

The Concept of 'Nature' in Peripatetic Islamic Philosophers*

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ABSTRACT

In this study, lexical and terminological meanings of the term “nature” were analyzed and some Peripatetic Islamic philosophers’ opinions about this term were included. A comparison was made between the words “tabiat” and “doğa” which are used in Turkish language to meet the term “nature”. The realm of existence which Peripatetic Islamic philosophers have used “nature” in as a noun was explained. Debate between Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) about the necessity of proving the term “nature” was mentioned. Ibn Sīnā's views on what “nature” portends in terms of being a source of motion and duration in objects were presented in comparison with Aristotle. Later definitions which are made by philosophers for “nature” as a term were presented. Peripatetic Islamic philosophers’ definition of the term “nature” which has a critical role in Islamic philosophy and the way they use it differentiates from that of Aristotle’s. The term “nature” which they especially use to explain every kind of becoming and motion enables to connect all reason to Allah in aspects of etymology. And it is also known that the term “nature” serves as a basis for differentiation between physics and metaphysics. The purpose of this article is to clarify the possible usages of the term “nature” in relation to new theories.

KEYWORDS

Islamic Philosophy, Peripatetic, Ṭabī‘a, Cause, Reason, Principle

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Meşşâî İslam Filozoflarında ‘Tabiat’ Kavramı

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada “tabiat” kavramının sözlük ve terim anlamı analiz edilmiş ve ona ilişkin bazı Meşşâî İslam filozoflarının görüşlerine yer verilmiştir. “Tabiat” sözcüğünü karşılamak üzere Türkçede kullanılan “tabiat” ve “doğa” sözcükleri arasında bir karşılaştırma yapılmıştır. “Tabiat”ın Meşşâî İslam filozofları tarafından isim olarak kullanıldığı varlık alanı hakkında bilgi verilmiş ve İbn Sina ile İbn Rüşd arasında cereyan eden tabiatın ispatının gerekip gerekmeyeceği tartışmasına değinilmiştir. Cisimlerde görülen hareket ve sükunun kaynağı olması bakımından “tabiat”ın nelere delalet ettiği hususunda İbn Sina’nın görüşleri Aristo ile mukayeseli olarak sunulmuştur. Daha sonra bir terim olarak “tabiat”ın filozoflar tarafından yapılan tanımı ortaya konulmuştur. İslam felsefesinde önemli bir yere sahip olan “tabiat” kavramına Meşşâî İslam filozoflarının yükledikleri anlam ve onu kullanma biçimleri, Aristo’dan farklıdır. Özellikle her türlü oluş ve hareketin kaynağını açıklamak amacıyla kullandıkları “tabiat” kavramı etimolojik açıdan tüm nedenleri Allah’a ulaştırmaya imkan sağlamaktadır. Ayrıca kavramın, “tabiat – tabiat ötesi” ayrımına dayanak teşkil ettiği de bilinmektedir. Makalenin amacı, “tabiat” kavramının günümüzde yeni teorilerle ilişkili olarak kullanılma imkanlarını belirginleştirmektir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER

İslam Felsefesi, Meşşâî, Tabiat, illet, Sebep, İlke

INTRODUCTION

It is extremely obvious that societies have an accumulation in every area that is humanitarian in essence and every accumulation is exclusive for a particular society and so the development of philosophy and science, which are the most significant human output, is only possible with the handing down of this accumulation from generation to generation. However, it is also inevitable that inadequate or inaccurate transference of this accumulation leads to negative consequences. In this context, in order to overcome the experienced difficulties, today’s intellectuals need to sufficiently consider and evaluate this inheritance. However, due to various problems – especially the language problem – the evaluation of this inheritance is not an easy task for new generations. Beyond doubt, it can hardly be said that it is realistic to turn to solutions that are gradually moving away from the past and particular accumulations of the society and overlook the society’s essential historical dynamics. As such, we argue that the basic concepts which constitute the philosophies of Islamic philosophers are not understood adequately and in no time, they should be studied in detail and the meanings of which should be revealed accurately. Therefore, we have studied the concept of “nature” which is commonly used among other concepts by Islamic philosophers. We hope that our study will make contribution to the proper understanding of Islamic philosophy.

The reason for the limitation of this study to only the peripatetic Islamic philosophers is that the members of this school have a great integrity with each other and see this specific concept as one of the most important concepts. Thus, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) the XII. century philosopher (d. 1198), states that the concept of “nature” should be known by all philosophers in detail as in the following: “Since the concept of nature is used for causes and the things that are the reasons of causes and, also philosophy takes the causes

as a subject matter, the philosopher needs to know and distinguish in how many different meanings of nature are used and which of them is more suitable to this term and lastly which one is granted with this meaning first...”¹ Hence, the arguments of peripatetic Islamic philosophers are included here first; however, when it is needed the current meaning of the concept and the arguments of another philosophers are also addressed.

Peripatetic Islamic philosophers approach the concept of “nature” within the context of nature-cause relation, nature-will relation and in general meaning its impact on the formation of an action. Yet, in this study only the concept of “nature” itself is researched, not the problems that involve the “nature” concept or the concept leads to and what peripatetic Islamic philosophers understand from it is tried to be brought to the light.

