

Rationalism and Islamic Thought: A Comparative Study of Rene Descartes and Harun Nasution on The Position of Ratio

Edi Sumanto¹
Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu¹
edisumanto@mail.uinfasbengkulu.ac.id

Received: October 16, 2025

Revised: October 25, 2025

Accepted: November 11, 2025

Abstract

This study examines the comparative perspectives of René Descartes and Harun Nasution on the role of reason (ratio) in the pursuit of truth. Using a library research approach with qualitative descriptive analysis, this study investigates how Descartes elevates reason as the primary source of knowledge through his rationalist philosophy, Harun Nasution underscores the integration of reason and revelation within Islamic intellectual tradition. In contrast, the study highlights that Descartes, through the notion of cogito ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am"), regards reason as the ultimate foundation of certainty, independent of sensory perception or divine revelation. In contrast, Harun Nasution emphasizes that reason holds a high position in Islam but must be aligned with revelation, especially in understanding theology and religious practice. This comparative analysis highlights the importance of reason in both Western rationalism and modernist Islamic thought, while also illustrating their distinct epistemological approaches. This study contributes to contemporary debates on the role of rationality in religion and philosophy, particularly in the context of Islamic education and modern philosophy.

Keywords: Rationalism, Islamic Thought, Rene Descartes, Harun Nasution, Role of Reason

INTRODUCTION

The role of reason in human knowledge has long been a central theme in both Western and Islamic intellectual traditions. Rene Descartes (1596–1650), widely recognized as the father of modern philosophy, maintained that genuine knowledge can only be attained through reason, independent of tradition, authority, or revelation (Khan, 2023). His famous dictum, cogito ergo sum, established rationality as the foundation of certainty in philosophy and science. (Dilucia, 2022). In contrast, Harun Nasution (1919–1998), one of Indonesia's leading Islamic reformist thinkers, sought to integrate rational inquiry with revelation, asserting that reason plays a crucial role in understanding religious teachings without contradicting divine guidance (Alef, 2020; Fuji & Maragustam, 2023). Descartes' ideas emphasized the role of reason in discovering important facts that need to be conveyed. From a religious perspective, this can be linked to the value of honesty and gratitude for the Creator's greatest gift, namely reason, which distinguishes humans from other creatures. René Descartes himself is known as the father of modern philosophy and a pioneer of continental rationalism. His most famous thought is cogito ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am"). Through this principle, Descartes asserted that reason is the only reliable basis for knowledge, not faith or revelation as believed by medieval philosophers (Arifin, 2021). According to him, the knowledge written in various books with arguments that are only probabilistic and differ from one writer to another, is no closer to the truth than simple thinking carried out normally by individuals with reason/power of thought regarding events that they directly face (Dada et al., 2025).

Reason's relationship to truth has preoccupied thinkers across civilizations. In the Western tradition, Descartes' rationalism challenged medieval scholasticism, which was closely tied to theology, and offered a new foundation for modern science and philosophy (Dobre, 2010).

Descartes' methodical doubt questioned all presuppositions, elevating human reason as the sole arbiter of certainty. His approach influenced not only philosophy but also the development of the scientific method, marking a turning point in European intellectual history (Strazzoni & Sgarbi, 2023).

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, reason also plays an important role. Classical theologians such as the Mu'tazilah upheld the primacy of reason in understanding divine justice and human responsibility (Arifin, 2021; Nisa, 2024). Later, Ash'ari theologians emphasized divine omnipotence but still acknowledged the role of reason in interpreting revelation. In the modern era, Harun Nasution revived rationalist Islamic thought in Indonesia by emphasizing that reason and revelation complement each other, and that rationality is important for Muslims to engage with science, modernity, and social reform (Aljunied, 2023).

Several scholars have studied Descartes' rationalism in depth, such as reconstructing the metaphysical foundations of Descartes' thought, exploring the theological dimensions of his philosophy, analyzing Descartes' legacy and his influence on subsequent Cartesian thinkers. (Christofidou, 2023; Dilucia, 2022; Sangiacomo, 2023). These studies highlight Descartes' central role in shaping modern philosophy and rationalism. In the Indonesian context, Harun Nasution has been widely studied as a pioneer of Islamic modernist thought. (Dodego & Yusuf, 2022). Such as examining the impact of Nasution's rationalist theology on Islamic higher education, showing how his ideas encouraged critical reasoning in the curriculum. (Khaidir et al., 2023; Mahmudah et al., 2023; Yudi Setiadi, 2021) Its implications for the reform of Islamic theology and education and its placement of Nasution's thought within the broader Islamic modernist movement, emphasizing his role in bridging faith and rationality. (Fuji & Maragustam, 2023; Muhammad, 2025). Despite these contributions, comparative studies between Descartes and Harun Nasution remain limited. Scholars have focused primarily on their respective traditions, without directly analyzing their potential intersections. By comparing their views, this study makes a novel contribution to philosophical and theological discourse, particularly by highlighting how rationalism can be contextualized differently in the Western and Islamic traditions.

Although Descartes and Harun Nasution come from different intellectual and cultural traditions, their emphasis on reason as the path to truth makes them comparable. What remains underexplored is how their epistemological frameworks intersect and differ, and what implications this comparison has for contemporary philosophy, theology, and education. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the role of reason in the works of both thinkers, identifying similarities and differences, and exploring practical implications for contemporary philosophy and Islamic education.

