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Khawf, Raja', and Mahabbah as Sufi Affects: A Philosophical Reading through Spinoza and Martha Nussbaum

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This article examines *khawf* (fear of God), *raja'* (hope in Divine mercy), and *mahabbah* (Divine love) as disciplined forms of affective transformation in Sufism. Against modern tendencies to treat emotion primarily as a psychological symptom, irrational disturbance, or object of regulation, this study argues that Sufi affect functions as a spiritual discipline through which the self is purified, ethically reoriented, and directed towards God. Using a philosophical-hermeneutic method, this article analyses selected discussions of *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* in al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and al-Qushayri's *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, placing them in dialogue with Baruch Spinoza's theory of affect and Martha Nussbaum's evaluative theory of emotion. The analysis shows that *khawf* is not merely paralysing fear, but vigilant awareness of Divine majesty and moral accountability; *raja'* is not passive optimism, but disciplined openness to Divine mercy; and *mahabbah* is not sentimental attachment, but a reorientation of the self towards the Beloved. Through Spinoza, these affects can be understood as movements from passivity towards active understanding. Through Nussbaum, they appear as value-laden judgements that disclose what the subject regards as ultimately meaningful. The article concludes that Sufi affect offers an ontological, ethical, and spiritual framework for rethinking emotion as a path of self-purification, existential restoration, and transcendence, without reducing Sufism to clinical psychotherapy.

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Abstract

This article examines *khawf* (fear of God), *raja'* (hope in Divine mercy), and *mahabbah* (Divine love) as disciplined forms of affective transformation in Sufism. Against modern tendencies to treat emotion primarily as a psychological symptom, irrational disturbance, or object of regulation, this study argues that Sufi affect functions as a spiritual discipline through which the self is purified, ethically reoriented, and directed towards God. Using a philosophical-hermeneutic method, this article analyses selected discussions of *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* in al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and al-Qushayri's *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, placing them in dialogue with Baruch Spinoza's theory of affect and Martha Nussbaum's evaluative theory of emotion. The analysis shows that *khawf* is not merely paralysing fear, but vigilant awareness of Divine majesty and moral accountability; *raja'* is not passive optimism, but disciplined openness to Divine mercy; and *mahabbah* is not sentimental attachment, but a reorientation of the self towards the Beloved. Through Spinoza, these affects can be understood as movements from passivity towards active understanding. Through Nussbaum, they appear as value-laden judgements that disclose what the subject regards as ultimately meaningful. The article concludes that Sufi affect offers an ontological, ethical, and spiritual framework for rethinking emotion as a path of self-purification, existential restoration, and transcendence, without reducing Sufism to clinical psychotherapy.

Keywords: Sufism; *khawf; raja'; mahabbah;* Spinoza; Nussbaum

INTRODUCTION

Modern human beings increasingly face not only socio-economic and technological challenges, but also an inner crisis related to affective life. Emotional exhaustion, existential alienation, and spiritual emptiness have become visible features of contemporary experience (Mansyur, 2022). Although access to information, communication, and therapeutic language has expanded, many individuals still struggle to understand the deeper meaning of their emotions. Emotion is often treated as a symptom to be controlled, an impulse to be regulated, or a disturbance to be removed. Such an approach may be useful in certain practical contexts, but it does not always address a more fundamental question: what does emotion reveal about the human self, its values, wounds, vulnerabilities, and orientation towards meaning? In this regard,

affect needs to be reconsidered not only as a psychological event, but also as an existential and spiritual phenomenon.

This question becomes more urgent in contemporary culture, where the search for emotional and spiritual peace often appears through practices such as healing, meditation, journaling, and spiritual retreat. These practices indicate that modern individuals are seeking ways to restore affective balance and inner meaning. However, this search can also become instant, superficial, and detached from ethical transformation. Spirituality may turn into an aesthetic lifestyle rather than a discipline of the self. In the digital era, affective life is also shaped by rapid and performative modes of expression. Social media encourages emotional responses that are immediate, visible, and easily commodified. Love, fear, and hope may appear less as reflective experiences than as reactions shaped by digital circulation (Fadeli, 2025). This situation calls for a deeper philosophical and spiritual framework for understanding how emotion can be interpreted, cultivated, and transformed.

