

## EXPLORING BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI'S THOUGHT ON NATURE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF *KALĀM JADĪD*

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### Abstract

This study examines Said Nursi's interpretation of nature within the framework of *Kalām Jadīd* (Neo Kalam) as a response to modern secular understandings of the natural world. Modern scientific discourse has often been shaped by philosophical currents such as naturalism, scientism, and materialism, which interpret nature as an autonomous system governed solely by causal laws without reference to divine agency. From the perspective of Islamic theology, such interpretations raise fundamental questions about the relationship between God and the natural order. Using qualitative textual analysis, primarily based on Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*, this study explores how Nursi reconstructs the concept of nature through the epistemological distinction between *al-ma'nā al-ismī* (the nominal meaning) and *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* (the indicative/relational meaning). The findings show that the *ismī* perspective represents a secular mode of perception that treats nature as a self-sufficient material reality explained through causation, natural laws, and chance. In contrast, the *ḥarfī* perspective understands nature as a network of

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signs (*āyāt*) that reflect divine attributes and point to the existence of the Creator. Within this framework, causal relations function not as independent creative powers but as patterns through which divine wisdom becomes manifest. This perspective also has environmental implications, encouraging a responsible and ethical relationship between humans and nature.

**Keywords:** Said Nursi; *Kalām jadīd* (new theology); *al-ma'nā al-ismī* (the nominal meaning); *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* (the indicative/relational meaning); environmental ethics.

### **Khulasah**

Kajian ini meneliti tafsiran Said Nursi terhadap alam dalam kerangka *kalām jadīd* (neo-kalam) sebagai respons terhadap pemahaman sekular moden tentang alam semula jadi. Wacana sains moden sering dipengaruhi oleh aliran falsafah seperti naturalisme, saintisme dan materialisme, yang mentafsirkan alam sebagai suatu sistem autonomi yang dikawal sepenuhnya oleh hukum sebab-akibat tanpa merujuk kepada perbuatan Ilahi. Dari perspektif teologi Islam, tafsiran sedemikian menimbulkan persoalan asas tentang hubungan antara Tuhan dan susunan alam. Dengan menggunakan analisis tekstual kualitatif berasaskan karya utama Nursi, *Risale-i Nur*, kajian ini meneliti bagaimana Nursi membina semula konsep alam melalui perbezaan epistemologi antara *al-ma'nā al-ismī* (makna nominatif) dan *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* (makna relasi). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa perspektif *ismī* mewakili cara pandang sekular yang memahami alam sebagai realiti material yang berdiri sendiri serta dijelaskan melalui hubungan sebab-akibat, hukum alam, dan unsur kebetulan. Sebaliknya, perspektif *ḥarfī* memahami alam sebagai rangkaian tanda (*āyāt*) yang mencerminkan sifat-sifat Ilahi serta menunjukkan kewujudan Pencipta. Dalam kerangka ini, hubungan sebab-akibat tidak berfungsi sebagai kuasa pencipta yang bebas, sebaliknya sebagai pola yang menzahirkan hikmah Ilahi. Perspektif ini turut mempunyai implikasi terhadap etika alam sekitar

dengan menggalakkan hubungan yang bertanggungjawab serta beretika antara manusia dan alam sekitar.

**Kata kunci:** Said Nursi; *Kalām jadīd* (neo-kalam); *al-ma'nā al-ismī* (makna nominatif); *al-ma'nā al-harfī* (makna relasi); etika alam sekitar.

## Introduction

The development of modern science has been shaped by several philosophical traditions, including empiricism, rationalism, naturalism, secularism, and scientism. These intellectual currents have contributed to the emergence of a secular approach to the study of nature,<sup>1</sup> in which the natural world is understood to operate according to fixed laws and causal relations, without reference to divine intervention. Within this framework, the universe is often viewed as a self-regulating system governed solely by natural processes.<sup>2</sup> Harvey Cox describes this condition as part of the broader process of secularization, which not only separates religion from public life but also encourages a worldview that interprets reality without reference to God. One of the key consequences of this process is what Cox calls the 'disenchantment of nature', where nature is reduced to purely material phenomena and stripped of its spiritual and sacred significance.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the natural world is increasingly understood through secular, materialist, and naturalistic

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<sup>1</sup> M. Kamal Hassan, "The Necessity of Studying the Natural Sciences from the Qur'anic Worldview," in *Islamic Perspectives on Science and Technology* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2016), 35-56; Tonny Ilham Prayogo & Abdul Rahmat, "Ateisme Dalam Perspektif Barat Dan Timur," *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam* 17(1) (2019), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Necati Aydin elucidated that causality is the concept that every consequence arises from specific causes. Put simply, when we witness an occurrence, we inquire into the underlying cause. Causality refers to the acceptance of underlying reasons that explain observed phenomena. Necati Aydin, *Said Nursi and Science in Islam: Character Building Through Nursi's Mana-i Harfi* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 69.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1965), 30-37.

perspectives.<sup>4</sup> From an Islamic theological standpoint, however, such an interpretation raises fundamental questions about the relationship between God and the natural order, since the secular understanding of nature tends to marginalize the Divine role in explaining the existence, meaning, and functioning of the universe.<sup>5</sup>

On many occasions, al-Attas characterizes Western culture as a form of secular-atheistic culture, in which God is largely excluded from both human life and the scientific worldview.<sup>6</sup> Within this perspective, nature is perceived as an independent and eternal entity that operates according to its own internal system, leaving no place for divine agency in the universe's mechanism. As he explains, "the world seen from this perspective is an independent, eternal universe; a self-subsistent system evolving according to its own laws."<sup>7</sup> Such a worldview gradually dissolves belief in the relationship between God and nature. Consequently, a distorted understanding of nature emerges, becoming one of the underlying causes of environmental destruction, as humans come to perceive themselves as having unrestricted authority

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<sup>4</sup> The idea that the rise of a rational worldview has undermined the foundations of faith in a world of the supernatural, the mysterious, and magic, was strongly influenced by Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. T. Parsons (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 109; Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 113; Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1969), 125.

<sup>5</sup> Collen Windham-Hughes, "Relational and Procedural Literacies in the Study of Religion," in *Civility, Religious Pluralism and Education*, ed. Vincent Biondo and Andrew Fiala (New York & London: Routledge, 2014), 160; Angela Rudert, "A Sufi, Sikh, Buddhist, TV Guru," in *Religious Pluralism, State and Society in Asia*, ed. Chiara Formichi. (New York & London: Routledge, 2014), 253.

<sup>6</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains*, trans. Saiful Muzani (Bandung: Institut Pemikiran Islam dan Pembangunan Insan, 2010), 28–29.

<sup>7</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995), 114; Al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains*, 27.

to exploit nature to satisfy their needs.<sup>8</sup> As Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues, the contemporary ecological crisis is deeply rooted in the desacralization of nature brought about by the rise of a secular and anthropocentric worldview that reduces nature to a mere resource to be dominated and exploited by humans.<sup>9</sup>

To address these challenges, Islam plays a crucial role in instilling fundamental values and ethical principles that shape how humans perceive and manage nature.<sup>10</sup> A correct understanding of nature will shape human attitudes and behavior toward it. As beings entrusted with a special status on earth, humans bear a profound responsibility to maintain ecological balance and preserve the natural order. In response to the crisis arising from erroneous conceptions of nature, Said Nursi proposed a renewed paradigm for understanding nature. Through the perspective of *kalām jadīd*, he sought to challenge the reductionist views of nature.

