

The Philosophical Meaning of Ki Ageng Sela's Pepali Perspective in Polres of Grobogan and Its Relevance to Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the philosophical meaning embedded in Ki Ageng Sela's pepali as adopted by the Grobogan Regional Police and explores its relevance to Islamic values in guiding social behavior and ethical conduct within the community.

Method: This research employed a qualitative descriptive design with a field-based approach. Data were gathered through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving several members and officials of the Grobogan Regional Police. The collected data were subsequently interpreted using a phenomenological perspective to uncover the ethical and philosophical dimensions of Ki Ageng Sela's teachings.

Findings: The results indicate that Ki Ageng Sela's pepali embodies a number of essential values, including social harmony, moral responsibility, mutual respect, self-restraint, and the rejection of destructive behavior. These principles have been incorporated into the institutional culture of the Grobogan Regional Police as a moral foundation for carrying out their responsibilities in maintaining public order and fostering social cohesion. Moreover, the teachings reflected in the pepali demonstrate substantial compatibility with Islamic principles, particularly those concerning ethics, justice, solidarity, and harmonious human relations.

Significance: This study enriches discussions on local wisdom, philosophy, and Islamic ethics by demonstrating that traditional Javanese teachings continue to offer meaningful guidance for contemporary institutions. The findings also emphasize the importance of preserving indigenous cultural values and integrating them into modern social and governmental practices.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized for its cultural diversity, which has produced various forms of local wisdom that continue to influence social life and public behavior. Within the Javanese tradition, ethical values occupy a central position because they shape the way individuals interact with others and understand their responsibilities toward society. Concepts such as harmony, self-restraint, mutual respect, and social solidarity have long been embedded in Javanese philosophical thought and transmitted across generations through oral traditions, literary works, and customary practices (Muaddab & Nafisah, 2026; Purwadi et al., 2026). Far from being merely historical legacies, these values still function as moral references in contemporary life. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of preserving local wisdom as a means of strengthening social cohesion and maintaining cultural identity amid rapid social transformation

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(Amin & Ritonga, 2024; Ufie et al., 2022). Consequently, traditional teachings deserve renewed attention, particularly when they continue to influence modern institutions.

One of the cultural expressions that embodies Javanese ethical philosophy is pepali, a collection of moral injunctions and prohibitions intended to guide human conduct. In Javanese society, pepali has historically served not only as a personal code of behavior but also as a mechanism for maintaining social order and collective harmony. Among the figures associated with this tradition, Ki Ageng Sela occupies a distinctive place because his teachings emphasize humility, moral discipline, respect for others, and the avoidance of destructive behavior (Awalin et al., 2026; Mustarom et al., 2025). These teachings are preserved in literary works and remain well known among communities in Central Java. Although originally formulated in a different historical context, the philosophical substance of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali continues to resonate with present-day concerns regarding ethics and social responsibility.

The discussion surrounding ethical values has become increasingly significant in public institutions, particularly those entrusted with maintaining security and social order. As a state institution that interacts directly with the community, the Indonesian National Police is expected not only to enforce the law but also to embody moral principles that foster public trust (Herlydinata, 2025; Srikusuma & Giyono, 2026). Contemporary challenges including social conflict, declining confidence in public institutions, and changing patterns of social interaction have intensified demands for greater professionalism and accountability (Bhuttah et al., 2024; Brady & Kent, 2022). In response to these developments, various approaches have been introduced to strengthen institutional integrity, including the incorporation of local cultural values into organizational life (Johar et al., 2025; Ocasio et al., 2023).

The relationship between local wisdom and social ethics has received considerable scholarly attention over the last decade. Previous studies have shown that indigenous values contribute significantly to character formation, community resilience, and the preservation of cultural identity (Usher et al., 2021). Research conducted in educational settings demonstrates that local philosophical traditions can strengthen moral awareness and encourage social responsibility among younger generations (Jadwiszczak et al., 2025). In the Javanese context, concepts such as rukun, tepa selira, and respect have consistently been identified as essential foundations of communal life (Wibowo et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that local wisdom continues to function as an important social resource in contemporary Indonesia.