This research is highly relevant today, as societies face challenges in balancing tradition with modernity, faith with rational inquiry, and global philosophical discourse with local religious contexts. By comparing Descartes and Harun Nasution, this research offers a new perspective on the epistemological foundations of rationalism in the Western and Islamic traditions, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on the role of reason in religion, education, and science.

METHOD

In this study, a qualitative approach was used which was sourced from library research, then analyzed using a comparative method. The aim is to systematically study the thoughts of Rene Descartes and Harun Nasution, find similarities and differences, and examine the relevance of their ideas to contemporary philosophical, theological and educational discourse (Sa'adi, 2011).

1. Identification and Formulation of Problems

The initial stage begins by identifying a research gap, namely the limitations of comparative studies between modern Western philosophical thought (Descartes) and

modern Islamic rationalist thought (Harun Nasution). The research questions are formulated: what is the position of reason according to Descartes and Harun Nasution, what are the similarities and differences, and what are the implications for contemporary Islamic philosophy and education?

2. Data Source Collection

Data collected from primary and secondary literature:

- a. Primary sources: Descartes' original works (Discourse on the Method, Meditations on First Philosophy) and Harun Nasution's works (Islamic Rationalism, as well as his writings on Islamic rational theology).
- b. Secondary sources: journal articles indexed by Google Scholar, Scopus, academic books, and recent studies discussing Western and Islamic rationalism (e.g. (Aljunied, 2023; Mujani, 1994; Muller, 2023; Putra et al., 2025; Sinaee, 2025) . Source searches were conducted in academic databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, and JSTOR) using keywords : rationalism, Descartes, Harun Nasution, Islamic rational theology, comparative philosophy .

3. Literature Selection and Evaluation

The literature found was selected using the following inclusion criteria:

- a. Directly relevant to the topic of rationalism and the role of reason.
- b. Written by experts or published in reputable journals (google scholar , Scopus, academic books).
- c. Published in the current period (1994–2025) for secondary articles, except for primary classical works. Literature that does not meet the criteria (e.g. non-academic articles or articles whose credibility has not been tested) was excluded from the analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis stage is carried out with the following steps:

- a. Theme Categorization: Arranging main themes related to the epistemology of reason, the relationship between reason and revelation, methods of thinking, and the implications for philosophy/education.
- b. Descriptive Analysis: Describes the views of Descartes and Nasution according to primary works and secondary interpretations.
- c. Comparative Analysis: Comparing two ideas on key aspects to find similarities, differences, and common ground.
- d. Synthesis of Findings: Arrange findings in the form of comparative narratives and comparative tables for easy understanding.

5. Validation of Findings

To ensure the validity of the analysis, source triangulation was conducted by comparing several academic literatures with different perspectives. Furthermore, the interpretations were confirmed with modern philosophical theory (Descartesian rationalism) and Islamic rational theology (Mu'tazilite kalam and Islamic modernism).

6. Drawing up conclusions

The final stage is to draw conclusions regarding the position of reason in both traditions, affirm its contemporary relevance, and provide recommendations for the development of modern Islamic philosophy and education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

a. Rene Descartes and the Autonomy of Reason

Descartes emphasized methodical doubt as the foundation of certainty. Rejecting knowledge derived from sense perception and tradition, he concluded that self-conscious thought is the only indisputable truth (Christofidou, 2023; Khan, 2023; Strazzoni & Sgarbi, 2023). Descartes viewed reason as superior to revelation and authority, believing that rational deduction provides a solid foundation for metaphysics and science (Dobre, 2010).

This epistemological framework establishes the independence of reason from faith. For Descartes, divine existence can also be proven through rational arguments, such as ontological proofs, but revelation itself is not necessary to confirm truth (Dilucia, 2022). This radical autonomy of reason laid the foundation for Enlightenment thought and modern philosophy. Rene Descartes emphasized that human reason has autonomy or independence in seeking the truth. With reason, humans can doubt, weigh, and find certainty. This concept marks the birth of modern philosophy which places reason as the center of knowledge and the basis of human autonomy.

Through his philosophy, René Descartes asserted that reason is the primary basis for the search for truth. In his famous phrase, *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”), he stated that the ability to think is proof of human existence. (Dilucia, 2022; Khan, 2023; Muller, 2023). From here was born the concept of the autonomy of reason, namely the belief that humans are able to determine the direction of their thinking freely without relying entirely on external authorities such as tradition, dogma, or sensory experience alone (Dilucia, 2022; Khan, 2023). Reason is seen as a rational tool that can test, assess, and conclude the truth independently (Sangiaco, 2023). The influence of this concept extends widely, shaping not only philosophy but also the advancement of science and the emergence of modernity (Christofidou, 2023; Strazzoni & Sgarbi, 2023). Descartes' autonomy of reason encourages humans to be more critical, analytical, and brave in seeking the basis of truth through logical reasoning. This gave birth to the spirit of rationalism, where science developed rapidly because it was based on systematic and tested methods of thinking. In addition, this idea also influences views on individual freedom, moral responsibility, and the importance of self-awareness in building a meaningful life.

b. Harun Nasution and Reason in Islamic Thought

Harun Nasution revitalized rationalist theology in Indonesia by emphasizing the harmony between reason and revelation. He argued that while revelation provides guidance, reason enables humans to interpret and apply it in contemporary contexts (Alef, 2020). For him, Islam should not be understood solely through dogma or traditionalist interpretations, but also through rational engagement with the Qur'an and Hadith (Mujani, 1994). Nasution argued that reason functions as a complement to revelation, especially in matters of theology and law, reflecting the rationalist heritage of Islamic kalam (theology). His vision of Islam encouraged Muslims to embrace modern education, science, and critical inquiry, positioning Islam as compatible with intellectual progress and social reform (Aljunied, 2023).

