

The Concept of Ugliness according to Ibn Dabbagh al-Qayrawani

Hachani Mohamed Redha^{1*}

¹ University of Batna 1- Haj Lakhdar- Algeria, Laboratory of Dialogue of Civilizations and Globalization, mohamedredha.hachani@univ-batna.dz

Received: 01 / 01 /2026

Accepted: 01 / 03 /2026

Published: 01/10/2026

Abstract: Ibn al-Dabbagh believes that ugliness is incidental to existence and that beauty is essential. He emphasises that the absence of perfection leads to the absence of beauty and thus to the emergence of ugliness. Ibn al-Dabbagh believes that the most important obstacles preventing a being from achieving perfection, and thus beauty, are darkness, i.e. matter and its associated immoral qualities, indulgence in material desires, and the existence of these obstacles, which are false and illusory. Therefore, ugliness is also false, since true and authentic existence belongs to God alone, who is characterised by beauty, goodness and absolute truth. The idea of affirming these attributes in their perfection for the divine essence and realising them in it is the purpose of Islamic law, which is based on the sanctification and purification of the divine essence in its names, attributes, actions and everything related to it. If we say otherwise, that is, that ugliness exists and its existence is authentic, and that ugliness can be absolute ugliness, we would be attributing the attribute of ugliness to the divine essence, and God is far above what they describe, which confirms that our thinker did not formulate his theory of negative aesthetics: Ugliness on purely religious and moral grounds, but went beyond that and innovated by giving it an ontological basis related to the concept of essential existence: which is for the divine essence alone, and everything else is a false, non-essential existence destined for destruction.

Key words: Ugliness; Beauty; The opposite of beauty; Aesthetics; Islam; Perfection.

* Hachani Mohamed Redha

I- Introduction :

The philosophy of art and aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that studies human products, namely human feelings, emotions and ideas embodied in works that are called artistic and described as beautiful. It attempts to subject artistic and aesthetic phenomena to research into the conditions of artistic work, the standards and theories of beauty, and the basis for value judgements and controls in this field.

In this context, we find that Islamic aesthetic thought is a very important and distinctive link in the chain of human aesthetic thought. We find that the aesthetic discourse within this thought was not insignificant; on the contrary, it has an important place that we cannot overlook or ignore. Suffice it to say that this discourse is closely linked to all studies related to Islamic doctrine and to the complete and certain knowledge of those who worship Him, His names and attributes – the names of the self, the names of the attributes, and the names of the actions – as well as being linked to the study of theology, love, pleasure, the senses and human powers. Were it not for the few serious scientific studies presented by some of those who took it upon themselves to explore this intellectual wealth, it could be said that this thought still suffers from a lack of awareness of its cognitive value, while we find that many specialists have almost complete knowledge of the subtleties and subtleties of classical Greek or modern and contemporary Western aesthetic thought!

Therefore, there is a cultural and scientific need to study our intellectual aesthetic heritage and to root ancient and contemporary Islamic aesthetic theses in contemporary practice, i.e. by using contemporary cognitive tools.

In this article, we have attempted to draw attention to the philosophical aesthetic thought of a Sufi model, namely Ibn al-Dabbagh al-Qayrawani^{**}. We chose this thinker as a model for study because he was one of the Sufis in Islamic Morocco who wrote on this subject, which was crystallised in his treatise, one chapter of which dealt with the reality of perfection, beauty and majesty () and the feelings associated with them, as well as the negative aesthetic values of ugliness and repugnance associated with them. and even if we do not say that his treatise contained an explicit theory about the nature of perfection, beauty and ugliness, it was at least a **distinctive vision** specific to its author, which differed from other visions.

In our study, we adopted a descriptive, comparative, analytical and interpretative approach, based on the author's most important source in this field, his treatise entitled: "The Dawning of the Lights of the Hearts and the Keys to the Secrets of the Unseen". In particular, we find that the author classified the fourth chapter under the title: On the Meaning of Beauty and Perfection According to the Essay, attempting through this work to discover the truth and nature of ugliness in his view, in contrast to beauty, for it is through opposites that things are understood.

In order to extract the aesthetic aspects, in which he formulated his vision of the value of ugliness and the feelings that accompany it, and the nature of aesthetic value. Within the source we have before us. We ask the following question: What is Ibn al-Dabbagh's concept of ugliness? And on what basis does ugliness originate? Is it based solely on the contrast between ugliness and

^{**} – Ibn al-Dabbagh: He is Abu Zayd Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Muhammad al-Ansari al-Asadi al-Qayrawani al-Maliki, known as Ibn al-Dabbagh. a jurist, Sufi, historian and narrator, who was involved in the rational and traditional sciences. He died in 696 AH and was a historian of Kairouan. He wrote a book on the biographies of its people, which formed the basis of the book "Ma'alim al-Iman fi Ma'rifat Ahl al-Qairawan" (Landmarks of Faith in the Knowledge of the People of Kairouan) by al-Qasim ibn Isa al-Naji, who died in 837 AH. He also wrote "History of the Kings of Islam," "Jala al-Afkar fi Manaqib al-Ansar" (The Clarification of Ideas on the Virtues of the Ansar), and "Mashariq Anwar al-Qulub wa Mafatih Asrar al-Ghayb" (The Dawnings of the Lights of the Hearts and the Keys to the Secrets of the Unseen), which we relied on as the primary and sole source in our study. It is a verified copy by H. Ritter of a copy by Brockelman, found in the Tübingen Library in Germany alongside some of the oldest books by Sufis on divine love, such as the book "Atf al-Alf al-Ma'luf 'ala al-Lam al-Ma'tuuf" by Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad al-Dailam, and the treatise "Jamhat al-Naha 'an Lamhat al-Maha" by Fakhr al-Din Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Fayruz Abadi, and the treatise "Nasl al-Asrar wa Sir al-Asrar" by the same author. For more information on his biography, refer to the following sources: Kashf al-Zunoon by Haji Khalifa (5/526), Hadiya al-Arifin by al-Baghdadi (1/526), Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin by Omar Kahala (5/185), and Nayl al-Ibtihaj by al-Tanbukti (163-164). Ibn al-Dabbagh: Kitab Mashariq Anwar al-Qulub wa Mafatih Asrar al-Ghayb, ed. H. Ritter, Dar Sadir, Beirut, n.d., pp. H-W.

beauty, with purely value-based roots (religious, aesthetic, ethical)? Or does it transcend to another dimension, and if so, what is it?