In Islamic thought, emotion is closely connected to the soul, desire, moral discipline, and spiritual purification. The concept of *nafs* indicates that human beings possess inner impulses that may lead either to moral disorder or, when properly disciplined, to spiritual transformation (Ramli et al., 2024). Within this broader framework, Sufism offers a particularly rich account of affect. It does not simply reject emotion, nor does it treat emotion as an obstacle to spiritual life. Rather, Sufism seeks to purify, educate, and redirect emotion as part of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, the purification of the soul. The broader history of Sufism shows that inner experience is inseparable from discipline, training, and the formation of spiritual character (Knysh, 2017). In al-Qushayri's *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, for example, the Sufi path is described through spiritual states, stations, discipline, and proper comportment before God (al-Qushayri, 2007). This shows that Sufism provides a serious language for understanding the affective dimension of human life.

Within this framework, affect is not necessarily a spiritual obstacle. It can become a medium of transcendence when it is disciplined and oriented towards God. Three important forms of affect in Sufism are *khawf* (fear of God), *raja'* (hope in Divine mercy), and *mahabbah* (Divine love). These are not merely passing emotions, but affective orientations that shape the relation between the servant and God. Al-Ghazali presents *khawf* and *raja'* as two balancing forces in the spiritual journey: fear protects the soul from arrogance and negligence, while hope protects it from despair (al-Ghazali, n.d.). He also places *mahabbah* as a higher form of spiritual affect because love moves the self beyond obedience based merely on fear of punishment or desire for reward (al-Ghazali, n.d.). In

this sense, Sufi affect is not raw emotion, but emotion that has been spiritually educated and directed.

This understanding challenges the assumption that emotion stands in opposition to reason. In several strands of Western intellectual history, emotion has often been regarded as irrational, bodily, unstable, or subordinate to rational control. However, modern philosophy of emotion has increasingly questioned this dichotomy. Robert Solomon, for instance, argues that emotions are not merely passive disturbances, but meaningful engagements with the world (Solomon, 2003). This development opens a space for rethinking the relation between emotion, reason, value, and ethical life. It also allows Sufi affect to be discussed not only as a devotional or theological matter, but also as a philosophical problem.

Baruch Spinoza and Martha Nussbaum are especially relevant to this discussion because both provide philosophical frameworks that give emotion a more serious conceptual status. Spinoza defines affect as a modification of the body and mind that either increases or decreases the power of acting (Spinoza, 1994). For him, human freedom is not achieved by suppressing affect, but by understanding its causes and transforming passive affects into active understanding. Although Spinoza's metaphysics differs significantly from Islamic theism, his theory of affect offers a useful conceptual language for analysing how emotion may move from passivity to transformation.

Nussbaum offers another important perspective. In her evaluative theory of emotion, emotion is not merely an irrational outburst or biological reaction, but a form of value-laden judgement (Nussbaum, 2001). Fear, hope, grief, and love reveal what a person regards as important, vulnerable, and meaningful. This perspective is relevant for rereading Sufi affect because *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* are not merely subjective feelings. They are spiritual evaluations of the self, the world, and God. They reveal what the Sufi subject regards as ultimately real, valuable, and worthy of devotion.

Previous studies on Sufism have discussed *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* mainly as spiritual states, ethical virtues, or devotional experiences. Meanwhile, studies in the philosophy of emotion have explored affect through questions of cognition, embodiment, value, and ethical orientation. However, the philosophical structure of Sufi affect has not been sufficiently explored through a dialogue between classical Sufi thought and modern theories of emotion. This article addresses that gap by reading *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* through Spinoza's theory of affect and Nussbaum's evaluative theory of emotion. The purpose is not to force Sufi concepts into Western philosophical categories, but to construct a critical dialogue that clarifies the philosophical significance of affect in Sufism.

This article therefore argues that *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* should be understood not merely as devotional emotions, but as disciplined affective orientations through which the self is purified and reoriented towards God. Through Spinoza, these affects can be interpreted as movements from passivity towards active understanding. Through Nussbaum, they can be read as value-laden judgements that disclose what the subject regards as ultimately meaningful. Nevertheless, Sufi affect remains distinct because its final orientation is theocentric: fear, hope, and love become transformative because they are directed towards Divine reality. Thus, Spinoza and Nussbaum are used here as interpretive lenses, not as frameworks that replace or exhaust the theological depth of Sufi spirituality.

Based on this argument, the article is guided by three questions. First, how does Sufism understand and discipline affect as part of the spiritual journey towards God? Second, how can Spinoza's theory of affect and Nussbaum's theory of emotion help clarify the philosophical structure of *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah*? Third, how can this cross-traditional reading contribute to contemporary discussions of affect, self-transformation, and spiritual restoration without reducing Sufism to clinical psychotherapy? By addressing these questions, this article seeks to contribute to the study of Sufism, the philosophy of emotion, and contemporary Islamic spirituality. Its contribution is philosophical rather than clinical: it proposes a framework for understanding emotion not merely as an object of regulation, but as a possible path of self-purification, ethical reorientation, and transcendence.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a philosophical-hermeneutic method. This method is used to examine the conceptual meaning of affect as it appears in classical Sufi thought and modern philosophy of emotion. As a library-based study, it does not collect empirical data from human participants, but analyses selected philosophical and Sufi texts through interpretation, conceptual reasoning, and critical reflection.