Reason is not positioned as an antithesis to revelation, but rather as a fundamental instrument in the process of interpreting, understanding, and practicing religious teachings in the context of everyday life. According to Harun Nasution, the decline of Muslims is partly due to an

anti-rational attitude and a shift away from the tradition of critical thinking that once flourished during the golden age of Islam (Mubarok & Mughayyirah, 2025) . He criticized the tendency of Muslims to prioritize blind imitation of certain authorities without seeking to understand and study them in depth (Rosidi, 2023) . Therefore, he encouraged Muslims to revive the tradition of rationalism, as it once flourished during the era of Mu'tazilah thought, where reason played a primary role in interpreting revelation and reality (Rasyid et al., 2021) .

According to Harun Nasution's view, reason is not intended to replace revelation, but rather functions as a complementary partner. Revelation provides a fundamental basis for absolute truth, while reason plays a role in studying, understanding, and implementing it in accordance with the dynamics of developments in the times. (Musa & Khaidir, 2023) . Through this approach, Islam can maintain its relevance to scientific and technological advancements while maintaining its spiritual essence and moral values . Reason is seen as a gift from God that strengthens faith, not weakens it. Furthermore, Harun Nasution's thoughts on reason have also impacted the approach to Islamic education in Indonesia (Mahmudah et al., 2023) . He emphasized the importance of education that integrates Islamic values with a critical, analytical, and scientific spirit (Aljunied, 2021; Firdaus, 2023) . Harun wanted Muslims to have a strong foundation of faith and be able to compete in the global intellectual realm (Dodego & Yusuf, 2022) . By reviving the role of reason in Islamic thought, Harun Nasution hoped that the Muslim community would be able to emerge from stagnation, reorganize civilization, and progressively actualize Islamic teachings in modern life (Wirman, 2013) .

c. Comparative Analysis and Novelty

Although they both emphasize the central role of reason, René Descartes and Harun Nasution have fundamentally different epistemological orientations. Descartes developed rationalism through methodical doubt, where reason is positioned as the highest authority for achieving certainty. For him, truth is obtained from clear and distinct ideas, without the need to refer to external authorities such as revelation. This view is in line with the development of modern Western philosophy, which seeks to affirm the autonomy of reason from theological tradition.

On the other hand, Harun Nasution views reason as an important instrument, but not the only source of truth. In his perspective, reason must function within the framework of revelation, so that rational inquiry does not lose its spiritual direction. This is based on his efforts to revitalize the rationalist theological tradition in Indonesian Islam, which emphasizes that the use of reason must remain rooted in divine values . Thus, reason in Nasution's thinking is complementary, not independent.

This distinction reveals two forms of rationalism: secular and religious. Descartes' rationalism is universalistic and individualistic, but has been criticized for ignoring the social and historical dimensions of knowledge. Meanwhile, Nasution's rationalism provides space for the integration of logic and faith, but has also been criticized for being considered to overemphasize the rational aspect, potentially neglecting Sufi spirituality. This difference shows that rationalism is not singular, but is always influenced by its cultural context, traditions, and philosophical aims.

From a comparative perspective, the meeting of these two traditions actually opens up opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue. Descartes offered a model of the autonomy of reason that drove the development of modern science, while Nasution presented an integrative model relevant to building a modern religious civilization. Both can complement each other: Descartes with his critical rationality, and Nasution with his balance between reason and revelation. Thus, this comparative study not only reveals epistemological differences but also opens new horizons for cross-cultural philosophy relevant in the era of academic globalization.

Furthermore, from a methodological perspective, Descartes emphasized *doubt* as a starting point for discovering absolute truth. This doubt is radical, to the point of questioning all knowledge

except the existence of the thinking self (*cogito ergo sum*). Conversely, Nasution did not emphasize radical doubt, but rather a rationalization of religious teachings so they could be better understood through a scientific and contextual approach. For Nasution, the primary purpose of using reason was not to doubt, but rather to interpret and expand religious understanding to make it relevant to the modern era.

Besides that, the difference between the two is also apparent in the final orientation of thought. Descartes was oriented towards the foundation of certain knowledge for the development of philosophy and science, which later became the foundation of Western modernity. Meanwhile, Nasution focused on renewing Islamic thought, with the mission of enabling Muslims to compete intellectually amidst the tide of modernization. In other words, while Descartes built a universal epistemological foundation, Nasution built a contextual epistemological foundation, specifically for the intellectual awakening of Indonesian Muslims.

