

A Comparative Study of Natural Law Theories: The Views of Thomas F. Wall and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze and compare the perspectives of Thomas F. Wall and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas on the concept of natural law, highlighting their differing philosophical traditions. Wall, in "Critical Thinking", presents a secular understanding of natural law, arguing that it is a human construct originating solely from human reasoning, independent of any divine authority. In contrast, al-Attas, in "Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam", asserts that natural law, or sunnatullah, is divinely ordained, reflecting God's will in governing the universe while involving human participation. This study employs a philosophical approach grounded in the Islamic worldview to examine and contrast their interpretations, utilizing content analysis to systematically interpret the key arguments in their respective works. The findings reveal a fundamental divergence between the two perspectives: Wall perceives natural law as an innate principle recognized by human reason as the highest moral and ethical authority, whereas al-Attas views it as a manifestation of divine order that governs creation. This contrast underscores the broader epistemological differences between the Western secular and Islamic metaphysical worldviews in understanding the foundation and authority of natural law.

Keywords : *Thomas F. Wall, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Natural Law, Philosophical Traditions, Secular vs. Divine Authority.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan membandingkan perspektif Thomas F. Wall dan Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas mengenai konsep hukum alam dengan menyoroti perbedaan tradisi filosofis yang mereka anut. Wall, dalam karyanya "Thinking Critically", mengemukakan pemahaman sekuler tentang hukum alam, yang menurutnya merupakan konstruksi manusia yang sepenuhnya berasal dari rasionalitas manusia tanpa keterkaitan dengan otoritas ilahi. Sebaliknya, al-Attas, dalam "Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam", menyatakan bahwa hukum alam, atau sunnatullah, ditetapkan secara ilahi sebagai manifestasi kehendak Tuhan dalam mengatur alam semesta, dengan melibatkan peran manusia di dalamnya. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan filosofis yang berlandaskan pada pandangan dunia Islam untuk mengkaji serta membandingkan interpretasi kedua pemikir tersebut, dengan menerapkan analisis isi guna menafsirkan argumen utama dalam karya mereka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perbedaan mendasar antara keduanya. Wall memandang hukum alam sebagai prinsip bawaan yang diakui oleh akal manusia sebagai otoritas moral dan etika tertinggi, sedangkan al-Attas mengartikannya sebagai tatanan ilahi yang mengatur penciptaan. Perbedaan ini mencerminkan perbedaan epistemologis yang lebih luas antara pemikiran sekuler Barat dan pandangan metafisika Islam dalam memahami dasar dan otoritas hukum alam.

Kata Kunci: *Thomas F. Wall, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Hukum Alam, Tradisi Filsafat, Sekuler vs. Otoritas Ilahi.*

Introduction

Natural law is a concept often used in the West, rooted in morality, ethics, and the pursuit of truth. It is also a legal system whose principles are derived from human nature. Aristotle, in his work "*Etika Nikomakea*", states that natural law is based on teleology, the ultimate goal of human beings, which is to achieve happiness (eudaimonia).¹ This idea aligns with the views of Marcus Tullius Cicero,² Thomas Aquinas,³ and John Locke⁴, who argue

¹ Aristoteles, *Etika Nikomakea*, ed. Trans. Ratih Dwi Astuti and Editor. Wawan Kurn, 1st ed. (Yogyakarta: Basabasi, 2020).

² Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On The Commonwealth*, ed. Trans. George Holland Sabine & Stanley Barney Smith (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1929).

³ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica, Volume 1*, ed. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago, London: William Benton, 1923).

⁴ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: The Syndics of the

that the truth of natural law can be observed through human nature. Thus, natural law serves as a fundamental framework for understanding justice and ethical governance based on human reason and nature. The conception of natural law is important because natural law is the object of scientific inquiry.⁵

However, the concept of natural law in Islam differs from that of the West. In Islam, it is referred to as *sunnatullah*, which is the divine decree governing the universe, including human beings. Islamic theologians describe the universe as part of God's creation and an expression of His will.⁶ Islamic theologians describe the universe as part of God's creation and an expression of His will. Nature itself is considered a form of knowledge, where each aspect of reality corresponds to a specific divine order.⁷ *Sunnatullah*, or natural law in Islam, is a set of divine principles established by God for both living and non-living beings, designed to ensure human well-being. This divine order also emphasizes the importance of ecological balance, as the sustainability of nature is essential for maintaining harmony between humans and their environment.⁸ In contrast, the Western philosopher Thomas Hobbes defines natural law as the fundamental principles that govern everything in accordance with the laws of the universe. According to Hobbes, the natural law that governs human life is similar to that which

Cambridge University Press, 1960).