The material object of this study is Sufi affect, particularly *khawf* (fear of God), *raja'* (hope in Divine mercy), and *mahabbah* (Divine love). These three affects are selected because they represent central affective orientations in the Sufi path. They are not merely psychological reactions, but spiritual disciplines through which the soul is purified and reoriented towards God. The formal object of the study is the philosophy of emotion, which serves as an analytical lens for clarifying the ontological, ethical, and spiritual significance of these affects.

The primary Sufi texts examined in this article are al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and al-Qushayri's *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*. These works are selected because they provide important classical formulations of Sufi affect, spiritual discipline, and the transformation of the soul. Al-Ghazali is especially relevant for understanding the balance between *khawf* and *raja'*, as well as the elevated position of *mahabbah* in the spiritual journey. Al-Qushayri is relevant because his account of spiritual states, stations, discipline, and proper comportment offers a broader vocabulary for understanding affect as part of the path towards God.

These Sufi concepts are then placed in dialogue with Baruch Spinoza's theory of affect in *Ethics* and Martha Nussbaum's evaluative theory of emotion in *Upheavals of Thought* (al-Ghazali, n.d.; al-Qushayri, 2007; Nussbaum, 2001; Spinoza, 1994). Spinoza is used because his theory of *affectus* explains emotion as a modification of the body and mind related to the increase or decrease of the power of acting. Nussbaum is used because her theory of emotion as evaluative judgement helps clarify how fear, hope, and love disclose what the subject regards as valuable, vulnerable, and meaningful. In this sense, the selected texts are treated not merely as historical sources, but as conceptual resources for constructing a philosophical dialogue between Sufism and the philosophy of emotion.

The sources are gathered through documentary study by selecting primary and secondary literature relevant to three main themes: Sufi affect, especially *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah*; philosophical theories of affect and emotion, especially in Spinoza and Nussbaum; and contemporary discussions on affective transformation, self-restoration, and spirituality. Secondary literature is used to clarify the historical context of Sufi concepts, the philosophical meaning of affect, and the limits of translating spiritual affect into contemporary therapeutic language.

The analysis is conducted in three stages. First, the article interprets *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* in Sufism by examining how these affects function as part of spiritual discipline and the purification of the soul. Second, it analyses the structure and function of emotion in Spinoza and Nussbaum, especially the transformation of passive affect into active understanding in Spinoza and the role of emotion as value-laden judgement in Nussbaum. Third, it constructs a reflective synthesis that reads Sufi affect as a disciplined path of transcendence, while also considering its relevance for contemporary discussions of self-restoration without reducing it to clinical psychotherapy.

Through this approach, the study formulates a dialogue between Islamic spirituality and modern philosophical discourse. This dialogue is not intended to reduce Sufism to Western philosophical categories, nor to claim that Spinoza and Nussbaum fully explain Sufi spirituality. Rather, it seeks to clarify the philosophical significance of Sufi affect while remaining attentive to the theological and spiritual depth of Sufism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Dimension of Affect in Sufism: *Khawf*, *Raja'*, and *Mahabbah*

Sufism, as the inner dimension of Islam, speaks not only of metaphysical doctrine, but also of the formation of the soul through spiritual discipline, moral refinement, and affective transformation. In this tradition, emotion is not simply suppressed or ignored. It is purified, educated, and redirected within the discipline of *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Affect may become a path towards transcendence when it is no longer dominated by the ego, but trained to open the self to humility, vigilance, hope, love, and awareness before God.

Among the various forms of emotion in Sufism, three occupy a central position in the spiritual journey: *khawf* (fear of God), *raja'* (hope in Divine mercy), and *mahabbah* (Divine love). These are not temporary feelings, but affective orientations that shape the relation between the servant and God. In al-Qushayri's account, Sufi life is structured through the movement between spiritual stations, states, discipline, and inner refinement (al-Qushayri, 2007). This means that affect in Sufism cannot be separated from the training of the soul. *Khawf* is not paralysing fear, but awareness of Divine majesty and moral accountability. *Raja'* is not empty optimism, but trust in Divine mercy that prevents the soul from falling into despair. *Mahabbah* is not sentimental attachment, but love that grows from knowledge of the Beloved and reorients the whole self towards God.

