

## **Şufi Aesthetics as an Epistemological Critique of Western Aesthetic Thought: A Philosophical Inquiry through the Lens of al-Ghazālī**

**Alifah Yasmin<sup>1</sup>, Bekti Galih Kurniawan<sup>2</sup>, Syifaurrahmah<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>123</sup>UNIDA Gontor, Ponorogo

Corresponding E-mail: alifahyasmin@unida.gontor.ac.id



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**Abstract:** *Contemporary discussions on aesthetics are still framed mainly by Western secular-rationalist assumptions that detach beauty from moral vision, spiritual cultivation, and theocentric meaning. This tendency contrasts sharply with Islamic intellectual traditions, especially şufi thought, which views aesthetic experience as part of the holistic formation of the human soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) and as a pathway to recognizing divine perfection. The absence of a comparative framework that brings these two epistemic worlds into conversation has left a conceptual gap in understanding how beauty functions within Islamic thought and how it diverges from dominant Western models. Using a library-based method that integrates philosophical analysis with hermeneutic interpretation, the research explores how Islamic thought roots beauty in the harmony of body, character, and spirit, and how spiritual taste (żauq) functions as an epistemic mode that surpasses the limits of rational cognition. The findings show that while Western aesthetics prioritizes artistic autonomy and sensory judgment, şufi aesthetics anchors beauty in ethical refinement, ontological purpose, and the pursuit of human perfection (kamāl). This contrast reveals that şufi aesthetics offers a value-laden, spiritually grounded understanding of beauty deeply embedded in the Islamic worldview. The study argues that şufi aesthetics can serve as a constructive corrective to contemporary aesthetic discourse, which often suffers from moral fragmentation, commodification of art, and the loss of transcendent meaning. By restoring the centrality of the Divine and the moral-spiritual orientation of the human self, şufi aesthetics provides an integrated framework that enriches both Islamic studies and broader discussions about the place of beauty in human life.*

**Keywords:** şufism, Aesthetics, Sufi Aesthetics

**Abstrak:** Diskursus estetika kontemporer hingga kini masih didominasi oleh asumsi-asumsi sekuler-rasionalistik Barat yang memisahkan keindahan dari visi moral, pembinaan spiritual, dan makna teosentrisk. Kecenderungan ini sangat bertolak belakang dengan tradisi intelektual Islam, khususnya pemikiran sufistik, yang memandang

pengalaman estetis sebagai bagian dari pembentukan holistik jiwa manusia (tazkiyat al-nafs) serta sebagai jalan menuju pengenalan kesempurnaan Ilahi. Ketiadaan kerangka komparatif yang mempertemukan dua dunia epistemik ini telah menyisakan kekosongan konseptual dalam memahami fungsi keindahan dalam pemikiran Islam dan perbedaannya dengan model-model Barat yang dominan. Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan yang memadukan analisis filosofis dan penafsiran hermeneutik, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pemikiran Islam menautkan keindahan pada harmoni antara tubuh, akhlak, dan ruh, serta bagaimana *żauq* (rasa spiritual) berfungsi sebagai modus epistemik yang melampaui batas-batas kognisi rasional. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sementara estetika Barat menekankan otonomi seni dan penilaian inderawi, estetika sufistik menambatkan keindahan pada penyempurnaan etis, tujuan ontologis, dan pencapaian kesempurnaan manusia (*kamāl*). Perbedaan ini menyingkap bahwa estetika sufistik menawarkan pemahaman tentang keindahan yang sarat nilai dan berlandaskan spiritualitas, yang tertanam secara mendalam dalam pandangan dunia Islam. Studi ini berargumen bahwa estetika sufistik dapat berfungsi sebagai koreksi konstruktif terhadap wacana estetika kontemporer yang kerap mengalami fragmentasi moral, komodifikasi seni, dan hilangnya makna transendental. Dengan mengembalikan sentralitas Yang Ilahi serta orientasi moral-spiritual diri manusia, estetika sufistik menghadirkan kerangka terpadu yang memperkaya kajian keislaman sekaligus diskursus yang lebih luas mengenai posisi keindahan dalam kehidupan manusia.

**Kata kunci:** sufisme, estetika, estetika sufistik

## Introduction

Western aesthetics has both enabled the West's success and contributed to its downfall. This statement is supported by the concept of Western aesthetics, as expressed by Immanuel Kant: "*The judgment of taste is dependent on an empirical representation, and cannot be bound up a priori with any concept. But the pleasure is the determining ground of this judgement only because we are conscious that it rests merely on reflection and not on the universal though only subjective cognition of Objects in general...*"<sup>1</sup> Aesthetics stands alone, unaffected by the values and morals of philosophy, ethics, or scientific projects. Baumgarten formulated aesthetics as an autonomous discipline, focused solely on aesthetic experience and imagination, while simultaneously developing its own methods of study, such as the sublime, mimesis, and creativity. However, it neglected moral and religious values.<sup>2</sup>

Kant's main idea is the subjectivity of aesthetic experience. Art is not viewed objectively. In line with Hegel, aesthetics stems from the freedom and expression of sensory and spiritual ideas. For him, aesthetics is the harmony of external and internal

<sup>1</sup> Bernard, J., *Kant's Critique of Judgement* (Macmillan and Co Limited St. Martin's Street, 1914).

<sup>2</sup> Mary J. Gregor, "Http://Www.Jstor.Org Baumgarten's 'Aesthetica,'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 37, no. 2 (1983): 379.

forms.<sup>3</sup> The concept, initially interpreted as the integration of the physical and spiritual, turns out to have the same meaning as Kant's aesthetics. For Hegel, visible truth falls within the realm of aesthetics, while truth that can only be felt falls within the realm of religion. Thus, neither aesthetics nor religion is the ultimate medium for truth.

Kant and Hegel's theories gave birth to the idea of "*art for art's sake*"<sup>4</sup> Meaning "*art for art's sake*," aesthetics is separate from ethics and social life. Aesthetics tends to be oriented solely towards the needs of visual sensation. This concept also led Théophile Gautier to argue that art and literature are independence & autonomous<sup>5</sup> Art and literature are not required to teach, advise, or change society. They have no other purpose than to arouse the pure aesthetic experience of the reader or the connoisseur of beauty itself.

This basic idea frees art from social constraints and rules. However, art ultimately reaches a point of identity loss. Art lacks rules and moral boundaries. This ideology has drawn criticism from Western academics, such as John Dewey. For Dewey, the concept of "*art for art's sake*" narrows the scope of art within aesthetics and isolates it from everyday life.<sup>78</sup> Art becomes the consumption of the elite. It gives rise to consumerism.<sup>9</sup> In modern humans, the goal of art, which focuses on creating aesthetic experiences, is merely an expression. In fact, this goal actually eliminates the active relationship between the work, the creator, and the aesthetic audience.

