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**RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S THEORY OF CREATION: A RENEWED INSIGHT INTO
ART AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION**

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Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore,¹ the first Asian and Indian Nobel Laureate, offers a profound examination of human creativity from an artistic perspective. Although he does not formally identify as an academic philosopher, his reflections on the human capacity for creativity and the infinite potential for generating novelty can be interpreted as modern philosophical insights grounded in the Vedas and *Upaniṣads*, positioning him as a contemporary Indian thinker. Conventionally, creation is understood as the act of producing, inventing, or bringing something into existence. Within religious creationism, God is regarded as the ultimate creator of the universe. Tagore does not repudiate this view; he recognizes God as the ultimate reality underlying the cosmos, thereby aligning himself with theistic and idealist philosophical traditions.

Nevertheless, Tagore introduces a distinctive conception of artistic creation, describing it as “an innovative work of man” and “the surplus in man” within the domain of art and culture. In his analysis, creation as an art form illuminates a new dimension of human potential. Philosophically, creation signifies artistic production endowed with aesthetic value, representing the spontaneous expression of the conscious soul.² To elucidate the nature of innovative work, Tagore distinguishes between construction and creation. Construction refers to a tangible, measurable object, whereas creation transcends materiality and is essentially immaterial. Tagore emphasizes that the human spirit possesses a surplus that enables the generation of novel forms, which he terms the “creative spirit.” This potential can be actualized through acts of creation. As he articulates in his lecture “Construction versus Creation,” “Creation is infinitely in excess of all measurements; it is the immaterial in matter.”¹

The Philosophical Dimensions of Creation in Art:

As a concept, creation can be examined in terms of its origins and contextualized within religion, philosophy, and science. In English literature, the term “creation” generally denotes the act or process of producing or constructing something new, or the outcome of such an act. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Bible defines creation as the act by which God brought the world into existence. In Old

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English usage, creation referred to something newly produced through human skill. Across many religious and philosophical systems, creation is often understood as a divine act through which God generates the universe. Etymologically, the term “creation” derives from the Latin word *creatio*, signifying invention or production, and it encompasses a range of related concepts including origination, foundation, formation, construction, fabrication, generation, innovation, and production. Words associated with creation further include notions such as new-concept, innovative work, original work, creative work, art-formation, imagination, conception, establishment, development, and achievement. In defining the specific nature of creation, Rabindranath Tagore conceptualizes it as the production of art, realized through the aesthetic appreciation of beauty. Within his works, creation is framed as an artistic production that may take multiple forms: a concept within a thought process, an act manifested in a work, a voice of humanity expressed in speech, a spontaneous articulation in art, or the realization of truth. Through this lens, creation is not merely a material or technical endeavour but an expression of the human spirit that embodies both aesthetic and philosophical dimensions.

In fact, in its meanings, the term ‘creation’ indicates two aspects - the action of making something new and the thing (as a result of the action) that has been made or invented. A creation is an act of starting something new for the first time or an act of introducing something new, it is either God’s act or human act. There are some dimensions of creation that follow some acts of making or transformation: (1) The spiritual transformation makes the world as the great design of God (the divine creation), (2) The biological transformation makes the different species of life (the gross creation or production), (3) The physical transformation makes the different stages of body, (4) The material transformation (combination of components) makes the different types of matter (natural creation), (5) Man can produce something new with his diligent effort to fulfil his needs or self-interest, and (6) Man creates something new forms which are infinitely in excess of all basic and material needs. Tagore mentions his view of creation in the senses of (1) and (6). The great influence of Vedas, *Upaniṣadas* and teachings of Buddha make him both a humanistic philosopher and a poet of spirit.² Even, his view on the ultimate reality as the creator of universe is considered as a theistic approach to the existence of God in His divine creation. It is true that Tagore follows the philosophy of *Upaniṣadas* but he does not believe that the physical world or the gross body is an illusory or false production. Rather, he believes that both the physical body and the conscious soul are real, but every production or construction is the finite nature of physical body,

