

THE TRUTH OF KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO ADELBERT SNIJDERS; ITS RELEVANCE TO MODERATING RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

<i>Article History</i> <i>Received :25-07-2026</i> <i>Revised :30-08-2026</i> <i>Accepted :01-09-2026</i> Keywords: <i>The Truth of</i> <i>Knowledge,</i> <i>Moderation,</i> <i>Religious</i> <i>Understanding,</i>	<i>This study aims to analyze Adelbert Snijders' concept of the truth of knowledge and its relevance to strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. This research employs a qualitative approach through library research, using Adelbert Snijders' works as primary data sources. Data are analyzed through hermeneutics, involving description and interpretation. The findings reveal that, according to Snijders, true knowledge reflects reality and possesses dynamic, paradoxical, and multidimensional characteristics. These characteristics suggest that human understanding of truth is not entirely exhaustive or static. Snijders' epistemological perspective is relevant to religious moderation because it encourages individuals and groups to recognize the limitations of their interpretations of religious texts. This awareness can foster intellectual humility, openness to diverse perspectives, dialogue, and mutual respect. Furthermore, it can help minimize absolute truth claims that potentially lead to religious exclusivism and intolerance. This study argues that Snijders' concept provides a philosophical foundation for promoting inclusive, reflective, and moderate religious understanding in Indonesia.</i>
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Introduction

Claims to truth in the realm of religion are more dangerous than claims to truth in science. Two scientists with differing theories rarely end up judging one another and fighting. Similarly, two soccer teams do not quarrel simply because of differences in strategy (Ulil Abshar Abdalla 2020, 88–103). The situation is different when it comes to claims of truth in religion. Differences in religious understanding often lead to misguidance and conflict. Clashes between the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and PWI-LS at Riziq Shihab's religious gathering on July 24, 2025 - ((35) FPI dan PWI - LS Bentrok di Pengajian Habib Rizieq Shihab | AKIM tvOne - YouTube n.d.) - The incident mentioned above is one example of

the many religious conflicts that have occurred in the public sphere, triggered by differences in belief. A similar incident also occurred when a religious study session led by Syafiq Reza Basalamah was disrupted by a mass organization on February 23, 2024, - ((35) Duduk Perkara Pengajian Ustadz Riza Basalamah Dibubarkan Banser dan GP Ansor | AKIS tvOne - YouTube n.d.)-. This contest over truth in the religious sphere, which leads to conflict, must be minimized in order to strengthen the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia. To this end, it is important to elaborate on the concept of epistemic truth proposed by Adelbert Snijders so that it can serve as an epistemic foundation for individuals and groups in fostering a moderate understanding of religion.

Snijders's ideas have been widely cited by authors in the field of philosophy. However, to date, there has been little research on Snijders's ideas. One article that elaborates on Snijders's thought is the piece written by Alexius Harefa and L. Tambunan titled "Paradoxical Knowledge According to Adelbert Snijders" (2004) (Harefa and Tinambunan 2024). Although this article has captured Snijders' concept of knowledge, it has not comprehensively described the nature of knowledge as intended by Snijders—that is, not only paradoxical but also dynamic and multidimensional. Furthermore, this article does not identify the philosophical schools that influenced Snijders' thought. Nor does this article specifically apply Snijders' concept of paradoxical knowledge in relation to strengthening the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia. Based on existing studies, it appears that the relevance of Snijders' thought as a crucial epistemological foundation in the discourse on religious moderation has not been sufficiently elaborated.

In addition to complementing previous studies, this research aims to catalog Snijders's thoughts on true knowledge in order to identify the relevance of this concept of truth as an epistemological foundation for strengthening religious moderation in the realm of understanding. In line with this, the research questions that can be formulated are: How does Adelbert Snijders view the truth of human knowledge regarding reality? And what is its relevance to the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia? The answers to these questions will provide new insights for establishing an epistemological foundation for religious moderation in Indonesia.