Scholars have also explored the relationship between local traditions and Islamic teachings from various perspectives. Existing literature generally argues that many indigenous values are compatible with Islamic principles, particularly those related to justice, compassion, solidarity, and moral responsibility (Allasad Alhuzail & Mahajne, 2026; Rane et al., 2024). However, the majority of these investigations focus primarily on educational institutions, village communities, and cultural preservation programs (Banda et al., 2024; Saputra, 2024). Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how local philosophical traditions are adopted and interpreted within

Formal state institutions. Research specifically addressing Ki Ageng Sela's pepali has largely concentrated on its literary characteristics, educational messages, and moral

teachings. Meanwhile, studies concerning the Indonesian police predominantly examine issues related to legal reform, organizational effectiveness, and public administration (Darwinsyah et al., 2026; Pangaribuan, 2025). The philosophical dimension of local wisdom as a foundation for institutional ethics has rarely been discussed in depth. Consequently, the intersection between these two fields of inquiry remains relatively underdeveloped.

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the philosophical meaning of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali as implemented by the Grobogan Regional Police and to analyze its relevance from an Islamic perspective. More specifically, the research seeks to explain how local wisdom contributes to the construction of ethical values within a modern law-enforcement institution. From a theoretical standpoint, this study expands discussions at the intersection of philosophy, Javanese cultural studies, and Islamic ethics. From a practical perspective, the findings are expected to provide insights for policymakers and public institutions seeking to integrate local values into organizational practices and community engagement strategies.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design grounded in a phenomenological perspective to explore the philosophical meaning of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali as practiced within the Grobogan Regional Police and to examine its relevance to Islamic ethical values. A qualitative approach was selected because the primary objective of the study was not to measure causal relationships or test hypotheses, but rather to understand how cultural values are interpreted and enacted in a particular institutional context. By employing phenomenology, the research sought to capture participants' experiences, interpretations, and reflections regarding the ethical principles embodied in pepali.

The study was conducted at the Grobogan Regional Police Office, Central Java, Indonesia, between June and August 2015, a period during which the institution actively incorporated local wisdom into its organizational culture and public-service practices. The research procedure consisted of a series of interconnected stages, beginning with the identification of the research problem and a review of relevant literature on Javanese philosophy, pepali, Islamic ethics, and police institutions. The subsequent stages involved determining the research design, selecting participants, preparing research instruments, collecting and validating data, conducting thematic analysis, and interpreting the findings within philosophical and Islamic frameworks. The complete procedure is presented in Figure 1.

