Communities Like You: Animals in the Qu’ran and Animals in Islam

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Communities Like You:

Animals in the Qu'ran and Animals in Islam

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ABSTRACT

The Qu'ranic scriptures that are the foundation of Islam advocate an environmental ethic that enjoins worship with compassion towards and the protection of non-human animals. Later texts in the Islamic tradition, however, demonstrate this theocentric environmentalism with less consistency. As a result, the non-human animals of the Muslim world are often treated in ways incompatible with Islam's core principles. Since there is limited research on the human-animal relationship available in English, this paper aims to help fill the gap in scholarship by providing an overview of Qu'ranic expectations for how humans are to interact with other animals in the context of modern findings in science and theory.

INTRODUCTION

Islam is often understood to be a compassionately anthropocentric religion, one that values the lives of non-human animals as secondary to human lives and concerns. While it does present some aspects of compassionate anthropocentrism, Islam relies more on theocentric environmentalism that places worship and glorification of the creator at the forefront of all action, not just for humans but all animals. The ethic links praise for the creator with environmental care. As khalifas (viceregents or caretakers) of the planet, all humans have a responsibility to protect the lives and habitats of all other animals because every animal is a member of the vast ecological community of Allah's creation. Humans have a two-way relationship with the rest of creation, as khalifa over the rest of Allah's creation, but are also 'abd, or slaves to Allah. The combination of the roles of khalifa and 'abd means that humans must defer to Allah's expectations in how to treat other animals. The theocentric environmental ethic of the faith demands that humans preserve and protect the livelihood of all other animals; thus, while human concerns are important, acting for the good of all creation is more important.
There are three primary sources of guidance for Muslims that lay out the theocentric environmentalism that will be explored in this paper: the Qur’an, hadiths and fatwas. All Muslims rely on the Qur’an for the rules and expectations for how to act, since it is the foundational text for the religion. Muslims believe that the Qur’an was revealed to Allah’s final prophet, the Prophet Muhammad, (Peace Be Upon Him) over a period of 23 years, between 609 CE and 632 CE.¹ The Qur’an is organized into 114 surahs, or chapters, which are then broken down into ayah’s, or verses of varying lengths². In total, it is approximately the same length as the Christian New Testament. The Qur’an does not cover all the mundane aspects of daily life, thus the hadiths, or stories of the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) life, provide insight on everything from marriage and divorce to loans and taxes. The hadiths are stories of the actions of the Prophet (PBUH) that serve as models for Muslim behavior. For questions on how to deal with modern concerns, the fatwas provide guidance. Fatwas are non-legally binding opinions of prominent Islamic scholars based on the Qur’an and hadiths, and address topics including whether or not Muslims may eat factory farmed animals. The Qur’an is the primary source of knowledge for Muslims since it is believed to have been direct revelation from Allah. The hadiths are not as infallible as the Qur’an, since they were recorded centuries after the death of the Prophet (PBUH) by his successors. The fatwas are the only modern body of Islamic knowledge, as the other two texts were completed by the mid eighth century.

The Qur’an is a linguistically complex text since it has remained unchanged in language since its compilation. As a result, there is a branch of scholarly knowledge known as tafsir, or interpretation of the Qur’an. Tafsir, as explained by prominent Islamic scholar Sara Tlili, serves a dual purpose: to both “satisfy an intellectual need for understanding the most central text in a

¹ Traditionally, (PBUH) or “peace be upon him” follows any mention of the Prophet Muhammad’s name in Islamic writing as a sign of respect, and I follow that convention in this paper.
² The Qur’an was not written as it was revealed but compiled together later, it arose in a literary tradition that was primarily oral.
believer’s life or a desire for studying a text deemed by Muslims to be the epitome of literary perfection” and for the more practical and worldly purpose “of deriving and inferring rules and recommendations that Muslims would implement in their lives” to constantly become better Muslims (Tlili, 2012). This paper relies heavily on the *tafsir* of ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE) and al-Qurtubi since they are prominent Qur’anic exegetes (d. 1273 CE).

This paper aims to use the theocentric environmentalism of Islam as a lens to understand the human-animal relationship defined by the Qur’an and to analyze instances where this ethic is not upheld properly. In applying this ethic to reading the foundational texts of Islam this paper hopes to examine modern concerns of how to treat other animals using the Qur’an as the guide. The idea that dogs are unclean and impure animals has persisted for centuries, resulting in maltreatment of dogs ranging from not allowing them into the home to mass slaughter of the animals despite there being no Qur’anic grounding for the claim of impurity. This paper analyzes where these misconceptions came from and how they violate the basic tenants of Islam.

Another concern facing modern Muslims that this paper addresses is the dilemma of how to eat only *halal* or permissible meat of animals raised and slaughtered compassionately in an era where industrialized slaughter practices make doing so nearly impossible. This paper then addresses animal mind and intelligence as put forth by the Qur’an and further elaborated on in Islamic fiction through an analysis of the story *The Case of Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn.*

According to the Qur’an, Allah created all of nature and all of nature submits to Allah’s will, so all of creation serves as visible signs of Allah’s power. Since the term “muslim” means “submission,” all of nature is necessarily Muslim. Since all animals are Muslims, human believers, according to Islamic ecology scholar Ibrahim Ozdemir, “live in a world that is alive,” with every creature worshipping their creator in unique and meaningful ways (Ozdemir, 2003).
Such worship is shown in the variety of different prayers by different animals. The Qur’anic Scholar Ibn Kathir, writing in the 1300s, explains that the prayers of non-human animals are much like human prayer, “first in its complexity; second, in its being a conscious practice; and third, in its use of language, which, in spite of its difference from human languages, is intelligible to some human beings on exceptional occasions,” particularly prophets (Tlili, 2012). His view assumes that all animals have an awareness of their Creator and a sense of devotion towards that Creator. Ibn Kathir takes the stance that non-human worship is “a complex phenomenon that may even be ritualistic, because it involves ritualistic prayers (ṣalat), as opposed to invocations or simple prayers (du’ā’) (Ibn Kathir, via Tlili, 2012). Salat for humans is the five daily prayers, which are intentionally performed methods of worship higher than a simple invocation or du’ā. The idea that other animals can perform salat and intentional prayers positions their worship on the same level as human worship, implying that humans are not unique in the most important of duties, glorifying Allah. Similarly, for Al-Qurtubi, “birds have a ritualistic prayer” in the form of flying, even though "it does not involve bowing and prostration, as is the case with ritualistic prayers practiced by Muslim human beings” (Tlili, 2012).

To explain how other animals pray, Ibn Kathir describes a time when "the humans prayed, the camels brayed, the cows mooed, and the sheep bleated until God forgave them" (Ibn-Kathir, qtd. in Tlili, 2012). In that story, he argues that when “the camel brayed” and the “cows mooed” they were praying, just like the human. Ibn Kathir “seems to imply that these animals were praying to God as intensely as the human beings and that their prayers were answered, which resulted “in everyone’s salvation” (Tlili, 2012). Sara Tlili explains in Animals in the Qur’an, this story serves to show “how firmly humans are perceived to be placed within the animal world” as an animal like any other who worships and praises the creator (Tlili, 2012). Since humans do not have direct access to the minds of other animals to understand exactly how they pray, not knowing how
another prays doesn’t negate their prayer, but rather shows that humans must rely on anthropocentrism – that is, imaginative identification – to view the nonhuman world.

COMMUNITIES LIKE YOU

A foundational concept in the human relationship with the rest of creation is the idea that every animal is a part of the grand ecological community of Allah’s creation, and thus every animal in the community must be treated with compassion. This community of creation addresses the interdependence of all animals, including humans, and asks humans to see themselves not above the rest of creation but as an integral part of the community. The Qu’ran’s Surah al-An’am states:

And there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you. We have not neglected in the Register a thing. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered.