The mistaken understanding of aesthetics reduces it to a mere means of satisfying the lust for visual beauty. This failure to think in Western aesthetics stems from the glorification of reason. It contrasts with Islamic aesthetics, which is filled with transcendent values and contemplation of meaning. These two paradigms create a profound divide. No research has yet placed the two subjects within a single comparative framework. According to Ghazali, *ṣufi* aesthetics serves as a theoretical foundation and integrative model that offers a synthesis between the two, addressing the problems of moral emptiness, the commodification of art, and the crisis of modern aesthetics.

In *Kimiyyā al sa'adah*, Ghazali states, "*Allah is the source and essence of reality. The universe's existence comes from God, and the beauty of reakity manifests God's beauty. The heart, as the substance of the soul, was created to witness God's beauty. Therefore, there is no other way to achieve happiness except to focus oneself on Allah as the source of the happiness. This stage is related to the fourth aspect of al Ghazali's concepts of happiness, namely loving.*"<sup>10</sup> For

<sup>3</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford [England]: Clarendon Press, 2010), 140.

<sup>4</sup> Javed Akhter, *Art for Art's Sake Movement*, 9, no. 12 (2018): 1862.

<sup>5</sup> Lynette Stocks., "Théophile Gautier 41 Théophile Gautier: Advocate of 'Art for Art's Sake' or Champion of Realism?," *French History & Civilization*, 1851, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Maureen Elizabeth Coulter, "The Eroticised Body and The Transcendent Word: Representation of The Dancer in The Works of Theophile Gautier, Arthur Symons, and W.B Yeats.," *Art History*, 2024, 11.

<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sone, 1934), 3.

<sup>8</sup> D Rio Adiwijaya, *We Can Teach Art, but Can Art Teaches Us? John Dewey on the Significance of Art*, 6, no. 2 (2019): 106.

<sup>9</sup> Kate Mondloch, "The Influencers: Van Gogh Immersive Experiences and the Attention-Experience Economy," *Arts* 11, no. 5 (September 2022): 12–13, <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050090>.

<sup>10</sup> Achmad Khudori Soleh, "Al-Ghazali's Concept of Happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (December 2022): 206, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.14>.

Ghazali, beauty, which constitutes aesthetics, is that which brings pleasure and perfection. Ghazali's grand concept of *ṣufi* aesthetics serves as a theory that explores the meaning of aesthetics and demonstrates that *ṣufi* aesthetics presents beauty and a harmonious, collaborative aesthetic experience between the creator and the servant, between the universe and living beings. *ṣufi* aesthetics creates dynamic movement. Dynamism always creates renewal and development.

This study reviews the concepts of Western and Islamic aesthetics. Then, the researcher critically assesses the epistemological and ethical basis of both. This study highlights epistemological tensions and the potential for integrating the two paradigms. From this research, the formulation of the concept of *ṣufi* aesthetics is the collaborative result of aesthetic rationality and spiritually-based aesthetic purity. This concept offers an alternative answer to the crisis of modern aesthetic reading and is expected to enrich the analytical reading of contemporary aesthetic disciplines.

## **Research Methods**

This research uses a hermeneutic comparative philosophical research method. In this philosophical method, researchers examine concepts, values, and structures of meaning through in-depth analysis. Then, the researcher compares two variables or two paradigms from different traditions of thought to identify common ground and differences through a dialogue, as described in the previous section. Gadamer revealed in *Truth and Method* (1975) that the function of the comparative method is to broaden the horizon of understanding through confronting differences. In the final stage, researchers interpret texts and ideas using a hermeneutic approach. Textually written ideas are treated as living entities within the historical context and the interpreter's horizon. This textual interpretation emphasizes that "*The work of understanding that unfolds between text and reader*" in *Interpretation Theory* (1976).

This comparative-hermeneutic philosophical research involves fundamental reflection on the concept of Western aesthetics, drawing on several leading Western philosophers as primary references, including Immanuel Kant, whose aesthetic concept is summarized in the "*Critique of Judgement*".<sup>11</sup> Hegel in the book "*Aesthetic, Lecture on Fine Art*".<sup>12</sup> To strengthen the axiology of this research, the researcher presents the basic concept of *ṣufi* aesthetics through a study of Imam Ghazali's *ṣufi* aesthetics in the book "*Kimiyyā al sa'adah*".<sup>13</sup> The researcher also draws on the ideas of *ṣufi* aesthetics, summarized by Ibnu Misykawaih in the book "*Tahżib al Akhlaq*", and on Islamic aesthetics, as outlined by the first Muslim philosopher, al-Farabi, in the book "*Araa Ahlu al Madinah al Faḍilah*".<sup>14</sup>

## **The Origin of the Term *ṣufi* Aesthetics**

The process of Sufism, or the stages of the order of increasing the spiritual quality of the salik (*ṣufi*), is called the order (*tariqah*). For spiritual improvement, it is called the

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<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*.

<sup>13</sup> Abu Hamid Ghazali H. A. Homes (ed.); Cornell Un, *Alchemy of Happiness* (Munsel, State Street., 1873).

<sup>14</sup> (أبى النصر الفارابى). (أراء أهل المدينة الفاضلة) (1906).

şufi experience (الصوفية التجريبية).<sup>15</sup> Within the scope of philosophical studies, the practice of şufism, or şufi experience (التجريبة الصوفية), is known as mystical experience and a spiritual journey.<sup>16</sup> This spiritual journey can also be called *riyadah*, or mental and character training. Always pray to Allah Ta'ala.

Annemarie Schimmel defines mystical experience as a significant spiritual current that flows in all religions.<sup>17</sup> This great spiritual current requires a span and duration that is not fleeting, until it can give rise to a multitude of methods (*tariqah*), states (*maqamah*), and conditions (*aḥwal*). This diversity is also influenced by the environment, traditions, culture, and even the country's socio-political conditions. Nevertheless, the goal of şufi practice is a spiritual/inner approach to The One and to fulfill worldly duties based on love (*maḥabbah*), longing (*isyq*), and (*al-uns*) to achieve the pleasure of God.

The şufi experience of the seeker is said to reach its peak when the seeker experiences *mukasyafah*, *fana'*, and *baqa'*, each of which has its own characteristics, including *transiency*, *passivity*, *noetic quality*, and *ineffability*.<sup>18</sup> The experience of şufism itself is a meeting of şufism and aesthetics in philosophy. Two aspects that concentrate on external beauty and inner beauty. Because the experience of şufism reflects beauty, which is called an aesthetic experience.<sup>19</sup>

However, it is essential to note that Ghazali defines aesthetic experience as a phase of spiritual experience that is not based solely on intellectual knowledge and symbolic vision, as in the Western definition. Ghazali's understanding of aesthetic experience is summarized into three types: *first, physical beauty, second, moral beauty, and third, spiritual beauty*.<sup>20</sup> Ghazali's three types of aesthetic experience are further divided into aesthetic stages that arise from each.