This study is based on the argument that the explicit expression of truth regarding reality (text) does not fully reveal the nature of reality (text) itself. This is because a text is always broader and deeper than its articulation. The term "text" here refers not only to sacred texts but also encompasses all religious phenomena. In relation to religious moderation, the tendency of individuals or groups to become trapped at one extreme is a result of a failure to recognize the dynamic, paradoxical, and multidimensional nature of knowledge. With the awareness that knowledge is dynamic, paradoxical, and multidimensional, religious moderation can be more easily fostered and developed. The reason is that, from the very beginning, interpreters have recognized the perspectival and

paradoxical nature of knowledge, which allows them to postpone certainty regarding meaning and willingly remain open to the emergence of new interpretations.

Research Methods

The material object of this study is Snijders's philosophy of truth, while its formal object is philosophy. The formal object will serve as an analytical tool for identifying problems related to true knowledge and examining their relevance to the moderation of religious understanding—specifically, as the epistemic beliefs of religious adherents in strengthening the moderation of religious understanding.

This study is a qualitative study, specifically a study of key figures. The rationale for this research design is based on the consideration that the study's objective is to uncover true knowledge as understood by these key figures (Snijders), which will then be used to construct an epistemic foundation that can serve as a basis for strengthening religious moderation. Therefore, a quantitative approach is not suitable for this purpose. The intended final product is an epistemic foundation for religious moderation.

The primary data sources are books and articles written by Snijders, including the book "Anthropologi Filsafat Manusia Paradoks dan seruan" (2004), which explores the nature of humanity as dynamic, paradoxical, and multidimensional beings. The book "Manusia dan Kebenaran" (2006) is a discussion of the philosophy of knowledge. The third book, "Seluas Segala Kenyataan" (2009), serves as an introduction to metaphysics (2009). Sources of data related to religious moderation include the book "Moderasi Beragama" from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019), the book "Moderasi Islam" from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the book "Wasathiyah" by Quraish Shihab (2020).

Data collection was conducted by gathering relevant books and journals. The next step involved reading the information from these sources to list and record the relevant data and information. The data are then presented in the form of a narrative description. Data analysis employs philosophical hermeneutics with a methodological focus on interpretation. The interpretation aims to uncover the norms, assumptions, and/or hidden presuppositions underlying the data, after which the researcher provides a critical evaluation.

Discussion

Biography of Adelbert Snijders

Snijders was born in Raamsdonk, the Netherlands, on January 10, 1927, to Johannes Petrus and Johanna Maria Vissers. He was Catholic and was baptized Pieter Gerardus. Snijders was the fifth of seven children. As an adult, Snijders chose to dedicate his life to God by entering religious life. Snijders joined the Order of the Capuchin Friars on August 30, 1946, taking the religious name Adelbertus. Snijders was ordained a priest on August 4, 1953. Snijders became acquainted with philosophy while studying at the Capuchin major seminary in the Netherlands, where he delved deeply into philosophy and theology (Harefa and Tinambunan 2024).

In order to fulfill the Church's mission, the Capuchin Order sent several Capuchin priests. Snijders was given the opportunity to serve on a mission in

Indonesia. Before that, Snijders was asked to first study philosophy at Propaganda Fide in Rome. He completed his studies in Rome, earning a doctorate in philosophy on June 17, 1957. Snijders arrived in Indonesia, specifically in Pematangsiantar, on March 24, 1964. In 1986, he became a lecturer at the St. John College of Philosophy and Theology in Pematangsiantar, while also serving as a mentor to Capuchin candidates at the Alverna Capuchin Formation House in Pematangsiantar (Harefa and Tinambunan 2024).

On Christmas Day 2010, Snijders fell ill and was admitted to Elisabet Hospital in Medan. By mid-January 2011, his condition began to improve, and he was subsequently cared for at the Capuchin Emaus Monastery in Helvetia, Medan. In June, he was readmitted to the hospital. Finally, on Tuesday, June 28, 2011, Father Adelbert Snijders ended his struggle in this world as he breathed his last breath (Harefa and Tinambunan 2024).

Key Concepts in the Thought of Adelbert Snijders

Being as Norm.