This paper seeks to reinterpret the concept of nature in Said Nursi's thought through the framework of *kalām jadīd*. Although the concept of nature has long been discussed in the classical tradition of *'ilm al-kalām*, these discussions were largely confined to metaphysical debates such as whether the universe is *qadīm* (eternal) or *ḥadīth* (created), as well as polemical disputes among theological schools.<sup>11</sup> In the context of contemporary intellectual challenges, however, such discussions are often insufficient to address modern

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<sup>8</sup> Layna Droz, "Anthropocentrism as the Scapegoat of the Environmental Crisis: A Review," *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics* 22 (2022), 31–32; Zal Al. Hamid, "Ekoteologi Dalam Islam Pandangan Said Nursi," *Relinesia: Jurnal Kajian Agama Dan Multikulturalisme Indonesia* 3(3) (2024), 237.

<sup>9</sup> Mohammad Fazlhashemi, "Islamic Ecotheology," in *Intersections of Religion, Education, and a Sustainable World*, ed. Windsor, S., Franck, O. (Cham: Springer Nature, 2025), 26–27.

<sup>10</sup> Muhamed Ali and Muaz Agushi, "Eco-Islam: Integrating Islamic Ethics into Environmental Policy for Sustainable Living," *International Journal of Religion* 5(9) (2024), 949–950.

<sup>11</sup> Kholili Hasib & Zainal Abidin, "The Concept of Nature According to Syed M. Naquib al-Attās: The Perspective of New Kalam," *Potret Pemikiran* 27(1) (2023), 18–117.

philosophical and scientific paradigms. Classical *kalām* was formulated to respond to the doctrinal and philosophical problems of its time, whereas modern debates about nature are closely related to secular interpretations of science, materialism, positivism, and naturalism. Consequently, many of the conceptual frameworks and arguments developed in classical *kalām* no longer fully correspond to the intellectual challenges of the modern era.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary discussions of nature, therefore, require engagement not only with theological discourse but also with developments in science, philosophy, and metaphysics in order to respond to the secular interpretation of the cosmos.<sup>13</sup> Within this context, *kalām jadīd* provides a renewed theological paradigm that allows the concept of nature to be understood not merely as a physical reality but as a meaningful sign (*āyāt*) pointing to divine existence, thereby offering a more comprehensive philosophical framework for understanding the human relationship with nature.

Said Nursi is particularly significant in this discussion for several reasons. First, his monumental work, the *Risale-i Nur*, represents a significant manifestation of *tajdīd al-kalām*, as Nursi himself understood his writings as an effort to renew the methods and approaches of Islamic theology in responding to modern intellectual challenges. Second, in the field of ecology and environmental thought, Nursi has often been regarded as an influential Muslim environmental thinker, making him an authoritative figure in discussing the concept of nature within the framework of *kalām jadīd*.<sup>14</sup> Third, the

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<sup>12</sup> Amal Fathullah Zarkasyi & Akhmad Mujahidin, "A New 'Ilm Kalam: Thinking Between the Classical Heritage and the Philosophical Methodology" (Paper, Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies (ICSSIS 2018), Paris: Atlantis Press, 2019), 208: 11–12.

<sup>13</sup> Hasib & Abidin, "The Concept of Nature According to Syed M Naquib al-Attās," 18–117.

<sup>14</sup> D. Aidus, "The Approach to the Environment Question of the Qur'an and Its Contemporary Commentary, The *Risale-i Nur*" (The Fourth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Badiuzzaman Sa'id Nursi: A

*Risale-i Nur* was written during a period marked by intense Westernisation and secularisation in the late Ottoman and early Republican era. Consequently, both the content and style of Nursi's writings reflect a strong intellectual effort to respond to these challenges by reaffirming Islamic understandings of nature, faith, and reality.<sup>15</sup>

To demonstrate the novelty of this research, it is necessary to examine several previous studies in more detail. The article entitled "Said Nursi's Concept of God and Nature: A Critique of the Views of Atheism and Naturalism" analyzes Nursi's theological critique of atheism and naturalism, particularly their assumption that nature operates independently without divine intervention. The study shows that, according to Nursi, nature does not possess autonomous power but functions as a sign that reflects the existence and power of God. However, the focus of this study remains primarily on Nursi's critique of atheistic and naturalistic worldviews rather than on the broader theological framework of *kalām jadīd*.<sup>16</sup> Another study, titled "Paradigma Kalam dalam Konservasi Lingkungan Menurut Said Nursi," examines Nursi's ecological thought and its relevance to environmental conservation. The article highlights Nursi's concept of *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī*, which views nature as inseparable from the divine dimension and emphasizes that humans should interpret the natural world as pointing to God rather than as an independent reality. Nevertheless, this study mainly addresses the ethical and environmental implications of Nursi's thought without situating it within the broader discourse of contemporary Islamic theology.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, the article "The Concept of Nature

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Contemporary Approach Toward Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of *Risale-I Nur*, Istanbul, 1998), 64.

<sup>15</sup> Nur Hadi Ihsan & Moh. Isom Mudin, "Paradigma Kalam dalam Konservasi Lingkungan Menurut Said Nursi," *Tasfīyah* 4(1) (2020), 30–31.

<sup>16</sup> Amal Fathullah Zarkasyi & Chandra Dwisetyo Widodo, "Said Nursi's Concept of God and Nature: A Critique of the Views of Atheism and Naturalism," *Rusydiah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 4(2) (2023), 170–93.

<sup>17</sup> Ihsan & Mudin, "Paradigma Kalam," 27–46.

According to Syed M. Naquib al-Attas: The Perspective of New Kalam” argues that al-Attas’s understanding of nature, grounded in the Islamic worldview, can serve as a model for developing *kalām jadīd* in response to modern intellectual challenges. The study emphasizes that contemporary discussions of nature must move beyond classical theological polemics and engage with science, philosophy, and metaphysics to respond to secular interpretations of the cosmos.<sup>18</sup> Despite these contributions, previous studies have not systematically analyzed the concept of nature in Nursi’s thought through the analytical framework of *kalām jadīd*. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing Nursi’s reinterpretation of nature within the discourse of *kalām jadīd*, particularly through the concepts of *al-ma‘nā al-ismī* (the nominal meaning) and *al-ma‘nā al-ḥarfī* (the relational meaning).

This study, therefore, aims to answer the following question: How does Said Nursi reinterpret the concept of nature within the framework of *kalām jadīd* in response to modern secular interpretations of nature? By analyzing the concepts of *al-ma‘nā al-ismī* and *al-ma‘nā al-ḥarfī*, this article argues that Nursi reformulates the classical theological discourse on nature within the framework of *kalām jadīd*. In doing so, his perspective offers a theological response to the secular interpretation of nature and provides a framework that remains relevant for contemporary philosophical and environmental discussions.