1. “NATURE” CONCEPT IN A DICTIONARY

“Nature” as a word has its roots in Arabic language and it is derived from the verb “ṭabī‘a” (In Turkish language, it is: “Tabiat, doğa”*, in Greek language: “Physis”, in Latin: “Natura”, in German: “Natur” and, in French and English: “Nature”). It has several usages as a verb and its meaning changes depending on the subject and the object it takes; for example:

a) If the subject is God and the object is human, it means “created”, “built”, “has done it according to a right example, has given it a form”;

b) if it takes an indirect object when the subject is the God (with a preposition ‘alâ’), it means The God took the “ability of knowing and understanding power from him/her, The God sealed him/her”.

c) It can be used with the meaning “sealed” when the subject is human, but this is different from the first one, here it means “seal something” by using a seal.

d) If the subject is human and the object is a book or an article, it means “to print out the content of a book or an article with using a printing or writing tools.

e) When the subject is human, depending on the object it takes, it means “impressed” him, “kissed” him, “turned towards Qibla”, “made the pot from the mud etc.”.

f) Also, again when the subject is human, it is used in passive form and (with ‘alâ’ preposition) if it takes an indirect object, it means “reinforced”, the thing put in his “natural disposition”, “get used to”.²

g) Different from the usages above, it can also be used as the government coined money.³

It is possible to draw these conclusions below by the usages compiled above:

¹ Ibn Rushd, Averroes, Tafsîr Mâ ba’d al-ṭabī‘at, ed. M. Bouyges, S.J. 3rd Edition (Beirut: s.n., 1983), 2: 508.

* Also in old Turkish the word “sajyya” was being used for the same meaning and “sajyya” means “a state in human nature”. For more information see: Muhammad ‘Ali al-Tahānawī, *Kashshaf istilāhāt al-funūn*, ed. Ali Dahruj, translated Farsi to Arabic by Abdullah al-Hālidi, translated to European languages by Corc Zeynati (Beirut; Dār al-Kutub, 1966), 1127.

² *Al-Munjid fi l-luga wa-l-‘ilam* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986), 460; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut, 1990), 8: 232-233; Asım Efendi, *Kamus Tercemesi* (Istanbul, nd.), 3: 343; Commission, *Al-Mu‘jam al-‘Arabī al-Esāsī* (Tunus, 1989), 784-786.

³ Commission, *Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīf* (Cairo: Academy of Islamic Research, 1972), 2: 549-550.

1. The verb from which “nature” is derived, is only used for the sensible beings (God and human being). If it is used for government than there we can talk about an activity performed by human beings.
2. When the subject is God, it has both positive (“created”) and negative (“eliminated=dispelled) meanings.
3. When the subject is human or the government, it has only positive meaning.
4. Excluding the usage in the meaning of “kissed” for human, the rest of the meanings have a permanence and durability. In other words, it is understood that this act which is carried out by sensible beings results in not a temporary but a permanent outcome.
5. When it is used in the passive form, it means transitivity. Namely, effect always rises to the surface in others, it does not occur in itself.

However, the word “nature”, which is used as a name, has a wider content that we can list here as follows:

- a) *“Everything that is created in the universe as mountains, plains, plants, the sky etc.*
- b) *“The character (mizāj) of the humankind that is the mixture of moral quality, disposition”.*
- c) *“The usual thing” (the opposite one, extraordinary).*
- d) *“The force and the power that penetrate the body itself and the other bodies that reach their natural perfection”.*
- e) *“(A body) that the Supreme God achieved its mixture with a thing.”* For instance, the nature of fire, medicine etc..⁴

The equivalent of the word “nature” in Turkish dictionaries correlates with the meanings in Arabic: “Nature:

1. *Nature, material world.*
2. *Everything that is the work of the creation, all the things that are created, the whole universe, the cosmos.*
3. *The harmony and the order among the created things, established by the divine wisdom.*
4. *The inherent force in the created things.*
5. *The nature, basic qualifications and the invariable, intrinsic properties and peculiarities of a body, innate character, moral quality, humor, temper, disposition.*
6. *Custom, habit.*
7. *Hardship or easiness of the bowel movement.*⁵

It can be said that all these above-mentioned meanings of the word “nature”, which is used as a noun, express a positive permanency. Since all the meanings it contains are resistant to time. Therefore, it could be said that the “nature” as a word expresses the positive and the permanent effect and expresses the object that the effect is stemmed from, too. Hence, when we consider the verb stem of the word, it is seen that the noun “tabiat”, which is derived from the verb “tabea (taba’a)”, is derived to express the object (the affected). The objects that the “tabea” verb is mentioned in could be animate or inanimate, so the “nature” concept that is derived for them has a wider content than the verb that it is derived from. In this usage being smart is out of question.

⁴ Commission, *Al-Mu'jam al-'Arabī al-Esāsī*, 786; *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasīf*, 2: 549-550/ II/549-550; al-Tahānawī, *Kashshaf*, 1127.

⁵ D. Mehmet Doğan, *Büyük Türkçe Sözlük* (Ankara, 1986), 1046.

According to us, in Turkish, the word “doğa (nature)” which is derived to express the word “tabiat” is not adequately meet the meaning of it. Because, the verb stem of “doğa” is “doğmak” (to be born) and it is not used for the intelligent beings only and, also it is not transitive. In Turkish dictionaries, you can find these meanings for the verb “doğmak (to be born)”: “To be born:

1. *Come into the world, get out of the womb, to be born.*
2. *To be sighted on horizon: Sun rise, moon rise.*
3. *To occur, to be the result of something: Why did this disorder occur?*
4. *To appear in a sudden, to arise, to come into existence: To cross one’s mind.”*⁶ As you can see here, the verb “doğmak (to be born)” different from the verb “taba’a” is used for all the beings as animate and inanimate and it is also used as intransitive. Besides, in the verb “doğmak (to be born)” there is no permanency meaning as in the verb “taba’a”. On the contrary, “doğmak (to be born)” is an immediate act. Therefore, the subject and the object of this verb is the same and it expresses the act of all objects that has no permanency and durability.

