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*The Problem of the Nature of the Science of Tafsir by Enes Büyük (İstanbul: Ensar Publications,
2019), 232 pages, ISBN: 9786057619501*

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Öz

Bu eser, tefsir ilminin mahiyetindeki karmaşıklığı ele almaktadır. Eserde; tefsir usulünün ilkelerinin belirlenmesi ve tefsir rivayetleri çerçevesinde tefsirin işlevi tartışılmaktadır. Kitabın tefsir ilmine katkısı, konunun anlaşılması ve ele alınması için gerekli detayları vermeyi amaçladığının altı çizilerek ve klasik ve modern tefsir anlayışları karşılaştırılarak vurgulanmaktadır. Ayrıca tefsirin ilmi değeri ve diğer İslami ilimlerle ilişkisi incelenmektedir. Çalışma, öncelikle İslam düşüncesindeki tefsir mahiyetine ilişkin tartışmaları belirlemeye ve analiz etmeye odaklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tefsir, Kur'an, Mahiyet, İşlev, Tanım, Kitap Değerlendirmesi.

**The Problem of the Nature of the Science of Tafsir by Enes Büyük (İstanbul: Ensar Publications,
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Abstract

This article focuses on the intricate nature of the science of tafsir. It discusses the function of tafsir within the framework of identifying the principles of tafsir methodology and tafsir narrations. The book's contribution to the science of tafsir is emphasized by underlining that it aims to provide essential details for understanding and addressing the subject and comparing classical and modern understandings of tafsir. In addition, the scientific value of tafsir and its relationship with other Islamic sciences is examined. The work primarily focuses on identifying and analyzing the discussions regarding the nature of tafsir within Islamic thought.

Keywords: Tafsir, Qur'an, Essence, Definition, Function, Book Review.

The question of whether the activity of understanding and interpreting the Holy Qur'an and the general name of the literature written in this context, known as "tafsir" constitutes a genuine science, and whether it has principles and needs to be studied. This book, which we will review, has been written by Enes Büyük aims to seek answers to this issue. The book consists of five main chapters, which are: Chapter 1: The Problem of Defining Tafsir. Chapter 2: The Problem of the Scientific Nature of Tafsir. Chapter 3: The Problem of the Knowledge Value of Tafsir and Its Formation Depending on Human Effort. Chapter 4: The Problem of the Function of Tafsir. Chapter 5: The Problem of the Sciences Related to Tafsir. In this book, the author explores the nature of the science of tafsir, examines the possibility of defining tafsir at its utmost limit, and discusses the function of tafsir. The study titled 'The Problem of the Nature of the Science of Tafsir' is significant because it is the first detached book that deals with the nature of the science of tafsir and its related topics collectively that are mentioned above. In the introduction, concise definitions of concepts such as science, expertise, and miscellaneous sciences under the issues of the science of logic are given succinctly. The fifty-eight definitions of tafsir identified within the tradition of exegesis at the end of the book, with careful attention to the chronologies of authors, are highly functional for researchers in the field. This breakdown elucidates the multifaceted

benefits of presenting authors' interpretations and definitions together in scholarly discourse: Clarity and Coherence as readers grasp the context of defined terms more clearly, thereby enhancing comprehension and coherence of the text. Additionally, it fosters engagement by encouraging readers to engage more deeply with the text when they understand the authors' interpretations, thereby fostering critical thinking and analysis. Moreover, it streamlines the reading experience by simplifying the process, as the proximity of interpretations and definitions eliminates the need for readers to search for contextual meanings elsewhere in the text. Furthermore, it facilitates discussion, as readers can readily reference authors' interpretations to support arguments or seek clarification, thereby fostering richer and more informed discussions around the text.

With the acceptance of the science of logic as a tool science for Islamic sciences, particularly through the influential efforts of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) during this process, the definition, subject, issues, principles, and utility of science that constitutes the framework the classical philosophy of science, began to be taken into consideration in the evaluations of nature of religious sciences. The articulation of nature has brought up specific issues, such as how a science will be defined in terms of its limits and scope and whether a complete description is possible. The science of tafsir also had its share of these debates and faced the problem of its essence and definition. In this context, the author starts by presenting approaches and evaluations concerning the nature of the science of tafsir. This is done by introducing the definitions within the Islamic intellectual tradition related to the science of tafsir.