⁵ Usmanul Khakim, Khasib Amrullah, Hifni Nasif, "Metode Sains: Membaca Pemikiran Epistemologis al Attas dan Wall," *IJOIS: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies* .2, no.02, (2021), <https://doi.org/10.59525/ijois.v2i2.39>

⁶ Abdul Hakim Bin Mohamad Najib, "Sunnatullah Dalam Perspektif Ulama Dayah (Studi Kasus Sekitar Kota Banda Aceh Dan Aceh Besar)" (UIN Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh-Indonesia, 2019), 1, <http://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id>.

⁷ Cici Zulaika, "Penciptaan Alam Menurut Imam Al-Ghazali" (Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, 2018), 65, <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/40617>.

⁸ Ach. Syaiful Islam, Suhermanto Ja'far, and Ahmad Sunawari Long, "Islam and Eco-Theology: Perspectives and Strategies of Muhammadiyah in Addressing the Environmental Crisis," *Fikri: Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya* 9, no. 2 (2024): 170, <https://journal.iaimnumetrolampung.ac.id/index.php/jf/article/view/4821>.

governs other creatures, as both operate based on their inherent physical tendencies.⁹

Two leading contemporary scholars who have contributed to the discussion of natural law are Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Thomas F. Wall. Wall, in his book *“Thinking Critically About Philosophical Problems”*, examines natural law from a Western philosophical perspective,¹⁰ whereas al-Attas, in his work *“Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam”*, explains natural law within the framework of Islamic metaphysics.¹¹ Their views represent two distinct approaches: Wall presents natural law as a human construct that evolves with time,¹² while al-Attas argues that natural law is solely based on God’s will, as understood through the Islamic worldview.¹³ This study explores how their perspectives on natural law differ and seeks to provide a comparative analysis of their thoughts.

Several studies have examined the natural law theory of these two figures. One such study was conducted by Usmanul Khakim et al., titled *“God and Worldview According to al-Attas and Wall.”*¹⁴ The study first explores the concept of God and its relation to worldview. The findings reveal that al-Attas’ understanding of God is based on divine revelation (*kehabar shadiq*), leading to the

⁹ Yuval Eytan, “Hobbes on Scientific Happiness,” *Philosophical Papers* 52, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/05568641.2023.2237695>; Kody W. Cooper, “Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law,” *The Review of Politics* 81, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj7dr3>.

¹⁰ Thomas F. Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems* (Canada: Scarborough, 2001).

¹¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Element of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

¹² Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems*.

¹³ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Element of the Worldview of Islam*.

¹⁴ Usmanul Khakim et al., “God and Worldview According to Al-Attas and Wall,” *Tsaqafah: Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 16, no. 2 (November 21, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v16i2.4853>.

conclusion that God is One, possesses all attributes of perfection, and exists with absolute certainty. In contrast, Wall constructs his concept of God through rational inquiry, expressing doubt about God's existence. However, according to Wall, God should be understood metaphorically, as a myth rather than an absolute reality.

Another study titled "*The Conception of Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas' Philosophy*" was conducted by Nosakhare Monday Eribo and Benson Oghenero Kano. This research was published in the *Albertine Journal of Philosophy & Related Disciplines* in 2019.¹⁵ The findings indicate that St. Thomas Aquinas viewed law as a rational ordinance aimed at the common good, rooted in natural law derived from divine law, with a strong emphasis on moral principles.

Although many studies have been conducted on natural law, no research has specifically examined the concept from the perspectives of Thomas F. Wall and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. Therefore, this study is necessary to fill that gap. Examining the views of these two thinkers is particularly intriguing because they come from different philosophical traditions—Wall represents the secular Western perspective, while al-Attas is deeply rooted in Islamic thought. The uniqueness of this study lies in its epistemological contrast: Wall perceives natural law as a human construct independent of divine authority, whereas al-Attas sees it as a divine decree (*sunnatullah*) that reflects God's will in governing the universe.

Furthermore, this research provides valuable insights into how the concept of natural law influences moral and legal systems in both Western and Islamic civilizations. Wall emphasizes human rationality as the foundation of natural law, while al-Attas centers it on divine revelation. To date, no study has specifically compared their thoughts, making this research a crucial contribution to filling the academic gap and opening new discussions on natural law.

¹⁵ Nosakhare Monday Eribo and Benson Oghenero Kano, "The Conception of Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas' Philosophy," *Albertine Journal of Philosophy & Related Disciplines* 3 (2019): 47–52, <https://doi.org/10.5507/sth.2017.088>.

Additionally, the debate between secular and religious thought in understanding law, ethics, and morality remains highly relevant in contemporary contexts. Therefore, this study has the potential to enrich discussions in legal philosophy, epistemology, and the interaction between Western and Islamic thought in understanding the concept of natural law.