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whereas the spontaneous creation of soul is the man's infinite nature.⁴ In the sense, a creation is an act of producing something new for the first time along with its spontaneous expression as an artistic talent.¹

In general, a concept may be regarded as a form of creation, and conversely, a creation may be understood as a conceptual realization. Religious creationism asserts that the universe—including nature, the Earth, and all living beings—is the product of divine, supernatural acts. From this perspective, God brought the world into existence, providing the framework within which human beings experience their being and consciousness. This theological view is frequently contrasted with scientific accounts of creation, which advance theoretical explanations for the origin and development of the universe and living phenomena, drawing upon disciplines such as cosmology, evolutionary biology, and archaeology. Tagore does not dismiss these diverse theories of creation and evolution; rather, he situates his understanding within the philosophical framework of the *Upaniṣads*. He maintains that human beings, endowed with conscious souls, are capable of apprehending the universe as a unified creation and of perceiving their own existence as part of this infinite whole. For Tagore, an individual who restricts themselves to mere physical existence, devoid of imagination, innovation, and aesthetic sensibility, fails to realize their true nature and cannot fully participate in the broader creative and spiritual reality. Consequently, human fulfilment is inseparable from the exercise of creative, imaginative, and aesthetic faculties, which reflect the infinite dimension of human consciousness.

From the metaphysical point of view, the world-nature as a great creation, according to Tagore, is the sign of divine nature of God, and when an artist draws a picture for it, from the aesthetical point of view, it is the spontaneous expression of man's infinite nature which is measured not by his basic needs of gross life, but by the joy of life. In fact, no creation is measured truly by its material output, because it is infinite in its nature. The life in the fulfilment of needs in its unlimited desire has neither great end nor real joy, but the man who is in his life as exists in his creative nature can realize the truth in the form of joy. To define the nature of creation he says, "Creation is the revelation of truth through the rhythm of forms."³ Every creation has its spontaneous expression in which it reveals within itself as the true nature of beauty – it is the ultimate manifestation ending itself in its infinite nature. For instance, in our civilization, man expresses humanity in his true-nature – it is his creative expression which does not exist in his mussel power. Sometimes, as a rational animal man tries to express his animal behaviour

¹ See Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 93–98; and Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 215–217. Tagore's interpretation of creation reconciles the theistic understanding of divine reality with the *Upaniṣadic* affirmation of both the material and spiritual worlds as manifestations of the same universal spirit (Brahman).

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with the help of rationality in order to establish himself as a powerful living being in the world. But it is not creation, because it is not good for others in the human society. Without humanity our works become a mere construction of mechanism, but with humanity it is more than mechanism, i.e., a creation of soul. According to Tagore, creation is not a mere measurement of material things; it has the immaterial aspect which is totally infinite in its nature.⁴ He makes a sharp distinction between the divine creation (such as the world) and human creation (such as a beautiful composition of music). God is the ultimate reality in His completeness of creation.² The whole world is the divine creation of God; it is neither the result of mechanism, nor the product of mere matter. Rather, the natural beauty, completeness, harmony, consciousness, etc. prove that it is a great divine creation as revealed under the grand design of God. In his true nature, man has a creative mind, and as an artist he can create the art which is known as his spontaneous response to the evergreen call of soul. Indeed, human life becomes true in itself when it is a creation.⁸ Based on Tagore's conception of creation, the following characteristics can be identified: 1. Creation entails the production of something genuinely new. 2. It is grounded in imagination and the capacity for innovation. 3. Accordingly, creation is inherently an innovative endeavor. 4. It communicates through a rhythm of forms, revealing deeper truths. 5. True creation is realized only when it is devoid of inhumanity. 6. It emerges as a spontaneous expression of the infinite potential within humans. 7. Creation is fundamentally distinct from mere construction. 8. It must possess originality rather than being a mere replication. 9. It is free from unethical impulses or coarse desires. 10. A creation is inseparable from its creator, reflecting their consciousness and spirit. 11. The realm of art exemplifies the domain of creation. 12. Creation represents the response of the human soul to the call of ultimate reality. 13. It is fully appreciated through the aesthetic recognition of its beauty. 14. Through creation, the richness and vitality of human life are revealed. Like the supreme Creator, a genuine artist approaches creation with humility.⁵

