

Reconstructing the Epistemological Framework of Scientific Qur'anic Exegesis: Tafsir Ulul Albab and the Interpretation of Ayat Kauniyah

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of modern science has stimulated renewed discussions on the relationship between the Qur'an and scientific knowledge, leading to the emergence of diverse models of scientific Qur'anic exegesis. Nevertheless, studies examining the epistemological foundations underlying contemporary scientific tafsir remain limited, particularly regarding how revelation, reason, and empirical science are integrated into a coherent interpretive framework. This study aims to reconstruct the epistemological framework of *Tafsir Ulul Albab* by Agus Mustofa in interpreting *ayat kauniyah*. Employing a qualitative library research design with content analysis, the study examines the sources of knowledge, interpretive methodology, and validation principles that characterize the exegetical approach of *Tafsir Ulul Albab*. The findings demonstrate that its epistemology is constructed upon an integrative paradigm that synthesizes revelation (*wahy*), rational inquiry (*'aq*), and contemporary scientific knowledge. Methodologically, the tafsir employs a deductive-confirmatory approach within a partial thematic (*mawdū'ī*) and *ra'y* interpretive model, where Qur'anic descriptions of nature are interpreted through contemporary scientific discoveries while maintaining the primacy of the Qur'anic text. The validity of interpretation is established through correspondence between scriptural meaning and empirically verified scientific evidence, enabling constructive dialogue between religious knowledge and modern science. This study contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by conceptualizing *Tafsir Ulul Albab* as an integrative epistemological model of scientific exegesis that strengthens interdisciplinary engagement between Qur'anic interpretation and scientific inquiry without reducing the authority of revelation.

Keywords: Scientific Qur'anic Exegesis; Epistemology; *Tafsir Ulul Albab*; *Ayat Kauniyah*; Integrative Interpretation.

Abstrak

Perkembangan ilmu pengetahuan modern telah mendorong munculnya berbagai model tafsir ilmiah yang berupaya membangun dialog antara Al-Qur'an dan sains. Namun, penelitian yang mengkaji landasan epistemologis tafsir ilmiah kontemporer masih relatif terbatas, terutama dalam menjelaskan bagaimana wahyu, akal, dan ilmu pengetahuan empiris diintegrasikan ke dalam suatu kerangka penafsiran yang utuh. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi kerangka epistemologis *Tafsir Ulul Albab* karya Agus Mustofa dalam menafsirkan *ayat kauniyah*. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan metode analisis isi. Analisis difokuskan pada sumber pengetahuan, metodologi penafsiran, serta prinsip validitas yang membentuk konstruksi epistemologi *Tafsir Ulul Albab*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa epistemologi *Tafsir Ulul Albab* dibangun di atas paradigma integratif



yang mensintesis wahyu (*wahy*), akal (*'aql*), dan ilmu pengetahuan modern. Secara metodologis, tafsir ini menggunakan pendekatan deduktif-konfirmatif dalam kerangka tafsir tematik parsial (*mawḍūʿī*) berbasis *ra'y*, dengan menafsirkan *ayat kauniyah* melalui temuan-temuan sains kontemporer tanpa mengesampingkan otoritas teks Al-Qur'an. Validitas penafsiran dibangun melalui kesesuaian antara makna tekstual dan bukti ilmiah yang telah terverifikasi sehingga membuka ruang dialog yang konstruktif antara agama dan sains. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan studi Al-Qur'an kontemporer dengan mengonseptualisasikan *Tafsir Ulul Albab* sebagai model epistemologi tafsir ilmiah yang integratif serta memperkuat dialog interdisipliner antara tafsir Al-Qur'an dan ilmu pengetahuan modern tanpa mereduksi otoritas wahyu.

Kata kunci: Tafsir Ilmiah; Epistemologi; *Tafsir Ulul Albab*; *Ayat Kauniyah*; Tafsir Integratif.

Introduction

The diversity of Qur'anic exegesis from the classical to the contemporary era illustrates the evolving methods and approaches employed by exegetes to interpret the Qur'an's meanings. This evolution reflects efforts to uphold the principle of “al-Qur'an sahiḥ li kulli zaman wa al-makan,” ensuring the Qur'an's relevance across different times and contexts. While the Qur'anic text remains unchanged, the changing nature of society necessitates the development of various interpretive methods, including tafsir bi al-ma'tsur and tafsir 'ilmi.

Tafsir 'ilmi or scientific exegesis has become one of the modern approaches that has shaped the development of Qur'anic interpretation in the contemporary era. This approach emerged in response to the reality that the Qur'an contains *ayat kauniyah*, verses containing scientific references, or guidance regarding natural phenomena that can be studied through scientific research. *Ayat kauniyah* do not explain scientific theories but merely provide scientific information intended to encourage humans to think, observe, and conduct research on God's creation. (Anhar et al., 2018; Syahril, 2009) The implications of these scientific indications have given rise to exegetical works that employ a scientific approach to interpreting the Qur'an, which have come to be known as scientific exegesis or tafsir 'ilmi. (Bilhaq & Nur, 2026)

Scientific exegesis developed in response to the scientific references found in the Qur'an. Several Qur'anic verses address the creation of the universe, natural phenomena, human embryology, (Jannah & Albab, 2026) and the reduction of oxygen at high altitudes, which are interpreted as invitations to contemplate *ayat kauniyah*. Developments in modern science have highlighted the necessity for interpretations that correspond with current scientific knowledge. Progress in fields such as biology, physics, astronomy, and geology has

encouraged exegetes to interpret ayat kauniyah contextually, ensuring that Qur'anic verses are both spiritually significant and relevant to scientific discoveries. The rise of scientific exegesis is also influenced by the tendencies of modern society, which often places greater trust in religious interpretations that are supported by scientific evidence.(Putra et al., 2024) Consequently, interpreting ayat kauniyah from a scientific perspective is considered highly pertinent to the rational and empirical mindset of contemporary society, reinforcing the authority of religion in the context of scientism.(Setyaningtyas & As'ari, 2025; Suwari & Dedy Pradesa, 2019)

