




Interfaith Dialogue and Tolerance: Franz Magnis-Suseno's Theological Insights in the Indonesian Context

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Abstract

This article provides a thorough examination of Franz Magnis-Suseno's theological and philosophical perspectives on interreligious dialogue and tolerance set against the multicultural backdrop of Indonesia. Operating as a philosopher, theologian, and public intellectual, formulates a well-founded ethical paradigm for sustaining social coexistence in the face of radicalism and the politicisation of faith. Employing qualitative analytical techniques, the study collates his major texts alongside existing scholarly articles to construct a unified evaluation of his thought. The investigation discloses three interdependent pillars underlying contribution: first, a humanistic Christian theological core asserting the inviolable dignity of human beings as the *imago Dei* and articulating the universal duty of the law of love; second, a philosophical elaboration of Javanese ethical precepts, especially the notions of *rukun* (harmony) and *hormat* (respect), which provide a concrete, culturally resonant basis for non-violent coexistence; and third, a critical dialogue with Western normative philosophy—foremost the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant and the discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas—that formulates equitable procedural standards for public deliberation. The practice of intellectual inculturation, local knowledge, religious customs, and philosophical insights aims to shape public discourse aimed at addressing intolerance and advancing democracy in Indonesia.

Keywords: Interfaith Dialogue, Tolerance, Theology, Franz Magnis-Suseno, Indonesian Identity.

Introduction

Indonesia's identity as a country founded on the idea of unity amidst variety finds a clear and urgent contradiction in the present. At the constitutional level, Pancasila claims a dedication to *bhinneka tunggal ika* (Elson, 2010). Empirical observation, on the other hand, shows growing



widespread intolerance, politicalization of religious identities, and the spread of extreme views endangering the civic order. Once hailed as a communal legacy, a civilisation defined by many religions, what was once so enthusiastically celebrated now confronts a turning point that invites the possibility of serious division, no less than it confirms the ongoing vibrancy of that variety. Considering this danger, it is imperative to create a strong ethical and theological framework that can act as a trustworthy moral compass, guiding the country through the complexity of group belief and promoting a vision of true harmony that transcends the fragile peace of surface tolerance with both academic rigour and pastoral sensitivity (Zuo'an, 2013).

Franz Magnis-Suseno, S.J., often and fondly known as Romo Magnis, is virtually unchallenged in terms of power and respect within Indonesia's academic circles (Meyer, 2016). Over more than half a century, this Catholic Church priest, philosophy professor, and above all public intellectual, fully involved in civil life, has been developing what he calls the vocation of linking ideas into the connective tissue connecting otherwise separated communities (Magnis-Suseno, 2017). His autobiographical narrative—German aristocrat, Jesuit novice, deliberate choice of Indonesian citizenship in 1977, and a lifetime buried in the cadence of Javanese language and rhythm—gives him a very bi-cultural viewpoint (Magnis-Suseno, 2020; Magnis-Suseno, 1984). Catholics, aware of the irony of noble birth and deliberate renunciation of privilege, would see the following perspective as a gift of the Spirit that would help him to move across the no-man's-lands of culture and confessional allegiance freely. He becomes a natural and effective designer of policy structures, fostering peace in a politically pluralistic society (Laksana, 2015). However, his philosophical thoughts are still very grounded in the real world: one could point to his careful and timely additions to the legislative body, especially his thorough analysis of a draft law meant to punish blasphemy, a provision whose constitutional and ethical ramifications he evaluated against the backdrop of Indonesia's ongoing demi-sovereignty.

Magnis-Suseno's body of research shows continuous interaction with the basic needs of just, peaceful, and courteous cohabitation among religious diversity in Indonesia. His answers, rather than offering any formulaic prescriptions, unfold as complex interlacing strata of argumentation (Komaruddin & Setiawan, 2015). This study thus poses the central question: In what manner does Franz Magnis-Suseno construct a theological-ethical framework for inter-religious dialogue and tolerance, synthesising Catholic doctrine, Western philosophical inheritance, and Javanese indigenous sapience (Magnis-Suseno, 2017). The thesis propounded here maintains that Magnis-Suseno conceives a deliberative public ethics that artfully integrates these three intellectual legacies (Chaudhari, 2016). Such integration furnishes a robust normative anchor for tolerance and, simultaneously, the ethical preconditions for the flourishing of substantive democracy within the Indonesian milieu.