Al-Ghazali gives an important formulation of *khawf* and *raja'* in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. He presents fear and hope as two balancing forces in spiritual life: fear protects the servant from arrogance, negligence, and false security, while hope protects the servant from despair and spiritual paralysis (al-Ghazali, n.d.). Both must be present in balance. Fear without hope may lead to despair, while hope without fear may produce complacency. In this sense, *khawf* and *raja'* are not merely psychological states, but ethical-spiritual disciplines that educate the soul to remain alert before Divine justice and open to Divine mercy.

Mahabbah, according to al-Ghazali, occupies a higher position because love for God moves the servant beyond obedience based only on fear of punishment or desire for reward. Love for God is born from a deeper recognition of Divine beauty, generosity, and perfection. It is therefore not only an emotion directed towards God, but also a transformation of the centre of the self. The lover no longer acts merely because of external command, but because the heart has been inwardly attached to the Beloved. This is why Sufi love should not be understood as affective softness alone; it is a disciplined orientation that reshapes desire, action, and spiritual perception.

These conceptions show that affect in Sufism has a clear direction: from ego-centred feeling towards Divine orientation, from negligence towards awareness, and

from ordinary emotion towards *ma'rifah*. In *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, spiritual states and stations are described as part of the gradual refinement of the servant before God (al-Qushayri, 2007). Affective transformation is therefore not passive, but continuous and disciplined. It forms a spiritual character that is stable, reflective, and ethically responsive.

Furthermore, affect in Sufism is integrated into devotional and ethical practice. *Khawf* does not make a Sufi cowardly, but humble, careful, and morally vigilant. *Raja'* does not encourage empty dreaming, but sustains effort, repentance, and trust in God. *Mahabbah* does not lead to sentimentalism, but to sincerity, compassion, steadfastness, and self-giving on the Divine path. These affects are lived through *dhikr*, *muhasabah*, worship, ethical conduct, and the discipline of the heart. Affect in Sufism is therefore emotional, spiritual, and existential at the same time.

The transformation of affect in Sufism occurs not through denial, but through purification. Emotions often considered weak or dangerous, such as fear, hope, and love, become central to transcendence when they are disciplined by *tazkiyah*. Sufi spirituality recognises the complexity of the human soul and guides it towards transformation through that very complexity. In this context, affect functions as a map of the soul. A *salik*, or traveller on the Sufi path, recognises *khawf* as a call to preserve spiritual vigilance, *raja'* as openness to Divine forgiveness and possibility, and *mahabbah* as the deepest orientation of the heart towards the Beloved.

By understanding *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* within the Sufi framework, affect can be seen as inseparable from self-purification. Emotion is not merely a residue of worldly experience, but a spiritual language that discloses the condition of the heart. Sufism offers a way of seeing emotion that does not oppose reason, but deepens it by directing the self towards awareness, surrender, and transformation. This is where Sufi affect becomes philosophically significant: it shows that feeling, when purified and properly oriented, may become a path of knowledge, ethical formation, and transcendence.

3.2. Philosophy of Emotion: Spinoza and Nussbaum

Baruch Spinoza is one of the early modern philosophers who challenged the sharp dichotomy between reason and affect. In *Ethics*, he does not treat emotion simply as an irrational disturbance that must be eliminated, but as part of the structure of human existence. Spinoza defines affect as a modification of the body and mind that either increases or decreases the power of acting (Spinoza, 1994). Affect is therefore not merely a subjective feeling, but a change in the existential power of a person.

For Spinoza, affect is closely related to *conatus*, the fundamental striving by which each being endeavours to persevere in its existence (Spinoza, 1994). Human beings are

not passive containers of emotion; they are living beings whose affects express their effort to survive, expand, and preserve their mode of being. Emotion, therefore, should be understood within the framework of power, causality, and knowledge. By understanding the causes of one's emotions, human beings may transform passive affects into more active forms of understanding.

Passive affect, in Spinoza's view, arises when a person is determined by external causes that are not adequately understood. A person becomes passive not simply because he feels, but because he does not understand why he feels and how that feeling is connected to the wider order of reality. Conversely, active affect appears when a person understands the causes of his emotion and is no longer merely carried by external forces. Deleuze reads this as one of the central points of Spinoza's practical philosophy: affect becomes ethically important because it concerns the increase or decrease of the power of acting (Deleuze, 1988). Thus, the transformation of affect is also a transformation of knowledge.