Among the works of scientific exegesis is al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur'an by Thanthawi Jauhari, one of the contemporary exegetes who has been a leading pioneer in the use of modern science to interpret the Qur'an.(Jauhari, 1350) Similarly, in the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir Ilmi was developed in collaboration with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (now BRIN), bringing together two distinct epistemic authorities: religious scholars from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and scientists from LIPI. Together, these examples show the ongoing dialogue between religion and science.(Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2013)

In the modern era, the authority to interpret the Qur'an is no longer the exclusive domain of Arabic linguists, jurists, or traditional exegetes, but has also attracted and engaged thinkers with backgrounds in the exact sciences, such as biology, physics, geology, astronomy, and medicine.(Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf al-Qur'an, 2013) This involvement is undoubtedly linked to the development of modern science, which has introduced new perspectives on understanding ayat kauniyah. Scientists in the exact sciences are considered capable of explaining the scientific dimensions of these verses. The involvement of scientists in the exact sciences in interpreting the Qur'an demonstrates that interpretation is dynamic and open to the developments of the times.(Anhar et al., 2018) While classical era interpretations placed greater emphasis on linguistic, legal, and theological aspects, the modern era has enriched the dimensions of understanding the Qur'an in addressing the challenges of the times.(Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf al-Qur'an, 2013)

Tafsir Ulul Albab by Agus Mustofa is a significant modern scholarly commentary that exemplifies a contemporary approach to exegesis, aiming to facilitate dialogue between the Qur'an and modern scientific developments. Notably, Agus Mustofa's background as a scientist in nuclear engineering informs his rational and scientific perspective, which distinctly shapes his interpretation of Qur'anic verses, especially those concerning the universe and

natural phenomena. The contribution of Tafsir Ulul Albab demonstrates how scholars from the exact sciences can enrich the Islamic intellectual tradition.

This explanation can be understood by examining how Agus Mustofa interprets Quranic Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 29, regarding the “sab’ah samawat”. He does not interpret it as seven layers of the skies as understood literally in classical exegesis, but rather relates the verse to modern astronomical developments concerning atmospheric layers. That “sab’ah samawat” does not refer to outer space but rather to the near sky in the form of atmospheric layers known as the troposphere, stratosphere, mesosphere, thermosphere, and exosphere. (Mustofa, 2019)

The study of Tafsir Ulul Albab is significant because it provides interpretations that are closely aligned with modern scientific developments and are accessible to readers who value logical and critical analysis. This exegesis illustrates how the exact sciences can serve as a medium for broader exploration of Qur’anic meanings. Tafsir Ulul Albab exemplifies the evolution of exegetical methodologies, offering interpretations that are contextual and relevant to contemporary challenges. Accordingly, this study aims to formulate the epistemological framework of Tafsir Ulul Albab by analyzing its interpretive sources, methodologies, and the validity of its exegesis.

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology, specifically a literature review, to examine the interpretation of ayat kauniyah in Agus Mustofa’s Tafsir Ulul Albab. A literature review is appropriate because the units of analysis consist of literature, texts, ideas, and conceptual frameworks found within the exegetical work. Meanwhile, literature in the form of books, texts, and previous scientific articles relevant to the research topic is referenced as supporting sources to strengthen the analysis and expand the theoretical framework. These secondary sources also serve as a tool for comparison, situating Agus Mustofa’s thought within the landscape of contemporary exegesis, particularly regarding the integration of the Qur’an and science

Specifically, the primary unit of analysis in this study is the interpretation of ayat kauniyah in Agus Mustofa’s Tafsir Ulul Albab, particularly in Surah Al-Baqarah, verses 22 and 29. These two verses exemplify Agus Mustofa’s application of a scientific approach to understanding ayat kauniyah through the lens of modern science. The selection of these two verses is based on the consideration that, textually, both contain discussions of cosmological phenomena that provide a space for dialogue between religious texts and modern science.

Quranic Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 22, contains references to *firasy*, interpreted as the layers of the Earth's structure, and *sama'a bina'an*, interpreted as the sky within the Earth's atmosphere. Meanwhile, verse 29 speaks of "sab'ah samawat," which is interpreted as the seven heavens, understood as layers of the Earth's atmosphere. Furthermore, Agus Mustofa's interpretation of these two verses clearly demonstrates a shift in interpretive approach from a classical-theological to a scientific-contextual approach, utilizing findings from modern science to elucidate the verses' meanings. Thus, it is relevant to use the Quranic Surah Al-Baqarah, verses 22 and 29, as the unit of analysis, as they represent the epistemological framework of the "Tafsir Ulul Albab" interpretation.

Data collection was conducted using a documentation technique by reviewing various literature related to the research topic. This technique was used to systematically obtain data from written sources relevant to the epistemological construction of scientific interpretation. The data collected through documentation were then analyzed descriptively using content analysis to identify the sources of knowledge, methods, and validity of interpretation in Tafsir Ulul Albab.

The data analysis process was conducted in several stages, beginning with data collection to gather specific data that scientifically addresses the interpretation of the Quranic Surah Al-Baqarah, verses 22 and 29. The next stage involved data reduction by eliminating data irrelevant to the epistemological construction of interpretation. The classified data is then presented descriptively. The final stage involves drawing conclusions by conducting an in-depth interpretation of the presented data to answer the research question: how does the epistemological construction of the Ulul Albab interpretation approach the understanding of ayat kauniyah.