Differentiating Construction and Creation in Art and Philosophy:

The terms "construction" and "creation" are often used interchangeably in everyday language. For instance, one might describe a newly built structure as either "a new construction" or "a new creation," with both statements seeming accurate. In such contexts, the two terms are applied simultaneously to convey aspects of structure, design, or aesthetic appeal. However, Rabindranath Tagore treats these concepts distinctly. For Tagore, creation is fundamentally different from

² Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana: The Realisation of Life* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 45–52; see also *The Religion of Man* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 101–105. Tagore emphasizes that true creation is a spiritual realization of beauty and harmony, where the divine creative energy manifests through the human soul. For Tagore, mechanical or utilitarian production lacks the essence of creation unless it embodies the infinite ideal of humanity and goodness.

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construction; it is not merely a material assembly but embodies an immaterial, qualitative dimension that transcends mechanical composition.

Tagore emphasizes that every creation comprises two aspects: material and expression, forming a dualism between construction and creation. A mere material assembly without spontaneous expression constitutes construction. For example, a lamp without light is a simple construction; when it emits light with aesthetic or symbolic significance, it becomes a creation. Similarly, in poetry, adherence to grammatical rules ensures the construction of the poem, but without poetic expression, the work remains a construction rather than a creation. Human beings exemplify this distinction: the physical body, organized mechanistically, represents construction, whereas the spontaneous expression of the body and mind reflects creation.⁶ Moreover, aesthetic appreciation exemplifies creation in everyday experience. Observing a flower involves more than recognizing its material parts; it is the perception of beauty as a harmonious whole that constitutes creation. Conversely, artistic expressions rooted in vulgarity, aggression, or mere muscular power reflect only mechanical construction. A true artist, according to Tagore, distinguishes between forces that manifest violence and those that cultivate the perfection of creative unity, channeling human potential toward infinite, harmonious expression. Creation, therefore, is inseparable from the spontaneous, expressive, and ethical dimensions of human consciousness.

Man's Creative Spirit as an Expression of Inner Surplus:

According to Tagore, human life comprises two distinct dimensions: one as the ordinary individual and the other as the extraordinary or "great" human. As ordinary beings, humans focus on satisfying their basic needs, but as great individuals, they strive to transcend these limitations by realizing their infinite potential. Throughout life, a person endeavors to evolve from a rational animal to a spiritual being, or from the ordinary to the extraordinary, through the exercise of the creative spirit inherent in human nature. In this sense, a simple life, when guided by consciousness, becomes a creative life, revealing the greatness of the soul. Tagore emphasizes that within human beings lies a humanistic and moral impulse to express themselves in ways that exceed basic requirements—what he terms the "surplus in man." This surplus embodies the fullness of human creativity, expressed spontaneously and authentically, and distinguishes humans from other living beings. He defines this surplus as the excess of life beyond mere biological needs, stating, "But the most important fact that has come into prominence along with the change of direction in our evolution, is the possession of a Spirit which has its enormous capital with a surplus far in excess of the requirements of the biological animal in man".⁷

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In The Religion of an Artist, Tagore asserts that life is inherently creative because it contains this surplus, which continually exceeds the constraints of time and space, seeking expression in diverse forms of self-realization.⁸ In Personality, he further explains that the creative nature of humans, particularly in the artist, manifests this surplus in the production of art, which functions as a proper expression of the human spirit.⁹ Through such creative activity, humans not only realize their inner greatness but also experience their infinite potential, attaining a sense of fulfilment and authenticity in life.