To achieve the research objectives mentioned above, this study employs a comparative analysis to examine the thoughts of both figures. It begins with content analysis, interpreting their works to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives. The study then conducts a philosophical comparison, highlighting both the similarities and differences in their views. Through this approach, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their concepts and contributions to the discourse on natural law.

Thomas F. Wall's Perspective on Natural Law

Natural law has been a fundamental concept in philosophy and legal theory, with various scholars offering different interpretations. Thomas F. Wall, defines natural law as the highest law known naturally in the heart of every people.¹⁶ So, to explain the above natural law, it is presented based on the quote below:

“At the Nuremberg Trials, several nazi officials who were being tried as war criminals said in their defense that they were merely following orders when they carried out their genocidal policies against the jews. How could they be found guilty of crimes, they argued, when they were simply following the laws of their land? The court rejected this defense. It claims that such laws and orders were immoral, that they required the officials to commit “crimes against humanity” and thus, did not order that they should have obeyed.”¹⁷

The explanation of natural law in the quotation above will be explained implicitly as what happened at the Nuremberg trials some nazi officials were tried as war criminals who declared their

¹⁶ Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems*, 439.

¹⁷ Wall, 439.

defense, that they only had medical orders to carry out policies to exterminate specific groups, based on these orders they were not found guilty of a crime is an order from the state if it is considered based on natural law. The nazi officials should not receive punishment, because they are carrying out state duties, but if it is considered based on humanitarian law, then the nazi officials, as usual, should receive punishment for their actions. The law or laws above ignored also do not need to be obeyed, because breaking the highest law known in everyone's heart. Based on the explanation above, it has a relationship with human rights.

To conclude, the definition of natural law according to Thomas F. Wall is, *first* the object in the natural law of Wall is only humans and nature; *second*, the natural law of Wall also only pivots on humans, ratios, and five senses without involving the law of God in it. The object in natural law is related to physical and non-physical things; examples of natural physical objects are in human development, which is getting older, and non-physical in the form of the mind. However, Wall's opinion regarding the object of natural law is that man is part of nature, and he is obliged to submit to the natural law, and there is no other law on it.¹⁸ According to Aristotle, the laws of nature are natural and regulated by nature, because they are regulated by nature, there is no change in them, and they are valid for the whole community.¹⁹ According to William Auxerre,²⁰ natural law is a principle of doing good and avoiding evil. He argues that humans can use their reason to distinguish what

¹⁸ Wall, 431.

¹⁹ Simona Vieru, "Aristotle's Influence on the Natural Law Theory of St Thomas Aquinas," *The Western Australian Jurist* 1, no. (2010): 117, <http://dictionary.oed.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/cgi/entry>; Tony Burns, "Aristotle and Natural Law," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 2 (1998): 142–66.

²⁰ William of Auxerre (d. 1231) was a secular master and scholastic theologian at the University of Paris. He is best known as the author of the *Summa Aurea*, an early and influential theological work, as well as the *Summa de Officiis Ecclesiasticis*, a commentary on the Mass. See at Boyd Taylor Coolman, "William of Auxerre," in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), 1405–7, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9729-4_531.

is good and right. He believes that natural law can be understood through intellect without relying on religious revelation.²¹ Just as the concept put forward by Thomas Aquinas is that man with his dual nature, seeks worldly goods and considers them to be the final goal, and man, with his rational nature, find is commandment and justice central to natural law, but the commandment must come from God, it can be concluded that the content of natural law itself is obedient to evaluation by those who are trained either in spiritual or deliverance self and the application of divine law.²²

Natural law is often used by political and social philosophers to determine the power of a state. However, natural law sometimes requires obedience to human laws for the sake of public order. Aristotle's idea of natural law asserts that it is unchanging. On the other hand, actions such as murder and theft must be addressed, as Aristotle's concept strictly forbids crimes like murder, theft, and adultery, considering them always wrong. Therefore, the natural concept of justice is based on immutable rules.²³ A state's limitations on natural law occur in two ways. *First*, one can assume that political power is restricted by natural law, meaning no government has the right to violate fundamental human rights.²⁴ *Second*, a legitimate and recognized government is obligated to grant its citizens the freedom to act in accordance with their humanity and to protect the rights inherent to every individual, which the state must not infringe upon.

The state is also bound by natural law, which all members of society are obliged to obey. Although the government has no right to take away an individual's freedom—such as the right to life,

²¹ Hilman Satriady Effendy et al., "Hukum Alam Menurut William Auxerre Hilman," *Praxis: Jurnal Filsafat Terapan* 1, no. 2 (2024): 8, <https://doi.org/10.11111/praxis.xxxxxxx>.

²² Alessandro Passerin D'Entrèves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1970), 3.