Results and Discussion

A. Profile Agus Mustofa

Agus Mustofa was a Muslim thinker who was born in Malang on August 16, 1963, and passed away on March 30, 2026. (Mustofa, 2005) Agus Mustofa began his academic education at an elementary school in Malang, then continued at SMPN 2 Malang and SMAN 1 Malang. He then pursued higher education at Gadjah Mada University in 1982, majoring in nuclear engineering. (Rozikin, 2025)

He learned about religion from his family environment, specifically through his father, Sheikh Djafari Karim, a spiritual guide of the Qadariyah Naqshbandiyah order and a member of the Advisory Board of the Indonesian Islamic Order Party during the era of Indonesia's first

president, Ir. Soekarno.(Mustofa, 2019) In addition to his father, Agus Mustofa also studied religion under his teacher and close friend, KH. Abdullah Fattah, the founder of the Bahrul Maghfiroh Islamic boarding school in Malang, and KH. Nursalim, the founder of the Budi Mulia School in Kepanjen. Academically, Agus Mustofa interacted directly with Islamic scholars, including Ahmad Baiquni, a professor in the field of nuclear engineering who once served as director general of the National Nuclear Energy Agency, as well as an author of religious books with a scientific perspective who actively discussed the relationship between religion and science in his various lectures. Additionally, Ir. Shirul Alim, a physics lecturer, sought to understand religion from the perspective of modern science. These scholars and scientists are said to have significantly influenced Agus Mustofa's thinking, which is reflected in the religious books with a scientific perspective that he wrote over the following decade.(Rozikin, 2025)

B. Overview of Tafsir Ulul Albab

Tafsir Ulul Albab emerged as a continuation of Agus Mustofa's intellectual efforts to interpret Qur'anic verses using a scientific approach, which he had previously shared extensively through various lectures, books, and videos published across various media. These scattered ideas and thoughts were subsequently reorganized into a more comprehensive work to allow readers to grasp them more deeply.(Mustofa, 2019) Through this work, Agus Mustofa seeks to compile his interpretations into a more systematic work. This systematic organization reflects his desire to present a Qur'anic exegesis that is more accessible to modern society, particularly for those seeking to explore the connection between divine revelation and the advancement of scientific knowledge.

Agus emphasized that the publication of Tafsir Ulul Albab is also driven by modern society's need for an alternative perspective on understanding the Qur'an, one that differs from the traditional commentaries that have long served as the primary references.(Mustofa, 2019) The perspective in question involves applying a scientific approach to interpreting Qur'anic verses. It appears that Agus embodies the spirit of Arkoun, who sought to inspire modern society not merely to perpetuate the way of thinking of medieval Muslims but to utilize the epistemology of contemporary society, namely the use of science and technology in understanding the Qur'an.(Ajahari, 2017)

"Times are constantly changing" is the opening line Agus Mustofa uses in the preface to Tafsir Ulul Albab to argue for the reinterpretation of the Qur'an in accordance with the circumstances and conditions of the present era. The Qur'an was revealed not only to address

the needs of past civilizations but also as guidance for humanity in every age, including the present and the future. In reality, classical interpretations born from specific historical and civilizational contexts cannot fully address the challenges of modern society, which is characterized by scientific progress. While traditional interpretations retain significant value as part of Islam's intellectual heritage, serving as a foundation for *ijtihad* on new issues, there is simultaneously a need for interpretive renewal to ensure the Qur'an's meaning remains relevant. Tafsir Ulul Albab, Agus continued, is his *ijtihad* in interpreting Qur'anic verses using a scientific approach grounded in the development of science and technology, as well as the latest empirical data. (Mustofa, 2019)

C. The Epistemology of Tafsir Ulul Albab

Etymologically, epistemology derives from the Greek words *episteme* (knowledge or science) and *logos* (science, theory, exposition, or reasoning presented systematically). Generally, epistemology is defined as the theory of knowledge. (Bagus, 2002; Phillips, 2014; Pranaka, 1987) Terminologically, epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its assumptions and foundations, and the justification of claims about the truth and certainty of knowledge. (Bakhtiar, 2005; Mintaredja, 2003)

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that examines the origins and methods of acquiring knowledge, as well as the validity of knowledge. (Kattsoff, 2004; Thiselton, 2002) Thus, the scope of epistemological inquiry, or the theory of knowledge, investigates three main issues: the sources of knowledge, the methods of acquiring knowledge, and the criteria or validity of knowledge as a means of verification. Therefore, to formulate the epistemological framework of Tafsir Ulul Albab, this study undertakes the following three steps: explaining the sources used in interpreting the Qur'an; the methods of interpreting the Qur'an; and the validity of the Qur'anic interpretation.

1. The Integration of *Al-Wahyu* and Reason as Sources of Knowledge

Agus Mustofa establishes a close relationship between *al-wahyu* and reason as the foundation for interpreting ayat kauniyah and for explaining the meanings they contain. He emphasizes the importance of understanding verses holistically by connecting one verse with another that is thematically related. His argument is grounded in Surah Al-Baqarah: 185 and Surah Ali Imran: 7, which state that the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses is explained by the Qur'an itself, the meaning of a verse is elucidated by the Qur'an itself without the intervention of the exegete's personal interpretation. This means the primary source of interpretation is the Qur'an itself. (Mustofa, 2019)

In the Tafsir Ulul Albab, it is difficult to find evidence for Agus's claims regarding the interpretation of ayat kauniyah, aside from his brief statements. For example, when interpreting the word *as-sama'* in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 22, he briefly mentions that this word is used in the Qur'an to describe the space above humanity (i.e., the sky). However, Agus does not provide a detailed and in-depth thematic analysis of the verses regarding *as-sama'*. (Mustofa, 2019) Agus states that his exegesis leans toward thematic exegesis (tafsir *maudhu'i*), yet the reality of his interpretation does not reflect this. He does not connect the verse being interpreted with other related verses to derive concepts based on the Qur'anic perspective. This differs from the *maudhu'i* exegesis model, which provides an in-depth analysis when linking one verse to another. (Nazhifah & Isyti Karimah, 2021)