Within Spinoza's ethics, happiness is not the absence of emotion, but the movement towards active understanding. The more adequately a person understands himself and the causes that shape him, the less he is enslaved by confused passions. This point is useful for the present article because it allows affect to be read not as a disturbance, but as a field of transformation. However, the comparison must be made carefully. Spinoza's God or Substance is not identical with the personal God of Sufism. Therefore, Spinoza should not be used to dissolve Sufi theology into monistic metaphysics, but to clarify how affect can be transformed through understanding.

At this point, Spinoza's thought can be brought into dialogue with Sufism without being equated with it. In Sufism, affective movements such as *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* are not left in their raw psychological form, but are disciplined through knowledge, remembrance, and purification. Through Spinoza's lens, these affects can be understood as movements that may either weaken or strengthen the self, depending on whether they remain passive or become integrated into understanding. *Khawf* may paralyse the soul if it remains confused fear, but it becomes spiritually active when it produces humility, vigilance, and awareness before God. *Raja'* may become illusion if detached from discipline, but it becomes active when it sustains effort and trust. *Mahabbah* may become attachment when directed towards the ego, but becomes transformative when directed towards the Divine.

Martha Nussbaum offers another important approach to emotion. In *Upheavals of Thought*, she rejects the assumption that emotion is random, irrational, or merely bodily. For Nussbaum, emotion is a form of evaluative judgement that reveals what a person considers important for his or her life (Nussbaum, 2001). When someone fears, hopes,

grieves, or loves, that person is not merely undergoing an inner reaction, but is also disclosing what he or she sees as valuable, vulnerable, and worthy of concern. Emotion, in Nussbaum's view, has a cognitive and ethical structure.

This approach helps clarify why Sufi affect cannot be reduced to psychological sensation. *Mahabbah*, for example, does not merely indicate attraction towards something, but affirms that the Beloved is supremely valuable and worthy of devotion. Likewise, *khawf* is not only trembling fear, but recognition of Divine majesty, human limitation, and moral accountability. *Raja'* is not only emotional optimism, but an evaluative orientation towards Divine mercy and the possibility of transformation. Through Nussbaum's perspective, Sufi affect can be read as a value-laden orientation that reveals what the spiritual subject regards as ultimately meaningful.

Nussbaum's approach is also relevant because it refuses to separate emotion from ethical life. Emotion is not only a reaction, but also a statement about what matters. A person's emotions are connected to personal history, vulnerability, attachment, and life-orientation (Nussbaum, 2001). This allows affect in Sufism to be understood as an evaluative structure that reflects spiritual orientation. Here, Sufism and Nussbaum meet in their appreciation of inner complexity as an arena of value, even though their metaphysical foundations are different.

If Spinoza sees affect as a change in existential power, Nussbaum sees emotion as an expression of evaluative meaning. Both reject the old opposition between reason and emotion, but from different directions. Spinoza foregrounds causality, power, and the transformation from passive to active affect (Spinoza, 1994). Nussbaum emphasises value, judgement, vulnerability, and ethical attachment (Nussbaum, 2001). When read side by side, both offer a broader understanding of emotion: affect is an inner movement that can be recognised, interpreted, cultivated, and directed towards a higher form of life.

From here, a bridge can be built between the philosophy of emotion and the concept of affect in Sufism. *Khawf*, through Spinoza's lens, can be understood as an affect that must be transformed from passive fear into active awareness. Through Nussbaum's lens, it can be read as an evaluative recognition of human limitation and Divine majesty. *Raja'*, through Spinoza's lens, can be seen as an affective power that sustains the movement of life. Through Nussbaum's lens, it expresses attachment to a meaningful future grounded in Divine mercy. *Mahabbah* becomes the deepest meeting point of both perspectives: it is an intensification of existential power and, at the same time, the centring of the highest value in the life of the subject.

By bringing Spinoza and Nussbaum into dialogue with Sufi thought, this article does not claim that their theories fully explain Sufi spirituality. Rather, both thinkers

provide conceptual tools for clarifying the philosophical structure of Sufi affect. Spinoza helps illuminate the movement from passivity to active understanding, while Nussbaum helps explain how emotion discloses value, vulnerability, and meaning. In this way, Sufi affect can be read not only theologically, but also existentially and ethically, without losing its theocentric orientation.

3.3. Reflective Synthesis: Reading Sufism in the Light of the Philosophy of Emotion

When Sufi affect is reread through the lenses of Spinoza and Nussbaum, *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* appear not as denials of rationality, but as affective orientations that contain existential power and evaluative meaning. Sufism, which is often approached theologically and doctrinally, also contains a philosophical dimension of lived experience. These three affects are not only spiritual states or devotional experiences, but also disciplined movements of the self through which emotion is purified, interpreted, and directed towards God.

