

Donny Gahral Adian

JAVANESE-ISLAM VALUE CONSENSUS: A Remark on Value Pluralism

ABSTRACT

Artikel ini hendak menyanggah anggapan bahwa agama sebagai monisme etis tidak sesuai dengan filsafat politik liberal yang menghargai keragaman nilai. Sebagai acuan digunakan sejarah islamisasi di Jawa, yang telah melahirkan hubungan konsensual harmonis antara Islam dan konsepsi etik Jawa. Dari sana dibangunlah hipotesis bahwa pada dasarnya agama (Islam) sebenarnya mampu membangun '*overlapping value consensus*' seperti yang dicanangkan filsafat politik Rawlsian.

Key Words:

Value pluralism • Value monism • Overlapping consensus • Totalitarianism • Ethical homogenization • Fictitious body • Summum bonum • Cultural chauvinism • Polarization • Politicization

Some proponents of liberal political philosophy have come up with the idea of value pluralism, a principle that underlines the diversity of value held by human being as moral subject. This has resulted in a new

agenda proposed by Rawlsian political philosophy called an 'overlapping consensus'. Overlapping consensus is a consensus on what kind of socio-political values everyone must share for actualizing each own ethical conception. This consensus is a delicate matter since society is often built upon a major ethical conception gained by marginalizing or discriminating other conceptions.

Most of ethical conceptions take the form of a doctrine, a comprehensive doctrine, according to Rawls; a doctrine which deals with all parts of human affair, from personal to political. This renders the doctrine confrontational to other doctrines. The main agenda is always how to propose the ethical conception as a comprehensive doctrine to be held by the rest of the society, by taking over or influencing state apparatus.

According to liberal political philosophy, religion may be regarded as a form of ethical monism which has three major weaknesses. *First*, it is the seed of totalitarianism due to its commitment to the highest good (*summum bonum*). *Second*, it cannot reach consensus upon which the democratic culture is built. Its agenda is always ethical homogenization by integrating individual to society. *Third*, it blurs the private/public distinction by privatizing public sphere which is supposed to be pluralized by varieties of interests, values, ideologies and perspectives.

These are strong criticisms toward religious ethical conception. The question, then, is whether the criticisms are theoretically and historically justifiable. Is it true that religion and liberal way of living will always be in enormous tension toward each other? In this paper I would like to show how the critiques can be proven incorrect. My argument is based upon the historical Islamicization in Java which has resulted in harmonious consensual relationship between Islam and Javanese ethical conception. The consensus leads to my hypotheses that religion (Islam, in this context), despite its comprehensiveness, is capable of making an overlapping value consensus with any other belief system. The paper consists of three main parts. *First*, religion and value pluralism. *Second*, Islamicization in Java: tension and integration. *Third*, Javanese-Islam overlapping value consensus.

Religion and Value Pluralism

Value pluralism is a concept that many liberal philosopher hold as basic principle. It is what they think distinguishes liberal philosophy from communitarian, conservative or socialist philosophy. Isaiah Berlin is the one who came up with the concept. He differentiates between value

pluralism and value monism.¹ The first is the doctrine that there are many values or good things in life and , consequently, there is no rational basis for concluding one to be the best. The value monism, on the other hand, insists that there is, in principle, a rationally best way for us to live. Berlin said that the world we encounter in ordinary experience is one in which we are faced with choices between ends equally ultimate, and claims equally absolute. The commitment to value pluralism in such a world is inevitable.

Value pluralism principle bases itself on the idea of community. Community nonetheless is a fictitious body, composed only of individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. Community is simply a name we use to describe the actions, traits and interactions of individuals, who are real. Every social explanation must take account of individuals as the starting point. The pluralists like Rawls take this idea of community and hold a principle that each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of the whole society cannot override.

Meanwhile, the social philosophy developed during the 19th century brings about strong resistance to such social ontology. Society is not simply an aggregation of individuals: it has a culture and customs that shape the individuals born into it. The life of individual only expresses the common will of society, and in extreme cases may have to be sacrificed for the good of her society. An atheist, for example, may have to relinquish her believe for the common religious believe.