All significant human achievements must be evaluated not only in terms of effort or technical skill but also through the lens of the creative spirit—the innate, conscious power that drives spontaneous growth and expression in life. Tagore identifies the creative spirit as an intrinsic force of the human soul, spiritual in nature and infinite, surpassing mere material needs and superficial interests. This creative spirit distinguishes extraordinary individuals from ordinary humans, representing what Tagore terms the “surplus” within man. Through this surplus, humans strive to produce novel works that arise from the depths of their inner consciousness.³

To conceptualize human infinitude or the inner spirit, Tagore draws upon the idealistic framework of *Vedānta*, proposing a form of synthetic idealism that acknowledges both the finite, temporal aspects of human existence and the eternal, spiritual dimension. The creative spirit relies on internal faculties such as intelligence, intuition, imagination, and occasionally, emotion, enabling the soul to express itself spontaneously. In the realms of art and culture, a creation attains greatness when it originates from this inner spirit, producing something genuinely new that resonates as an enduring expression of the soul. Such creation embodies humanity, reflecting the surplus of life beyond basic needs, and is realized in what Tagore calls the “Man of the Heart” (*moner mānuṣ*). As he observes, But, man has a surplus where he can proudly assert that knowledge is for the sake of knowledge, because there knowledge is freedom. This surplus seeks its outlet in the creation of Art, for man’s civilization is built upon his surplus.¹⁰

The Concept of Creation in Tagore’s Philosophy:

Creation as the Artist's Religion Every creative person, in Tagore's opinion, is a part of the same community that creates the art world. Art is a creative realm. Tagore truly intends to refer to it as an artistic work when he characterizes the nature of creation as the revelation of truth via the rhythm of

³.Tagore describes the “surplus” as the transcendent creative energy of the human spirit, through which individuals participate in the divine act of creation, transforming material existence into expressions of truth, beauty, and harmony.

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forms. From a metaphysical perspective, the world is a harmony of forms with a rhythm. Here, rhythm is the creative spirit or power that allows an artist to produce something new in the context of his religion. It is also the systematic movement that is produced and controlled by harmonious limitation. Man's creative nature is inherently inclined to produce new works of art, and his artistic ability to do so is so exceptional and one-of-a-kind. In the end, a fresh creation that conveys its beauty as the reality of art is what an artist considers to be a true art-production. An artist's creation, in Tagore's opinion, is their religion; it is the ideal fusion of harmony and rhythm. According to him, there are two types of rhythm: flawless and flawed. True art can only be created through the creative nature of perfect rhythm; imperfect rhythm cannot be forced to create it.

We see true music as the epitome of beauty and see its aesthetic manifestation that transcends all mathematical explanations and logical sequencing. Similar to music, a flawless image of an artist always includes their lovely medium in harmony.¹¹ When a piece of music is out of tune, it has a lot of non-musical notes; yet, a flawless piece of true music does not include these imperfections. The rhythm and harmony of the music demonstrate that it is the greatest creation in the world of music. The harmony of melodies and rhythms forms the foundation of true music, which is evidently produced by the music-maker and provides us with aesthetic pleasure. Its genuine essence also makes us happy.⁴

The Connection between the Creator and Creation:

Can a creation be detached from its creator? This is an old yet essential question. In general, we may say that at least one creator is required for a creation; he must participate in the creation process. The *Cārvāka*, a materialist and heretic school of Indian philosophy rejects God's role in the creation of the world. The major theistic schools of Indian philosophy argue that solely material causes or components cannot make something new as creation without a conscious being design.

Tagore, as an *Upaniṣadic* thinker, does not accept the materialistic view, but he follows the Upaniṣadas and accepts the concept of ultimate reality (Param Brahman) for the creation of the universe. His view as he used in a sentence is: “Upaniṣads have said that all things are created and sustained by an infinite joy.”¹² Infinite bliss is completely free from all vile desires here, but man can still enjoy it by using the inner strength of his soul, which God has given to both the creator and other appreciators. One

⁴ Rabindranath Tagore, *Sangeet O Sahitya [Music and Literature]* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1936), 22–27; and Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 107–111. Tagore conceives rhythm and harmony as the spiritual principles underlying all art, particularly music, where the fusion of sound and feeling reveals the infinite beauty of creation. For him, artistic rhythm mirrors the divine order of the universe—flawless, spontaneous, and harmonious in essence.