Khawf, in a Spinozistic reading, may be understood as an affect that emerges from the awareness of one's limitation before a greater reality. However, this comparison must be made carefully. Fear of God in Sufism is not simply fear before an external force, but awareness of Divine majesty, justice, and moral accountability. Through adequate understanding, *khawf* can be transformed from paralysing fear into an active affect that produces humility, vigilance, and responsibility. This is close to Spinoza's idea that passive affects may be transformed when their causes are understood more adequately (Spinoza, 1994). In Nussbaum's view, *khawf* can also be read as an evaluative emotion because it discloses what the subject regards as ultimately significant and vulnerable: the spiritual relation between the servant and God (Nussbaum, 2001). This reading is in line with studies of al-Ghazali's *khawf* and *raja'*, which show that fear in Sufism is not intended to destroy the soul, but to direct it towards vigilance, repentance, and spiritual discipline (Dacholfany, 2014). Thus, *khawf* is not merely fear, but an ethical involvement with the transcendent.

Raja', or hope in Divine mercy, also has an important affective structure. In Spinoza's language, hope may be related to the movement of *conatus*, the striving of the self to persevere and remain open to possibility. Yet in Sufism, *raja'* is not merely a biological or existential impulse to survive; it is an active orientation towards Divine mercy. It prevents the soul from falling into despair while still requiring discipline, repentance, and effort. Through Nussbaum's perspective, *raja'* can be understood as an evaluative emotion directed towards a meaningful future (Nussbaum, 2001). A person who hopes is not merely waiting passively, but judging that the future still contains value, possibility, and mercy. In this sense, *raja'* becomes an affective force that sustains

self-improvement and spiritual perseverance. This interpretation strengthens the Sufi view that hope must be joined with effort and moral responsibility, not with empty optimism or spiritual complacency.

Mahabbah, or Divine love, provides the richest field of synthesis. In the Sufi tradition, *mahabbah* is a high form of affect because it moves the self beyond calculation, fear, and self-interest. Love for God is not simply emotional attraction, but a reorientation of the whole person towards the Beloved. In Spinoza's framework, love can be understood as an affect connected to joy and the increase of the power of acting, especially when accompanied by adequate understanding (Spinoza, 1994). However, Spinoza's intellectual love of God should not be equated directly with Sufi *mahabbah*, because Spinoza's God or Substance is not identical with the personal and transcendent God of Islamic spirituality. What can be taken from Spinoza is the idea that love, when joined with understanding, becomes an active and transformative affect. For Nussbaum, *mahabbah* can be read as the expression of the highest value: something is loved not merely because it is useful, but because it is intrinsically valuable and worthy of devotion (Nussbaum, 2001). In contemporary Indonesian discussions of *akhlak-tasawuf*, *mahabbah* is also often understood as a spiritual orientation that reshapes obedience, sincerity, and compassion (Bakri, 2020; Mubarok, 2023). Sufi *mahabbah* therefore appears as an emotion that penetrates reason and manifests the highest spiritual value.

From this synthesis, affect in Sufism can be understood as both a religious and philosophical phenomenon. It contains ontological dynamics, as suggested by Spinoza, because affect concerns the movement and transformation of the self's power of being. It also contains evaluative-ethical dynamics, as explained by Nussbaum, because affect reveals what the self regards as meaningful, vulnerable, and worthy of devotion. Reading Sufi affect through these two figures does not remove its spirituality. Rather, it clarifies how Sufism articulates human affective life as a field of knowledge, value, and transformation. This suggests that Sufism contains a philosophical dimension that can be expressed through the language of affect, meaning, and self-transformation.

This approach also helps dismantle the old dichotomy between reason and feeling. Spinoza shows that understanding does not eliminate affect, but transforms it into a more active and adequate form of life (Spinoza, 1994). Nussbaum affirms that ethical values cannot be separated from the structure of emotion, because emotions disclose what human beings judge to be significant for their lives (Nussbaum, 2001). In Sufism too, *ma'rifah* and *mahabbah* are not separated. The more deeply the servant knows God, the more deeply love, fear, and hope are purified. This shows that spiritual development requires the integration of understanding and affective sensitivity.

