THE IMPACT OF PHILOSOPHY ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract:
This article is a result of a research conducted to examine the interrelation between religion and philosophy and to measure how such interaction is embodied in religious subjects taught in middle-high schools in Indonesia. This is considered important because in Indonesian national education, the religious dimension is regarded fundamental and therefore must be emphasised. The classes are divided based on the students' religion. In order to prevent such division becomes religious segregation that could lead to practices of intolerance, philosophy is proposed as a rational solution to bridge the discrepancy. This is considered imperative so that in school religion is not understood as an exclusive set of doctrines, but as a subject in education process that brings inclusive and pluralistic attitudes. Three basic and important characteristics are analysed in this article, that is, the breadth of perspective about God, the openness towards other religions, and the willingness to embrace science in general.

Keywords:
high school students ● *religious education* ● *inclusiveness* ● *embedded philosophy* ● *autocriticism* ● *pluralism*

Introduction

The relationship between philosophy and religion in a broader sense has existed since the dawn of philosophy in Classical Greece. However, the close relation between religion and philosophy became apparent in the Middle Ages (300–1500). This is the time when philosopher-theologians used philosophy as basis for their philosophical reflections like Augustine (354–430), Al-Kindi (801-873), Ibn Sina (980-1037), Thomas Aquinas (1125-1274), Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), and Duns Scotus (1266-1308). The enlightening sides of philosophical thoughts and the breadth of understanding of the meaning of life that is central to theological findings became the mainstream of theologico-philosophical reflection common to this era. The depth of philosophical ideas in this century is also strongly influential to the subsequent strings of thought to this day. Philosophy, like other disciplines that alter the course of theological debates, will be used to examine high school students' religious beliefs.

Intolerance, radicalism, and even terrorism cannot be separated from the monolithic way of seeing the truth, including religious truth. In order to prevent this radical stream of thought from transforming further into terrorism, the role of philosophy is inevitable in religious education. For centuries, philosophy has been a rational and critical reflection that is forging an intellectual partnership with theological doctrines. Based on this, we have conducted a research on religious teaching methods in various high schools to reveal the philosophical elements in them.

This research is dedicated to examine philosophical thinking in education, especially in the religious education in Indonesia. This is a crucial step since the school subject tends to segregate distinctively middle school students. In order to prevent a sharp segregation between a student from one religion to another, we propose philosophy as a sort of bridging method for critical and open interreligious dialogues. Furthermore, all subjects (schoolers, teachers, and parents) are expected to provide a healthy dose of auto-criticism for their self-development. In this process, we can see that philosophy allows auto-criticism to be performed rationally and reliably.

Relation between Philosophy, Religion, and Children's Education

The Relation between Religion and Philosophy

The link between religion and philosophy can be clearly observed in the Middle Ages. The Latin proverb "*Philosophia ancilla theologiae*" (philosophy is the primary instrument for theology) marks this strong tie. Philosopher-theologians from the Christian, Islamic, and Jewish traditions lived in this era, from 165 to 1500 CE.[1] These philosopher-theologians defended their faith rationally using philosophical arguments. Several Christian philosophers like Augustine, Aquinas, and Scotus; Islamic thinkers like Kindi, Sina, and Rushd; and Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, all clearly indicate the strong ties between philosophy and religion. These thinkers employ philosophical traditions, especially Greek philosophy, to justify their faith and their community's faith.

In the Modern age (from 1500 CE until the present day), the link between philosophy and religion stays closely connected. Moreover, it is also not a baseless claim to say that modern science was born from the reflective womb of religion and philosophy if we take the development of scientific knowledge into account. Various research attempts, criticisms, and findings allow modern thoughts to provide extended answers to philosophical and religious questions. Modernity was conceived as a way to criticize expired schools of thought and also to reveal novel ideas and practical ingenuity. Thus, religion and philosophy become co-locutors and even colleagues in mutual partnership in a more general context. It is not an overstatement when Muhamad Akram points out that "there is religion in modernity as there is modernity in religion"[2]. Akram's claim related to the intense mutual correlation is a fruitful line of argument to be examined further. The authors of this article propose that such pronounced relationship is not to be taken lightly.

