



Debus in Banten Tradition: A Hermeneutic Exploration of Its Spiritual and Cultural Significance

Debus dalam Tradisi Banten: Kajian Hermeneutik terhadap Makna Spiritual dan Budayanya

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Abstract: This research aims to analyze the practice of debus in the Banten tradition using a hermeneutic approach. Debus is a traditional martial art that has been passed down through generations in the Banten community. This tradition involves various mystical, ritualistic, and spiritual elements, making it intriguing to investigate through a hermeneutic perspective. The hermeneutic approach is employed to uncover the hidden meanings behind the debus practice. The study combines analyses of ancient texts, historical records, interviews with debus practitioners, and direct observations of debus performances to understand the cultural context, philosophy, and symbolism associated with the practice. The findings of this research are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the debus practice as part of Banten's cultural heritage and how this tradition remains relevant in modern society. Additionally, this research is also anticipated to offer fresh insights into the significance and meaning of the spiritual and mystical aspects inherent in the debus practice. With the hermeneutic approach, this research aims to unravel interpretative layers and comprehend how the debus practice in the Banten tradition serves as a valuable means of cultural expression and local identity. The outcomes of this research can contribute to strengthening cultural sustainability and preserving the debus practice for future generations.

Keywords: Debus; Martial Art; Hermeneutics.



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Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis praktik debus dalam tradisi Banten dengan menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutika. Debus merupakan seni bela diri tradisional yang telah diwariskan secara turun-temurun di masyarakat Banten. Tradisi ini melibatkan berbagai unsur mistis, ritualistik dan spiritual, sehingga menarik untuk diteliti melalui perspektif hermeneutika. Pendekatan hermeneutika digunakan untuk mengungkap makna tersembunyi di balik praktik debus. Penelitian ini menggabungkan analisis teks kuno, catatan sejarah, wawancara dengan pelaku debus dan pengamatan langsung terhadap pertunjukan debus untuk memahami konteks budaya, filosofi dan simbolisme yang terkait dengan praktik tersebut. Temuan penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang praktik debus sebagai bagian dari warisan budaya Banten dan bagaimana tradisi ini tetap relevan dalam masyarakat modern. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga diharapkan dapat menawarkan wawasan baru tentang signifikansi dan makna aspek spiritual dan mistis yang melekat dalam praktik debus. Dengan pendekatan hermeneutika, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap lapisan interpretatif dan memahami bagaimana praktik debus dalam tradisi Banten berfungsi sebagai sarana ekspresi budaya dan identitas budaya lokal yang berharga. Hasil penelitian ini dapat memberikan kontribusi bagi penguatan keberlanjutan budaya dan pelestarian praktik debus bagi generasi mendatang.

Kata Kunci: Debu; Pencak Silat; Hermeneutika.

Introduction

Philosophy at the level of *ordinary philosophy*, talks about issues similar to philosophy in academic discourse, that humans with their inherent curiosity thirst for explanations that overcome the reality they live in daily. Humans, according to this assumption, even in the most layman's way, must have a certain ontological outlook. Titus (1984) seems to have succeeded in providing confirmation of this fact, that humans who have a tendency to question problems that are extraordinarily far from their perception show that human curiosity in trying to get answers is so great. This is what shows that every human being has actually philosophized even though with a simple scheme, even outside of his awareness.

"In a general sense, a person's philosophy is the sum of his fundamental beliefs and convictions. In this sense everyone has a philosophy, even though he does not realize it. All people have some ideas concerning physical objects, man, the meaning of life, nature, death, God, right and wrong, and beauty and ugliness. Of course, these ideas are acquired in a variety of ways".¹

Thus, every culture inherently contains a certain ontological perspective—a way of understanding reality that unifies various human experiences in life (*a unified view of things*). Ontology serves as the underlying foundation that supports beliefs, practices, and cultural traditions.

"...there are wide differences of opinion, especially between the professional philosopher and the intelligent man in the street. The latter, when he turns to philosophy, usually expects it to

provide him with an enlightening and satisfying interpretation of the universe. He wants to be instructed as to 'the meaning of life' and 'the nature of ultimate reality'. He wants a firm basis for his thinking and his scheme of living, a unified view of things which will make him feel at home in the world".²

Banten has long had a solid reputation as a place where supernatural sciences reside, not a few Bantenese have taken advantage of this reputation by acting as fortune tellers, exorcists, spirit controllers, fracture healers, masseurs and healers, business facilitators to gain wealth, position and supernatural protection and peace of mind.³ In practice, these rites are often accompanied by magical practices, making Banten a region famous for its magical practices. One of the most distinctive cultural practices in Banten is *Debus*, a mystical martial art performance that incorporates elements of *silat* (martial arts), *tariqa* (Sufi brotherhood), Islamic rituals, and supernatural powers.