By reading Sufism through the philosophy of emotion, emotion can be seen not as a disturbance in the search for meaning, but as an essential element of that search. Conscious fear, disciplined hope, and Divine love are not obstacles to spirituality, but affective movements through which human beings are drawn beyond ego-centred existence. Affect is not only an inner symptom, but a field of existential struggle that demands awareness, learning, and transformation. Indonesian studies on Sufism and spiritual psychology also show that affective life can become a space for moral formation and self-purification when it is connected to spiritual discipline (Masykur, 2025; Siti, 2023). In this sense, Sufi affect becomes meaningful because it is not left raw; it is trained through remembrance, self-examination, purification, and devotion.

This synthesis opens space for reinterpreting emotion in contemporary human life. If, in Sufism, affect becomes a path towards God, then in contemporary life affect still carries spiritual and ethical potential. By rereading the affective tradition of Islam through the philosophy of emotion, this article proposes a language that values affect as a force that shapes existence, rather than as a residue that must be removed. This becomes an important foundation for the next discussion: the possibility of rehabilitating affect as a philosophical-spiritual resource for self-restoration, without reducing it to a merely clinical or psychotherapeutic instrument.

3.4. Rehabilitating Affect beyond a Clinical Framework

Modern psychotherapy, from psychoanalysis to cognitive-behavioural therapy, has developed important ways of interpreting, restructuring, and regulating emotion. Cognitive-behavioural approaches, for instance, commonly work by identifying distorted thoughts, restructuring maladaptive patterns, and helping individuals regulate emotional responses (Islamiah et al., 2015). Such approaches have clear clinical value, especially in addressing anxiety, low self-esteem, and behavioural problems. However, from a philosophical perspective, emotion also raises a question that cannot be answered by regulation alone: what does emotion reveal about the subject's relation to value, existence, and transcendence?

This question is important because some therapeutic discourses tend to treat emotion primarily as a pathological symptom, dysfunctional residue, or object of correction. Within this framework, fear is easily read as anxiety, hope as compensation, and love as attachment. Such readings are valid in certain clinical contexts, but they become reductive if all forms of affect are interpreted only through the language of disorder, symptom, or adjustment. The deeper existential and spiritual meanings of emotion may disappear when affect is viewed merely as something to be stabilised.

The Sufi approach to affect offers another way of understanding emotion. Emotion is not eliminated, but experienced, purified, and directed. Fear of God is not regarded as

irrationality, but as existential awareness that builds humility and vigilance. Hope is not equated with illusion, but becomes a spiritual impulse to endure through inner darkness. Love for God is not reduced to emotional dependency, but becomes a force that weakens egoism and reorients the self towards the Divine. Within this framework, emotion becomes a means of inner ascent, not simply a burden to be removed. Sufism therefore does not negate human feeling, but disciplines it so that emotion becomes ethically and spiritually oriented before God.

Spinoza's distinction between passive and active affects helps clarify this point. Human beings become freer when they understand the forces that move them (Spinoza, 1994). This is close to the principle of insight in modern psychotherapy, but Spinoza gives it a broader ontological depth. Emotion is not merely a surface reaction; it is connected to the way a person exists, acts, and understands reality. In this sense, affective transformation is also a transformation of knowledge. When read alongside Sufism, this insight helps explain why *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* must be understood, disciplined, and purified rather than simply suppressed.

Nussbaum's approach further shows that emotion contains value evaluation. Therapy is therefore limited if it only repairs symptoms without exploring the structure of meaning that lives within the subject. Nussbaum's view allows fear, hope, and love to be read as emotions that disclose what the subject regards as significant, vulnerable, and worthy of concern (Nussbaum, 2001). The Sufi approach strengthens this point by showing that human affect cannot be separated from its deepest relation of value: towards God, existence, and the purpose of life. Affect is therefore not only a clinical problem, but also a philosophical and spiritual language of the self.

The dialogue between Sufism and the philosophy of emotion opens the possibility of a spiritually existential understanding of self-restoration. This does not mean turning psychotherapy into a religious practice, nor does it claim that Sufi concepts can replace professional clinical intervention. Rather, it opens space for inner experiences that are often marginalised when emotion is approached only through strictly clinical or positivistic psychology. An individual experiencing anxiety, for instance, should not always be positioned merely as someone suffering from a disorder. In certain spiritual contexts, some experiences of anxiety may also carry existential or moral meanings that invite reflection, without denying their possible clinical dimensions. This does not remove the need for clinical treatment when necessary, but it prevents the emotional life of the subject from being reduced entirely to pathology.

Furthermore, if contemporary therapy often uses the language of emotion regulation, Sufism offers the deeper language of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or purification of the soul.