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative perspective, which highlights the different ways reason is conceptualized across cultures. Descartes' rationalism emphasizes human autonomy in the pursuit of truth, while Nasution's thought illustrates how rationality can coexist with faith. This comparative analysis enriches the discourse of rationalism by demonstrating that rational inquiry need not be in conflict with religion but, in certain contexts, can serve as its interpreter and partner. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the relevance of Nasution's rationalist approach for modern Islamic education and reform, offering a model for integrating faith with critical reasoning in contemporary Muslim societies. Table 1. Comparison of the thoughts of René Descartes and Harun Nasution is as follows:

Table 1. Comparison of Descartes and Harun Nasution's Thoughts on Reason

Aspect	Rene Descartes	Harun Nasution	Comparative Analysis
Epistemological Framework	Reason as the sole authority, independent of revelation	Reason is integrated within the framework of revelation, in harmony with divine guidance.	Descartes is secular-rational. Nasution religious-rational.
Method	<i>Methodic doubt</i> (radical doubt) as a path to absolute truth.	Rationalization of religious teachings, not radical doubt, for modern relevance.	Descartes started from skepticism. Nasution from religious reconstruction.
Final Orientation	Universal foundations of knowledge for philosophy and science.	Renewal of Islamic thought for the intellectual awakening of the people.	Descartes universal-secular. Nasution contextual-religious.
The Role of Reason	Autonomous reason, free from external authority.	Reason as an instrument for understanding revelation.	Fundamental differences in the sources of knowledge authority.

Multidisciplinary Implications	Encouraging the birth of modernity, science, and Western rationalism.	Encouraging the integration of modern science with religious values in the Islamic world.	Both are productive for the development of science, but in different areas.
Socio-Historical Significance	Contribution to the secularization of knowledge and the scientific revolution.	Contribution to the reform of Islamic thought in Indonesia.	Descartes formed a global paradigm, Nasution formed a local-religious paradigm.

This comparative table shows the fundamental differences between Descartes and Harun Nasution in their epistemology, methods, orientations, and the impact of their thinking. Descartes placed reason as the sole authority, independent of revelation, and employed *methodic doubt* to reach universal truth, thus his orientation was both secular and universal. Nasution, on the other hand, emphasized the integration of reason with revelation, rationalized religious teachings for modern relevance, and aimed to foster an intellectual awakening among Muslims, thus his orientation was both religious and contextual.

Descartes and Harun Nasution both emphasized the role of reason, but with fundamentally different approaches. Descartes positioned reason as autonomous and independent of revelation, using methodic doubt to achieve universal knowledge. Instead, Nasution integrated reason with divine guidance, rationalizing religious teachings to make them relevant to the modern context and the intellectual renewal of Islam. Thus, Descartes promoted secular-universal knowledge, while Nasution promoted contextual and rational religious thinking.

d. Practical Implications for Contemporary Philosophy and Education

The comparative insights of Descartes and Harun Nasution also have practical implications for contemporary philosophy and Islamic education:

1. **Islamic Higher Education** : Nasution's integration of reason and revelation can serve as a framework for Islamic universities to foster critical thinking while remaining rooted in Islamic values. This approach can counteract traditionalist tendencies and encourage curriculum reform that integrates theology with modern science (Alatas, 2020).
2. **Philosophy and Global Dialogue** : By placing Descartes' rationalism alongside Nasution's Islamic rationalism, this study contributes to intercultural philosophical dialogue. It highlights the possibility of a shared global discourse on rationality that respects both secular and religious epistemologies (Marion, 2021; Syamsuddin, 2022).
3. **Educational Reform** : In the context of Muslim societies, particularly in Indonesia, Nasution's ideas provide a model for reforming Islamic education to produce graduates capable of critically interacting with both tradition and modernity. This has implications for policymaking in Islamic higher education institutions.
4. **Ethical and Theological Engagement** : Descartes' skepticism and Nasution's rationalist theology together demonstrate models of humility and intellectual openness. Both demonstrate how doubt, reason, and revelation can work together to foster a deeper engagement with truth claims in philosophy and religion.

These implications strengthen the argument that rationalism is not merely a theoretical concern, but has transformative potential for education, philosophy, and theology in contemporary contexts.

Based on research conducted with several informants, including Malay figures from Bengkulu City, cultural figures, artists, coastal communities, and academics, we obtained a picture of the existence and development of community identity groups, or stock identities, in Bengkulu City. Data collection methods included direct interviews, observation, and focus group discussions. This research revealed that the community in Bengkulu City currently comprises various ethnic groups, both immigrants and indigenous people originating from various regions in Bengkulu Province, such as Malay, Rejang, Lembak, Serawai, Semende, Javanese, Sundanese, Bugis, Minang, Batak, Pekal, and several other ethnic groups.

While these ethnic groups have officially agreed-upon customs and traditions, there are also communities in Bengkulu City who do not share biological ancestry with these ethnic groups. These communities have developed new identities known as Orang Bengkulu, Orang Melayu Kota Bengkulu, and Orang Melayu Lembak Bengkulu. These three categories represent the stock identities currently developing in Bengkulu City.