To dig further into the intersection among philosophy, religion, and modernity, we employ the five principles of thinking elaborated by Bernard Lonergan, in that they are instrumental in philosophical and religious reflections, and also in the modern way of thinking. These principles are understanding, understanding systematically, reversing counterpositions,

270

developing positions, and accepting the responsibility of judgment.[3] The method suggested by Lonergan in contemplating the bridge connecting philosophy, theology, and contemporary thoughts has been commonly used by current research pertaining to the three domains.

By using the principle of understanding, we examine one of the fundamental characteristics of human beings. In understanding, moreover, the second step–to understand systematically–is implied. The system further prerequisites goals and structures, in that the latter is necessary to accomplish the former. Lonergan summarizes this by saying "understanding to be systematic".[4] The understanding is contrasted with the current way of thinking (reversing counterpositions), and from that point, the next logical step is to construct a new way of thinking (developing positions). Finally, the task is to accept the consequences of the nevel thought construction (accepting the responsibility of judgment).

In reality, the five methical steps explained above have shaped human beings in their decision-making process. In these, the intricate link between philosophy and religion complements and enriches one another, and even provides deeper insight into human knowledge. This epistemological dynamic is important so that the philosophy of religion will not be "too narrow, intellectualist, and insular"; on the contrary, it had better be directed toward a global philosophy of religion.[5] The future of philosophy and religion is examined in this research based on a small sample concerning religious education in middle-high schoolers. The result is also used to examine how philosophical thoughts affect Indonesia's mid-high education. The following section will discuss how philosophy is applied to children and teenagers.

The Role of Philosophy for Children

For the general public, philosophy is often notoriously associated with daydreaming. The problem is that such a notion is completely senseless and ahistorical. From history it is obvious to see that philosophy was born of human daily necessities. Philosophy itself relies on two groundings: empirical observation and intellectual abstraction. These footings give philosophy its standing. These, nevertheless, are the essential part of childhood and teenage developmental years.

It is not uncommon for children and teenagers to ask various questions. They can question anything, from simple to complicated matters and

from fundamental to trivial ones. This is the core of every philosophical investigation. Philosophers ask questions not mainly to get answers; they want to construct better questions. Therefore, every child begins her or his cognitive development with questions, and this means she or he does exactly what philosophers do. Maughn Gregory says that the understanding and philosophical thinking method help children to increase their linguistic ability, social skills, psychological resilience, and scientific vision. These acquired skills let them learn much easier compared to those who do not.[6]

The definition of children and teenagers in the United Nations Charter is straightforward. In Article 1 of the charter, it is stated that: "Children are persons aged under 18 years old, except when it is stated otherwise by the law of a country. All children have the rights stated in this charter". This charter is in line with the Law No. 15 in 2014 stating that "Children are persons that have not reached 18 (eighteen) years old, including those in conception". Based on these two normative statements, it is justified to say that students in their high school years aged 16 to 18 can still be categorized as children. This section also elaborates that in the Indonesian system of education there are elementary education and middle education. The age bracket from 16 to 18 years old is defined by the law as the stage when a person is studying in her or his middle education. In the Ministry of Education Regulation No. 6 in 2019 Article 1 Line 3, it is said that: "Middle education is a level of formal education that is subsequent to elementary education that takes the form of high school (or SMA), *Madrasah Aliyah* (or MA), vocational high school (or SMK), vocational *Madrasah Aliyah* (or MAK) or other equal forms of high education." From this regulation, we decide to use the term 'children' throughout this writing. However, this research is limited to religious education for children in their middle school years (SMA, MA, MAK and other similar forms of education), as stated earlier.

