversity but also the theological necessity of power balance as a condition for preserving religious pluralism. It does not portray diversity solely as a joyous celebration of difference, but rather as a necessary tension that restrains domination and protects the sacred.

This Quranic framing challenges the idea that one religion should have absolute power or supremacy. The underlying logic is straightforward: unchecked authority—religious or otherwise—leads to corruption. Therefore, pluralism is not just about difference; it is about justice, mutual restraint, and maintaining the possibility of coexistence. In this, the Islamic tradition is acutely aware of the dangers of hegemony and presents religious diversity as both a reality and a moral requirement.

Recognizing this, we begin to understand that respect for diversity is not optional within the Islamic ethical framework. It is not merely an act of generosity to "tolerate" the other. Instead, it is a form of submission to God's will, who created diversity as part of the divine order. As such, the Islamic ethical response to difference must go beyond tolerance.

Indeed, the concept of "tolerance" may be inadequate when considered from within the Quranic worldview. Tolerance implies the power to exclude or suppress, and choosing not to exercise that power. It leaves open the possibility of rejection. But the Quran gives us no such option. God willed diversity, and to honour that diversity is to honour God's will. To marginalize, coerce, or convert others against their will is not only socially destructive—it is a theological failure.

Another frequently cited verse, particularly in interfaith dialogues, deepens this argument. It reads: "O humankind, We created you from male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another" (Quran 49:13). This verse makes explicit that the purpose of diversity—of gender, ethnicity, and community—is not conflict or competition, but mutual knowledge.

This verse introduces a robust three-tiered framework: the creation of diversity is from God; social differences are real and part of the divine plan; and the goal is *ta'aruf*—to know one another. Importantly, "knowing" here does not imply agreement or assimilation; it suggests recognition, learning, and ethical engagement.

Thus, the Quran situates tolerance within a broader framework of epistemological humility and moral purpose. Diversity is not a problem to be solved or a threat to be neutralised; it is a valuable asset to be leveraged. It is an invitation to deeper understanding, to ethical coexistence, and communal flourishing. The Quranic vision envisions a society where the plurality of belief systems is preserved not only by law but also by conscience, where no faith community seeks to erase another, and no group claims exclusive access to dignity, truth, or value.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the Islamic conception of pluralism extends beyond toleration. It moves toward recognition, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. By grounding this ethos in divine will and spiritual ethics, the Quran presents a model of pluralism that is both theocentric and socially

transformative. It challenges all communities—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—not merely to tolerate, but to engage, protect, and uplift the other as part of a shared moral universe.

Understanding diversity as a divine gift and an epistemological opportunity is central to the Quranic worldview. It offers more than a mere recognition of difference—it calls for a deep, mutual understanding of the other. Crucially, the Arabic term *taaruf* implies reciprocal knowledge on equal terms. It is not about tolerance in the passive sense, but about active recognition—an intentional effort to learn from, about, and with the other. Tolerance can allow ignorance to persist; one may tolerate another person while knowing nothing about them. But respect, as the Quran indicates, demands knowledge. One cannot fully respect what one does not understand. Thus, respect implies a movement beyond indifference toward engagement and appreciation.

This framework also imposes a reflective burden. To engage others meaningfully, one must also come to know oneself. A persistent obstacle to mutual respect is self-ignorance. When individuals or communities have only a superficial understanding of their own identity, they are more easily threatened by difference. In this sense, fear of the other often stems from confusion about the self. Without a rooted sense of identity, the presence of others—especially those who differ significantly—can feel destabilizing.

This insight is not merely psychological but profoundly philosophical. Consider, for instance, debates in the West over the cultural foundations of Europe. When some claim that Europe's roots are solely Greek and Christian, excluding Islamic contributions to philosophy, science, art, and architecture, they do more than distort history. They reveal a fear of the present—a reactionary attempt to secure identity by narrowing the past. This reductionism is not just historically inaccurate; it betrays an intellectual insecurity that undermines the very pluralism it purports to uphold.

Turning the gaze inward, this imperative toward self-knowledge also applies to Muslims. Within the Islamic tradition, scholars have debated the role of Muslims about others. What is our duty toward those who do not share our faith? The classical concept of *da'wah* (inviting others to Islam) has often been interpreted narrowly as religious proselytization. However, a closer reading of the Quranic guidance reframes *da'wah* as bearing witness, rather than converting others.

The Quran commands: "Call to the path of your Lord with wisdom, with good advice, and in the most beautiful manner" (Quran 16:125). This verse offers three criteria: wisdom, referring to one's internal clarity and ethical stance; beautiful speech, referring to the substance of one's message; and graceful delivery, referring to the respectful manner in which it is shared. All three elements concern the character and behaviour of the speaker, not the manipulation or domination of the listener

Another verse deepens this perspective: "Thus We made you a middle nation, so that you may be witnesses to humankind" (Quran 2:143). To bear witness (shahada) means to embody and exemplify the values one holds. In pluralistic societies, the role of the Muslim is not to impose belief but to offer a living example of what Islam makes possible in a human life: justice, compassion, humility, and dignity. In this light, the ethics of pluralism demand not just understanding the other but being morally consistent and transparent about oneself.