1. Ibn al-Dabbagh's concept of ugliness:

Islamic aesthetic thought's interest in the concept of ugliness (*) is secondary to the great interest it has shown in beauty and majesty. This ranking is not due to a lack of thought about what is ugly, but rather to the fact that beauty is the origin of all beings and phenomena, while ugliness is a temporary phenomenon caused by internal or external factors. Therefore, the secondary interest stems from the secondary nature of ugliness in the world, for God is beautiful and creates only what is beautiful (**). This is the same assumption made by the axioms of the theory of emanation: "This ugliness cannot be intrinsic to the world. If it were, then according to the chain of emanation, ugliness would be one of God's attributes" ⁽¹⁾. This is absolutely impossible to attribute to the divine essence. Glory be to God above what they describe. This is nothing but an expression of the majesty, beauty and perfection of the divine essence.

If beauty and majesty are linked to perfection in Ibn al-Dabbagh's view in a causal and existential manner, then ugliness is linked to non-existence, and not just any non-existence, but rather the absence of the characteristics inherent in the fixed perfections of a thing's type and nature. In other words, that which does not attain its proper perfection is ugly. Ugliness, in this sense, is imperfection, which is the same fundamental idea in Ibn al-Dabbagh's definition of ugliness. Since he defined perfection from the outset as "the secret of beauty's existence," it is the cause of its appearance, as he said: "This is apparent perfection, and souls are affected by it because it is the manifestation of beauty" ⁽²⁾. If this cause—i.e., perfection—is absent, it will necessarily lead to the absence of beauty. He also emphasised that beauty is inherent in perfection, saying: "If this perfection **is found** in it, beauty **is found** with it, and if **not, then not**. Perfection is its manifestation and calls for its existence. Therefore, the soul loves perfection, because beauty only exists in comparison to it." ⁽³⁾ From this, we will have something that is not beautiful and may be ugly, in a sense.

We say "**potentially**" here because not all thinkers believe that the absence of beauty is ugliness. There are those who do not place ugliness in opposition to beauty or as its opposite. If most philosophers believe, like the Sufis, that ugliness must be opposed to beauty, justifying this by saying that the beloved system of values and the harmony between our three values must collapse and a philosophical dilemma arise if we do not place the ugly opposite the beautiful. They have

⁽¹⁾ Dr. Saad al-Din Kulaib: Previous reference, p. 194.

^(**) - God is beautiful and has created only beautiful creatures and does only beautiful deeds, for He is the absolute and pure good, and evil is merely the absence of good, for it is merely a judgement and judgements are relative. This is in accordance with the words of the Prophet, peace be upon him, in his supplication to his Lord, the Most High: "All good is in Your hands, and evil is not from You." This hadith is reported in Al-Tirmidhi, Book of Supplications, No. 3344. Dr. Suhaila Abdul-Baath Al-Targuman, op. cit., p. 244.

^(*) - Beauty and ugliness according to al-Ghazali: One of the points of controversy in Islamic thought is the subject of beauty and ugliness. The disagreement revolves around the role of reason and Sharia in knowing beauty and ugliness, and then reckoning for that in the hereafter. The Mu'tazilites agreed that beauty and ugliness must be known through reason, and that embracing beauty and avoiding ugliness is also obligatory. As for the Sunnis, they say that reason does not indicate the beauty or ugliness of something in terms of God's commandment in Sharia, and they define beauty as that which is praised by Sharia, and ugliness as that which is condemned by Sharia. Zaki Mahmoud Adl al-Din Salim: Man in al-Ghazali's Philosophy and Sufism, p. 53.

⁽³⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh, previous source, p. 45.

⁽²⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 39.

linked beauty and ugliness in the field of aesthetics with the same relationship that links good and evil in the field of ethics, so that truth, good and beauty form a trinity of absolute values, which must have their opposites in absolute non-values, namely falsehood, evil and ugliness ⁽⁴⁾. This is the view of philosophers, but Sufis replace falsehood with either nothingness or falsehood as the opposite of truth. However, we find those who disagree with this position and assert that the absence of beauty is not evidence of the presence of ugliness, but rather: "It is simply unattractive or neutral from an aesthetic point of view; it is the pure negative absence of beauty. Any subject that is neither beautiful nor ugly does not create feelings of aesthetic pleasure or displeasure in us. It will be an example of the non-beautiful, like the pure abstractions of science, which are not beautiful, but also not ugly; rather, they are non-beautiful." ⁽⁵⁾.

If we return to the previous paragraph, and specifically to the idea that ugliness is the absence of beauty and its opposite, whether in Ibn al-Dabbagh or Ibn Sina, we find that they were influenced, like most of the luminaries of Islamic thought, by both rationalism and mysticism. They followed the pattern of their influence by the Platonic theory of emanation and the idea of the Platonic world of ideals, so that ugliness was placed opposite beauty, and ugliness occurs when the characteristics and essential features of beauty are absent. This only occurs when obstacles prevent a being from existing, developing and progressing towards its proper perfection, thus preventing it from attaining perfection and realising its potential.