The Arabic word translated as “community” in this ayah is ummah, a term that carries special weight in Islam since it also applies to the original companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Applying the term to all animals positions them alongside the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) and humans generally. In his tafsir, Ibn Kathir explains that “Birds are an Ummah, humans are an Ummah and the Jinns are an Ummah, which essentially means that it is impossible to deny that any of Allah’s creation is exempted from the group.” The passage helps break down the human/animal binary by positioning humans and animals together in the same group of being. Surah al-Baqara states that, since all animals are of the same community, “whoever kills a soul...is as if he had slain mankind entirely” because no creature’s life is unimportant (Qur’an, 5:32). This passage forms the basis of the ethic of compassion by uniting all animals in the same broad community so that harming any single part of the community harms the others. That statement has powerful implications for human interaction with the rest of the world, calling into question acceptability of practices such as deforestation that disrupt animal lives and habitats. Surah al-
An’am concludes by declaring that all beings will be gathered before Allah at the end of time, which Ibn Kathir’s *tafsir* interprets as meaning that “all creatures will be gathered on the Day of Resurrection, the beasts, birds and all others. Allah’s justice will be so perfect, that the un-horned sheep will receive retribution from the horned sheep,” suggesting that it is not only humans who will be judged but all animals (Ibn Kathir, n.d). Ibn Kathir continues to say that “Allah will then command them, ‘Be dust!’” after their judgment has occurred (Ibn Kathir, n.d). His interpretation points to the idea that even though other animals cannot have eternal life, animals will receive compensation for any wrongs committed against them. Human crimes committed against other animals therefore will be considered on judgment day.

Ibn Kathir’s reading of the passage runs counter to the popular idea that only humans will be judged because only they are in possession of *taqwa*, which is a love for, fear of, and awareness of Allah. But *Taqwa* can also be seen as similar to the soul, which is significant because it means that Allah has infused a part of himself into every human, and possibly other animals as well. Regardless of who possesses *taqwa*, as Sarah Tlili writes, all “nonhuman animals will be resurrected” at judgment day like humanity. Tlili argues that, for animals, “Even if their existence, unlike that of humans, is perhaps not everlasting, they will still receive compensation for undeserved suffering and retribution for the deeds they have performed in this life,” including suffering caused by humans (Tlili, 2012). The judgment of non-human animals and the compensation they will receive for their suffering, coupled with the Qur’anic idea that all animals are a part of the same community, creates an Islamic ethic of compassion towards all of creation that Muslims are expected to uphold.

**DOGS**

Popular perceptions of dogs in Islamic cultures position the animals as dirty and impure animals that humans are to avoid. Dogs are often reviled, and many Muslims will not pet a dog, or
allow one into their homes. In some countries dogs are publicly abused and slaughtered on the assumption that there is a religious mandate to do so. There are two surahs that discuss human interactions with dogs, surah al-Ma'idah and surah al-Kahf. These in fact do not allow for violence against dogs, but position them as working alongside people by protecting humans and helping them hunt.

Dogs are members of the community of creation like all other animals, and have specific roles to help people, as explained in al-Ma'idah and al-Kahf. Their role in the community is explained in Surah al Ma'idah, which explains what Muslims may eat. The surah allows Muslims to eat food that their dog catches, as dogs may help with hunting: “as for what you have taught hunting dogs [to catch], teaching them out of what Allah has taught you, eat of what they catch for you” after reciting Allah’s name over whatever animal the dog catches (Qur’an, 5:4). There is a relationship between humans and dogs implied as Allah taught humans to hunt, and humans share that knowledge with dogs, and the dogs help humans catch food that they might not be able to otherwise. Surah al-Kahf similarly shows dogs working with people, but in this case the dog in the story protects the people from certain harm. The surah’s story of the Seven Sleeper tells the tale of a group of young people who take refuge in a cave to hide from people who were persecuting them. They enter the cave and are put into a centuries long sleep by Allah to protect them until the threat is gone, while at the entrance to the cave, a dog sleeps to keep other people from entering the cave, stretching “out his paws on the threshold” (Recitequran.com, 2018). Ibn Kathir commenting on the story, writes of the dog that “It was his nature and habit to lie down at their door as if guarding them” to keep them safe (Recitequran.com, 2018). Among the interpretative traditions on this surah, the most well-known concludes that it says that “the angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog,” just as they do not “enter a house in which there is an image, a person in a state of

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3 The Qur'an allows for humans to hunt other animals but only for food, killing another animal for sport is prohibited because all animals are members of the community of creation.
ritual impurity or a disbeliever” (Recitequran.com, 2018). From the fact that the dog in the story sleeps outside the cave at the entrance comes the popular idea that dogs cannot be kept as pets inside homes, as the angels will not enter a house with a dog. However, according to the Qur’an and its interpretation, dogs can serve as protectors for people. Since the Qur’an is the highest authority in the faith, any ideas that counter it, such as this hadith, must be considered in the context of the Qur’an to be considered legitimate. As this hadith directly contradicts the Quran, it should not be the basis for all Muslims’ treatment of dogs as pets, though it currently is.

Despite the fact that the Qu’ran is the core text of the Islamic faith, when it comes to attitudes towards dogs and ideas about how they should be treated, most Muslims rely on the hadiths, which tend to present dogs as problems. The Qur’an is the primary authority on Islam as it is considered to be the direct word of Allah, while second in importance to the faith are the hadiths, or sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The hadiths cover a wide range of topics, have “the form of a brief narrative, a ‘sound bite,’ or a snapshot from the life of the Prophet,” and can be read in any order (Senturk, 2005). They were compiled by followers of the Prophet (PBUH) called Companions, who recorded what he said and did. These Companions all knew the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) directly and they relayed his stories and sayings to the next generation, who are referred to as the Successors. Then, those Successors told the following generation of scholars what they had learned, and the chain continued for over two centuries. Such a chain of transmission relies quite heavily on memory for the preservation of the integrity of each hadith. Since they were recorded so late after the death of the Prophet (PBUH), questions abound as to how accurate these snapshots can be. By the very nature of an oral transmission the chance of accidental or purposeful alterations of the hadiths is quite high even with a vigorous authentication process for hadiths. The hadiths are therefore graded based on their authenticity. There are six compilations of hadiths that exist, however only two, the hadith compilations by Imam Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi (875 AD) and Imam Muhammad al- Bukhari (d. 870 AD), are considered to be
sahih or authentic hadiths. Even these authentic hadiths cannot be entirely trusted due to how late they were recorded after the death of the Prophet (PBUH).

Contradicting the Qu’ran’s surahs, the hadiths compiled by Imam Muslim and Imam Bukhari justify dog abuse. These stories are meant as a companion text to the Qur’an and offer guidance on matters related to daily life as a Muslim, not to be taken as the sole truth. Still though, the hadiths rather than the Qur’an dominate popular discourse regarding dogs in Islam. Several hadiths in this collection allow for killing dogs, and are used as justification for maltreating and killing them.

A number of hadiths that mention dogs do so in relation to mitigating the risk of contracting rabies to protect the lives of the community. The hadiths focused on limiting potential contact with rabid dogs are special allowances to break the sacred trust of humans as guardians of other animals and are meant as exemptions for killing dogs by certain people and under certain circumstances. In a hadith compiled by Bukhari, “Prophet Muhammad said, ‘It is not sinful... to kill five kinds of animals, namely: the crow, the kite, the mouse, the scorpion and the rabid dog’” (Bukhari, 9, 31). The hadith states that the only dogs who can be killed are rabid dogs, and only because of their incurable disease as it could wreak havoc on all other animals they came in contact with while infected.

