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AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF ISLAMIC ART BASED ON
WITTGENSTEIN'S FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

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ABSTRACT

Art and beauty are very clear concepts that everyone understands. However, it is very difficult to provide an accurate definition for these concepts, especially if we look for intrinsic characteristics in the definition, which is the main feature of them. Today, along with the concept of art, other words are added to explain the type of art, like Islamic art, Christian art, committed art, and etc. But what does these added words really add to the meaning of art? The focus of discussion in this paper is on the Islamic clause that sometimes follows art. Perhaps if a precise definition of art could be provided, a better explanation would be offered for the meaning of adverbs added to art. Here, first a definition of art is offered based on Wittgenstein's views in the second period of his life - including language games, and especially, the concept of family resemblance. Then, all the possibilities regarding the adverb added to the art concept are evaluated. This study shows is that providing an analytical definition of Islamic art is as difficult as defining art, but making a comprehensive definition is possible through Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance.

INTRODUCTION

Today, various terms are widely used for describing art including Islamic art, Christian art, committed art, and etc. But what exactly is meant when words like Islamic, Christian, etc. are added to the art concept? This paper tries to answer this by explaining the concepts of art and beauty. Most definitions of art and beauty seek to provide an analytical definition. In this approach, first, it is necessary to discover the nature of art and beauty. Aristotle and Plato, for instance, referred to "mimesis" as the essence of art in defining it: "Aristotle considers every action that requires a special skill to be art, but when he

speaks of music, painting, and tragedy, he enumerates a prominent feature in all of them, which is "mimesis" (Aristotle, 2005: 48).

Can any mimesis be called art, so that mimesis could be considered as the essence of art? Certainly not. To refine Aristotle's definition, we may limit mimesis to nature and think that art is a kind of mimesis of nature. These adverbs cannot solve the problem. Suppose a painter who creates a work only by imagination and no imitation! Can we say that his work is not a piece of art? Are we allowed to call any imitation of nature as art? It seems that even attitudes of philosophy of art's scholars, who consider mimesis in Aristotle's definition as a necessary condition in any art, is not without problems (Carroll, 2008: 34). This problem is also evident in the definition of beauty. Suppose, as Plato defined beauty, that beauty is the harmony of the parts with the whole; So that, if the whole and the set have proportionate parts, the object is beautiful. "Proportion" in this definition is not a very clear concept and needs to be defined. Besides, it is not clear whether any proportion is beautiful, and if something is out of proportion, is it necessarily ugly? To define "art" and "beauty", a thought-provoking option is the Wittgenstein's approach into meaning.

Wittgenstein and the Theory of Meaning

The philosophical thoughts of Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein, the Austrian philosopher of the twentieth century, are divided into two periods. "logisch PhiloSoPhische abhandlung" expresses his main views in this period. The book in its English version was renamed "tractatus_ logico_ PhiloSoPhicus", which is still used in academic and scientific circles (Ray, 1990: 41). Picture Theory of Language is an initiative of this period. Given this theory, language represents the world through illustration, and propositions are images of reality. This book had a great impact on the orientation of the emerging thinking of Logical Positivism in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Philosophical Investigations encompasses the fruits of sixteen years of Wittgenstein' thoughts in the second period of his intellectual life (Biletzki, 2020). The new Wittgenstein, with an epistemological turn, rejects his earlier theory of the visual language, and believes that we must look and see how people use words. The real picture is just one of the thousands of language games. Language is like a tool used to do and express different things. Meaning is understood through usage, so if we want to understand the meaning of a word, we have to see how that word is used. "Do not ask the meaning of a proposition, but seek its application," he says succinctly. The meaning of a statement is manifested by its application. The predicate of a word on meaning is a contract determined by the application of that language speakers. This application is a function of its own special social paradigm, which Wittgenstein refers to as Form of Life. Namely, in different forms of life, a word may find different meanings. Of course, no word / sentence alone makes sense. Each word / sentence makes sense only in the context of its use. The similarity of words / sentences to tools leads Wittgenstein to conclude that each word / sentence has not one meaning but infinite meaning because each

word / sentence can be used in different ways. On the other hand, a language is used based on the rules and conventions determined by its speakers. It is the society that determines what is in accordance with the rule and what is against it. So, judging about the correct use of a language needs to see if the speaker is acting according to the rules, as trained to do in the society (Wittgenstein, 1986: 23).

Definition Through Family Resemblance

Wittgenstein believes that not all words could be comprehensively expressed in a way that encompasses all its uses. On the other hand, the scalability of language loads creates new meanings for words that could be absent in past applications. According to Wittgenstein, among the different meanings of a word, there is only a family resemblance in terms of usage, and it is not possible to provide a definition that expresses the same nature of different uses. Wittgenstein uses the word "game" as an example and offer several definitions of the word, but since games refer to so many types and it is not possible to find a single rule that applies to all games, he concludes that it is impossible to find a common feature that applies to all games, and that only a few family resemblances can be found among the various uses of a game. This is against the theoretical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, in which the word is considered meaningful since it implies to a certain intrinsic feature. Wittgenstein rejects this method for all words and phrases, and accepts it just for words such as "game", and believes that a number of apparent similarities can be discerned in the various uses of the word, and that no common feature can be talked about.