Ibn al-Dabbagh emphasised that the most important obstacles preventing a being from achieving its perfection are matter, i.e. that dark density and all its attributes, as if preventing the image of an existing thing from appearing in its entirety and perfection, which necessitates the manifestation of ugliness upon it, and ugliness also occurs if beauty is absent because matter loses its perfection, Ibn al-Dabbagh gives us the example of the beauty of a plant: "If its freshness is gone and its image is reflected, it becomes debris" ⁽⁶⁾, and the human soul is repelled by it because of the ugliness that has befallen it. Another example of the beauty of the human image is "one whose temperament is dominated by melancholy" ⁽⁷⁾. The human soul is also repelled by it, even if the image was previously beloved, according to Ibn al-Dabbagh, who asserts that the human soul "will be repelled by any **image that is imperfect or distorted**" ⁽⁸⁾.

This proves that Ibn al-Dabbagh based his concept of ugliness on the obstacles to beauty, especially physical ones, which obstruct matter. Deformity in creation, the loss of freshness, the decay of youth, the transformation from a green, fresh body to wreckage, and the predominance of melancholy—all these words and phrases he used refer to obstacles related to matter, whether it be the organic matter of plants, the matter of the human body, or the matter of any other creature. It is well known that matter or substance is the bearer of images and forms, so if an image falls into ugliness, this is not fundamentally due to its nature. "Rather, it is due to the nature of the matter that

⁽⁵⁾ - Ibid., p. 95.

⁽⁴⁾ - Walters, Stice: *The Meaning of Beauty: A Theory of Aesthetics*, trans. Imam Abd al-Fattah Imam, Supreme Council of Culture, Datt, 2000, pp. 93-94.

⁽⁸⁾ - Ibid., same page.

⁽⁷⁾ - Ibid., same page.

⁽⁶⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 51.

did not accept planning, shaping, and correction, due to specific phenomena" ⁽⁹⁾. Acceptance is the origin of matter, just as beauty is the origin of form, and indeed of existence as a whole, as Ibn al-Dabbagh has previously established. When an image falls into ugliness, the cause of this is due to the material and what obstructed it during planning, shaping and correction. Did not Ibn al-Dabbagh affirm that absolute divine perfection and beauty **are** the origin, which is the true existence (), and that anything other than that is a **contingent**, created existence, and if measured against it, it is false () ^(*) and non-existence and evil? He went even further and did not consider it to be only a false, contingent existence, but considered our statement of its existence to be a kind of metaphor.

That being the case, it is not surprising that **beauty is the origin** and foundation of this existence, and **ugliness is the accident**. This statement should be understood in its broadest sense. That is, beauty is linked to the image, which is necessarily complete, regardless of its bias in matter. Bias, in itself, is an accident that interferes with the image. This is because the origin of the image is abstraction, as Islamic thought dictates. From this, it is emphasised that the abstract image is more beautiful than the embodied image. This is because the image, in its abstraction, remains true to its spiritual nature, which is eternal and everlasting, without being tainted by matter that is destined to decay and perish. In other words, the spiritual beauty of the abstract image is not tainted by material density, nor does it mix with it, and is therefore in a more noble state than when it is mixed with it. When the image connects with matter, it is embodied in that dense darkness and descends from the infinite honour of its abstraction to the limitation of its bias towards a physical body. With this bias, it has entered into its opposite, which is matter. It thus acquires the dual qualities of delicacy and density, and the image and matter are separated. "This duality is inherent only in the physical worlds. As for the spiritual worlds, their origin is unity, the unity of image or gentleness. Except for God, who is neither image nor matter, who is not biased and does not adapt" ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The solution of the image in matter is not its attainment of perfection, but rather the completion of matter. Matter only attains perfection when it unites with the image, whereas the image is complete in its existence before and after it is resolved in matter. Indeed, matter is **a prison** ^(*) for the image. For in its abstract world, it was free and unlimited, but upon its connection with matter, its limitations were defined. However, this prison does not affect the perfection and beauty of the image. For the dense does not affect the subtle, as Ibn al-Dabbagh said: "**For the dense does not affect the subtle**" ⁽¹¹⁾. The subtle is connected only to the subtle, and vice versa. "For the subtle soul is attracted only to its equal or its superior, even if from behind a veil, and there is no connection between the subtle and the dense" ⁽¹²⁾. What we want to emphasise in this regard is that matter is, in essence, an obstacle that obstructs the image, transforming it from a state of abstraction

^(*) - This is based on the meaning of the saying of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him: "**Everything other than Allah is false.**" Hadith agreed upon, narrated by Al-Bukhari/6147 and Muslim 1767. According to Sufis, true divine existence is manifested in the words of the Prophet, peace be upon him: "**Allah was and there was nothing with Him, and He is now as He was.**" Hadith: Al-Bukhari 3191/7418.

⁽⁹⁾ - Dr Saad al-Din Kuleib: Previous reference, p. 195.

⁽¹⁰⁾ - Dr. Saad al-Din Kuleib: Previous reference, p. 196.

⁽¹²⁾ - Same source, p. 117.

⁽¹¹⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 44.

^(*) - **Prison**: As we have said, Ibn al-Dabbagh considered matter and dark density to be a prison for the spiritual essence, and we find this explicitly in his saying (from Al-Kamil):

Confused in **the prison** of events, bound * * * * Take the beloved in **the lowest depths**
He forgot knowledge and **subtleties**, so he sought life from the dead and frozen.

to a state of embodiment, and bringing it down from the realm of abstractions, which are contrary to matter, to the realm of base materials. Add to that if this accident, which is matter, is also obstructed by something that prevents it from obtaining its image and accepting it in the best possible way! How ugly is matter in this case?