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis of Said Nursi’s thought on nature within the framework of *kalām jadīd*.<sup>19</sup> The research is based primarily on library sources, with the main primary source being *Risale-i Nur* written by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Secondary sources include

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<sup>18</sup> Hasib & Abidin, “The Concept of Nature,” 23-113.

<sup>19</sup> John W. Cresswell, *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches*, ed. Achmad Fawaid (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2014), 7.

scholarly books, journal articles, and previous studies discussing Nursi's theology, Islamic philosophy, and the discourse of *kalām jadīd*.

The analysis is conducted through a conceptual and textual approach.<sup>20</sup> First, key concepts related to Nursi's understanding of nature, particularly *al-ma'nā al-ismī* and *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī*, are identified from relevant passages in *Risale-i Nur*. Second, these concepts are analyzed within the broader framework of Islamic theological discourse, especially in relation to classical discussions on nature and causality in *kalām*. Third, the study interprets how Nursi's perspective can be situated within the intellectual context of *kalām jadīd* as a response to modern secular interpretations of nature.

The study applies content analysis techniques to systematically examine textual evidence and interpret Nursi's arguments in a coherent and integrated manner.<sup>21</sup> This analysis evaluates Nursi's concepts by examining their philosophical coherence, theological consistency, and relevance to contemporary environmental discourse.

### **Between Tradition and Modern Science: A Critical Assessment of Said Nursi Intellectual Phases and Theological Legacy**

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1876–1960) was one of the most influential Muslim scholars of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods in Turkey. He was born in the village of Nurs in eastern Anatolia to a religious Kurdish family; his father was Mirza and his mother was Nuriye. From an early age, Nursi showed exceptional intellectual ability and pursued traditional Islamic education in various madrasas across eastern Anatolia. He studied under several prominent scholars and became widely known for his remarkable memory and

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<sup>20</sup> Mudjia Rahardjo, *Tanya Jawab Metodologi Penelitian Sosial Kualitatif*, ed. Suprpto and Bresca Meirina (Mojokerto: Giri Prapanca Loka, 2024), 72–73; Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 87–183.

<sup>21</sup> Kimberly A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook* (California: SAGE Publications Inc., 2017), 37–39.

intellectual capacity, earning him the title "Bediuzzaman" (the wonder of the age).<sup>22</sup> In addition to mastering classical Islamic sciences such as theology (*kalām*), jurisprudence, and logic, Nursi also engaged with modern sciences, including history, mathematics, and philosophy. He believed that the intellectual decline of the Muslim world was partly due to the separation between religious knowledge and modern scientific disciplines.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, he proposed establishing an educational institution known as Madrasat al-Zahra, which aimed to integrate religious and modern sciences.<sup>24</sup>

Scholars commonly divide Nursi's intellectual life into several phases.<sup>25</sup> The first phase, often referred to as "Old Said" (Eski Said), was characterized by his involvement in political and social reform during the late Ottoman period.<sup>26</sup> The second phase, known as "New Said" (Yeni Said), marked a shift toward a more reflective intellectual approach, in which Nursi focused on strengthening Islamic faith in response to the rise of secularism, materialism, and positivism in modern society.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars also identify a later phase, often referred to as "Third Said", during which Nursi devoted himself primarily to teaching and guiding society through his writings.<sup>28</sup> Nursi's most significant work is *Risale-i Nur*, a

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<sup>22</sup> Sukran Vahide, *Biografi Intelektual Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: Transformasi Dinasti Usmani Menjadi Republik Turki*, (Jakarta: Anatolia), 8–30.

<sup>23</sup> Ihsan Kasim Salih, *Said Nursi Pemikir dan Sufi Besar Abad 20: Membebaskan Agama Dari Dogmatisme dan Sekularisme Said Nursi* (Jakarta: Murai Kencana, 2003), 14; Habiburrahman El Shirazy, *Api Tauhid: Cahaya Keagungan Cinta Sang Mujaddid* (Jakarta: Republika, 2014), 202.

<sup>24</sup> Sukran Vahide, *Biografi Intelektual Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Sujat Zubaidi Saleh, *The Epistemology of Contemporary Tafsir with Reference to Risale-I Nur Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Yogyakarta: Kurnia Kalam Semesta, 2019), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ihsān Qāsim al Šālīhī, *Badī' al Zamān Sa'īd al Nursī: Naẓrah 'Āmmah 'an Ḥayātih wa Āthārih* (Morocco: Maṭba'at al Najāh al Jadīdah, 1999), 50.

<sup>27</sup> Nezir Akyeşilmen & Arif Behiç Özcan, "Islamic Movements and Their Role in Politics in Turkey," *Selcuk University Journal of Institute of Social Sciences* 31 (2014), 29–38.

<sup>28</sup> Ihsan Kasim Salih, *Said Nursi Pemikir Dan Sufi Besar Abad 20*, 50.

collection of writings that offers a theological interpretation of the Qur'an, with particular emphasis on explaining and strengthening faith in the modern age. Written largely during periods of exile, imprisonment, and political pressure, these works address the intellectual challenges posed by modern secular thought and aim to reaffirm the relationship between faith, reason, and the natural world.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Kalām Jadīd* and the Metaphysical Reconstruction of Nature**

The development of Islamic theological discourse has always been closely connected to the intellectual challenges encountered by Muslim societies in different historical periods. In the classical era, Islamic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) primarily functioned as a discipline for defending core doctrinal beliefs against internal sectarian debates and external philosophical critiques. As described by Ibn Khaldun, *'ilm al-kalām* is "a science that involves argumentation on behalf of faith-based doctrines using rational evidence and responding to those who deviate from the beliefs of the Salaf and Ahl al-Sunnah."<sup>30</sup> Within this framework, classical served mainly as an apologetic discipline aimed at safeguarding orthodox Islamic belief through rational argumentation.

With the advent of modernity, however, Muslim scholars were confronted with new philosophical and scientific paradigms emerging from Western intellectual traditions, such as secularism, scientific materialism, positivism, naturalism, Marxism, existentialism, Darwinism, and pragmatism. These developments significantly reshaped the landscape of religious thought and posed new epistemological challenges to traditional theological frameworks.<sup>31</sup> In response, modern Muslim scholars introduced *kalām jadīd*, a renewed theological approach that

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<sup>29</sup> Ihsan Kasim Salih, *Said Nursi Pemikir Dan Sufi Besar Abad 20*, 24–25.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah* (Morocco: Bayt al-Funūn wa al-'Ulūm wa al-Adab, 2006), 458.