Agus does not view *al-wahyu* and reason as opposing forces but rather as complementary elements in the process of understanding and explaining the meanings of Qur'anic verses. Therefore, the interpretation of the Qur'an is not limited to the principle that "the Qur'an explains some of its own verses." For Agus, the meaning contained in a verse can also be revealed through scientific methods, characterized by their logical, rational, and empirical nature. He argues that the advancement of science requires interpreting the Qur'an within the scope of current science and technology. The use of reason is considered essential and is itself a command of the Qur'an, which repeatedly urges humanity to reflect (*tafakkur*). (Mustofa, 2019)

For example, in interpreting QS. Al-Baqarah verse 29, which states, *tsumas tawa ila as-sama''i fasawahunna sab'a samawat* (Then He turned to the sky and perfected them into seven skies), Agus drew on the science of astronomy to explain the meaning of "seven skies". Agus explains that the term refers to the atmosphere's layers: the Troposphere, Stratosphere, Mesosphere, Thermosphere, and Exosphere. Between the Troposphere and the Stratosphere lies the Ozone Layer, which blocks ultraviolet radiation. Meanwhile, the outermost layer is called the Magnetosphere, which protects the Earth from electromagnetic influences from outer space.

"Itulah yang digambarkan oleh ayat di atas. Bahwa setelah menciptakan bumi, Allah mengarah kepada penciptaan langit. Bukan langit luar angkasa, melainkan langit dekat berupa lapisan-lapisan atmosfer tersebut." (Mustofa, 2019)

Agus's interpretation of the seven skies is one of several possible views among the various theories held by scientists and astronomers. Other views, for example, suggest that the seven skies are understood as the seven dimensions of space-time, as described in the

Kaluza-Klein Theory. On the other hand, Indonesian astronomer Thomas Djamaluddin interprets the seven skies as countless celestial bodies rather than as layers of the sky. According to him, in Arabic, the number seven is commonly used to denote a large quantity rather than merely a literal number. Another view states that the term refers to galaxies scattered throughout the universe. (Setiyawati & Abdullah, 2026)

Another example is his interpretation of the Quranic Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 26, which contains the word *ba'udhatan*, translated as “mosquito.” He employed scientific logic to understand the verse by linking the words’ meaning to various modern scientific disciplines, such as biology, medicine, and pharmacy, in his interpretation. Agus firmly states that the verses of the Qur’an are not merely to be believed as revelations, but that such faith must be grounded in scientific knowledge.

“Bagi seorang dokter, nyamuk bisa memunculkan segala macam ilmu terkait dengan penyakit yang dibawanya. Dan bagaimana penanggulangannya serta obat apa saja yang bisa digunakan? Berbagai macam penelitian terkait dengan hal ini. Termasuk ketika buku ini sedang ditulis, terjadi pro-kontra soal nyamuk *wobachia* yang digunakan untuk memberantas demam berdarah..... Berbeda lagi dengan ahli farmasi yang bisa melakukan penelitian terkait dengan obat-obatan untuk mengantisipasi berbagai macam penyakit akibat nyamuk. Seperti malaria, demam berdarah, virus Zika, sampai chikungunya. Dan kemudian bersama pengusaha mendirikan pabrik obat yang bisa menyerap ribuan tenaga kerja.” (Mustofa, 2019)

Thus, he seeks to present an integrative model in which *al-wahyu* serves as the primary foundation, while reason is used to expand our understanding of the meanings contained within a verse. *al-wahyu* and reason are positioned in harmony, supporting and complementing one another. Both function as tools for simultaneously unraveling the meanings of Qur’anic verses, particularly those concerning ayat kauniyah.

2. Interpretation Method

Agus Mustofa uses the term *Ulul Albab* not only to refer to his tafsir but also as a method. Specifically, it is a method grounded in a holistic and comprehensive scientific approach. He bases this method on verses of the Qur’an that explicitly mention the term *Ulul Albab*, interpreted as “*tadzakkur*” and “*tafakkur*.” These two terms are used to understand Qur’anic verses simultaneously. “*Tadzakkur*” means deeply contemplating the spiritual dimension of humanity’s relationship with the Creator of the Universe. As for *tafakkur*, it is understood as a scientific thinking activity characterized by logic, rationality, and analysis, grounded in empirical facts. For him, these two aspects merge as a perspective in

understanding the verses of the Qur'an. (Mustofa, 2019) Ulul Albab are not merely “a rational person” but those capable of balancing spiritual intelligence and rational intelligence. Ulul Albab represents the integration of inner intelligence and rational intelligence working simultaneously.

Agus Mustofa uses Quran 3:190–191 as the basis for the method he calls Ulul Albab in interpreting Quranic verses.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولَى الْأَلْبَابِ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا
وَعَلَى جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night there are signs for people of reason. ‘They are’ those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth ‘and pray’, “Our Lord! You have not created ‘all of’ this without purpose. Glory be to You! Protect us from the torment of the Fire.

Through this Qur’anic argument, Agus emphasizes the central role of reason in interpreting Qur’anic verses, particularly when examining ayat kauniya. The Qur’an repeatedly urges humans to think, observe the universe, and draw lessons from various phenomena of creation through the expressions afala ta’qilun and afala tatafakkarun. This Qur’anic encouragement to use reason is further supported by the development of science and technology in the modern era. (Faizin, 2017) Here, science serves as an instrument for understanding Qur’anic verses and as a means to uncover the meanings contained within the Qur’an.

a. The Integration of the Qur’an and Science

Tafsir Ulul Albab essentially employs a deductive-confirmatory approach, (Faizin, 2017) in which scientific findings explain the verses concerning ayat kauniyah. This is evident in the interpretation of Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 22.