²³ Burns, "Aristotle and Natural Law," 152.

²⁴ Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems*, 440.

property, or other fundamental liberties—if it does so, it violates the highest law of God or nature. One example of such freedom is the right to be attracted to the opposite sex. Since sexual preference is a natural human inclination, any government-imposed restriction in this regard would constitute a violation of natural law. Human tendencies that arise from nature, or natural behaviors intrinsic to individuals, should remain free from governmental intervention. According to Thomas Aquinas, the first systematizer of natural law,²⁵ human beings possess inherent rights simply by virtue of their humanity. Nature serves as the foundation for human behavior. In addition to the laws governing the natural world, there are laws that regulate human conduct and political societies, though their specifics vary across different political systems. The Roman philosopher Cicero argued that the laws of nature form the biological basis of human behavior and reflect the intrinsic characteristics of humanity.²⁶ As such, natural patterns establish the highest moral standard. These laws are universally applicable and acceptable to all people. Natural law serves as a guiding principle that governs both nature and human behavior, encompassing the physical and psychological changes that individuals undergo throughout their lives.

Furthermore, natural law is grounded in “pure” behavior that is inherent rather than learned. The “pure” or “natural” aspect of natural law refers to human behavior and innate characteristics present from birth. It encompasses fundamental human nature across various cultures, shaping desires and inclinations that contribute to human happiness. Both law and natural law impose an obligation to act according to ethical principles that govern human behavior. As rational beings, humans navigate between right and wrong actions, possessing the ability to discern good from bad.

²⁵ Ana Marta González, “Contemporary Perspectives on Natural Law: Natural Law as a Limiting Concept,” *Taylor and Francis*, 2016, 14, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315573915>.

²⁶ Cicero, *On The Commonwealth*.

Consequently, natural law dictates that individuals avoid actions that are inherently contrary to moral principles.

Syed M. Naquib al-Attas's Perspective on Natural Law

As beings endowed with knowledge, understanding, and cognitive faculties such as memory, imagination, reasoning, intuition, and consciousness, humans can comprehend God's will, whether it is communicated directly by God or manifested in natural law. God's will can be discerned through observation and inference. Throughout the world, various expressions of God's will are evident, and the patterns within them align with the certainty of natural law. These patterns have existed since the beginning of human creation and divine decrees. In the law of nature, or *sunnatullah*, there is an unchanging consistency—just as water flows downward and anything thrown upward inevitably falls, following the principle of cause and effect. This principle applies not only to physical phenomena but also to human experiences. For example, if an individual diligently saves money, they will eventually accumulate wealth.²⁷ Human actions represent God's will, actualized deliberately, freely, and voluntarily. If the human mind and body are created as one with nature, individuals inherently conform to the natural laws embedded within it.²⁸ Based on this understanding, human actions are freely actualized expressions of God's will, and humans—created both physically and psychologically—are integral parts of nature and subject to its laws.

Based on the description above, al-Attas defines natural law as “a way of acting in accordance with God. Based on this understanding, the law is not rigid, as it is open and unlimited.” The existence of God is not a myth, an image, or a mere symbol

²⁷ Mhd. Rafi Ikram, “Konsep Sunnatullah Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an (Studi Komparatif Tafsir Al-Maraghi Karya Ahmad Mustafa Al-Maraghi Dan Tafsir Al-Azhar Karya Buya Hamka)” (Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, 2022), 4, <https://repo.uinmybatusangkar.ac.id/xmlui/handle/123456789/25439>.

²⁸ Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *Tauhid* (Bandung: Penerbit Pustaka, 1995), 1.

of holiness; rather, God is a reality that exists in itself. Modern philosophy serves as an interpreter of science, organizing the results of natural sciences into comprehensive worldviews.²⁹ Existence originates from God and is derived from His attributes, allowing entities to become conscious and act in accordance with divine principles (*sunnatullah*). Natural law, therefore, is understood as God's customary way of acting. *Sunnatullah* does not merely describe God's habits but also applies universally, governing the continuous process of creation.³⁰ His law is neither rigid nor confined; rather, it is open and without limits. It represents the essence of existence, which is the foundation of reality.³¹ Understanding existence as a fundamental principle of reality establishes a natural relationship with human nature—an original disposition bestowed upon humanity by God.³² Thus, as Syamsuddin Arif and Elit Ave Hidayatullah suggest, religion and science are inherently linked to human nature and its connection to the Creator.³³

Muslims may accept the transcendence and majesty of God. However, theological concerns arise regarding the emphasis placed on the natural order, which seemingly renders God inactive. This perspective suggests that after creating nature, God has no further role, as He, being the prime mover of nature and all within it, has already established the law of cause and effect. Meanwhile, some philosophers argue that God, as an essence, is unaware of events

²⁹ Usmanul Hakim and Winda Roini, "Identifikasi Worldview Dalam Ilmu Pengetahuan Barat Kontemporer Menurut Syed Muhammad Naquib Al Attas," *Tasfiah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 3, no. 2 (2019): 53, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfiah.v3i2.3498>.