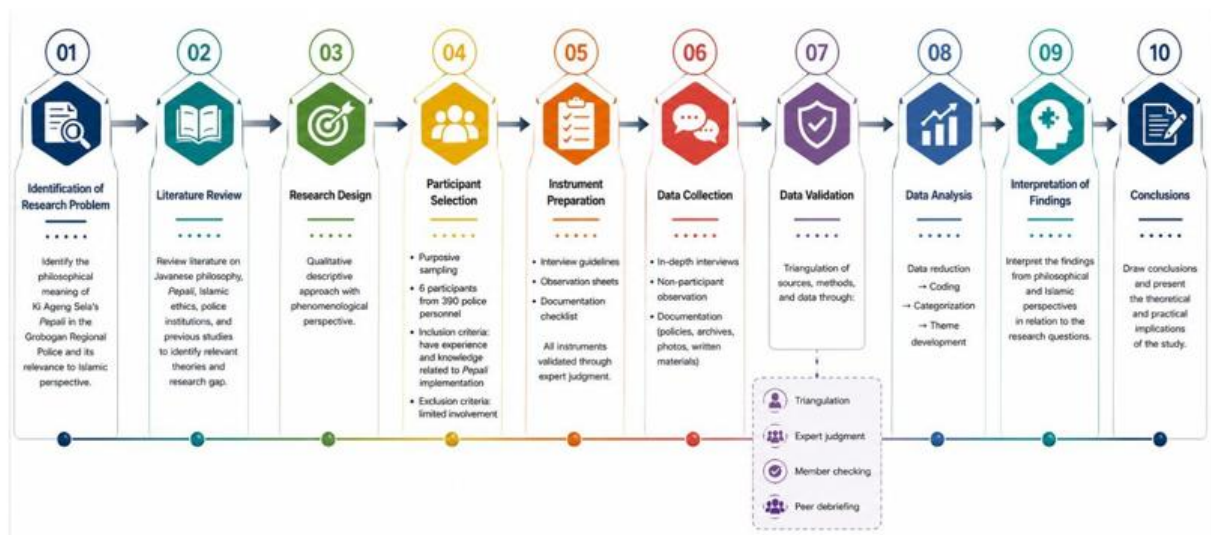


Figure 1. Research procedure

The research procedure consisted of several interconnected stages, beginning with the identification of the research problem concerning the philosophical meaning of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali in the Grobogan Regional Police and its relevance to Islamic perspectives. Subsequently, a comprehensive review of previous studies on Javanese philosophy, pepali, Islamic ethics, and police institutions was conducted to establish the theoretical foundation and identify research gaps. After determining the qualitative phenomenological design, participants were selected through purposive sampling. The preparation of research instruments, including interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation checklists, was followed by data collection through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through triangulation, expert judgment, member checking, and peer debriefing. Finally, the data were analyzed through coding, categorization, and theme development before being interpreted from philosophical and Islamic perspectives.

Participants

The population of this study consisted of 390 police personnel serving at the Grobogan Regional Police Office. Because qualitative inquiry emphasizes depth of understanding rather than statistical representation, participants were selected through purposive sampling. Six participants were recruited based on their institutional roles, experience, and familiarity with the implementation of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali. The participants included the Chief of the Grobogan Regional Police, the Head of the Human Resources Division (Bagian Sumber Daya), and several police officers directly involved in community service and institutional activities. Inclusion criteria required participants to have served in the institution for at least two years and to possess sufficient knowledge of the philosophical values promoted within the organization. Individuals who had limited involvement in institutional programs related to local wisdom were excluded from the study.

Instruments

Data were collected using three complementary instruments: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The interview protocol was designed to explore participants' perceptions of the philosophical meaning of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali, its implementation within the police institution, and its relationship to Islamic ethical principles. Observation sheets were employed to record organizational practices, symbolic representations, and interactions reflecting the application of local values in everyday activities. Documentary sources included institutional records, policy documents, photographs, historical archives, and literary texts related to Ki Ageng Sela's teachings. To ensure the trustworthiness of the instruments, the interview guidelines and observation framework were reviewed by experts in Islamic philosophy and Javanese culture. Furthermore, methodological triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. Data credibility was strengthened through member checking, whereby participants were invited to confirm the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations. Peer debriefing and continuous reflection throughout the research process also contributed to the dependability and confirmability of the findings.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic qualitative analysis following several interconnected stages. First, all interview recordings, field notes, and documentary materials were transcribed and organized systematically. Second, the researchers conducted data reduction by identifying meaningful statements related to ethical values, social norms, and religious interpretations. Third, an open-coding process was performed to classify similar ideas into broader categories. These categories were subsequently grouped into themes representing the philosophical dimensions of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali, including social harmony, moral responsibility, mutual respect, and the rejection of destructive behavior. The themes were then interpreted through a phenomenological lens to uncover the meanings attributed by participants to the teachings of Ki Ageng Sela and their relevance to Islamic ethics. Throughout the analysis, particular attention was given to the relationship between local wisdom and institutional practice. Finally, conclusions were drawn by synthesizing the findings from different data sources and relating them to existing literature on Javanese philosophy, local wisdom, and Islamic ethical thought. This study adhered to established principles of research ethics. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by omitting personal identifiers from transcripts and reports. All data were used exclusively for academic purposes and stored securely to protect participants' privacy and institutional integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Implementation of Ki Ageng Sela's Pepali within the Grobogan Regional Police

The findings demonstrate that the Grobogan Regional Police has incorporated Ki Ageng Sela's pepali into its institutional culture as part of a broader effort to reinforce

ethical awareness and strengthen relationships with the local community. According to the participants, the initiative was introduced under the leadership of the former Chief of