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَّكُمْ
فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

‘He is the One’ Who has made the earth a place of settlement for you and the sky a canopy; and sends down rain from the sky, causing fruits to grow as a provision for you. So do not knowingly set up equals to Allah ‘in worship’

In interpreting this verse, Agus focuses his analysis on two key terms closely linked to modern scientific findings: *firasy* and *as-sama binaan*. The term *firasy* is understood as a surface resembling a mat or carpet. However, he rejects a literal interpretation and the view that this verse provides evidence that the Earth is flat. Here, an effort to integrate and harmonize the Qur'anic text with modern scientific findings is evident. Agus employs scientific data from modern astronomy and geology to affirm that the Earth is spherical, so the meaning of “spread-out” does not refer to the Earth's geometric shape but rather to the condition of its surface that allows humans to live comfortably. Agus then relates the term *firasy* to the concept of tectonic plates. According to him, the Earth's outermost layer resembles a spread or carpet that forms the relatively flat and habitable parts of the Earth's surface. (Mustofa, 2019)

Agus explained the interpretation of that verse by describing the layers of the Earth from a scientific perspective, using images of the Earth's structure, from the inner and outer cores, the mantle, the asthenosphere, and the lithosphere, all the way down to the crust.

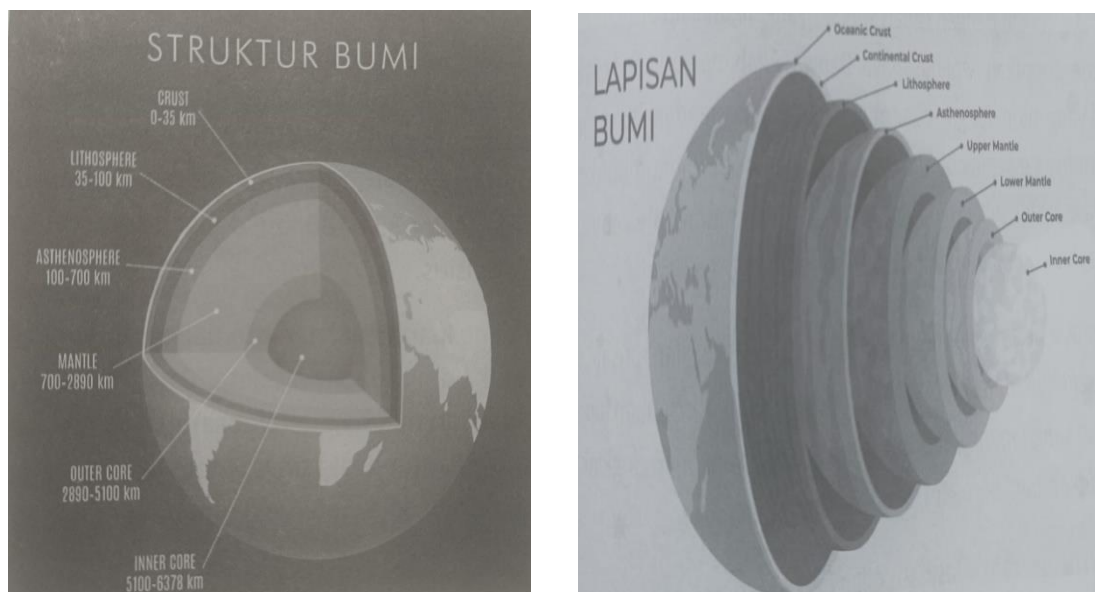


Figure 1: Agus Mustofa presented diagrams of the Earth's structure and layers to support his interpretation

“Gambar di atas menunjukkan bahwa planet Bumi memiliki lapisan-lapisan. Mulai dari yang paling dalam, sebagai inti bumi berupa gumpalan logam besi dan nikel yang suhunya sekitar 6000 derajat Celsius. Disebut sebagai *inner core*—inti luar. Kedalamannya sekitar 6000 KM.”

“Di susul bagian luarnya yang disebut *outer core* – inti luar. Berupa leburan batuan panas yang suhunya masih sangat tinggi, sekitar 4000-an derajat celcius. Dengan kedalaman 2890 – 5100 KM.”

Kemudian lapisan yang lebih luar lagi adalah *mantel* yang suhunya berkisar di 3000-an derajat celsius, dengan kedalaman sekitar 700 – 2890 KM. Di atasnya, lebih ke permukaan ada lapisan *athenosphere* pada kedalaman 100 - 700 KM. Suhu rata-ratanya berkisar antara 1000-an derajat celsius. Lantas, disusul lapisan *lithosphere* pada kedalaman sekitar 35 – 100 KM, dengan suhu rata-rata sekitar ratusan derajat celsius.”

“Nah, yang paling luar adalah lapisan paling tipis yang disebut “*crust*” atau kerak bumi. Tebalnya sekitar 0 - 35 KM. Dengan suhu permukaan mulai dari puluhan derajat sampai minus beberapa derajat celsius, bergantung lokasinya. Atau, jika rata-rata, sekitar belasan derajat celsius saja. Sehingga memungkinkan untuk dihuni makhluk hidup.”(Mustofa, 2019)

This explanation aims to demonstrate that the part of Earth habitable to humans is merely the outermost layer, which is extremely thin compared to the Earth’s overall structure. Thus, the term *firasy* is understood not as an assertion that the Earth is flat, but rather as a reference to the Earth’s crust, which resembles a spread-out surface or a carpet where humans live.

