

# Moderation of religion in A.J. Ayer's perspective

*by Pps A Lahmi*

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## 1 Религиозная умеренность с точки зрения А.Д. Айера

1 РИКИ САПУТРА, АРРАСИЙИД, МАХУДИН РИТОНГА, АХМАД ЛАХМИ, ШОФВАН КАРИМ, РИДО ПУТРА

## 2 Moderation of religion in A.J. Ayer's perspective

2 RIKI SAPUTRA, ARRASYID, MAHYUDIN RITONGA, AHMAD LAHMI, SHOFWAN KARIM, RIDO PUTRA

*Аннотация. Радикализм и насилие во имя религии можно минимизировать, обогатив литературу по религиозной умеренности. До сих пор многие выводы, касающиеся литературы о религиозной умеренности, исходили из внутренней религиозной точки зрения. Исследование всегда богаче, интереснее и глубже, если оно осуществляется через философский подход, поэтому представленная статья раскрывает концепцию религиозной умеренности в работах английского философа XX в. Алфреда Джулса Айера. Исследование проведено с применением контент-анализа, раскрывающего смысл религиозной умеренности, характерной для Индонезии.*

*Ключевые слова: мультикультурализм, социально-религиозный, эпистемология, религиозная умеренность.*

*Abstract. Radicalism and violence in the name of religion can be minimized by enriching the literature on religious moderation. Until now, many findings related to the literature on religious moderation have emerged from an internal religious perspective. The study will be richer, more interesting, and deeper if it is carried out through a philosophical approach, therefore this research will reveal the concept of religious moderation according to A.J. Ayer. The research was conducted with a content analysis approach, which reveals the meaning of religious moderation which is juxtaposed with A.J. Ayer's thoughts, and even Ayer's epistemology is used as an analytical knife in considering religious moderation that occurs in Indonesia.*

*Key words: multicultural, socio-religious, epistemology, religious moderation.*

Indonesia as plural and multicultural country in the concept of a state certainly can not abandon the concept of moderation. As multicultural and nationalistic country, of course, there is a tension between the religion and racism<sup>1</sup>. This concept of moderation is the foundation of Indonesian society's harmony. Through the Ministry of Religion, moderation is encouraged to achieve a moderate state, respecting differences in beliefs, ethnicities, and cultures. The purpose of religious moderation is to create the atmosphere of tolerance, peace, and harmony in religion and nation, as well as to support multicultural life<sup>2</sup>. This framing must be supported by the government so that each religion and culture respect the beliefs of others<sup>3</sup>.

This moderation movement does not only exist in Islam, but all religions have their own understanding of moderation. Islam by using the wasathiyyah concept develops the concept of moderation. The current global challenges in the Islamic

world, both relating to social stability, culture, and political structures in various countries, can be overcome through wasathiyah, namely by promoting moderation. Wasathiyah is essential to support the fight against violent Islamic extremism<sup>4</sup>. Christian religious moderation is used as a perspective to mediate the extremes of Christian teachings interpretation. Catholics use the word “open” to reject fundamentalist and traditionalist views that reject renewal in the sense of the Catholic Church. The Hindu roots of moderation spirit can be traced back during thousands of years. Buddha also taught religious moderation in the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. Even Confucianism, they have their own concept of religious moderation<sup>5</sup>.

The Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia take various steps to anticipate the occurrence of barriers and discrimination in the name of religion. The Indonesian government must have its own way of thinking and knowledge not to be trapped in the barriers of social spaces<sup>6</sup>. At this point, religious moderation as the integration of core religious teachings and the state of the multicultural society in Indonesia can be combined with social policies taken by the government. That way, through new knowledge, will raise awareness in every child of the nation that Indonesia does not only belong to one group but belongs to all of them<sup>7</sup>.

The problems described above require a new formula in the form of a new epistemology that must be supported by the state not to overlap with the existing moderation in their respective religions. This is because religious moderation is a shared commitment of maintaining a perfect balance, where every society in Indonesia, regardless of ethnicity, has ethical beliefs and must listen to one another. With religious moderation and a new epistemology, the community is expected to be able to live together in the conditions of tolerance and togetherness<sup>8</sup>.

Some studies of A.J. Ayer related to epistemology. Mauliansyah explains Ayer's idea of Language, Truth, and Logic and considers this epistemology critically<sup>9</sup>. This study assesses Ayer's idea in the positivistic perspective that he does not want to consider deeper. The difference between this and Mauliansyah's study lies in the application of Ayer's epistemology, which is used as an analytical tool in viewing religious moderation in Indonesia.