Police, AKBP Langgeng Purnomo, who viewed Ki Ageng Sela's teachings as a valuable source of moral guidance that remains relevant to contemporary social life. Rather than functioning merely as a cultural symbol, pepali has been positioned as an ethical reference that shapes the attitudes and professional conduct of police personnel. Several participants noted that the teachings were publicly displayed within the police compound to remind officers of their responsibility to serve society with integrity and respect. The implementation of pepali was not limited to internal institutional activities. The Grobogan Regional Police collaborated with religious leaders, community figures, educational institutions, and local government authorities to promote the values associated with Ki Ageng Sela's teachings. This collaboration reflects an institutional commitment to integrating local wisdom into public service and community engagement. Participants emphasized that such initiatives have helped strengthen communication between the poli

Table 1. Principal Teachings of Ki Ageng Sela's Pepali

Original Expression	English Translation	Philosophical Meaning
<i>Aja agawe angkuh</i>	Do not behave arrogantly	Encourages humility and respect for others
<i>Aja ladak lan aja jail</i>	Do not be harsh or malicious	Promotes self-restraint and harmonious relations
<i>Aja ati serakah</i>	Do not be greedy	Emphasizes moderation and responsibility
<i>Lan aja clumut</i>	Do not take what belongs to others	Encourages honesty and integrity
<i>Lan aja mburu aleman</i>	Do not seek excessive praise	Promotes sincerity and modesty
<i>Aja ladak, wong ladak pan gelis mati</i>	Arrogance leads to destruction	Warns against harmful behavior
<i>Lan aja ati ngiwa</i>	Do not deviate from righteousness	Reinforces ethical consistency

The teachings summarized in Table 1 reveal that pepali encompasses not only personal virtues but also broader social values intended to preserve harmony and mutual respect. Participants consistently described these principles as practical guidelines that continue to influence institutional behavior and everyday interactions within the police environment.

Philosophical Values Embedded in Pepali

The interviews revealed that Ki Ageng Sela's pepali contains a number of philosophical values that extend beyond individual morality and contribute to the ethical foundation of public institutions. Participants frequently referred to humility, honesty, self-discipline, mutual respect, and social responsibility as the core principles embodied in these teachings. Such values were regarded as essential for cultivating professionalism and reinforcing the moral obligations of police officers toward the communities they serve. The analysis further indicates that the adoption of pepali has shaped institutional practices in several ways. Participants explained that the teachings encourage officers to prioritize public protection, provide services with empathy, and strengthen cooperation with local

communities. Consequently, pepali functions not only as a cultural legacy but also as an ethical framework that connects traditional wisdom with the demands of modern law enforcement.



Figure 2. Conceptual framework of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali in the Grobogan Regional Police.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the principal components identified in this study. The framework shows that Ki Ageng Sela's pepali serves as the starting point for a set of philosophical values, including humility, honesty, self-control, mutual respect, and responsibility. These values are subsequently translated into institutional practices centered on public service, protection, and community partnership. The implementation of these principles contributes to social harmony and public security, which, in turn, reflect ethical values that are closely aligned with Islamic teachings.

Institutional Motivation and Perceived Impact

The findings suggest that the incorporation of Ki Ageng Sela's teachings was motivated by the desire to strengthen ethical standards within the Grobogan Regional Police. Participants emphasized that legal authority alone is insufficient to establish public trust and that institutional legitimacy must also be supported by moral commitment and cultural sensitivity. Within this context, pepali has become an important instrument for encouraging officers to balance professional responsibilities with ethical considerations rooted in local traditions. Participants also reported that the implementation of pepali has contributed positively to institutional life. The teachings were perceived as encouraging greater courtesy, accountability, and sincerity in interactions with the public. Moreover, the integration of local wisdom into organizational practices was believed to enhance cooperation between police officers and community members. Although participants acknowledged that institutional performance depends on multiple factors, they consistently emphasized the role of pepali in strengthening ethical awareness and promoting more humane forms of public service.