To advance this thesis, the article is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the literature review will situate Magnis-Suseno within contemporary religious theology, delineating the novel aspects that the present study contributes. A subsequent segment will clarify the research methodology, specifying the qualitative literature study that underpins the analysis. The heart of the article is devoted to the results and discussion, where the three constitutive pillars of Magnis-Suseno's thought will be examined: the humanistic theological foundation that undergirds his work, his articulation of Javanese ethics as a pragmatic basis for cultivating tolerance, and the integration of this framework with Western moral philosophy to develop rigorous procedures for authentic dialogue. The discussion will also consider the ramifications of his ideas within the Indonesian public sphere, attending particularly to his exchanges with distinguished Muslim thinkers. The article will conclude with a concise recapitulation of Magnis-Suseno's contributions and will present avenues for continuing scholarly inquiry.



Literature Review

A nuanced engagement with Franz Magnis-Suseno's theological corpus necessitates situating his insights within contemporary debates on the fate of non-Christian religions (Ringer, 2003). Within traditional Christian reflection, one discerns three predominant models (Knepper, 2014). First, the exclusivist thesis posits that salvific grace is confined to those who consciously assent to the Christian Gospel and remain within the Church's sacramental economy. The second, inclusivist, reaffirms the singular efficacy of Christ's redemptive work while permitting the hypothesis that the Spirit can operate outside ecclesial confines, enabling virtuous adherents of other faiths to respond to grace, albeit without the sacramental means the Church provides (Magnis-Suseno, 2020; Van Den Toren, 2012). Finally, the pluralist position maintains that the world's principal religions, though divergent in ritual, cosmology, and ethics, each genuinely mediate the same transcendent Reality and therefore individually legitimise, if not exhaust, the possibilities of grace (Magnis-Suseno, 2006; Chaturvedi, 2016).

Magnis-Suseno's position can best be described as humanistic inclusivism. Magnis-Suseno's humanistic inclusivism is not an absolute normative ideal but a context-sensitive ethic whose strength lies in its effectiveness. While normatively stronger than exclusivism or relativism because it affirms universal human dignity through reason rather than dogma, its primary value is practical: enabling moral consensus and coexistence in plural societies without erasing religious differences. He decisively rejects radical pluralism on the grounds that its relativisation of all religious truth claims renders genuine conviction impossible (Johanson, 2016). In his view, the believer's fidelity to the truth of his tradition is a natural and necessary feature of faith, and authentic dialogue does not demand abandonment of that conviction. However, his inclusivism is distinctly humanistic; its starting point is not the fate of the believer's soul but the universal, God-given dignity of every human person (Magnis-Suseno, 2022). This foundation enables him to recognise, with both sincerity and respect, the truth and holiness present in other traditions, while refusing to collapse them into complete equivalence. Dialogue thus becomes, for him, an ethical obligation that flows from faith, rather than the neutral consequence of asserting equal truth in all religions.

Earlier scholarship has investigated singular dimensions of Magnis-Suseno's intellectual legacy. F. Budi Hardiman (2016), for instance, has concentrated on the formulation of the "Ethics of Dialogue," illuminating the procedural acceptances and attitudinal dispositions that should govern interreligious exchanges. Other investigations have framed his articulation of religious moderation as a distinct theological orientation and have examined dialogue as a cultural, rather than purely doctrinal, exchange (Magnis-Suseno, 2021). Despite these focused inquiries, the literature remains deficient in a deliberate and integrated articulation that interrelates the three cardinal components of his thought: the Catholic theological grounding, the philosophical reworking of Javanese ethical sensitivity, and the critical engagement with the corpus of Western ethical philosophy (Magnis-Suseno et al., 2017; Arifinsyah et al., 2020). Absent such a synthesis, Magnis-Suseno's public ethical project risks remaining that of disparate components rather than a unified edifice. This study seeks to ameliorate that deficiency by illustrating the manner in which these three strata mutually reinforce and constitute a durable intellectual framework for dialogue and tolerance in the Indonesian context (Bukido et al., 2024).

Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing a literature review methodology throughout. Such a design is particularly suited to a comprehensive investigation of a thinker's seminal texts, arguments, and underlying philosophical frameworks (Snyder, 2019). The study

pivots on the morphology of thought as articulated in written forms rather than on empirical field data; consequently, a literature review affords the most rigorous means of excavating, interpreting, and critically appraising the theological dimensions in Franz Magnis-Suseno's corpus (Krstić, 2018). Methodologically, the study is not a systematic review, as it does not apply exhaustive inclusion–exclusion protocols or meta-analytic criteria; rather, it combines a narrative review with a philosophical reconstruction, aiming to interpret, synthesise, and coherently reconstruct Magnis-Suseno's ethical framework across texts rather than merely survey existing scholarship.

The investigation delineates its data sources in two principal categories. Primary sources encompass the original writings of Magnis-Suseno, with an emphasis on seminal texts that interrogate the intersections of ethics, politics, dialogue, and culture. Among the principal works that serve as touchstones are *Javanese Ethics: A Philosophical Analysis of Javanese Wisdom*, *Political Ethics: Basic Moral Principles of Modern Statehood*, *Fighting for the Soul of the Nation: Dialogue, Peace, and Brotherhood*, and *Religion, Openness, and Democracy* (Magnis-Suseno et al., 2010). The secondary corpus comprises scholarship that engages or critiques Magnis-Suseno's arguments, including peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, analytical essays, media reports, and transcripts of interviews that frame and interrogate his ideas within broader academic and socio-political discourses.

The data collection was carried out by means of structured searches across selected academic databases, university library catalogues, and relevant digital archives. Under the guidance of philosophical hermeneutics, the analysis went on in three linked stages: first, the descriptive reconstruction of Magnis-Suseno's main ideas about conversation and tolerance, organised with both clarity and systematic priority; second, the interpretative clarification of their semantic weight, logical connections, and potential consequences as they evolved against the backdrop of his larger system; and finally, the critical synthesis, in which his findings were set within the wider theological and philosophical discussion, their strengths and possible limits were noted, and their unique significance for the Indonesian setting was highlighted.

Results and Discussion

A careful study of Franz Magnis-Suseno's body of work reveals a complex but coherent intellectual structure influencing his views on interreligious tolerance and dialogue. This building depends on a tripartite combination of constituent parts: a humanistic interpretation of Christian theology, the practical moral awareness of Javanese culture, and the systematic inquiry typical of Western ethical thinking, not on a single idea (Magnis-Suseno, 1984; Magnis-Suseno, 2004; Magnis-Suseno et al., 2010).

Theological Foundations for Encounter: Faith-Based Humanism

Magnis-Suseno first approaches the question of interreligious relationships not from the vantage of political strategy or social compromise but from a rigorous theological posture. His humanism, grounded in faith, pivots around three inseparable doctrines: the inherent dignity of the human person as the divine likeness, the all-embracing commandment of love, and the principle of inculturation as the mode of doing theology (Magnis-Suseno, 2020). For him, the primary theological focus that undergirds honest dialogue is theological anthropology rather than soteriology (Magnis-Suseno, 2006). He insists, with persistent clarity, that “faith unaccompanied by a constructive attitude toward human living is faith misnamed.” His logic is both lucid and weighty: if every person, irrespective of ethnic, cultural, or confessional identity, is a cherished act of God's creative love, then to belittle or to abuse any person is, in the deepest sense, a



blasphemy against the Creator (Magnis-Suseno, 2022). Each human, in his or her singularity, stands already affirmed and known in divine love; therefore, authentic religion is and must remain a refuge of human dignity, never a pathway to intimidation or devaluation.

