
The Concept of Divinity in Javanese Mysticism: Viewing the Universe as a Manifestation of God

Shinta Nurziana¹, Thoriqi Firdaus²

¹Department of Philosophy, Universitas Gadjah Mada

²Department of Natural Science Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

¹Email: shintanurziana2000@mail.ugm.ac.id



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ABSTRACT

The concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism views the relationship between God, nature, and humanity as a harmonious and interconnected unity. In the Javanese worldview, God is understood as a transcendent entity and an immanent manifestation in every aspect of life and the universe. This study aims to analyze the Javanese community's understanding of God within the context of Javanese mysticism by exploring symbols, myths, and cultural practices associated with these beliefs. The approach employed in this article is library research, examining various classical and contemporary literature relevant to divinity in Javanese tradition. The findings indicate that in Javanese mysticism, the universe is perceived as a manifestation of God, reflected in the principle of balance between the microcosm (human beings) and the macrocosm (the universe). This perspective underscores the importance of harmony between humans, nature, and God, realized through various rituals and traditions, such as *slametan* and *nyadran*. The concept of *manunggaling kawula gusti* (the servant's union with God) forms the core of Javanese spiritual teachings, emphasizing values of simplicity, wisdom, and devotion to God through a life in harmony with nature. This study also highlights the relevance of the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism in a modern context amidst ecological crises and spiritual disorientation. By emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balance between humanity and nature, this concept provides a philosophical foundation for fostering environmental ethics and sustainability. The understanding of God in Javanese mysticism not only enriches studies on local spirituality but also demonstrates the relevance of Javanese mysticism concepts of divinity in addressing modern challenges by promoting values of simplicity, harmony, and respect for nature as a form of worship.

I. INTRODUCTION

Javanese mysticism encompasses philosophical and spiritual values that reflect the harmonious relationship between humanity, the universe, and God. The concept of divinity addresses issues related to belief or religion that manifest in human life (Paloutzian & Park, 2021). Faith in the existence of God is considered a profoundly fundamental foundation (Harun Nasution, 1987). Changes brought about by modernization and globalization have led to the erosion of local wisdom, including the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism. Younger generations tend to be influenced by more materialistic modern values, resulting in a diminishing appreciation for this traditional worldview (Geertz, 1976). Furthermore, academic studies on Javanese mysticism often focus more on its cultural and ritualistic aspects, leaving its theological and philosophical dimensions underexplored (Koentjaraningrat, 1985; Endraswara, 2012). Consequently, the concept of divinity within Javanese mysticism is rarely integrated into global academic discourse, failing to contribute to cross-cultural discussions on theology and philosophy (Mulder, 1998; Maarif, 2023).

In Javanese society, life is understood as a cycle uniting humanity, the universe, and the Creator, emphasizing harmony among the three (Wisnumurti, 2012). This perspective is evident in Javanese mysticism, which reflects the community's worldview regarding the universe and its relationship with God and highlights the understanding of divinity as both a transcendent and immanent entity in daily life (Thohari, 2022). This approach reveals how the Javanese perceive the universe as a manifestation of God, shaping their mindset, culture, and way of life.

Javanese mysticism also teaches the principle of harmony between humanity and nature as a manifestation of God. This concept holds relevance in addressing contemporary challenges such as environmental crises and the spiritual disorientation of modern humans. However, the widespread exploitation of nature and materialistic modern lifestyles often conflict with this principle of harmony (Firdaus et al., 2024). Understanding and contextualising Javanese mysticism is crucial to providing relevant solutions to global issues while preserving local wisdom that is increasingly under threat. This research aims to strengthen Indonesia's cultural identity while contributing to global discussions on the relationship between humanity, nature, and God by documenting and exploring the theological dimensions of Javanese mysticism.

Javanese mysticism is a system of thought that illustrates the Javanese worldview of the universe, humanity, and their relationship with God (Haryati, 2017). The universe is perceived not merely as a physical entity but also as a symbol of divine manifestation, portraying the harmonious relationship between the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (humanity) (Yudari et al., 2024). Research on the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism is urgent, as it can explain how local wisdom serves as a philosophical and theological foundation relevant to contemporary spiritual issues.