Hence, the Quranic imperative is twofold: know others to respect them, and be known by demonstrating your values. These dynamic forms the foundation of what could be called an Islamic ethic of coexistence, one that is grounded not only in mutual recognition but also in spiritual integrity.

In this understanding, tolerance is not the end—it is the beginning. The deeper aim is mutual respect, active engagement, and ethical witness. Such a framework contributes not only to interfaith harmony but also to the broader construction of an environmentally safe world. It challenges Muslims and non-Muslims alike to rethink pluralism not as a reluctant compromise but as a divine mandate and a shared moral opportunity.

For others to get to know us better, we must be prepared to bear witness to our values, not through coercion, but through ethical consistency and intellectual humility. This, in essence, is one dimension of tolerance as it has been understood and developed by a range of Muslim thinkers from different eras. From early medieval figures such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazali and al-Fārābī, who were influenced by both Islamic sources and Greek philosophical traditions, to modern European Muslim scholars, the Islamic tradition has developed a deeply philosophical framework for toleration grounded in Quranic principles. These thinkers consistently emphasised that bearing witness to the truth is the appropriate attitude for Muslims living in pluralistic contexts, rather than imposing belief or demanding uniformity.

From this theological foundation, a broad set of values emerges. These values speak not only to Muslims living in the West, but also to our fellow citizens of all backgrounds. They are not merely reactive answers to criticisms of Islam; instead, they form the substance of a moral and spiritual vision of how we should live as human beings. They address fundamental questions: What does it mean to uphold human dignity?

The first step in answering these questions lies in recognising diversity as a willed aspect of God's creation, grounded in the Oneness of God (tawḥīd) and the equal dignity of all human beings. Respect for diversity is, thus, a form of obedience to God's will. From this principle follows the imperative to engage in ta'aruf—mutual knowledge. Knowing the other, not ignoring them, is the foundation of meaningful coexistence. And in turn, we must be prepared to let others know who

we are, not through imposition, but through ethical conduct and coherence between our beliefs and actions.

Humility, consistency, and respect are not uniquely Islamic values; they are shared across religious and ethical traditions—from Jewish and Christian moral frameworks to Buddhist and Hindu philosophical systems. The Dalai Lama, for example, how rigorous self-discipline and internal struggle are essential prerequisites for genuine openness to others. Similarly, liberation theologians in Latin America echo this principle: openness to others is inseparable from accountability to one's values.

From these shared foundations, three key qualities emerge as prerequisites for meaningful toleration. First, humility. Humility means acknowledging that we do not possess the entire truth. Even when we believe our path is true, we must admit that our knowledge is partial and our understanding fallible. Humility opens the door to learning from others without surrendering our convictions. In the West, this resonates with the Socratic tradition—"I know that I do not know"—a cornerstone of intellectual humility that is sorely needed in today's polarised world. A lack of humility, especially in political leadership, often exacerbates conflict and undermines pluralism.

Second, consistency. Consistency is the demand that our actions align with our values. It means recognising our contradictions and striving to minimise them. No community, Muslim or otherwise, lives perfectly by its ideals. Too often, Muslims compare Islamic values with the behaviour of non-Muslims, while others compare Western values with the behaviour of Muslims. These are false equivalences. A more honest approach is to compare behaviour with behaviour and values with values—and to admit where our communities fall short. Critical self-reflection is crucial for personal and professional growth.

Third, respect. Respect goes beyond tolerance. Tolerance implies enduring someone else's presence, often from a position of power or condescension. Respect requires deeper engagement. It calls for curiosity about who others truly are, about what they believe and why. It challenges us to honour their dignity, even when we disagree.

These three qualities—humility, consistency, and respect—are not merely abstract ideals; they are essential components of a spiritual and ethical education in the Islamic tradition. However, the tragedy is that many Muslims today are unaware of this rich heritage. Meanwhile, Western academic institutions often neglect Islamic philosophy altogether. It is still possible to earn a PhD in philosophy in the West without reading a single page of Islamic, Chinese, or Indian thought. This intellectual isolation impoverishes us all.

Figures like al-Ghazali wrote profoundly about the role of shakk (doubt) in refining one's faith, long before Descartes popularised the method of systematic doubt. Ghazali saw doubt not as

an enemy of faith but as a pathway to spiritual humility and clarity. Such contributions remain deeply relevant but tragically underappreciated.

This is why, when we speak of toleration, we must go beyond mere endurance of difference. We must strive for ethical respect and reciprocal recognition, rooted in both our philosophical traditions and spiritual disciplines.

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