By situating human dignity as the embodied *Imago Dei*, Magnis-Suseno reorients the entire framework of interfaith dialogue (Magnis-Suseno, 2007). The inquiry thus ceases to be narrowly confined to the evaluative question of doctrinal correctness and eschatological fate, and instead becomes the constructive question of how we, equally marked as God's handiwork, may coexist in arrangements marked by reciprocal respect for the dignity He has granted us. The consequences of this reorientation are significant (Magnis-Suseno, 2022). It renders a robust theological justification for the affirmation of universal and intrinsic human rights, rights that precede and surpass the particular claims advanced by any single tradition. Consequently, the recognition and protection of the religious liberty of others do not amount, therefore, to a pragmatic toleration, but rather to a theological imperative that arises from the acknowledgement of divine sovereignty over the human conscience.

A second theological foundation rests upon a universal law of love. Magnis-Suseno invokes the decisive Christian imperative, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (James 2:8), as the norm that transcends every circumscribed community (Magnis-Suseno, 2022). He contends that every person, irrespective of rank, nationality, or religion, not only the fellow believer, is bound by the injunction to love (Reid, 2013). The law so takes on the character of a moral obligation requiring openness, recognition, and energetic response to "the Other." Magnis-Suseno directly opposes the exclusive views that support suspicion and hate by claiming the universality of love. Rejecting every temptation toward withdrawal or inward-looking isolation, he demonstrates that his tradition's most basic logic drives contact and solidarity. For him, dialogue among faiths and collaborative effort transcend arbitrary, tactical decisions; they are the required actualisation of justifiable faith. Therefore, whether people of faith or not, solidarity with the suffering or the oppressed is the actual realisation of the law of love (Allison, 2013).

Theological works of Magnis-Suseno clearly reflect the Jesuit values that guided his development and supported his apostolic life. Underlying Jesuit spirituality and mission is a pedagogy of inculturation meant as a demanding dialectic in which the invariants of the Gospel and the actual historical context of a certain culture interact in mutual examination rather than as superficial adaptation (Streetman, 2015). In that crucible, both emerge reconfigured; neither faith succumbs to culture in uncritical surrender nor culture escapes judgment.

The Gospel acquires a novel resonant cadence, attuned to the communal imaginary, while the culture, in return, is examined with a hermeneutical sharpness that exposes previously unarticulated presuppositions (Sanneh, 1995). Magnis-Suseno's autobiography is a clear example of this idea: his deliberate acquisition of the Javanese language, his thorough investigation of its philosophical body of knowledge, and his eventual national naturalisation are presented not as educational politeness but as purposeful strategies to forego the position of a remote instructor and to occupy the relational space of a dialogical co-learner (Magnis-Suseno, 1984).

For him, inculturation entails a refusal to regard Javanese culture merely as material to be reformed or "Christianised"; instead, he views it as a vibrant interlocutor, replete with time-honoured wisdom and admirable ethical principles (Mu'adi & Sofwani, 2018). This dialectical engagement sits at the centre of his entire intellectual undertaking: he first employs the Javanese ethical tradition as a hermeneutical lens that refracts and enriches his theological insights within the Indonesian context; in turn, he applies his theological and philosophical frameworks in order



to scrutinise and honour the deeper layers of the Javanese ethical landscape (Magnis-Suseno, 1997).

Javanese Ethics as a Practical Foundation for Tolerance: From Local Wisdom to Public Ethics

If the theological grounds supply the rationale for dialogue, Magnis-Suseno's philosophical examination of Javanese ethics furnishes the operative technique for its enactment (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). In his major study, *Javanese Ethics: A Philosophical Analysis of Javanese Wisdom*, he treats Javanese ethical thought not as an obsolete repository of folkways, but as a living wellspring of normative resources for the governance of present-day multicultural societies. From his analysis emerge two foundational principles that underscore Javanese public life: the principle of harmony and the principle of respect. Harmony, as he delineates it, denotes a normative condition of mutual accord, proportionality, equanimity, and the subsumption of overt conflict. Its ultimate aim is the maintenance of a tranquil and secure civil community that guarantees the safety and well-being of every constituent (Budiwati, 2017).

Respect, in this context, serves as the normative imperative that delineates the appropriate manner in which individuals ought to relate to one another, in accordance with their differing positions within the gradients of age, office, and social rank. Its ultimate purpose is to safeguard recognition of each person's dignity by honouring their place in the social order. Magnis-Suseno has justly advanced these precepts beyond the register of ceremonial forms, presenting them instead as the foundation upon which civic moral life is constructed. Their effectiveness derives from powerful internal sanctions: the feeling of *isnin*, which inhibits violations of recognised norms by the prospect of social shame, and the sentiment of *sungkan*, which delicately modulates behaviour in accordance with the graduated ordering of rank.