Relevance of Ki Ageng Sela's Pepali to Islamic Ethical Values

Another important finding concerns the compatibility between Ki Ageng Sela's teachings and Islamic ethical principles. Participants explained that many of the values embedded in pepali, such as humility, honesty, justice, and social solidarity, correspond closely to the moral teachings of Islam. The rejection of arrogance, greed, and harmful behavior was interpreted as consistent with Islamic views on noble character and moral responsibility. The study further revealed that pepali encourages individuals to cultivate attitudes that support harmonious social relations and collective well-being. Participants associated these teachings with the Islamic concepts of *akhlaq al-karimah*, which emphasizes virtuous conduct, and *fastabiqul khairat*, which encourages individuals to compete in acts of goodness. The convergence of local wisdom and Islamic ethics demonstrates that traditional Javanese teachings continue to provide meaningful guidance for contemporary institutions and remain relevant to the social realities of predominantly Muslim communities.

Discussion

The integration of Ki Ageng Sela's pepali into the institutional environment of the Grobogan Regional Police demonstrates that local wisdom can function not only as a cultural inheritance but also as an ethical foundation for contemporary public institutions. The findings suggest that the adoption of these teachings reflects an awareness that law enforcement requires more than legal authority and administrative procedures; it also depends on moral principles that are socially recognized and culturally meaningful. In the context of Javanese philosophy, ethical values are inseparable from the pursuit of social harmony and collective well-being (Sugiarto & Suparno, 2025). The institutionalization of pepali therefore represents an effort to bridge traditional values with the demands of modern governance. This result reinforces previous studies emphasizing that indigenous knowledge continues to provide important resources for strengthening social cohesion amid ongoing social transformation (Partarakis & Zabulis, 2024; Tsegaye, 2025). More importantly, the present study shows that local wisdom is capable of moving beyond symbolic representation and becoming part of everyday organizational practice.

One of the most significant findings concerns the prominence of humility, honesty, self-restraint, mutual respect, and responsibility as the central values embedded in pepali. These principles reflect the long-standing Javanese understanding that social order depends on an individual's ability to regulate personal interests and maintain harmonious relations with others (Februandari, 2026). Rather than being imposed through formal mechanisms alone, ethical behavior within the institution appears to emerge through the gradual internalization of shared cultural norms. Such a pattern is consistent with virtue ethics, which views moral conduct as the outcome of cultivated dispositions and habitual practices. Recent studies on local wisdom and character formation have similarly argued that cultural traditions play an important role in shaping civic responsibility and social awareness (Mulyana, 2024). Nevertheless, the findings of this study broaden existing discussions by illustrating that values traditionally associated with family and community life may also influence professional ethics in state institutions.

The implementation of pepali within police practices further reveals the close relationship between culture and institutional legitimacy. Participants consistently

described the teachings as encouraging officers to prioritize service, protection, and collaboration with local communities. This orientation resonates with community policing frameworks, which emphasize trust and public participation as essential elements of effective law enforcement. However, the present findings suggest that community engagement is not merely a technical strategy but is deeply connected to the cultural values shared by police officers and citizens (Blair et al., 2021). In this regard, pepali serves as a mediating framework that enables institutional authority to be exercised in ways that are perceived as legitimate and socially acceptable. Earlier studies on police reform in Indonesia have predominantly focused on structural and administrative dimensions Mulyana (2024), whereas the cultural foundations of institutional trust have received considerably less attention. Consequently, this research offers a different perspective by positioning local wisdom as an integral component of organizational effectiveness.

Another important aspect emerging from the findings is the strong correspondence between Ki Ageng Sela's teachings and Islamic ethical principles. The rejection of arrogance, greed, and harmful conduct, alongside the promotion of honesty, justice, and social solidarity, reflects values that occupy a central place in Islamic moral thought. Rather than existing in opposition, local traditions and religious teachings appear to interact in a complementary manner, reinforcing one another in everyday practice. This interpretation is in line with recent scholarship demonstrating that many forms of Indonesian local wisdom are compatible with broader Islamic values and contribute to the development of ethical communities (Sanjani et al., 2024; Zaman et al., 2024). At the same time, the present study moves beyond normative discussions by showing how this relationship operates within a formal state institution. The convergence between pepali and Islamic ethics indicates that cultural identity and religious commitment can coexist as mutually supportive sources of moral guidance.