The concept sounds ideal enough, but the reality shows how many moral doctrines regard themselves as general and comprehensive?² A Doctrine is general when it applies to a wide range of subjects and limits all subjects universally. It is comprehensive when it includes conceptions of value in human life, ideals of personal character, ideals of friendship, ideals of familial and associational relationships, and many other things informing our conduct and regulating our life as a whole.

These are two characters that cannot be accommodated by the commitment to value pluralism when it comes to politics. Rawls shows how political conception needs to free itself from any comprehensive moral doctrine. When it fails to do that, political affair will be ruled by a single doctrine and result in marginalizing other doctrines. The political affair must be founded on liberal tolerance and value neutrality. However, this principle of value pluralism for most of the third world countries like Indonesia, which uphold moral homogeneity, seems remote and alien. But before we get into that issue, let us take a look at the theoretical dispute over the two principles.

Liberal tolerance is a principle insisting that it is wrong for government to use its coercive power to enforce ethical homogeneity on the heart of community as a shared ethical code.³ Many arguments have been proposed to challenge this principle. *First*, the argument from democratic theory associating community with majority. The community has the right to use law to support its vision of ethical decency. In other words, it has a right to impose its views about ethics just because it is the majority. *Second*, the argument of paternalism. It holds that in a genuine political community each citizen has a responsibility for the well being of other members and should therefore use his political power to reform those whose defective practices will ruin their lives. *Third*, the argument of self interest. It denies atomism that holds individuals as self-sufficient being and emphasizes that people need community, materially, intellectually and ethically. *Fourth*, the argument of integration. The argument rests on the belief that the value of goodness of any individual citizen's life is only a reflection and function of the value of the life of the community in which he lives. This means that in order to make their lives valuable, citizens must vote and work to make sure that their fellow citizens lead decent live.

All of the above arguments rest on the priority of community over individuals. This is the same social ontology that strongly opposes the liberal commitment to value neutrality, the neutrality over any sustaining account of what it is to live well, the political realm that is free from any comprehensive moral doctrine. The liberal value neutrality faces three strong challenges. *First*, the challenge from the romantics that accuses liberal as insensitive to the importance of individuals breaking free of petty morality. *Second*, the challenge from the Marxists that are strongly against the alienated and impoverished life of liberal capitalist democracy. The value neutrality is a mask for its support to bourgeois morality. *Third*, the challenge from the conservatives that accuses the failure of liberalism to understand that life can be satisfactory only when it is rooted in community defining norm and traditions. These three challenges shared the same belief that political community must be run by one single ethical conception. The value pluralism is just unthinkable.

Religion as a comprehensive ethical doctrine is usually associated with the idea of ethical homogenization. It is based on the idea that religious conception of the good is the highest good (*summum bonum*) so all other goods must be subdued and being converted into one. It denies value pluralism. This attitude leads to the need for a political hand to bring about its agenda. A political hand that converts the dissident by punishment-reward mechanisms. The freedom to choose his or her own ethical

conception is being limited. Individual must integrate herself fully to the community's moral doctrine.

Recently there is a strong resistance to the monolithic tradition of religious moral doctrine. Brian Hebblethwaite in his essay *The Varieties of Goodness*⁴ said that the idea of *summum bonum* is by implication totalitarian. It puts aside the recognition and positive affirmation of the varieties of human goodness. From the perspective of Christian theological ethics, Hebblethwaite underwrites the necessity of welcoming other forms of religiously motivated goodness. Christian has no monopoly of the ways of God since there may well be forms of the religious life that encapsulate and manifest values understated in the Christian tradition.

