



NEGOTIATING SECULARISM: DAOED JOESOEF'S INTELLECTUAL MEDIATION BETWEEN ISLAMIC ETHICS AND STATE RATIONALITY IN THE POST-COLONIAL CONTEXT OF INDONESIA



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Abstract

This article examines how Daoed Joesoef mediated Islamic ethics and state rationality in postcolonial Indonesia. Using qualitative – interpretative intellectual history, it analyzes eight works through close reading, contextual reconstruction, and comparative interpretation. Findings show that Joesoef did not treat secularism as exclusion of religion. He reframed it as ethical rationality that protects pluralism and prevents confessional capture while keeping state power morally accountable. Islam functions as a source of civic virtue—justice, trust, adab, responsibility, and service—rather than a juridical state ideology. Joesoef translated these principles into educational statecraft through literacy, character formation, and institutional discipline. The article terms this synthesis Islamic Rational Statecraft, demonstrating how an Indonesian Muslim intellectual transformed secularism into a contextual grammar of moral governance beyond the secular – state/Islamic – state binary.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji mediasi Daoed Joesoef antara etika Islam dan rasionalitas negara dalam Indonesia pascakolonial. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif-interpretatif sejarah intelektual, kajian menganalisis delapan karya melalui pembacaan dekat, rekonstruksi konteks, dan interpretasi komparatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Joesoef tidak memaknai sekularisme sebagai pengusiran agama, melainkan rasionalitas etis yang melindungi kemajemukan, mencegah dominasi konfesional, dan menjaga akuntabilitas moral negara. Islam berfungsi sebagai sumber kebajikan kewargaan—keadilan, amanah, adab, tanggung jawab, dan pelayanan—bukan ideologi negara yang legalistik. Prinsip tersebut diterjemahkan ke dalam statecraft pendidikan melalui literasi, pembentukan karakter, dan disiplin kelembagaan. Artikel menyebut sintesis ini Islamic Rational Statecraft, sebuah tata bahasa kontekstual bagi pemerintahan bermoral di luar dikotomi negara sekuler dan negara Islam.

Background

The relationship between Islam and secularism remains one of the central problems in modern Islamic thought because it concerns the authority of religion, the limits of the state, and the moral meaning of public reason. In many Muslim societies, the debate is often framed as a binary choice between a secular state that confines religion to private life and an Islamic state that formalizes religious law as public authority. This binary is intellectually narrow and historically inadequate. It overlooks the many ways Muslim



thinkers have mediated between faith, rationality, citizenship, and the plural demands of the modern nation – state.¹

Indonesia offers an especially important case for revisiting this debate. The republic is neither a liberal secular state in the strict European sense nor a confessional Islamic state. Its constitutional life is organized through Pancasila, a political compromise that recognizes belief in God while refusing to identify the state with one religious tradition. This arrangement creates a distinctive field of moral negotiation. Religion remains publicly meaningful, but state authority must serve citizens across religious and cultural differences. The Indonesian experience therefore requires a theory of secularism that is not simply copied from Europe and not reduced to the vocabulary of political Islam.²

Daoed Joesoef (1926 – 2018) is significant precisely in this field of negotiation. He is commonly remembered as a former Minister of Education and Culture, a controversial policymaker, and a disciplined public intellectual. Yet his deeper contribution lies in the philosophical logic behind his educational and cultural statecraft. Across his writings on reading, intelligence, culture, development, and public morality, Joesoef consistently treated rationality not as a value – free instrument but as a moral discipline. He rejected both anti – religious secularism and ideological religiosity. What he sought was a form of public reason capable of governing a plural nation without emptying public life of ethical substance.³

This article argues that Joesoef's thought can be reconstructed as ethical secularism or, more precisely, Islamic Rational Statecraft. The term does not mean an Islamic state, nor does it mean the bureaucratic use of Islam by the state. It refers to a model of governance in which the state maintains institutional neutrality while public reason remains answerable to ethical values such as justice, trustworthiness, discipline, civic responsibility, and human dignity. In this model, Islam functions as a source of public ethics rather than as a formal ideology of domination.⁴

The article responds to several concerns raised in the study of secularism. First, much of the theoretical literature remains dominated by Euro – Christian genealogies.

¹ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Robert W Hefner, "Islam and Covenantal Pluralism in Indonesia: A Critical Juncture Analysis," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2020): 1 – 17; Zainal Abidin Bagir, Suhadi Asfinawati, and Renata Arianingtyas, "Limitations to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Indonesia: Norms and Practices," *Religion & Human Rights* 15, no. 1 – 2 (2020): 39 – 56.

² Lahaji and Ahmad Faisal, "'Caliphate No in Indonesia': Nurcholish Madjid and Yudian Wahyudi Critiques toward Islamic State Discourse in Indonesian Islam," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2023): 2278207; Abiyyu Riwanto and Iin Nur Zulaili, "Kebijakan Pendidikan Sekuler Era Menteri Pendidikan Daoed Joesoef 1978 – 1983," *Qurthuba: The Journal of History and Islamic Civilization* 6, no. 2 (2022): 66 – 84; Badrun Badrun et al., "Pancasila, Islam, and Harmonising Socio – Cultural Conflict in Indonesia," ed. Nahdlatul Wathan, *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 61, no. 1 (2023): 137 – 156; Musawar and Gatot Suhirman, "Khilafah in the View of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) Ulema in Lombok," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, no. 2 (2021): 317 – 346.