Bengkulu People

Research has shown that a group of people in Bengkulu City refer to themselves as Bengkulu People. The term "Bengkulu People" is used by a group of people who feel they are indigenous and have long resided in Bengkulu City. Individuals who identify themselves as Bengkulu people claim to have lived in this area for generations. This statement demonstrates that the identity of "Bengkulu People" is not solely determined by their current residence, but also by the length of time an individual or group has resided in the area. The longer a person lives in Bengkulu, the stronger their claim to identity as an indigenous community. This identity serves as a symbol of existence, recognition, and historical roots inherent in a community that feels authentically part of Bengkulu.

The research found that identity as Bengkulu people is not always formed through biological ancestry, but also through attachment to the region they have long inhabited. Claims to be Bengkulu people are not always based on biological ancestry, but rather on territorial attachment. Individuals tend to refer to themselves as Bengkulu people because they feel more secure in their territorial identity. When someone is asked, "Where are you from?", the safest and most common answer is to refer to your geographic origin, namely Bengkulu. This is especially true for people who don't have direct ancestry from Bengkulu's indigenous tribes, such as the Rejang, Lembak, Serawai, or Pekal. They feel they lack a strong biological cultural identity, so they tend to adopt a broader or neutral ethnic identity, namely Malay, or more commonly refer to themselves as "Orang Bengkulu." Thus, the identity of "Orang Bengkulu" in this context is built on claims to their residential area, not solely on lineage, and symbolizes their emotional and social attachment to Bengkulu City as a living space they have occupied for generations.

Malay People of Bengkulu City

The presence of the Malay ethnic group in Bengkulu City has existed since 1897, according to data contained in the book "Bunga Rampai Melayu Bengkulu" (Sarwono et al., 2004, p. 111). Research has shown that the formation of ethnic identity in Bengkulu City stems not only from lineage but is also influenced by the social history and community organizations that developed in the region. One piece of historical evidence regarding the existence and recognition of Malay identity in Bengkulu City was expressed by Junai, Head of the Berkas Customary Community, who stated that the presence of the Malay ethnic group in Bengkulu City has recorded since the early 20th century. Junai stated that the term Malay began to be known in Bengkulu City around the 1900s, precisely after the formation of the Bengkulu Malay Community Association. He stated that it was only in the 1900s, since the establishment of the Bengkulu Malay Community Association, that the term Malay appeared in Bengkulu City. This statement supports the information contained in the book Bunga Rampai Melayu Bengkulu regarding the existence of the Malay ethnic group since 1897, which shows that the Malay ethnic group has long been part of the Bengkulu City

community. As social life in this city developed, claims of identity as Malay people of Bengkulu City also emerged, especially from people who do not have biological lineage from tribes such as the Rejang, Lembak, or Serawai. This claim emerged in response to social segmentation and the need for identity recognition within a multi-ethnic society. For those who have long lived there but lack genealogical affiliation, the identity of "Bengkulu City Malays" serves as an alternative representation, considered more inclusive and relevant, to affirm their presence and connection to Bengkulu City.

Social segmentation persists despite peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups, and this is used to differentiate between ethnic groups based on the boundaries of their cultural identities. Some people who do not have ancestry from Bengkulu's indigenous tribes, such as the Rejang, Lembak, or Serawai, desire recognition of their ethnic identity in Bengkulu City. Therefore, they have adopted the identity of "Bengkulu City Malays" as a form of ethnic representation that is perceived as inclusive and open. Although the Malays have long existed in Bengkulu, their identity boundaries, based on customs and traditions, are less restrictive than those of other ethnic groups, thus creating a space for identity claims by groups outside the dominant ethnic structure in Bengkulu City.

According to Setiyanto, an academic who studies Bengkulu culture, the social identity of the people of Bengkulu City is heavily influenced by strong tribal affiliations. Setiyanto stated that people from tribes such as the Rejang and Lembak prefer to refer to themselves based on their respective tribal identities rather than using the general term "Bengkulu People." He emphasized that sometimes the social identities of the Rejang, Lembak, and others do not want to be called Bengkulu People, preferring to be referred to as people from their respective tribes. This indicates that social segmentation in Bengkulu City is formed due to the limitations of cultural identity that have been ingrained for a long time and become a source of pride for each group. As a result, people who do not have lineal ties to indigenous tribes such as the Rejang, Lembak, Serawai, or Pekal, but have long lived in Bengkulu, feel the need to build identity claims through other, more open ethnic channels. In this context, "Bengkulu City Malay" becomes an identity choice that can represent feelings of attachment to their region and social existence. However, in everyday life, the Malay community of Bengkulu City also often refers to themselves as "Bengkulu People" to emphasize their existence as part of the city's indigenous community.

DISCUSSION

Identity claims such as "Bengkulu People" and "Urban Malay People" do not emerge spontaneously. They emerge from a long process of social interactions, historical experiences, and negotiations of meaning between individuals and communities. Using the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) analysis tool, we map identity into four main dimensions: personal, enacted, relational, and communal. The following is a detailed discussion based on each layer within the CTI:

Personal Layer

This layer reflects how individuals subjectively define themselves.

1. Bengkulu People

In this context, identity as a Bengkulu person is not based on lineage, but on personal experiences of living and interacting for a long time in the Bengkulu region. Individuals feel an emotional and historical attachment to the local community (Hecht & Choi, 2020). Individuals who identify as Bengkulu people generally do not come from indigenous ethnic groups such as the Rejang, Lembak, or Serawai, but feel a strong attachment to Bengkulu City due to their long-standing residence and residence there. They define this identity based on their life experiences, participation in social life, and a sense of belonging to the region.