Regarding *physical beauty*, Ghazali refers to it as aesthetics based on sight, or vision, which is otherwise known as *jamāl* (in Arabic). Material beauty creates a false sense of pleasure that is easily felt and quickly disappears, like a flash of light. This flash of light can remain within a person, but it easily disappears if they don't cultivate their inner taste, known as *żauq* (*flash of lightning*)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ulya, "Tasawuf Dan Tarekat : Komparasi Dan Relasi.," *Esoterik: Jurnal Akhlak Dan Tasawuf* 1, nos. 1146–165 (2015): 151.

<sup>16</sup> Muzairi, "Dimensi Pengalaman Mistik (Mystical Experience) Dan Ciri-Cirinya," *Religi* 10, no. 1 (2014): 51.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmad Sidqi, "WAJAH TASAWUF DI ERA MODERN: Antara Tantangan dan Jawaban," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 10, no. 1 (June 2015): 12, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2015.10.1.1-28>.

<sup>18</sup> James, W., *The Varieties of Religious Experience*., 299-300 (The New American Library., 2003), 287–88.

<sup>19</sup> Ibrahim, "Sufi Aesthetic Taste: A Study of Methodology and Objectives.," "مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات" no. 41 (2024): 1153–76.

<sup>20</sup> Mojib Alzahrani, "The Concept of Esthetics and Beauty in Islam as One of the Components of Islamic Art," 88, *المجلة التربوية لكلية التربية بسوهاج* no. 88 (August 2021): 68–69, <https://doi.org/10.21608/edusohag.2021.180592>.

<sup>21</sup> Loumia Ferhat, "Al-Ghazālī's Heart as a Medium of Light: Illumination and the Soteriological Process," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4, nos. 1–2 (December 2020): 201–22, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340050>.

The term *żauq* is easily interpreted as a feeling full of abstraction. Qusyairi defines *żauq* as the phase where a seeker (*salik*) feels a slight ‘taste’ of God’s presence. This feeling is fleeting, as if on the tip of the tongue, which then continues not only tasting/feeling on the tip of the tongue, but also drinking (*syurub*) until the phase of quenching thirst or ‘*riyy*’, where a seeker is satisfied and fulfilled by the phase of abundance of *tajalli* (revelation of God’s presence), *kashf* (unveiling of the veil), and *waridat* (flow of inspiration). The final phase of *żauq* itself is *mutasakir*, which means drunk, not drunk on alcohol, but drunk in the love and presence of God.<sup>22</sup> Qusyairi ends the definition of *żauq* with the phrase “*whoever is at the żauq stage, he will be encouraged to seek an even stronger aesthetic experience, namely mutasakir*”.

The concept of *żauq* is closely linked to the metaphor of *ṣufi* experience. In other words, *żauq* is also defined as intuition. However, the meaning of *intuition* is not as broad as *żauq* itself. *żauq*, or intuition, is one of the epistemologies of knowledge in Islam, defines along with *syurub* (drinking) and a less commonly used term *riyy* (being quenched).<sup>23</sup> *Żauq* acquires knowledge differently from syllogistic or other forms of reasoning; it acquires knowledge through the light of Allah. The five senses cannot reach the light of Allah, but Thusi defines *kasyf* in *żauq* as the experience of inner discovery revealed to the servant as if seeing through the eyes of the head.<sup>24</sup> Ghazali stated that the experience gained through knowledge is insignificant compared to that achieved through feelings, circumstances, and changes in character. This comparison emphasizes the differences in the functions and roles of human reason and logic.<sup>25</sup> It can be concluded that *żauq* is knowledge obtained through direct experience and is a peak experience.<sup>26</sup> This experience cannot be proven by logic because it cannot be expressed by language. The entire original and authentic experience of *żauq* cannot be expressed in the language of logic but can be directly experienced. At this point, *żauq*’s role is crucial in expanding the scope of aesthetics beyond Western aesthetics, which glorifies the power of reason.

The power of *żauq* lies deeper than the power of logic. A concrete example of the power of *żauq* is the aesthetic experience the Prophet Muhammad had when he explained (*żauq*) the pleasure of his relationship with the world to Umar ibn Khattab.<sup>27</sup> The Prophet said that he was like a horseman traveling in the summer. He sought shade under a tree for an hour, and a few moments later, he left the tree.

*“What have I got to do with this world? By He in Whose hand my soul resides, my relationship to the world is just like a rider who travels on a summer’s day and seeks shade under a tree for an hour of the day, then he departs and leaves it.”*

<sup>22</sup> n.d., دار الجامع الكلم (.), أبي القاسم القشيري, الرسالة القشيرية 464.

<sup>23</sup> S Wulan and D Pratiwy, “The Spiritual States (Ahwal) in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam,” *KnE Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (April 2018): 864–66, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i4.1993>.

<sup>24</sup> دار الثقافة للنشر والتوزيع (أبو الوفاء النقازاني, مدخل إلى التصوف الإسلامي 90-96 140.

<sup>25</sup> الغزالى, .. المنف من الضلال, (.) مكتب الأنجلو المصرية, 578 286, 1963.

<sup>26</sup> Amin Hasan, “Menyusuri Hakikat Kebenaran: Kajian Epistemologi atas Konsep Intuisi dalam Tasawuf al-Ghazali,” *At-Ta’ dib* 7, no. 2 (December 2012): 192, <https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v7i2.71>.

<sup>27</sup> Ismail Lala, “Ibn ‘Arabī and the Spiritual Sirah of Prophet Muhammad,” *Religions* 14, no. 6 (June 2023): 6, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060804>.

*Second, moral beauty.* Moral and ethical rules are the foundation for the sustainability of a civilization, according to Ibn Khaldun.<sup>28</sup> For Ghazali, the integrity and moral engagement in aesthetics do not marginalize its existence. In fact, with the existence of social rules, aesthetics successfully depicts the beauty of society. Values and morals make aesthetics harmonious with social and political systems. In fact, with morals, aesthetics becomes a mediator between humanity and the practical socio-economic system. Ibn Misykawayh holds the same opinion as the concept of moral aesthetics. Because, in moral aesthetics, humans understand the pleasure of feeling (state), the pleasure of circumstances (*hal*), and the pleasure of ownership (disposition), or, in Arabic, *malaka*. Humans easily experience the beauty of disposition itself because its qualities are easily possessed, like character in general, such as patience, humility, and wisdom. Disposition is born from the habituation of character. Unlike “state,” the feeling of aesthetic pleasure is formed from things (circumstances), just as sight is a temporary aesthetic experience, but challenging to obtain. Same with the fact that good habits show long-term beauty, which later becomes known as character, as in *Tahžib al-Akhlaq* by Ibn Misykawaih.<sup>29</sup> Good character cannot be said to be an aesthetic experience, but good character is a habit that becomes the aesthetic identity of the human soul itself.

*Third, spiritual beauty.* Ghazali conveys that aesthetic wholeness is achieved by fulfilling the criteria of spiritual beauty, which is born in accordance with one’s essence and nature. The essence of humankind is the perfection of four elements within itself: *qalb*, *ruh*, *‘aql*, *nafs*.<sup>30</sup> When these four basic needs are fulfilled naturally, humans will be able to create beauty that soothes the heart, beauty that sharpens the power of reason, beauty that places the interests of the soul above the interests of the body, and beauty that can interact with the three *nafs*, namely *nafs-l-lawwamah*, *nafsu-l ammarah bissu*, and *nafsu-l-muthmainnah*.<sup>31</sup> When humans live out their true nature, beauty and perfection will emerge.