³ Daoed Joesoef, *Dia Dan Aku: Memoar Pencari Kebenaran* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2006); Daoed Joesoef, *Pikiran Dan Gagasan Daoed Joesoef: 10 Wacana Tentang Aneka Masalah Kehidupan Bersama* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2011); Daoed Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanya, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daoed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2018).

⁴ Joesoef, *Pikiran Dan Gagasan Daoed Joesoef: 10 Wacana Tentang Aneka Masalah Kehidupan Bersama*; Moh Muchtarom and Abu Zarrin Selamat, "Civic Values: Thematic Studies on Citizenship in Islam," *Jurnal Civics: Media Kajian Kewarganegaraan* 20, no. 1 (2023): 135 – 144; Robert W Hefner, "Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia," *Religions* 12, no. 6 (2021): 415.

Talal Asad's critique is indispensable because it shows that secularism is not a neutral universal doctrine but a historical formation shaped by power. Yet the Indonesian case also requires attention to local agency: how Muslim intellectuals appropriate, translate, and moralize secular rationality for their own context. Second, Indonesian discussions of Daoed Joesoef often focus on policy controversies without reconstructing the philosophical architecture that made those policies intelligible. Third, comparative studies of Islamic modernism have emphasized Nurcholish Madjid and Harun Nasution while leaving Joesoef's state – oriented ethical rationalism under – theorized.⁵

The novelty of this article lies in repositioning Joesoef within debates on Islam, secularism, and postcolonial modernity not simply as a policy actor but as a theorist of moral governance. Rather than treating him as an Indonesian variant of European secularism, the article reads his corpus alongside Asad's genealogy of the secular, Jackson's *Islamic Secular*, and recent Indonesian scholarship on Pancasila, citizenship, religious moderation, and Islamic education. This frame makes visible Joesoef's distinctive move: he translates the problem of religion – state relations into educational statecraft, where public reason is institutionalized through literacy, civic formation, disciplined administration, and non – confessional moral education.⁶

⁵ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*; Rizky Widian, Putu Agung Nara Indra Prima Satya, and Sylvia Yazid, "Religion in Indonesia's Elections: An Implementation of a Populist Strategy?," *Politics and Religion* 16, no. 2 (2023): 351 – 373; Edward Aspinall et al., "Elites, Masses, and Democratic Decline in Indonesia," *Democratization* 27, no. 4 (2020): 505 – 526; Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulema Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 21 – 35; Ahmad Faisal et al., "Strengthening Religious Moderatism through the Traditional Authority of Kiai in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2022): 2150450; Aisah Putri Budiatri, "Dynamic Tolerance: Tolerance within Nahdlatul Ulama and Nahdliyin in Indonesia," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 13, no. 2 (2025): 247 – 263; Masdar Hilmy and Khoirun Niam, "Winning the Battle of Authorities: The Muslim Disputes over the Covid – 19 Pandemic Plague in Contemporary Indonesia," *QIJIS: Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2020): 293 – 326.

⁶ Sherman A Jackson, *The Islamic Secular* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024); Hasnan Bachtiar, "Dar Al – 'Ahd Wa Al – Shahadah: Muhammadiyah's Position and Thoughts on Negara Pancasila," *Studia Islamika* 27, no. 3 (2020): 485 – 513; Syamsul Arifin, Syafiq A Mughni, and Moh Nurhakim, "The Idea of Progress: Meaning and Implications of Islam Berkemajuan in Muhammadiyah," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (2022): 547 – 584; David Efendi, Nanang Indra Kurniawan, and Purwo Santoso, "From Fiqh to Political Advocacy: Muhammadiyah's Ecological Movement in the Post New Order Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 2 (2021): 349 – 383; Wasisto Raharjo Jati et al., "From Intellectual to Advocacy Movement: Islamic Moderation, the Conservatives and the Shift of Interfaith Dialogue Campaign in Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 26, no. 2 (2022): 472 – 499; Umi Musyarrofah and Zulhannan, "Religious Moderation in the Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's Dakwah in the Era of Industry 4.0," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 22, no. 2 (2023): 409 – 434; Jamaludin Hadi Kusuma and Sulistiyono Susilo, "Intercultural and Religious Sensitivity among Young Indonesian Interfaith Groups," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020): 26.; Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "The Religious Moderation for Indonesia Muslim Middle Class: Challenges & Solutions," *Penamas* 36, no. 1 (2023): 18 – 34; Sugeng Bayu Wahyono et al., "Multicultural Education and Religious Tolerance: Elementary School Teachers' Understanding of Multicultural Education in Yogyakarta," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (2022): 467 – 508; M Jailani and Suyadi, "The Impact of Neuroscience – Based Modern Islamic Education on the Aspect of Creative Imagination and Development of Religious Moderation on Madura Island," *Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2023): 157 – 172; Jamhari and Saifudin Asrori, "The Making of Salafi – Based Islamic Schools in Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 1 (2022): 227 – 264.; Jajang Jahroni, "Saudi Arabia Charity and the Institutionalization of Indonesian Salafism," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 58, no. 1 (2020): 35 – 62.