The techniques associated with tarekat are only one part of *debus*, as *debus* masters are not commonly known as tarekat masters. Some of the *debus* masters do lead congregational *wiridan* similar to tarekat, but none of the *debus* masters are actual tarekat leaders.⁴ Others are known as *silat* teachers but have no direct connection with *dhikr* and *ratib*. In these cases, certain recitations, prayers and rituals performed in order to be more *useful* usually have to be 'paid for' by fasting or other similar formulas, reading some kind of *amulet* or 'borrowing' the guru's power which has been temporarily transferred through a *jiyad* practice.

Debus was originally only owned by a group of Banten people who were members of a religious-Islamic association, namely the *Qadiriyyah* Order and the *Rifaiyah* Order. The presence and development of these two congregations are related to the emergence of the *debus* phenomenon in Banten. *Debus*, in this relationship, appears that *debus* and tarekat are two Philosophy at the level of *ordinary philosophy*, talks about issues similar to philosophy in academic discourse, that humans with their inherent curiosity thirst for explanations that overcome the reality they live in daily. Humans, according to this assumption, even in the most layman's way, must have a certain ontological outlook. Titus (1984) seems to have succeeded in providing confirmation of this fact, that humans who have a tendency to question problems that are extraordinarily far from their perception show that human curiosity in trying to get answers is so great. This is what shows that every human being has actually philosophized even though with a simple scheme, even outside of his awareness things that are intertwined. There is a leader in the tarekat who is commonly known as *syeikh* or *kiyai*. These three things, namely *debus*, Islam and *kiai*, are inseparable issues in the study of this research, with a hermeneutic approach and focusing on a case study in one of the largest and oldest *debus* hermitages in Banten, namely Padepokan Surosowan, Walantaka, Serang City, Banten Province.

These popular tariqas are often accompanied by magical practices, so Banten is an area famous for its magical practices. Bantenese people who like to practice various kinds of magical practices often use methods and prayers taken from various known tariqahs, albeit superficially. Recitations of *wirid*, prayers, and specific rituals formed an integral part of the practice. However, Debus eventually developed into a standalone cultural performance, rich in mystical and supernatural elements that reflect the beliefs of the local community.

There are several reasons why Banten *debus* is the material object of this research. *First*, *debus* for Banten people contains magical elements so that it becomes inseparable from religion, because religion (Islam) for Banten people is something that must be unconditionally believed, lived, able to guide human life and bring practical consequences (benefits).⁵ Most of the magical skills developed in Banten are closely related to martial arts and the world of *Javanese*.⁶

Secondly, *debus* and other arts in Banten mostly contain mystical elements, such as the martial art Pencak Silat, mystical performing arts such as *Taraje* (ladder) *Go-lok*, *Taraje Cau Ambon*, mystical and magical dances *Syaman*, *Patingtung*, *Gatele* and so on. *Debus*, in this case, is one of the mystical performing arts.

Third, Banten *debus* is still valid and sustainable today. *Debus* is preserved by *Jawara* (mystic martial arts experts) and several *Debus Padepokan* in various regions in Banten. *Fourth*, *debus* is authentically one of the inherent and inseparable cultures for the people of Banten.

Another academic reason that encourages this research to use the material object of *debus* is because until today, as far as the author's search goes, there has been no philosophical study of *debus*, especially through a hermeneutic approach. The writings that have existed about *debus* only revolve around cultural studies, anthropology and religion - still anthropological in nature - which are more focused on ritual issues. Studies on *debus*, although there are also studies that contain philosophical elements of *debus*, are only discussed within the framework of cultural philosophy, so they have not touched on the hermeneutical aspect.

Nevertheless, despite its persistence, Debus faces new challenges in the modern era, particularly as a result of globalization and shifting cultural values. The transformation of meaning, changes in public perception, and the broader cultural identity crisis pose ontological questions about how humans understand their own existence within an ever-changing reality.

To date, most studies on Debus have been conducted through anthropological, cultural, or religious lenses, while philosophical studies—especially from a hermeneutical perspective—remain limited. In fact, hermeneutics offers a powerful approach to explore the deeper existential meaning of Debus, shedding light on how

the people of Banten construct, interpret, and transform their understanding of reality amid the waves of global change.

Therefore, this study seeks to illuminate the existence of *Debus* through a hermeneutical lens, aiming to uncover its ontological significance and examine its role in reinforcing the cultural authenticity of the Bantenese community within the context of globalization. In this regard, the research is guided by the following central inquiries: (1) What constitutes the essence of *Debus*? (2) In what ways can a hermeneutical approach reveal the ontological meaning embedded within *Debus*? and (3) How does the elucidation of *Debus* contribute to the preservation and affirmation of Bantenese cultural identity? Accordingly, the study is directed toward three main objectives: to identify and critically analyze the essential characteristics of *Debus*; to investigate the capacity of hermeneutics in unveiling its ontological dimensions; and to assess the extent to which the existence of *Debus* contributes to the consolidation of Banten's cultural authenticity amid the pressures of globalization.