<sup>31</sup> Fathullah Zarkasyi & Mujahidin, "A New 'Ilm Kalam," 10–13.

seeks to reinterpret and reformulate classical Islamic theology within the context of modern intellectual developments. Rather than rejecting the classical tradition, *kalām jadīd* attempts to reconstruct its arguments and methods so that Islamic theology remains relevant in engaging contemporary philosophical and scientific debates.<sup>32</sup>

The term *kalām jadīd* is often associated with the Indian Muslim scholar Shibli Nu'mani, who used the concept to describe a new approach to Islamic theology capable of engaging with modern intellectual developments. According to Nu'mani, the scope of theological discussion must expand beyond classical debates over sectarian doctrines to address broader intellectual issues, including modern science, secularism, and philosophical skepticism.<sup>3</sup> In his work, *ʿIlm al-Kalām al-Jadīd*, he explained that the old theology was mainly concerned with Islamic doctrines because the objections to Islam at that time were related to doctrines. Today, however, it addresses itself more to religious history, civilization problems and ethical concerns.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, *kalām jadīd* does not introduce entirely new theological doctrines but rather represents a reinterpretation of classical theological discussions through the lens of contemporary intellectual contexts.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that *kalām jadīd* does not replace classical *kalām* (*kalām qadīm*) but rather develops new approaches that are more compatible with advances in modern knowledge and contemporary modes of

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<sup>32</sup> A similar observation is made by Frederick M. Denny, who notes that in the modern era, Islamic theology increasingly confronted philosophical and intellectual challenges. Although he did not explicitly employ the term *Kalām Jadīd*, his analysis highlights how modern philosophical thought reshaped the context in which Islamic theology operates. Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Islamic Theology in the New World: Some Issues and Prospects," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64(4) (1994), 1069–1084; Fathullah Zarkasyi & Mujahidin, "A New 'Ilm Kalam,'" 11.

<sup>33</sup> Shibli al-Nu'mānī al-Hind, *ʿIlm Kalām Jadīd* (Cairo: Al-Markaz al-Qawmī li al-Tarjamah, 2012), 182–83.

thought.<sup>34</sup> Classical Muslim theologians such as al-Ash'ari, al-Ghazali and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi had already engaged deeply with philosophical challenges, particularly in their encounters with Greek philosophy and metaphysical debates concerning causality, the eternity of the world, and the nature of divine attributes.<sup>35</sup> Their intellectual efforts demonstrate that Islamic theology historically evolved through dynamic interaction with philosophical traditions. What distinguishes *kalām jadīd*, therefore, is not the emergence of entirely new theological questions, but the transformation of the methodological frameworks used to address them within the intellectual context of modernity.

Some scholars trace the methodological roots of *kalām jadīd* to earlier theological developments. The works of al-Ghazali, particularly *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, demonstrate an early engagement between Islamic theology and philosophical reasoning.<sup>36</sup> Later theologians such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi further expanded this engagement by incorporating various rational disciplines such as physics, metaphysics, and mathematics into theological discussions.<sup>37</sup> In contemporary contexts, this intellectual legacy encourages Muslim theologians to engage with modern science and philosophy while maintaining the foundational principles of Islamic belief, reflecting the broader aim of *kalām jadīd* to preserve theological orthodoxy while addressing the epistemological challenges of modernity.<sup>38</sup>

One of the most significant themes emerging in this renewed theological discourse is the concept of nature, particularly in relation to modern scientific interpretations of the universe.<sup>39</sup> Classical theologians debated whether the

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<sup>34</sup> Fathullah Zarkasyi & Mujahidin, "A New 'Ilm Kalam," 12.

<sup>35</sup> Hasib & Abidin, "The Concept of Nature," 117.

<sup>36</sup> Hasib & Abidin, "The Concept of Nature," 114–117.

<sup>37</sup> Adi Setia Mohd Dom, "Reviving Kalam Jadid in the Modern Age: The Perpetual Relevance of al-Ghazali and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi," *Tafhim* 4 (2011), 124–125.

<sup>38</sup> Fathullah Zarkasyi and Mujahidin, "A New 'Ilm Kalam," 12.

<sup>39</sup> J. Ṣalībā, *Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-'Arabīyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Ranānī, 1970), 68.

universe was eternal (*qadīm*) or created (*hadith*), focusing primarily on metaphysical questions concerning the relationship between God and the cosmos.<sup>40</sup> However, modern discussions increasingly address the relationship between scientific explanations of nature and divine agency, particularly in light of the rise of scientific naturalism and mechanistic interpretations of the universe.<sup>41</sup> Within modern scientific discourse, nature is often interpreted as a self-regulating system governed by natural laws. Such interpretations frequently emerge from secular philosophical frameworks that limit the understanding of reality to empirical and material dimensions.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, the universe is perceived as operating independently of divine intervention, thereby marginalizing theological interpretations of the natural world.

From the perspective of Islamic theology, nature cannot be reduced to a purely physical system, as it possesses both physical and metaphysical dimensions that reflect divine wisdom within the created order.<sup>43</sup> This theological understanding is central to the framework of *kalām jadīd*, which seeks to reinterpret the relationship between God, nature, and scientific knowledge in response to modern intellectual paradigms. In this context, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas argues that nature should be understood within the Islamic worldview (*ru'yat al-Islām li a-wujūd*), where reality encompasses both empirical and metaphysical dimensions. Accordingly, nature is not merely a physical system but a collection of divine signs (*āyāt*) that point toward the existence and wisdom of God.<sup>44</sup> By reintegrating metaphysical and theological dimensions into the study of nature, this perspective challenges modern secular interpretations of science that treat nature as an autonomous

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<sup>40</sup> Hasib and Abidin, "The Concept of Nature," 117.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to The Metaphysics of Islam*, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Fathullah Zarkasyi and Mujahidin, "A New 'Ilm Kalam," 13.

<sup>43</sup> Wan Mohammad Nor Wan Daud, *Filsafat Dan Praktik Pendidikan Islam Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas* (Bandung: Mizan 2003), 183.

<sup>44</sup> Hasib and Abidin, "The Concept of Nature," 117.

system and instead restores a holistic understanding of reality that connects scientific knowledge with spiritual insight.<sup>45</sup>

This renewed theological approach provides an important framework for understanding how contemporary Muslim thinkers reinterpret the relationship between God, nature, and scientific knowledge. Among those thinkers, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi offers a particularly influential perspective. Through his work, *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi presents a theological interpretation of nature that directly engages with modern scientific and philosophical paradigms while reaffirming the central role of divine agency in the natural order. The following section, therefore, examines Nursi's understanding of nature and its relationship to God within the broader context of *kalām jadīd*.

### **Reading Nature in *Kalām Jadīd*: Said Nursi's *Al-Ma'nā al-ismī* and *Al-Ma'nā al-ḥarfī***

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi develops a distinctive theological interpretation of nature through the concepts of *al-ma'nā al-ismī* (the nominal meaning) and *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* (the relational meaning), which represent two epistemological perspectives for understanding reality. Nursi refers to these concepts as central principles in his intellectual framework, stating that over decades of reflection, he came to recognize several key notions, including *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī*, *al-ma'nā al-ismī*, *niyyah* (intention), and *nazar* (viewpoint).<sup>46</sup> Among these, *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* and *al-ma'nā al-ismī* are particularly significant for explaining how human beings perceive the relationship between nature and God.

These terms originate from Arabic grammar. In linguistic usage, *ism* (noun) refers to a word that possesses an

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<sup>45</sup> Fathullah Zarkasyi and Mujahidin, "A New 'Ilm Kalam," 13.