The author subjects these definitions to various classifications and, as a result, highlights two definitions of tafsir that gained prominence, particularly among commentators in the later period. The writer in this context provides an overview of general definitions about interpretation, delineating them into classifications based on the classical era. These classifications encompass definitions accentuating narration, those emphasizing knowledge, and those encapsulating the amalgamation of both narration and discernment. In the second section, he mentioned definitions from modern times and highlighted the changes that have occurred in defining the interpretation of the Holy Quran. These definitions, primarily associated with the authors of commentaries and glosses, are attributed to Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 766/1364) and al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390). The author notes that Mollā Fanārī (d. 834/1431) and al-Bābartī (d. 786/1384) raised various objections to these definitions, and these objections were criticized by some Ottoman scholars like Sheikh Alī al-Bistāmī Musannifak (d. 875/1470). While the issue of defining tafsir remained somewhat limited to certain commentators in the classical period, the situation appears to be more problematic when examining the contemporary era. In this period there has been more of a transfer of definitions rather than the creation of new ones, Mollā Fanārī's well-constructed definition has been almost entirely overlooked, and some individuals

have considered any effort to define tafsir as futile. From this point of view, it has been emphasized that, with few exceptions, there hasn't been sufficient effort, both in the classical and modern periods, to define tafsir. The most competent definitions made so far have been made by Abdallāh b. ʿUmar al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344), al-Taftāzānī, and Mollā Fanārī. It is suggested that clearer definitions can emerge by eliminating the ambiguities.

As a result of the debates that emerged in the definitions of tafsir, the question of whether tafsir is an affirming science or a conceptual knowledge involving the perception of meanings has come to the forefront. In order to examine this question/problem, the author has written the second chapter. First and foremost, it should be recognized that there is a direct connection between the issue of whether tafsir is a science and whether it has a basis or not. From this point of view, scholars such as Musannifak, and Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1393/1973) have asserted that tafsir has rules and, therefore, can be seen as "confirmatory science." On the other hand, many commentators and researchers such as Mollā Fanārī, Ṭarsūsī Meḥmed Efendī (d. 1145/1732), Abū Saʿīd al-Khādimī (d. 1176/1762), ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Siyālkūti (d. 1067/1657), Hüseyin Atay, Ömer Türker, and Mustafa Öztürk, emphasize that tafsir does not have the quality of being a confirmatory science due to its lack of sufficient principles. Enes Büyük, based on this, draws attention to the fact that numerous contemporary studies have been conducted to identify and establish the principles of tafsir and that these studies are very important steps towards establishing tafsir as a science.

Another issue in the debates on the definitions of tafsir is the epistemic value of tafsir. Arising from the objections of Mollā Fanārī, the question of whether the interpretations and explanations expressed in tafsir are definitive or speculative constitutes the subject of the third chapter of the study. Some possible situations, such as the fact that language and narrative materials are of the type of ḥadīth "khabar al-āḥād", the conflict between reality and metaphor in speech, the presence of abrogation (Naskh), and the possibility of generality-specificity (al-ʿĀmm wa-l-khāṣṣ), are potential factors that tend to make the epistemic value of tafsir speculative. On the other hand, factors like the possibility of sometimes arriving at certain rulings intellectually, the information conveyed through language and narration that comes through Mutawātir transmission, and the possibility of achieving certainty through inductive inference are elements that solidify the science of tafsir.

It should also be underlined that in some definitions "in proportion to human capacity" is included. Indeed, it is expressed that the placement of this principle is grounded in the Qur'anic imagination of the commentators. According to this conceptualization, since the Qurʾān is the word of Allah and one of His attributes, and due to the boundlessness of the knowledge of the Almighty, the meanings of the Qurʾān are limitless. With this feature, the Qurʾān encompasses the

rulings of every legal issue that the ummah needs until the Day of Judgment. The principle of "in proportion to human capacity" has been introduced to acknowledge that the commentator can only explore all these meanings within the limits of their own human capability. However, the author, in this context, Emphasizes that other religious sciences such as Islamic theology (*Kalām*), Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), and Sufism (*Taşawwuf*) also investigate the Qurʾān. Additionally, the responsibility of exploring all layers of meaning in tafsir is not clearly defined. To discuss this question, the author dedicates the fourth chapter to the issue of the function of tafsir.

The function of a science is what distinguishes it from other sciences. Therefore, the issue of function can be considered the most crucial aspect in determining the nature of tafsir. In the classical period, two functions were assigned to tafsir: researching the Qurʾān in terms of its essence and researching the Qurʾān in terms of its signification of the purpose." The subject being the Qurʾān, tafsir cannot differentiate itself from other sciences. However, it can distinguish itself from other sciences based on its approach to the subject (the Qurʾān) and the honor associated with it. In the contemporary period, there are three different approaches to the function of tafsir: Firstly, tafsir only determines the primary or original meaning. Secondly, tafsir not only determines the primary meaning but also interprets it. And thirdly, tafsir is only concerned with explaining the words and providing contextual information. The first approach criticizes the second approach for expanding the scope of tafsir, evaluating it within the domains of *fiqh* and *kalām*. The second approach does offer a serious response to this criticism and reviews the first approach by stating that limiting tafsir solely to determining the primary meaning would lead to stagnation and the loss of its dynamism. Apparently, the author positions himself in favour of the second approach on this matter, emphasizing that due to the unique nature of any type of interpretation, the commentator's original interpretations differentiate tafsir from other disciplines. In general, while the first two approaches seem to assign a function to tafsir that could allow it to be considered a science, the third approach claims that tafsir is merely a compilation activity and lacks a distinct quality beyond serving as a supplier. According to this view, the commentator's role is perceived as not extending beyond narrating the issues presented in jurisprudence and theology under the verses. Thus, it does not attribute a mission to the commentator beyond conveying what is stated in the verses. However, as the author has pointed out, the fact that most commentators adopt a critical stance, either confirming or negating the relevant issues under the verses, and the potential for unique interpretations that can arise from considering tafsir as an art and application field, make the mentioned approach problematic.