Relevant Literature Review

This research is an effort to find the deepest essence of *Debus*, which has implications for strengthening cultural authenticity in Banten. Another reason that prompted this research to use the material object of *Debus* is because until now, as far as the author's search goes, there has been no philosophical study of *Debus*, especially in the ontological dimension. The existing writings on *Debus* only revolve around cultural studies, anthropology and religion - still anthropological in nature - which are more focused on ritual issues. Studies on *Debus*, although there are also studies that contain philosophical elements of *Debus*, are only discussed within the framework of cultural philosophy, so they have not touched the ontological aspect. As far as the researcher's search goes, there are several previous articles that are relevant to the theme of this research, including:

Isman Pratama Nasution's thesis (1995) entitled "Debus, Islam and Kiai: A Case Study in Tegal Sari Village, Walantaka Subdistrict, Serang Regency" seems to be a fairly comprehensive writing in discussing *debus* and its relationship with Islam and clerics in Banten, that *debus* as a culture has a meaning based on the historical background of Banten people as a form of struggle against invaders. *Debus* is considered to have an Islamic rite as an effort to approach oneself to the Almighty brought by the kiai.⁷ In this case, the essence of *debus* appears a little because it is considered a culture that was born and based on the nuances of Islamic knowledge, evidence of self-approach to God through certain rituals, but it does not seem to have reached how *debus* exists and strengthens Banten's cultural identity authentically.

A journal article written by Mohammad Hudaeri (2016) entitled "Debus in Banten: The Linkage of Tarekat with Local Culture", firmly writes that-in an

anthropological *view-debus* is not only a local tradition that exists in Banten, but also has a close link with what he calls tarekat. Hudaeri tries to uncover the traditions that develop in the lives of Bantenese people, which also illustrate the anthropological condition of their Islam. His finding is that Bantenese people whose Islam is more Sufistic in nature is motivated by the affinity and parallels with the characteristics of Bantenese people who are thick with mystical nuances.⁸ Here, Hudaeri does not mention, or even mention at all, the nature of *debus* and how its existence strengthens as a truly authentic Bantenese culture through a hermeneutic approach.

Hasani Ahmad Said (2016) with the title of his article "Islam and Culture in Banten: Examining the Debus and Maulid Traditions" wrote that the Islamic knowledge that developed in Banten became a reference for scholars not only in the archipelago, but also in Asia. The comparison of two Banten traditions between *Debus* and Panjang Maulid is the focus of his study portrait that both Banten traditions are inseparable from the Islamic tradition that continues to develop from generation to generation.⁹ In this article, he does not use a hermeneutic approach and has not found the true meaning of *debus*.

Muhamad Yusuf Sulaeman (2019) in his article entitled "Debus Art Learning Strategy in the Context of Local Culture Preservation at Padepokan Terumbu Banten", focuses on the discussion of how *debus* can be taught as a Banten regional art that must be preserved as a form of Bantenese identity. By taking the subject of the study at Padepokan Terumbu Banten, Yusuf firmly said that Banten people are known as a religious society because their connection with Islam is so strong. As a result, Yusuf recorded the *debus* learning strategy for students from planning, implementation to assessment.¹⁰ Here Yunus does not have philosophical nuances in his writing at all, moreover the approach used is only limited to qualitative with descriptive methods.

Siti Solehah et al (2022) with her title "Cultural Values in Debus Art (Banten Cultural Ethnographic Study Approach) discusses more aspects of *debus* as *Civic Culture*, how *debus* art is positioned as a form of culture that also fosters *Civic Culture* values. Through an ethnographic approach, Siti Solehah succeeded in finding *debus* cultural values in strengthening *Civic Culture*-religious values, social values, economic values and artistic values-as well as efforts to preserve them.¹¹ Because of the different approaches, Siti Solehah did not explain the nature and existence of *debus*.