The Indonesian system of education does not recognize philosophy as a school subject. This is different from France, for example, where philosophy is taught in middle schools (or *Lycée*), especially in Baccalauréat Générale specialization that specializes in literature and philosophy.[7] In the United Kingdom and the United States, there has been a special method for teaching philosophy to children which is known as *Philosophy for Children* (P4C). This method is aimed to train children to think critically, creatively, and caringly through open philosophical dialogues.[8]

Taking the Indonesian system of education into deeper account, there are four fundamental things that become the foundation of a national curriculum. First, the philosophical foundation that emphasizes the systematical and comprehensive dimension; second, the psychological foundation that puts the emphasis on inter-individual interaction; third, the social foundation that underlines social changes happening in society; and fourth, the scientific and technological development foundation that puts forward the development of science and technology.[9] In Indonesia, the education of religion has become the principal instrument to build students' characters and ethical behaviors. This approach is strongly stipulated in Law No. 20 in 2003 Article 1 Paragraph 1, and restated further in Paragraph 2. In those two definitions, religions are clearly stated. In Paragraph 1 the spirituality of religions becomes one of the cornerstones of educational goals, and in Paragraph 2 it is even stated that religions become the root of national education.

Education is an effort to empower and liberate human beings from their weaknesses and limitations to a more humane living condition. In short, education is a process to humanize humans. To achieve this, several aspects are related to the purpose. Therefore, this paper discusses religious education as one of the means to achieve the aim of humanizing humans. The importance of religious education can also be justified by the Indonesian 1945 Constitution Chapter XIII on Education and Civilization, especially in Article 31 Paragraph 3, saying: "The government provide and manage a national education system that upholds faith and piety, and human virtues in the light of educated Indonesians, that is regulated by the government."

In the constitution, both faith and piety, and also virtue are stated explicitly. Based on this, certainly these ideals must be taken seriously in the whole education process in Indonesia. However, religious education needs to carefully consider this because the orientation of religious education is directly related to these aspirations. Based on this, we want to review the teaching of religion, especially the six religions that exist in Indonesia. This philosophical reflection aims to delve into the depth of values (theological, creed) and the breadth of religions (mission, preaching) as far as they are understood by the subjects involved in religious education at

the secondary level. This philosophical reflection is analyzed based on the experiences of the subjects, namely the students involved in the learning process.

The Impact of Philosophy on Religious Education

There are two parts that will be examined in this discussion, that is, *firstly*, the researcher discusses the profile of the respondents and various conditions of religious education in schools. The background and life space (*Lebensanschauung*) of the respondents help to carry out a more comprehensive and structured mapping and study. This mapping is important to see the reality of how the respondents receive religious education and the references and other written documents that are also used in the learning process. And *secondly*, after obtaining an overview of the respondents, we interpret the three questions posed in the context of a philosophical reflection related to three areas: the breadth of insight about God, openness to others, and the willingness to study knowledge more broadly beyond religion.

Understanding the Respondents

This study on the influence of philosophy on religious education in secondary education takes a sample of 173 students pursuing higher education in Bandung, West Java. This research is directed towards students, especially those who graduated from secondary school in 2019 and 2020 and entered the college level. The reason for selecting students is that they have recently graduated from secondary education and are more independently able to assess the processes they have undergone in secondary education. Additionally, the research limits the students to the cohorts of 2019 and 2020 because during the time of the research, they were considered recent graduates from secondary education.

The respondents, coming from both private and public secondary education, are distributed across various colleges in the city of Bandung. Looking at the distribution percentage, 71.7% continue their education in public colleges and 28.3% in private colleges. The religious affiliations of the respondents in this research are as follows: Islam 64.7%; Catholicism 20.8%; Protestantism 10.4%; Buddhism 3.5%; and Hinduism 0.6%.

In contrast to other subjects in secondary education, Religious Education can be conducted within schools or outside of schools. The research results indicate that respondents generally participate in classroom-based learning (94.2%) while learning outside the classroom, usually in places of worship, accounts for 5.8%. This finding is crucial to understand that religious education within schools plays a role in broadening the students' perspectives.