The central questions of this study are therefore: how does Joesoef reinterpret secularism as rational statecraft in Indonesia's plural setting? In what ways does he position Islam as a moral and cultural source rather than a formal legal ideology? How does his synthesis of modern rationality, Islamic ethics, and Indonesian nationalism offer a postcolonial model of ethical governance? These questions guide the analysis that follows.⁷

Methodologically, this article employs a qualitative – interpretative approach within intellectual history. Its object is the architecture of ideas that recurs across Joesoef's texts, biographical experience, and public reflections rather than the statistical measurement of policy outcomes. Intellectual history connects concepts to the circumstances in which they were formed, especially Joesoef's education in France, Islamic moral sensibility, Indonesian nationalism, and experience in state administration.⁸

The primary corpus comprises eight works: *Bacalah*; *Isra' dan Mi'raj* serta *Pesan – Pesan Ilahiah*; *Budaya Baca*; *Dia dan Aku*; *Emak*; *Pikiran dan Gagasan Daoed Joesoef*; *Rekam Jejak Anak Tiga Zaman*; and *Bangunlah Jiwanja, Bangunlah Badannya*. These texts are treated as an intellectual corpus and read for recurring concepts such as *akal budi*, moral discipline, reading culture, civic responsibility, the formation of the whole person, and the relation between religion and public life. Secondary sources situate these themes within scholarship on Indonesian Islam, Pancasila, citizenship, secularism, and education, with priority given to recent peer – reviewed journal literature.⁹

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, close reading identifies semantic patterns linking rationality, morality, education, and governance. Second, contextual reconstruction locates those patterns within Indonesian postcolonial modernity and Islamic intellectual reform. Third, comparative interpretation places Joesoef in dialogue with relevant theories and Indonesian scholarship in order to clarify the originality and limits of his position. Interpretive validity is pursued through source triangulation across Joesoef's corpus and secondary scholarship, while reflexivity is maintained by distinguishing the reconstruction of his philosophical logic from endorsement of particular policy choices.¹⁰

⁷ Bagir, Asfinawati, and Arianingtyas, "Limitations to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Indonesia: Norms and Practices."; Hefner, "Islam and Covenantal Pluralism in Indonesia: A Critical Juncture Analysis."; Ronald A Lukens – Bull and Al Makin, "Paradoxical Pluralism: Training Militants for Tolerance in an Indonesian Youth Movement," *Studia Islamika* 32, no. 2 (2025): 211 – 239.

⁸ Riwanto and Zulaili, "Kebijakan Pendidikan Sekuler Era Menteri Pendidikan Daoed Joesoef 1978 – 1983."; Joesoef, *Dia Dan Aku: Memoar Pencari Kebenaran*.

⁹ Daoed Joesoef, *Bacalah* (Jakarta: Aries Lima, 1984); Daoed Joesoef, *Isra' Dan Mi'raj Serta Pesan-Pesan Ilahiah* (Jakarta: Aries Lima, 1991); Daoed Joesoef, *Budaya Baca* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2004); Joesoef, *Dia Dan Aku: Memoar Pencari Kebenaran*; Daoed Joesoef, *Emak: Penuntunku Dari Kampung Darat Sampai Sorbonne* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2010); Joesoef, *Pikiran Dan Gagasan Daoed Joesoef: 10 Wacana Tentang Aneka Masalah Kehidupan Bersama*; Daoed Joesoef, *Rekam Jejak Anak Tiga Zaman* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2017); Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanja, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daoed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional*; Amalia Solihat, Abdul Syukur, and Kurniawati, "Kebijakan Kontroversial Menteri Daoed Joesoef 1978 – 1983: Perubahan Tahun Ajaran Dan Libur Bulan Ramadhan," *Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah* 9, no. 1 (2020): 55 – 73.

¹⁰ Solihat, Syukur, and Kurniawati; Wasisto Jati et al., "Reevaluating Approaches to Religious Moderation at the Grassroots Level: The Role of Muslim Youth in Advancing Interfaith Dialogue," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 62, no. 1 (2024): 185 – 213; Bagir, Asfinawati, and Arianingtyas, "Limitations to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Indonesia: Norms and Practices."; Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulema Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam."