The Javanese community holds a unique perspective on God, often shaped by a fusion of various religions and beliefs, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and indigenous Javanese spirituality known as *Kejawen*. Within *Kejawen* traditions, God is frequently referred to with terms such as *Sang Hyang Tunggal*, *Sang Hyang Widhi*, or *Gusti Allah* (Wisnumurti, 2012). These names reflect the belief that God is the source of all existence in the universe. Furthermore, the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism is rooted in the conviction that God is present in all physical and metaphysical things (Ardiman, 2023). This belief is embodied in the concept of harmony and balance through *manunggaling kawula Gusti* (the union of the servant with God), which forms the core of Javanese spirituality. This understanding encourages the Javanese to treat nature with profound reverence, as it is considered sacred and imbued with high spiritual value

(Rafsanjani, 2019:39). This principle is evident in various traditions, such as customary ceremonies, arts, and architecture, where cosmic symbols are often employed to illustrate the relationship between humanity, nature, and God.

The philosophical perspective on divinity is vital as cultural heritage and relevant in addressing contemporary issues of spirituality (Faris, 2023; Ardana et al., 2024). Amid ecological crises, spiritual disorientation, and modern social fragmentation, the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism offers insights into the importance of maintaining balanced relationships between humanity, God, and the universe. For instance, Haryati (2017) notes in her research that the principle of harmony taught in Javanese mysticism can serve as an ethical and philosophical foundation for fostering better relationships between humans and nature amidst the challenges of modernization and resource exploitation. In this context, understanding nature as a manifestation of God holds philosophical significance and practical implications for shaping human ethics toward the environment and society.

This research is crucial for preserving the intellectual heritage of the archipelago. Javanese mysticism embodies universal values that, while rooted in local traditions, align with global philosophical discourses on God and the universe (Geertz, 1976; Mulder, 1998). As a cultural product rich in philosophical meaning, this worldview deserves to be a reference for reconstructing spiritual foundations often neglected in the modern era.

This study also contributes to building a bridge between local spirituality and global academic discourse. In Javanese mysticism, God is often understood through the symbolism of the universe as His representation. This perspective parallels the philosophy of nature in Western traditions, exemplified by thinkers like Spinoza, who viewed God as immanent in all things. Thus, Javanese mysticism provides an alternative framework for cross-cultural theological discussions, which have long been dominated by Western thought.

This analysis is also relevant in responding to contemporary environmental crises and spiritual challenges. Javanese mysticism teaches the principle of harmony between humanity and nature, offering inspiration for developing a spirituality-based ecological approach. This perspective proposes a paradigm shift from exploiting nature positioning it as an integral part of human spiritual life. This study also strengthens Indonesia's cultural identity amidst the currents of globalization, which often threaten the sustainability of local traditions. By documenting and analyzing the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism, this research contributes to preserving local wisdom while enhancing Indonesia's intellectual contribution to the international academic arena (Koentjaraningrat, 1984).

This article aims to bridge local insights with global perspectives, significantly contributing to developing spirituality and ecological discourse. In this context, understanding and documenting the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism is an effort to preserve highly valuable cultural and spiritual heritage. Beyond this, the article creates space for cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue by illustrating how the Javanese integrate various belief elements to build an inclusive and harmonious understanding of God and the universe.

By exploring symbols, myths, and cultural practices, this article examines the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism. It includes how the Javanese define God, perceive the universe as His manifestation, and its impact on their lifestyles and religious practices. The findings are expected to provide deep insights into the richness of Javanese philosophy and spirituality, which remain relevant to modern life. Furthermore, this article serves as a foundation for developing studies that connect local traditions with

global issues such as spirituality, ecology, and sustainability while enriching the dialogue on the role of religion and culture in shaping human worldviews.

II. METHOD

This study employs the library research method as the primary approach to analyze and understand the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism. The selection of this method is based on the philosophical, theological, and cultural nature of the research, which necessitates an in-depth examination of written sources. Data were collected from various literature, including classical Javanese texts and academic research findings in journals, books, and scientific articles. Secondary documents related to Javanese mysticism, religion, and culture also serve as critical references.