Mun'minatus in his research describes the connection between facts and the idea of Ayer's epistemological papa. This research only focuses on the idea of elaborating

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facts and meanings that can be verified by Ayer's ideas, even in science there must be a deep explanation and meaning that can be verified by knowledge <sup>10</sup>. The object of this research is focused on dissecting the notion of religious moderation from Ayer's perspective, which is rarely discussed by previous researchers.

No previous research has been included in cross-epistemological studies such as this one. The reason is that it becomes ambiguous when western epistemology is used to consider discourses of religious moderation. Those case studies are in Indonesia where the majority of the population is Muslim. This is a novelty in religious moderation research from a western perspective.

In connection with the above facts, this study discusses one of the contemporary idea of a philosopher A.J. Ayer regarding the knowledge of truth and its relevance to the idea of religious moderation. This research is included in library research or library research with a descriptive analysis method <sup>11</sup>. Ayer considers new knowledge in formulating approaches related to religious moderation. For the author, moderation will not be realized, especially if there is no new knowledge in considering problems that exist in a plural country like Indonesia.

The research data was obtained from the literature containing Ayer's thoughts. These sources include Ayer's work and the work of others who have studied Ayer's ideas. The type of source used is a combination of journals and books related to research content. Data was collected from these sources by reading and observing and taking the meaning contained therein related to the research theme. The analysis of the research data was based on comparative approach between the opinions to find the position of the researcher among the existing ideas.

Intellectual Career of A.J. Ayer. Alfred Jules Ayer was born on October 29, 1910, in London. He married a descendant of a Jew who was in the same family as the Citroen family, the founders of a rugged car factory in France. His involvement with the world of philosophy and philology began at Oxford where he studied in the period from 1932 to 1935 <sup>12</sup>. Ayer is known as a philosopher of radical positivism. His career skyrocketed after he returned from Vienna and was appointed a lecturer at Oxford. Due to the Second World War, he was assigned by the British government to serve as a soldier in military intelligence.

After the Second World War, Ayer received an extraordinary award. He was appointed a professor at the University of London (1946–1959) and the University of Oxford <sup>13</sup>. As an academic, Ayer certainly received the ideas contained in the book "Language, Truth and Logic" which became a phenomenal work and was admired by the English philosophers of the XX c. The idea expressed in this book seems radical <sup>14</sup>. Ayer became a philosopher of radical positivism because of the studying in Vienna.

His second masterpiece "The Problem of Knowledge" contains the aspects of philosophical skepticism. The ideas put forward by Ayer in his book "Language, Truth, and Logic" are not new but they have been deeply embedded in Viennese circles. During the Second World War, Ayer worked mostly in intelligence that made his way of thinking positivistic, empirical and useful for the development of religious moderation knowledge.

A.J. Ayer's Epistemology. A.J. Ayer developed the concept of logical positivism in a radical way <sup>15</sup>. According to logical positivism, the pure philosophy of science may simply be a logical analysis of the language of science. The function of this

analysis, on the one hand, reduces metaphysics and, on the other hand, examines the logical structure of scientific knowledge and aims to determine the content of empirically diversified scientific concepts and statements. The pattern developed in logical positivism seeks to avoid the prolonged turmoil associated with science.

At the stage of its development, logical positivism views philosophers as investigating human nature. For the representatives of Viennese group, especially Ayer, the framework developed in Greek philosophy was pointless<sup>16</sup>.

Through language analysis A.J. Ayer reveals that philosophical problems can only be solved if the words do not contain ambiguity, or multiple meanings. According to logical positivism, knowledge is the impression stimulated by an object to the senses and the truth is the sensory response to the stimulus from the object. For Ayer, the concept of logical positivism can not be separated from the principle of verification: "We say that a sentence is factually significant to any person, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. If, on the other hand, the putative proposition such is, that assumption concerning the nature of his future experience is if not a tautology, a more pseudo-proposition. The sentence expressing it may be emotionally significant, but not literary significant"<sup>17</sup>.

From the explanation by Ayer, the verification principle intends to determine the meaning and not to determine a criterion of truth. An expression can sometimes be right or interpreted wrong, but it can be meaningful. For Ayer, the expression comes from observations concerning sensory reality. In other words, it is meaningful if it is done by observation or verification. This case must require empirical facts and data.