Relevant Theory

1. Illumination of Existence Concept

The term "*Existence Illumination*" borrows from what Karl Jaspers calls "*Existenzherhellung*"¹² which means "understanding and using the freedom"-to realize, choose

and identify oneself—that is at the core of human life. Jaspers links existence illumination with transcendence, because there is no existence without transcendence. With the illumination of existence, man understands himself as an existent being who understands and achieves the authentic “I”.¹³ “*Existence is not a kind of being, it is potential being. That is to say, I am not existence but possible existence. I do not have myself, but become to myself*”.¹⁴ As Jaspers has expressed in *Way to Wisdom; an Introduction to Philosophy*:

“*The more authentically free man is, the greater his certainty of God. When I am authentically free, I am certain that I am not free though myself*”⁵

This description of existence is intended by Jaspers so that every human being is authentically and distinctively aware and fully understands that he is truly unique as distinguishing himself from other creatures. Authentic here means that humans are able to recognize, determine and will according to themselves, because, according to Jaspers, existence is individual. The uniqueness of the human person does not become a possibility for others, because self-authenticity always leads to true freedom.¹⁶

Through this total freedom, existence must be lived in relation and communication with other existences. Man needs the illumination of existence to find himself in his quest for his vision of life. This true illumination is only obtained from the Transcendent, the true source and reality.¹⁷ This relationship leads man to the illumination of various issues and circumstances that transcend the empirical dimension.¹⁸

2. The Concept of Debus Authenticity in an Ontological Framework

Authenticity in the discourse of existentialism is the extent to which individual human actions are congruent with the desires and beliefs of the individual. The individually conscious human being is considered to be negotiating with his presence in an empirical world and external influences that are clearly different from his own. In existentialism, the absence of authenticity is regarded as *mauvaise foi*.¹⁹ The appeal to be authentic is similar to the appeal of Pithia which means “Know Thyself”. However, in this case, authenticity means even more, namely “Do not just know yourself, but be yourself”.²⁰

Authenticity is very close to existence. Existence is the existence of an *authentic* and unique self. *Authentic* self-existence is not defined in *Dasein* or me in empirical existence.²¹ My selfhood is the self-realization of the result of my deepest consciousness or my vision of life. Existence is not a legacy of history, although to exist one must listen to history, but *existence* is rather a self that is reborn from the vision that emerges from free thought.²²

The first principle gives meaning and laws to reality. The first principle, in this case considered as the actual reality, is generally taken from the traditional schema.²³

Humans, according to this assumption, must have a certain ontological view, albeit in its simplest form.

Debus, although a culture that is essentially the result of a syncretic process between Islamic culture and local traditions, has strong roots in Islam as one of the absolute requirements for *debus* knowledge. All *debus* performers must be Muslim without exception. This indicates that *debus* performers, as a consequence of adhering to Islam, believe that their belief is a form of monotheism, believing in the existence of one God. God, as explained in the previous sub-chapter, is the creator and is considered the source of life force without which humans and all His creations cannot live.

Debus expertise and strength are believed to be a form of appearance of God's power in the ritual symbols used. Immunity in *debus* comes from God's power. The existence and ability of *debus* immunity in overcoming sharp objects indicates the existence of a power that overcomes and exceeds human strength. God is believed to be the creator of all things, the source of all life, the regulator of all dynamic movements and the giver of unlimited power to humans and other creatures through His pleasure.

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative research in philosophy that uses a philosophical hermeneutic approach and heuristics - explained later in the Data Analysis Technique section. Library data is used as the main material and in addition researchers also directly observe the phenomena and activities in Padepokan *Debus* Surosowan Banten as supporting material. This research also uses methodical elements of description, analysis and reflection, aiming to inventory various information in *debus* and explain its relevance and influence for the formation of Banten people's cultural identity.

Based on the data sources mentioned, collection was carried out using the triangulation method, namely, using more than one data collection method. The course of research begins with data inventory, then selected and reduced, systematized, finally analyzed in accordance with the formulation of the problem and research objectives.

This research uses methods and methodical elements that refer to the book written by Anton Bakker and Achmad Charris Zubair (1990: 114-119), which are as follows:

- a. The hermeneutic method, which is a process of interpretation followed by a process of hermeneutic analysis to capture the essential meaning by interpreting *debus* so that the essence and nature in *debus* can be understood in

accordance with the time and context of the current situation with the following methodical elements:

- 1) Description, the author describes and describes in detail about *debus*, starting from the definition, history, components, elements and values summarized in the practice of *debus* performances so that a clear understanding of the nature of *debus* is obtained.
- 2) Analysis, an attempt to decipher general phenomena in *debus* to find out more specific elements so as to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the nature of *debus*.
- 3) Reflection, the data that has been compared is then given a new interpretation so as to create a new understanding of Banten *debus* from the aspect of ontology.

b. The heuristic method, which is the stage of collecting historical sources related to the research topic. This method is used to find a new paradigm of the Banten *debus* issue which is then expected to play a role in the increasingly complex and heterogeneous contemporary culture in Indonesia.