Data analysis was conducted through a philosophical approach to explore Javanese mysticism views as a reflection of the concept of divinity, a theological approach to understanding the relationship between God, humanity, and the universe in Javanese religious traditions, and a cultural approach to interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in the beliefs and cultural practices of Javanese mysticism. Each source was critically analyzed using internal criticism, which examines the authenticity of content and context, and external criticism to ensure the sources' validity and relevance to the research topic.

Once the data were analyzed, the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism was developed by synthesising ideas from various literatures. This process aims to understand how the universe is viewed as a manifestation of God in Javanese mysticism and to explore the relevance of this perspective to modern human life. The results of this analysis were then tested against major theoretical frameworks, such as Eastern metaphysical philosophy, to ensure the consistency and depth of the findings. Thus, this library research approach provides a foundation for a comprehensive and reflective understanding of the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism and its relationship with the harmony between God, humanity, and the universe.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Concept of Divinity in Javanese Mysticism

The concept of divinity in Javanese society is deeply rooted in their ancestors' traditional teachings and beliefs, which are influenced mainly by animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. However, these perspectives have been further enriched by local values and Islamic influences that arrived later. The Javanese believe God exists in all His creations, encompassing humans and the universe. Nonetheless, humans and the universe are not regarded as God Himself. This is reflected in the Javanese expression, *Pangeran iku lagging, tan kena kinaya ngapa, pangeran iku maujud, nanging perwujudan iku dudu Pangeran* (Panjaitan et al., 2024), which means that God is eternal and cannot be likened to anything; God manifests, but the manifestation itself is not God.

The Javanese seek the essence of God through spiritual practices such as fasting (*pasa*) and meditating (*tapa*). These are Javanese spiritual disciplines aimed at understanding and drawing closer to God. According to Javanese beliefs, God's transcendent nature can be comprehended through inner senses but cannot be perceived by physical senses (Siswadi, 2022). Javanese views on divinity tend to be syncretic and flexible, reflecting a philosophy of life that upholds balance. Their concept of divinity represents profound and rich local wisdom.

The Javanese also interpret God through symbolic systems, such as those found in the *kidung dandanggula*. In this traditional song, the essence of God is understood as a void or *suwung*. Although this void is indescribable, it is perceived as encompassing

everything, both visible and invisible. This void possesses extraordinary power, capable of moving and governing the entire universe (Wisnumurti, 2012). Nature, as the macrocosm, holds a central position in human life. Based on this understanding, the Javanese began developing their mysticism concepts.

Javanese mysticism is a system of understanding encompassing the worldview and how the Javanese perceive the universe, humanity, and their relationship with God. Humans are called *jagad cilik* (microcosm), representing the small world within themselves. In contrast, the universe is called *jagad gedhe* (macrocosm), encompassing the external world and all elements outside the human self, such as planets, stars, and natural elements. In Javanese mysticism, the interplay between the macrocosm and the microcosm depends on the leading actor (*lakon*) of life, which is the human being. Within the macrocosm, humans are positioned in the concept of the *mandala* circle a symbol of balance, order, and perfection, generating energy to achieve harmony (Panjaitan, 2024).

The Javanese believe that various elements of nature, such as wood, stones, and trees, contain spiritual power, a notion influenced by dynamism. Based on this belief, they strive to align the universe (macrocosm) with themselves (microcosm). The Javanese see the universe as reflected in the human self, and humans as a small representation of the entire cosmos, as everything in the universe is also present within themselves. This worldview encourages certain rituals often associated with mysticism (Endraswara, 2018).

Humans are regarded as responsible for maintaining harmony between themselves (*jagad cilik*) and the universe (*jagad gedhe*). This harmony is seen as a form of devotion to God, who created everything in balance. Traditions such as *bersih desa* (village purification) and *slametan* are ways in which the Javanese maintain a harmonious relationship with nature as a tribute to God (Awalin, 2018). Rituals like *nyadran* (pilgrimage to ancestral graves) and *kenduri* also reflect reverence for God through the intermediary of ancestors. The Javanese believe that ancestors who have united with God can act as mediators in seeking God's protection.