However, the verb “doğmak (to be born)” from which the word “doğa (nature)” is derived, correspond to the stem from which Ancient Greek word “physis” is derived. The actual meaning of the Ancient Greek word “physis”, which is used as an equivalent of “ṭabī’a (or “nature), comes from the stem “phy” and “phy” shows the process of germination, birth, fertilization, organic development...”⁷ In this case, it is possible to say that the word “doğa” is not derived to express the concept “tabiat”, but to correspond to the Ancient Greek concept “physis”.

The consequences of using the concept of “doğa” instead of “tabiat” will be discussed later in this article.

2. ‘TABIAT (NATURE)’ AS A MULTI MEANING NOUN

Aristotle and the peripatetic Islamic Philosophers try to determine to which things the “nature” concept has been given as a name and each philosopher consider the usage of this concept only until the age they live in. At this point, philosophers are not concerned about introducing new things, they are only interested in making some evaluations related to the usages of the concept.

Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) does not talk about the significations of “nature” as a noun in his works, yet he dwells on its definition in detail. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) who states that the “nature” is generally used for forms, substances, changes, and the things related to them⁸, transfers what Aristotle says about this matter. However, in his work *Physics* Aristotle discusses the three significations of the concept of nature⁹, while in his work *Metaphysics* he says it has six significations. These are as follows: a) “existence or nascence”, b) “the first element (component) that the growing thing originated from”, c) “the principle of the first move in a

⁶ Doğan, *Büyük Türkçe Sözlük*, 270.

⁷ Hüsamettin Erdem, “Tabiat (Doğa)”, *Sosyal Bilimler Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1990), 4: 40.

⁸ Ibn Rushd, *Talkhiṣ Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, ed. Osman Emin (Cairo, 1958), 32.

⁹ Aristotle, *Physics*, translated by Saffet Babür (Istanbul, 1997), II. Book, 193a 29-33. It can be said that Aristotle also indicates other meanings of “nature” here. But these informations are not systematical.

body”, d) “the first item of artistic objects”, e) “the substance of natural objects” and f) “all kinds of substances”.¹⁰ Ibn Rushd elaborates his views and puts them in order as follows:

1. First of all, the noun “nature” is used for the movements that shows up in bodies. These movements are four in total as **a)** generation and corruption (Kawn wa-Fasād) **b)** transposition, **c)** growth, **d)** alteration of qualities.¹¹

Among these movements Ibn Rushd only discusses the growth in detail. According to him, growth appears in various forms as *growth with contact*, *growth with fusion* and *growth with mixture*. In growth with contact, the sum of the growing and the thing which is born as a result of growth is not one (but two). Since, in both of them there is no common piece whatsoever. On the other hand, in growth with fusion and in growth with mixture, the sum of the growing and and the thing which is born as a result of growth is one. Because; in fusion, there is a fused piece which is common in both sides. According to him, just as fetuses (embryo) grow attached (with contact) to the pregnant, fruits and seeds also grow via fusion or contact attaching to the trees.¹² However, Ibn Rushd indicates that there is a difference between the fusion and the mixture. Accordingly, the piece, that is fused, brings forth a fused unity not in terms of quality but in terms of contiguity. Namely, it is impossible for such a body to split quantitatively. So, the things that are combined via fusion are not one in terms of quality, but they are one interms of contiguity and quantity. On the other hand, mixtures are one in terms of quality.¹³

According to Ibn Rushd, the principle of movement and change in any entity can be found both as the principle of all variation kinds and as the principle of certain parts of the variation. For instance, an animal has all the principles of the four movements (transposition, growth, alteration and generation and corruption). Whereas this is not the case with simple substances such as the water and the earth. The water and the earth have the three movements excluding the growth. For celestial body, Ibn Rushd claims that it only has the movement in space (moving motion). The other movement kinds can not be seen in celestial body.¹⁴

2. A specific thing is also called as “nature” from which an object is originated, or it gives birth to an object.¹⁵ Ibn Rushd identifies that if “nature” concept is used with this meaning then it contains the component as well. Since, according to him, the people who attribute this meaning to “nature” argue that the nature of natural objects and the nature of their components are the same. For example, when we say, “the

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1014b 16-36, 1015a 1-13.

¹¹ Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīṣ Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 32. Aristotle phrases this as “being”. See: Aristotle, *Physics*, II. Book, 193b 13,14. (In “metaphysics”, he phrases it as “occurrence”. See : Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1014b 16-17). But according to Aristotle “being” means the way that leads to “nature”. He explains this with health and treatment example. In his view it is not possible to call the way that leads to treatment “nature”; because what is needed from treatment isnt for it to go in the direction of art of treatment but for it to come from the art of treatment. In this case treatment is not the way to “nature” whereas health is. See : A.e., 193b 13-14.

¹² Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 2: 508. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, translated by Ahmet Arslan (Izmir, 1985), V. Book, 1014b, 16-20.

¹³ Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 2: 510. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1014b, 24-26.

¹⁴ Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ at-Ṭabī’i*, ed. Josef Puig (Madrid, 1983), 20.