Discussion

The changes that occur within the *debus* system and outside the *debus* environment caused by the times and globalization are also one of the ontological issues that need to be studied more deeply. Globalization implies that there has been a shift in meaning in all areas of life, including the art and culture of *debus* in Banten, thus affecting the essential meaning of the cultural identity of the Bantenese people as a whole. The crisis of cultural identity, along with the developments that have occurred in the Banten area, has become an ontological issue because it touches on the most basic human structure, so it is still very relevant today. Through a hermeneutic approach, this research seeks to reveal how *Debus* is ontologically linked to the cultural identity of the people of Banten.

This research outlines the findings and analysis, which are divided into three sections, as follows:

Essence of Banten Debus

The deepest essence of Banten *debus* is that belief and total submission to God the Giver of Strength is the main principle in *debus* immunity. *Debus* contains religious elements because it is closely related to the Transcendental, in every performance there are always certain rituals which indicate that the implementation of *debus* cannot be separated from the role of the Transcendental, there is a principle of belief for *debus* actors and several issues in ontological studies which are also contained in *debus*.

God is the creator of all existence. God creates existents not only with their substance, but also with their essence. The substance and existence of all existents are determined and recorded in His provisions. God is the beginning where all existence begins and the end where all existence returns, as well as the Regulator and Determiner of its existence.²⁴ All forms of movement of substance and its accidents run based on His provisions and must not deviate from Him. Deviations from His provisions will have their own consequences. God as Creator indicates that apart from substance and accidents, God is also actively involved in all existent actions. Since the act of existence is under God's provision, God also creates the potential of existence. This causes the law of causality to be relative so that immunity in *debus* becomes possible and can be possessed. Causality is false while God's will be absolute. Therefore, *debus* actors are immune to sharp objects and fire. God as the Giver of power functions through His absolute will. Without obtaining His pleasure, immunity in *debus* becomes impossible to possess.

"The main requirement for debus is to have a wholehearted belief in the power of God. Total submission to God will have a positive impact on debus performers. Humans are basically weak; they can become strong if there is a will from God. So, there is the principle of faith in debus".²⁵

God is also believed to be the regulator of all movements in the universe. The universe and its contents move actively according to the rules and regulations set by God. The regularity of the galaxy of stars, the cluster of solar systems, the life cycle of all living things to the dynamics of all forms of life originate from God. The same applies to the active movement in human life. The process of weak to strong in humans is obtained according to His will even though humans have done a lot of exercises to support strength. *Debus* practitioners can only plan and do exercises and prayers to gain immunity, but God is the one who decides.

Total submission and belief are an absolute. God for *debus* performers is everything and cannot be replaced with anything. Deviation from this belief will cause accidents for *debus* performers when performing *debus* attractions. Existence is only a multiplicity overshadowed by the absoluteness of God. Everything is centered and sourced in God, not a single existent can escape Him. It is only from this perspective that the nature of reality can be explained rationally. The power of *debus* comes from God, so it can be concluded that the first principle for *debus* is God.

Existence Illumination of *Debus* Practice

The analysis of the illumination of *debus* existence, namely that apart from God as the first principle underlying all reality, there is also a dimension of the quantity of existence characterized by pluralism, but God is considered the most important and the source of all existence (Pluralism-Metaphysics-Centric), the dimension of

the dynamics of existence, namely that God is the creator of the form of existence along with the potential for movement which is dynamic-purposeful-determined (dynamic-teleological-deterministic).

There are three assumptions to justify the *debus* practitioner's view of reality, whether one or many. These assumptions are taken from the elements contained in *debus*. *First*, *debus* actors have the view that there are created beings that consist of only one element of the physical dimension, namely inanimate objects and plants. Inanimate objects and plants must also be seen as creations that occupy space in the world. *Second*, the *debus* actors' view of humans is that humans are composed of two dimensions, namely the physical and spiritual dimensions. These two dimensions must exist simultaneously to signify that humans are truly human beings who can be sensed by experience and are able to interact with others consciously. The knowledge of immunity in *debus* can be possessed by humans is an effort to maximize the role of the body through physical exercise as well as the spirit through mental exercise by getting closer to God. *Third*, there is the principle of total belief and trust that God is the source of all power, God is the most decisive substance.

The close relationship between God as creator and existent as creation indicates that *debus* actors' first principle of quantity is that existents are many, belonging to centrist metaphysical pluralism. It is said to be centrist metaphysical pluralism because *debus* actors accept the *azali* principle of many but one is considered the main one and the one that gives meaning. The main one and the one that gives meaning is God according to their beliefs and beliefs, which can be sought for explanation in Islamic terminology.