In any case, the occurrence of ugliness in existence is a rare occurrence. However, this occurrence has a specific function, for without ugliness, the meaning and value of beauty would not be known, and as they say, things are only known by their opposites. This proves what we mentioned earlier about the existence of ugliness being a reality, for the reality of **ugliness** seems doubtful (*). As long as ugliness is necessary in order to reveal beauty and exalt its value, it is obvious that it should not be reprehensible ugliness, or ugliness at all, in the end.

If we return to Ibn al-Dabbagh's idea that the origin of existence is beauty, goodness and truth, and the idea of proving these qualities in their perfection to the divine self and their realisation in it, and therefore nothing exists except God, we find ourselves, from this perspective, faced with a seemingly natural assumption that ugliness is not ugliness in essence—as an inevitable consequence of the fact that nothing exists except God; and God is beautiful, and from Him there is no room for ugliness. "Rather, it is beauty, but of a special kind. That is, it is beauty on the level of function, where the beauty of the beautiful appears, and without it, beauty would not have that appearance" (13).

This is the same idea expressed by contemporary art philosophy and aesthetics, which considered that: **"Ugliness is sometimes beauty**, simply because it is imitation, that is, imagination rather than reality. We say that this is true, but if we admire it, we admire first the artist's realistic value, and then something realistic and alive, for which the imitation of beauty is only a means of expression. The imitation of ugliness and pain (especially physical pain that does not involve moral elevation) is not an essential element of art, but rather, like all imitation and imagination, the result of a kind of impotence. We can explain the depiction of ugliness in the arts in general by the artist's desire to give his vision more possibility, due to his inability to give it reality itself. **Some ugliness is necessary for art, because it is sometimes a condition of life**. It is similar to the wrinkles and creases that tourists in polar regions impose on their faces of their own volition, to revive their muscles and prevent their features from freezing in the cold" (14).

(*) - Rodan says in a commentary on Baudelaire's poem: " **The character of the ugly is often more apparent and stronger than that of the beautiful**, because the inner truth may be revealed with ease and simplicity, in the features of a sick person's face, or in the lines of a malicious countenance, or in everything that is deformed, withered or diseased. Whereas it may not be revealed so easily in regular features and a symmetrical face." Since the power of character is the origin of beauty in art, we often notice that the uglier something is in nature, the more beautiful it is in art. Therefore, the only thing that is ugly in art is that which lacks character or personality. I mean that which is stripped of all external or internal truth. As for an artist worthy of the name, everything in nature is beautiful. For when his eyes courageously accept all external truth, they then find no difficulty in discerning the inner truth that lies behind it, as if they were reading an open book. Charles Lalou: Provided that we understand that this thing may be beautiful or ugly in nature without the slightest concern. Dr. Zakaria Ibrahim: The Problem of Art, pp. 50-51. Among the artistic and literary works that have used ugliness to express beauty are: most of the famous literary stories, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Miser by Al-Jahiz, The Miser by Al-Tawhidi, The Miser by Molière, and the texts of Baudelaire and Nietzsche./ Dr. Ezzat al-Sayyid Ahmad: The Philosophy of Art and Beauty in al-Tawhidi, p. 131.

(13) - Dr. Saad al-Din Kuleib: Previous reference, p. 197.

Consideration, then, is the reason for the existence of ugliness in some beings. And since ugliness achieves this goal—the goal of consideration—it necessarily has a beautiful side, a side that we consider and learn from, and through which we appreciate beauty.

Thus, the function of ugliness lies in revealing beauty and in consideration. In both cases, the ugly performs a positive function. This gives it a beautiful aspect (*).

Ugliness can be defined, in addition to being defined, by deficiency, i.e., the deficiency of beauty by the deficiency of perfection and its characteristics, by discord, i.e., the deficiency described by discord is ugliness. This is what Ibn al-Dabbagh expressed: "Likewise, **the soul is repelled** by the body of a plant if its freshness is gone, its greenness is gone, and its image is reversed, so that it becomes wreckage. Indeed, **it is repelled** by the human image if the radiance of the mind is lost and it becomes dark, like someone overcome by melancholy, even if that image was there before, and it is repelled by every image that is imperfect or deformed in its creation." (15).

The ugly, then, is the incomplete, the discordant, or the deformed. This reminds us of the words of Charles Lalou, the contemporary French aesthetician: "For nature to be ugly, it must appear to have missed its mark, and we must accuse it, to some extent consciously, of having failed to apply an inherent artistic formula, without which it would be inaesthetic. Ugliness in nature is, in principle, a monstrous aberration" () (16). If beauty is defined by Kant as the quality of something that pleases us, i.e. causes us pleasure, then ugliness, according to him, is "that which causes us disgust" () (17). This also reminds us of the words of Russian aesthetician Cherepov, who said that "an ugly object is one that does not speak to us of life or its successful development" () (18).

(14) - Jean-Marie Guillaud: Previous reference, p. 49.