We also examine the compatibility of religious education in secondary education to ensure that the respondents' viewpoints are based on religious teachings as taught in school. The data above shows that the majority of respondents follow religious education in line with their practiced religion (93.6%), 5.2% responded negatively, and 1.2% responded occasionally. This data outlines the ideal scenario for religious education in secondary education. Respondents find themselves in an open learning environment when it comes to religious education. This serves as an important foundation for open discourse and thinking.

Aside from focusing on the students, this research also scrutinizes texts such as student textbooks, teaching materials, and even notes taken by students, which serve as important learning resources that contribute to broadening students' perspectives. Consequently, this survey also investigates the textbooks used by the students. The survey reveals that 90.2% of respondents claim that they use textbooks, while only 5.2% say they do not have textbooks, and 4.6% mention occasional use.

The following relevant aspect is where these textbooks originate from, as their content influences students' understanding of religion and their openness to other subjects. From the available data, 74% of respondents state that the textbooks used in their learning are published by the government, specifically the Ministry of Education and Culture. Meanwhile, 13.3% combine government-published textbooks with other books, and 12% state that they do not use government-published textbooks. Respondents mention that schools not using Ministry of Education and Culture textbooks utilize other books, namely:

Books for Islamic Religion:
- Book of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education for Grade X, Publisher: Erlangga, Year: 2016.

- Book of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education for Grade XI, Publisher: Tiga Serangkai, Year: 2017.
- Book of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education for Grade XII, Publisher: Yrama Widya, Year: 2018.
- Book on Aqidah Akhlak (Respondent did not provide publisher and year of publication).

Books for Christian Religion:
- Title: *Christian Religious Education*, Publisher: BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Catholic Books:
- Book of Catholic Religious Education & Character Education K 13 *Diutus Sebagai Murid Yesus*, Collaborative work between the Catechetical Commission of the KWI and PT KANISIUS.
- Book on Ignatian Pedagogy (Respondent did not provide publisher and year of publication).
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These are some of the books used in religious education at the secondary level, apart from the government-published textbooks.

Continuing on the subject of texts, this research also examines handouts typically created by teachers during lessons. Handouts are an important aspect to study because they provide students with insights to enhance their religious knowledge. Regarding the use of handouts, 51.5% of respondents answered that teachers provide handouts, while 48.5% answered that there are no handouts. The level of seriousness in learning is also demonstrated through documentation or personal notes. If personal notes serve as a measure of respondents' attention to their learning, it can be said that respondents exhibit a strong interest in learning. This can be observed from students' study notes, where 60.7% have notes, while 30.1% have very few notes, and 9.2% do not have any notes. This indicates a high level of student interest in religious education.

The Breadth of Vision and Inclusiveness in Religious Education

In this section, we focus on the second part of the research questions. In this section, we aim to delve deeper into the hypothesis that religious education is intertwined with philosophy. This can be observed through

three models of philosophical thinking: openness to insight about God, openness to other religions, and openness to knowledge in general. Openness to God can be seen as personal or specific to the religious community, reflected in the rituals of all religions. This leads to the second and third questions. The second question is more specific about relations with individuals of different religions. Openness to insight about God should be reflected in two ways of thinking: openness to those of different religions and a willingness to study secular knowledge in general. This is the essence of the philosophy examined in this research.

A philosophical analysis of the first research question, based on the survey results above, indicates that religious education opens insight into God. The majority of respondents (43.4%) answered that religious education opens insight into God, with 37.6% responding "very open," 16.8% "fairly open," 2.3% "not very open," and none answering "not open." These numbers indicate that religious education at the secondary level opens students' perspectives regarding belief in God. Openness to the Transcendent, God, Allah, the Supreme Being, and the Great Deity, is a fundamental aspect of human existence. This is because human life is not only constructed horizontally but also vertically. The dimension of openness to insight about God indicates a philosophical way of thinking present in the process of religious education. Throughout history, philosophers like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Dun Scotus, al-Kindi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, and Maimonides have utilized philosophy as a reflective foundation for religions. In the modern age, figures like Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Luiz Segundo, Fazlur Rahman, and Seyyed Hosein Nasr have contextualized religion and spirituality. Religious and spiritual perspectives are no longer confined to closed patterns of thought but remain open. Divine truth is understood not as a closed ending but as an endlessly open one.