All existence-inanimate objects, plants, angels and jinn, animals and humans-is the creation of the Almighty, namely God. This belief is absolute for *debus* practitioners. The slightest deviation from this belief is a form of *shirk* and must be strictly avoided. God is the source of everything. Therefore, God is the ultimate and meaning-giver for all existents without exception. Physical, spiritual, bodily-spiritual existents are very much related to God, but God is completely different from all existents. God is the creator; the existent is the creation. The two cannot be mixed.

Existence is created by God not only in form, but also accompanied by movement and all its potentials. It is this potential that gives the existent the power to experience movement. The dynamics of existence make it have freedom, but that freedom is not absolute. Freedom in existence is a responsible freedom, especially for humans. Being created indicates that there is a beginning and an end. God creating all existents means that everything will return to God. The movement and change of all existents is also not purely from within. Existence cannot develop itself. That development is in God's will. Therefore, all movement and change depend on God's decree.

All the activities of existents, including humans, are teleological in nature, because all life as an existent is theologically determined. The life of all existents is a life of activity that has direction and purpose. All existence, as well as religion, morality, art and science, all lead to one goal-to return to the Transcendental. The fact that all existent activity has a purpose in reality shows that while the dynamics are forced by a force pushing from behind, the dynamics of all existents are unconsciously always moving forward. This force is a form of power from the Absolute. God ultimately determines and wills all existents. The dynamics of all existents are limited by God's decree.

The dynamics of each being has its own purpose. Existence is dynamic in the world of objective reality; permanence only occurs in the hereafter. Ultimately, God as the creator determines the movement and change of all existents. This explanation can be concluded that the movement of existents in reality is dynamic-teleological-deterministic. There is purposeful motion, but it is limited by the will and provisions of the Transcendent.

Humans, especially here the *debus* actors, are in determinism shown in several ways. *First*, *debus* actors have the freedom to perform all dangerous *debus* actions and attractions. The immune attraction is not only obtained through physical and mental exercises, but must be accompanied by prayer, namely getting closer to God. Prayer to God is an effort to get protection so that it can be immune. Immunity in *debus* depends on God's provisions. His freedom is ultimately false because it is "limited" by God's will and provisions. *Debus* performers must always get closer to God, so that God's support, protection and provisions determine success in every *debus* performance. The activities and efforts made by *debus* performers are an undeniable fact of self-awareness as humans created by God. Humans, in all their actions and efforts, feel themselves limited by something they face. The existence of the environment and the outside world is also involved in it.

This determinism is similar to what Jaspers expressed that freedom is one of the bases for humans to incarnate themselves continuously, as if towards perfection.²⁶ However, it is impossible for humans to achieve perfection, so this freedom becomes one idea with transcendence. What Jaspers revealed shows that God is the source of freedom, therefore in freedom, God can be found. God is an unfrozen openness in human appreciation as a free existence. "*Freedom is not absolute; it is always bound at the same time*".²⁷

For *debus* practitioners, being human is freedom. We become more aware of our existence as freedom, precisely when we are faced with various choices. This is the same as Jaspers' thought, that freedom of action and action in humans is faced with a limit situation. This is also the response to God, who among other things appears

to humans as a source of choices faced by humans. The more truly a person is aware of his freedom, the stronger his certainty about the existence of God.

“The more authentically free man is, the greater his certainty of God. When I am authentically free, I am certain that I am not free though myself.”²⁸

The second form of determinism is that *debus* actors have the principle of belief and total submission to God. This can be seen in an obvious form if all practices and prayers are a form of absolute obedience and surrender to God. *Debus* performers, because of their absolute submission and emotion to God, are totally absorbed in thoughts about God and His power. This encourages him to associate himself with something whose existence is relative and does not exist in total according to the intensity of his feelings. *Debus* performers are completely absorbed and dissolved into the Power of God. But this absorption is only emotional and not existential.

The Transcendental must be considered as part of the nature of *debus*. *Debus* does not exist apart from God’s provisions nor apart from the space that lies between God and *debus*, for God encompasses and encompasses all existence in its entirety. The immunity of *debus* demands God’s protection. God’s unlimited power in this case does not appear in the arbitrary and unpredictable-as in the case of miracles-but as repetitive, orderly and composed. That is why there are ritual processes and practices that must still be performed in *debus*. But still that essential connectedness cannot lie within the range of human experience. Therefore, He is transcendent.

The Contribution of *Debus* Existence to The Strengthening of Banten Cultural Authenticity

This section explains the analysis of the value function contained in Banten *debus* so that it becomes relevant and influential on humans, both for the *debus* actors themselves and the wider social community in the formation and strengthening of the cultural authenticity of Banten society.