¹⁵ Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 2: 509. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1014b, 17-18.

nature of water”, “the nature of fire”, “the nature of earth” and, “the nature of air”, we refer to the components of the water, fire, earth and the air.¹⁶ Secondly, Ibn Rushd gives a bronze sculpture as an example. The sculpture is made of bronze and when the sculpture is made of that, the bronze stays as it is. It is same for the goods that sculpted from wood. The nature of wood continues in that good.¹⁷ Ibn Rushd discusses that the proponents of this view do not accept any substance but hyle and, also, they deny the existence of form. According to Ibn Rushd, those who claim this accept hyle as the only substance. That’s why ancient philosophers act differently in this matter and, some recognize the water as a component, some recognize the earth, some recognize the air, some recognize the fire and some of them recognize all of these as a component and they argue that the nature of things is identical with the thing that they say component.¹⁸

3. Thirdly, “nature” is used for the form (şūra) of natural objects. According to the proponents of this argument, “nature” is the structure (bunya) of the first composition that exists in each natural object one by one. Since, according to them, in a mixture, the mixed thing can not be a component. A component of an object can not be found in that object as a mixture but in actual sense. For someone who adopts that the component exists in the mixture as an act, the composition can not be anything else but the form. As an example, Ibn Rushd gives a house that is made of stone and concrete. Composition or the mixture is the shape of the house, it is not the stone and the concrete which are the components of the house. Stone and the concrete do not become a mixture in any way. They continue to exist as stone and concrete and they are in movement form. According to Ibn Rushd’s quotations from Aristotle, Empedocles’s (d. B.C. 440)* opinions also support this argument. According to Empedocles, the mixing and changing of objects create the nature of the composed objects. In other words, the forms and the substances of the composed objects are in the mixture and in the change; they are in the alteration of the pieces. For Ibn Rushd, it is the mixture that is made up of the composition from which Empedocles refers to as change and mixture in actual sense.¹⁹

4. Fourthly the concept of “nature” is used for hyle (hayūlā). For Ibn Rushd, hyle has two parts. The first part is the prime matter that is common to everything; and the second part is the hyle that is unique to each individual entity. Here, with the prime matter Ibn Rushd refers to the hyle which is the main substance of a gender or species; he is not referring to the absolute hyle of which God put in action first. For instance, bronze is the closest thing to everything made of bronze. However, since the the prime matter of fluxing materials, bronze is also one of them, is water, then the prime matter of the objects made of bronze is water.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibn Rushd, *Talkhiş Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 32.

¹⁷ Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 2: 510. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1014b, 26-30.

¹⁸ Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 2: 511. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1014b, 32-35.

* For more information about Empedocles and his views see: Bertrand Russel, *Batı Felsefesi Tarihi*, translated by Muhammer Sencer (Istanbul, 1983), 65-69; Macit Gökberk, *Felsefe Tarihi* (Istanbul, 1985), 34; Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, translated by H. Vehbi Eralp (Istanbul, 1991), 28-30.

¹⁹ Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 2: 512. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1014b, 35, 37, 1015a, 2; Aristotle, *Physics*, II. Book, 193a 33-37, 193b 1-4.

²⁰ Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 2: 513-514. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1015a, 7-10; *Physics*, II. Book, 193a 28-29. In “Physics” Aristotle phrases hyle as subject. He says that first matter can only be called “nature” after it

After all these meanings Ibn Rushd compiles till here, he explains the argument which he supports. According to him, genuinely the concept of “nature” can only be a noun to substance and the thing that indicates the substance is the form. Then in real terms, only the form can be named as “nature”. Because it is the form that makes the natural beings what they are, and it is special to each entity individually, so when it originates in the existent, then distinctive acts emanate from that existent entity. Yet the substance is common.²¹ The usage of the name “nature” about the substances other than the form (material and a composite entity that is formed with a material and a form) is a secondary usage. In other words, they take this name due to the fact that they become an attribute to a gender or a species. Besides, it is also possible for “nature” to be a name for substances other than form with semantic extension due to the caused effects.²²

On the other hand, for Ibn Rushd, there is also a priority and recency in giving the name of the “nature” to itself among the forms and in this point the one which has the highest priority is the simplest form. Since it is more eligible to call the mechanic principle as “soul” not as “nature”. Therefore, when physicians say, “Nature did this, nature did that”, they mean the power which command the bodies and this power is the nutritious (gâziya) power. Because, according to the physicians, although this power is mechanic, it is simpler than the other powers. For this reason, they nearly never use the term “nature” for heart power. From this angle, natural act and the act that based on thought are contradictory.²³

3. ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF “NATURE”

In general, peripatetic Islamic philosophers base their ideas about logic, physics, and metaphysics largely on the ideas of Aristotle (d. B.C. 322)²⁴ and especially about the basic concepts of philosophy they hold on to his views.²⁵ And it is the same for the concept of “nature”.

merges with semblance, power or possibility cant be called “nature”. See also Aristotle, *Physics*, II. Book, 193a, 36-37, 193b 1).

²¹ Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ at-Ṭabī’ī*, 22-23.

²² Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 2: 514. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, V. Book, 1015a, 10-13. Aristoteles, *Fizik*, II. Book, 193b 1-9). According to Aristotle the reason to call form “nature” comes from form being according to “nature”. And the reason we call matter “nature” is because it is an “output of nature”. See also Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 193a 31-32.

²³ Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīş Mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, 32; Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ at-Ṭabī’ī*, 23.

²⁴ Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, translated by H. Vehbi Eralp (Istanbul, 1991), 68; Macit Gökberk, *Felsefe Tarihi* (Istanbul, 1985), 74.

²⁵ For this subject see Mahmut Kaya, *İslam Kaynakları Işığında Aristoteles ve Felsefesi* (Istanbul, 1983). In this book the importance of Aristotle’s every work for muslims is explained.

Al-Kindī (d. 873?)²⁶, considered as the first peripatetic Islamic philosopher, gives short definitions of “nature” in his works and does not go into the details of the concept.²⁷ As far as we have searched, Al-Fārābī (Alpharabius) (d. 950)²⁸ who is respected as the Second Master after Aristotle, also does not approach to the concept of “nature” as a concept, but he uses it with same meaning as Aristotle in various problems.²⁹ Among peripatetic Islamic philosophers, Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) are one of a few philosophers who discuss the concept of “nature” comprehensively.