In a similar hadith compiled by Bukhari, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says, "It is not sinful of a person in the state of Ihram [purity while on pilgrimage] to kill any of these five animals: The scorpion, the rat, the rabid dog, the crow and the kite." These hadiths are almost identical; the only difference is that the second one relates specifically to pilgrimage. The similarity between the hadiths reaffirms the point that only dogs who pose a danger to others may be killed, while the killing of healthy dogs not allowed at any point (Bukhari, 59, 121). The second hadith specifies who may be killed while in a state of because according to the Qu’ran it is forbidden to hunt or kill while on pilgrimage. Thus, this hadith states that it is acceptable to kill an animal who is causing harm to
others in order to protect the rest of the group. This hadith appears a third time in the Bukhari compilation with another slight variation: this time there is an allowance to kill rabid dogs in the haram, or area where violence of every kind is strictly forbidden. The hadith states that “Five kinds of animals are harmful and could be killed in the Haram (Sanctuary). These are: the crow, the kite, the scorpion, the mouse and the rabid dog” (Bukhari, 28, 9). In addition to the Bukhari hadiths, there are other hadiths compiled by Imam Muslim that list out the five animals who may be killed and in what context. All these hadiths go to show that only rabid dogs may be killed by humans, and any other killing is a violation of the role of humans as khalifas since dogs are a part of creation just as humans are. Contrary to popular misunderstanding, then, the hadiths give humans no right to harm or kill dogs. The use of these hadiths to suggest that all dogs are impure and that, therefore, humans can kill them is incompatible with the Qur’an’s injunction on animal community and ignores the hadiths’ restrictions on harming and killing dogs. The ending of a life in Islam is not to be taken lightly. As will be explained in greater detail in the section of this paper on animal slaughter, humans must ask for permission and forgiveness when killing an animal for food; thus, it follows that killing any other healthy animal is a grave undertaking.

A seeming exception to this is a hadith that appear to break with convention by seeming to permit the killing of dogs when they are not rabid or posing any threat to humans. The first, the Prophet’s (PBUH) companion claims that the Prophet Muhammad told them

to kill dogs, and we carried out this order so much so that we also killed the dog coming with a woman from the desert. Then Allah’s Apostle (may peace be upon him) forbade their killing. He (the Holy Prophet further) said: It is your duty the jet-black (dog) having two spots (on the eyes), for it is a devil.

That the hadith contradicts itself and allows for of killing a community member quite unusual and break convention for a reputable hadith. It opens with the statement that the followers were
“ordered” to kill any dogs, and not just the rabid ones. In the next line, the hadith says the Prophet “forbade their [the dogs’] killing” without explaining the drastic reversal from the first line. It ends by once again allowing for the killing of dogs under the claim that the black dog is the devil. The Qur’an positions all animals as members of communities within their own species and as members of the larger community of believers. Since all animals are believers and no believer may be killed by humans, this hadith directly contradicts the Qur’an. Even though it is considered an authentic hadith, most scholars agree that any hadith that cannot be corroborated by the Qur’an cannot be taken as truth. Additionally, the hadith appears only in the compilation by Imam Muhammed al-Bukhari; it does not appear in the compilations by Iman Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al Naysaburi or in any others. Yet this one, anomalous hadith it has been used to justify distrust of dogs and the killing of them across Islamic communities for centuries.

There is a possibility that the basis for the perception of black dogs as evil for originates not in Islam but in Zoroastrianism, and speaks to 7th century political complexities.⁴ A set of verses that were rejected from inclusion in the Qur’an are known as the Satanic Verse or the Myth of Gharaniq. In one of these, while reciting the Qur’an before a group of pagan listeners, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said during the recitation of the Qu’ran, in an apparent non-sequitur, that al-Lat, al-Uzzah, and al-Manat, pre-Islamic Arabian gods, have intercessory powers. That claim goes against the foundational idea in Islam of tawhid, that there is only one God. Soon after, the Prophet was visited by the angel jibra’il (Gabriel), who told the Prophet that the claim was inspired by Shaitan (Satan), not Allah. Those lines were removed from the text with surah al-Haj explaining that it was Shaitan who inspired the verse. It is likely that the Prophet (PBUH) mentioned those gods to win the favor of prominent Qurayshi tribe members who were listening to his recitation (Oxfordislamicstudies.com, 2018). There could be a similarly politically motivated

⁴ Zoroastrianism is one of the world’s oldest monotheistic religions, started by Zoroaster in Iran over 3000 years ago.
reason for the apparent Islamic hatred for dogs that evolved out of the complex relationship between Zoroastrianism and Islam. Islam likely borrowed elements from Zoroastrianism while also attempting to differentiate itself from the older religion. In Zoroastrianism, dogs were highly regarded beings, so much so that people were expected to feed them daily; they could even take the place of humans in religious rituals whenever needed. In contrast to the Islamic view of dogs as unclean and untouchable, in Zoroastrianism a “dog while alive was held to be the cleanest of all creatures” (Boyce, 1977 qtd. in Foltz and Saadi-nejad, 2008). Early Muslims may have devalued dogs as a means of creating distance between Islam and Zoroastrianism, an idea which would explain the negative sentiment associated with dogs in the hadiths. Cats are highly regarded in the hadiths while Zoroastrian opinions towards cats were rather negative, which “puts the tradition in direct opposition to Islam” (Foltz, 2014). Thus, the tension between Zoroastrianism and Islam seems to be connected to the hadiths rather than the Qu’ran.

Despite likely having no origin in Islam, the perceived prejudice against dogs still informs how many Muslims view dogs today, with modern scholarship relying on the hadiths over the Qur’an. In The Ideal Muslim Society: As Defined in the Qur’an and Sunnah by Muhammad Ali Al-Hashimi exemplifies these popular ideas about dogs. In the book Dr. Al-Hashimi comments on many parts of life, from prayer to economics to relationships, and includes a brief passage on “attachment to dogs” in a comparison between Western and Muslim society. His book is a modern manifestation of the skewed ideas of dogs that are prominent in the hadiths. He writes that “the Westerns love all dogs” and have a “passion for keeping dogs, spoiling them and caring for them” that is unique to Western society (al-Hashimi, 2002). He claims that this care for dogs comes from the need to compensate “for the warmth of human emotion that the westerner has lost” from indulging in a “materialistic philosophy” for too long (al-Hashimi, 2002). He asks the reader if “man can suffer any worse emotional upheaval than that which makes him befriend animals because he has lost the blessings of guidance and faith” (al-Hashimi, 2002). He writes that people never interact with non-
human animals unless they have no human companionship, and concludes that spending time with any other animal is a perversion of human nature. Dr. al-Hashimi’s ideas reflect broader beliefs about human-animal relationships that permeate Muslim communities around the world.

It is the hadiths, and works like those of Dr. al-Hashimi, rather than the surahs of the Qu’ran that have been shaping attitudes on dogs in Egypt. In many cases, this results in mass dog abuse with feral dogs being killed through slow and painful measures. In December 2015, Egyptian officials were given permission to shoot any stray dog they found in two wealthy neighborhoods in Alexandria. The officials claimed they needed to kill these dogs because they were “severely ill,” which makes it seem as though they were following the logic of the hadiths that say a rabid dog may be killed. According to residents, though, there was no reason for these neighborhood dogs to be killed, as they were not severely ill or causing any problems to the community. The officials killing these dogs agreed that “stray dogs can be trained and used for security purposes” like the dog in the story of the Seven Sleepers, but only in rural areas, not in residential areas like Alexandria (Deyya, 2018)