The effectiveness of pepali as an ethical framework cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context in which it is embedded. Grobogan is historically associated with Ki Ageng Sela, and this historical connection appears to strengthen the acceptance of his teachings among both police officers and the broader community. The influence of local wisdom is therefore shaped not only by institutional policies but also by collective memory, regional identity, and cultural legitimacy. This contextual dimension provides an important explanation for why similar initiatives may not necessarily produce identical outcomes in different regions. Research on value-based governance has repeatedly shown that institutional reforms are more likely to succeed when they resonate with the social and cultural experiences of the communities involved (Akbar et al., 2026; Jannah et al., 2024). Accordingly, the experience of the Grobogan Regional Police should be understood as a context-dependent model rather than as a universally applicable formula.

At the same time, the findings invite a more critical consideration of the relationship between local wisdom and institutional transformation. Although participants generally viewed the implementation of pepali positively, ethical practices within the police institution are inevitably influenced by a range of additional factors, including leadership, organizational regulations, and broader political conditions. It is therefore difficult to isolate the specific contribution of local wisdom from other dimensions of institutional change. Moreover, positive perceptions of pepali may partly reflect the symbolic value

attached to cultural preservation rather than concrete changes in professional behavior. Similar concerns have been raised in previous studies, which note that organizational ethics are shaped by complex interactions between cultural, administrative, and social variables (Martínez et al., 2021). Recognizing these limitations is essential in order to avoid reducing institutional dynamics to a single explanatory factor.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to ongoing debates concerning the role of indigenous knowledge in contemporary governance. Existing scholarship has largely examined Ki Ageng Sela's pepali within historical, literary, and educational contexts, while studies on policing have generally emphasized legal and bureaucratic issues. By bringing these fields together, the present research expands current understandings of how traditional values can inform institutional ethics and public service. The findings suggest that local wisdom should not be viewed merely as a cultural legacy preserved for historical reasons, but as a dynamic ethical resource capable of responding to present-day challenges (Latupapua et al., 2026). Practically, the study offers insights for public institutions seeking to strengthen community engagement and ethical accountability through culturally grounded approaches. More broadly, it demonstrates that the dialogue between local traditions, religious values, and state institutions remains highly relevant in shaping the future of public ethics in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that Ki Ageng Sela's pepali continues to hold relevance beyond its historical and cultural origins. Within the context of the Grobogan Regional Police, these teachings have been transformed into a set of ethical principles that inform institutional attitudes and practices. Values such as humility, honesty, self-control, mutual respect, and responsibility are not merely preserved as elements of local tradition; they have become part of the moral foundation underlying public service and community engagement. The incorporation of pepali into institutional life demonstrates that local wisdom can provide meaningful guidance for contemporary organizations seeking to strengthen ethical awareness and social trust. This study also reveals that the philosophical values embedded in Ki Ageng Sela's teachings are closely aligned with Islamic ethical principles. The emphasis on justice, solidarity, and virtuous conduct reflects a common moral orientation shared by both Javanese philosophy and Islamic teachings. Rather than existing as separate systems of thought, the two traditions interact in ways that reinforce social harmony and collective responsibility. By examining the relationship between local wisdom, religion, and institutional practice, this research offers a broader perspective on the continuing role of indigenous knowledge in modern society. The experience of the Grobogan Regional Police ultimately illustrates that culturally rooted values remain capable of contributing to ethical governance and the development of stronger relationships between public institutions and the communities they serve.

AUHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Ahmad Subkan: Conceived the study, developed the research design, conducted the fieldwork, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the findings, and prepared the original manuscript.

Zainul Adzfar: contributed to the conceptualization of the study, supervised the research process, and provided critical feedback on the philosophical and theoretical framework.

H. Sudarto: assisted in refining the research methodology, reviewed the analysis, and contributed to the revision and improvement of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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