(*) - This idea is very similar to the Western **philosophers of art and beauty** who say that beauty exists in ugliness, or in their terms, "**the beauty of ugliness**." For example, Jean-Marie Guillaud addresses this issue in his book *Questions of Contemporary Art Philosophy*, where he argues that "in the harmony that lies deep within life, and in the solidarity that life presupposes between different members, there is a deep, true beauty that art may attempt to highlight through this bloody distortion in images and forms. However, the artist must then introduce into this distortion what would make life impossible if it were lost, namely balance and proportion. Then we realise the consistency behind the disorder, the harmony behind the abnormality, the reality behind the imagination, and the nature behind the imitation. Therefore, the imitation of deformity in human art is nothing but a necessary means or an indispensable tool. (Imitation: Sully Prudhomme said: "A sculptor can create a wonderful work of art from a hunchback's torso if he can grasp the deep biological cooperation that makes the hump affect the angle of the face and even the features, and then express that proportion between the shapes. This is because people with humps are similar, no matter how different they may be, in that you see the hump wherever you look at their bodies. From this point of view, it can be said that **there is a beautiful hunchback** in the eyes of the sculptor, just as there is a beautiful hunchback in the eyes of the naturalist who admires this harmony between features. Naturally, this beauty is only one of the conditions of pictorial beauty, but artists appreciate it highly because it is essential and rare, and because it requires great powers of observation. In their opinion, those who betray pictorial truth for the sake of imaginary beauty, without taking this truth into account, even if their imagination is poor, "The Expression in Artistic Works, p. 204". So the beauty of the hunchback depicted or sculpted by a great artist, that is, **the beauty of the ugly, is the harmony that lies behind the disorder, I mean the life that achieves order in the heart** of chaos. ... If it is said that the imitation of ugliness and hideousness sometimes has beauty, simply because it is imitation, that is, imagination and not reality, we would say that this is true. . . Do we not feel, when faced with two artistic works that are equally vibrant, that we tend to prefer the more beautiful one? We always feel that beauty is closer to the spirit of poetry and more worthy of creation. In order to understand what Rosencrantz called the beauty of ugliness, we need some artistic culture. When ordinary people watch some of Shakespeare's or Victor Hugo's dramas, they do not feel genuine artistic emotions, but suffer violent emotions that are almost painful. If they are interested in these dramas, it is a savage interest, similar to the Spaniards' interest in watching bullfighting. Don't you hear them say, "How terrible!" They are not interested in analysing characters and traits. In order to appreciate the horror in art, or the **beauty of ugliness**, we must have a scientific interest as well as an imaginative one. Understanding is linking a thing to its causes and consequences; it is generalisation; it is looking beyond this or that ugliness **to see the truth behind it: ugliness is erased from the face of truth. Imitation of ugliness is therefore nothing but imitation** of beauty, that is, of the general cosmic order. Imitation in general tends to become creation, and imagination tends to merge into life. In short, the goal of art is life, and the artist merges into life, imitating only to deceive us into thinking that he is not imitating. / Jean-Marie Guillaud: *Questions of Contemporary Art Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 49-52.

(15) Ibn al-Dabbagh: op. cit., p. 51.

(16) - Nishvsky: *The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality*, translated by Youssef Hallaq. Ministry of Culture, Damascus, 1983. See p. 22.

(17) - Dr Ali Abu Melhem: op. cit., p. 114.

(16) - Charles Lalou: *Principles of Aesthetics*, translated by Khalil Shatta. Dar Damascus, 1982, pp. 75-76.

Ibn al-Dabbagh states: "'We find that the soul naturally recoils from the body of the dead, even if it was loved in life" ⁽¹⁹⁾, the question of the sense of death and its relationship to ugliness. It seems that ugliness is what reminds us of death. It is as if everything that is contrary to life, or represents its opposite, is encompassed by ugliness. "That is, the intense physical inability to carry the gentle spiritual causes it to fall into ugliness" ⁽²⁰⁾. The essence of this inability lies in deficiency on the one hand and incompatibility on the other, which necessarily leads to life not appearing as it should in the physically disabled. It is therefore indicative of death, as it is indicative of ugliness.

Types of ugliness:

Based on all of the above, we conclude that we can only speak of the existence of ugliness in some beings, for we cannot speak of absolute ugliness or total ugliness—by analogy with absolute beauty and total beauty—based on an analysis of the texts of Ibn al-Dabbagh in his book *Al-Mashariq*. there is no such thing as absolute ugliness or total ugliness, "just as there is no such thing as specific ugliness—that is, ugliness specific to a particular type" ^(, 21).

For this reason, we find in Ibn al-Dabbagh's texts only partial ugliness, which, in his opinion, is divided into apparent and hidden.

Outward ugliness is that which is associated with bodies. This has already been explained.

Inner ugliness: that which is related to morality. It is the most heinous type of ugliness, as it is the only true ugliness that exists, according to Ibn al-Dabbagh, especially since he is a Sufi, and it is well known that Sufis **are people of the inner self** ^(*) more than the outer self. They base their entire system of knowledge and values on the unseen world that lies behind the phenomena of things and existence as a whole. In addition, this ugliness is the greatest obstacle between the soul and its attainment of happiness by reaching the presence of God, as it is the ugliness of morals, which cannot have a beautiful face in terms of function. It is specific to humans alone, in their moral relationships with each other and with members of society.

The relationship between immorality and ugliness: Ibn al-Dabbagh defines inner ugliness as vices and immoral acts, which he considers to be types of deficiency, imperfection and flaws that threaten perfection, its existence and attainment. The absence of virtues is moral imperfection, which is inner ugliness. In general, the qualities that prevent beauty and cause inner ugliness lie in the opposites of the cardinal moral virtues, which are wisdom, courage, chastity and justice, according to Ibn al-Dabbagh's classification. Wisdom includes good management, cultural opinion, and correct judgement; courage includes pride, endurance, forbearance, generosity, helpfulness, and

⁽²⁰⁾ - Dr. Saad al-Din Kuleib: Previous reference, p. 199.

⁽¹⁹⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 50.

⁽²¹⁾ - Dr. Saad al-Din Kuleib: Previous reference, p. 199.

^(*) - The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "*The knowledge of the unseen is a secret of Allah, the Almighty, which He reveals to whomever He wills among His servants.*" For this reason, Sufis use symbols and signs to protect secrets from those who are not entitled to them. This knowledge is also supported by his saying in the noble hadith: "**Every verse has an apparent meaning and a hidden meaning, and it has seven apparent meanings and seventy hidden meanings.**" / Dr. Suhaila Abdul-Baath Al-Targuman, previous reference, pp. 249, 251.

dignity; chastity includes prudence, modesty, shyness, forgiveness, patience, generosity, cheerfulness, and contentment⁽²²⁾.