The Qur’an specifies that dogs can be useful in protecting people, so it follows that keeping dogs in the cities for protection is acceptable, while the mass slaughter of community members such as feral dogs, is strictly prohibited by the Qur’an. The dogs in Alexandria were shot, this being the quickest way to kill them, but more frequently these animals are killed by poisonous injection, which is a much slower and more painful death. Yasser El-Serafy, chair of veterinary medicine at Al-Mansoura University, notes that “when the body is firstly injected with Strychnine, it gets fully paralysed then all the system begins shutting down one by one beginning with the respiratory system until it reaches the nervous system causing death” over several minutes (Deyya, 2018). Death by poison is more common in Egypt purely because of the potential of the bullets hitting humans in the vicinity.
Whereas justifications for killing dogs are often based in the hadiths, efforts to protect the lives of dogs are often based on the Qur’an. Abdo Jo of the Cairo Animal Rescue Team (CART) posted a video of the killing, reminding viewers that the dogs who were killed are “God’s creatures,” animals created as members of the community of creation (Insight-egypt.com, 2018). The Cairo Animal Rescue Team is centered on protecting all of “God’s creatures” from abuse, providing shelter and medical attention for stray animals and educating children on how to interact with animals. The organization’s founder, Abdo Jo works to educate the Egyptian public that the violence perpetuated against dogs, from kicking them and throwing rocks at them to poisoning or shooting them “goes against civil humanity and all religious doctrines” because of the Qur’anic mandate to treat other community members with kindness (Insight-egypt.com, 2018). Harming dogs is a violation of the role of khalifa, or viceregent/caretaker thus his organization aims to help people live out that role properly. He is repulsed by the idea that people in Egypt consider dogs “useless, dirty, or even forbidden by religion” since there is no Qur’anic basis for the maltreatment of dogs (Insight-egypt.com, 2018). CART works to reestablish an Islamically just relationship between people and dogs by implementing changes “through awareness campaigns that we plan to run through media and schools” (Insight-egypt.com, 2018). In an interview with In(sight) Magazine Abdo Jo explains that he wants to break down “the false notion of how animals are aggressive or dangerous” by creating educational videos for children to model proper treatment of dogs that will help people see all animals as members of the community of creation (Insight-egypt.com, 2018). Abdo Jo is vocal about the need to increase access to information on taking care of other animals since the popular discourse is built on violence and fear of other animals, not understanding of them. By teaching children how to better interact with Allah’s creation, CART aims to create an Egyptian society based on the compassionate care of humanity’s fellow creatures that would align society more closely on Qur’anic lines.
The shift in how Egyptians view dogs in light of Qur’anic expectations is seeping into popular culture. The opening of Egypt’s first pet café in 2015 seems to be an effect of that change. Mohamed el-Kok, the owner of Pet Corner Café, was inspired to create the café “after seeing the way some kids treat animals” violently, throwing stones at them and kicking them because they were taught that violence towards dogs is acceptable due to the common misperception that dogs are impure in Islam (Tawfeek, 2018). Kok “realized that the prevailing mentality in Egypt doesn’t teach children to treat animals with kindness, so, he took it upon himself to do so (Tawfeek, 2018). His approach to changing the culture rests on the idea that people need to have positive interactions with these animals to break the cycle of violence. At the pet café, Kok says, ”We teach young children mercy when dealing with animals. I see many kids, when they see a dog or a cat in the street, they throw stones” at it; Kok’s organization works to undo that impulse (Tawfeek, 2018).

Since the majority of Egyptians are Muslims, it is likely that the violent attitude towards dogs comes out of deeply ingrained misperceptions about dogs in the faith that arose from the hadiths. Thus, by providing a space where Muslims can interact with dogs non-violently, the café can help stem the violence to create a more Islamically appropriate relationship between humans and dogs. That goal seems to be closer to realization as of January, 2018, when Kok reported that the café is seeing an increase in the number of visitors who come to pet and play with the dogs there which suggests that a change is occurring by broadening the group of people who want to spend time with canines. Parents often bring their children to the café to show them examples of how to interact properly with other animals, demonstrating a remarkable shift in Egyptian culture towards treating dogs more in keeping with the principles of Islam established in the Qu’ran.

SLAUGHTER

All of Islamic slaughter is governed by the theocentric environmentalism of the faith, as the most important components of slaughter are minimizing the pain of the animal being killed and
thanking Allah for the allowance to kill and eat the animal. Muslims may only eat animal products that are halal or Qur’anic permissible and are banned from eating haram or forbidden foods. For a product to be considered halal the meat must come from certain animals who are slaughtered under carefully prescribed rules from surah al-Baqara and surah al-Ma’idah. The passages in each surah related to slaughter focus not just on informing humans on who they may eat, but also detail how to properly kill an animal for slaughter to minimize the animal’s suffering. The animals poised for slaughter are required to have access to food and water and be comfortable prior to the execution. The Prophet said that "If you must kill, kill without torture" to avoid all unnecessary suffering (Sunnah.com, 2018). The focus, therefore, of a great deal of the halal slaughter regulations is animal welfare, not taste or quality of meat. In industrialized slaughter operations, it is easy to lose sight of the animal involved. Their animality is stripped away as the animals are commodified, pigs become pork and cows are turned into beef. With the overtaking of small farms by concentrated animal feeding operations, many people never see the animal they eat anywhere but on a plate. Islam forces the animal back into the forefront of the mind of believers who are expected to consider the suffering of their food animals. Surah al-Ma’idah re-enforces those expectations in explaining that particularly violent deaths for food animals renders them haram. Muslims therefore are tasked with knowing how their food became food, and only consuming the flesh of animals killed in a halal manner to minimize their suffering. As dictated by Allah in Surah al-Ma’idah explains:

O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is [indeed] Him that you worship. He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah . But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Qur’an, 2:171)
Surah al-Ma'idah begins with a call of gratitude to Allah for allowing people to kill animals for food since it is only by permission that people may kill other animals. The surah serves a reminder “that God is the only One (Wāḥid) authority Who can grant dispensation from the penalty of this iniquitous act” of ending the life of another being (Masri, 2007). Given the billions of animals slaughtered for food around the world each year, it might appear trivial to consider killing food animals a grave inequity, but the sacred nature of all life, regardless of species, is a central tenant of the Islamic faith. Cattle and chickens are no exception from the community of creation, so harming them cannot be done lightly and without permission from the Creator.

There are two rules for a slaughter to be halal, permissible, and tayyib, or clean. The first is the invocation of Allah’s name over the animal and the cleaning of the carcass after slaughter (Allen, 2016). The name of Allah must be pronounced "at the time of slaughtering an animal" in order "to remind the slaughterer that: He has no right to take this life without Allah’s permission; that, except for Allah’s permission, the meat of this animal would have been unlawful" due to the value of every life (Masri, 2007). Every slaughter should be intentional, and "performed in a spirit of humility with a trembling heart at the mention of God’s name" (Masri, 2007). Invoking Allah’s name, or saying Bismillah before slaughter is "a declaration on the part of the slaughterer that his act is not an act of aggression against the universe nor of oppression of the creature about to be slaughtered, but simply an act necessitated by a need fulfilled in the name of God" (Farouk et al, 2013). The other surah that includes rules on slaughter is surah al-Ma'idah which states:

Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah, and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars, and [prohibited is] that you seek decision
through divining arrows. That is grave disobedience. This day those who disbelieve have despaired of [defeating] your religion; so fear them not, but fear Me. This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.” (Qur'an, 5:3)

Surah al-Ma'idah details horrifically painful forms of death for food animals, which renders them *haram*, likely in an attempt to prevent Muslims from normalizing the consumption of animals killed by unnecessarily harsh methods. By employing *mafhum al muwafaqah*, a logic game used by Islamic scholars to draw inferences on the Qur'an and make statements on topics not addressed in the text, it can be argued that factory farming is haram. With chickens in battery cages unable to walk or turn, and then strung on an execution line for slaughter, slaughterhouses cause unnecessarily painful deaths. How the animals die matters because “Muslims must realise that, in the eyes of the Creator, an animal is worth much more than its weight in flesh” as they are members of “communities like you,” as surah al-An'am puts it (Masri, 2007).