Secularism as Ethical Rationality

The first finding is that Joesoef shifts secularism from an ideological doctrine to an ethical function. He does not begin with the question of whether religion must be separated from the state in an abstract metaphysical sense. He begins with a practical and moral problem: how can a plural state govern fairly without allowing any one religious or ideological group to monopolize public authority? For Joesoef, the answer lies in rational statecraft, a disciplined use of reason that secures justice, order, and public accountability.¹¹

This position differs from liberal secularism when liberal secularism becomes morally empty. Joesoef does not imagine the state as a neutral machine detached from values. He accepts that a modern state must be administratively rational, but he insists that rationality requires moral orientation. Without ethics, rationality becomes technocracy; without rationality, ethics becomes sentiment or dogma. His thought therefore places *akal budi* at the center of public life. Reason must be cultivated as a moral faculty, not merely as an instrument of calculation.¹²

This reconstruction also differs from political Islam when political Islam treats the state as the institutional vehicle of religious truth. Joesoef refuses to identify Islam with formal state ideology. He understands that the modern Indonesian state must protect a plurality of citizens and traditions. The moral role of Islam, in his view, is not to dominate the state but to form citizens capable of honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social service. This is why his secularism is better described as bounded secularism: religion is not expelled from public morality, but the state is protected from confessional capture.¹³

In relation to Asad, Joesoef's position is constructive rather than merely genealogical. Asad helps expose secularism as a historical formation of power, but Joesoef asks how a postcolonial Muslim – majority society can use rational statecraft without surrendering to the Eurocentric assumptions of secular modernity. He provincializes secularism by relocating it within Indonesian moral life. Secularism becomes less a Western doctrine than a practical grammar for managing plurality through ethical public reason.¹⁴

The theoretical implication is important. If secularism is treated only as the exclusion of religion, then Joesoef appears contradictory. But if secularism is understood as a moral technology for protecting public fairness, then his synthesis becomes coherent. He seeks a state that is not anti – religious, a religion that is not coercive, and a public reason that is neither spiritually empty nor ideologically closed.¹⁵

¹¹ Joesoef, *Pikiran Dan Gagasan Daoed Joesoef: 10 Wacana Tentang Aneka Masalah Kehidupan Bersama*; Hefner, "Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia."; Muchtarom and Selamat, "Civic Values: Thematic Studies on Citizenship in Islam."

¹² Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanya, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daoed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional*; Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Polarization of Indonesian Society during 2014 – 2020: Causes and Its Impacts toward Democracy," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 26, no. 2 (2022): 152 – 167.

¹³ Joesoef, *Pikiran Dan Gagasan Daoed Joesoef: 10 Wacana Tentang Aneka Masalah Kehidupan Bersama*; Alexander R Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post – Reformasi Indonesia," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 37 – 50.

¹⁴ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*; Hefner, "Islam and Covenantal Pluralism in Indonesia: A Critical Juncture Analysis."; Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*.

¹⁵ Bagir, Asfinawati, and Arianingtyas, "Limitations to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Indonesia: Norms and Practices."; Serafettin Pektas, "A Comparative Analysis of Three Sunni Muslim Organizations on Moderate and Radical Islam in Egypt, Morocco and Indonesia," *Religion*

Islam as Public Ethics beyond Legalism

The second finding is that Joesoef positions Islam primarily as a source of public ethics rather than as a legal – political blueprint. This does not weaken Islam; it relocates its public force. For him, the decisive question is not how much religious vocabulary appears in state law, but whether public life embodies justice, trust, discipline, compassion, and responsibility. In this sense, Islamic ethics operates as a moral infrastructure for citizenship.¹⁶

Joesoef's writings on education and culture repeatedly return to the formation of the person. Reading, intelligence, moral discipline, and civic responsibility are not merely technical capacities. They are signs of a cultivated soul. This emphasis resonates with the classical Islamic concern for *adab*, the proper ordering of knowledge, conduct, and social responsibility. Although Joesoef does not write as a systematic theorist of *adab* in al – Attas's sense, his educational philosophy shares the conviction that knowledge without moral formation produces disorder rather than civilization.¹⁷

Sherman Jackson's concept of the Islamic Secular helps clarify this point. Jackson argues that not all morally meaningful Muslim action is reducible to the formal domain of Sharia. There are social, cultural, and civic actions that are not juridically prescribed yet remain ethically significant before God. Joesoef's thought fits this space. He does not need to turn every policy into religious law in order to make it morally Islamic. Rather, he sees public ethics, education, and disciplined citizenship as arenas where Islamic values can work without legal formalization.¹⁸

Nurcholish Madjid's distinction between secularization and secularism is also relevant. Madjid defended secularization as the desacralization of worldly institutions so that Muslims would not absolutize political power. For him, only God is truly sacred; worldly arrangements must remain open to criticism, renewal, and rational evaluation. Joesoef shares this refusal to sacralize the state, but he moves the argument into administrative and educational practice. Where Madjid clarifies the theological meaning of renewal, Joesoef asks how state institutions can cultivate moral citizens without becoming theological institutions.¹⁹

51, no. 2 (2021): 190 – 213; Greg Barton, Ihsan Yilmaz, and Nicholas Morieson, "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 641; Mun'im Sirry, "Muslim Student Radicalism and Self – Deradicalization in Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 31, no. 2 (2020): 241 – 260.