Javanese mysticism teaches the duality of life, such as day and night, male and female, good and bad. This duality is not meant to oppose but to create harmony. These concepts are understood theoretically and practiced in daily life through various traditions, rituals, and symbols. As Hakim (2023) explains, in the idea of *tan kena kinayangapa, cedak tanpa senggolan, adoh tanpa wangenan*, God is perceived as an entity that cannot be sensed or imagined, close without physical contact, and far without spatial boundaries. While beyond human imagination, the Javanese profoundly believe in God's existence.

To understand God, humans require intermediaries, so God is represented by divine names and attributes referred to as *Tu* or *To*, meaning mystical power. The concept of *Tu* or *To* in Javanese belief is thought to manifest in various objects or elements associated with names containing these terms. Examples include *wa-Tu* (stone), *Tu-gu* (monument), *Tu-ngkub* (sacred structure), *Tu-k* (spring), *Tu-ban* (waterfall), *Tu-mbak* (spear), *To-san* (heirloom), *To-pong* (crown), and *To-ya* (water) (Hakim, 2023). Through these symbols, humans can recognize the existence of God.

In Javanese tradition, God is often called *Sang Hyang Tunggal* (The One), *Kawula Gusti* (Master and Servant), or *Sang Hyang Widhi*. These references signify respect for God's transcendent and immanent nature. God is considered beyond human comprehension yet close and present in all aspects of life. The Javanese deeply believe that God is the origin of everything (*sangkan dumadi*) and the ultimate goal of all existence (*paraning dumadi*). This philosophy suggests that humans, nature, and all worldly creations originate from God and will ultimately return to Him. This concept reflects a

holistic worldview in which all beings are integral parts of a cosmos centered on God (Wisnumurti, 2012).

Furthermore, divinity in Javanese mysticism is often symbolized through art, architecture, and tradition. One of the most renowned symbols is the *gunungan* in *wayang kulit*. The *gunungan* represents the universe with God as its center. It contains symbols of life, such as the tree of life, animals, and elements that signify God's presence in all aspects of the world (Abdullah, 2019). The design of Javanese palaces and temples also embodies the mysticism of divinity. For instance, the layout of the Yogyakarta Palace reflects the relationship between the human world (middle realm), the divine world (upper realm), and the underworld. Similarly, with its tiered structure, Borobudur Temple represents humans' spiritual journey toward enlightenment and closeness to God (Dolan & Dolan, 2021).

3.2 The Universe as a Manifestation of God in Javanese Tradition

The Javanese community holds a profound and philosophical view of the universe, deeply rooted in rich traditional beliefs and cultural heritage (Krishna, 2021). In their perspective, the universe is seen as a manifestation of the supreme God, a reflection of His presence and power. This understanding is religious and mysticism, where humans, nature, and God are interconnected in a harmonious unity (Donder, 2007). In Javanese culture, nature is not merely a physical environment but also a spiritual and cultural concept that encompasses the interconnectedness of all living beings. This understanding influences daily life, traditions, and rituals and shapes their worldview, guiding actions towards sustainable living and community resilience.

In Javanese thought, the universe is divided into three main realms: *alam purwa*, the primordial realm, known as *sonya rur* or *awang-uwung*, where everything is empty and unformed; *alam madya*, the current world where humans live and real life unfolds; and *alam wasana*, the eternal realm (*kalanggengan*), representing the final stage of human life after leaving the mortal world. These three realms form a unified cycle of life known as *Cakra Manggilingan* (Endraswara, 2003). This division illustrates the passage of time—past, present, and future signifying that human life is interconnected and continuously flows from creation to eternal existence.

The Javanese believe living in harmony with nature ensures peace and prosperity for themselves and future generations. The existence of the universe and everything within it does not stand alone but is inherently dependent on God (Simuh, 1988). The Javanese conceptualize God as emanating His presence, with creation being a manifestation of His existence, as expressed in *Serat Jatimurti*. This belief fosters the idea that God governs all life and is regarded as *Kang Murbeng Tuwuh* (the Sustainer of Life) (Samidi, 2016). One of the key values in the Javanese worldview is the importance of balance. The universe is perceived as a system created by God with perfect equilibrium. Mountains, forests, rivers, and oceans each have roles in maintaining the harmony of the ecosystem (Suwito, 2001).