The Qur'anic insistence on limiting animal suffering in slaughter imposes an ethical mandate on Muslims that is elaborated in the hadiths. One suggests that terrifying an animal before slaughter is as violent as the slaughter itself: “Muhammad saw a man sharpening his knife while an animal waited nearby, he reprimanded him, “Do you wish to slaughter this animal twice, once by sharpening your blade in front of it and another time by cutting its throat?” (Al-Kulayni, Al-Kāfi, qtd. in Foltz, 2014). This hadith sets the expectation that when an animal is to be killed, it should never be aware of what is to come. No animal should know that it is about to be killed for the stress it would cause. That expectation acknowledges the emotional range of animals and their ability to feel stress and fear centuries before this was proved by science. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is also reported to have said, “whatever is cut off an animal, while it is still alive, is carrion and is unlawful
to eat.” Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) statement, inspired by Allah, is very clear that harming a live animal who is meant to be slaughtered is impermissible. That claim has tremendous implications for the billions of chickens in factory farms who are debeaked, as according to the Prophet (PBUH) these animals cannot be halal. Most chickens in factory farms are debeaked, a process that involves cutting off part of their beak so that they cannot peck at one another. Chickens pecking at one another is hardly a natural behavior but is one that occurs often in factory farms due to the limited space allotted to each chicken. Cutting off the tip of a chicken’s beak is more like an amputation than cutting a human nail as the beak is a sensory organ with nerves running through it. Since the Prophet (PBUH) said that mutilating animals is haram debeaking is inexcusable.

Debeaking and other practices common to industrialized food production is not a natural or necessary phenomenon but an abuse of the position of khalifa. Humans have a responsibility to Allah to ensure the protection of other. Some of the greatest dangers facing non-human animals are at the hands of people, especially today, given the prevalence of factory farms. Surah al-A’raft commands that humans “do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right” the way it is all intended to be (Qur’an, 7:8). Factory farming is creating “mischief” by altering the evolutionary track of cattle and chickens. Since the late 1950s cattle have been fed corn rather than grass in the feedlots that prepare them for slaughter. It is highly unnatural for cattle to consume corn, it is more difficult for them to digest corn then grass since they are ruminants. To prevent the illness that eating corn causes cows, they are often placed on heavy doses of antibiotics. As journalist and food theorist Michael Pollan points out, the cattle and grass they eat have coevolved, with cattle spreading grass seeds as they walk while the grass nourishes the cattle. Taking cows out of that environment and into feedlots is a form of doing “evil in the land” by unjustly altering the landscape and ecosystems and thus wreaking havoc on the community laid out in surah al-An’am that humans are called to protect.
Industrialized slaughter does not allow for the preservation of the wellbeing of the animals or landscape, thus Muslims are required to either reform mass slaughter or not eat factory-farmed animals. There are slaughterhouses, especially in the U.K., that have imams on site to say prayers over the animals prior to slaughter, this practice is not enough as the animals must be raised in an ethic manner, it is not enough to simply say Bismillah to make the slaughter halal. As reported by Jabir ibn Adhilla in a hadith narrated by Imam Muslim, the Prophet (PBUH) told his companions that there are rewards for a “Muslim who plants a tree, and then a beast or a bird or other eat the fruits” which requires that humans can gain some access how other animals think which is not possible in a factory farm. The conditions of modern slaughterhouses remove the basic rights and needs of individual animals by not allowing them to graze as they naturally would for throughout their lives. A famous hadith tells the story of a woman who "went to hell because of a cat that she had confined without leaving it any food, or allowing the cat access to bugs or fruits of the earth to eat" (Tantawi, 2008). Putting an animal in a position where it cannot live freely is disallowed in this hadith. When applied to food animals, the implications of this hadith are significant. Animals raised for slaughter too are confined for almost the entirety of their lives, and while they are fed in these institutions, the food does not provide them with the nutrition to live a healthy life, but makes them sick. Cows and chickens on industrial farms and feedlots are also not allowed to have access to the food "of the earth to eat" but are fed an artificial human constructed diet. Cows are forced to eat soy, corn, other cattle, manure and fish meal, all products that their digestive systems are not equipped to digest. Since the cat in the hadith is deprived good health and ultimately dies, and the human is punished for how she harms the animal, it follows that humans who engage in factory farming practices will also face punishment for their actions. According to a fatwa released by the Indonesian Ulama Council, one of the most prominent and influential scholarly groups, in 2008, "Islamic law requires that the animal at the time of its slaughter must be treated with kindness and
with procedures that guarantee to it mercy” to provide the least painful death since the animal is a member of the community of creation.

With all the rules for how to slaughter and which animals may be slaughtered, most scholars agree that the most important rule of all is the stating of Allah’s name over every food animal prior to ending their lives as a way to ask permission and forgiveness for the slaughter. According to contemporary Islamic scholar Al-Hafiz Basheer Ahmad Masri, the invocation of Allah’s name “at the time of slaughtering an animal is meant to remind the slaughterer that: He has no right to take this life without Allah’s permission; that, except for Allah’s permission, the meat of this animal would have been unlawful” due to the value of every life (Masri, 2007). In addition to asking permission to kill an animal, the Muslim slaughterer also thanks Allah for allowing them to eat another animal. The rules on slaughter highlight how “killing a living being is after all an act of iniquity” (Masri, 2007). Only Allah has the power to create and end life, thus slaughtering another animal requires clear permissions and forgiveness from Allah. The hadiths provide practical guidance on how to perform a slaughter, especially in regard to the way the animals should be treated. Despite expectations laid out in the Qur’an of how to properly slaughter animals in a halal manner, not all slaughterhouses abide by this rule. Halal slaughter should involve the invocation of Allah’s name, and the killing of one animal at a time. In most cases though, halal slaughter is no different from other forms of industrialized slaughter. Chickens are still placed in battery cages and debeaked, and the same kill lines are used. No factory farmed animal can be halal, even if Bismillah is uttered because these animals are all considered Al-Jallalah. Al-Jallalah are animals who eat “carrion… animal[s] with four legs like camels, cows, sheep, or two leg like chicken, geese” (Nazri Bin Abdul Rahman, 2012). Since most factory farmed chickens are fed a diet consisting of deceased male chicks, and cows are known to be forced to consume other cattle, the meat of these animals are haram. This is because of the Islamic mandate for providing compassionate care to animals raised to be slaughtered. It also means that by mafhum al muwafaqah, the logic game used by
Islamic scholars to draw inferences on the Qur’an the milk and eggs of factory farmed animals are also haram.

The debates on what factory farming practices are halal do little but obfuscate the real issue, that in large scale slaughterhouses it is impossible for the conditions of halal slaughter to be performed. The purpose of saying Bismillah over every single animal serves to slow down the killing process to keep the attention focused on what a significant undertaking it is to kill another living creature who has feelings, a personality and life. Saying Bismillah is a technicality that is aimed at ensuring that the spirit of halal slaughter is maintained. Muslims must realize that “in the eyes of the Creator, an animal is worth much more than its weight in flesh” (Masri, 2007). Further, if the animals are not treated compassionately throughout their lives, simply saying Bismillah is not enough to make the slaughter halal. As Muslims have begun to question the legitimacy of halal factory farming, several fatwas have been issued to justify that factory farming is indeed halal.