A philosophical thought does not arise in a vacuum but is always influenced by the circumstances of its time. As a Catholic, Snijders's thought was inspired by the transcendental Thomist school of philosophy. This is evident in his works, such as the book "Seluas segala Kenyataan" and "Manusia dan Kebenaran". In these works, Snijders describes transcendental Thomism as the third metaphysical tradition following those of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Transcendental Thomism continues the tradition of Thomas Aquinas's thought while introducing several developments. It also takes a critical stance toward Immanuel Kant's metaphysics, which is characterized by dualism. Kant distinguishes between phenomena reality as it is known and noumena reality in and of itself, which cannot be known (being itself). The starting point of Transcendental Thomism differs from Kant's dualism. Transcendental Thomism is grounded in the unity of reality. From the outset, knowledge and reality are one; thus, even though knowledge does not fully reveal reality, it remains true because it corresponds to reality. For Thomism, reality is the norm of truth for knowledge (being as norm) (Snijders 2006, 171).

Snijders subscribes to the concept of ontological differentiation. Ontological differentiation is the view that there are various ways and "levels of being." In other words, reality is hierarchical and diverse. Reality is pluralistic both at the level of individual species (many individuals of the same species) and at the level of "being" (many beings, each with its own uniqueness) (Snijder 2009). The most fundamental ontological differentiation is the distinction between contingent reality and Absolute reality. Contingent reality is indeed a reality, and is intrinsic (it is), yet it has no basis of existence in itself. In contingent reality (being), there are varying degrees of uniqueness. The uniqueness of physical reality is lower than that of spiritual reality (Snijder 2009).

All finite realities are contingent (temporary), meaning they exist but do not have a basis for their existence in themselves. To find a sufficient ground (*ratio sufficiens*), one must move from the horizontal plane to the vertical plane—that is, toward the Absolutely Existent. The basis for the unity of contingent reality and the Absolutely Existent is the vertical relation to the Absolutely Existent. The presence of the Existent in all states of being serves as the basis for this unity

(Snijder 2009).

The ontological differentiation outlined above has implications for the relationship between knowledge and reality. In his book “Man and Truth”, Snijders states that all knowledge and science are correlative or related to the questions posed about reality. Different questions about a given reality or object will yield different answers. Questions about empirical objects will yield answers in the form of empirical knowledge. Similarly, when questions are posed about metaphysical reality, they will yield metaphysical answers. Based on the correlative nature of questions and reality, the verification of knowledge also varies. Empirical knowledge requires empirical methods and verification. Conversely, metaphysical knowledge requires metaphysical methods and means of verification, namely reflection. Every science and every form of knowledge has its own set of “language game” rules (Snijders 2006).

The Paradoxical Nature of Knowledge

Paradoxical knowledge is a concept in Snijders’ philosophy that posits that human knowledge is paradoxical in nature (Snijder 2009). A paradox is something that is contradictory yet true in its unity (Snijders 2006). For Snijders, a paradox is not the same as a contradiction. The truth of a paradox lies in the unity of the two conflicting truths. In a contradiction, however, if one is true, the other must be false (Snijder 2004). This paradoxical nature is intrinsic and is the very essence of human knowledge (Snijders 2006). In practice, however, it is difficult for humans to live with this paradox, so they are tempted to eliminate its paradoxical nature. It is this elimination of the paradoxical nature that leads to being trapped at one extreme. In the history of philosophy, these extremes are evident in empiricism which recognizes only empirical truth and rationalism which treats logical truth as absolute.

The paradoxical nature of human knowledge is a consequence of human nature as a paradoxical being. The first human paradox is the paradox of the soul and the body (Leahy 1984). Human beings are a unity of soul and body. These are two realities that are contradictory yet both true. The fact that a human being is both soul and body is not a contradiction but a paradox. As a body, a human being has limitations. As a soul, however, a human being can transcend physical limitations. From this paradox of soul and body arise various paradoxes within the human being. Human beings are both closed and open, limited (Snijder 2004).

Based on the fundamental understanding that human beings are paradoxical creatures, this paradoxical nature influences other dimensions of human existence, including the dimension of knowledge (Harefa and Tinambunan 2024). Snijders states that the paradoxes in human knowledge encompass the nature of the implicit and the explicit, and of identity and non-identity. Implicit knowledge is pre-reflective knowledge that is, a type of knowledge that has not yet been fully articulated in decisions or propositions. Snijders refers to this type of knowledge as pre-knowledge (Snijders 2006). This prior knowledge is “implicit” in nature and is only realized during the process of asking questions (Snijders 2006). A person asks about something because they already know it; it’s just that what is being asked about is still implicit. This implicit knowledge is “identity” in the sense of knowing reality in its entirety. In other words, in implicit knowledge, there is no opposition between the knowing subject and the known object (Snijders

2006). Opposition arises when implicit knowledge is made explicit. In explicit knowledge, the totality is never fully revealed; therefore, it never reaches a point of completion (identity). Nevertheless, explicit knowledge still contains truth because it describes reality. This reflects Snijders' belief that reality is the norm or standard by which the truth or falsity of knowledge is measured. Our knowledge is the explicitation of what was implicitly known from the beginning in its entirety (Snijders 2006).