To start with we should specify that, since it is solely the discipline of philosophy which deals with the existents just because they exist and since the peripatetic Islamic philosophers themselves, who deal with the concept of “nature”, are philosophers, they first begin to question whether nature exists or not. Hence, Ibn Sīnā argues that such a questioning will be beyond the capabilities of a naturalist who engages with the natural science and so he emphasizes that the subject should be handled by philosophers and needed to be proved with evidences/demonstrations.³⁰ According to Aristotle, however, the existence of nature is so obvious that trying to prove it is ridiculous. At the utmost, this could be the work of someone who can not distinguish between the obvious and the obscure like a blind man making comments on colours. According to him, such people talk about words and nouns, but they can comprehend nothing.³¹ Ibn Rushd defends Aristotle in this regard and claims that Ibn Sīnā does not understand him. Because according to Ibn Rushd, what Aristotle wants to mean is, there is no truth as obvious as nature, so we can deny the existence of nature with some evidences whatsoever.³² The discussions made on this subject have an importance in determining the context in which nature is addressed. It is therefore useful to remember the outline of the discussion.

The criticism directed by Ibn Rushd to Ibn Sīnā is as follows: “It is obvious that these uttered things clearly state which are the natural entities and what does nature mean, which is seen in this way and which

²⁶ Date of death is debatable. Islamic philosophers gives years 860, 866, 870, 872 or 873 as the date of death. For date of death and about him being the first Islamic philosopher see: Mehmet Bayrakdar, *İslam Felsefesine Giriş* (Ankara, 1988), 184; A. Fuad al-Ehvānī, “Kindī”, translated by Osman Bilen, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M.M. Sharif, 2: 35-48; Mahmut Kaya, “Introduction”, *Kindī Felsefi Risaleler* (Istanbul, 1994), XII; Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, translated by Hüseyin Hatemi (Istanbul, 1994), 279; Hasan Şahin, *İslam Felsefesi Tarihi Dersleri* (Ankara, 2000), 79.

²⁷ Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, *al-Kindī's Philosophical Essays*, translated by Mahmut Kaya (Istanbul, 1994), 58, 73.

²⁸ Bayrakdar, *İslam Felsefesine Giriş*, 200; İbrahim Medkur, “Farabi”, translated by Osman Bilen, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M.M. Sharif, 2: 67-68; Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 286; Şahin, *İslam Felsefesi Tarihi Dersleri*, 85.

²⁹ Al-Fārābī. “Kitāb al-Ta‘līqāt”, *Al-A‘mal al-falsafiya* (Beirut, 1992), 1: 381; “Tahsīl al-sa‘āde”, *Al-A‘mal al-falsafiya* (Beirut, 1992), 1: 164-166; “Fīmā yasihhu wemā lā yasihhu min ahkām al-nujūm”, *Al-A‘mal al-falsafiya* (Beirut, 1992), 1: 290-291

³⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiiyat (I) Al-Simā al-tabī*, ed. Said Zāid (Cairo, 1970), 1: 30.

³¹ Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 193a 3-8.

³² Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā‘ at-Ṭabī‘ī*, 21-22. Ibn Sīnā also criticises Aristotle for ridiculing the ones who try to give evidence to nature’s existence. For more information see: İbn Sina, *eş-Şifa, Tabiiyyât/*, 30-31.

is not possible to appear in any other ways. On the other hand, Ibn Sīnā ascribes irrelevant meanings to the views of peripatetic philosophers. Ibn Sīnā says: “The definition of nature given here is not clear at all. Someone who deals with the first philosophy undertakes to explain this.” If Ibn Sīnā implies that it is that person, who deals with the first philosophy, undertakes to remove all the things that may lead to doubts about the existence of nature or more eloquently about negating anything that is obvious in nature, then it is true. But according to his implication, if that means that the existence of nature is unknown then he makes a mistake, in fact we can understand it from this phrase ‘the person who deal with the first philosophy, shows evidence about the existence of nature’. Because eventhough there might be some evidences, these evidences need to be formed with the secondary things within the science of nature. If there is an evidence from the first philosophy about this subject, the evidence must be from more familiar things and in terms of being, it must exist before the science of nature; and, which is not possible, however the related reasons can be given. But, in natural objects, the existence of the nature in the style that we specify is a self-evident, an obvious matter. So, it is possible to think about this much here”.³³

These explanations suggest that Ibn Rushd argues that there is no metaphysical aspect besides the four causes of nature (and the chain of causes till the First Cause). Ibn Rushd expresses that Aristotle also agrees with this and he goes on trying to prove that the criticisms which are directed by Ibn Sīnā to Aristotle about the existence of nature are unjust and irrelevant. It can be said that his criticisms are focused on Ibn Sīnā’s misunderstanding of this subject.

Briefly, Ibn Sīnā appoints philosophers to explain the movements of bodies according to the principles they based on and to give evidences on this subject and he sees it impossible for a body to be a mover due to the fact that it is a body. He argues that the reasons of the movements that emerge in bodies are the powers that exists within those bodies; these are also the principles of the movements and acts of those mentioned bodies. He lists these powers **according to the types of activity**³⁴ as follows:

1. The power (ḳuwwa) that is called as “nature”. These are the powers which are not subject to a will and which do not depend on an outside power but have the capability to move and change. The act or the movement that comes out of them all happens in the same way. For instance, “the stone falls and it stands in the middle”. According to him, this is the **nature**.
2. The powers in the souls of the spheres (aflāk). These are the powers in which the exit of the movements and acts are based on both will and power and besides, they are artistic. Just like the rotation of the sun, these are the **souls of the spheres**.
3. The powers that are named as “vegetative soul”. The powers whose movements and acts, which emerge from them, are not voluntary but artificial. Such movements, eventhough their act based on an artistic power, are not subject to the will. For instance, the formation, growth, and the corruption of the plants. Since plants move with growing into several directions, branching, and growing longer with attaching to the trunk. And this is called as the **“vegetative soul”**.
4. The powers named as the “soul of the animals”. The powers which are the cause of the voluntary movement in bodies. And these are the powers that lead to the movements of the animals and named

³³ Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ at-Ṭabī’ī*, 21-22.

³⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 30.

as the “**soul of the animals**”. Ibn Sīnā defines that this classification that he has already done here could also be done for the immobility.³⁵

For him, in movements and acts that are realized by the soul of the animal, animals use their own wills and this usage of the will is not subject to any coercion whatsoever.³⁶

Thereby, Ibn Sīnā classifies the powers according to their activity to which the movements and the acts of the bodies based on and accepts the powers which are the causes of the movements and the acts as a body. Thus, in this body he distinguishes the nature from other kinds and puts it into a context of its own.

In order to better enlighten the subject, after the powers that are the principles of the movements and the acts of the bodies, Ibn Sīnā, **himself classifies the movements and their acts** into three:

1. The movements and the acts whose cause and the body that is caused are the same. Such acts have no reason excluding the body that they are. The reason is the body itself that the act cause. For instance, if you leave it on its own, boiled water will cool down again depending on its own nature or a stone that is lifted up, will fall down again depending on its own nature when it is released. According to Ibn Sīnā it is the same as in the seeds becoming plants and a semen drop becoming an animal.³⁷ These movements and acts are also divided into two:

1.a. The movements and the acts whose cause and the body they are born into are the same and the movements and the acts which follow a single-string path at all without diverging. The movements of the water and the stone from above given examples are such.

1.b. The movements and the acts whose cause and the body they are born into are the same and which follow both multiple and various and an artificial but not a single-string path.³⁸ As an example, we can take the seeds that grow into plants and the semen drops that grows into animals.

2. The movements and the acts whose cause are outside the body they are born into, or the movements and the acts which do not depend on the body they are born into but to a cause from outside. For instance, the boiling of water and the lifting of the stone.³⁹ In water example, the boiling of water is not an act caused by the water, likewise in stone example, the lifting of stone is not an act caused by the stone itself.

3. The movements and the acts whose causes are not the bodies they are born into and they do not depend on an outside cause that we can sense. In other words, these movements and acts, outside the body, emerge as a result of the impact of the movers that are out of our reach. This mentioned mover can be not only a separate mover, but also a mover whose self can be sensed but its affect can not. In this point, for Ibn Sīnā, the thing that indicates a positive relation between the mover and the body which is affected by the mover, is not sensed. He explains this with an example of magnet. This is the situation of anyone who does not see the magnet pulls the iron, who does not sense it with his/her senses and who does not know it has

³⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 30; *Al-Najāt* (Beirut, 1992), 1: 124.

³⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 29; *Al-Najāt* (Beirut, 1992), 1: 124.

³⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 29.

³⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 29.

³⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 29.

the capability to pull the iron. But after the same person sees the iron moves towards the magnet, he/she can guess that the iron will move towards the magnet automatically as well.⁴⁰

In the case of Aristotle, he first distinguishes beings as “natural beings” and “artificial beings”. When he makes this distinction, he considers whether the beings have the principles of movement and immobility in terms of location, quality or quantity. According to him, animals, plants and simple bodies, namely the four elements (earth, air, fire, water) have the principle of movement and immobility in terms of location, quality or quantity. However, in artificial beings, there is no such principle since they are artificial. Therefore, this is the most obvious difference between the natural beings and the artistic/artificial beings.⁴¹

Therefore, to define the “nature”, Aristotle places it somewhere in the most universal concept “existence” and puts the natural one opposite the artificial one. However, Ibn Sīnā recognizes the power which is the principle of movement and immobility as the kind of “nature”, not the “existence” and he places the “nature” as a form in this kind. Hence, it can be said that the argument of Ibn Sīnā is more perceivable and more knowable.

From Al-Fārābī’s explanations regarding the soul, it is understood that he also distinguishes the bodies into two as Aristotle: the “natural” ones and the “artificial” ones. Besides for him, the natural ones also are divided into two as the animates and inanimates.⁴²

Ibn Rushd who makes extensive explanations about the concept of “nature”, also follows the ideas of Aristotle as much as he could and expresses Aristotle’s arguments more systematically. When entering the explanations about the concept of “nature”, like Aristotle he also defines the place of “nature” within the existence in the most meaning. He states the following in this regard:

“Bodies are divided into three: a) artificial b) natural and, c) coincidental. The artificial ones are everything in general that are the product of an art such as a chair, a couch. The natural ones are the animals, the plants and the other things that are the product of nature. As it can be seen, there are differences between the natural bodies and the artificial bodies. In natural bodies, there is the principle of movement and the immobility...”⁴³

Moreover, Ibn Rushd also approaches the concept of “nature” in the context of the Muslim theologians’ denials of it and criticises them; but since this debate is a problematic one, it is not going to be discussed here.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 30.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 192b 3-20.

⁴² Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī masāil mutafarriqa* (Haydarabad, 1344), 19.

⁴³ Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ at-Ṭabī’i*, 19-20.

⁴⁴ For more information about this see: Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (Beirut, 1986), 450-451, 472.