More fundamentally, he characterises the Javanese moral tradition as an "ethics of understanding," in which the cultivation of *olah rasa*—an attunement of the inner life to the feelings and motives of others—takes precedence over strictly formal deductive reasoning (Magnis-Suseno, 1984). The resulting framework thus provides an ethical orientation that is inherently relational and attuned to particular contexts, displaying particular resonance in societies that prize collective harmony more highly than abstract assertions of individual rights (Bertrand, 2008).

Any rigorous inquiry, however, must remain attentive to the persistent ambivalence that animates both the term *rukun* and the wider ideal of harmony. For instance, *rukun* calls villagers to maintain outward consensus in village meetings—smilingly agreeing despite private grudges—to preserve social peace. Yet this very harmony harbours ambivalence: it fosters unity by silencing individual grievances, quietly breeding resentment beneath the surface (Nasution et al., 2025). This example draws from anthropological observations of Indonesian rural life (e.g., Clifford Geertz's work on Java), where *rukun* upholds order but at the cost of authenticity (Geertz, 1976). Dominant elites have frequently enlisted to sanction the suppression of dissenting expression. Under the New Order regime, the invocation of harmony served to extinguish any articulation of political critique, cast in state discourse as a vital defence against the spectre of national dissolution. Within that framework, the explicit articulation of differing opinions became, by redefinition, a form of collective subversion, warranting immediate and punitive disavowal. Contemporary post-colonial and post-structural critique reminds us that the steadfast idealisation of harmony may, without critical mindfulness, re-establish a sedimented patriarchal political imaginary in which subaltern speech is either manoeuvred for elite ends or systematically rendered mute (Beyer & Girke, 2015).



Rukun can therefore be interpreted as a hegemonic dispositif that redirects rather than resolves political tensions, occluding confrontation that requires the messier, but indispensable, practices of representation and dialogic contestation (Magnis-Suseno, 1984). Magnis-Suseno seems acutely aware of this danger. In his reflections on political morality, he refuses a simplistic verdict of either rejection or nostalgic recuperation; he excavates the sediment of the New Order and relocates it within a pragmatics of democratic accountability and plural recognition.

Authentic rukun, for him, is not the imposition of homogeneity or the hollow imitation of acquiescence; it is a disposition of ethical openness—a deliberate preparedness to listen, to contest, and to co-construct a shared understanding—whereby genuinely deliberative dialogue becomes feasible. This re-framing distills rukun from its past instrumentalisation as a mechanism of coercive order and re-imagines it as the moral substrate from which a vigilant, responsive, and ever-evolving civil society may, in due course, take root and prosper.

Ethics of Dialogue as a Procedure for Authentic Encounter: Synthesis with Western Philosophy

To reinforce his ethical framework and provide it with a universal foundation beyond the specific cultural milieu of Java and the distinctive premises of Christian theology, Magnis-Suseno forges a distinctive synthesis of Western moral philosophy, drawing especially on the traditions of Immanuel Kant and Jürgen Habermas (Magnis-Suseno et al., 2017). The imprint of Kantian thought on Magnis-Suseno's writings is both visible and persuasive. For Kant, the pivot of moral philosophy is the Categorical Imperative, a principle that, in one of its best-known formulations, enjoins us to regard humanity, both in ourselves and in others, at all times as an end in itself and never merely as a means to some further aim (Magnis-Suseno, 2021). By this imperative, Kant identifies the innate worth of every rational agent. This worth precludes any reduction of that agent to a simple tool for the fulfilment of alien purposes (Bader, 2015).