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experiences the eternal unity of soul and life, or creator and created, when they appreciate joy.¹³ The creator and his created are inseparable in this relationship. This holds true for both human creation in the domains of art and culture as well as for divine creation in the universe. When Tagore composes music or writes a song, he frequently believes that his creation is inextricably linked to him. Music and the musician are inseparable, he adds in this context.¹⁴

The Unity of Creativity

Finally, Tagore, a brilliant Upanishadic thinker, supports the ultimate creation that is made by the one and recognized as the one. In this case, the first one represents God's creative ideal or spirit, while the second one represents the entire cosmos, which he refers to as the creative unity. In his opinion, this one is the creation of the cosmos of many, expressing the creative unity in its limitless display of variety. We can enjoy the delight of man's creations, such as pictures, music, poems, etc., since they perfectly harmoniously convey the unity of creation.¹⁵

A close relationship exists between the creator and the creation in a creation, implying another relationship between beauty and truth. When one uses reasoning to try to understand the status of creation, he can see it as the different intellectual proportions that indicate the truth as a combination of facts, but from an aesthetic standpoint, he can see it as a whole that represents the truth as a harmony of facts. It is true that individual facts in their variance are the varying proportions of one truth, but in a harmony of facts, they never break their relationship, which eventually creates unity in diversity.¹⁶ Here, it is necessary to be mentioned that when Tagore mentions the creative unity in the exposition of art-creation, it indicates not only the close relation between the creation and the creator, but also the concrete unity in its relation to the appreciators. The both creation and creative unity are true from the aesthetical point of view. The creations such as poem, picture, music, song, etc. are something more than other ideas or concepts⁵. The unity in different creations indicates the unity in diversity.¹⁷

Realization of Truth in Creation:

According to Rabindranath Tagore, the act of creation is not merely an artistic endeavor but a profound means through which truth is revealed. For him, truth does not exist as an abstract or static concept; rather, it manifests dynamically through the creative process, where the human soul becomes

⁵ Tagore's idea of "creative unity" emphasizes the triadic relationship between the creator, the creation, and the perceiver, where art serves as a living bridge uniting individual consciousness with universal beauty and truth.

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an instrument of expression. Creation, in this sense, serves as a bridge between the finite and the infinite, embodying the spontaneous realization of the spiritual essence within material forms. Tagore asserts that every genuine work of art carries an inner rhythm that reflects the harmony of the universe—what he describes as “the revelation of truth through the rhythm of forms.”¹⁸ Thus, the beauty inherent in art is not superficial decoration but a manifestation of the deeper unity between man, nature, and the divine. In creative activity, the artist transcends mere technical construction and becomes a participant in the cosmic process of creation itself. Through imagination, intuition, and emotional sensitivity, the human spirit apprehends truth not as intellectual knowledge but as lived experience—an aesthetic and spiritual realization that unites perception, emotion, and consciousness into a harmonious whole.¹⁹

Tagore in his great poetry, “Gitanjali.”⁶ wrote “When the creation was new and all the stars shone in their first splendour, the gods held their assembly in the sky and sang " Oh, the picture of perfection I the joy unalloyed !But one cried of a sudden — It seems that somewhere there is a break in the chain of light and one of the stars has been lost. The golden string of their harp snapped, their song stopped, and they cried in dismay — Yes, that lost star was the best, she was the glory of all heavens ! ”²⁰

From that day the search is unceasing for her, and the cry goes on Understanding the ultimate nature of creation requires two mental states: self-awareness and self-realization. Although he does not reject empirical knowledge of the outside world, he adheres to Upaniṣadic idealism in order to define self-consciousness and self-realization, which he defines by accepting subjective idealism and subjective truth.²¹ The *Upaniṣadas* assert that the absolute reality, which is utterly pure in its divine nature, is beyond the reach of limited understanding. We cannot, therefore, realize the absolute because of our limited understanding and finite nature. Our soul's inner spirit, or consciousness, however, allows us to see the limitless nature as the divine nature of absolute reality. Consciousness allows our own inner soul (*antarātman*) to realize the supreme soul (*paramātman*). In fact, the combination of truth and beauty is realized in the realization of creation, which ultimately represents the infinite. When the person who is appreciating it has the ability to perceive the beauty in the harmony of creation, then an aesthetical appreciation is conceivable.²² He is thus able to recognize the true essence of freedom as the manifestation of joy, which is thought to be immaterial and innate to the soul. In this instance, Tagore

⁶ Gitanjali presents an intimate dialogue between the human soul and the divine, portraying devotion not as ritual but as a spontaneous, lived experience. The collection reveals the essence of spirituality through the lens of everyday life, emphasizing humility, love, and the soul’s yearning for unity with the eternal.