The Multidimensional Nature of Truth

Truth is multidimensional. The observational method in the search for truth is applicable only to the empirical dimension. Metric science is limited to quantity. The truth of metric science lies in its logic namely, the existence of logical relationships between premises and axioms. Metric science is often likened to a "game of chess." The game must adhere to the rules formulated in advance for each element or piece of the game (chess axioms are defined by the "king" and "knight"). The truth of mathematics differs from that of the natural sciences. In the natural sciences, individuality is abstracted. These sciences aim to discover what is common to all individuals of the same kind. The method of the natural sciences is induction, that is, drawing general conclusions from individual observations (Snijders 2006).

Reality is multidimensional, and the path to truth varies depending on the dimension in question. The path to truth in the empirical dimension differs from the path to truth in interpersonal relationships, and this differs yet again in metaphysics and ethical judgment. Different dimensions require different methods of verification. Each academic discipline is autonomous, yet the multidimensional nature of reality serves as the foundation of unity. Autonomy defines a discipline's scope of expertise while also limiting it. Reality is multidimensional, yet it remains one and the same. Diversity is contained within this single reality. Each academic discipline is correlated with the questions that serve as its starting point and form the basis of truth when verified through the appropriate methods. Empirical sciences are validated through observation and experimentation. Metaphysical sciences are validated through reflection and reasoning that lead to truth based on metaphysical principles.

The Dynamic Nature Of Knowledge

Consistent with his philosophy of humanity, which views human nature as dynamic, human knowledge in Snijders' view, is also dynamic. The tension between implicit and explicit knowledge constitutes a dynamic foundation that never reaches a point of completion. Implicit knowledge, which is total and exhaustive, is made explicit through decision-making. Decisions are abstract and general in nature. Concrete and total individuality and uniqueness are never exhaustively revealed. The tension between the implicit and the explicit is a distinctive feature of human knowledge. This tension is also a hallmark of the dynamism of human knowledge. Explicit knowledge, which is non-identity-based, remains on a journey toward an identity that is present from the outset in an implicit form but is never explicitly attained. Implicit pre-knowledge "as vast as all reality" (the divine element) is dynamically present in all efforts at explicitation, yet explicit identity is never attained (the human element) (Snijders 2006).

In the concluding section of **Man and Truth**, Snijders states that humanity remains on a journey. This is the message of the philosophy of knowledge found in reflections on the truth of human knowledge. Snijders quotes Heraclitus and Thomas Aquinas regarding the dynamic nature of knowledge. “You will never find the limits of the soul,” said Heraclitus, and “the human soul, in a certain sense, is as vast as all of reality (*anima quondammodo Omnia*).” Humanity is a paradox and a call divine and human, finite and infinite. This message is also directed at all fields of knowledge, each of which, within its own sphere of expertise, strives to uncover the secrets hidden within reality. Paradoxes are never erased but are dynamically present in all endeavors, revealing unexpected riches. Paradoxes are a call and our shared struggle toward our identity in this world. This journey toward identity encompasses all dimensions of reality both empirical and meta-empirical. Reality is multidimensional, and humanity is “Seluas Segala Kenyataan” (Snijders 2006).

Moderation in Religious Understanding in Indonesia

The problem of truth claims in the realm of religious understanding has existed for a long time throughout history. In the Middle Ages, the conflict between the Church and scientists regarding the center of the solar system resulted in the persecution of scientists such as Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), as the Church condemned as heretics the proponents of the heliocentric theory proposed by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) (F. Budi Hardiman 2019, 11).