As Farabi explains in *Araa al Madinah al Fadhilah*, Farabi believes that the essence of aesthetics lies in the perfection of one’s nature. Farabi stated, “*Beauty and worthiness for every creature is to achieve perfection, or in other words, its best existence.*”<sup>32</sup> He believed that every creation of God possesses beauty, worthy of achieving perfection in its best form. By submitting to the nature and essence of each creation (*kodrat & haqiqat*), that beauty will be visible and can be enjoyed in the long term.

Ghazali, Ibn Misykawaih, and al-Farabi agree that physical beauty is the source of beauty itself. However, the harmony between physical and inner beauty achieves totality in aesthetics itself. This type of aesthetics produces the practice of holistic aesthetic experience. Perfection in achieving beauty is not only external perfection, but perfection

<sup>28</sup> Hasyim, “Watak Peradaban Dalam Epistemologi Ibnu Khaldun,” *Humaniora* 22, no. 3 (2010): 341–46.

<sup>29</sup> أبي على أحمد المعرف بابن مسكوني،.. تهذيب الأحراق وتطهير الأعراق. (مكتبة الحسينية المصرية، 1963)، 65–263.

<sup>30</sup> Alfi Sukrina and Wedra Aprison, “HUMAN NATURE IN THE VIEW OF THE PHILOSOPHER AL-GHAZALI,” *Jurnal Al Burhan* 4, no. 1 (June 2024): 37, <https://doi.org/10.58988/jab.v4i1.291>.

<sup>31</sup> Masmuni Mahatma, “The Concept of Purification of The Soul In Al-Ghazali’s View Is Related To Inner Peace,” *Syifa Al-Qulub: Jurnal Studi Psikoterapi Sufistik*, 7, no. 2 (2023): 13.

<sup>32</sup> Maryam Seifalipour, Farah Ramin, and Fatemeh Radmanesh, “An Analysis of Beauty from Islamic Perspective,” *International Journal of Arts* 01, no. 05 (n.d.): 58.

according to one's essence and nature. Through beauty that is in accordance with one's nature, humans will reach stages that cannot be expressed by language or measured by the human brain. The human brain only has the letters and numbers of the world to convey the beauty (*jamāl*) felt by 'abd. Meanwhile, feeling (*zauq*) through the intermediary of the four levels of the heart has the authority to control oneself (*malaka*) to achieve unlimited aesthetic experience.

### **The Origin of the Term Aesthetics**

Aesthetics experienced three periods: (1) *dogmatic*: the first stage of formation, which lasted from Socrates to Baumgarten (1714-1762), (2) *Critical*: starting from Kant to Kant's followers, (3) *solid & stable*: at this stage, the discipline of aesthetics already had a system since 1750-1850. In the first stage, Socrates was the founder of the science of aesthetics.<sup>33</sup> Although this discipline hadn't yet earned a name in Socrates' time, aesthetics is therefore relatively young. The study of aesthetics began with Socrates' dialogues with his student, Plato, who constantly asked for measures and criteria. The dialogues focused on the concepts of numbers, weights, justice and injustice, good and evil, honor and dishonor, and beauty and the ugly. These fundamental questions gave rise to the science of aesthetics.<sup>34</sup>

For Plato, seeking beauty is an effort to achieve immortality, similar to human self-purification, which then gives rise to feelings of love and pleasure.<sup>35</sup> As for Plato, absolute beauty will not exist on earth, which is then called the theory of mimesis.<sup>36</sup> For him, beauty was never held on the same level as life. Beauty is intangible on earth because beauty is higher and transcends this universe. As Russell said, *the man who only loves beautiful things is dreaming, whereas the man who knows absolute beauty is wide awake.*<sup>37</sup>

Another Greek philosopher, Aristotle, stated that beauty is the highest possible integration of forms. Beauty does not prioritize the view of human beings as they are in reality, but according to how they should be. Beauty reflects a sense of art, unity and plurality,<sup>38</sup> which, for Aristotle, is higher than nature, and some are lower than it, but Aristotle does not think that art is on the same level as nature.

Greek philosophers believed in the existence of absolute beauty. However, Plato thought that Ideal beauty is an ennobled appearance, a reciprocity of the individual presentation and its defining form a connection that makes the logical transcendence of

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<sup>33</sup> Philip Dietrich and Thomas Knieper, "(Neuro)Aesthetics: Beauty, Ugliness, and Ethics," *PsyCh Journal* 11, no. 5 (October 2022): 619, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pchj.478>.

<sup>34</sup> Mika Suojanen, "Aesthetic Experience of Beautiful and Ugly Persons: A Critique," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 8, no. 1 (January 2016): 1-3, <https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v8.30529>.

<sup>35</sup> Anwar Wajiz, *Filsafat Estetika: Sebuah Pengantar* (Nur Cahaya., 1980).

<sup>36</sup> Jonas Grethlein, "Plato in Therapy: A Cognitivist Reassessment of the *Republic*'s Idea of *Mimesis*," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 78, no. 2 (March 2020): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jaac.12716>.

<sup>37</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy: Collectors Edition*. (Routledge, 2013), 119.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Siebels Peterson, "UNITY AND PLURALITY IN HYLOMORPHIC COMPOSITION," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 96 (2017): 6.

the form <sup>39</sup> and cannot be discovered by reason. It differs from Aristotle, who believed that absolute beauty is the inner beauty found within the human mind, a beauty not possessed by objects outside the human self. From beauty, creating art, which is a productive ability guided by reason,<sup>40</sup> or in other words, “*art is nothing more or less than a productive quality exercised in combination with true reason.*” The perfect, orderly, neat, and intuitive beauty of poetry is deeply absorbed in the poet. It is what makes poetry one of the highest levels of knowledge, or even the only knowledge.

Unfortunately, beauty holds the same position as truth; for most Western intellectuals, truth is relative. In harmony with beauty, it will always have relative value. This relativism is born from perspective. According to Kant, aesthetics can be viewed from two perspectives: subjective and objective. The subjective aesthetic model begins without reflection and has practical uses. Meanwhile, from an objective standpoint, aesthetics is the integration or harmony of an object with its purpose,<sup>41</sup> just like Aristotle’s expression of aesthetics.

In the period of modern Western thought, the Western philosopher Montaigne argued that it was highly likely that humans would never know the true essence of beauty. Therefore, it was necessary to define beauty in a way virtue or good deed that suited human nature and qualities.<sup>42</sup> As beauty and attractiveness according to Negroes are in thick lips, according to Peruvians (Indians) are in big ears, in Japan with clean, smooth skin and straight hair, in India it is beautiful skin and hair, in Iran with a sharp and small nose, in Paris with a straight, graceful body and classy self-demeanor,<sup>43</sup> While other nations value red or black teeth, in modern times, objects of beauty are constantly shifting and changing according to national customs.