Furthermore, the interpretation of the phrase *as-sama bina'an* focuses on the Earth’s atmosphere. The word *bina'an* is understood as a structure that serves a specific function: protecting the Earth from threats from outer space, such as cosmic radiation, ultraviolet rays, meteors, and other celestial objects. The atmosphere is positioned as a protective canopy for life on Earth. Meanwhile, “*sama*,” which means “sky,” is understood not as the distant cosmos but as the Earth’s atmosphere, as the verse relates to the process of rain falling (*wa anzala mina as-sama'i maan*). The word “sky” (*sama' and samawat*) in the Qur'an has a broad spectrum of meanings, encompassing the entire space above humanity, ranging from the heights where birds fly, where clouds exist as a source of rainwater, the moon’s orbit, to the galaxies in the universe. Therefore, the understanding of the word “sky” is based on the context of the verse regarding the descent of rainwater.(Mustofa, 2019) This indicates, through relational meaning analysis, a semantic tendency: a single Qur'anic term can have different meanings depending on its context.(Nur et al., 2025)

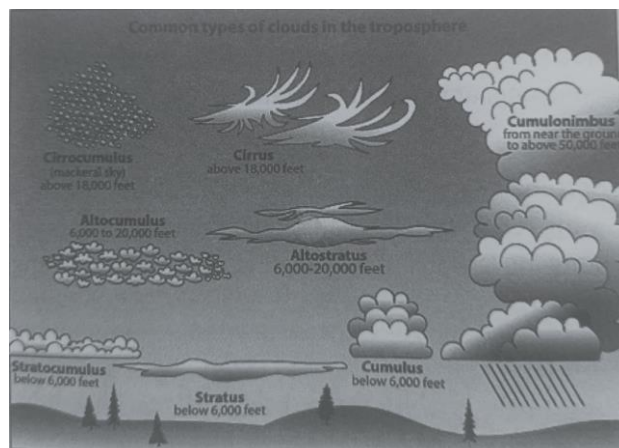


Figure 2: Tafsir Ulul Albab cited scientific findings to explain *as-sama'* in the Qur'an

The inclusion of images of various types of clouds in the troposphere further highlights the dominance of the scientific approach in interpretation. Meteorological data is used to reinforce the argument that rain does indeed originate from clouds in the Earth's atmosphere. In this context, the Ulul Albab interpretation embodies the objectivity of modern science, serving as a tool for verifying and elaborating on the meaning of the verse. This is emphasized by Agus, who states that the interpretation of Qur'anic verses must be verified with valid scientific data.(Mustofa, 2019)

In the concluding section, Agus emphasizes the theological dimension of all these scientific explanations. He argues that knowledge of the atmosphere, clouds, and rainfall processes is intended to strengthen awareness of God. In other words, scientific explanations do not stand alone as mere scientific information but are used as a means to demonstrate God's power through the order of the universe. Thus, Tafsir Ulul Albab, with its scientific approach, does not merely interpret the Qur'an through the lens of modern scientific discoveries; it employs science as a medium for theological reflection on the signs of God's power in the cosmos.

Methodologically, this type of interpretation demonstrates a model of integration and harmonization between the Qur'anic text and modern scientific findings. Qur'anic verses serve as the starting point, while scientific theories are used to rationally explain and reinforce their meanings. On one hand, there are the Qur'anic verses, on the other, scientific findings.(Nafisah, 2023) This approach has the advantage of demonstrating the Qur'an's relevance to the development of modern science. However, it also carries the potential for epistemological problems, as directly linking Qur'anic verses to scientific theories may give the impression that the verses are being forced to align with modern scientific theories and are merely serving as a justification for them.(Laila, 2014)

Nevertheless, Agus emphasized that the interpretation of Qur'anic verses must be verified using valid scientific data. However, scientific theories are tentative and subject to change as science progresses. Therefore, the interpretation of ayat kauniyah must not be based on unestablished scientific speculation, as this risks shifting the meaning of the Qur'an with changes in scientific theory. Nevertheless, Agus continued, the possibility of errors in scientific interpretation should not be viewed as a problem. Every interpretation, regardless of the method used, fundamentally carries the same potential for error since

interpretation is a product of the human mind influenced by the interpreter's intellectual, experiential, social, and cultural horizons.(Thahir & Dawing, 2022) Therefore, changes in interpretation are inevitable. The only thing that is absolute and cannot be wrong is the Word of Allah, namely the Qur'an, while human understanding or interpretation is relative; it can be wrong or right.(Mustofa, 2019)

b. *Maudhu'i Ra'yi*

In the introduction to Tafsir Ulul Albab, Agus explains the methodological framework for Qur'anic exegesis that he employs. He states that his exegesis leans toward *maudhu'i bil ra'yi* method. This is a method that combines a thematic approach with reason and modern science to understand the Qur'an. Agus outlines six steps for *maudhu'i bil ra'yi* exegesis.

The first step is to analyze the verse thematically by identifying the keywords used and referring to other verses that employ them. The second step emphasizes the importance of the verse's context within the broader discussion of the same surah. Through this approach, the context of the theme under discussion can be established. The third step involves using scientific knowledge and empirical data, such as medicine, astronomy, anthropology, neuroscience, psychology, and even politics, in the interpretation process. The fourth step combines groups of verses from different surah to arrive at a complete and comprehensive theme. The fifth step involves conducting comparative studies with historical cases. The final step is to conduct an in-depth thematic study to produce concrete solutions to the problems of modern life.(Mustofa, 2019)

The first step demonstrates the use of the "Qur'an-based Qur'anic exegesis" method by explaining one verse in terms of another. In the context of exegetical methodology, this method aims to maintain consistency of meaning and avoid contradictions between verses.(Rohman, 2017) Agus appears to view the Qur'an as an interconnected system of meaning, such that the understanding of a particular term is considered within the overall structure of the Qur'an. However, in the context of interpreting ayat kauniyah, Agus does not explicitly link or elaborate on the key terms discussed by referring to other verses. As mentioned in the previous discussion, when examining the word *sama'*, he does not connect that key term with other verses to uncover its concept from the Qur'an's perspective.