Magnis-Suseno's "Ethics of Dialogue" can fruitfully be interpreted as a contextualisation of Kant's moral philosophy within interconfessional exchange. Authentic dialogue, he contends, obliges participants to regard one another not as targets of conversion, rhetorical triumph, or strategic advantage, but as autonomous agents endowed with dignity, intellectual freedom, and a legitimate right to particular beliefs. This Kantian axiom furnishes a secular axiological ground that complements and strengthens its theological counterpart (the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*) (Magnis-Suseno, 2021). The two traditions converge at the same pivot point: the firm understanding of the inalienable worth and dignity inherent in every person. Magnis-Suseno engages in a critical discussion with Jürgen Habermas in current political philosophy. Famous for his idea of communicative action and his theory of deliberative democracy, Habermas contends that only through verbal interaction in an uncoerced public sphere can the legitimacy of legal norms and political will in today's varied societies be assured (Schalow, 2019).

Magnis-Suseno's most complex work is his examination of the moral criteria needed for the Habermasian public sphere to become a reality in the Indonesian setting. His model of conversation demands careful, responsible involvement in the public arena instead of only casual discussion. Religion is still a very powerful force, he notes, so he disputes the idea that the public sphere can go back to being completely secular. Consequently, the main difficulty is deciding how faith groups can engage in public argument while maintaining their unique beliefs. Magnis-Suseno, following Habermas, exhorts these groups to "translate" certain truth-claims and normative orientations into a common ethical and legal vocabulary, one that is still understandable and compelling to every citizen regardless of their beliefs. Such translational work creates a clear

intersection between religious and political theory, showing how religion may support constitutional democracy without turning to the use of religious power or the removal of religious perspectives from discursive praxis (Noor, 2016).

Implications in the Indonesian Public Sphere: Theology in Practice

Magnis-Suseno's theological-ethical framework is a vivid tool in the realm of modern Indonesian public contestation rather than some far-off theoretical edifice. The polemic conversations he has with Muslim colleagues, documented in his written exchanges, and the serious public actions he takes on matters of great national importance both provide evidence of this (Laksana, 2020). Along with the late Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur), two prominent Muslim leaders whose uniting authority caused observers to remark of a "triumvirate," or the three pillars of Indonesian pluralism and tolerance, whose influence was particularly obvious throughout the final decades of the twentieth century, he has also fostered close collegial ties and collaborative inquiry with the late Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) (Basya, 2011; Barton, 2002). Though everyone agreed on the main goal of maintaining an open and varied society, the points of departure and emphases each scholar chose expose subtle but significant distinctions that highlight the creative possibility of interfaith communication (Magnis-Suseno, 2007). While the three continue to be classified under a single rubric of "pluralism," a discerning reading exposes fruitful divergences in their argumentative strategies. The table that follows delineates these contrasts in comparative form:

Dimension	Franz Magnis-Suseno	Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)	Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur)
Definition of Pluralism	An ethical attitude: the ability to accept and respect others in their authentic differences, without having to agree with or assimilate their beliefs.	Recognition of plurality (factual diversity) as sunnatullah (God's decree) and active defence of civil rights and justice for minorities.	A theological meeting point (kalimatun sawa') between religions, originating from the One True God (Al-Haqq) and rooted in the universal concept of tawhid.
Main Foundations	Philosophical ethics (particularly Kantian), creation theology (Imago Dei), and Javanese ethical wisdom (rukun, hormat).	The principles of social justice, human rights, and the interpretation of Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin (mercy for all creation).	Theological reinterpretation of Qur'anic texts and elaboration of the concept of tawhid that is inclusive and universal.
Attitude toward Claims of Truth	Remaining committed to the particular truth of one's faith, yet rejecting absolutism in social expression. Absolute truth belongs solely to God, not to humans.	Every religion is the most true for its adherents. The state's role is not to judge truth, but to guarantee rights and justice for all groups.	All heavenly religions originate from the same divine source, so they have the same core truth in essence, even though their manifestations of law differ.

Table 1. Comparison of Thoughts on Pluralism
 Source: Author, 2025

The present comparative study demonstrates that the term "pluralism" cannot be treated as a single, stable signifier. Magnis-Suseno approaches the term with the tools of ethical philosophy, Gus Dur refracts it through the coordinates of sociopolitical justice and human rights, and Cak



Nur derives it from the matrix of Islamic theology and metaphysics. It is the irreducible heterogeneity of these entry points that generates their respective argumentative force. Each thinker, unapologetically situated within a different discursive tradition, nevertheless converges on the very same practical norm: the urgent necessity of tolerance, the imperative of dialogue, and the protection of minority groups. The Triumvirate of their intellectual camaraderie thereby crystallises into a concrete model of the dialogical ethics that they collectively advanced, thereby illustrating that diversity of origin need not preclude a durable practical agreement (Sahfutra, 2014).