The medieval Western thinker who coined the term for the discipline of beauty, Aesthetics, was Baumgarten (1714-1762).<sup>44</sup> At the same time, Western philosophers emerged who focused on aesthetic studies, such as Hogarth’s Analysis of Beauty (1753) and Burke’s Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful. Hogarth linked beauty to the formative arts, such as carving, sculpture, and architecture. He discovered and wrote about in his book, Aesthetic Measure, that the abstract principle of unity in variety is the highest level of beauty.

Burke, however, expressed beauty more simply. For him, taste cannot be the one of judge for beauty, a difference in taste exist because of a different in either experience,

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Crowther, “Beauty and Transcendence: From Plato to the Ideal,” *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* 53, no. 2 (November 2016): 142, <https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.147>.

<sup>40</sup> Dr Muhammad Kristiawan, *Filsafat Pendidikan (The Choice Is Yours)*. (Valia Pustaka., 2016), iii.

<sup>41</sup> Robertus Moses, “ESTETIKA DALAM PEMIKIRAN IMMANUEL KANT,” *Studia Philosophica et Theologica*, 17, no. 1 (2017): 82.

<sup>42</sup> Catherine H. Zuckert, “Montaigne and the Virtue of Moderation,” *The Review of Politics* 85, no. 3 (2023): 378–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670523000049>.

<sup>43</sup> Tri Fena Febri Situmorang, Sri Wahyuni, and Marisa Elsera, “Pengeseran Makna Kecantikan Dalam Budaya Melayu,” *Jurnal Masyarakat Maritim* 3, no. 1 (July 2019): 17–18, <https://doi.org/10.31629/jmm.v3i1.1698>.

<sup>44</sup> Alessandro Nannini, “Somaesthetics in Baumgarten? The Founding of Aesthetics and the Body,” *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* 59, no. 2 (September 2022): 103–4, <https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.289>.

natural sensibility or aattention.<sup>45</sup> Beauty stems from the principles of human nature or social instincts. Sublime (noble) stems from the instinct of *self-preservation*.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the cause that forms beauty and loveliness is “*those which engage our hearts, which impress us with a sense of loveliness, are the softer virtues; easiness of temper, compassion, kindness, and liberality; though certainly those latter are of less immediate and momentous concern to society and of less dignity.*”<sup>47</sup> Suppose the beauty of the idea of pleasure is tied to human social nature. So, sublime is an idea related to illness and danger, which later gives rise to powerful emotions, such as emptiness. Example: in the context of beauty, women are beautiful and soothing to the heart. At the same time, men are strong and protective figures. Meanwhile, in a sublime context, beauty brings envy and hurt, while male strength brings pain and arrogance.

Kant, in his book *Kritik der Urtheilskraft/Critique of Judgment*, explains that Germans first used the term aesthetic to describe criticism of the senses of taste, from which the term aesthetic originated.<sup>48</sup> Kant’s student, Schiller, in his book *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, said that beauty or art is an activity and a form of play, essential for a man under the constraint either or matter of form.<sup>49</sup> Beauty lies between spirit and nature, matter and form. It’s a great secret if an artist can conceal matter through form. For him, aesthetics is a field broader than any other discipline, stating, “*Aesthetic experience alone can bring humans to the infinite.*”

Hegel, a leading philosopher of his time, had a different view. He said that beauty and art are ideas manifested in the senses. “*Beauty is not after all in the work of art, but out of it, The Infinite, or the idea, or the fusion of real and ideal, must be shown to senses,*”<sup>50</sup> and for Hegel, the form of beauty is found in the senses and *khayali*. Hegel believed that if the essence of beauty and art reaches its final goal, it will accompany religion and philosophy in interpreting and explaining the divine element and solving most of humanity’s deep, boundless needs.<sup>51</sup> This achievement is carried out by beauty in the dimension of science.<sup>52</sup>

Even though he had analyzed art and beauty in depth, Hegel experienced great difficulty in solving the problem of beauty itself. The problem was: “*Which has greater value, between philosophy on the one hand and art-religion on the other?*” This question arose, and Hegel tried to answer it with a combination of art, religion, and philosophy. Note that art and religion have different functions from philosophy, perhaps at a level

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<sup>45</sup> Heij, *An Essay Concerning Burke’s Idea of The Sublime*, 36, no. 1757 (2008): 2.

<sup>46</sup> Edmund Burke, “A Philosophical Inquiry Into The Origin of Our Ideas of The Sublime & Beautiful with An Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste and Several Other Addition,” *Haymarket* 16, no. 2 (1823): 44–48.

<sup>47</sup> 158–59.

<sup>48</sup> Bernard, J., *Kant’s Critique of Judgement*, 43–45.

<sup>49</sup> Friedrich Schiller, “On the Aesthetic Education of Man,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Yale University Press, vol. 52, no. 21 (1954): 67.

<sup>50</sup> Ethel D Puffer, “The Psychology of Beauty,” *Journal of Educational Research* 24, no. 3 (2001): 45.

<sup>51</sup> Gyorgy Markus, “Hegel and the End of Philosophy,” *Archives de Philosophie*, 73, no. 2 (2010): 249–66.

<sup>52</sup> Orsini, G. N. G, “Benedetto Croce: Philosopher of Art and Literary Critic,” *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, Southern Illinois University Press., vol. 5, no. 1 (n.d.): 285–86.

lower than philosophy, but cannot be thrown away. Because with both, philosophy achieves the goal of knowing “spirit”. It is the same as what Plato understood, more glorification of reason. Croce said that Hegel had failed to explain aesthetics because he followed reason too much, the same mistake made by Plato and his predecessors.

Entering the third period, aesthetics was expected to emerge from the normative sciences and join the positive sciences. It signified that aesthetics was becoming a discipline that needed to be proven, not simply felt and experienced. As expressed by the French sociologist Auguste Comte.<sup>53</sup> This period also saw the birth of German philosophers in aesthetics, such as Lipps, Groos, Mueller, and Max Dessoir. The British with Bosanquet. The Americans, with their Journal of Aesthetics under the guidance of Dr. Thomas Monroe.

Understanding the division of aesthetic periods definitively, it can be concluded that the highest object of human aesthetics is beauty.<sup>54</sup> Beauty is an experience. Experience drives one to become an artist. Beauty from an artist’s perspective becomes even more beautiful because it undergoes a phase of contemplation. However, beauty is not just for artists; it exists in everyday life because human instinct has a fundamental tendency to notice and appreciate beauty.

It is life that creates these qualities of beauty, not merely the human within it. Beauty is an objective thing that exists outside and is an emanation of the idea of beauty (*absolute beauty*) found within the created world. It is different from aesthetic subjectivity, which rejects the notion that beauty comes from outside.<sup>55</sup> It is independent of our mental constitution and senses. However, the subjectivity of beauty holds a place in the eyes of Greek philosophers: it exists within humans themselves, because of humans, and for humans, and originates in the way humans imagine. It is the school of thought on beauty that was later developed by modern philosophers after Kant (*a free interplay of imagination and understanding*).