Nature is central to Javanese traditional rituals and ceremonies (Putri et al., 2022). It is believed that the natural world is imbued with spiritual energy, and by respecting and protecting it, individuals can maintain harmonious relationships with the unseen forces governing the universe. In Javanese culture, every aspect of nature, from mountains to rivers, is considered sacred and worthy of reverence. This belief is reflected in traditions and ceremonies performed to ensure the well-being of the community and the environment. Through these traditions, the Javanese strive to maintain balance and harmony in life and the world around them (Amin, 2000). The interconnection between

nature and spirituality is deeply embedded in Javanese culture, shaping how individuals interact with their environment.

The manifestation of God in nature is evident in every component of the natural world, as nature is considered filled with spiritual energy. These elements of nature are not merely physical entities but serve as mediums through which humans can connect with God. By honouring and respecting these manifestations, the Javanese believe they can maintain harmonious relationships with the spiritual realm and ensure their well-being and prosperity (Suseno, 1984). They think they can achieve spiritual balance and inner peace by living in harmony. Ultimately, the Javanese view the Earth as a sacred and interconnected web of life, where every living being plays a vital role in maintaining cosmic order (Thohari, 2022).

Additionally, the Javanese believe violating the balance between humans and nature can lead to physical and spiritual disasters (Thohari, 2022; Syukur, 2023; Mamahit, 2021). For example, excessive exploitation of nature driven by greed is thought to provoke nature's "wrath" in natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes. Spiritually, such violations are also seen as disobedience to God's will. Therefore, maintaining harmony with nature is part of worship and devotion to the Creator. The Javanese interpret natural phenomena like earthquakes, eclipses, and volcanic eruptions as signs or messages from God. These events are often considered warnings, prompting individuals to reflect on their actions and seek forgiveness for transgressions (Panjaitan, 2024).

Respect for nature is a reminder of the importance of living in harmony with the environment and honouring the divine forces governing it (Le Duc, 2023). By perceiving natural disasters as divine messages, the Javanese are encouraged to prioritize spiritual reflection and introspection (Suseno, 1984). This belief system fosters a sense of humility and reverence for the Earth and its elements. Through their relationship with the environment, individuals are inspired to live with mindfulness and gratitude, recognizing the balance of the world around them. Ultimately, the Javanese cultural reverence for nature is a guiding principle for ethical living and spiritual growth (Andriyanto et al., 2022).

3.3 Philosophical and Practical Implications of the Concept of Divinity in Javanese Mysticism

Javanese mysticism, as part of the spiritual traditions of the Nusantara, reflects a concept of divinity that unites theological, philosophical, and cosmic dimensions. The idea of divinity in Javanese tradition is often associated with the teachings of *Sang Hyang Tunggal*, emphasizing the oneness of God as the centre of universal existence. In this tradition, humans are considered integral to cosmic harmony, representing the relationship between the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (the human self). Within Javanese mysticism, God is often called *Sang Hyang Tunggal*, *Sang Hyang Widi*, or *Gusti*, denoting God as the source of all existence and the force governing and encompassing the entire cosmic order. Javanese philosophy holds that God is transcendent (beyond human comprehension) and immanent (present in everyday life).

The principle of *manunggaling kawula gusti* (the unity between humans and God) lies at the heart of this relationship. According to this view, humans must draw closer to God through a life of harmony with others, nature, and themselves. Additionally, the concept of harmonious dualism, such as *Rwa Bhineda* (two opposing but complementary forces), reflects how God maintains balance in the universe. Philosophically, the idea of divinity in Javanese mysticism profoundly influences how people understand life. Some of the implications include:

1. Life as Microcosm and Macrocosm: The relationship between humans and nature parallels the relationship between humans and God. Therefore, humans are expected to live in alignment with natural laws as a form of devotion to God.
2. Spiritual Awareness and Ethical Living: In Javanese mysticism, the presence of God as the centre of the universe fosters a heightened spiritual awareness. The Javanese are guided to live wisely, acting with *eling* (awareness) and *waspada* (vigilance). Values such as honesty, humility, and devotion are seen as pathways to achieving harmony with God.
3. The Cycle of Life: The concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism also shapes the understanding of life's cyclical nature. Life is seen as a temporary journey toward eventual reunification with the Creator. Consequently, every stage of life, from birth to death, is regarded as sacred and meaningful.