¹⁶ Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*; Muchtarom and Selamat, "Civic Values: Thematic Studies on Citizenship in Islam."; Arifin, Mughni, and Nurhakim, "The Idea of Progress: Meaning and Implications of Islam Berkemajuan in Muhammadiyah."; Badrun et al., "Pancasila, Islam, and Harmonising Socio – Cultural Conflict in Indonesia."; Musawar and Gatot Suhirman, "Khilafah in the View of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) Ulema in Lombok," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, no. 2 (2021): 317 – 346; Faisal et al., "Strengthening Religious Moderatism through the Traditional Authority of Kiai in Indonesia."

¹⁷ Joesoef, *Bacalah*; Eka Puspitasari and Anaas Tri Ridlo Dina Yuliana, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al – Attas' Concept of Islamizing Science and Its Relevance to Islamic Education," *Al-Misbah (Jurnal Islamic Studies)* 10, no. 2 (2022): 91 – 108.

¹⁸ Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*.

¹⁹ Nurcholish Madjid, *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemodernan*, ed. Budhy Munawar – Rachman (Jakarta: Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2019); Vita Fitriatul Ulya, M.Yunus Abu Bakar, and Ali Masud, "Reinterpreting Nurcholish Madjid's Theories of Secularization: Reapplying These Theories to Indonesia's Contemporary Islamic Education Curriculum," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 14, no. 3 (2025): 609 – 626.

Al – Attas provides a contrasting but necessary interlocutor. In Islam and Secularism, al – Attas criticizes secularization as a worldview that disenchant nature, desacralizes politics, and relativizes values. Joesoef would not accept an anti – religious secular worldview, but he also would not reject rational statecraft simply because it emerged from modern political history. The difference is subtle. Al – Attas stresses the danger of secularism as a civilizational worldview; Joesoef stresses the possibility of moralizing rational governance in a plural state. Read together, they sharpen the limits of Joesoef's project: rational statecraft is acceptable only insofar as it remains ethically disciplined and spiritually accountable.²⁰

Educational Statecraft and the Formation of Civic Virtue

The clearest institutional field for Joesoef's ethical secularism is education. Education was not, for him, merely a sector of government. It was the main arena for forming the moral and rational capacities of the nation. His concern for reading culture, intellectual discipline, character formation, and civic responsibility shows that he understood national development as a project of building the human person before building infrastructure. This is the meaning of his recurring emphasis on building the soul and the body of the nation.²¹

This orientation explains why his educational policies cannot be understood only as administrative decisions. They were part of a larger philosophy of statecraft. The school and the university were expected to produce citizens who could think rationally, act responsibly, and participate in a plural public order. Joesoef believed that a nation without reading culture and intellectual discipline would be vulnerable to slogans, ideological manipulation, and moral weakness. In this respect, literacy becomes a civic virtue, not merely an academic skill.²²

The controversial policy of Normalization of Campus Life/Student Coordinating Board (NKK/BKK) illustrates both the ambition and the ambiguity of Joesoef's statecraft. On one side, it reflected his fear that universities could be captured by ideological agitation rather than intellectual work. On the other side, critics viewed it as limiting student political expression. This article does not settle the empirical debate over the policy. It makes a more limited claim: the policy becomes intelligible within Joesoef's broader philosophy of disciplined rationality and moral order. The distinction between explanation and endorsement is necessary for a fair intellectual history.²³

²⁰ Syed Muhammad Naquib al – Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993); Ahmad Nurjali and Undang Ruslan W, "Konsep Adab Menurut Syed Muhammad Naquib Al – Attas," *Al-Ulum Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (2024): 43 – 57; Purniadi Putra, Mawazi Mawazi, and Hifza Hifza, "Analysis of Adab Education According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al – Attas," *International Research-Based Education Journal* 5, no. 1 (2023): 140 – 148; Andika Apriansyah, Abdur Razzaq, and Alimron, "Urgensi Adab Dalam Menuntut Ilmu: Pemikiran Naquib Al – Attas," *Jurnal Genta Mulia* 15, no. 2 (2024): 92 – 98.

²¹ Joesoef, *Bacalah*; Joesoef, *Budaya Baca*; Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanya, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daoed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional*; Wahyono et al., "Multicultural Education and Religious Tolerance: Elementary School Teachers' Understanding of Multicultural Education in Yogyakarta."

²² Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanya, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daoed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional*; Muhammad Rasyid Ridho and Maragustam Siregar, "Pemikiran Harun Nasution Dan Relevansinya Dengan Dunia Pendidikan Islam Kontemporer," *Tafaqquh: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Kajian Keislaman* 13, no. 1 (2025): 164 – 177.