The study of aesthetics has developed frequently in conjunction with contemporary literary studies, including hermeneutics; text interpretation studies; *neuroaesthetics* (the study of aesthetics integrated with neuroscience discourse), and *transcultural aesthetics* (the study of contemporary aesthetics that intersects with the dynamic transformation of norms, values, and aesthetic practices through ongoing intercultural contracts and exchanges). Although hermeneutics differs from aesthetics, the similarities between hermeneutic and aesthetic epistemologies create a combined approach to reading contemporary art.<sup>56</sup> Scheliermacher popularized the study of hermeneutics as the interpretation and reading of religious texts that does not emphasize the formation of

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<sup>53</sup> Harriet Martineau Frederic Harrison., *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*. (1896), 38.

<sup>54</sup> Elsa Magdalena et al., “Filsafat dan Estetika Menurut Arthur Schopenhauer,” *Clef: Jurnal Musik dan Pendidikan Musik* 3, no. 2 (December 2022): 68, <https://doi.org/10.51667/cjmpm.v3i2.1111>.

<sup>55</sup> Joerg Fingerhut et al., “The Aesthetic Self. The Importance of Aesthetic Taste in Music and Art for Our Perceived Identity,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (March 2021): 4–16, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577703>.

<sup>56</sup> Gadamer, *Aesthetics and Hermeneutics. The Continental Aesthetics* (2018), 57.

textual meaning, but instead attends to the act of understanding for the interpreter.<sup>57</sup> Although often compared to Islamic interpretation studies, hermeneutics has its own characteristics consistent with Western epistemology. The practice of hermeneutical ideology has also influenced contemporary art readings.

Through Gadamer's hermeneutic method, hermeneutics is understood practically with the analogy that once a text is thrown into the public space, the text lives with its own breath, he states:

*“Every time will have to understand a text handed down to it in its own way, for it is subject to the whole of the tradition in which it has a material interest and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it addresses the interpreter, does not depend solely on the occasional factors that characterize the author and his original public. For it is also always co-determined by the historical situation of the interpreter and thus by the whole of the objective course of history. The meaning of a text surpasses its author not occasionally, but always. Thus, understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always also a productive one. Does it succeed to say that one understands differently when one is under? Stands at all.”<sup>58</sup>*

“Text or speech is free and no longer bound by the author.” This concept aligns with the aesthetic slogan ‘*Art for art's sake*,’ which means art for art's sake. The reality of art's meaning in Western hermeneutics makes art independent of the ideology and subjectivity of the artist or creator. Dithley states that, in hermeneutics, the reader or interpreter of art is tasked with discovering the original meaning or the meaning intended by the author, even though the reader does not actually experience the author's psychology.<sup>59</sup> With this method, Dithley believes that hermeneutics can overcome the problem of textual alienation stemming from differences in the psychological experiences of the reader and the author. However, Dithley's method requires the interpreter's interpretation to be present in reading the art created by the creator or author. Unfortunately, the interpreter's interpretation can alter the originality of the art itself, as is the case with Van Gogh's paintings,<sup>60</sup> which leads to the commodification of art and the consumerism of the hybrid attention-experience economy, driven by the profit-oriented ambitions of the global elite.

In the discourse of neuroaesthetics, an interdisciplinary discipline that studies the neurological aspects of aesthetic experience.<sup>61</sup> A field of study initiated by British neuroscientist Semir Zaki in 1999. Neuroaesthetics concentrates on the biological and psychological mechanisms underlying the brain's response to art and other objects, which

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<sup>57</sup> Rasuki Rasuki, “Mengenal Hermeneutical Theory Sebagai Metode Memahami Teks Secara Objektif,” *Kariman: Jurnal Pendidikan Keislaman* 9, no. 1 (June 2021): 107–8, <https://doi.org/10.52185/kariman.v9i1.173>.

<sup>58</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics: Translated and Edited by David E. Linge* (Place of publication not identified: publisher not identified, 1976), xxv.

<sup>59</sup> Fendy Financy and Fitzgerald Kennedy Sitorus, “Wilhelm Dilthey's Thoughts on Understanding, Hermeneutics and Communication,” *Asian Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 3, no. 1 (April 2024): 21–22, <https://doi.org/10.55927/ajpr.v3i1.9360>.

<sup>60</sup> Mondloch, “The Influencers,” 13–14.

<sup>61</sup> Marcus T. Pearce et al., “Neuroaesthetics: The Cognitive Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 11, no. 2 (March 2016): 4–5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615621274>.

then give rise to aesthetic judgments and pleasure.<sup>62</sup> This study responds to signals in the brain by formulating and deriving findings on perceptions of artistic creation and creating new aesthetic formulations based on the logic of the human brain.

The phenomenon of “*emotional transfer in achievement*”<sup>63</sup> is one of the fascinating elements in neuroaesthetics. Unfortunately, the expression of this phenomenon marginalizes the meaning of beauty itself. In reality, beauty cannot be confined to the brain. The brain is simply a medium through which thoughts about beauty become clear.<sup>64</sup> This clarity actually limits the enjoyment of various forms of beauty. Although the brain has therapeutic potential, it cannot perceive the stimuli felt by the heart and its layers. The spatial resolution of brain-imaging instruments, such as fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging), is good. Still, their temporal resolution is only good in time, just as EEG (electroencephalogram) has good temporal resolution but limited spatial resolution.

Meanwhile, mystical aesthetic experiences are always fast, lightning-fast, and cannot be measured by the brain. Therefore, the thinking organ is unable to understand and capture these aesthetic patterns.<sup>65</sup> It is the weak point of the discipline of neuroaesthetics, the brain’s ability to measure the stimulus of happiness. Still, it is unable to answer the philosophical questions of aesthetic experience.

In the context of *transcultural aesthetics*, the rapid spread of digital technology has brought diverse cultural aesthetics and traditions worldwide into closer contact. Modern, minimalist Western lifestyles have become localized in Asian lifestyles, and vice versa. Asian cultural patterns and styles have colored Western lifestyles, transforming them into entertainment and history. This assimilation process is not merely *appropriation*. The transformation of norms driven by globalization, migration, and technology involves not only borrowing styles but also a profound restructuring of aesthetic frameworks, creating new *hybrid* forms that synergistically combine elements of various cultures.<sup>66</sup>

The Western-style aesthetic of dress, widely adopted by Asian communities, and the aesthetic of meaningful spaces within Asian culture, favored by Western civilization, are evidence of collaborative efforts by artists and society. Although the evolution of transcultural aesthetics has become more complex, people across countries experience global connectivity, and cross-cultural re-evaluation and dialogue are occurring.<sup>67</sup> It affects the emergence of aesthetic democracy.<sup>68</sup><sup>69</sup> However, the development of aesthetics

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas S McClure and Jessica A Siegel, *Neuroaesthetics: An Introduction to Visual Art*, 2015, 1–2.