Shaykh Muhammad Taqi al-’Uthmaani compares the Qur'anic allowance for saying Bismillah over a flock of birds while hunting to saying Bismillah once for every batch of chickens slaughtered. The rule he puts forth is that Bismillah must be pronounced every time the knife machine is turned on. As long as Bismillah is recited over each batch of animals when the machine is put to use, some scholars consider the slaughter to be halal even though only a fraction of the animals killed will hear the tasmiyah (Bismillah). Many scholars argue that as long as Bismillah is uttered at least once over a group of animals the slaughter is acceptable, otherwise it is haram. In some cases, there is an audio recording of Bismillah, or the blade used for slaughter has Bismillah engraved on it. Each of these practices are problematic, as the single most important component of halal slaughter is that the animal have Bismillah recited to them. In addition, the animals about to be slaughtered are expected to have access to water in the moments prior to their killing, and be calm enough to not know they will soon be killed. If the animals are not raised compassionately and treated with care prior to their deaths, simply reciting Bismillah is just a formality. It is no than an ethical way to
interact with other members of creation (Nawadir, 2006). In some slaughterhouses, the word Bismillah is written on a wall the animals will pass by but this practice is seen as haram by most scholars because it is not a verbal recitation as the Qur’an mandates (Majallat Majma‘ al-Fiqh al-Islami (Islamqa.com, 2018). Writing Bismillah does allow for all animals to see it, whereas all animals will not hear it if Bismillah is only recited once a day. Some Islamic groups are working to reform mass slaughter to align with the anti-cruelty values that are at the core of halal slaughter because industrialized slaughter directly contradicts the Prophet’s (PBUH) expectations of creating the least painful slaughter possible. He argued that no animal may see the slaughter blade or watch another be killed. Factory farming directly violates his expectation as billions of food animals are forced to witness the death of others on the slaughter line, and are often also able to see the weapon before they are killed. As members of the world’s fastest growing religion, Muslims hold a great deal of buying power. In choosing not to buy the meat of animals not slaughtered in a truly halal manner Muslims can reshape the halal industry. An organization working to create this systemic change is the UK’s Halal Monitoring Committee (Halal Monitoring Committee, 2018). The HMC’s purpose is “to promote animal welfare, issues of food safety, hygiene and quality in compliance with UK Law and within the teachings of the Islamic faith.” The organization is currently attempting to end the rampant abuses in factory farms by ensuring that genuinely halal products are available for consumers in demanding a “mandatory recitation of [Bismillah] by a Muslim slaughter man on each animal” in accordance with Qur’anic expectations (Halal Monitoring Committee, 2018). The HMC is a group led by volunteers and Islamic scholars that focuses on “animal welfare, issues of food safety, hygiene and quality in compliance with UK Law and within the teachings of the Islamic faith” (Halal Monitoring Committee, 2018). They list animal welfare first, which suggests that it is their primary concern. They acknowledge that “the demand for Halal meat and poultry has dramatically increased in the west and the companies supplying the meat and poultry have had to look for ways to increase the output” in order to keep with demand around the world (Halal Monitoring Committee, 2018).
This increased demand, and subsequent increase in production “has meant finding quicker ways of
slaying the animals and at the same time keeping within the Halal laws,” which has proven quite
difficult. Since it is nearly impossible to kill large numbers of animals in rapid succession and still
ensure that each hears Bismillah, “many slaughterhouses have looked for shortcuts in the Halal
rules, many disregard the Halal slaughter prerequisites, and many have no knowledge of the
prerequisites” as the focus is explicitly on increasing profit. In only certifying truly halal products,
the HMC can help consumers find products that all Islamically acceptable, pulling Muslims out of
the unjust system of mass slaughter to create new ways of consumption.

ANIMAL COMMUNICATION

The inclusion of several stories centering on insects and birds in the Qur’an reveals how
broad the environmental ethic in Islam is in including all animals in the community of creation and
revealing the intelligence of these other animals. There are several important Qur’anic stories with
insects as the main characters who help serve as moral guides for humans in addition to Qu’ranic
surahs about bees and ants. Humans are often attracted to animals who are like them, “such as bear
and lion cubs that share the same evolutionary juvenilization of biological features as human
infants,” which insects do not (Pierson, 2009). Lacking that charisma puts insects on a low position
on the sociozoologic scale, as they have limited social value. Given the human predisposition
towards charismatic animals, the Qur’anic focus on insects suggests a very broad ethic of
consideration. This ethic moves beyond protecting charismatic megafauna to extending moral
consideration to all creatures, since all animals are members of Allah’s community. In surah al-Naml
the Prophet Suleman approached an anthill while travelling through the Valley of Ants on his way
to the kingdom of Sheba, or Saba: “Until, when they came upon the valley of the ants, an ant said, ‘O
ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive
The story begins with a warning to the rest of the colony to hide as an army is approaching and could accidentally step on them. In warning the others, according to Tlili, this displays that the ant possesses a conceptual understanding of “what an army is, does, or is capable of doing; and what are good and bad intentions” by seeing the approaching army and understanding that they are a threat to the safety of her community (Tlili, 2012). Stating that the army might step on them “unperceiving” shows that the ant is aware of the men’s “(hidden) non-malicious intentions” that are still a threat (Tlili, 2012). This story provides insight into ant cognition that far predates science. The story also suggests that other animals can communicate. The Prophet Suleman was known for his ability to communicate with other animals, and because stories of the prophets serve as guides for people to emulate, his conversations with other animals are generally understood to mean that people need to listen to other animals and pay attention to them. *Surah al-Naml* continues: Suleman “smiled, amused at her speech, and said, ‘My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do righteousness of which You approve. And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants.’” Suleman’s reaction to noticing the ant colony and hearing the ant speak is not disgust or violence, but praise for Allah as he asks Allah to enable Him “to be grateful” for all Allah has provided for him. Suleman is grateful to be made aware of one of the smallest and often least

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5 As explained by Duncan Jackson and Francis Ratnieks in *Communication in Ants*, ants’ complex social network means that they necessarily need the sort of community put forth in the Qur’an. Food collection is a multi-ant job, every ant in the colony benefits when the foragers find and bring back food (*Communication in Ants*, 1). Ants collect food using a combination of long and short-term pheromones as well as positive and negative feedback. Long term pheromones function “as a memory” of where food was once found and can be found again, while the “short-lived attractive pheromone marks out routes to current food sources” (*Communication in Ants*, 4). Both the short lived attractive pheromones and the long-term memory pheromones are positive; they guide ants to where they need to go. The negative or “short-lived repellent pheromone is a ‘no entry’ signal” that tells ants a certain path no longer leads to a productive food source. Community is a defining factor of ant social structure and communication as the Qur’an suggests.
noticeable members of the community of creation which serves as an example for Muslims to pay attention to these community members with compassion.

There has been a great deal of analysis of Surah al-Naml, much of it reading the ant community anthropocentrically as a stand-in for human communities and concerns, relying on both sentimental anthropomorphism that denies the animality of ants as well as critical anthropomorphism to better understand them. The ant is often considered to be essentially human, the size of a person and with a human voice. These added characteristics, according to Tlili, “imply a number of human projections” on the ant that run the risk of removing the animality of the ant simply to prove a point about human behavior (Tlili, 2012). As Steve Baker, a scholar who studies representations of animals in the arts points out, it is common for animals in stories to become “furry humans,” or characters who could be any animal because their purpose is not to teach people about their species but to help humans better understand a moral or societal problem (Baker, 2001). In the story in Surah al-Naml, the ant could not be replaced with any other animal or the story would no longer make sense, as it teaches the reader not just to glorify Allah, but about ant cognition and the need to notice the small and non-charismatic animals that people rarely pay attention to. All stories about animals, though, Gregg Mitman and Lorraine Daston explain, “are by necessity anthropocentric, and also rely on anthropocentrism which occurs when “animals are humanized, some might even say hyperhumanized, by caricature” to get across a message (Daston and Mitman, 2009).