³⁰ Nidawati Nidawati, "Alam Dan Sunnatullah Dalam Implementasi Pendidikan Sepanjang Hayat (Life Long Education)," *Pionir: Jurnal Pendidikan* 5, no. 1 (2016): 15, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/pjp.v5i1.163>.

³¹ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Element of the Worldview of Islam*, 128.

³² Al-Faruqi, *Tauhid*, 144.

³³ Elit Ave Hidayatullah and Syamsuddin Arif, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Exposition on the Concept of Ethics," *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 431, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol24no1.12>.

and lacks the ability to oversee or control occurrences. They also propose the existence of other deities alongside Him. In response to such views, theologians reject these notions and introduce a new doctrine known as occasionalism—the belief that God continuously re-creates events, making Him the direct cause of all occurrences.

God is the ultimate destination, toward whom all components are directed.³⁴ In Islam, there are three perspectives on the origin of the visible world. *First*, according to the Qur'an, God is the Creator of the heavens, the earth, and everything within them. *Second*, some explanations suggest that the world of form originates from God's emanation rather than His creation and command. This view is associated with Islamic or Peripatetic philosophy, which has introduced a renewed cosmological system. *Third*, a perspective similar to the first expands on metaphysics, not only explaining the theory of creation but also the continuous process of natural creation. Among these three views, the first and third share similarities and have contributed to the development of atomic theory. In contrast, the second view differs significantly. The atomic theory, widely embraced by the *Ash'ariyyah* and *Mu'tazilah*, is often applied in the concept of natural creation.³⁵ God did not create the world in vain but according to a deliberate design. His creation is not the result of chance; rather, it is perfect and purposeful.

The Islamic worldview presents a vision of reality and truth as perceived by human understanding, revealing all aspects of existence. In Islam, this concept is referred to as *ru'yat al-Islam li al-wujūd*.³⁶ The functions of human beings, both physical and psychic,

³⁴ Al-Faruqi, *Tauhid*, 3.

³⁵ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Kausalitas Hukum Alam Dan Tuhan: Membaca Pemikiran Regio-Saintifik Al-Ghazali*, ed. Yusuf Maulana (Ponorogo: UNIDA Gontor Press, 2018), 148.

³⁶ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Element of the Worldview of Islam*; Abdullah Haq Al Haidary et al., "Islamic Worldview as a Basis of Islamization of Science Concept According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas," *Kalam: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam* 18, no. 1 (2024): 19–36, <https://>

are inherently connected to nature. As a result, humans naturally adhere to its laws, except in the case of spiritual functions, which transcend the limitations of nature. Humans must align themselves with both society and nature. The Sunnah is embedded within creation, and nothing can alter it. Nature itself cannot violate the laws that govern it. This is evident in the creation of Adam, whom God directly formed with His own hands. Likewise, the union of man and woman is necessary for the completeness of creation, in accordance with *sunnatullah*.³⁷ Furthermore, nature serves as a sign of God's manifestation on Earth.

God holds a central position in human life. The social order in Islam encompasses physical, material, and spiritual aspects, all of which contribute to justice for individuals and communities.³⁸ In Islam, social order is considered the kingdom of God on Earth, as it reflects divine command—a non-human order established by God that includes His desires, will, laws, and regulations, all of which play a fundamental role in human life. However, human beings consist of both body and soul. While humans are physical beings, their souls possess the ability to command the body, just as God commands His creation. In the formation of nature, the law of cause and effect is evident. The concept of *sabab* (cause) points directly to *musabbab* (effect), which manifests as natural events. Beyond viewing God as the ultimate cause of creation, philosophers describe Him as the principle that exists within the universe and the source of nature's emanation. Within this framework, God is understood as absolute reality. He is the ultimate determinant, and causality is regarded as a divine act that governs the natural order. Through His knowledge and will, God causes the existence and realization of all things. The universal principle of

doi.org/10.24042/002024181145700.

³⁷ Muhammad Mutawalli Al-Sya'rawi, *Qīṣaṣ Al-Anbiyā' Wa Ma'abā Sīrah Al-Rasūl* (Beirut: Darul Qudus, 2006), 7.