To verify means to test, to prove empirically. Every science and philosophy always has a statement in the form of axioms, theories, etc., that are considered to have a principled meaning that can be verified by empirical experience. This verification principle does not require having a true statement. Consequently, if every statement has no true meaning statement will have no real meaning<sup>18</sup>.

In this way, Ayer rejects metaphysics, because, on the principle of verification as a measure of the truth of speech, statements that are not verified and analyzed logically are meaningless, especially statements related to metaphysics that can not be proven with a framework empirical<sup>19</sup>. Unconsciously, the epistemology developed by Ayer rejects can not be proven with a rational and empirical framework, moreover he is one of representatives of the Viennese schools with the paradigm of "Logical Positivism".

One more thing that distinguishes Ayer's ideas from other positivist ideas is the analytic proposition. This means that truth or untruth is not based on experience, but the testing of propositions<sup>20</sup>. Analytical propositions consist of four main discussions: first, propositions that are true through limitations, solely based on their symbol arrangement. Second, propositions that are not based on experience, but a priori. Third, propositions that contain certainty and necessity. Fourth, propositions that contain meaning as they contain definite terms. All of this contains the possibility to be validated or not in the sense of experience<sup>21</sup>.

What Ayer has promoted, can be used as knowledge in assessing the framework of religious moderation in Indonesia. The reason is, as explained above, that the meaning contained in religious moderation must be following the empirical frame-



work that factually exists. On the contrary, the religious moderation movement is only a metaphysical movement that does not understand the root cause of the problem and its solution. In this way, it would be better if we looked more deeply into the meaning and context of religious moderation in a pluralistic and multicultural country.

Religious Moderation. Indonesia through the Ministry of Religion has been aggressively promoting religious moderation. This was made to provide understanding to the community and invite them to practice religious teachings without violence. Moderation comes from the word “moderatio” which means “medium”<sup>22</sup> or can be understood as “no more and no less”<sup>23</sup>.

In Islam moderation is known as “wasathiyah”. This term comes from the word “wasat”, extracted from the Qur’an, and contains a deep meaning of a combination of advantages and disadvantages<sup>24</sup>. Wasathiyah is an attitude to life and a way how to behave, and maintain balance in every dimension of life. Moderation is the result of a collaborative attitude of Islam itself which is then based on the attitude of the diversity of a Muslim both from the dimensions of worship and muamalah coupled with the attitude to the world<sup>25</sup>. Thus, Muslims should look to a more glorious future without fear or arrogance towards other religions.

Even in the Qur’an surah al-Baqarah verse 143 the word “wasathiyah” contains the most perfect meaning. The Hadith also mentions that the best of affairs is the middle. Or, in other words, Islam views the resolution of a problem through a deliberation approach, and always consider the middle point and the problem. Likewise facing the differences both between religions and within Islam itself. Moderate Islam always prioritizes the tasamuh attitude by not eroding trust in each other’s beliefs<sup>26</sup>. The aim is that all parties should accept the decision that do not cause anarchism.

Humans who have high loyalty to moderation can be characterized by the attitude of the extent to which they cultivate loyalty and justice<sup>27</sup>. If the individual is more moderate and balanced, then he will be more open to his potential to act with full justice that manifests the benefit of others. Likewise, if someone is not moderate and tends to be one-sided in making decisions, it indicates that he is not being fair. As explained above, the Prophet always taught his people to take the middle way in every decision.

For Nasir, the position of the moderates in Indonesia with plural and multicultural country must have a strong attitude so that all citizens of the nation stay away from all forms of radicalism that carry absolute understanding and contain extremism, intolerance, and violence regarding all matters relating to human life and nation<sup>28</sup>. With the firmness of religious people who have a moderate attitude, of course, extremist understanding is not easy to enter into Indonesian society, which is already plural and multicultural<sup>29</sup>.

Thus, religious moderation is a middle way amid religious diversity of Indonesia. Moderation can be called an archipelago culture that goes hand in hand and does not negate each other between religion and local wisdom. The principle is not questioning each other but looking for solutions together tolerantly<sup>30</sup>. Thus, it is time for the Ministry of Religion to promote a religious moderation movement to create a society that is more moderate and tolerant for other understandings. This is because a democratic country must manifest tolerant attitude towards other beliefs.

Moderate in Islamic thought is promoting tolerance and respect for other different ideas. Openness accepts diversity – whether religious in madzhab or religious in religion. Differences will not prevent cooperation, based on the principle of humanity. Believe that Islam is the most correct religion for Muslims, without harassing other people's religions. So, that there will be unity between religions, as it was in the time of the Prophet. Thus, there must be new knowledge regarding religious moderation so that the Indonesian people understand the true meaning of moderation (Table).