In addition to its philosophical implications, the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism has precise practical applications in daily life. These include:

1. Rituals and Religious Traditions: The Javanese engage in various rituals that reflect their relationships with God, such as *slametan*, *nyadran*, and village cleansing rituals (*selamatan desa*). Spiritual practices like meditation (*samadi*) are also conducted to draw closer to God. These practices embody the belief that closeness to God can be achieved through inner peace and self-control.
2. Harmonious Social Structures: The concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism influences social structures, instilling values of unity, cooperation (*gotong-royong*), and tolerance. Social harmony reflects harmony with God (Sumbulah et al., 2022; Agung et al., 2024).
3. Cultural and Artistic Values: Traditional Javanese arts, such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry), dances, and *gamelan* music, often carry philosophical teachings rooted in divinity. For instance, in *wayang kulit*, stories from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* depict epic battles and convey moral messages about virtue, sacrifice, and humanity's relationship with God (Kresna, 2012).
4. Environmental Stewardship: The Javanese have a strong ecological awareness derived from their mysticism. Nature is viewed as a manifestation of God that must be preserved (Suwito, 2001). Thus, traditional Javanese communities often practice eco-friendly measures, such as protecting sacred forests (*alas alas*), rivers, and mountains, regarded as the abodes of ancestral spirits and divine powers.
5. Simplicity in Life: The concept of divinity also teaches simplicity in living (White, 2022). The Javanese are encouraged to live sufficiently and avoid greed, as God sees everything they possess as entrusted. This simplicity extends beyond material possessions to include a mindset and daily actions.

In the modern context, the concept of divinity in Javanese mysticism remains relevant as a guide for life. Spiritual values such as harmony, wisdom, and mindfulness can help individuals navigate contemporary challenges (Mamirjanovna, 2024; Mallik, 2024; Ahmed, 2023). For example, amidst globalization's materialistic tendencies, the values of simplicity and community taught in Javanese mysticism can provide balance. The Javanese view of the universe as a manifestation of God remains relevant in modern life.

Amid the global environmental crisis, traditional values such as maintaining harmony with nature and respecting God's creations can solve climate change and ecosystem degradation. Awareness of the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and God can help foster more sustainable thinking. Understanding that nature manifests

divine power encourages people to use natural resources wisely and commit to preserving them.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Javanese define God as a transcendent and immanent entity in every aspect of life and the universe. God is understood as *Sang Hyang Tunggal*, *Sang Hyang Widhi*, or *Gusti Pangeran*, the source of all existence. God is also depicted through the concept of harmony between humans, nature, and God. In Javanese spirituality, the idea of *manunggaling kawula Gusti* (the union of the servant and God) lies at the core of this perspective, emphasizing a balanced and harmonious relationship. The universe is viewed as a manifestation of God's power and presence. The Javanese believe that nature is a sacred creation reflecting divine attributes. This is reflected in the view that nature represents the macrocosm, while humans embody the microcosm, with both being interconnected. Harmony between humans and nature is considered a form of devotion to God. Through elements such as mountains, rivers, and forests, nature is revered as an integral part of the spiritual relationship.

This worldview encourages the Javanese to live in harmony with nature and uphold balance in all aspects of life. Religious practices such as *slametan*, *nyadran*, and meditation reflect reverence for God through harmony with nature and fellow humans. These traditions also shape the social structure of Javanese society, emphasizing cooperation (*gotong-royong*) and tolerance. Furthermore, awareness of the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and God inspires the Javanese to care for the environment through worship and respect for God's creation. This perspective illustrates the close relationship between the concept of divinity, mysticism, and the daily practices of the Javanese while highlighting its relevance in addressing modern challenges such as environmental crises and spiritual disorientation.

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***Shinta Nurziana (Corresponding Author)**

Department of Philosophy, Universitas Gadjah Mada
Bulaksumur, Caturtunggal, Kapenewon Depok, Kabupaten Sleman, Yogyakarta,
Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55281
Email: shintanurziana2000@mail.ugm.ac.id



Thoriqi Firdaus

Department of Natural Science Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta
Jl. Colombo No.1, Karang Malang, Caturtunggal, Kec. Depok, Kabupaten Sleman,
Yogyakarta, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55281
Email: thoriqifirdaus.20213@student.uny.ac.id