The second step demonstrates an attention to the coherence of verses within a surah by connecting them to other verses, both preceding and following. Agus strives to avoid a narrow interpretation that might take a verse out of context. This is evident at the beginning of his discussion of a verse, where he first links it to the preceding verse.

“Ayat ke-29 ini kembali mengemukakan gugatan pikiran kita semua. Setelah menyampaikan tentang asal-usul dan perjalanan hidup manusia, kini Allah mengingatkan tentang planet bumi yang dijadikan oleh Sang Pencipta sebagai tempat kehidupan yang nyaman buat manusia. Sehingga, sesungguhnya tidak ada alasan bagi manusia untuk mengingkari-Nya.”(Mustofa, 2019)

The third step is the most distinctive feature of scientific exegesis: the use of science and empirical data to understand the verses. As mentioned in the example, findings from modern science are used as references in interpreting the Qur'an. Here, the integration of revelation and science as sources of interpretation is clearly evident. This approach demonstrates that Agus views the Qur'an as a text relevant to contemporary developments through the application of modern science in its interpretation.

Step four, compiling and integrating groups of verses from different surah is not observed when Agus interprets ayat kauniyah. For example, when interpreting Surah Al-Baqarah verse 22 regarding *as-sama'*, which is understood as the atmosphere, Agus does not connect it to Surah Al-Baqarah verse 29, which also discusses *as-sama'*. These verses are understood separately and independently, even though both discuss similar subjects.(Mustofa, 2019) Consequently, the potential for expanding meaning and understanding through correlations with other verses is not found in the Tafsir Ulul Albab.

Similarly, in the fifth step, when interpreting a verse, Agus does not refer to the corpus of classical or contemporary exegetical works. This tendency indicates that he places greater emphasis on a scientific approach rather than on engaging with previous traditions. In the final step, a broader, more in-depth thematic study is not found in Tafsir Ulul Albab, except in the form of partial thematic studies. This is evident from the discussion, which focuses more on a single verse than on comprehensively compiling all the Qur'anic verses related to that theme. Thus, the *maudhu'i ra'yi* method employed does not fully meet the criteria of a *maudhu'i* exegesis in the complete sense as proposed by Al-Farmawi, namely, gathering all relevant verses, examining their correlations, and systematically organizing the thematic concepts of the Qur'an.(Yusuf & Permana, 2021)

3. Validity of Interpretation

The validity of interpretation in Tafsir Ulul Albab can be analyzed through the perspective of correspondence theory, a theory of truth that holds that the correspondence between a statement and empirical facts is the primary measure of truth. (Audi, 2023) In the context of exegesis, an interpretation is considered valid if it corresponds to objective reality that can be verified through empirical experience, scientific research, historical facts, or real social phenomena. This approach appears dominant in Agus's interpretation, particularly when he explains verses on ayat kauniyah by referring to modern scientific data.

This is evident in the interpretation of the term *firasy* as the Earth's crust and *binaan* as the atmosphere. This interpretation is not based solely on a linguistic approach, but also on its correspondence with scientific facts about Earth's structure and the atmosphere's function, as demonstrated by modern geology and astronomy. (Mustofa, 2019) Thus, the validity of an interpretation is determined not only by the linguistic meaning of the verse but also by its connection to empirical reality that can be tested rationally and scientifically. From the perspective of correspondence theory, this approach strengthens the claim of the objectivity of interpretation because the meaning of the verse is linked to observable and verifiable facts.

Furthermore, the use of meteorology to explain rain falling from the atmosphere suggests that Agus employs scientific facts to legitimize his interpretation. The term *as-sama'* is understood to refer to the Earth's atmosphere, (Mustofa, 2019) as this aligns with the empirical fact that rain originates from clouds in the atmospheric layer, not from outer space. (Mustofa, 2019) This approach indicates that the exegesis in Tafsir Ulul Albab seeks to establish its validity through the alignment between the Qur'anic text and natural reality. In other words, an exegesis is considered valid if it can explain empirical phenomena in a reasonable manner and in line with scientific advancements.

In addition to scientific facts, the correspondence approach is also evident in the *maudhu'i ra'yi* method developed by Agus. He emphasizes the importance of referring to empirical data from disciplines such as medicine, anthropology, psychology, history, and socio-cultural studies to understand Qur'anic verses. This indicates that empirical reality is positioned as a crucial component in the process of validating interpretation. Interpretation does not merely stop at the normative-theological aspect but must be relevant to the actual conditions of human life and the advancements of modern science.

However, the use of correspondence theory in validating exegesis also raises epistemological issues. Scientific facts are dynamic and open to change, whereas the

Qur'an is believed to possess absolute truth. When exegesis relies too heavily on a specific scientific theory, the interpretation's validity is likely to change as science evolves. (Setiawan, 2025) For example, if the geological or meteorological theory used as the basis for interpretation is revised, the interpretation built upon that theory may also be called into question. Therefore, the validity of correspondence-based interpretation in Tafsir Ulul Albab tends to be contextual and temporary, as it follows developments in the scientific knowledge used as a reference.