Debus has become a reality in cultural embodiment which includes cultural practices and experiences combined with certain spiritual experiences both religiously and historically, because *debus* culture is not a culture that exists by itself. *Debus* is a process of historical accumulation that is unique to Banten that is able to shape its characteristics. *Debus* is a reality that has causal relationships with various other realities in the historical and cultural development of Banten society. This assumption becomes a hypothesis that the discourse about *debus* is closely related to the habits, lives and backgrounds of Banten people. *Debus* culture has influenced the behavior and characteristics of cultural identity, which has been believed to have value and meaning to the ritual symbols in *debus*.

Debus in Banten society can help the view of identity and its deepest values, *debus* identifies what is considered positive or negative. All components of *debus* provide

and explain the meaning of symbols, myths and even sources that ultimately help form a shared culture for most people in various regions in Banten. *Debus* culture provides materials and influences to form a cultural identity, where Banten people involve themselves in all rituals and forms of all components in *debus* that are developing themselves to be able to penetrate various circles.

Debus practitioners are obliged to maintain and practice the teachings concerning the laws governing community behavior. Islamic teachings, as they believe, are closely related to every stage in *debus*, and even the Pencaksilat movements are not just movements that must be mastered. Each stage and Pencaksilat movement in *debus* has its own symbol. The meaning of these symbols in general is how a *debus* player can have a polite and patient attitude.

Every meaning contained in the stages, rituals or movements of martial arts in *debus* must always be maintained and practiced in everyday life. This has become a norm in *debus*. The slightest violation of *debus* teachings will lead to its own consequences, such as difficulty concentrating and difficulty mastering *debus* knowledge, for example, being the result of committing these violations. Not being able to have immunity and having accidents are the most severe consequences experienced by *debus* players. This practice will indirectly be embedded in every *debus* performer so that they will become role models for their families and surrounding communities.

Debus, which is one of Banten's Islamic arts and culture and also the result of syncretism from local traditions, indicates that *debus* has a function in the field of Banten's arts and culture. Because the function of a cultural system itself is to organize and determine human actions and behavior, then the function of *debus* in the Banten cultural system is to strengthen the structuring and stabilizing of human actions and behavior in their lives through the ritual process in *debus* which is based on Islamic teachings.

Conclusion

All practices and prayers performed in every *Debus* performance can be considered transcendental because the practitioners of *Debus* believe that everything is created by God and is within His provisions, ultimately returning to Him. All arrangements and movements are predetermined in *Loh Mahfud*, the divine nature of God, in other words, *Loh Mahfud* is the Supreme Law of reality that regulates the existence of every created entity. *Loh Mahfud* indeed becomes a kind of absolute condition for the existence of immunity in *Debus* because it determines whether the *Debus* performer's body is immune or not. This can be seen from the belief of *Debus* practitioners who fully believe that the will and provisions of God are the most determining factors. God's protection is crucial in every stage and attraction of *Debus*, and it will be perfect because of God's will. The position and important role of God's will

as a transcendental ontological norm becomes one of the main ideas in *Debus*, which is theistic in nature, as it believes that God is the ruler of all creations.

The novelty of this study lies in its philosophical exploration of *Debus* through a hermeneutic-ontological approach, which has been rarely applied in previous studies. While most existing research on *Debus* focuses on its anthropological, cultural, or religious dimensions, this study offers a new perspective by interpreting *Debus* as a form of lived ontology that reflects the Bantenese community's transcendental worldview. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by revealing how the practice of *Debus* embodies a dynamic interplay between faith, metaphysical beliefs, and existential meaning. It also demonstrates how local spiritual traditions can serve as a living source of ontological reflection, particularly in the context of preserving cultural authenticity amidst the challenges of modernization and globalization. Thus, this study provides a philosophical framework that may serve as a basis for further research on the intersection between local tradition, spirituality, and ontological meaning in various cultural contexts.