In our perspective, Tafsir can be a distinct discipline from other religious sciences by combining the first two approaches and focusing on the activity of understanding and interpreting within the field. In other words, tafsir stands out from other disciplines due to its

focus on determining the primary meaning of the Qurʾān and exploring the nature of meaning, interpretation, and language. It involves elucidating the intricate relationship between the Qurʾān and the commentator, requiring a dedicated effort to understand the extent to which Allah's intent can be known. Tafsir's engagement in discussions on the philosophy of language and hermeneutics distinguishes it from other Islamic sciences.

The essence of understanding and tafsir is fundamentally interconnected, as underscored in contemporary hermeneutic discussions. In modern hermeneutical discussions, it is stated that the activity of understanding and tafsir has a nature that cannot be separated from each other. Within this process, three pivotal elements author, reader, and text coexist, leading to three distinct hermeneutical perspectives: author-centered, reader-centered, and text-centered. The commentator should focus on determining whether there is a difference in understanding and tafsir between texts authored by humans and text considered to be divinely sent by Allah (the Qurʾān). It is crucial for them to invest effort in unravelling the intent of Allah and exploring the feasibility of ascertaining that divine intent. Additionally, it is significant to highlight the importance of assessing the quality of identifying the original and objective meaning. The concept of an objective meaning, which exists independently and awaits discovery, should be a subject for thoughtful search. Only in this case, the commentator distinguishes themselves from experts in theology and jurisprudence by grappling with an issue that these specialists have not addressed but cannot ignore. Moreover, these unique issues within the field of tafsir may elevate it to a level where it not only stands alone but also contributes foundational principles to other Islamic sciences.

In the last part of the book, attention is turned to the relationship between tafsir and other sciences. The author collectively presents the essential knowledge required for the practice of tafsir, encompassing both classical and modern periods. Within this framework, it is noted that disciplines such as the Arabic language, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *kalām*, and *taṣawwuf* hold precedence. Notably, Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīshābūrī (d. 730/1329) stands out for emphasizing the necessity of commentator utilizing the science of logic in tafsir. In contrast, al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) takes a different stance, asserting that applying logical principles to the Qurʾān is haram and forbidden. This difference in views on the role of logic in tafsir is noteworthy. Specifically, understanding the reasons behind al-Suyūṭī's position and the general tendency of many scholars, who do not mention the science of logic among the sciences that tafsir depends on, and discussing the issue in detail requires separate studies. Indeed, it is clear that this situation is conducive to identifying the relationship between reason and revelation, as well as the connection between religion and philosophy.

The author's central claim in his book is to address questions and problems related to the nature of tafsir, actively contribute to ongoing discussions on this subject, and stimulate further

advanced research in the field. Looking at the chapters and the issues covered in the book, it can be stated that the topics are adequately addressed in line with the book's goal. The work appears to largely identify and to some extent analyze the discussions on the nature of tafsir within Islamic thought. Given the topics explored by the author and the central thesis in this context, the work can be characterized as a well-qualified study within the realm of academic tafsir research. It offers a comprehensive evaluation of the nature of tafsir, making a valuable contribution to the present literature on the subject. In addition to specific commentaries like the introduction of Mollā Fanārī's "Ayn al-a'yān" and Musannifak's gloss on al-Kashshāf, contemporary studies such as the writings of Mehmet Paçacı and Öztürk, which directly delve into the subject, can be identified as primary sources for the book. From this point of view, it should be stated that the author predominantly relies on primary sources, complemented by secondary sources. In terms of its subject matter, it is clear that the intended audience for the book is scholars and academicians specializing in tafsir. However, the author's approach, style, and the simplicity and fluency of the narrative have turned the work into a text that can also benefit the general reader. The issues discussed in the book could be further detailed in separate articles and theses. Specifically, the differentiation of tafsir from other Islamic sciences, the identification of the principles/methods of tafsir, and presenting it as a certifiable science are among the aspects that could be developed in the work.

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