The same resistance emerges from the Islamic intellectual world. Dale F Eickelman strongly states that it would be incorrect to say that there is a single, dominant view among Moslems concerning religious and value pluralism. It is restated by Khalid Masud saying that there have always been several moral traditions in Islam, some of which as in other religious traditions are more tolerant and open to alternative ethical positions. Qur'an as Moslems' holy guidance offers itself a distinctly modern perspective on the role of Islam as a force for tolerance and mutual recognition in a multiethnic, multicomunity world. There are several Qur'anic verses endorsing this view. "To each among you, We have ordained a law and assigned a path. Had God pleased, He could have made you one nation, but His will is to test you by what He has given you; so compete in goodness" (5:48), "O mankind! We created you from a male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another" (49:13). Historically, Islam has been remarkably open to the outside world. Fazlur Rahman, a prominent Moslem scholar, argues that the prophet Muhammad recognizes without a moment of hesitation that Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other old and new testament religious personalities are God's messenger like himself.⁵ Their different messages which is contextually bounded were truly universal and identical. Muhammad even said in the Qur'an that "I believe in whatever book God may have revealed" (42:15). It shows that the idea of "book" (*kitab*) is a generic term in the Qur'an denoting the totality of divine revelations.

Historically, Islamic tradition has been in intense interaction with other beliefs. We witness how Islam has incorporated many preexisting and coexisting cultural elements. It encompasses a variety of civilizational and cultural forms of life. By the tenth and eleventh century, for instance, Islamic world showed a remarkable variety of institutional forms ranging from North Africa to South Asia. In terms of moral tradition, Islam has

incorporated many pre-Islamic tribal values. There is something in Islamic moral doctrine, called literary moral tradition (*adab*), which derives its ethical values from multiple sources, both Moslem or non-Moslem. However, we also witness a rupture in the history of Islamic attitude toward value pluralism. A nadir of intolerance within the Moslem community was the inquisition (*mihna*) of 833-848 AC. Within the period of fifteen years, the four successive caliphs implemented an authoritarian imposition of a single doctrine through state apparatus. It soon met strong resistance and abandoned after 848 AC. Robert Bellah, a sociologist, argued that authoritarian version of Islam moral teaching is due to what he called “stagnant localisms” of tribe and kinship.⁶ This “stagnant localisms” strongly resists the pluralist version of community found in seventh-century Islamic society. A society built upon the very principle of egalitarianism.

The above arguments lead to the thesis that Islamic aversion to value pluralism is not based upon the holy guidance itself but upon the infiltration of cultural chauvinism. Islam as moral tradition favors pluralism based on two grounds. *First*, its appeal to human reason. Islamic moral tradition highly values individual rational choice and responsibility. Verses such as “There is no coercion in religion. The truth stands out clear from error” (2:256); “By the soul, and the order given it, He has inspired it to its wrong and to its good” (91:7-8); and “To each is a goal to which He turns it. Then, strive for what is good” (2:178) emphasize that ethical values are reasonable and understandable by all humans. The different levels of understanding from one person or one community to the other is inevitable. *Second*, social acceptance of Islamic values. Islamic values are understood by different persons and communities that result in different regulations of the permissible “room of maneuver” of dissent. It is the social dialectics that determine and enforce the acceptable definition of ethical values.

Islamicization in Java

Historically, Islamicization in Java did not start from cultural vacuum. Java already had a great civilization based on Hindu-Buddhist metaphysical and value system. Some called it a Javanese belief system (*kejawen*). So, according to Clifford Geertz, a well known American anthropologist, Islamicization in Java did not construct a civilization, it appropriated one.⁷ The appropriation itself, however, did not make a very good start. Islam did not win the heart of many Javanese aristocracy which strongly upheld

the Javanese belief system (*kejawen*) as their ultimate spiritual and practical guidance.

In *Babad Tanah Jawa*, a story about the history of Java, it was said how the king of *Majapahit* (one powerful kingdom in Java) refused to take Islam as a new belief system. This refusal represents the aversion of Javanese aristocrats toward Islam. It is based on the idea of superiority of Javanese belief system compared to the other. Due to this refusal many Islamic missionaries went to the villages, especially on the coastal area to spread Islamic teaching. Those missionaries were quite welcome there and built many Islamic school (*pesantren*) which started to be a counter-culture to the dominant Javanese culture.