2. Bengkulu City Malay

Individuals who do not belong to indigenous ethnic groups such as the Rejang, Lembak, or Serawai construct a personal identity as Malay based on historical ties and life experiences in the city. This identity is adaptive to the multi-ethnic cultural space (Mekuria & Roos, 2020). This identity emerges from individuals who feel unaccommodated by traditional ethnic categories. They define themselves as part of the Bengkulu City Malay community because they feel they align better with their values, lifestyle, and historical ties.

Enacted Layer (Actualized Identity)

This layer shows how identity emerges in social actions and communication.

1. Bengkulu People

The identity of Bengkulu people in the enacted layer, which is when people use the term *Orang Bengkulu* in social interactions as an existential marker. As explained by Zhu and Li (2021), in urban communities, identity is often constructed and communicated through linguistic symbols that convey a sense of attachment to living space.

2. Malay in Bengkulu City

The Malay identity of Bengkulu City developed in response to the strict genealogical structure of indigenous tribes in Bengkulu. Individuals who felt they did not belong to the Rejang, Lembak, or Serawai groups then constructed a more fluid and open identity. This identity was then actualized and enacted through the use of Malay cultural symbols in social activities, such as traditional ceremonies and regional organizations (Wulandari & Fitriani, 2020). This constitutes a form of identity enactment that is not passive, but rather active and symbolic.

Communal Layer (Collective or Communal Identity)

This layer relates to how identity is affirmed or questioned in relationships between individuals or groups.

1. Bengkulu People

This identity was formed collectively by people who have long lived together in Bengkulu, despite coming from diverse backgrounds. They construct a shared narrative as Bengkulu people based on their shared experiences, involvement in local socio-political dynamics, and a sense of attachment to the region (Indrawan & Mahfud, 2023).

2. Bengkulu Urban Malay

The communal layer is formed when this community begins to construct a collective narrative as an urban Malay group distinct from both Lembak Malay and indigenous tribes. In this regard, Kustanti & Yani (2021) emphasize the importance of collective narratives in the formation of a flexible community identity.

Based on analysis using Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), it can be concluded that identity in a multiethnic society like Bengkulu City is formed through a complex and layered communication process. The four layers of identity—personal, enacted, relational, and communal—do not stand alone but interact to shape our understanding of who we are amidst social diversity. Thus, identity in Bengkulu is not static or solely determined by descent, but is the result of ongoing communication processes at various levels of social life. CTI allows us to understand that identity is a dynamic, contextual, and multidimensional construct, which is continuously shaped by interactions between individuals and communities in diverse social spaces.

Thus, if we look at the term "Bengkulu People" in this study, it can be understood from two different perspectives but still with the same meaning, namely as the native people of Bengkulu, only seen as two things from different points of view, namely: first, the term "Bengkulu People"

which is based on the native people of Bengkulu who have long inhabited the Bengkulu City area. Their identity as "Bengkulu People" is based on the perspective of their residential area by looking at the period of residence and geography that they have, namely in Bengkulu City. Second, the term "Bengkulu People" is based on the people who are the native people of Bengkulu but are not affiliated with the native tribes of Bengkulu who have had identity boundaries such as the Rejang, Lembak, Serawai, and others, only they want to claim their identity by looking from a tribal perspective. The tribe that has open identity boundaries is the Malay tribe.

CONCLUSION

a. Epistemological Dialogue Across Traditions

A comparison of the thoughts of Rene Descartes and Harun Nasution shows that rationalism is not a single concept, but rather a product of diverse epistemological traditions. Descartes emphasized the autonomy of reason as the foundation of certainty, while Nasution positioned reason as an inseparable partner of revelation. This difference opens up a dialogue between secular Western epistemology and religious Islamic epistemology. Within the framework of *comparative philosophy*, the intersection of these two ideas illustrates that rationality can be a meeting point between cultures without erasing the theological and historical distinctiveness of each tradition (Christofidou, 2023; Muller, 2023; Strazzoni & Sgarbi, 2023). Thus, this study not only compares two figures but also contributes to cross-cultural philosophy, which is increasingly relevant in the era of academic globalization.

A comparison between Descartes and Harun Nasution also reveals the differing orientations in the goals of rationalism. Descartes sought to find a basis for certainty in knowledge free from external authority, including religion, thus establishing the principle of *cogito ergo sum* as an epistemological foundation. Conversely, Harun Nasution emphasized that reason cannot be separated from revelation, as revelation provides the foundation of values and moral direction for the use of reason. Thus, Nasution's rationalism is integrative, connecting the transcendental dimension with human intellectual capacity. If we look further, these two thinkers also differ in their conception of truth. Descartes believed that truth could be achieved through consistent logical deduction, while Harun Nasution emphasized that true truth originates from God, which can be understood more deeply through reason as His gift. This difference illustrates that modern Western epistemology places more emphasis on methodological-rational aspects, while the Islamic epistemology offered by Nasution adds normative and spiritual dimensions.