During an interview, a respondent from the 2020 cohort, currently studying at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), highlighted the early part of Islamic religious education focused on faith. This opened his perspective on the concept of God. Another respondent, studying at Institut Pendidikan Dalam Negeri (IPDN) and also from the 2020 cohort, mentioned that religious education led to personal transformation, shifting his focus away from worldly matters. He emphasized that religious

education, especially topics related to spirituality and faith, brought about a transformative change. Similarly, a student from Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, practicing Islam and from the 2019 cohort, perceived a detailed understanding of spirituality. For him, faith in Allah is a living thing, born from the heart, spoken, and practiced in behavior. The Islamic religious education also covers the concept of creation, the purpose of human existence, and the purpose of religion. This contributes to a continuous worship of God. Thus, this theme of education opens insights into spirituality.

A philosophical analysis of the second research question, regarding openness to other religions, reveals that being open to God does not necessarily indicate our integrity as human beings. True humans also establish relationships with others. This element forms the foundation of religions and is simultaneously a philosophical basis for all humanity. Humans inherently exist in relation to others. Philosophers from classical Greece such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, to modern philosophers like Heidegger, emphasize the aspect of relating to others. For Heidegger, the human existence he terms as *Dasein* (Being-there) always means *in der welt sein* (being in a world), and being-with-others also implies being in difference. This aligns with the "indispensable encounter between the datum of faith and the living reality of religious pluralism," as described by Paul F. Knitter. Similarly, the Quran states that religion cannot be forced, and implies that believers of different faiths, as long as they believe in God and do good, will be saved (Q. 2:62 and 5:16). This establishes the foundation of religious diversity. This diversity is positively acknowledged by the participants. For them, religious education at the secondary level promotes openness to different religions and perspectives, with the highest perception (45.7%) being very open, followed by open (41.6%). When combined, these percentages result in 87.3% perceiving openness to other religions as positive. This indicates that religious education in secondary education fosters openness to religious diversity.

Experiences reveal that religious education fosters understanding and efforts to accept others. An IPDN student grew up in a predominantly Muslim environment in South Sulawesi. When he joined the institute and encountered students of different faiths, the religious education on tolerance in secondary school helped him to respect peers of other faiths.

278

Similarly, a Catholic student from Universitas Padjajaran highlighted the importance of religious education in addressing differences, encouraging him to understand and respect other religions. Another student from Universitas Katolik Parahyangan emphasized that religious education encouraged him to study other subjects. The word "*iqro*" (read) carries significant meaning for him, signifying a call to learn both religious and general knowledge. A similar sentiment was expressed by a Universitas Padjajaran student who acknowledged that learning about Islamic history in secondary school, which covered dynasties like the Umayyad (661-880 AD) and Abbasid (750-1258 AD), motivated him to excel in various fields of study. These experiences underline the importance of fostering open dialogue and mutual understanding.