4. THE DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT OF “NATURE”

In his work “Physics” Aristotle argues the followings regarding the “nature”: “it is a principle or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not accidentally”.⁴⁵ In this definition, he studies all the meanings to which the concept of “nature” indicates as a noun one by one and he considers the significance that is common in all.⁴⁶

Peripatetic Islamic philosophers also follow the same way when defining the “nature” and they are based on Aristotle’s definition. For instance, Ibn Sīnā implies that, “nature is not the sign but personally the first principle of any movement or rest in a body”.⁴⁷ On the other hand, in his work *Kitāb as-Simā’ aṭ-Ṭabī’ī*, Ibn Rushd defines the “nature” as a thing that is “the first principle of and rest (in natural bodies).”⁴⁸

Islamic philosophers emphasize every word that are in the definition of the concept of “nature” and explains what they mean in depth. To start with, according to Ibn Rushd who stresses the “movement” and the “rest”, “movement” means “change” and “rest” means “lack of change”. For him, what is implied with the phrase of “being the principle of movement” is that “the nature as a principle can have an impact on its own, and it tends to change and to be affected”.⁴⁹ Ibn Rushd does not separately mention about “the nature being the principle of the immobility”, he confines himself to the explanations he gives about the “movement”. However, this is not possible from Ibn Sīnā’s perspective. Since, for him, the principle of movement is the mover and it can only be the perpetrator and its impact appear in some others.⁵⁰

According to Ibn Rushd, in some existences nature could only be the principle of one of the movement types (transposition, growth, transmutation and generation and corruption) and in some others it could take place as a principle which realizes all four variations of change. As a matter of fact, in an animal, nature is the principle of all four variations of movement. Whereas in simple bodies, there are only the principles of variations of three movement excluding the movement of growth. For instance, water and earth.⁵¹

For Ibn Sīnā, the word “first” mentioned in the definition refers to “the closest” and “lack of a mediator between the self and the mover”. For him, nature and the soul, which is from the same kind with nature, could be the principles of movement of “growth” and “transmutation in the bodies they exist”, but they can not be the first. Their being the principle of movement can only be via natures and qualities.⁵²

However, Ibn Rushd defines that with the usage of the word “first” in the definition of nature, it is aimed at putting forward the existing difference between the nature and the art and distinguishing the nature and the art from one another. He also argues that the principles of the objects that move some of the

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 192b 21-22.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 192b 3 - 193b 21.

⁴⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 31.

⁴⁸ Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ aṭ-Ṭabī’ī*, 20. See also al-Tahānawī, *Kashshaf*, 1127.

⁴⁹ Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ aṭ-Ṭabī’ī*, 19-20.

⁵⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 31 (13-14. lines). Furthermore Tehānevi also accepts Ibn Sīnā’s remarks. See Tehānevî, *Keşşâf*, 1127.

⁵¹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 31; Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ aṭ-Ṭabī’ī*, 20.

⁵² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 31.

artistic existence do not exist in the mentioned artistic objects for the first time. The movement of a ship, which is an art production, on its own by the help of the wind can be given an example to this.⁵³ Since, here the movement of the wind is not in the first principle position for the movement of the ship.

Ibn Sīnā has the following explanations for the other words in his definition of “nature”: the word “*present*” in the definition is for distinguishing nature from both the art and the coercion. The other word “*personally*” is interpreted in two different ways: according to the mover and to the one which is moved. When it is interpreted according to the first one, it is stated that ‘if nature moves a thing, it happens because of the self of the nature, it does not happen because it bows to a coercion’. Since it is not possible for a coercion (vulgar power), which is used to move, not to move a thing unless it is prevented by a reverse movement. The second case, in which the word “*personally*” is related to the moving thing, is interpreted as ‘nature moves a thing which is already moving thanks to its own self, it does not move a thing from outside’. Likewise, the expression “*not accidentally*” can be interpreted in two ways. In the first one is about the nature and the second one is about the moving one. When it is about the nature, it is understood that “for nature, the movement is not accidentally, it is the principle of an essential thing.” For accidentally movement, this can be a perfect example: a person on the ship moves with the movement of the ship. With relation to the movement, the movement of a statue caused by the nature can be given as an example. Since when the nature moves a statue, it moves the statue accidentally, yet it is not the statue itself the nature moves, it is the bronze (that the statue is made of). And the statue also, as the same in the movement of the stone, does not move depending on the nature just because it is a statue. Therefore, physic can not be nature. When a physician treats himself and moves the physic in himself, the presence of physic in him is not because he is sick, on the contrary it is because he is a physician. Since when physician treats himself and recovers, his recovery is not thanks to his being a physician but his treatment. This is again because his being the treater in one thing and being the one who is treated is another thing. In terms of treating himself, he is the treater and the person who knows how to treat and in terms of being treated, he is the sick person who takes the treatment...”.⁵⁴

Both Al-Kindī and Al-Fārābī, as mentioned earlier, do not emphasize the definition of the concept of “nature”, they only give explanations when necessary.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the definitions given by Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd clearly define the position of the nature within the kind and the body to which it belongs. Especially the two of the definitions made by Ibn Sīnā regarding the powers and the movements makes it easier to understand the subject.

⁵³ Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb as-Simā’ at-Ṭabī’ī*, 20.

⁵⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifa Al-Tabiyyat*, 1: 32-33.

⁵⁵ Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, *al-Kindi's Philosophical Essays*, translated by Mahmut Kaya (Istanbul, 1994), 58. Here Kindī says “Nature: The principle of movement and stillness which follows it. Nature is one of the first powers of soul “ p. 58; see also a.e., 73. As for Farabi he explains the term in relation to problems and gives different explanations to it for different problems. For examples see: al-Fārābī, “Kitāb Al-Ibāra”, *Ta’āliq Ibn Bācca Alā Mantiq Al-Fārābī*, ed. Majid Fakhry (Beirut, 1994), 167-168; “Tahsīl al-sa’āde”, 1: 164; “Kitāb al-Ta’līqāt”, 1: 391, 394.