Humans must rely on anthropomorphism though to understand how other animals may think and relate to their world. Critical anthropomorphism therefore “can provide a useful guideline for understanding how animals think and feel in the same way that empathy allows us to gain insight into the subjective experience of our fellow humans” (Arluke and Sanders, 2009). Sentimental anthropomorphism is particularly common in moralizing stories, because using
animals to teach a lesson allows for the simplification of a narrative to a single point that would seem “flat or at least allegorical if the same tale were recounted about humans”; thus, stripping “the characterizations down to prototypes” allows for ease in storytelling but is harmful to the animals who lose their animality in the process. Positioning the ant in human terms with a human voice is an example of sentimental anthropomorphism as it turns the ant into a human for the purpose of storytelling and creating empathy for ants. In another example of sentimental anthropomorphism, Qur’anic scholar Al-Razi “grants that it [the ant] is wise and intelligent,” characteristics humans are expected to emulate (Tlili, 2012). She is raised above humanity as “a model for proper human behavior and correct reasoning,” a guide for humans to follow, which is fitting in the Islamic tradition as humans are often expected to listen to and learn from other members of the community (Tlili, 2012).

After passing the Valley of Ants, Prophet Suleman speaks directly to another animal, a hoopoe who shows that intelligence is not unique to humans, but that different animals possess their own intelligence:

[Solomon] sought among the birds and said: How is it that I see not the hoopoe, or is he among the absent?... [the hoopoe soon arrived and said:] I have found out (a thing) that you do not apprehend, and I come unto you from Sheba with sure tidings. I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given (abundance) of all things, and hers is a mighty throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of God; and Satan makes their works fair-seeming unto them, and debars them from the way (of Truth)... (27/al-Naml: 20–26)

The hoopoe, like the ant, speaks directly to the Prophet and shows several forms of intelligence in their conversation. The bird tells the Prophet Suleman that the Queen of Sheba’a throne is “mighty” using the term anim. This is the same word used to describe the throne of God, which implies a
comparision between the queen and Allah. Using the term *anim* would no doubt stand out to the Prophet Suleman, so scholars posit that the word choice was intentional on the part of the hoopoe, al-Razi suggests that she “deliberately overstated [her] report lest Solomon take her rule lightly” (Tlili, 2012). She seems to know how “to present [her] case to [Suleman in] a persuasive manner” (Tlili, 2012). The fact that she can speak is not at all unusual, as “Qur’anic phrasing indicates that birds’ language is a constant matter, and that the miraculous element in this episode is the fact that Solomon was taught their language” and would listen to the ant (Tlili, 2012). The story of the ant and hoopoe help unravel notions of anthropocentrism in Islam by calling attention to animal communication and agency, and inviting people to listen to them and treat them compassionately and without violence. Humans are called to recognize that other animals are sentient and feeling creatures capable of communicating their concerns and interests with one another. Thus harming them is harming the community. The inclusion of speaking animals in the foundational text of the religion shows that what animals have to say is worth listening to.

THE CASE OF ANIMALS VERSUS MAN BEFORE THE KING OF THE JINN

*The Case of Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn* serves as an extrapolation of the theocentric environmentalism of the Qur’an in the form of a fable. It is one of 52 epistles composed by the highly secretive *Ikhwan al-Safa*, or Brethren of Purity. They were an anonymous group of esoteric philosophers from the tenth century CE based in Basra, Iraq. Their most famous work, *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasa’il Ikhwan al-Safa*), was likely written towards the start of the Fatimid dynasty around 908 CE. The *Ikhwan* drew heavily on the works of Plato and the Qur’an as inspiration for their work. *The Epistles* are divided into four parts: Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, and Theology. The epistle on Natural Philosophy examines and classifies plants and animals in story form. It includes the fable of *The Case of Animals*
Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn, a treatise on human-animal relations based on the Qur’an. The title of the fable draws attention to the way humans have separated themselves from the rest of creation through the separation of humans versus animals, a binary that the Qur’an, with its emphasis on the community of creation, resists. As broken down in the Qur’an, all animals (including humans), jinn, angels, and “possibly other types of creatures who are not known to us” are dabba because as Sara Tlili explains, “etymologically, the root d-b-b, from which the word is derived, denotes the idea of movement, and a dabba is any being that can move intentionally” (Tlili, 2012). That animals can move intentionally implies agency in other animals, which requires mind and motivation in other animals, an idea that the Qur’an supports. In keeping with the emphasis on the community of creation in the surah al An’am, dabba is the term used most often in the Qu’ran in reference to non-human animals.

The Case of Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn presents the case animals might make against humans for their mistreatment. The story begins with the animals explaining the injustices they have faced at the hands of humanity, and then moves into the humans and animals taking turns presenting their cases and ends with the jinn’s verdict. According to the animals, humans have unjustly subjugated the rest of creation, treating the non-human members of the community like slaves. Because the humans’ argument lacks a Qur’anic basis, they often rely instead on trickery and sophistry. The animals, conversely, have the backing of the Qur’an and rely on that as their primary source—in presenting their claims. With the Qur’an, the animals make a compelling case that sways the jinn judge in their favor for much of the story, but in the final few pages, the jinn decide that humans have access to eternal life while no other animal does and rule in humanity’s

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6 The fable features prominently in the Shi’ite tradition, which is ripe with stories that have animal narrators and subjects but it is less popular in mainstream Sunnism. In general, the Sunni tradition attributes less mind to other animals.

7 The jinn are a class of beings who live on earth and engage in all the same activities as people but cannot be seen by humans. Like all other members of creation, the jinn also worship Allah.
favor. The assumption that the promise of eternal life excludes the non-human members of the community of creation is spurious, however, since no such distinction is mentioned anywhere in the Qu’ran and is not accepted as Islamic doctrine (Tlili, 2012). In fact, all members of Allah’s community of creation will be judged at the end of time: as surah al An’am makes clear. The final ruling of the jinn, who have been persuaded throughout the trial by the animals’ Qu’ranic arguments, comes as a non-sequitur, and marks a deliberate shift from an effort to live on earth according to Qu’ranic principles to a self-serving fallacy that is incompatible with Islamic scripture. The story shows the illogical basis of anthropocentrism, at least in an Islamic context, as the human case is centered purely on protecting the interests of humankind and not the rest of creation and is thus a violation of humanity’s roles as khalifa (viceregent or caretaker) and ‘abd (slave).

As a whole, the fable presents a microcosm for the way that all of creation exists within a single ecological community and the way humans tend to ignore this fact. The animals in the fable present their case directly in a language that humans can understand. Animals in the world outside the fable may not be able to speak in human language, but the story’s use of critical anthropomorphism allows readers to consider animals’ place in the community from what might be their point of view, a point of view that in this story is consistent with one of the foundational tenants of Islam. In this way, the anthropocentrism of the fable’s talking animals undermines and compromises the anthropocentricism of the jinn’s ruling. The story, minus its compromised, dubious conclusion, functions as a guide for how people should treat animals. It gives voice to oxen, snakes, and insects, in addition to charismatic animals such tigers, whales and buffalos to include the diversity of non-human animals in the community. In fact, animals speak on several occasions in the Qur’an. The Ikwhan, author of the Case of Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn engage
in critical anthropomorphism\(^8\) because the animals articulate the way the Qur’an expects humans to treat them. As an extrapolation from the Qu’ran’s mandates on the place of animals in the community of creation, *The Case of the Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn* makes the importance of protecting and caring for the wellbeing of other animals. The fable’s talking animals become symbolic representations of their real-world counterparts, including the neglected and abused dogs in Egypt, the animals in factory farms and slaughterhouses worldwide, and all other animals living in various states of well-being and misery throughout the Muslim world. The animals in the story explain that Allah “set some in service to others, for their good or to preclude some evil,” which does not deny that some animals can be used by other animals, including humans, under specific conditions. The humans in the story argue that “cattle, beasts of prey, and wild creatures — all animals in fact — are our slaves. We are their masters. Some have rebelled and escaped. Others obey grudgingly and scorn our service.” What the humans fail to add here, significantly, is that in the Qu’ran most of creation is *mukshkhar*, or in service to one another, meaning it is not just some animals serve humans, but that all of creation can serve one another. The claim that humans are the “masters” of other animals is un-Islamic since it is a violation of the role of vice-regent or caretaker of creation as well as servant to Allah. As a rebuttal to this claim, the mule in the story points out that following the human logic, “the sun and moon, the wind and clouds” are also subject to man; “are we to think, Majesty, that these heavenly bodies too are their slaves and chattels, and men their masters? Hardly!” The mule’s reasoning here calls attention to the fact that the community of creation includes forces of nature that humans of course have no power over. The mule continues his argument by saying that Allah “set some in service to others, for their good or to preclude some evil. He subjected animals to man only to help humans and keep

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\(^8\) Gordon Bughardt explains in an article entitled *Ground rules for dealing with anthropomorphism* that critical anthropomorphism involves not only careful replicable observation, but also knowledge of the natural history, ecology, and sensory and neural systems of animals as well.
them from harm, not, as they deludedly suppose and slanderously claim, to make them our masters and us their slaves.”