*Table*

*Knowledge of Religious Moderation in AJ. Ayer's Epistemology*

Moderation in Religion	Ayer's Concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wasathiyah</li> <li>• Moderate in religion</li> <li>• Religious beliefs must be verified so that religious radicalism does not occur</li> <li>• The truth of religious people tawasuth, tawazun, i'tidal, and tasamuh</li> <li>• The method in Islam is the teaching that is justified in the Qur'an, Sunnah, Ijma', and Qiyas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Meaning</li> <li>• Verification</li> <li>• Truth</li> <li>• Method</li> </ul>

Ayer's verification concept reminds the concept of religious moderation which is often known as tabayyun in Islamic teachings. As explained above, being moderate means always doing tabayyun, so, that there are no misunderstandings between religious people or Muslims themselves. Tabayyun is a command that is important for human life. One of the morals is to persevere in everything, especially in different cultures and beliefs.

Ayer's concept should not be confused with traditional subjectivist teachings. The difference is clearly shown when people point the difference between expressing feelings and affirming that people have certain feelings <sup>31</sup>. The reference between affirmation and the expression of certain feelings is because people have certain feelings often accompanied by the expression of those feelings. Similarly, in religious moderation of a plural and multicultural country, one must have self-affirmation before talking about the idea of religious moderation. Muslim can be called moderate when he still has the nature and attitude of hatred towards other religions <sup>32</sup>.

This means that there are still radical groups. Radicals are often associated with tough attitudes, which in the context of moderate religious moderation is understood as an ideology that seeks to make changes to the social and political order by using violent or extreme means in the name of religion <sup>33</sup>. Thus, Ayer mentions that there must be knowledge of religious moderation regarding affirmation with its disclosure.

We all understand that wasathiyah is the best attitude to apply, not only in life as individual beings but also as social beings <sup>34</sup>. For Ayer, people like to make ethical or value judgments merely to express, not affirm a certain feeling <sup>35</sup>. So, the problem of moderation should be accompanied by feelings, not just disclosure. The concept described above is important in a plural and multicultural country. Speaking heart to heart is more effective than mere speech. This is as we discussed above regarding the concept of tabayyun.

This is because a moderate attitude will have an impact on two aspects of life, namely the aspect of oneself and the social aspect. They will assert and disclose to resolve the conflicts that exist within themselves. Whereas in social life, moderation

makes it easier to interact with other different communities, especially in the context of a society that has a diverse religious composition<sup>36</sup>. Moderate attitude will be one of the right solutions of religious radicalization. Ayer said that moderation can provide a principle of verification of the existing truth<sup>37</sup>.

For Ayer, humans never argue about values, but rather only argue about facts<sup>38</sup>. By looking at the development of the religious moderation movement highlighted by groups or the government, it is only debating the facts, not looking at the axiological studies related to the emergence of the religious moderation movement<sup>39</sup>. So, what will emerge is only limited the nursery facts that can be obtained in the field, not the essence of moderation itself. In this way, the values of moderation must also be stated, not only in the data obtained in the field<sup>40</sup>.

Thus, Ayer mentions that there must be new knowledge related to religious moderation, especially when talking about moderation in a plural and multicultural country. For Ayer, it should not only talk about facts but should also prioritize the values that exist in the religious moderation movement. In addition, for Ayer when talking about religious moderation, he must prioritize tabayyun's actions, not just talking about affirmations and disclosures related to religious moderation.

Religious moderation lately has become a massive movement. The reason is to stem radical and extremist movements, the government through the Ministry of Religion seeks to carry out a religious moderation movement to fight with new ideologies that tend to bring division. Religious moderation is not a new concept – it has existed since the time of the Prophet. However, because some Muslims were infiltrated by an understanding that was not following Islamic teachings, finally the religious moderation movement was brought back to the surface to fight this ideology.

Ayer is a radical positivist philosopher who made a breakthrough in positive philosophical discourse. For Ayer, when talking about religious moderation, there must be a new formula in the form of new knowledge. This new knowledge is in the form of a value concept and is not based on real facts. For Ayer, this value is important because the essential part of religious moderation is the value, not the fact. Ayer mentions that feeling, not just expression as stated in the tabayyun concept in Islam, is essential in religious moderation.

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