CONCLUSION

Introducing the concept of “nature” as a concept is essential both for the present day “Islamic Philosophers”, and for the philosophy of Islam in historical sense. It is essential in terms of Islamic philosophy because Islamic philosophers are Muslim, and they live in an Islam dominant culture.⁵⁶ In other words, their acceptance of God primarily is according to how Qur’ān foresees the acceptance of God. It is inevitable and natural for this understanding to dominate their philosophy or at least to have an impact on it. No matter how religious a philosopher, it can not be claimed that a philosopher or a scientist, who reflects his thoughts to his ideas, puts religious arguments in each statement. However, it can be claimed that his beliefs have an impact on his each thought one by one. Briefly, Islamic philosophers’ definitions regarding the concept of “nature” are closely related with their Muslim identity⁵⁷.

The explanation of the concept of “nature” is also very essential for the present day “Islamic philosophers”. Since achieving new goals both in scientific field and in the field of philosophy is only possible with taking advantage of what previous generations have produced.

Although the definitions assigned to the concept of “nature” by Islamic philosophers do not lead to significant debates among peripatetic Islamic philosophers, now we need to list the possible conclusions related to the concept of “nature”:

1. First of all, the concept becomes a milestone to the “nature - beyond nature” distinction. Because the limits of natural world are determined according to this.
2. In the definition of “nature”, excluded activities and types of actions are perceived as the opposite of nature even from the Antiquity and the Sophists use the word “nature = physis” to refer everything done or created by God (Demiurgos)⁵⁸. They call the laws made by human as “nomos”, name the things that people set as norms as “thesis” and again call the things that people form with skills and art in time as “techne” and they distinguish all these from each other. Nature and coercion is assumed as the opposite things since they leave the meanings of coercion and outside intervention outside and nature-coercion contrast is discussed. Accordingly law-nature contrast is also brought forward and the Sophists are the first ones who bring them into question.

However, Aristotle uses the word physis as the mover in every single thing and as the binding law (which binds everything to each other). In Stoics physis is defined as the whole or the “common nature” which includes the vitality or the life as one of its parts within its secluded order. Besides Physis is continued to be understood as a unique capability related to the plants different from the inorganic nature, animals and psyche and logos of human and even something contrary to this. Cicero uses the Latin *natura* for the

• In this phrase we mean the people who studies on academic level.

⁵⁶ Bayrakdar, *İslam Felsefesine Giriş*, 1-2.

⁵⁷ For the examples of Islamic philosophers clear statements of them being a muslim see: al-Fārābī, *İdeal Devlet*, translated by Ahmet Arslan (Ankara, 1997), 33-53; Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Najāt*, 77-124; Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (Beirut, 1986). Actually it is possible to see this case in all of their works.

⁵⁸ Erdem, “Tabiat (Doğa)”, 4: 39. In the same title it is indicated that sophists express the laws that were made by humans as “nomos”, norms that were presented by humans as “thesis” and things that were shaped by humans’ craftsmanship and skills as “techne”. See also *Mawsū‘at muṣṭalahāt ‘ilm al-mantiq ‘inda al-‘Arab*, 507.

word physis. As a stem *natura* means an activity of birth, blossom and appearance and all the existences are made of this. Lucretius understand the word nature in four different meanings: a) The creative power that presents in everything, b) the universe created by this power, c) each and every created thing, d) the order of the nature. The grasp of the term “nature as in its full meaning occurs after XVI. century and in XVII. century it reaches the concept as modern physical nature.”⁵⁹

It is seen that the act of nature defines all its units as first of all its activity defines as movement and immobility, it includes all four movements and immobility is explained as the opposite of these. Besides it should be underlined that the nature which is the principle of movement and immobility, does not realize these two acts together but only one of them.⁶⁰ So it is possible to say that this present definition is accurate and complete.

After Islamic philosophers examine the concept of nature in detail, they enter several discussions about it. For instance, the conditions for nature to realize its acts, is the act of nature (to move things or to immobilize) infinite etc.

For Ibn Sīnā, there can not be a hindrance which will hinder the act of nature in the body where the power called “nature” exists. But if there is any deficiency in the body, then it means that the nature does not belong to that body. For instance, the body could be big or small, this does not constitute a hindrance or a support for the nature to realize its act. It is only the deficiency in the power that is called nature that can cause the act of nature not to realize. Since, power can change depending on the change in its location.⁶¹ It is needed to be stated here that same as in the movements that are impelled, eventhough the deficiency in the acts of other powers arise from the one who accept the power, in natural acts this arise from the power itself.⁶²

Briefly, Ibn Sīnā states that the body in its nature is not something that is subject to move or hinder things. For him, the reason is the power that the body accepts.⁶³

The answer to the question why Ibn Sīnā emphasizes these kind of problems is, he wants to search the causes and the principles of the powers that naturally moves or immobilize things in the universe. His reasoning regarding this and other identical problems proves that both bodily/material powers and bodies themselves are finite.

As it is mentioned earlier, since examining the concept of “nature” problematically will exceed the boundaries of this article, further detail would be irrelevant.

⁵⁹ Erdem, “Tabiat (Doğa)”, 440.

⁶⁰ For more information about this see: al-Tahānawī, *Kashshaf*, 1127.

⁶¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. Sulayman Dunya, 3rd Edition (Cairo, 1985), 3: 171. This book’s first printing was started at 1983 with first volume and the third edition we used here was published at 1985.

⁶² Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī, *Al-Sharh al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*. ed. Sulayman Dunya. 3rd Edition. Cairo, 1985, 3: 172-173 (Sulayman Dunya, published this exegesis together with *al-Ishārāt*. Ibn Sīnā’s texts are on the top of the pages and al-Tūsī’s exegeses are at the bottom).

⁶³ For more information see al-Tūsī, *Al-Sharh*, 170.

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