Endnotes

1. Harold H Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy: An Introductory Textbook. Fourth Edition*, (American Book Company, New York, 1984), p.5-7
2. Whiteley, C. H, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, (Methuen & CO. Ltd, London, 1950), p.1
3. Mohammad Hudaeri. *Debus in the Tradition of Banten People*. (FUD Press: Banten, 2010), p.3
4. Others are generally silat teachers and are not known as *dhikr* and *ratib* at all. The Islamic recitations used to be effective must also be "charged" or "paid for" by fasting. The same results can sometimes be achieved in different ways, for example one might recite a formula that is "paid for" in advance, recite *an amulet* that has been "charged" while "borrowing" the power of the guru which is transferred through a *jiyad* practice. Mohamad Hudaeri. *Debus in the Tradition of Banten People*. (FUD Press: Banten, 2010), p.4
5. Helmy Faizi Bahrul Ulumi. *Magi of Banten People in Ontological Perspective (Case Study in Ciomas District, Serang-Banten)*, 2004. Master Thesis in Philosophy, Gadjah Mada University, Published in Joko Siswanto and Reno Wikandaru. *Metaphysics of the Archipelago: Learning Life from Local Wisdom*. (Gadjah Mada University Press: Yogyakarta, 2013), p.3
6. *Debus*, the practice of cultivating immunity to fire and sharp objects, is a particularly striking part of these techniques that eventually became attached to those called *Jawara*. *Debus* masters commonly use all kinds of magical practices. *Debus* techniques are an eclectic mix of Islamic magi and local traditions derived from pre-Islamic beliefs. The magic recitations consist of Islamic prayers in Arabic in addition to Javanese and Sundanese recitations. Mohamad Hudaeri. *Debus in the Tradition of Banten People*. (FUD Press: Banten, 2010), p.3
7. Isman Pratama Nasution, *Debus, Islam and Kiai: A Case Study in Tegal Sari Village, Walantaka Subdistrict, Serang Regency*, Thesis of Postgraduate Program in Anthropology, University of Indonesia (1995). Not Published
8. Mohammad Hudaeri, "Debus in Banten: The Link between Tariqah and Local Culture". *Al Qalam Journal*, Volume 33, No. 1 (January-June 2016), p. 63-83.

9. Hasani Ahmad Said, "Islam and Culture in Banten: Examining the Debus and Maulid Traditions", *Kalam Journal: Journal of Religious Studies and Islamic Thought*, Volume 10, No. 1 (June 2016), p. 108-138.
10. Muhamad Yusuf Sulaeman, Hidayatullah Haila, Ila Rosmilawati, "Debus Art Learning Strategy in the Context of Preserving Local Culture in Padepokan Terumbu Banten", *Journal of Existence of Out-of-School Education (E-Plus)*, Volume 4 No.1 (February 2019), p. 91-97.
11. Siti Solehah, Ujang Jamaludin, Dinar Sugiana Fitrayadi, "Cultural Values in Debus Art (Banten Cultural Ethnography Study Approach)", *Journal of Civic Education*, Volume 5 No.2 (2022), p. 212-221
12. Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy II*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p.3. See <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/jaspers/> (2022), In 1932, Jaspers published his Trilogy book entitled *Philosophie*, which consists of 3 separate volumes based on the object of Transcendence, namely *Weltorientierung* (World Orientation), *Existenzherhellung* (Existence Illumination) and *Metaphysics* (Metaphysics). This book is considered to be his magnum opus. Although the term Existenzphilosophie is widely used, he did not choose Existential Philosophy as the title of his book.
13. K. Bertens, *Western Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1983), p.132.
14. Karl Jaspers, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 21
15. Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom; An Introduction to Philosophy*, (Translated by Ralph Manheim. London and New York: New Haven and Yale University, 1973), 24
16. K. Bartens, *Western Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, p.133
17. Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy II*, p.9
18. Karl Jaspers, *Truth and Symbol: From Von de Wahrheit*, (Trans. Jean T. Wilde, William Kluback and William Kimmel. New York: Twayne, 1959), p. 11.
19. *Authenticity* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
20. Uriel Abulof, "Be Yourself! How Am I Not myself?". (Society, (2017-12-01). 54 (6): doi:10.1007/s12115-017-0183-0. ISSN 0147-2011), p.530-532
21. Karl Jaspers. *Philosophy III*, Transl. E.B. Aston (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 9.
22. Karl Jaspers. *On My Philosophy. Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*. (Ed. Walter Kaufman, 1941), p. 4
23. This first principle is material, living, spiritual and divine. Joko Siswanto, *Western Metaphysical Systems; From Aristotle to Derrida*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1998), p.4
24. Helmy Faizi Bahrul Ulumi. *Magi of Banten People in Ontological Perspective (Case Study in Ciomas District, Serang-Banten)*, 2004. Master Thesis in Philosophy, Gadjah Mada University, Published in Joko Siswanto and Reno Wikandaru. *Metaphysics of the Archipelago: Learning Life from Local Wisdom*. (Gadjah Mada University Press: Yogyakarta, 2013), p.158
25. Interview with Debus Practitioner, Abah Idris, Sunday July 16, 2023
26. Jaspers does not accept the possibility of absolute freedom. Freedom is lived where imperatives appear. Freedom is not something that simply appears as an appreciation. Freedom of self for Jaspers must be accompanied by the recognition and acceptance of others as freedom as well. Therefore, it is impossible to imagine freedom that is completely independent of other people or other restrictions. Joko Siswanto, *Western Metaphysical Systems; From Aristotle to Derrida*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1998), p.133
27. Karl Jaspers. *Philosophy II*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p.162

28. Karl Jaspers. *Way to Wisdom; An Introduction to Philosophy*. (Translated by Ralph Manheim, New Haven and Yale University: London and New York, 1973), p.24

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