Defining Art And Beauty Through The Theory Of Family Resemblance

The two words of "art" and "beauty" have seemingly the same characteristics, so they find different functions in different contexts including in painting, ethics, politics, industry, and economics. According to Wittgenstein, the search for essence is a mistake rooted in Aristotelian philosophical thought. Everything must be accepted as it is, and the pursuit of the essence beyond experience of being results at nothing but confusion. Therefore, to perceive "art" and "beauty", we must attend to the actual use of these words in real situations - language games - and admit that each game has its own logic that must be discovered. So we suppose that:

- A) The reason for the confusion in different definitions of "art" and "beauty" is that theorists have been searching for an essence that does not exist.
- B) The meaning of "art" and "beauty" should be sought in their real use. In other words, we should attend to the way these two words are used.
- C) The common feature of "art" and "beauty" is several apparent similarities in their various uses.

Deconstructive Identity of Art

Art, as a human artifact influenced by the power of creativity and human genius, has a deconstructive identity, meaning that it is difficult to define a single structure and form for art / artwork, and to find a neat geometric framework for it.

The regularity or interpretability of an algorithm that exists in problem solving, for example, is absent here, and it is not possible to define an algorithm for an intelligent system whose output is an artwork. Even if there is such an output, it may be called practical, useful or even beautiful, but it is not considered an artwork. As Tolstoy describes "art" as merely a human activity whose purpose is to convey emotions (Tolstoy, 1985: 55). Art is a human activity which helps him to transmit his emotions, consciously and with the help of outwardly recognizable signs to others to let them experience the same emotions. Creativity in making an artwork is the result of avoidance of structure (Pourdehghan, 2009: 8). Structure destroys creativity and extinguishes the bright ray of human creativity. On the other hand, creativity, which seeks to create original beauty, is completely influenced by the artist's vision and intuition of beauty, which is seemingly relative and appears differently in each individual and society. This does not mean an artistic anarchist, since we can evaluate an artwork based on generalities, and study its aesthetic issues, or compare two artworks in terms of excellence and beauty. Undoubtedly, two paintings can be compared in terms of the type, proportion, and volume of colors, lines elegance, etc., but this does not mean that art is structural.

On the other hand, the sociology of art sees this issue from another angle, which can be the artist's motives, the audience's beliefs, or even economic, social, political or historical relations. Due to this attitude, various schools of art are created in the contemporary period, which confirms the deconstructive identity of art (Rahnavard, 2001: 45)

Art as a Song of Culture, Customs and Beliefs

The people of each nation have certain customs and traditions, all of which make up the characteristic of that nation, which is called culture. Cultural differences are quite objective and obvious. The culture of each nation is shaped by the civilization level of that era, and in each period, it is influenced by the characteristics of the past culture. Anything that expresses the symbols, signs, customs and traditions of a nation and represents its pains, needs, spirit, and nature, and its social, literary, religious, material, biological and artistic characteristics is called culture (Sharia'ti, 1980: 6). Cultures have specific forms and themes that are derived from different customs and behaviors, and are the source of differences in different civilizations; But what is related to art and affects the artists, are cultural themes (Nabavi, 1999: 227).

Gradually, Islamic civilization and culture acquired unique features that helped it offer a special form in all fields. Islam also found its way into

scientific, artistic and other contexts, and it grew up to build a world and Islamic culture and civilization of his own. For example, one of the features of Islamic architecture is the emptiness of mosques from images because it is believed that images in a worship space prevents man from being alone with God and prevents and prohibits the creation of a heavenly atmosphere that is the consolation of the human soul. For this reason, in mosques, images that brighten the human's soul are in used.

Islamic Art

Titus Burckhardt states, "Islamic art, especially Islamic architecture, creates an empty space, eliminates all the anxieties and unbridled temptations of the world, and instead offers an order that represents balance, purity and calm. The root of this influence must be sought in the characteristics of Islamic art, which make it different from Western art. In the current Western view, an artwork reflects the role of individuality in art, while Islam believes that an artwork is in its essence the manifestation of the eternal and universal truth"(Burckhardt, 2007: 115).

To clarify the issue, all the possibilities that may be understood by the Islamic adverb are examined in order to finally examine the issue in detail with the help of what has been said before.