A philosophical analysis of the third research question, regarding openness to knowledge beyond religious education, suggests a positive indication. Respondents' perceptions of other knowledge domains, such as general knowledge and science, show a positive inclination. About 43.9% responded that religious education motivated them to learn other subjects, with an additional 20.8% responding "very motivating." Together, this represents 64.7% with a positive perception of studying other subjects. Religious education positively influences students' motivation to engage with scientific knowledge. This aligns with Fazlur Rahman's perspective that education, according to the Quran, develops the intellectual faculties of a person, integrating acquired knowledge organically with their creative personality. Religious education encourages students to question–a philosophical element–a fundamental part of thinking. A Universitas Padjajaran student recounted that learning about the creation story in Catholic religious education led him to question various topics, like evolution theory and dinosaurs. This reflects an essential element of philosophical thinking: the ability to place something within its context. A Universitas Katolik Parahyangan student emphasized the importance of religious education in driving him to learn more. The word "*iqro*" symbolizes a call to learn, both religious and general knowledge. Another student from Universitas Padjajaran expressed that Islamic history lessons in secondary school motivated him to delve into other subjects as well. This reveals the ongoing need for critical thinking and the constant honing of dialogues to ensure that religion and modern knowledge complement and enrich each other.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

From the data and descriptions above, it can be said that religious education in secondary schools is built upon a solid philosophical foundation. The space for philosophy, encompassing openness to insights about God, openness to relations with individuals of different religions, and motivation to learn general knowledge, is crucial. These three points constitute fundamental aspects of philosophical thinking in concept and practice. This research finds that religious education in secondary schools provides a conducive environment for the dynamics of this philosophical thinking. Hence, several conclusions can be drawn from this study.

1. Religious education in secondary schools offers an open perspective for students. This is vital as demonstrative religious education that separates students based on religious identities does not lead to division

2. The books used also offer a broad perspective to students, fostering openness

3. Students critically discern and choose rational teachings from problematic ones

4. The significant task is to establish an open and pluralistic educational pattern that can bring transformation to the society.

Recommendations

Points of openness to God, individuals of different religions, and knowledge need continuous reinforcement. Therefore, the following recommendations are provided.

1. The government should prioritize strengthening the philosophical basis of education over mere administrative technicalities. Focus on teachers and the content of education must take precedence

2. Educational institutions should ensure that educators play an active role, as they are the key to fostering openness in students. Educators should continuously hone their openness

3. For students, cultivating openness is not a one-time endeavor but a lifelong lesson. Therefore, a critical and open attitude is key to fostering openness in the dynamics of philosophical thinking

4. As for researchers, further in-depth research should be conducted to build a stronger and deeper discourse on religion and philosophy, promoting a better and more cultured living space aligned with the ideals of Pancasila.

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Endnotes:

1   Brian Duignan refers to it as Christian philosophy that began in 165 AD when Justin Martyr initiated the reflection on Christianity based on Platonic thought. See Brian Duignan, *Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Britannica educational publishing, 2011) 154.

2   Muhammad Akram, "Emergence of the Modern Academic Study of Religion: An Analytical Survey of Various Interpretations," in *Islamic Studies* 55:1-2 (2016) 22.

3   Robert B. Crocken et al. (eds), *Collected works of Bernard Lonergan-Philosophical and Theological Paper 1958-1964* (Toronto: Published for Lonergan Research Institute, 1996) 30.

4   *Ibid.*, 35.

5   Mike Grimshaw, "The Future of the Philosophy of Religion is the Philosophy of Culture-and Vice Versa," in *Palgrave Communications* (2018) 4:72, DOI: 10.1057/s41599-018-0129-1. www.nature.com/palcomms.

6   Reza A.A Watimena, "Pendidikan Filsafat untuk Anak? Pendasaran, Penerapan, dan Refleksi Kritis untuk Konteks Indonesia," in *Jurnal Filsafat* Vol. 26, No. 2, Agustus 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307523862.

7   See the official statement from the French Ministry of Education on https://www.education.gouv.fr/reussir-au-lycee/bac-2022-les-sujets-des-epreuves-ecrites-de-specialite-341303.

8   Jane Gatley, "Philosophy for Children and Extrinsic Value of Academic Philosophy," in *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (July 2020) 550.

9   For these statements, compare Fauzan et al., "Analisis Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam di Indonesia dan Thailand-Studi Kebijakan Kurikulum 2013 dan Kurikulum 2008 di tingkat SMA," *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Agustus 2019) 306-307.