<sup>46</sup> Nursi explicitly states: "During the 40 years of my life and 30 years of study, I have learned four phrases and four sentences. The phrases are: 1] the *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* (being, like a letter, pointing to God rather than to itself); 2] the *ma'nā al-ismī* (beings are disconnected from God. They indicate none other than their own existence); 3] *niyyah* (intention]; and 4) *nazaar* (viewpoint)." Badi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nursī, *Al-Mathnawī al-'Arabī al-Nūrī* (Cairo: Sozler Publications, 2004), 67.

independent meaning, whereas *ḥarf* (particle) derives its meaning only through its relation to other words. Nursi adopts this linguistic distinction metaphorically to describe two different ways of interpreting the natural world.<sup>47</sup> In this framework, *al-ma'nā al-ismī* refers to a mode of perception in which things are viewed as possessing meaning in themselves. When nature is interpreted through this perspective, natural entities are treated as independent realities whose existence and functioning can be explained solely through physical causes, natural laws, or chance.<sup>48</sup> Such an interpretation tends to detach nature from its Creator and reduce the universe to a self-sustaining material system.

In contrast, *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* represents a mode of perception in which beings are understood as signs pointing beyond themselves. Just as a grammatical particle derives meaning through its relation to other words, the entities of the natural world derive their ultimate meaning through their relation to God. From this perspective, natural phenomena do not merely exist as physical objects but function as indicators of divine wisdom, power, and creativity.<sup>49</sup> Nursi therefore emphasizes that when the universe is viewed as signifying its Creator rather than itself, scientific knowledge can lead to a deeper recognition of God; however, when nature is interpreted as self-referential, even extensive scientific knowledge may fail to reveal its true meaning.<sup>50</sup>

To clarify this distinction, Nursi employs the analogy of a mirror. When a person looks at a mirror, one may focus either on the material surface of the mirror itself or on the image reflected within it. If attention is directed only to the glass surface, the mirror is perceived merely as a physical object. However, if attention is directed to the reflection, the mirror functions as a medium that reveals something beyond

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<sup>47</sup> Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words* (Istanbul: Nesil, 2005), 147; Aydin, Necati, *Said Nursi and Science in Islam: Character Building through Nursi's Mana-i Harfi* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 10.

<sup>48</sup> Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Flashes* (Istanbul: Nesil, 2004), 244.

<sup>49</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 3:123.

<sup>50</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 757.

itself. For Nursi, the first mode corresponds to *al-ma'nā al-ismī*, in which nature is viewed as a self-contained material reality. The second corresponds to *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī*, in which nature functions as a reflective medium that points toward the existence and attributes of its Creator.<sup>51</sup> Through this conceptual framework, Nursi argues that the interpretation of nature ultimately depends on the epistemological perspective adopted by the observer. When nature is approached through *al-ma'nā al-ismī*, the universe appears as an autonomous system governed by material causation. In contrast, when interpreted through *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī*, the universe becomes a vast network of signs (*āyāt*) that reveal the divine names and attributes. Natural phenomena are not merely physical processes but manifestations of divine creativity within the created order.<sup>52</sup> As Colin Turner observes, this distinction forms the basis of Nursi's critique of modern naturalism, which tends to interpret the universe as a closed causal system independent of divine meaning.<sup>53</sup>

In this sense, Nursi's distinction between *al-ma'nā al-ismī* and *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* represents a theological reinterpretation of the relationship between God and nature within the framework of *kalām jadīd*. These two perspectives ultimately lead to different worldviews. The *al-ma'nā al-ismī* perspective corresponds to a materialistic interpretation of nature.<sup>54</sup> By contrast, the *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* perspective reflects a theocentric understanding in which the universe is perceived as a network of signs (*āyāt*) revealing the divine names and attributes.<sup>55</sup> This epistemological distinction also plays a central role in Nursi's critique of modern interpretations of nature.

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<sup>51</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 167.

<sup>52</sup> Sa'id Nursī, *al-Mathnawī al-'Arabī al-Nūrī*, 177, 183, 395.

<sup>53</sup> Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Gerlach Press, 2013), 95–131.

<sup>54</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 244.

<sup>55</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 757; Aydın, *Said Nursi and Science in Islam*, 42.

## Nature and Divine Agency in Nursi's *Kalām Jadīd*

In the modern era, the interpretation of nature has increasingly been shaped by philosophical currents such as naturalism, scientism, and materialism. Naturalism tends to interpret the universe as a self-sufficient system governed entirely by natural laws without reference to any transcendent reality<sup>56</sup>, while scientism assumes that empirical science is the only reliable source of knowledge.<sup>57</sup> Materialism further reinforces this worldview by reducing all phenomena to physical processes and denying the metaphysical dimensions of existence.<sup>58</sup> These intellectual tendencies developed particularly after the Renaissance and Enlightenment, when scientific inquiry gradually became separated from theological and metaphysical considerations. Scholars such as Harvey Cox describe this shift as the "disenchantment of nature," where nature loses its sacred significance,<sup>59</sup> while Seyyed Hossein Nasr refers to it as the "desacralization of nature," in which the cosmos is no longer perceived as a manifestation of divine wisdom but as a mechanism governed by impersonal laws.<sup>60</sup>

From the perspective of Islamic theology, such interpretations raise fundamental questions about the relationship between God and the natural order. The challenge for contemporary Islamic theology is therefore not merely the existence of causal relations in nature, but the philosophical interpretation that treats them as sufficient explanations of

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<sup>56</sup> Zarkasyi and Widodo, "Said Nursi's Concept of God and Nature," 179.

<sup>57</sup> Rik Peels, "Scientism and Scientific Fundamentalism: What Science Can Learn from Mainstream Religion," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 48(2) (2023), 395-410.

<sup>58</sup> Nur Hasan, "Kritik Islamic Worldview Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Terhadap Western Worldview," *Maraji` Journal of Islamic Studies* 1(1) (2014), 115-145.

<sup>59</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, 30-37.

<sup>60</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), 119.

reality without reference to a Creator.<sup>61</sup> In this context, the reinterpretation of nature becomes an important task for contemporary Islamic theology, particularly within the framework of *kalām jadīd*.

To understand how contemporary Muslim thinkers respond to these challenges, it is necessary to briefly revisit the classical theological discussion on causality that has long been a central theme in Islamic theological discourse. Classical Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd generally adopted Aristotelian notions of causality.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, theologians within the Ash'arite tradition, particularly al-Ghazali, rejected the idea that causes possess intrinsic creative power, arguing instead that what appears as causal relations in nature reflects the order established by divine will.<sup>63</sup> Within this classical debate, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi stands closer to the theological position that affirms divine agency as the ultimate source behind all natural events.<sup>64</sup> However, Nursi revisits this issue within a very

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<sup>61</sup> Gigih Saputra, "Zakir Naik's Concept of Divinity-Cosmology: Criticism-Reconstruction of the Modern Natural-Cosmological Theology," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 10(2) (2020), 325-352.