However, both have a point in common in emphasizing the central role of reason in the search for knowledge. Descartes, with his methodical skepticism, encouraged people not to accept the truth at face value, while Nasution criticized the practice of *imitation* in Islam which hindered intellectual development. These similarities demonstrate that, despite their different backgrounds, both scholars emphasized freedom of thought and the use of critical reasoning as a path to escape dogmatic impasses. In the context of the globalization of science, the dialogue between Descartes and Harun Nasution is crucial for formulating an inclusive model of rationality (Mujani, 1994; Pratama & Arif, 2023). Descartes' rationality can strengthen methodological and critical aspects, while Nasution's rationality keeps the pursuit of knowledge anchored in ethical and spiritual dimensions. The combination of the two has the potential to give birth to a transcultural rationalism paradigm that not only prioritizes intellectual certainty, but also existential meaning within a religious framework.

b. Descartes and Harun Nasution's Rationalism and the Relevance of Multidisciplinarity

The thoughts of René Descartes and Harun Nasution show the central role of reason in building an epistemological framework, even though both operate in different contexts.

Descartes, through his methodical doubt, sought to discover absolute truth by making reason the primary foundation of knowledge. However, this approach is often criticized for producing an individualistic epistemology and not allowing enough space for the social and historical dimensions of knowledge (Dodego & Yusuf, 2022) . Meanwhile, Harun Nasution succeeded in revitalizing rationalist theology in Indonesian Islam by emphasizing the importance of reason in understanding revelation (Fuji & Maragustam, 2023) . However, some scholars consider his approach too rationalistic, potentially neglecting aspects of Sufi spirituality, which is also an important part of Islamic heritage (Sa'adi, 2011) . This criticism reminds us that rationalism, in both Western and Islamic traditions, should not be understood in absolute terms but rather needs to be placed within the context of human limitations and epistemic plurality.

Understanding this criticism opens up a wider space for reflection regarding the position of reason in human life. The rationalism of Descartes and Harun Nasution both emphasize the importance of freedom of thought, but both also present epistemological challenges related to the limitations of rational methods. Reason does have a great capacity to reveal truth, but it cannot stand alone without considering empirical, spiritual, and social dimensions (Aljunied, 2023) . Thus, the integration of rationality, experience, and spirituality is an epistemological necessity to address the complexities of the modern era. The thoughts of Descartes and Harun Nasution also resonate in various fields of science.

In the philosophy of science, both show the tension between universal rational methods and culturally rooted knowledge systems. In the psychology of religion, both perspectives are relevant for understanding the role of reason in moral development, spirituality, and self-regulation. In education, their ideas paved the way for the development of an integrative curriculum that combines modern science with religious values (Yudi Setiadi, 2021) . This multidisciplinary approach demonstrates that rationalism is not merely a theoretical debate but a foundation for intellectual innovation and social practice (Dodego & Yusuf, 2022) . The interconnectedness of Descartes and Harun Nasution's thinking across disciplines demonstrates the breadth of rationalism. In the philosophy of science, Descartes' idea of methodical certainty encouraged the birth of the modern scientific paradigm that is oriented towards objectivity, while Harun Nasution showed that science cannot be separated from the religious values that live in society. Furthermore, in the realm of religious education and psychology, the thoughts of both act as a bridge between the cognitive, moral, and spiritual aspects of humans. Descartes emphasized the function of reason as the basis for ethical reflection, while Harun Nasution positioned it as an entry point to understanding Islamic teachings in a contextual and progressive manner.

Thus, the rationalism offered by Descartes and Harun Nasution is not only an intellectual legacy worth studying, but also a source of inspiration for the development of contemporary knowledge. Both schools of thought teach that reason is a crucial instrument in seeking truth, but it must also be complemented by an openness to epistemic plurality, spiritual experience, and social values. This combination is what makes rationalism relevant to the development of science, education, and modern human life.

REFERENCES

- Alef, TW (2020). Rational Islam (Ideas and Thoughts). *Journal of Education* , Vol. 1 (59), 37.
- Aljunied, K. (2021). Bringing Rationality Back: Harun Nasution and the Burden of Muslim Thought in Twentieth-Century Southeast Asia. *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* , 6 (1), 29–55. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jims.6.1.02>
- Aljunied, K. (2023). Reason and Rationality in Twentieth-Century Southeast Asia: Harun Nasution's Dynamic Interventions. In *Texts and Studies on the Qur'an* (Vol. 20, pp. 294–326). Brill Academic Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004529397_012