³⁸ Al-Sya'rawi, 61.

cause and effect operates according to His divine determination.³⁹

1. The Elements of Natural Law

God possesses attributes that cannot be conditioned by anything. Among these attributes is the fact that He cannot be fully comprehended by human knowledge and can only be known by Himself.⁴⁰ While the essential nature of humans—both body and soul—is physical, God imparted knowledge to them by teaching them the names of all things, enabling human understanding.⁴¹ The highest existence, or ultimate reality, is called *wājib al-wujūd*. As an absolute being, His existence is self-sufficient and requires nothing. However, His essence, attributes, and names manifest at a lower ontological level, necessitating a reality that encompasses both the visible and invisible worlds. Everything, whether seen or unseen, is ultimately a manifestation of divine nature.⁴²

The existence of God is not a myth, an image, or a mere symbol of holiness; rather, God is a reality in itself. Modern philosophy interprets science and structures the findings of natural science into worldviews. Consequently, science indirectly becomes the foundational assumption of authentic knowledge, which is derived solely from observable phenomena.⁴³ One Western thinker, Anselm, stated that anyone who denies the existence of God is foolish. He quoted the Bible includes a phrase that says, “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God,”” and in destruction, there are no good works.⁴⁴

³⁹ Zarkasyi, *Kausalitas Hukum Alam Dan Tuhan: Membaca Pemikiran Regio-Saintifik Al-Ghazali*, 238–41.

⁴⁰ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Element of the Worldview of Islam*, 273.

⁴¹ Al-Attas, 143.

⁴² Al-Attas, 243.

⁴³ Al-Attas, 114.

⁴⁴ Danny Frederick, “A Puzzle About Natural Laws and the Existence of God,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (June 2, 2013): 269, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-012-9343-8>; Yujin Nagasawa, *The Existence of God* (USA:

Thus, the authors conclude that the elements of natural law are centered on the existence of God as the absolute reality (*wājib al-wujūd*), whose manifestation encompasses both the visible and invisible worlds. God grants knowledge to humans, enabling them to understand creation and natural law. Furthermore, modern philosophy interprets reality through science, although true knowledge is not limited to observable phenomena. Anselm asserts that denying the existence of God is irrational, as everything is a manifestation of divine attributes.

2. The Highest Position of Natural Law

In the creation of the universe, there is a decree of God based on the provisions (*qadr*), the law (\square *ukm*), knowledge (*‘ilm*) and will (*masyārah*) which stipulates as follows: *first*, God and His law that establishes the cause and effect in it, *second*, God’s determination of the cause of the basic cause that will not change until the end of time, as Al-Ghazali at this stage called “the establishment universal of a universal eternal cause”, *the third*, which is called the word *qadr* which means God’s direction and makes something come into being, which is likened to a water clock, which will not operate if three conditions are met, namely, the device on which the clock is arranged with the law of cause and effect in it, the movement that makes the sound of opposition, and the existence of the tool, then the determination if there is a cause that makes the regularity in moving regularly. So based on the existing example of the water clock above the interaction between divine causality and nature.⁴⁵

God and His nature are a supreme reality, as described in the Qur’an, and humans understanding of them is the only absolute, eternal reality that encompasses the whole. God is the beginning and the end, visible and invisible.⁴⁶ In the Qur’an, Allah offered

Routledge, 2011), 7.

⁴⁵ Zarkasyi, *Kausalitas Hukum Alam Dan Tuhan: Membaca Pemikiran Regio-Saintifik Al-Ghazali*, 241–43.

⁴⁶ M.M Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy: With Short Accounts of Other*

His mandate to the mountains, rivers, heavens, and earth, but they rejected the revision, so how dare people accept the burden? The will of God that affects to heaven and earth can be realized through the laws of nature. Thus, the highest natural law is based on God's decree, which encompasses the principle of cause and effect in creation. God is the absolute reality that establishes the universal and eternal order of nature. His will is manifested through the natural laws that govern all of creation.

3. Source of Natural Law

Islam is a religion that aligns with the philosophy of religion, particularly metaphysics. All aspects of human activity, including destiny (*taqdir*), nature, and responsibility, are addressed in the Qur'an.⁴⁷ God holds a central position in human life. The social order in Islam encompasses physical, material, and spiritual dimensions to uphold justice for individuals and communities.⁴⁸ Natural law, or *sunnatullah*, is a divine decree that governs the universe and everything within it, requiring all creation to submit and adhere to His will.⁴⁹

In the creation of nature, the law of cause and effect applies. *Sabab* refers to the primary cause, while *musabbab* refers to the resulting natural event. In addition to viewing God as the cause of nature's creation, philosophers describe Him as "the principle that exists in the universe is also the cause of the emanation of nature". The concept of God represents absolute reality. In this view, God is the ultimate determining factor. Causality is understood as a divine act that governs the natural order. He brings things into

Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), 137.

⁴⁷ Al-Faruqi, *Tauhid*, 124.