<sup>62</sup> Kara Richardson explains that classical Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna and Averroes adopted Aristotelian accounts of causation in which natural phenomena are explained through necessary relations between causes and effects. Kara Richardson, "Causation in Arabic and Islamic Thought," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015, 3-6, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-causation/>.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Ghazali explicitly rejected the notion of intrinsic causal power in natural causes. He argued that what appears as a causal relationship is merely a conjunction (*iqtirān*) created by God, not a necessary connection between cause and effect. Thus, the events such as burning by fire or healing by medicine occur through divine will rather than through the independent efficacy of natural causes. Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahāfut al-Falāsīfah): A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, ed. M. E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 166.

<sup>64</sup> Nursi's conception of causality closely resembles al-Ghazali's occasionalist view, according to which natural causes lack independent efficacy and serve only as instruments through which divine power is manifested. Consequently, what appears as autonomous forces in nature must be understood as veils that obscure the underlying operation of

different intellectual context shaped by modern scientific and philosophical developments.

It is within this intellectual context that Nursi's thought can be understood as part of the broader project of *kalām jadīd*. Rather than merely repeating classical theological discussions on causality, Nursi reinterprets the relationship between nature and divine agency in response to modern naturalistic interpretations of the universe. While acknowledging the observable regularity of causal relations in nature, he rejects the idea that causes possess independent creative power. Instead, causes function only as apparent instruments through which divine power becomes manifest in the created order.<sup>65</sup> Nursi criticizes modern scientific perspectives that treat causal mechanisms as self-sufficient explanations of natural phenomena, elevating causes to ultimate explanatory principles while obscuring the role of divine agency. Nursi argues that causes serve merely as veils within the observable order of the universe, while the true agent behind all events remains the "Eternally Besought One."<sup>66</sup>

This theological critique becomes clearer when examined through Nursi's epistemological distinction between *al-ma'nā al-ismī* and *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī*. When nature is interpreted through the perspective of *al-ma'nā al-ismī*, natural phenomena are understood as self-referential entities whose existence and functioning can be explained solely through causal mechanisms and natural laws. Such a perspective encourages a naturalistic worldview in which the universe appears as an autonomous system independent of

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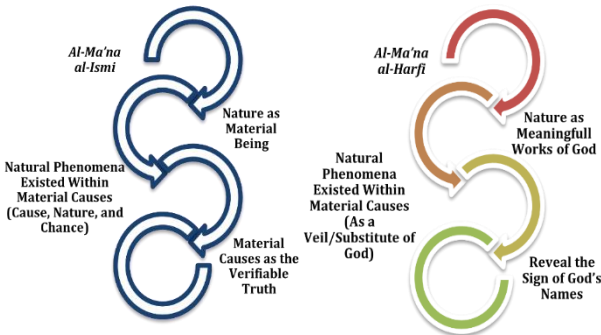
divine agency. Aydin, *Said Nursi and Science in Islam*, 71; Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2013), 95–131.

<sup>65</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 188.

<sup>66</sup> Said Nursi explained, "O heedless worshipper of causes! Causes are a veil; for, Divine dignity and grandeur require them to be thus. But that which acts and performs matters is the power of the Eternally Besought One; for Divine unity and glory require it to be thus, and necessitate their independence. That is to say; causes have been placed so that the dignity of power may be preserved in the superficial view of the mind". Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 300–301.

divine agency. In Nursi's critique, this approach attributes explanatory power to what he calls the "secular trio" of cause, nature, and chance, which are mistakenly regarded as the ultimate determinants of natural events.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, the perspective of *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* understands the entities of the natural world as signs that point beyond themselves toward the divine source that sustains them. From this viewpoint, causal relations do not represent independent mechanisms but rather the observable patterns through which divine wisdom becomes manifest. Nursi therefore argues that what appears as causation in nature is not efficient causation but a form of concurrence in which cause and effect are created together by divine power.<sup>68</sup> Causes and natural processes thus function only as apparent intermediaries within the divinely established order of the universe. As illustrated in Figure 1, these two perspectives represent fundamentally different ways of interpreting nature.

Figure 1: *Al-Ma'nā al-Isīmī* and *al-Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* Perspectives on Reading Nature



Source: Adapted by researcher

Figure 1 illustrates two different ways of interpreting

<sup>67</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 176.

<sup>68</sup> Said Nursi explains that what appears as causation in the universe is not efficient causation but a form of concurrence in which God creates cause and effect together. Apparent causal relations are established through order and sequence, while causes and nature function merely as veils for the manifestation of divine power. Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 244.

nature according to Nursi's epistemological framework. From the perspective of *al-ma'nā al-ismī*, nature is perceived as a material reality that stands independently, without reference to a Creator. Within this perspective, natural phenomena are explained primarily through material causes such as causation, natural laws, and chance. In contrast, the perspective of *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* understands the universe as a meaningful manifestation of divine action. Natural phenomena may appear to occur through natural causes, yet they ultimately function as signs that reveal God's names and attributes.

To clarify how natural causes operate within this perspective, Nursi employs simple analogies drawn from everyday experience. For instance, the production of light involves instruments such as a bulb and electrical circuits. Although these elements participate in the process, none possesses the power to produce light independently. Likewise, natural causes participate in the manifestation of events but cannot generate effects by themselves.<sup>69</sup> Within the perspective of *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī*, even the concept of natural law must therefore be understood differently. Natural laws are not autonomous forces governing the universe, but expressions of the order established by God. As Nursi argues, laws themselves cannot act or create effects; they merely describe the patterns through which divine power operates in the world.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, nature cannot be understood as an independent causal system but must be interpreted as a manifestation of divine wisdom and creativity, reflecting Nursi's broader methodological approach within *kalām jadīd*, which seeks to communicate theological principles through rational argumentation and accessible illustrations.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Alparslan Acikgenc, "Causation in Islamic Philosophy", In *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 114.

<sup>70</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 244.

<sup>71</sup> Muhammad Arwani Rofi'i, Siti Fatimatuz Zahroh and Nodir Tolipov, "Critique of Materialism in 'Ilm Al-Kalām Al-Jadīd: An Analysis of Jamaluddin Al-Afghani's Thought," *Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies* 3(2) (2025), 223.

In conclusion, the way humans interpret nature has significant ethical implications. When nature is viewed as an autonomous material system detached from divine meaning, it becomes easier to treat the natural world merely as an object of exploitation. Conversely, when nature is understood as a network of signs that reflect divine wisdom, human beings are encouraged to approach it with a sense of responsibility and reverence. Within Nursi's framework of *kalām jadīd*, this perspective reorients the understanding of nature from a purely material reality to a meaningful sign that points to the existence and attributes of God. The following section therefore examines how Nursi interprets nature as a sign (*āyah*) that reveals the presence of the Creator.

### **Said Nursi's Cosmological Semiotics: Nature as Divine Manifestation**

Having recognised the two perspectives of *al-ma'nā al-ismī* (the nominal meaning) and *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* (the relational meaning), Nursi argues that the *ismī* perspective is closely associated with philosophical currents such as secularism, atheism, naturalism, and materialism, which interpret nature as an autonomous material reality.<sup>72</sup> From this standpoint, nature is analyzed solely in terms of its physical structure and causal mechanisms without reference to its divine meaning. Nursi criticizes this approach as a form of desacralization that reduces nature to a purely material object and obscures its deeper metaphysical significance.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* perspective understands nature as a meaningful sign that points beyond itself to its Creator. For Nursi, the universe is not merely a collection of physical entities but a manifestation (*tajalliyāt*) of divine attributes.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, nature functions as one of the strongest indications of God's existence. This perspective resonates with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' view that the physical world can be understood as a collection of signs

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<sup>72</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 143.