<sup>63</sup> Widjaya, “Neuroaesthetics Dan Cognitive Load Dalam Produksi Musik : Studi EEG Terhadap Pengalaman Audio Yang Immersif.,” *Profilm: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Perfilman & Pertelevision*, 4, no. 2 (2025): 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ivan Roca, *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, n.d., 77.

<sup>65</sup> David Cycleback, *What Is Thinking?* (2025), 18.

<sup>66</sup> Tanchio, P. A., *Transcultural Aesthetics*. (Sydney College of The Arts The University of Sydney., 2014), 256.

<sup>67</sup> Rosalind Silvester, “Art and Motion: Shen Yuan’s Transcultural Aesthetics,” *Modern Languages Open* 2019, no. 1 (June 2019): 21–22, <https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.232>.

<sup>68</sup> Jason Frank, “Aesthetic Democracy: Walt Whitman and the Poetry of the People,” *The Review of Politics* 69, no. 3, (2007): 402–3.

<sup>69</sup> Viviane Juguero, “Aesthetic Democracy as the Roots of Sustainable Cities and Communities,” *Nordic Journal of Art & Research* 12, no. 2 (November 2023): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.7577/ar.5052>.

for a civilization is paradoxical. *Transcultural aesthetic* choices become expressions of identity, and the diversity of societal aesthetics widens, eroding the increasingly thin boundaries of traditional cultures. Diversity undermines aesthetic norms. Although standards of beauty or skill become more inclusive from various perspectives, fundamental changes occur in how society views beauty, value, and meaning. Today's reality is the result of a paradoxical civilization. Aesthetics changes civilization: *continuous yet changing, bounded yet mobile, with consensus among followers and connoisseurs, yet also internal competition (consensual yet contested), and shared yet varied characteristics.*<sup>70</sup>

The study of aesthetics will continue to develop. It is especially true given the collaboration between contemporary literature and Western epistemological sources, which reinforces the meaning of aesthetics as an autonomous body of knowledge. This academic dynamic affirms the position of Islamic aesthetics. Islamic or *ṣufi* aesthetics presents a new paradigm with a more nuanced sense of self-contemplation. Aesthetic studies differ epistemologically from Western aesthetics. To simplify the epistemological differences between Western and Islamic aesthetics, researchers have compiled a table summarizing comparative analyses of the two aesthetic studies.

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<sup>70</sup> Yeun Joon Kim, Soo Min Toh, and Sooyun Baik, "Culture Creation and Change: Making Sense of the Past to Inform Future Research Agendas," *Journal of Management* 48, no. 6 (July 2022): 1503–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063221081031>.

### Results of Comparative Analysis of Western Aesthetics & Sufi Aesthetics

Western aesthetics	Islamic/ Sufi Aesthetics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Anthropocentric</li><li>○ Western aesthetics is an autonomous discipline, not bound by norms and morality.</li><li>○ <i>Art for art's sake</i>: art for its own sake.</li><li>○ Absolute and absolute art</li><li>○ Nudity in Western Aesthetics is interpreted as a form of freedom of thought, consumerism, and commodification of art space.</li><li>○ Aesthetics in the form of visual-spatial beauty, enjoyment in physical form</li><li>○ The interpretation and reading of aesthetic space is objective. The subjectification of the aesthetic creator is minimized and adapted to the aesthetic connoisseur's psychology.</li><li>○ Aesthetic standards are measured from the brain's sensory</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Theocentric</li><li>○ God is the source of all aesthetics.</li><li>○ Islamic/ Sufi aesthetics is a discipline rich in values and morality, a continuation of beauty.</li><li>○ There is harmony between worldly and everyday beauty</li><li>○ Perfect beauty is created from the harmony of nature and essence.</li><li>○ There are stages of aesthetic experience from the form of state (<i>hal</i>) and disposition (<i>character</i>)</li><li>○ An aesthetic experience that cannot be measured by logic is felt by <i>zauq</i> (taste) to <i>mutasakir</i> (intoxicated)</li><li>○ Art as a form of healing and cleansing the heart (healing &amp; purification)</li></ul>

### Sufi Aesthetics: A Means of Expressing Islamic Beauty

Beauty in Islam is closely linked to the patterns of sufism. Sufism is easily understood as the behavior of a Muslim,<sup>71</sup> which was then made into a scientific discipline in Islam, following philosophy, *kalam*, and so on. Sufism is closely related to the beauty of understanding the harmony of *mu'amalah ma'Allah*, *mu'amalah ma'annas*, and *ma'al-alam* (ecology). In short, sufism teaches honesty of expression, sincerity of intention, & gentleness of emotion.

This harmony poses an ideological challenge to Western epistemological practice. Western aesthetic independence does not recognize the concept of aesthetic harmony. Western aesthetics are limited to visual-spatial boundaries. In contemporary cultural practice, visual enjoyment becomes a platform for excellence and priority. This practice

<sup>71</sup> Abdul Aziz and Randi Saputra, "Konsep Tasawuf dalam Perspektif Konseling Islami," *Guidance* 19, no. 02 (December 2022): 164–65, <https://doi.org/10.34005/guidance.v19i02.2127>.

can be illustrated by the example of the slogan “give and take” in human relationships. Beauty is interpreted as a service and a reward, as the necessity of a collaborative relationship between aesthetic experience and the subject, and as the existence of a personal dialogue between feelings and aesthetic choices that create feelings of autonomy.<sup>72</sup> A collaboration that satisfies physical and material needs, becoming the benchmark for beauty, as logic cannot prove spiritual beauty. As the English philosopher William Blake put it, “*Art can never exist without naked beauty displayed.*”<sup>73</sup><sup>74</sup> Beauty will never be realized without nudity. This expression clearly demonstrates a flawed mindset. However, in the Western paradigm, nudity is interpreted as a measure of beauty due to its visibility and also freedom from all attachments. These include attachments to dress codes, attachments to health, attachments to norms and morals, even though this freedom violates nature and essence. Because, for the West, human nature and essence are nothing more than the satisfaction of physical and material needs. The domino effect of this perspective is often presented as a universal aesthetic, but in reality, it is individualistic, marked by privatization and exclusivity. An aesthetic that does not offer inclusivity. Beautiful sentences in the field of aesthetics are born for the sake of beautiful sentences themselves. Aesthetic autonomy works not for the social, but for specific aesthetic connoisseurs.