²³ Joesoef, *Dia Dan Aku: Memoar Pencari Kebenaran*; Joesoef, *Pikiran Dan Gagasan Daoed Joesoef: 10 Wacana Tentang Aneka Masalah Kehidupan Bersama*; Solihat, Syukur, and Kurniawati,

His support for moral education must also be read carefully. Pendidikan Moral Pancasila was often interpreted as part of the New Order's ideological apparatus. Yet within Joesoef's own logic, moral education aimed to cultivate shared civic virtues in a religiously plural nation. Values such as honesty, responsibility, justice, discipline, and mutual respect are compatible with Islamic ethics without being exclusive to Muslims. This is precisely the kind of public ethic required by a Pancasila state.²⁴

Educational statecraft is therefore the practical face of Islamic Rational Statecraft. It shows how Islamic moral concerns can enter public life through character formation, intellectual discipline, and civic responsibility rather than through formal religious domination. Joesoef's contribution lies in translating the ethics of the person into the ethics of institutions. The state must not merely administer citizens; it must create conditions in which citizens learn to govern themselves morally.²⁵

Hybrid Modernity and Postcolonial Mediation

Joesoef's thought is also a form of postcolonial mediation. His education in France exposed him to modern rationalism, administrative discipline, and the idea of the state as an organized public project. Yet he did not simply imitate French laicite. Indonesia's plural religious landscape and his own Islamic moral sensibility prevented him from adopting a secularism of privatized religion. He took from Europe the discipline of rational organization, but he refused the moral emptiness that can accompany secular technocracy.²⁶

This makes his modernity hybrid rather than derivative. Joesoef does not treat European modernity as a universal script to be copied; he translates selected elements of rational administration into Indonesian and Islamic moral vocabularies. The result is a postcolonial act of intellectual agency: modern institutions are retained, but their legitimacy is judged by justice, civic responsibility, and moral accountability rather than by European provenance alone.²⁷

Post – Asadian scholarship is useful here because it cautions against imagining Islam and the West as sealed, opposed worlds. Joesoef's intellectual trajectory instead shows translation, negotiation, and selective appropriation: neither passive reception of secularism nor a simple defense of inherited tradition. His thought emerges in the

"Kebijakan Kontroversial Menteri Daoed Joesoef 1978 – 1983: Perubahan Tahun Ajaran Dan Libur Bulan Ramadhan."; Riwanto and Zulaili, "Kebijakan Pendidikan Sekuler Era Menteri Pendidikan Daoed Joesoef 1978 – 1983."

²⁴ Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanya, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daoed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional*; Wasisto Raharjo Jati and Hasnan Bachtiar, "Redefining Religious Moderation Education for Urban Muslim Youth," *EDUKASI: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama Dan Keagamaan* 22, no. 1 (2024): 153 – 166; Wahyono et al., "Multicultural Education and Religious Tolerance: Elementary School Teachers' Understanding of Multicultural Education in Yogyakarta."

²⁵ Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*; Muchtarom and Selamat, "Civic Values: Thematic Studies on Citizenship in Islam."

²⁶ Joesoef, *Dia Dan Aku: Memoar Pencari Kebenaran*; Joesoef, *Emak: Penuntunku Dari Kampung Darat Sampai Sorbonne*.

²⁷ Aspinall et al., "Elites, Masses, and Democratic Decline in Indonesia."; Dina Afrianty, "Rising Public Piety and the Status of Women in Indonesia Two Decades after Reformasi," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 65 – 80.

intermediate space where religious ethics is reformulated to address the institutional demands of the modern state.²⁸

Contemporary studies of Indonesian Islam and post-Islamist politics provide a second lens. Joesoef does not seek a theocratic state, yet he also rejects a public order emptied of moral substance. His concern is the ethical quality of public institutions and the civic capacities of citizens. In this respect, his project moves beyond the binary of Islamic ideology and secular ideology toward plural governance in which moral commitments remain publicly significant without becoming a monopoly of state power.²⁹

Comparative Position: Joesoef, Madjid, al-Attas, and Nasution

A comparative perspective clarifies Joesoef's distinctive place in Indonesian Islamic modernism. Harun Nasution emphasized rational theology and the recovery of human agency in understanding revelation. Nurcholish Madjid emphasized the renewal of Islamic thought, the desacralization of political forms, and the moral meaning of religious pluralism. Al-Attas emphasized adab, the Islamization or dewesternization of knowledge, and the metaphysical danger of secularization. Joesoef intersects with all three but is reducible to none of them.³⁰

From Nasution, Joesoef shares the confidence that reason is not the enemy of faith. From Madjid, he shares the refusal to make Islam a closed political ideology and the insistence that worldly institutions must remain open to rational critique. From al-Attas, he shares the conviction that knowledge and education require moral order. Yet Joesoef's

²⁸ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*; Chris Chaplin, "Communal Salafi Learning and Islamic Selfhood: Examining Religious Boundaries through Ethnographic Encounters in Indonesia," *Ethnography* 21, no. 1 (2020): 113–132; Jamhari and Saifudin Asrori, "The Making of Salafi-Based Islamic Schools in Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 1 (2022): 227–264; Jahroni, "Saudi Arabia Charity and the Institutionalization of Indonesian Salafism."

²⁹ Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post-Reformasi Indonesia."; Widian, Satya, and Yazid, "Religion in Indonesia's Elections: An Implementation of a Populist Strategy?"; Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Critical Analysis of Islamic Populism: Insights from Indonesian Perspectives," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 18, no. 1 (2024): 27–48; Barton, Yilmaz, and Morieson, "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia."