After the fall of *Majapahit*, Islamicization started to get a grip on Javanese society belief system. By the end of 18th century almost the whole Java had been Islamicized. At the beginning, the central development of Islamic culture was founded in the cities in north coast of Java. From there, it moved deeper into the central area of Java. But the tension was then still fiery between the world views. Even though many palaces in Java had officially accepted Islam, the way of life of most its aristocrats was still based on Javanese worldview. Many was still conducting Javanese spiritual rites like *wayang* performance, dances, and other spiritual ceremonies.

More frequent contact between Islamic movements in Java and those in Middle East brought the tension to another level. The demarcation was becoming more vivid as the Middle East movement's orientation of purifying Islam infiltrated into the culture of *pesantren*. It strongly opposed Javanese mysticism which they regarded as non-Islamic belief system. The *pesantren* society's main agenda then was to implement the purest character of Islamic teaching as it was comprehended in Egypt through the influence of Muhammad Abduh. They emphasized the rigid implementation of Islamic *sharia*⁸ like that during the period of prophet Mohammed. This purification resulted in the rising of awareness of many Javanese followers. They started to realize their uniqueness compared to Islam and tried hard to preserve their ancestor's worldview. The schism between *pesantren* and non-*pesantren* culture began to take its form.

This schism echoes to the modern period. Clifford Geertz anthropological research in Mojokuto, small village in East Java, shows a tension between the so called *santri* and *abangan*.⁹ *Santri* is a category for those emphasizing the ritual aspects of Islam. A true Islam according to them is the one who perform all those rituals as God's absolute imperatives. *Abangan*, on the other hand, leads a mystical way of life that emphasizes

spiritual aspect of religion. They do not put enough credit to ritual aspect of spiritualism. For them, the most important thing is controlling inner drive and doing good deeds.

That schism was then emphasized by the anti colonial movement which was very political in nature. In the year 1913 a political organization called Sarikat Islam (Islamic Union) was born. During the first ten years there was an internal conflict between the puritan group and the socialist-based group. Since then the development of Indonesian politics is based upon that polarization. After the nation's declaration of independence, the polarization was becoming stronger and stronger and led to many crises. There were certain Islamic groups who strongly opposed the new born nation. A nation which according to them is a non-Islamic (*kaafir*) nation. Many revolts conducted by Islamic puritan groups happened during the 1950's.

The conflict between Javanese and Islam is only one side of the story. There has also been an integration between Islam and Javanese belief system on the esoteric level. An integration which can be seen in many literary works. In terms of literature, many Javanese man of letters absorb the wisdom of Islamic mysticism to Islamicize the ancient literature from the period of Hinduism. They wrote many beautiful literary work about mystical teaching. Among others are: Wedhatama, Wulangreh, Serat Centini, Wirid Hidayat Jati, and Paramayoga. *Serat Centini*, for instance. This is a work written by Ronggowarsito, a prominent Javanese man of letter, about the journey of reaching the highest knowledge and becoming one with the ultimate reality.

Many man of letters thought that Islamic mysticism can enrich and perfect the culture of the ancient. What is extraordinary about these man of letters is their openness, adaptability, and flexibility toward other cultural elements. Something that cannot be found in *pesantren* religious figures. What we find here is no other than strict orthodoxy of *pesantren* culture based on Imam Al-Gazali religious teaching; the teaching which is held by *pesantren* as guidance to purify Islam from the infiltration of Javanese belief system. The cultural gap will never be narrowed down if none of the rival believers relinquish their orthodoxy. The openness of Javanese man of letters had made the integration possible. They had opened the bridge between those two belief systems within the context of esoteric teaching.

Integration or Value Consensus?