This necessarily means that the opposites and negatives of these virtues are the vices, which are: ignorance, cowardice, greed, and injustice. It is obvious that if the virtues are qualities that promote beauty, then the vices are qualities that promote ugliness, which include: poor management, low opinion, and misjudgement fall under ignorance; humiliation, servility, anxiety, anger, stinginess, and lack of neighbourliness fall under cowardice; lack of modesty, shamelessness, resentment, and panic fall under gluttony; and stinginess, tightness, and eagerness fall under greed. If Ibn al-Dabbagh defines justice as "the proper ordering of these powers and their perfection in fairness, and all the virtues **that uphold the existence of the whole world** fall under it"⁽²³⁾, then it is obvious that it will be countered on the other side by injustice and tyranny, robbery and oppression... etc., which are characteristics of inner ugliness and include all vices and immoral acts⁽²⁴⁾ that disrupt the order and balance of the whole world, if not destroy it.

These vices, which are essentially qualities of deficiency, not only make man an object of ugliness, but also prevent him from attaining his highest goal and ultimate happiness, which is closeness to God. In this moral sense, an ugly person is not only a source of evil and harm to those around him, but also harms himself when he strays from the path of ultimate happiness, thus becoming one of the wretched (from Al-Basit):

O servant of the body, how **hard you labour** in its service * * * * * Do you seek profit in that which is **loss**?

You **must complete the virtues of** the soul * * * * * For you are human by your soul, not by your body⁽²⁵⁾

"The possessor of these desires neither remains with his own self nor is free from pain (resulting from indulging in vices and the remorse that accompanies them - author) nor does he attain happiness in the hereafter, and this is the ultimate misery - we seek refuge in God from it."⁽²⁶⁾ We can also prove that Ibn al-Dabbagh truly acknowledged **the existence** of inner **ugliness** through the passage in which he mentioned "the love of scholars and the best of people, not knowing whether their physical appearance was beautiful or ugly, for he loved only their inner **image**... Such as Hatim al-Tai's love for his generosity and magnanimity, and the love of Umar ibn Ma'di Karb for his courage, and al-Sam'il for his loyalty, and al-Ahnaf ibn Qais for his forbearance."⁽²⁷⁾, where Ibn al-Dabbagh emphasised that people "did not pay attention to the beauty of their outward appearance, and this is evident in himself"⁽²⁸⁾. Rather, they were attracted to their inner beauty, represented by their noble character and virtues. This means that if souls love inner beauty, they will be repelled by and disgusted with inner ugliness, represented by bad character.

⁽²²⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: previous source, p. 42.

⁽²⁴⁾ - Same source, same page.

⁽²³⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 42.

⁽²⁵⁾ - Ibid., p. 100.

⁽²⁸⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 49.

⁽²⁷⁾ - Same source, p. 49.

⁽²⁶⁾ - Ibid., p. 115.

Ibn al-Dabbagh paused at length when discussing issues of evil and inner ugliness, making it a priority among his concerns. This was through his fierce attack on it and his defence of inner moral beauty. Ibn al-Dabbagh emphasises that we are "a nation of good morals, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *'I have been sent to perfect good morals'* ⁽²⁹⁾. Compliance with and obedience to the commands of God and His Messenger is the basis for the great attention and care that Ibn al-Dabbagh gave to the moral aspect, because of its role in beautifying man with noble morals and combating the inner ugliness represented by despicable morals. In other words, there is a correspondence between the inner beauty that reforms the individual and society and **"through which the whole world is redeemed"** ⁽³⁰⁾ and especially with regard to the virtue of justice, which is one of the elements of this beauty, and the inner ugliness that corrupts the individual and society and disrupts the whole world, especially in the flaw of injustice, which is one of the elements of this ugliness. If justice encompasses all virtues and also encompasses all powers in their perfection and moderation, such as mental power, angry power, and sensual power ⁽³¹⁾, then injustice encompasses all shortcomings and also encompasses all powers in their deficiency and extremity. From this perspective, it can be said that injustice has several levels: a psychological level, a moral level, and a political level. Inner ugliness encompasses all these levels, which, if integrated, corrupt both the individual and society ⁽³²⁾.

Therefore, if the mothers of virtues, according to Ibn al-Dabbagh, are the source of inner beauty or moral beauty and its manifestation, they are also a means of attaining and realising ultimate happiness in this world, by enjoying God's satisfaction, and in the hereafter, by being close to Him, which is sought by those of perfect intellect. and the conceptual framework of spiritual, moral, and aesthetic values that an individual should possess is built upon them. From this, the shortcomings and flaws that afflict the perfection of these virtues, foremost among which is injustice, are the most important means of dissipating happiness and leading to misery on all levels.

Feelings associated with ugliness:

As for the feelings and emotions generated when witnessing ugliness and its representation before human senses and perceptions, and those feelings that accompany the manifestation of ugliness, they all fall, according to Ibn al-Dabbagh, under the concept of aversion, which he expressed in several places, including his statement: "One is repelled by all images that are imperfect or distorted" ⁽³³⁾ and "One is repelled by images that are **distorted, inverted, or deficient** or flawed" ⁽³⁴⁾. "We find that the soul **is naturally repelled by the body of the dead**, even if it was loved in life" ⁽³⁵⁾, where this Sufi affirmed that the soul is repelled by the ugly, because seeing it causes pain

⁽³¹⁾ - Same source, see pp. 41-42.

⁽³⁰⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous reference, see pp. 41-42.