Possibilities In the Meaning of Islamic Art

The following possibilities can be mentioned about Islamic art:

- Islamic art refers to all the works of Muslim scientists and artists. In other word, Islamic art refers only to the architecture, calligraphies, paintings, and etc. created by Muslims.
- Islamic art refers to all works of art formed in Islamic societies.
- Islamic art originates from Islamic thoughts sources - the Qur'an and Hadith.
- Islamic art has goals in line with the development of Islam.
- Islamic art is directed and reformed by Islam.
- Islamic art is in harmony with Islamic sharia't.
- Islamic art is a set of common features in artworks and differentiates Islamic artworks from other aspects of art.

To analyze the mentioned issues in detail, we should first ask: can art be considered as the essence? And if it is so, is art a mere phenomenon that cannot be bound to any adverb? That is to say, the adverbs commonly used with art (e.g., Western art, Christian art) are in fact a kind of credit adverb, and indeed art is bound to none of these? In this regard, the nature of art and the goals of an artwork must be distinguished from each other.

Nature of Art

The concept of art in this article is free from any intellectual, cultural and social presuppositions. At the beginning, the existence of intrinsic characteristics of artworks was examined to provide an accurate definition of the nature of art. Finally, it was concluded that it is difficult to find such a definition. Since there are many difficulties in expressing the true nature of art, another issue was raised to better understand this nature: the difference between "art" and "beauty". Art is influenced by a human factor, and it is man who creates the artwork with his perception of beauty. However, "beauty" is in the nature of the universe, a beautiful flower or a beautiful landscape is nothing but the beauty embedded in the body of the universe. On the other hand, man is able to perceive beauty, which is a complex process of interaction between man and the universe. Kant opines that the human perception of beauty would be different if the structures of his eyes and mind were different. Therefore, the human factor has a major role in the perception of beauty (Nasr, 2015: 18).

The artist creates his artwork based on the beauty evident in the world beside his vision of beauty. Even when an artist paints a picture of nature, and his work is merely an imitation of nature, his work is influenced by preconceived factors governed on his aesthetics; To be specific, the culture, customs and mentality of the artist have a profound effect on his artwork. Sometimes this effect is quite noticeable, but sometimes is hidden in layers of the artwork. Islamic art is like a special veneer, or an illuminating and transformative prism that has changed some local forces and traditions, either temporarily and incompletely, or forever" (Graber, 2000: 2) Islam also brought with it unique rationality, special culture and beliefs, and Sharia't. It seems that what makes a work of art Islamic art is the emergence of these factors in the artist and their manifestation in the creation of an artwork. So, just a certain social or historical area cannot be called a feature of Islamic art. Put differently, when traces of Islam are visible in the nature of an artwork it may be called Islamic art (Dori, 1984: 115)

Purpose of Islamic Art

The second part that affects an artwork is its purpose(s). Undoubtedly, art can be for art, meaning that an artwork may have no purpose other than being an artwork, and may be merely the product of the artist's pure creativity. However, according to the points raised in the part "Nature of Art", every man is influenced by the thought, culture and customs that govern his society. So, these factors are effective in creating pure beauty and determine the direction of an artwork. In many artworks, the artist pursues a specific goal and tries to convey a message. In this case, the artwork is not the ultimate purpose but a means to reach another one. Islamic art is very close to this meaning: art is a transversal phenomenon with an ultra-purpose which the artist attempts to convey with his artwork. The principle in Islamic art is to guide the mind of the audience from the material nature to the spiritual, and to unify the truths that seem multitudinous at a superficial look. And finally, Islamic art has

symbols within it to free the audience from the busyness and to create peace in the light of sacred signs. Of course, the concept of Islamic art will be rich if it is properly understood. That is why an audience from another culture and religion, unfamiliar with Islamic concepts, certainly cannot understand the concepts that exist, for instance, in the architecture or tiling of an Islamic mosque.

Symbols in Islamic Art

The presence of symbols is another characteristic of sacred art. Symbols allow manifesting concepts that language is incapable of expressing, especially patterns that reflect the reality of the afterlife, in the form of architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, and literature. "The use of two-dimensional shapes – e.g., squares and circles - and three-dimensional shapes – e.g., cubes and spheres - in Islamic architecture is an allegory of earth and sky. Movements in Islamic designs and geometric patterns, tiling and meshes all refer to symbols, and the most outstanding symbolic forms are used in religious buildings, such as mosques" (Sartipy pour, 2008: 67). So, in describing the concept of Islam in Islamic art, can we find common characteristics in a multitude of artworks called Islamic (including architecture, calligraphy, and painting) ? If Islamic art is considered a classical period with distinctive characteristics, the following features can be inferred: Repetition of shapes and designs. In most of these artworks, the shapes and designs have an Islamic meaning. Certainly, independent research is needed to investigate this subject. The scientific study of Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, is a study in this field.