For Agus, the interpretation of the Qur'an must be verified against valid modern scientific findings. These findings may be incorrect or subject to refinement, but Agus continued that this should not be a problem. Every interpretation carries the same potential for error, since interpretation is a human product constrained by human ability. He illustrated this by showing how interpretations change as science advances. For example, consider the interpretation of the word *zarrah* in Surah Al-Zalzalah, verse 7. In his commentary, Mahmud Yunus translates the word as "spinach seed," while Zainuddin and Fachruddin translate it as "dust," and HAMKA's Tafsir Al-Azhar translates it as "atom." These shifts in meaning are considered inevitable because the verse is understood in light of human understanding and modern scientific discoveries. (Mustofa, 2019)

Nevertheless, this approach plays a significant role in ensuring that the Qur'an remains relevant to the changing times. By treating empirical facts as a parameter for the validity of interpretation, Agus seeks to foster a dialogue between *al-wahyu* and science, so that the Qur'an is not understood merely in a textual sense but also as a scripture capable of addressing modern realities. In this context, the correspondence theory serves as the epistemological foundation for the integrative style of exegesis developed in Tafsir Ulul Albab, which seeks to reconcile the truth of *al-wahyu* with empirical reality through a rational and scientific approach.

Meanwhile, the validity of coherence in Tafsir Ulul Albab appears inconsistent with the method it establishes, namely the *maudhu'i ra'yi* method. This can be seen in the critique from the previous discussion, which noted that Agus focuses more on the theme of a verse without linking it to other verses on the same theme to achieve a comprehensive understanding; thus, it does not meet the criteria of the *maudhu'i* exegesis method except in the form of a partial thematic study. In terms of coherence, Tafsir Ulul Albab operates at the level of harmony between exegesis and modern science. The validity of Agus Mustofa's scientific exegesis is achieved when Qur'anic

interpretation and modern scientific findings form a unified system of thought that is coherent, logical, and mutually reinforcing, without negating one another—a concept he refers to as *tadzakkur* and *tafakkur*. These two terms are used to understand Qur'anic verses simultaneously— that is, two perspectives that merge in their understanding.

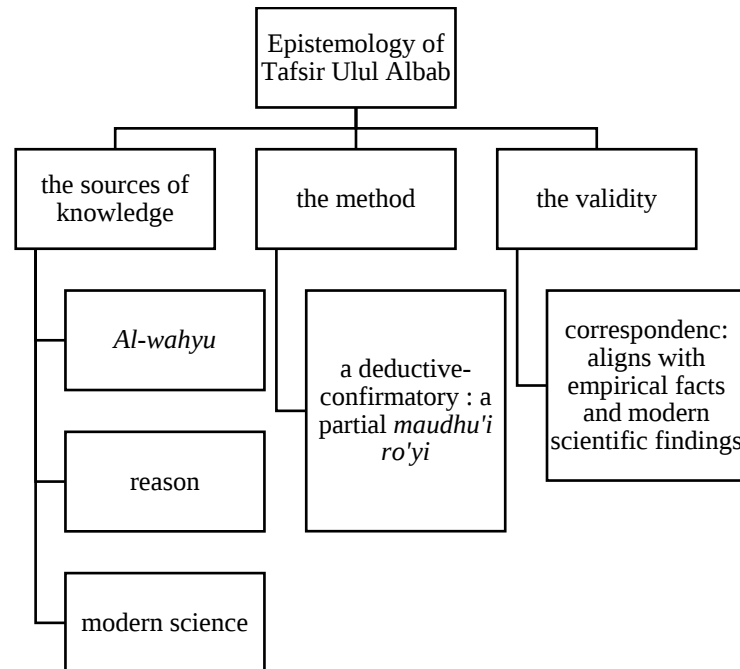


Figure 3: The Epistemological Framework of Tafsir Ulul Albab

Conclusion

Based on the analysis conducted, the epistemology of Tafsir Ulul Albab is constructed on a paradigm of integration between *al-wahyu*, reason, and modern science. *Al-wahyu* is positioned as an authoritative source, yet its interpretation does not disregard the role of reason and modern science. As sources of knowledge, *al-wahyu* and reason are placed in a harmonious relationship, mutually supporting and complementing one another. Both serve as epistemological tools used simultaneously to uncover the meaning of ayat kauniyah.

Methodologically, Tafsir Ulul Albab employs a deductive-confirmative approach in interpreting ayat kauniyah. Valid, up-to-date scientific findings are used to explain these verses. In interpreting ayat kauniyah, Tafsir Ulul Albab employs a partial *maudhu'i ra'yi* method. Tafsir Ulul Albab does not fully apply the *maudhu'i* exegesis method by collecting related verses, examining correlations between them, and comprehensively organizing the thematic concepts of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, Tafsir Ulul Albab has made a significant contribution to the development of contemporary exegetical methodology. This exegesis successfully fosters a dialogue between religion and science and offers a rational, contextual, and relevant reading of

the Qur'an in light of modern developments. Through this integrative approach, ayat kauniyah are understood not only as normative-teleological texts but also as a source of intellectual inspiration that encourages humanity to think about and investigate the universe.

In interpreting ayat kauniyah, Tafsir Ulul Albab employs a criterion of truth for interpretation based on correspondence. An interpretation is considered valid if it aligns with empirical facts and modern scientific findings. It emphasizes the importance of using empirical data from various scientific disciplines, such as medicine, anthropology, psychology, history, and socio-cultural studies, to understand the verses of the Qur'an. Tafsir Ulul Albab seeks to establish the validity of an interpretation through the relevance between the Qur'anic text and natural reality. Thus, interpretation is considered valid if it can explain empirical phenomena rationally and in harmony with the advancement of scientific knowledge. In terms of coherence, however, the Tafsir Ulul Albab appears to be inconsistent with the method it explicitly states. Rather than employing the *maudhu'i ra'yi* method of exegesis, its approach leans more toward a partial *maudhu'i ra'yi* approach.

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