The snake argues that anthropocentrism has blinded humans to understanding their role as a member of the community of creation as they focus on their interests alone. In a democratic process that gives equal weight to the opinion of all animals, even ones as small and socially insignificant as a gnat, who is also a participant at the trial, the animals pick several delegates to speak before the judge. When the crawling animals are preparing their argument, the cricket delegate approaches a snake, to discuss the role of snakes and their significance in the grand scheme of creation. At first, the snake tries to erase his kind from the narrative out of fear that their inclusion would hurt the case of the rest of the animals because “there’s an inveterate hatred, a grudge nursed from time immemorial between snakes and the Adamites. Many men even criticize their Lord, often asking why he created snakes, since there’s no value or good in us but only harm, and thus no wisdom in our creation.” The grudge against serpents comes from the book of Genesis as well as hadiths that contain an apparent allowance to kill snakes, but there is no Qur’anic basis for the hatred. Humans, the snake in the fable of the trial argues, have a tendency to look only towards themselves and their own needs. They go so far as to question the wisdom of their creator, asking why Allah created snakes, in contravention of the understanding that Muslims are to submit to their creator and not question His wisdom. In essence, the snake calls the humans out on their very real tendency to invent justifications for their cruelty to animals not sanctioned by God. All animals are created perfectly by Allah, says the surah al-An’am, so when the humans argue that they were endowed with the most perfect form, and that “The cow and water buffalo have long tails and thick horns, but no tusks. Rams have two great horns and a thick tail, but no beard” and thus are less than perfect, the animals respond: “You’ve missed the beauty and wisdom of their creation. Don’t you see that a slight to the work is an affront to its Maker? You should start from the recognition that all animals are the work of the wise Creator, who made them as He did with reason
and purpose, to benefit them and protect them from harm. But this is grasped only by Him and those who are rooted in knowledge.” The view of animals being created perfectly means that every single animal is created exactly as it should be: thus the places they live, what they eat, and how they act are all determined by Allah. Since Allah created everything, humans are not to dismantle or destroy any of it as the Quran demands that humans not create mischief on the land or alter the way Allah created everything, according to surah Al-A’raft. The snake’s story symbolizes the blasphemy of anthropocentrism because focusing on only on protecting only the interests of humans comes at a cost to the entire community of Allah’s creation. The effect of placing these animals at the bottom of the sociozooologic scale and authorizing violence against them is that snakes are eradicated from earth’s ecosystems and the community is left imbalanced. The snake explains that humans don’t like snakes because “of the poison in our fangs. They say it’s of no use except for killing and destroying living things. That shows how ignorant they are of the nature of things and of what is useful or harmful.” Snakes are unlike most animals, the snake explains, who have a “hot stomach, rumen, or paunch, or even molars to chew their meat” because Allah instead “set burning poison in our fangs to prepare the meat we eat,” thus providing snakes with a way to eat and survive, though humans see this ability as a threat, it is in actuality a mechanism for survival. The snake is correct in his explanation of the purpose of venom as “the primary function of snake venom is to facilitate immobilization and/or digestion of prey” (Barlow et. al, 2009)

The snake explains that “Had this poison not been created for snakes and had we not been given our nutriment, we would have died of starvation or injury. Every one of us would have perished, and our kind would be extinct.” The snake in the fable explains that his kind is a keystone species, or a species whose exclusion from the ecosystem would drastically alter its makeup. According to the snake, snakes “serve the same purpose as predators do among wild and domestic beasts, the same purpose as sea-serpents in the sea — or swordfish, or crocodiles — or hawks and eagles and other birds of prey.” Thus, the snake expresses an awareness of ecological systems that
was not prominent at the time the fable was written and that the humans in the story do not understand. The snake's argument shows that the early texts of Islam were ecologically focused even before the advent of modern environmental concepts. Although humans may try to remove themselves from the ecological community, this is as impossible in Islamic religious doctrine as it is in what is today accepted biological fact. Thus, the community of creation that surah al-An’am discusses is a global, ecological community of all creation. That is because if one species is removed or poached to extinction, the ramifications are widespread across all species. The snake understands the value of its place in the ecosystem, even if the humans, blinded by their anthropocentric worldview, cannot. The snakes are advocating for an ethical approach towards nature and animals through deep ecology. Deep ecology claims that all species and all of nature is interconnected, and once humans realize that core truth, anthropocentric thinking simply no longer makes sense. In explaining snakes are a crucial part of the ecological community, the snake is attempting to make the humans understand that they are connected to the snakes and all other animals, and thus can no longer mistreat them. The snake continues to explain that:

When God first brought all creatures into being, gave them their origin, by His power ordering all things according to His will, He made some dependent on others for their sustenance. He made some the means and instrumentality of others' survival — all for the common good. Granted, what benefits some may harm others. But the harm was not His primary intention. He foresaw what was to be, yet knowing of this harm did not keep Him from creating these dangerous creatures. For He saw that the benefits they would confer were more general; the good they would do would outweigh the harm.

The snake hints at the idea of muskhkhar in stating that some animals are dependent on others for their survival, which adds another layer of meaning to the idea of serviceability as it relates broadly
to the maintenance of a balanced ecosystem as that is a basic tenant of the religion. It also serves to illustrate that it is not just humans who rely on the natural activities of other species. Instead it is a phenomenon that occurs with all other animals. This breaks down anthropocentrism, because people only hate snakes since they are dangerous to, humans: here, the snake is demonstrating that humanity's view is too narrow, and they must realize that snakes are helpful, not harmful, to the ecosystem as a whole. The anthropocentric view criticised by the snake is mirrored in the real life anthropocentric views of Muslims around the world. the story employs concepts now accepted as scientific fact to undermine the violent ideologies of the hadiths and recall the original, compassionate instructions of the Qu'ran.

CONCLUSION

Despite the anti-animal attitudes of many Muslims derived from the hadiths and perpetuated in popular culture and now-entrenched practices, the Qu'ranic core of the faith consists of a theocratic environmentalism that demands that humans act towards animals compassionately and protectively. Following this religious mandate completely results in a paradigmatic shift in seeing other animals as fellow beings and members of the community, not as commodities or problems. This shift has been occurring in Egypt with the creation of the first pet café and the emergence of animal welfare organizations. By shifting how people view other animals, it is possible to move out of the dangerous anthropocentrism that is in violation of Islamic expectations but nonetheless has dominated human relationships with other animals for centuries. While there is still a long way to go in improving halal production and ending violence against dogs and other animals, changes in popular sentiment towards animals in the last decade, reflecting the growing environmental consciousness and awareness of the interdependence of all species, seems
to be shifting, however slowly, Muslim attitudes and practices back to the original Qu’ranic expectations.
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