Some scholars think there was a total integration between Javanese and Islamic belief system, metaphysically and practically. In short, a new born religion of Java. However, I myself have some reservations about this thesis. There are two basic considerations. *First*, the Javanese and Islamic worldview is quite distinct. Javanese believes in cosmic order to which man must fit himself in. The Javanese idea about God is not a transcendent deity, but a mysterious one who can only be found in personal experience. God is not God of knowledge but of feeling. Whenever we can discard our self-interest and integrate harmoniously with the cosmic order, we will feel God's presence in our day-to-day conduct. Islamic worldview, of course, is a monotheistic worldview. This is a worldview that posits God as a transcendent being who is the centre of the universe, and the course of history is His volition; man is mere creature who should live attuned and subjected to the will of God. In other words, a transcendent God is the measure of all things, and man a mere servant who achieves satisfaction and legitimacy by following the rules and religious obligations set by God. *Second*, religion of Java is not identical with religion in Java. Followers of Javanese belief system vividly demarcate themselves with the followers of Islam. The so called integration is just a political construct for the sake of social stability. It was deliberately made by the kingdom of Mataram to neutralize revolts from *pesantren* communities. The integration, thus, is not a natural integration but a forced one.

What happened was that each belief system respects each other's integrity, yet develops some kind of value consensus for social and political affair. The question then how can Islam and Javanese belief system develop such a consensus if both of them claim to be comprehensive. My thought about this is that both belief systems, no matter how comprehensive they are, remain at peace toward each other. That which stimulates the tension is politicization. Politicization means : each would like to authorize their ethical conception as the ruling conception of society. Meanwhile, what happened in grass-root society was quite different. There was value consensus between Islam and Javanese teaching in regulating public affair. In a Javanese family consisting of a Moslem father, an *abangan* mother, one Moslem daughter and two *abangan* sons there hardly was any significant fissure between them.

The question is can there be such an overlapping value consensus between two ethical conceptions claiming to be highest good (*summum bonum*)? That is, a claim which is shared by both Javanese and Islamic belief

systems, since both proposed some ultimate ethical code of conduct regulating everything from personal to social affair derived from each metaphysical doctrine. History taught us about the difficulty of such a consensus between two *summum bonum* ethical conceptions. In the sixteenth century we witnessed a religious conflict due to the lack of consensus between Catholic and Protestant. Both faiths held that it was the duty of the ruler to uphold the true religion and to repress the spread of heresy and false doctrine.

Rawls thinks that such an ethical consensus between two comprehensive doctrines is possible. The consensus about values hold in socio-political affair does not necessarily be indifferent, say, to truth in the comprehensive doctrines. It must be true or reasonable from the standpoint of each comprehensive doctrine.¹⁰ The value of toleration, for instance, must be backed up by the truth in each belief system. Therefore, the gate toward overlapping value consensus is also open to Javanese and Islamic ethical conception as *summum bonum*. So, first of all we must explore each ethical conception to find their overlapping value consensus.

Javanese ethical conception is based upon the idea about the sacred order of cosmos where one must find the way to fit in. In order to do so, she must repress her self-interest orientation and become one with the macrocosm. Based on the unity of cosmos, there are three elements in Javanese ethical conception. *First, sepi ing pamrib*. This means we as human being must cleverly control our self-interest impulses for the sake of harmony. Self-interest is what hinders us from developing compassion to other beings. The basic idea of *sepi ing pamrib* principle is solidarity and harmony as a result of self-interest management. *Second, rame ing gawe*. It can be translated as actively doing good deeds for the welfare of humanity. As a Javanese, we are not only asked to manage our impulses but also actively doing good to one another. When people from other belief system want to hold a ceremony, for instance, a Javanese obliges himself to offer a help. It is an ethical obligation to help one another sincerely, and it can only be conducted when one has managed his self-interest. *Third, mamayu hayuning bawono*. It is an ethical imperative for Javanese to beautify the world. Beautifying the world can only be reached by continuously checking our self-interest and doing good to one another. In other words, it presupposes an ethic of solidarity. Not just solidarity among human being but also with the entire cosmos.