Sufi aesthetics, with the emotional essence of a servant who loves his Lord, frequently mentions and praises Him, giving rise to a variety of symbolic expressions of love, longing, steadfastness, and concern. Sufi expressions are an esoteric form of love,<sup>75</sup> as written in various syiar since the time of the Prophet. Although, at that time, ḫufism did not have a name, but the expression of poetry laden with ḫufism already had its own history, such as the poetry of the companions Ka’ab ibn Zuhair and Hassan bin Tsabit with their poems of praise for the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the poem “*Maḥabbah*” Rabi’ah al Adawiyah, Nizamuddin Qisti with his book “*Fawaid al-Fuad*”, Sana’i with “*hadiqat- haqiqat*” which even two hundred years before Rumi had questioned about ‘love’ itself, then ‘*Maṣnawi-i-al Ma’awi*’, ‘*Fīhi mā Fīhi*’, the writings of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, a ḫufi whose name is famous in the western world, and has written at least 60,000 verses of ghazal, ruba’, and other ibarat stories. Ibnu’ Arabī in *Tarjuman al-aswaq*, Ibnu’ Abbad al Rundi, a Spanish-born ḫufi who produced several ‘treatises’, al-Busiri with his qasidah ‘*Hamziya*’ and ‘*Burda*’, to Amir Hamzah, a Malay poet-ḥufi. The essence of “love” in Islam is universal, eternal love that encompasses all elements. The spirit of Islamic love creates pure beauty that originates in human nature, as Islamic beauty is in accordance with it.

Sufi do not only talk about love and affection. In fact, from love, the spirit of struggle is born, the spirit of da’wah is born, because pure love does not give birth to mere

<sup>72</sup> Harry Drummond, “Aesthetic Experiences with Others: An Enactive Account,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, ahead of print, July 26, 2024, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-024-10015-w>.

<sup>73</sup> William Blake, *A STROLL THROUGH TATE BRITAIN* (n.d.), 16.

<sup>74</sup> Bowen Wang, “Word-Image Intertwining: William Blake’s Illuminated Poetry and the Aesthetics of Compositeness,” *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 11, no. 6 (June 2021): 379–83, <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5836/2021.06.001>.

<sup>75</sup> Kundharu Saddhono Haniah, “Nuansa Dan Simbol Sufistik Puisi-Puisi Karya Ahmad Mustofa Bisri,” *Teosofi* 8, no. 1 (2018): 44–46.

physical lust. As stated in the work of ‘Al-Hikam’ Ibn Athaillah al-Iskandari, a ḥanfi born in Egypt in the 13th century, Mansur al-Hallaj with his *diwan* which is often not understood by the general public, because Hallaj often uses difficult language, however, there is an interesting expression from al-Hallaj which is the spirit of love that surged within him to invite humanity in his time to Islam, in monotheism, he said, “*To see religion, look at its leader, not the mosque lamp*”. The poet inherited this steadfastness and spirit of love of struggle from India, Muhammad Iqbal. Muhammad Iqbal’s poems, works, and compositions are filled with struggle against colonialism, the glory of Muslim society, and the pursuit of independence.

The struggle born of this symbolic love is eternal, just as the ṣufi of the past, with the power of their *syiar*, the consistency of their *da’wah*, and their movements just as the consistency of Dzun Nun al-Mishri has raised the status of ṣufism in the eyes of the world, until the creation of the “doctrine of ṣufism,” or like ‘*Manṭiqu- tair*’, the story of the spiritual journey of 12 birds towards one final destination, the work of Fariduddin at-Tar, a ṣufi born in the 12th century.

Love and struggle are two different things. Despite their differences, they are deeply connected and even interdependent. These two things reflect the unity of many things. Love works for unity, harmony, tolerance, and struggle.<sup>76</sup> It is at this point that the symbolic love in ṣufism meets the beauties of a physical and material nature. Ṣufism unites, grounding the concept of beauty, explaining true love more deeply, as in Ghazali’s masterpiece *Iḥyā’ ulumudīn*, or Badi’uzzaman Said Nursi’s *Rasail an-Nur*. Both masterpieces, laden with ṣufism values, were born during a time of disunity within the Muslim community, a time of doubt and the fading of the purpose of being a Muslim. Both masterpieces were born in different times, but have more or less the same spiritual challenge: the loss of identity as a Muslim.

For Ghazali, ṣufism is the final path of ‘*abdullah*’, but long before that realization, ṣufism had become a connecting path between many scattered disciplines. Ṣufism becomes a meeting point between civilizations, between religions, and between generations. This meeting point is the first step in the harmony and beauty of civilization. The beauty contained in ṣufism is a solution to the deviation of the meaning of Western aesthetics. Ṣufi aesthetics brings holistic empowerment to humans. Ṣufi aesthetics expresses physical or non-physical ‘beauty’; Ṣufism becomes a mediator for servants to obtain and realize love throughout their lives and to find the purpose of their existence. Because in essence, humans were created with natural ‘beauty’ and a holy ‘*fitrah*’.

If John Locke’s concept of *tabula rasa* reveals that experience is what can shape humans toward change and meaning throughout their lives, especially from a perspective that understands aesthetics, then ṣufi aesthetics has the spiritual power to perfect and restore humans to their true nature and nature. Ṣufism holds great authority in spiritual empowerment because it is grounded in the fundamental concept of Islam, namely *Tauhid*.

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<sup>76</sup> Yoshi Hendra Hardiyah Syah and Rinni Winarti, “Konsep Cinta Sebagai Upaya Harmonisasi dalam Konflik Antar Agama-agama Besar Dunia,” *Refleksi* 21, no. 2 (November 2022): 207, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ref.v21i2.28599>.

With the value of ‘*Tauhid*,’ a servant will once again find the best way to express the essence of beauty that has always been their nature and purpose.

### **Conclusion**

Sufi aesthetics provides a solution to the marginalization of aesthetic space from a Western perspective. The spiritual squalor that is a product of Western aesthetics can be mitigated and purified through the stages of *ṣufi* aesthetics. Within *ṣufi* aesthetics, there is a process of *takiyatun nafs* (*self-purification*), which is not only the practice of cultivating good character. It also liberates ideology from the errors of thinking about fundamental concepts of beauty, and restores the meaning of beauty to the essence and nature of humankind. Furthermore, *ṣufi* aesthetics reflects the harmony and balance of physical and spiritual needs. Ghazali’s three *ṣufi* aesthetic concepts are the main key to the explanation of *ṣufi* aesthetics: physical beauty, moral beauty, and spiritual beauty. The key concept of beauty is the manifestation of perfect beauty in accordance with human nature and essence.

These three main concepts experience many phases of aesthetic experience that the human brain cannot measure, even with the use of sophisticated tools to measure the stimulus of human happiness during aesthetic experiences. Because the brain can only measure aesthetic experiences based on numbers, letters, and colors. Meanwhile, the aesthetic experience felt by humans can be a divine aesthetic experience, felt by the *żauq* through the intermediary of the heart and all its layers.

*Ṣufi* aesthetics give birth to love and struggle. Two distinct yet interconnected things. Love is not merely an emotion, but from love grows a sense of passion, a struggle for truth. Truth that aligns with human nature. When human aesthetics work only for love, not for truth, humans have freed themselves from their true nature as humans. They forget their natural self. Love works for unity, for harmony, for tolerance, for struggle. Human nature itself is theocentric, where God is the center that animates it. God becomes the orientation of human actions. It is not an anthropocentric view, which makes humans the center of all truth. Because God’s beauty cannot be measured by humans, while human beauty itself is very relative compared to the beauty of other humans.

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