⁴⁸ Al-Faruqi, 61.

⁴⁹ Maksudin, Mohamad Yasin Yusuf, and Robingun, "Thinking Map Pendekatan Integrasi Interkoneksi Agama Dan Sains Teknologi (Berbasis Al-QUR'an Dan Sunnatullah)" (Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga, 2020), 42, <http://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/48338>.

existence and actualizes them based on His knowledge and will. His determination establishes the universal law of cause and effect.⁵⁰ Islam aligns with the philosophy of religion, affirming God as the absolute reality who establishes *sunnatullah* as the law governing nature. Everything submits to His will, including the law of cause and effect in creation.

Comparative Analysis of Wall and al-Attas

1. Differences Between the Two Perspectives on Natural Law

Based on the explanation above, both have differences in the definition of natural law, as well as objects in the theory of natural law. Then the authors will explain the difference between the two, *first*, the definition of Wall's natural law: "*Higher law known naturally in the hearts of all people*"⁵¹ based on this definition, Wall argued that natural law is a supreme law that already exist in every human heart, and only man can control it. Natural law wall is the orderly behavior of nature that can be replaced by science, the rules that govern nature into a law regulated by humans, and focus on natural behaviors that cannot be learned.

While the definition in natural law al-Attas namely "*a habit of God in acting sunnatullah and can be understood the law cannot be seen because there is no superior in it*" Based on this definition of natural law, al-Attas explains that natural law is God's law, it is also a way of acting and habits that God does, the law cannot be seen openly and there are no restrictions in it. There is no limitation in the definition in the form of God's way of providing sustenance and various blessings to humans. Since the law according to al-Attas is the highest law created by God, the creation of nature by God is

⁵⁰ Zarkasyi, *Kausalitas Hukum Alam Dan Tuhan: Membaca Pemikiran Regio-Saintifik Al-Ghazali*, 238–41.

⁵¹ Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems*, 439.

a sign that can show the nature of His existing nature.⁵²

2. Natural Law and Its Highest Authority

The basis Wall's natural law must be based on a sense ratio and experience, just as the knowledge of God is obtained through religious texts and authorities,⁵³ Everything must be achieved based on the senses. Both are unacceptable. In addition, Wall argues that it is a man who can determine the natural law because man means a thing that includes the senses and ratios; *First*, based on the ratio of eggs, there is an animal that lays eggs, *second*, based on the senses, namely, if we see a knife, which is a dangerous object, then the object must be far away and out of reach of small children.

In contrast to al-Attas, who asserts that everything originates from God and that humans are merely responsible for interpreting natural law, human knowledge attainable through rational inquiry, experience, and observation remains distinct from the knowledge granted by God. The latter can only be received through acts of worship, obedience, and servitude to God, known as divine knowledge and grace.⁵⁴

According to Wall, man is part of nature, and he is required to submit to the natural law,⁵⁵ Just as women give birth, which has been agreed upon by all humans, humans are also a cause of the natural law. The natural law in it includes humans, namely, aspects physical and non-physical aspects of the physical, and the older the human body weaker the non-physical aspect. In contrast, the aspects non-physical aspects include the soul and reason, but the human soul has two aspects, namely the high soul called the rational soul, while the law soul is called the animal soul or physical.⁵⁶

⁵² Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Element of the Worldview of Islam*, 143.

⁵³ Al-Attas, 97.

⁵⁴ Al-Attas, 67.

⁵⁵ Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems*, 80.

⁵⁶ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Element of the Worldview of Islam*, 58.

According to al-Attas; “man is also a part of nature, but man must submit to God’s law.”⁵⁷

Whereas Islam includes physical, material, and spiritual aspects with which humans can create justice for the individual as well as for society. The social order in Islam is the kingdom of God on Earth; God is not a man, man is only His representative, who is given the mandate to rule, and governs as He wills.⁵⁸ Natural objects, according to Wall, only exist in humans and nature, because both are physical objects that can be sensed.

3. Similarities Natural Law Between Wall and al-Attas

Natural law, as conceptualized by Thomas F. Wall and al-Attas, shares fundamental similarities despite differences in perspective. Both scholars acknowledge the existence of a higher law that governs human life. However, Wall defines it as something naturally ingrained in the human heart; this was also expressed by Marcus Tullius Cicero,⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas,⁶⁰ and John Locke, while al-Attas attributes it to God’s decree (*sunnatullah*). Similarly, they recognize that natural law has a definite source, with Wall emphasizing human reasoning and al-Attas highlighting divine authority. The concept of hierarchy within natural law also emerges, where Wall places humans at the highest position, whereas al-Attas asserts that God holds the supreme authority.⁶¹ Additionally, both scholars identify common elements in natural law, including humans, nature, and the law itself, although al-Attas incorporates God as a crucial element. This study explores these similarities, shedding light on the universal principles underlying natural law from both perspectives.