Islamic ethical conception is based on the notion of the oneness of God (*tawhid*). This means that for Moslem, no other thing beside God deserves her worship including her self interest. One must remember that

everyone or everything is her equals as fellow creations of one and the same God. When one worships his self interest, he finds himself distant from his fellow creations and discards God from his life. The remembrance of oneness of God must illuminate the whole life of a Moslem, that makes her life full of meaning: the meaning deriving from the trial of doing good. The remembrance of one true God endorses man to live in harmony while taking all the elements of his humanity: living in harmony means to be linked with values of good, justice, and solidarity.¹¹ Values which transcend reductionist individualism and commodity fetishism. Prophet Mohammed himself told Moslem to speak in the best manner and not to forget to treat one another with generosity, goodness and kindness. Something that can be fulfilled only by continuous remembrance of God, self-restraint and linking oneself with an ethic of solidarity.

Both Islamic and Javanese ethical conception, as we see, uphold the value of solidarity over individualism, remembrance (*eling* in Javanese belief system) over forgetfulness, being over having, finality over means and quality over quantity. Consensus upon that principle was, I believe, to be the social integrator of the post-*Majapahit* Javanese society. Conflicts arised only when the Moslem orthodox from *pesantren* community blindly followed Islamic *shariah* and forgetting the universal ethical message behind the Quranic revelation. They forgot that *shariah* was supposed to be a legal conversion of ethical principles found in the Qur'an. What they struggled for was only the legalizing *shariah* through the positive law which meant proposing Islamic ethical conception as an official conception. This agenda discarded any effort of natural overlapping consensus which, I believe, was happening during the absence of all those social engineering processes. Without the "political make over", Islam and Javanese ethical conceptions, despite their differences in metaphysical worldview, and far from being totally excluded from one another, were managing to have consensus upon values such as solidarity, justice, self-restraint and generosity.

Overlapping consensus is the most advanced agenda proposed by liberal political philosophy to back up theoretically the very concept of democratic society, a society built upon the principle of equal concern. What can endanger this consensus is politicization of some belief systems. Politicization is something that triggers the conflicts, while also provoked by the strong orthodoxy hold dear by the fanatics. Such an orthodoxy hastily writes demarcation line between puritans and heresies. The combination between politicization and orthodoxy leads to ethical

homogenization which, from the perspective of liberal political philosophy, blurs the distinction between an association and democratic society, between society which is single-handedly run by a comprehensive doctrine and that which treats the whole society with equal concern. In other words, the ethical homogenization stands diametrically in contradiction with the commitment to value pluralism.

Historically, religion as *summum bonum* finds difficulties for developing an overlapping value consensus with other belief systems. However, value consensus between Islamic and Javanese belief system proved to be otherwise. What happened between them was not an integration. It was an overlapping consensus which work as social mechanism to maintain the order and stability; consensus upon values such as solidarity, justice and self-restraint. This consensus shows how far Islam can walk hand-in-hand with the principle of value pluralism in a liberal society. The contemporary echo of this historical message is the need of Islam to give up its ethical homogenization agenda and to focus instead on finding out the overlapping value consensus with other belief systems within the framework of democratic society.

Donny Gahral Adian

*Department of Cultural Sciences
University of Indonesia, Jakarta
Indonesia*

End Notes :

1. Gerald F. Gaus, *Political Concepts and Political Theories* (Colorado: Westviewpress, 2000), p. 58-59.
2. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 13.
3. Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 211.
4. See Joseph Runzo, ed., *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society: New Directions in a Pluralistic World* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1992), p. 3.
5. Sohail H. Hashmi, ed., *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), p.118.

6. *Ibid.*, p.117.
7. Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Marocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), page11
8. Law constitutes a divinely ordained path of conduct that guides the moslem toward a practical expressions of his religious conviction in this world and the goal of divine favor in the world to come
9. See Clifford Geertz, *Abangan, Santri, Priyayi dalam Masyarakat Jawa* (Pustaka Jaya: Jakarta, 1970), p. 165.
10. Rawls, *Op.Cit.*, p. 150.
11. See Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, The West and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2001), p. 234.