³⁰ Harun Nasution, *Islam Rasional: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995); Khairudin Aljunied, "Bringing Rationality Back: Harun Nasution and the Burden of Muslim Thought in Twentieth-Century Southeast Asia," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 29–55; Ahmad Farouk Musa and Piet Hizbullah Khaidir, "The Philosophical Sufism of Harun Nasution: A Phenomenological-Historical Investigation of the Influence of Neo-Mu'tazilism," *Intellectual Discourse* 31, no. 2 (2023): 325–344.; Imron Rosidi, "Harun Nasution's Influence on Shaping Muslim Intellectual's Development in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 17, no. 3 (2023): 391–409; Madjid, *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemodernan*; Mohammad Sholeh Abdurrohman, Ahmad Zakki Fuad, and Achmad Zaini, "Paradigm of Educational Modernization Nurcholish Madjid Perspective and Relevance to the Merdeka Belajar Concept," *ATTARBIYAH: Journal of Islamic Culture and Education* 9, no. 1 (2024): 29–41; Ulya, Bakar, and Masud, "Reinterpreting Nurcholish Madjid's Theories of Secularization: Reapplying These Theories to Indonesia's Contemporary Islamic Education Curriculum."; al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*; Ahmad Nurjali and Undang Ruslan W, "Konsep Adab Menurut Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas," *Al-Ulum Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (2024): 43–57; Putra, Mawazi, and Hifza, "Analysis of Adab Education According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas."; Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanya, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daeed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional*.

distinctive contribution is statecraft. He thinks from within the problem of governing: how can a state educate, organize, and sustain a plural people without losing moral direction?³¹

This is why Joesoef can be described as the state-oriented figure in Indonesian Islamic modernism. Nasution works primarily at the level of theology, Madjid at the level of public religious renewal, al-Attas at the level of civilizational epistemology, and Joesoef at the level of educational governance. His originality lies in carrying the moral-rational impulse into institutional formation. He asks not only what Muslims should think, but how a modern state can cultivate citizens who are capable of ethical thought.³²

The comparison also prevents overstatement. Joesoef was not a systematic theologian like Nasution, not a public Islamic reformer like Madjid, and not a metaphysical philosopher of knowledge like al-Attas. His writings are scattered across memoir, essay, cultural reflection, and policy thought. But precisely in this scattered corpus, one finds a consistent philosophy: reason must be moral, education must be civilizational, and the state must govern plurality through disciplined justice.³³

Theoretical Contribution: Islamic Rational Statecraft

The concept of Islamic Rational Statecraft summarizes the theoretical contribution of this article. It names a model of governance in which Islamic ethics informs public reason without becoming a coercive ideology, and in which rational state administration remains morally accountable without becoming anti-religious. It is Islamic because it draws from values such as *adab*, *amanah*, *'adl*, *maslahah*, and responsibility before God. It is rational

³¹ Nasution, *Islam Rasional: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran*; Ridho and Siregar, "Pemikiran Harun Nasution Dan Relevansinya Dengan Dunia Pendidikan Islam Kontemporer."; Madjid, *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemodernan*; Imas Masripah Dian et al., "Nurcholish Madjid's Perspective About Thought of Religious Pluralism," ed. Nurcholish Madjid et al., *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 2 (2022): 139–148; Andi Ahmad Zahri Nafis, Barsihannor Barsihannor, and Indo Santalia, "Pluralism Theology of Nurcholis Madjid," *AL-MUTSLA* 5, no. 1 (2023): 54–71; al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*; Andika Apriansyah, Abdur Razzaq, and Alimron, "Urgensi Adab Dalam Menuntut Ilmu: Pemikiran Naquib Al-Attas," *Jurnal Genta Mulia* 15, no. 2 (2024): 92–98; Puspitasari and Yuliana, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of Islamizing Science and Its Relevance to Islamic Education."

³² Joesoef, *Pikiran Dan Gagasan Daoed Joesoef: 10 Wacana Tentang Aneka Masalah Kehidupan Bersama*; Khairudin Aljunied, "Bringing Rationality Back: Harun Nasution and the Burden of Muslim Thought in Twentieth-Century Southeast Asia," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 29–55; Ahmad Farouk Musa and Piet Hizbullah Khaidir, "The Philosophical Sufism of Harun Nasution: A Phenomenological-Historical Investigation of the Influence of Neo-Mu'tazilism," *Intellectual Discourse* 31, no. 2 (2023): 325–344; Rosidi, "Harun Nasution's Influence on Shaping Muslim Intellectual's Development in Indonesia."

³³ Nasution, *Islam Rasional: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran*; Muhammad Rizky Shorfana, "Epistemologi Islam Rasional Harun Nasution Sebagai Pintu Awal Masuknya Filsafat Islam Di Indonesia," *Al Hikmah: Jurnal Tarbiyah Dan Ilmu Keguruan* 5, no. 2 (2025): 44–56; Madjid, *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid: Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, Dan Kemodernan*; Thoriq Aziz Jayana and Siswanto Siswanto, "Penjabaran Nilai-Nilai Pluralisme Perspektif Nurcholish Madjid Dalam Konteks Pendidikan Islam Multikultural," *Tarbawiyah: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2022): 1–15; Windy Lidyaningsih and Muh Hanif, "Nurcholish Madjid's Ideas on Renewal of Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2024): 223–241; al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*; Sri Syafa'ati and Hidayatul Muamanah, "Konsep Pendidikan Menurut Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Dan Relevansinya Dengan Sistem Pendidikan Nasional," *PALAPA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman Dan Ilmu Pendidikan* 8, no. 2 (2020): 285–301; Puspitasari and Yuliana, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept of Islamizing Science and Its Relevance to Islamic Education."; Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanya, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daoed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional*.