<sup>73</sup> Sa'īd Nursī, *al-Mathnawī*, 395.

<sup>74</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 415 & 608.

(*āyāt*), similar to the Qur'an. While the Qur'an is the revealed written book, nature may be understood as an "unwritten book" that reflects divine wisdom and invites human beings to contemplate the Creator.<sup>75</sup>

Nursi frequently describes the universe using metaphors such as a book and a mirror. The universe, in his view, is a vast book whose pages continually testify to the attributes of God. As he writes, the universe is a mighty book whose chapters, pages, and letters praise and extol the Most Pure and Holy One by manifesting His attributes of beauty and perfection.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, every creature functions as a mirror reflecting the divine names and attributes. Through observation and contemplation of the order, harmony, and beauty of the natural world, humans can recognize manifestations of divine wisdom, power, and mercy.<sup>77</sup>

Consequently, Nursi emphasizes that the harmony and order observed in natural phenomena serve as clear indications of divine wisdom.<sup>78</sup> In another passage, he explains that the sciences themselves ultimately point to the Creator, since each discipline reveals the divine attributes through its own "particular mirror, far-seeing eye, and searching gaze."<sup>79</sup> Nature thus functions not merely as a physical environment but as a meaningful network of signs that guide human beings toward the recognition of God. Such an understanding of nature not only affirms the theological meaning of the universe but also encourages a responsible ethical relationship between humans and the natural world.

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<sup>75</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to The Metaphysics of Islam*, 78.

<sup>76</sup> Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Rays* (Istanbul: Nesil, 2004), 55-654.

<sup>77</sup> Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness* (Istanbul: Sozler, 1994), 16.

<sup>78</sup> Badiuzzaman Said Nursi explains, "Throughout the universe the mystery of co-operation is both concealed and pervasive; intimated in every part of it are mutual assistance and the reciprocal answering of needs. Only an all-encompassing power could do this, and create the particle, situating it suitably to all its relations.... Wherever they come from, they respond to the call for help; in the name of Divine unity, they meet with their surroundings." Said Nursi, *The Words*, 731.

<sup>79</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 171.

### ***Al-Ma'nā al-Ḥarfī* and *Tawḥīd*: Grounding Environmental Ethics in Said Nursi's Cosmology**

In recent decades, the world has faced increasingly severe environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.<sup>80</sup> Many scholars argue that contemporary environmental crises stem not only from technological and economic factors but also from deeper philosophical and ethical paradigms shaping human–nature relations.<sup>81</sup> When nature is understood purely as a material system devoid of sacred meaning, it becomes easier for human beings to exploit natural resources without ethical restraint. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr observes: The symbols in nature became facts, entities in themselves that are totally divorced from other orders of reality. The cosmos, which had been transparent, thus became opaque and spiritually meaningless, at least to those who were totally immersed in the scientific view of nature, even if individual scientists believed otherwise.<sup>82</sup> From this perspective, the environmental crisis can also be interpreted as a crisis of worldview shaped by reductionist and anthropocentric assumptions that detach nature from its moral and spiritual significance.<sup>83</sup>

Regarding this issue, Nursi's theological interpretation of nature offers an alternative perspective that reintroduces a sacred dimension to the natural world. By emphasizing the

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<sup>80</sup> Saad Saood Safdar and Ghulam Shams-ur-Rehman, "The Roots of the Ecological Crisis in the Theological and Philosophical Landscape of Modern Civilization," *Islamic Studies* 60(3) (2021), 303.

<sup>81</sup> Nasr argues that the ecological crisis stems from the loss of the sacred view of nature, and that restoring a moral relationship with the environment requires the resacralization of nature and the revival of religious ethics. Gloria Luque-Moya, "Toward a Harmonic Relationship Between Humans and Nature," *Asian Studies* 11(3) (2023), 129-147; Güncel Önkal, "Reconsidering the Paradigm Shift from Environmental Philosophy to Global Environmentalisms," *Filozofia* 79(9) (2024), 1049-1057.

<sup>82</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1990), 23.

<sup>83</sup> Fazlhashemi, "Islamic Ecotheology," 26–27.

concept of *tawhīd* and interpreting nature through the perspective of *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī*, Nursi views the universe as a manifestation of divine attributes and a network of signs (*āyāt*) pointing to the existence and wisdom of God.<sup>84</sup> Within this framework, nature is not merely a collection of material objects but a meaningful creation that reflects divine order and harmony. Nursi's conception of the universe as a book of the cosmos encourages a contemplative engagement with nature, in which scientific observation becomes a means of recognising divine wisdom in creation.<sup>85</sup> This interpretation resonates with broader Islamic ecological thought, which understands the natural world as a symbolic manifestation of divine unity rather than an autonomous material system.

This theological worldview also implies a profound interconnectedness among all elements of creation. Nursi frequently describes the universe as an integrated system in which every entity participates in a network of relationships reflecting the unity of the Creator.<sup>86</sup> Contemporary interpretations of his thought emphasize that such a cosmological vision challenges modern dualistic assumptions separating humans from nature and instead presents the universe as an interdependent order in which each element contributes to the harmony of creation.<sup>87</sup> In ecological terms, this perspective parallels contemporary environmental theories emphasizing systemic interdependence within ecosystems, although Nursi grounds this interconnectedness in the metaphysical principle of *tawhīd*. Accordingly, all beings from the stars to the smallest creatures are interconnected like links in a chain,<sup>88</sup> while at the same time

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<sup>84</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 731.

<sup>85</sup> Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, *Staff of Moses* (Cairo: Sozler Publications, 2004), 98; Akhmad Rizqon Khamami, "Membangun Peradaban Dengan Epistemologi Baru: Membaca Pemikiran Said Nursi," *Tsaqafah: Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 11(1) (2015), 65.

<sup>86</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 731.

<sup>87</sup> Zein Muchamad Masykur, "The Unity of Existence: Al-Bustami's Sufism and Environmental Thought," *Renai* 11(1) (2025), 86.

<sup>88</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 192; Muhammad Widus Sempo and Norullisza Khosim, "Said Nursi's Thoughts on Environmental Sustainability in

functioning as mirrors that reflect the divine names and attributes.<sup>89</sup>

The ethical implications of this theological framework are particularly significant for contemporary environmental discourse. If nature is understood as a manifestation of divine wisdom rather than merely as a material resource, human beings are more likely to approach the natural world with responsibility, humility, and reverence. Nursi's perspective reinforces the Islamic concept of human beings as *khulafā'* (stewards) entrusted with maintaining the balance and harmony of creation.<sup>90</sup> This mandate is explicitly stated in al-Qur'an, al-Baqarah: 30, "*innī jā'ilun fī al-ard khalīfah,*" which places humans as God's representatives to uphold justice and balance on earth.<sup>91</sup> Nursi interprets the role of humanity not as absolute domination over nature but as a moral trusteeship that requires the preservation of ecological equilibrium.<sup>92</sup> Within this framework, environmental responsibility becomes an integral dimension of religious ethics rather than simply a technical issue addressed through policy or regulation.