However, does the existence of an Islamic symbol in an artwork make it an Islamic artwork? Certainly not. More precisely, the existence of Islamic symbols can be a sign that an artwork is Islamic. But, first, this is not general since symbols may have been used in another culture, and second, the symbol does not mean the existence of an Islamic nature or purpose, they just merely lead the audience to a deeper understanding based on Islamic teachings. Art is closely related to the intellectual and artistic context of the observer, and symbols direct the observer's thought and remind him to seek meaning beyond what he sees. Islamic architecture is an example. "Burkhart exaggerates about the symbolic expression of sacred art, and regards it as an inherent part of sacred art" (Rahnavard, 2001: 18).

Assessing the Possibilities in Defining Islamic Art

The first possibility (Islamic art refers to all the works of Muslim scientists and artists. In other word, Islamic art refers only to the architecture, calligraphies, paintings, and etc. created by Muslims) is rejected since there is a lot of evidence that contradicts this. Many artworks in the Islamic society were created by non-Muslims while they are classified as Islamic artworks. "A group of artworks specifically made by non-Muslims can rightly be considered Islamic art" (Grabar, 2000: 113).

The second and third possibilities (Islamic art refers to all works of art formed in Islamic societies; Islamic art originates from Islamic thoughts sources - the Qur'an and Hadith) could be true since most theorists' interpretation of art is a kind of art formed in Islamic culture and societies, which is certainly influenced by Islamic thought. However, another issue is raised. Actually, what is called Islamic art is not merely the product of Islamic culture, since some symbols that exist in Islamic works have a background in other pre-Islamic cultures and religions. Or even some of the Islamic works are in fact imitations of Iranian or Roman works, like the Islamic-Christian art that is the most obvious examples of which are the Khazib metal works of the thirteenth century. Thus, it can hardly be said that the starting point of most artworks is in Islamic culture and influenced by Islamic thought.

"Since Islamic conquests were seldom destructive, it could be sure that the traditions of ancient art have been continued at almost all levels of creativity and support for artists. And the work of artists has been used equally by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. If lots of artifacts left from the first three centuries of Islamic history is considered, the first result will be that at the simplest technical levels and the "phonology" of forms, there is little new. Every type of object has a prototype in the older traditions of the Near East and the Mediterranean... There are exceptions to this general rule. In this field, the art of pottery emerged, which was completely new, and in decoration, Arabic writings emerged as an important means of decoration and pictography. But the most important exception was the scattering of shapes and techniques. For example, building units of Iranian origin, like the porch, were also built in Syria... Recognizable exceptions became aspects of Islamic art with a unique importance" (Grabar, 2000: 229).

Purpose is important in Islamic art. In religious authorities' attitudes toward Islamic art, art itself is not original, but a meaning lies in the heart of an artwork created for a transcendent intention in line with divine and Islamic wisdom. Hence, the fourth possibility is true of many artworks, as many theorists have discussed the wisdom and meaning of Islamic art.

The fifth (Islamic art is directed and reformed by Islam) and sixth (Islamic art is in harmony with Islamic Sharia't) possibilities also applies to many artworks, But despite the variety of artworks, a specific criterion for Islamic art encompassing all the characteristics of an Islamic artwork cannot be found. For instance, due to the unique attitude of Shari'at toward art, and the prohibition of works containing embodiment and simile, a special form of art, specifically, pictography is created. In this new form, animal or human figures are replaced with plant images. This attitude has even influenced Christian art. Therefore, this is not specific to Islamic art, and this kind of pictography is seen in other artworks, although meaning and content may differ.

Finally, in the definition of Islamic art, a family resemblance is also encountered, where all the mentioned possibilities - except the first one which is very weak – may contain a wide range of characteristics that overall characterize Islamic art. So, Islamic art can be regarded a kind of art formed in

an Islamic culture and society, influenced by Islamic thought and wisdom. In fact, Islamic art gave new identity to many artworks by collecting them from other cultures in the conquered lands and distributing them in a new way, often in the light of using symbols.

CONCLUSION

In response to the question of whether intrinsic characteristics can be found for artworks in order to provide an accurate definition of art, it became clear that offering such a definition is fundamentally difficult, since creativity in the creation of an artwork the main reason for the avoidance of structure, which prevents art from being embedded in a pre-determined form. On the other hand, creativity is completely influenced by the artist's vision and intuition of beauty, which seems to be a relative matter. The difficulties encountered in providing an analytical definition of art cause us to refrain from providing such a definition, and define art through family resemblance. Wittgenstein believes that the search for essence is a wrong act rooted in Aristotelian philosophical thought. So, to understand "art" and "beauty", the real use of these words in real situations, or in other words, in language games, should be considered. The theory of family resemblance in art made it clear that discrete similarities can be found among what is called art. Finally, a family resemblance is also encountered in the definition of Islamic art, which include a wide range of characteristics that overall characterize this kind of art.

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