because it requires public justification, institutional discipline, and administrative fairness. It is statecraft because it concerns the art of governing a plural society.³⁴

This concept modifies existing secularism theory in three ways. First, it moves from genealogy to construction. Asad reveals the power history of secularism; Joesoef shows how a postcolonial society may reconstruct secular rationality for ethical governance. Second, it moves from legalism to public ethics. Islam appears not primarily as state law but as civic virtue and moral infrastructure. Third, it moves from universalism to hybridity. Modern rationality is not rejected, but it is translated through Indonesian and Islamic ethical vocabularies.³⁵

The concept also has contemporary relevance. Many democracies suffer from a crisis of trust, corruption, polarization, and the moral exhaustion of public institutions. Muslim – majority societies, meanwhile, often face the double temptation of authoritarian secularism and religious populism. Joesoef's model does not provide a ready-made solution, but it offers a useful grammar: institutions need rational procedures, but procedures require moral citizens; religion can nourish public virtue, but it must not monopolize state authority; pluralism needs neutrality, but neutrality must not become moral indifference.³⁶

In this sense, Joesoef's thought contributes to global Islamic studies and political theory from the Indonesian experience. Indonesia is not merely a local case to be explained by theories produced elsewhere. It is a site of theory formation. Through Joesoef, one can see how the Malay – Indonesian world contributes to rethinking secularism, public ethics, and modern governance beyond the established categories of the Euro – American academy and Middle Eastern political theology.³⁷

Conclusion

This article has reconstructed Daoed Joesoef's intellectual mediation between Islamic ethics and modern rationality as a theory of Islamic Rational Statecraft. The argument has shown that Joesoef did not defend secularism as an anti-religious worldview. He reconstructed secularism as ethical rationality: a mode of public reason that enables a plural state to govern fairly while remaining morally accountable.

The analysis produced three main conclusions. First, Joesoef transforms secularism from an ideology of separation into a practical ethic of statecraft. Second, he positions Islam as public ethics rather than as a formal political ideology. Third, he develops a hybrid postcolonial modernity that takes modern rational organization seriously while grounding

³⁴ Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*; Joesoef, *Bangunlah Jiwanya, Bangunlah Badannya: Buah-Buah Refleksi Daoed Joesoef Untuk Membumikan Pembangunan Nasional*; Muchtarom and Selamat, "Civic Values: Thematic Studies on Citizenship in Islam."

³⁵ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*; Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*; Jati et al., "Reevaluating Approaches to Religious Moderation at the Grassroots Level: The Role of Muslim Youth in Advancing Interfaith Dialogue."; Bachtiar, "Dar Al-'Ahd Wa Al-Shahadah: Muhammadiyah's Position and Thoughts on Negara Pancasila."

³⁶ Jati, "Polarization of Indonesian Society during 2014 – 2020: Causes and Its Impacts toward Democracy."; Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam."; Mun'im Sirry, "Muslim Student Radicalism and Self-Deradicalization in Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 31, no. 2 (2020): 241 – 260; Hilmy and Niam, "Winning the Battle of Authorities: The Muslim Disputes over the Covid – 19 Pandemic Plague in Contemporary Indonesia."

³⁷ Lahaji and Faisal, "'Caliphate No in Indonesia': Nurcholish Madjid and Yudian Wahyudi Critiques toward Islamic State Discourse in Indonesian Islam."; Budiatri, "Dynamic Tolerance: Tolerance within Nahdlatul Ulama and Nahdliyin in Indonesia."

it in Indonesian and Islamic moral consciousness. These conclusions clarify why his thought cannot be reduced either to liberal secularism or to political Islamism.

The comparative dialogue with Nurcholish Madjid and al-Attas sharpens this finding. Like Madjid, Joesoef refuses to sacralize political forms. Like al-Attas, he understands that knowledge and education require moral order. Yet unlike both, he translates these concerns into educational statecraft. His central field is the formation of citizens and institutions. He is therefore best read as a philosopher of moral governance whose main language is education, culture, and state responsibility.

The study has limits. It reconstructs Joesoef's conceptual architecture rather than measuring the empirical effectiveness of his policies. Future research should examine the reception of his educational policies among students, teachers, Islamic organizations, and universities. Comparative studies with Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt, and other Muslim-majority societies may also test whether Islamic Rational Statecraft can function beyond the Indonesian Pancasila context.

In the end, Joesoef's legacy lies in his refusal of easy binaries. Modernity need not mean westernization; religion need not mean formal ideology; rationality need not mean moral neutrality; and secular governance need not mean the expulsion of faith. His thought invites Indonesian Islam to build a public ethic that is rational, plural, disciplined, and spiritually grounded.

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