Thomas F. Wall and al-Attas both acknowledge the existence

⁵⁷ Al-Attas, 49.

⁵⁸ Al-Attas, 55–56.

⁵⁹ Cicero, *On The Commonwealth*.

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica, Volume 1*.

⁶¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, Second (Kuala Lumpur: Intenational Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1993), 51.

of a higher law beyond human-made laws, yet they differ in their views on its source and nature. Wall emphasizes that natural law is inherently known in the human heart, focusing on rational and internal aspects.⁶² In contrast, al-Attas asserts that natural law is *sunnatullah*, a divine decree originating from God's will, which at times may manifest in extraordinary ways.⁶³ Consequently, Wall's perspective is more human-centered, while al-Attas places greater emphasis on divine authority.

Regarding the primary source of natural law, both scholars agree that it has a fundamental origin. However, they differ in identifying its source. Wall argues that natural law stems from humans, suggesting that people inherently possess an understanding of a higher law.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, al-Attas maintains that natural law originates from God, signifying that it is a divine decree independent of human reasoning.⁶⁵ Thus, Wall adopts a more humanistic approach, whereas al-Attas adheres to a theocentric perspective.

In terms of the highest authority within natural law, both scholars acknowledge a hierarchical structure that governs it. However, they diverge in determining who holds the supreme position. Wall considers humans to occupy the highest position in natural law, emphasizing their role in understanding and practicing it. Conversely, al-Attas asserts that God holds the highest position, as natural law is His decree. This distinction highlights Wall's humanistic approach and al-Attas's theocentric viewpoint.

Regarding the essential elements of natural law, both thinkers recognize humans, natural law, and nature as crucial components. However, their perspectives differ concerning the inclusion of God.

⁶² Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems*.

⁶³ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Element of the Worldview of Islam*, 128.

⁶⁴ Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems*, 107; Khakim et al., "God and Worldview According to Al-Attas and Wall," 232.

⁶⁵ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 52.

Wall focuses on the interrelation between humans, natural law, and nature from a naturalistic standpoint, whereas al-Attas asserts that God is the central element in establishing natural law. As a result, Wall’s interpretation leans toward a rational-humanistic approach, while al-Attas maintains a theocentric understanding.

Based on the analysis above, both Wall and al-Attas argue that natural law is the supreme law. However, they differ in their views on the highest legal authority. According to Wall, the highest position in natural law belongs to humans, as all laws are ultimately created by human will. In contrast, al-Attas asserts that the highest authority is God. Regarding the elements of natural law, Wall identifies humans, nature, and natural law itself as key components, while al-Attas includes God, humans, and nature. The distinction between their perspectives is evident. Therefore, this study concludes that there is no complete equivalence between their concepts of natural law, as their fundamental differences remain significant. To make it easier for readers, the authors have provided the following table illustration:

Figures	Thomas F. Wall	SM.N. al-Attas
Definition	The natural law is a higher law is known naturally in the hearts of all people	The natural law is established as sunnatullah, also a decree of God, in which God sometimes behaves unusually.
Source Of Natural Law	Man	God
The Highest Position	Man	God
Elements Of Natural Law	Natural Law, Man, Nature	God, Man, Natural Law, Nature.

Conclusion

Based on the comparison between Thomas F. Wall and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas’s perspectives on natural law, it is evident that both thinkers offer distinct conceptual foundations

rooted in their respective philosophical traditions. Wall, representing the Western secular viewpoint, perceives natural law as an innate principle within human reason, emphasizing sensory experience and rationality as its basis. In contrast, al-Attas, from an Islamic metaphysical perspective, defines natural law (*sunnatullah*) as God's will and habitual order governing the universe, requiring human submission through worship and obedience. This fundamental difference reflects their broader epistemological frameworks, with Wall prioritizing human reason as the highest moral authority and al-Attas grounding natural law in divine revelation.

The findings reveal a significant divergence between the two perspectives. Thomas F. Wall perceives natural law as an intrinsic principle recognized by human reason as the ultimate moral and ethical guide, whereas al-Attas views it as a manifestation of divine order governing all creation. This contrast underscores the broader epistemological differences between the Western secular and Islamic metaphysical worldviews in understanding the foundation and authority of natural law. Despite these fundamental distinctions, both perspectives acknowledge natural law as the highest form of law, with nature and humanity as its primary objects. This study highlights the epistemological divergence in interpreting natural law while recognizing the shared acknowledgment of human obligation toward it. Future research can further explore the implications of these perspectives in contemporary legal, ethical, and philosophical discussions.[]

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