⁽²⁹⁾ - Same source, p. 41. The hadith was narrated by Imam Malik in Al-Muwatta and Imam Ahmad from the hadith of Mu'adh ibn Jabal, and Al-Tabarani from the hadith of Jabir. Good manners and good behaviour are all inner beauty, and their opposite is inner ugliness. The wise Sharia commands us to adhere to the former and reject the latter. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: **"My Lord has taught me good manners and I have learned them well."** The hadith was narrated by Ibn al-Sam'ani, with a broken chain of transmission from Ibn Mas'ud: Kashf al-Ghita, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, p. 707. See also Dr. Suhaila Abd al-Ba'ith al-Tirmidhi, op. cit., p. 482.

⁽³²⁾ - Dr. Saad al-Din Kulaib: Previous reference, p. 200.

⁽³⁵⁾ - Ibid., p. 50.

⁽³⁴⁾ - Same source, p. 40.

and distress and leaves behind turmoil and discomfort, due to the imperfection that has befallen the perfection of the being and the discord that characterises it. Therefore, the emotional psychological effect of ugliness is contrary and opposite to the effect ^(*) produced by seeing and imagining beauty. While the latter produces a positive effect of comfort, ugliness produces a negative effect on the soul, causing the recipient to feel disgust, distance themselves and turn away from it. Therefore, according to Ibn al-Dabbagh, the ugly will necessarily be hated and detested, because it is the opposite of beauty, which is: "loved by nature and the soul, since a person who is free from defects loves a beautiful image and is repelled by an image that is distorted, deformed, or flawed ⁽³⁶⁾ necessarily loved and adored. "For this reason, it seems incorrect to speak of aesthetic pleasure accompanying ugliness. Since pain is one of the accompaniments of ugliness, it is not permissible to speak of this pleasure" ⁽³⁷⁾.

Through the above texts by Ibn al-Dabbagh, we can confirm that he has proven the fact that the aversion caused by seeing ugliness is a negative psychological effect associated with it, but this does not necessarily mean that the pleasure of ugliness is a negative pleasure. Rather, it is a positive pleasure, the essence of which is to recognise flaws and causes of discord, and to take heed and learn from them so that they do not seep into us ⁽³⁸⁾, which, according to him, makes us more immune to falling into ugliness. From this perspective, the pain caused by ugliness, on a psychological level, is transformed into pleasure on an aesthetic level. It is the pleasure of avoiding everything that is repulsive, deformed, deficient, detestable or abhorrent. Here, the role of ugliness emerges and its effectiveness becomes apparent, in line with the idea of ^{The} beauty of ugliness ^(*) which we referred to earlier in relation to Western philosophers of art and aestheticians. Herein lies the positive relationship with what is ugly, without this meaning contamination by it. It is positive on **an existential level**, not on the **subjective level of** ugliness ^(**). This is the meaning referred to by Ibn al-Dabbagh when he said: Among those who love God Almighty, there are those who are overcome by the intoxication of love and appear to be in a state of bliss, embracing caution and accepting all

⁽³³⁾ Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 51.

^(*) - Walter Steiss believes that ugliness—at first glance—leads not to aesthetic pleasure, but to aesthetic pain or aesthetic displeasure, as the word "pain" is stronger than it should be. Since pleasure and displeasure are opposites, he also assumes that ugliness is the opposite of beauty. However, he believes that we will see that this way of looking at the subject is based on an error or mistake. The feeling of pain is aroused by the ugly, but it is not an aesthetic feeling, because the pure aesthetic feeling produced by the ugly is, on the contrary, a feeling of pleasure. Although this statement seems paradoxical, he believes he can justify this paradox, arguing that those who believe that ugliness cannot be an element of beautiful art have tended to produce forms of beauty that are emotional and tasteless, as we find in the paintings of the English painter F. Leighton (1830-1896), who took a classical approach in his work. Among his most famous works are Hercules Wrestling Death, Andromache Captive, The Art of War and Peace, Venus Undressing to Bathe, and The Gardens of Hesperides. Walters Stiths asserts that those who believed that ugliness had a place in art produced powerful, profound and vivid works of art. However, aestheticians had trouble justifying what these artists produced, as all serious thinkers rejected the idea that ugliness in art serves as a foundation for strengthening the impact of beauty—as is often said—as a superficial and false idea. / Walters Stith: Previous reference, pp. 97–98.

⁽³⁶⁾ Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, pp. 39–40.

⁽³⁷⁾ - Dr Saad al-Din Kuleib: op. cit., p. 203.

^(**) - Ugliness that becomes beautiful is not the same thing, but rather what appears to us as a characteristic of something that is completely unattractive, or repulsive behaviour or a reprehensible nature. None of these things are beautiful in themselves, but they can be beautiful when they are related to the performance of a certain role. There is a close relationship between the inside and the outside, the apparent and the hidden, between action and reaction, between the appearance of behaviour and its essence, between behaviour and its motives, between external formation and internal formation. This relationship may be antagonistic or synergistic. The ugly becomes beautiful based on this relationship or its manifestation if it becomes harmonious.

^(*) - Aesthetic ugliness: But how can the ugly be beautiful? Few have addressed this issue with calmness and depth. Although this topic belongs elsewhere, it cannot be left without some clarification, given its relevance to our current topic. We therefore wish to examine the justifications for accepting ugliness as beauty, or the reasons that make us see the ugly as beautiful, according to Ibn al-Dabbagh.