Magnis-Suseno's framework finds its clearest empirical manifestation in his interventions on contentious policy matters. During a recent public hearing on the proposed revision of the Criminal Code, he forcefully argued against any broadening of the blasphemy provision. He insisted that the state lacks the jurisdiction to adjudicate whether a particular religious doctrine is "true" or "deviant". Variance of interpretation, he held, is a characteristic, not a failing, of religious traditions and does not meet the threshold of criminal blasphemy. Religious truth, in his view, is strictly a dialogic encounter between the conscience of the individual and the divine, exempt from administrative oversight (Uddin, 2015).

This position, upon further inspection, illustrates the operational deployment of his complete intellectual corpus. He first invokes the tenet of liberal democracy—freedom of conscience—yet anchors his rationale in a theological assertion of divine sovereignty, a strategic rhetorical translation that renders philosophical abstractions accessible to a confessional polity. Simultaneously, he maintains a decisive analytical separation between the core of religious instruction—rooted in ethical good—and the aberrant conduct of its practitioners, thereby shielding the tradition itself from the moral discredit that may arise from its fallible representatives (Ritonga et al., 2023).

He often says that the current situation is more of an "inter-group conflict" than a "religious conflict," where people use their religious beliefs for political and economic gain. This intellectual intervention frees the Pancasila Republic from the tired need to show itself either as a belligerent secularist, disconnected from the spiritual fabric of its people, or as a theocratic government demanding compliance with a single holy canon. Magnis-Suseno's political moral philosophy instead defines a constructive intermediate stance for the state: its proper function is to act as a neutral steward, creating a civic space where different faiths can flourish while always being rooted in the universal standards of law, justice, and human dignity, which alone provide real moral legitimacy to the polity's collective arrangements (Latif, 2018).

Conclusion

Through the interweaving of three normative strands—a Catholic theological humanism grounded in the inviolability of human dignity, the pragmatic ethos of Javanese moral orientation towards relational equilibrium, and the critical rigour of Western moral philosophy centred on rational deliberation and fair procedure—this article has demonstrated that Franz Magnis-Suseno articulates an exceptionally coherent ethical synthesis for interreligious dialogue and tolerance. Rather than juxtaposing these traditions, he places them in sustained dialogical interaction, allowing each to illuminate and correct the others. The principal contribution of this study lies in reconstructing this synthesis as a unified framework of public ethics, showing that Magnis-Suseno's work functions not merely as contextual interpretation but as a normatively structured model for democratic coexistence in plural societies.



At a theoretical level, this article advances existing scholarship by demonstrating that Magnis-Suseno's thought constitutes a form of contextual normative integration, in which theological anthropology, cultural ethics, and procedural moral philosophy are combined into a transferable ethical architecture rather than a purely descriptive or confessional account. His significance lies less in the creation of new theoretical categories than in the patient craftsmanship of an intellectual who builds durable conceptual bridges between theology, philosophy, and local moral wisdom. By combining confessional commitment with rational accountability, and indigenous ethical sensibilities with universal procedural norms, authors offers an ethical framework within which deep difference can be negotiated without recourse to coercive uniformity or relativistic fragmentation.

Nevertheless, Magnis-Suseno's framework is not without limitations. Its reliance on shared ethical rationality presupposes a willingness to engage in dialogue that may be absent in highly polarised political contexts, while its emphasis on harmony risks underplaying structural inequalities and power asymmetries that cannot be adequately addressed through deliberation alone. Furthermore, the cultural specificity of Javanese ethical categories raises questions concerning the extent to which his model can be applied beyond the Indonesian context without significant adaptation. Future research could therefore pursue empirical studies assessing the practical implementation of his ethical framework in concrete interreligious settings, as well as comparative analyses with other Southeast Asian societies to evaluate its broader applicability, limits, and potential for further theoretical development.

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