This is not merely control, but a long process that touches the roots of motivation, value, desire, and the human relationship with the Divine. *Tazkiyah* does not stop at emotional stabilisation, but moves towards the reconstruction of life orientation. In this regard, Sufism can contribute a restorative narrative structure, not merely a calming technique. It teaches that emotion must be purified not because emotion is evil in itself, but because emotion can either be captured by the ego or directed towards transcendence.

The world of psychotherapy today is increasingly aware of the importance of the spiritual dimension. Various integrative approaches, such as spiritual counselling, mindfulness-based practices, and meaning-centred therapies, have begun to combine emotion, attention, and the meaning of life. Contemporary discussions of Islamic counselling and spiritual approaches also show that religious resources can support emotional and moral formation when used carefully and contextually (Karisma et al., 2025). However, without a strong philosophical framework, these approaches may lose direction or become overly sentimental. This is where the contribution of Sufism and the philosophy of emotion becomes important: they provide a conceptual language for articulating human inner experience without reducing it either to clinical symptoms or vague spirituality.

The rehabilitation of affect is therefore not the uncontrolled release of emotion, but the recovery of meaning through emotion. Fear, hope, and love need to be interpreted and guided. In Sufism, *khawf* teaches humility before Divine greatness; *raja'* prevents the self from surrendering to despair; and *mahabbah* invites the self to move beyond egoic desire towards the Beloved. These affects do not merely describe what a person feels, but indicate the direction of the person's existence. In this sense, emotion becomes a map of the soul and a sign of the self's relation to what it regards as ultimate.

Ultimately, the Sufi approach to affect opens the way for recognising that human emotion may become an expression of spiritual longing. Fear, hope, and love may therefore be understood as expressions of the soul's orientation towards meaning, vulnerability, and transcendence. Sufism teaches that this voice should not be silenced, but listened to, purified, and guided towards the Source. Here, the philosophy of emotion meets spirituality: both realise that becoming a whole human being does not mean overcoming emotion by eliminating it, but journeying through it to its deeper meaning. The proposal offered here is therefore philosophical rather than clinical: affect should be rehabilitated as a path of meaning, self-restoration, and transcendence, while still respecting the boundaries and responsibilities of psychotherapy as a professional practice.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that affect is not the enemy of spirituality, but an existential force that may direct human beings towards transcendence. In the Sufi tradition, *khawf*, *raja'*, and *mahabbah* are not treated as weaknesses or irrational disturbances, but as affective orientations through which the soul is purified, disciplined, and reoriented towards God. These three emotions demonstrate that affect, when properly cultivated, can become a medium of self-purification, ethical formation, and existential restoration. Sufism therefore addresses not only matters of faith and doctrine, but also the deeper structure of human beings as creatures who feel, fear, hope, love, and search for meaning.

By rereading Sufi affect through Spinoza and Martha Nussbaum, this article opens a philosophical space for understanding emotion beyond the opposition between reason and feeling. Spinoza helps clarify affect as a movement of existential power that may be transformed from a passive condition into active understanding (Spinoza, 1994). Nussbaum helps explain emotion as an evaluative judgement that discloses what human beings regard as valuable, vulnerable, and meaningful (Nussbaum, 2001). Together, these perspectives strengthen the argument that emotion is not merely an irrational residue, but contains an inner logic related to knowledge, value, and self-transformation.

The synthesis of Sufism, Spinoza, and Nussbaum also enables a reinterpretation of emotion within contemporary discussions of self-restoration. Rather than viewing emotion only as something to be regulated, corrected, or removed, the spiritual-philosophical approach proposed in this article sees affect as an entry point for reconnecting the self with meaning and transcendence. Fear, hope, and love are not only symptoms of inner disturbance, but may also function as directions of the soul. In this sense, Sufism and the philosophy of emotion contribute to a more complete and humane language for understanding affective life.

However, this article does not claim that Sufi affect can replace clinical psychotherapy or function as a direct therapeutic model. Its contribution is philosophical rather than clinical. It proposes that Sufism provides a spiritual framework for understanding how emotion may be interpreted, purified, and directed towards transcendence. The rehabilitation of affect offered here is therefore not a simple integration of spiritual concepts into psychotherapy, but an effort to restore emotion to its ontological, ethical, and spiritual significance.

Ultimately, affect needs to be recognised, interpreted, and purified, not simply suppressed or removed. Both Sufism and the philosophy of emotion show that understanding emotion also means understanding the human being. The rediscovery of emotion within a spiritual-philosophical space therefore becomes important for

imagining a fuller form of human life: one that does not deny feeling, but journeys through fear, hope, and love towards meaning, freedom, and the transcendent.

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