⁽³⁸⁾ - Dr Saad al-Din Kuleib: op. cit., p. 204.

types of plants and animals **without distinguishing between the beautiful and the ugly**, because they see in these creations the subtle secrets of the beloved Creator" ⁽³⁹⁾. For when the light of divine beauty shines on the heart of the knower and appears on the pages of existence and manifests itself, he knows with certainty that there is no god but God, that there is nothing in existence except Him, and from this he realises at the highest levels of this realisation that God is beautiful and creates only what is beautiful ^(***), and if ugliness exists, it is a temporary existence and, on a metaphorical level, has no real existence. It exists to perform a positive existential function, **if not an aesthetic function** ^(****). **In essence**, if it were not for ugliness, we would not enjoy beauty, delight in it, or know its value. This function proves that ugliness has a beautiful side. "As we mentioned earlier, its function lies in consideration. It is as if consideration **is humanising**, just like beauty, on this level. Therefore, it is not surprising that ugliness has a positive aesthetic pleasure, despite being a negative value and having a negative psychological and emotional impact." ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

From all of the above, we conclude that Ibn al-Dabbagh denied the possibility of absolute ugliness and total ugliness, just as he denied the existence of ugliness embodied in types of beings, but he proved the existence of partial ugliness, both apparent and hidden. This is through his analysis of the attribute of deficiency and the accompanying emotional feeling of aversion, proving that they are the substance and manifestation of ugliness, which are reflected as aversion on the level of accompanying feelings. Thus, aversion to ugliness becomes a noble feeling that elevates man to adhere to beauty and exalt its value. This highlights the positive aspect of ugliness in existence as an active value in humans and their values, and in the world as a whole.

What this Sufi has put forward regarding the concept of ugliness becomes very useful and rich in knowledge when compared to the concept of ugliness as a negative aesthetic value (opposite to the value of beauty) in modern and contemporary philosophy of beauty, such as that of Nietzsche, Baudelaire and Schopenhauer. We note many similarities in their definitions of the qualities and characteristics of ugliness and the feelings associated with it when it is presented to the self and perceived. This opens up prospects for using Ibn al-Dabbagh's formulation of this concept in contemporary aesthetic research. Although his starting point was metaphysical and spiritual, he arrived at many of the same aesthetic conclusions and observations as philosophers with their empirical approach. This leads us to point out that his aesthetic thought was neither superficial nor marginal, but rather often managed to reach the essence of the major issues raised in the field of

⁽³⁹⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 121.

^(***) - God is beautiful and creates only beautiful creatures and does only beautiful deeds, for He is the absolute and pure good, and evil is nothing but the absence of good, for it is merely a judgement and judgements are relative, and this is in accordance with the words of the Prophet, peace be upon him, in his supplication to his Lord, the Most High: *"All goodness is in Your hands, and evil is not from You."* This hadith is reported in Al-Tirmidhi, Book of Supplications, No. 3344. Dr. Suhaila Abdul-Baath Al-Targuman, previous reference, p. 244.

^(****) - Some believe that ugliness has another function, **which is purifying or therapeutic**, and this is specific to the philosophy of art, where the task of art is to purify our emotions through what Aristotle called "catharsis" This means that "tragedy" comes and expels or removes our feelings of fear, compassion, love and other violent emotions, absorbing all our need to feel such emotions into a harmless imaginary realm. Artistic work here performs an important positive function, namely liberation or moral fortification, as is clearly evident in what Goethe did when he wrote his famous novel Faust in order to free himself from the intense emotional turmoil that was driving him to suicide! Perhaps this is what Goethe himself meant when he advised some of his friends, saying: "Follow my example, for if you bring forth into the world that foetus that torments you, you will soon enjoy peace, feel tranquillity and attain serenity." The cathartic function is clearly evident in Aristotle's statement: The purpose of theatre is to bring about catharsis in the human soul through the emotions of fear and pity." Aristotle./ Dr. Zakaria Ibrahim: The Problem of Art, p. 177.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ - Ibn al-Dabbagh: Previous source, p. 204.

modern and contemporary aesthetic thought and philosophy, and this is to his credit. Margins and list of references.

Referrals and references:

The Prophetic Sunnah: -Sahih Muslim. - Sahih al-Bukhari. - Jami' al-Tirmidhi.

1. Sources:

1. Ibn al-Dabbagh: Mashariq Anwar al-Qulub wa Mafatih Asrar al-Ghayb (The Dawning of the Lights of Hearts and Keys to the Secrets of the Unseen), ed. H. Ritter, Dar Sadir, Beirut, n.d.

2. References:

1. T. Nishivsky: The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality, translated by Youssef Hallaq. Ministry of Culture, Damascus, 1983.
2. Jean-Marie Guillaud: Contemporary Issues in the Philosophy of Art, translated and introduced by Dr. Sami al-Daroubi, Dar al-Yaqda al-Arabiya, Beirut, n.d.
3. Zakaria Ibrahim: The Philosophy of Art in Contemporary Thought, Dar Misr, Damascus, 1988.

The Problem of Art. Maktabat Misr, Cairo, n.d.
4. Zaki Mahmoud Adl al-Din Salem: Man in al-Ghazali's Philosophy and Sufism, Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, Cairo, 1994.
5. Saad al-Din Kulaib: The Aesthetic Structure in Arab-Islamic Thought, Ministry of Culture, Damascus, 1st edition, 1998.
6. Saeed Tawfiq: Aesthetic Experience: A Study in Phenomenological Philosophy of Beauty (Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Dufrenne, Ingarden), Dar al-Thaqafa Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 2001.
7. Suhaila Abdul Baath Al-Targuman: The Theory of the Unity of Existence between Ibn Arabi and Al-Jili: A Comparative Critical Analytical Study, edited by Harbi Abbas Atiyo, Khazal Library, 1st edition, 2002.
8. Charles Lalou: Principles of Aesthetics, translated by Khalil Shata. Dar Damascus, 1982.
9. Walter Steiss: The Meaning of Beauty: A Theory of Aesthetics, translated by Imam Abd al-Fattah Imam, Supreme Council for Culture, Damascus, 2000.
10. Ali Abu Melhem: On Aesthetics: Towards a New Philosophy of Art, University Foundation for Studies, Beirut, 1st edition, 1990.