Furthermore, Nursi's ecological thought highlights several ecological principles embedded within the natural order. He interprets these patterns as manifestations of divine

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Risale-I Nur," *Afkār: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* Special Issue 2 (2020), 118.

<sup>89</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words*, 226.

<sup>90</sup> Said Nursi, *Staff of Moses*, 32.

<sup>91</sup> The term *khalīfah* is derived from the root *khalf*, which denotes succession, replacement, or generational continuity, as well as representation and deputation. This root and its derivatives occur approximately twenty-two times in the Qur'an, from which the concept of *khalīfah* emerges. Zuleyha Keskin and Mehmet Ozalp, "An Islamic Approach to Environmental Protection and Ecologically Sustainable Peace in the Age of the Anthropocene," in *Towards a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace*, ed. Camilleri, J., Guess, D. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 129.

<sup>92</sup> Moh Isom Mudin, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, and Abdul Kadir Riyadi, "Prinsip Ekologis Untuk Kehidupan Berkelanjutan Perspektif Teologi Islam: Kajian Atas Kitab Rasail Al-Nur Sa'id Nursi," *Fikrah* 9(1) (2021), 48-49.

attributes reflected in the structure of the universe, in which the continuity of life depends on maintaining divinely established patterns of balance and cooperation.<sup>93</sup> Within this framework, Nursi emphasizes moderation and simplicity as essential ethical virtues,<sup>94</sup> warning against excessive consumption and the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources as violations of the balance established in creation.<sup>95</sup> In this respect, Nursi's environmental ethics resonate with contemporary sustainability discourse, particularly in their emphasis on responsible consumption and ecological balance.

Beyond theoretical reflection, Nursi's perspective also offers practical implications for contemporary environmental initiatives. His eco-theological framework can inform Islamic environmental education programmes that integrate scientific knowledge with spiritual awareness. Such initiatives may encourage communities to reinterpret environmental stewardship as a religious and ethical obligation rooted in the recognition of nature as a manifestation of divine wisdom.<sup>96</sup> In this sense, Nursi's thought contributes to contemporary discussions on ecological responsibility by offering a holistic

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<sup>93</sup> Nursi interprets several ecological patterns in nature as manifestations (*tajallī*) of the divine names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*). Among them are purification and recycling (*al-tandhīf*) reflecting the Divine Name al-Quddūs; interdependence (*al-tasānud*); cooperation and harmony (*al-ta'āwun*); and dynamic balance (*al-iqtisād wa al-muwāzanah*), which reflect divine wisdom (*al-Hakīm*). These principles function as signs that guide human beings toward recognizing the order and wisdom of the Creator. Nur Hadi Ihsan and Moh Isom Mudin, "Paradigma Kalam Dalam Konservasi Lingkungan Menurut Said Nursi," *Tasfīyah* 4(1) (2020), 52–53.

<sup>94</sup> Zein Muchamad Masykur and Nasrudin, "Embracing the Sacred Trust: Said Nursi's Sufism as a Pathway to Climate Resilience and Environmental Stewardship," *Asian Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 3(2) (2024), 87–88.

<sup>95</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, 183.

<sup>96</sup> Taufikin Taufikin, "Integrating Eco-Theology in Islamic Education: A Case Study on Fostering Ecological Awareness Through Religious Pedagogy," *El-Tarbawi* 18(1) (2025), 1–37; Stefan Altmeyer, "Religious Education for Ecological Sustainability: An Initial Reality Check Using the Example of Everyday Decision-Making," *Journal of Religious Education* 69(1) (2021), 57–74.

framework that integrates theology, ethics, and environmental awareness.

Table 1: Nursi’s Integrative Framework of Nature

No.	Dimension	Nursi’s Perspective	Implication
1	Theology	Nature as divine signs ( <i>āyāt</i> ) reflecting God’s wisdom	Re-sacralization of nature
2	Science	Scientific observation as a means of understanding divine order	Integration of revelation and rational inquiry
3	Environmental Ethics	Human as responsible steward ( <i>khalīfah</i> ) of creation	Ethical responsibility toward the environment

Source: Adapted by researcher

As illustrated in Table 1, Nursi’s theology of nature integrates theology, science, and environmental ethics within the framework of *kalām jadīd*. Nature is understood as divine signs (*āyāt*) reflecting God’s wisdom, while scientific observation becomes a means of recognising divine order in creation. This perspective also transforms the human relationship with nature from exploitation into ethical responsibility and stewardship (*khilāfah*). In this respect, Nursi’s approach offers a theological response to the separation between religion, science, and ecology in modern secular thought.

Ultimately, Nursi’s theology of nature provides an important intellectual resource for addressing the ecological challenges of the modern world. By interpreting nature as a meaningful manifestation of divine attributes and emphasizing humanity’s responsibility as the steward of creation, his thought offers a critical alternative to materialistic conceptions of nature that underlie many contemporary environmental crises. At the same time, Nursi integrates scientific reflection with spiritual awareness, providing a constructive framework for rethinking the

relationship between humans, nature, and the Creator within the broader discourse of environmental sustainability. In this respect, his perspective resonates with contemporary sustainability debates, which increasingly acknowledge that environmental solutions require not only technological innovation but also ethical and spiritual transformation.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined Said Nursi's understanding of nature within the framework of *kalām jadīd* as a response to modern secular interpretations of the natural world. The analysis demonstrates that Nursi reformulates classical theological discussions on nature by addressing the epistemological challenges posed by modern philosophical currents such as naturalism, scientism, and materialism. Through the conceptual distinction between *al-ma'nā al-ismī* (the nominal meaning) and *al-ma'nā al-ḥarfī* (the indicative/relational meaning), Nursi proposes two fundamentally different ways of interpreting reality. The *ismī* perspective interprets nature as a self-referential material system explained solely through causal mechanisms, natural laws, and chance, while the *al-ḥarfī* perspective understands the universe as a network of signs (*āyāt*) that point to the existence and attributes of God. Within this framework, Nursi does not reject scientific observation but reinterprets it within a theological worldview in which natural phenomena function as manifestations of divine wisdom rather than autonomous causal powers. His approach, therefore, represents a form of theological reconstruction characteristic of *kalām jadīd*, in which classical theological concepts are reformulated to engage modern scientific and philosophical paradigms.

Furthermore, Nursi's interpretation of nature carries significant ethical implications for contemporary environmental discourse. By understanding the natural world as a meaningful manifestation of divine order, his theology encourages a moral relationship between humans and nature grounded in responsibility, humility, and stewardship (*khilāfah*). In this sense, Nursi's thought provides a constructive framework that integrates theology, science, and

environmental ethics. It offers an important intellectual resource for rethinking the relationship among humans, nature, and the Creator in contemporary discussions of ecological responsibility and sustainability.

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