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acknowledges the subjective truth in order to realize truth in creation. An aesthetic appreciation of beauty is undoubtedly a personal affair for any individual who possesses this knowledge.²³

Thus, the way that truth in art is understood through the sense of beauty may vary from one person to another, from one subject to another, or even from one point of view to another. He claimed that in order to recognize truth as the beauty of creation, one must have firsthand experience, knowledge, feelings, and a respect for art. He also adopts subjective idealism to accomplish this, which holds that the beauty of anything is determined by the subjective condition in which the mind views it. When one is able to appreciate the beauty of creation and comprehend the truth of glorious creation from an aesthetic perspective, they will realize the delight of perfection. For the human soul to be directly connected to God's creation is the state of realization. Goodness shows beauty not so much as a thing to be perceived or understood. The beauty of goodness is a thing of much wider and deeper significance—it endows man with Godliness. It is because of its intimate nearness that we do not always notice goodness as beauty. When we do realise this, our whole being overflow with happiness like a river in flood, we come to know that nothing in the world can be more beautiful.²⁴

Conclusion:

The primary goal of Tagore's philosophy of creation, as we have seen throughout the discussion, is to distinguish between creation and construction. This allows one to recognize a creation as a harmonious expression of the soul that possesses a relationship between truth and beauty. His conception of creation gives man a creative spirit grounded in peace, love, and aesthetic enjoyment. Art is more than just its structural design (or syntax); it is a realm of creation. According to Tagore, creation is an artistic expression of man's creative essence, even though it is not a construction. According to him, an artwork is the result of man's creative soul responding to the Real World's call. Since both creation and construction are unique and innovative, they can both be regarded as new productions. However, creation is distinct from construction in that it involves the unplanned manifestation of harmony, beauty, and truth. Similar to Kant, he emphasises that in terms of aesthetic appraisal, an artistic expression is beautiful when it is as natural as nature, and that nature is lovely when it is an artwork. For the aesthetic appreciation of creation, he actually embraces subjectivism, which maintains that the individual appreciator's realization determines how beautiful a thing is.

However, when humanity is lacking, creation cannot occur. He asserts that a man becomes a great artist and ultimately a great man when he realizes his humanity. Thus, despite his significant contributions to the sphere of art and culture, no artist can achieve perfection in his art-expression

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without humanity. In the same way, no work of art would exist if truth and beauty or rhythm and harmony were not perfectly combined. The spontaneous manifestation of spirit can actualize and manifest artistic creation, which cannot be measured by mathematical laws or determined from logic. The two worlds—the world of reality and the world of joy—belong to the realm of creation; science and metaphysics deal with abstract truth, while art creation deals with real truth. Tagore makes a compelling case that a man's creative personality is influenced by his understanding of truth, his contribution to the arts and culture, and his limitless nature. In actuality, the man's inventiveness and charisma might complement one another.

According to Tagore's theory of creation, it is possible to draw the conclusion that in the realm of creation, a painter, a musician, and a dancer are all aware of the particular applications of color, musical notes, and body postures that are not known by physicists, chemists, anatomists, or physicians. A person's level of aesthetic taste is determined by both his aesthetic appreciation skills and his capacity for impromptu artistic expression. The nature of joy, the nature of ecstasy, and the beauty of creation can all be realized through aesthetic appreciation. The subjective truth experienced by an artist is not the same as the objective truth experienced by a scientist. An artist can appreciate a sculpture's beauty, but geologists and engineers cannot, unlike architects. Therefore, the subjective perception of beauty determines the aesthetic appreciation of art creation as perceived by each individual artist.

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