- Arifin, M. (2021). Rational Theology: The Perspective of Harun Nasution's Thought. In *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 6(11), 951–952. (Vol. 13, Issue April).
- Christofidou, A. (2023). Descartes on Selfhood, Conscientia, the First Person and Beyond (pp. 9–40). Florence University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36253/979-12-215-0169-8.03>
- Dada, F., Iyadh, AM, Alfira, H., & Syahla, AP (2025). Revitalizing Reason in Islamic Theology: A Rational Study of Harun Nasution's Kalam Thought. *Lentera Journal: Religious, Scientific, and Technological Studies*, 24, 704–717. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.29138/lentera.v24i2.828>
- Dilucia, N. (2022). Robert Desgabets' eucharistic thought and the theological revision of Cartesianism. *Intellectual History Review*, 32 (4), 669–690. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2021.1913350>
- Dobre, M. (2010). Metaphysics and physics in Cartesian natural philosophy : Descartes and early French Cartesians on the foundations of natural philosophy .
- Dodego, SHA, & Yusuf, M. (2022). Harun Nasution'S Renewal of Islamic Thought and Its Implications for Islamic Education in Indonesia. *Equator*, 12 (2), 181–193. <https://doi.org/10.24260/khatulistiwa.v12i2.2376>
- Firdaus, QAH (2023). On Wirman's Allegation of Fallacies of Harun Nasution's Theological Logic. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 17 (2), 352–375. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2023.17.2.352-375>
- Fuji, A., & Maragustam, S. (2023). Harun Nasution's Thoughts (Religious-Rational) on Education. *Risalah: Journal of Education and Islamic Studies* Harun Nasution's Thoughts (Religious-Rational) on Islamic Education, 9 (1), 379–390.
- Khaidir, PH, Riyadi, AK, & Ibrahim, A. (2023). Rational Sufism: The Influence of Harun Nasution's Thought in the Academic World in Indonesia. *ULUL ALBAB Journal of Islamic Studies*, 24 (1), 137–159.
- Khan, N. (2023). An Analytical Reconstruction of Descartes' Philosophical Method. *International Journal of Current Science (IJCS PUB)*, 13 (1), 556–564.
- Mahmudah, M., Siregar, M., & Putra, WH (2023). Modernization of Islam and Language Education in the Society 5.0 Era in the Perspective of Harun Nasution. *Scaffolding: Journal of Islamic Education and Multiculturalism*, 5 (3), 30–43. <https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v5i3.3455>
- Mubarok, IA, & Mughayyirah, Y. (2025). Islamic Education Revolution in Indonesia: A Review of Harun Nasution's Thoughts. *Juwara: Jurnal Wawasan Dan Aksara*, 5 (1), 159–173. <https://doi.org/10.58740/juwara.v5i1.421>
- Muhammad, RR (2025). Harun Nasution's Thoughts and Their Relevance to the Contemporary Islamic World. *Tafaqquh: Journal of Islamic Research and Studies*, 13 (1), 164–177.
- Mujani, S. (1994). Mu'tazilah theology and the modernization of the Indonesian Muslim community: Intellectual portrait of Harun Nasution. *Studia Islamika*, 1 (1), 92–131. <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v1i1.868>
- Muller, J. (2023). Humors, Passions, and Consciousness in Descartes's Physiology: The Reconsideration through the Correspondence with Elisabeth (pp. 59–80). Florence University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36253/979-12-215-0169-8.05>
- Musa, AF, & Khaidir, PH (2023). The Philosophical Sufism of Harun Nasution: A Phenomenological-Historical Investigation of the Influence of Neo-Mu'tazilism. *Intellectual Discourse*, 31 (2), 325–344. <https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v31i2.2054>
- Nisa, M. (2024). Harun Nasution's Theological View. *Asian Journal of Engineering, Social and Health*, 3 (5), 966–977. <https://ajesh.ph/index.php/gp%0AHarun>
- Pratama, RA, & Arif, S. (2023). Emergency Government of Lampung Residency during Kraai Operation, 1949-1950. *Paramita*, 33 (1), 106–117. <https://doi.org/10.15294/paramita.v33i1.31858>

- Putra, AFR, Robbani, AS, Mubarak, AY, Hamdani, A., Muslim, MB, & Mubarak, AZ (2025). Transmission of knowledge from Mā Warā' Al-Nahr to Nusantara: The central Asia Ulama network and its influence on Islamic intellectual traditions in the Malay archipelago - 18th-19th century. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* , 6 (3). <https://doi.org/10.58256/9xc13216>
- Rasyid, D., Rasyid, AD, Lubis, A., Mohd Balwi, MAWFBM, & Rasyid, BD (2021). The writing of hadith in the era of prophet muhammad A Critique on Harun Nasution's Thought. *Al-Jami'ah* , 59 (1), 191–220. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.591.191-220>
- Rosidi, I. (2023). Harun Nasution's influence on shaping Muslim intellectual development in Indonesia. *Contemporary Islam* , 17 (3), 391–409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-023-00523-y>
- Sa'adi, S. (2011). A survey on the development of Islamic higher education in Indonesia: An epistemological review. *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* , 1 (1), 151–169. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v1i1.151-169>
- Sangiaco, A. (2023). *Consciousness without Existence: Descartes, Severino and the Interpretation of Experience* (pp. 169–198). Florence University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36253/979-12-215-0169-8.10>
- Sinaee, A.H. (2025). Rationalism vs. textualism: a comparative analysis of Islamic pedagogical approaches in Iran and Saudi Arabia. *British Journal of Religious Education* . <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2451044>
- Strazzoni, A., & Sgarbi, M. (2023). *Reading Descartes: Consciousness, Body, and Reasoning* . Florence University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36253/979-12-215-0169-8>
- Wirman, EP (2013). The fallacies of Harun Nasution's thought of theology. *Journal of Indonesian Islam* , 7 (2), 246–267. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2013.7.2.246-267>
- Yudi Setiadi, NI (2021). Harun Nasution's Educational Innovation in Islamic Higher Education. *International Conference on Islamic Education* , 1 (1), 97–110. <http://proceeding.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/ICIE/article/view/27>
- .