In the context of Islam, claims to truth in the realm of religious understanding have also given rise to the phenomenon of heresy. Fahrudin Faiz states that “mihna” in Islamic history can be translated as an ideological test. During these mihna, every religious figure was examined regarding their views on a single theological issue: the created nature of the Qur’an. Those whose views differed from the Mu’tazila school of thought would face punishment by the state. This phenomenon of heresy has persisted throughout Islamic history. Jurists (ulama fiqih) have labeled philosophers (ulama filsafat) as heretics; theologians (ulama aqidah) have labeled Sufi scholars (ulama tasawwuf) as heretics; jurists have excommunicated other jurists; theologians have excommunicated fellow theologians with differing views, and so on. This phenomenon of labeling others as heretics has continued into the current era of globalization; for example, fundamentalist groups declare liberal groups to be infidels. This perspective is expressed in major issues such as terrorism, as seen in the horrific events throughout human history (Faiz 2015, 139–40).

The development of religious moderation in Indonesia is based on three pillars: moderation in thought, moderation in movements, and moderation in action (kementrian RI 219AD, 27). The first pillar of moderation in religious thought is characterized by the ability to avoid a literalist interpretation of religious texts, or the ability to reconcile text and context. In other words, it is neither rigid nor liberal. The second pillar moderation in movement ensures that the spread of religious preaching does not lead to the propagation of new forms of immorality. The third pillar moderation in tradition and practice ensures that religion and tradition are not pitted against each other but rather engage in dialogue, thereby giving rise to a new culture.

The relationship between knowledge and moderation in the context of explicit religious understanding is explicitly stated in the book **Religious Moderation**, published by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. The book states that one of the prerequisites for religious moderation is having comprehensive knowledge of religion and religious practices. It further states that, armed with comprehensive religious knowledge, a believer will naturally adopt an inclusive attitude toward differences and diversity. This, in fact, is one of the very essences of religious moderation (kementrian RI 219AD).

Quraish Shihab states that moderation (*wasathiyah*) in the interpretation of religious texts requires flexibility in understanding them. Adherents of *wasathiyah* uphold the texts but do not reject the possibility of interpretation (*takwil*) if the meaning of the text does not align with logical reasoning. The concept of *wasathiyah* distinguishes between acts of worship and matters other than acts of worship. In the case of acts of worship, adherents of *wasathiyah* accept them without considering whether a teaching is logical or not. Meanwhile, teachings other than acts of worship must be examined to determine whether they should be retained or modified (Shihab 2019).

The Relevance of Snijders' Thought in the Context of Moderating Religious Understanding

Snijders's ideas are highly relevant in the context of the discourse on moderation in religious understanding in Indonesia. The tendency to become trapped at one extreme which leads to misguidance and conflict—can be traced back to a misunderstanding of the dynamic, paradoxical, and multidimensional nature of truth and knowledge. Snijders has pointed out that it is difficult for humans to live with and accept the paradoxes of knowledge, leading them to be tempted to eliminate these paradoxes. The relevance of Snijders's ideas regarding the truth of knowledge in relation to moderation of religious understanding in Indonesia can be summarized in the following three points:

First, moderation in religious understanding requires the ability to change one's epistemic beliefs that is, one's perspective on knowledge. When a person fails to recognize that knowledge is inherently perspectival and capable of capturing only certain dimensions of reality, the tendency to reduce (simplify) the diverse dimensions of reality becomes increasingly strong. This means that the richness of reality is diminished. As a result, differing perspectives will be labeled as wrong. For example, when religion (a part of reality) is viewed solely through its exoteric dimension, the esoteric practices of that religion will be regarded as heretical innovations. In other words, religions possessing an esoteric dimension (the spiritual realm) will be marginalized, with greater emphasis placed on ritualistic forms of worship. This has occurred in the history of Islam, where scholars of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) have deemed Sufi scholars to be heretical. Based on this understanding, the principle of multidimensional truth in knowledge, as articulated in Snijders' thought, is relevant as a foundation for building the epistemic convictions of both individuals and groups in understanding religious texts and phenomena. By recognizing the multidimensional nature of knowledge whether at the individual or group level it becomes easier to foster and develop moderation in religious understanding.

Second, Snijders' concept of paradoxical knowledge offers new insights into the interpretation of religious texts. The implicit knowledge Snijders refers to conveys the message that the explicitation (interpretation) of religious texts will never fully reveal the text's true nature (meaning). However, even though it is incomplete and not exhaustive, the explicitation of a text can be considered valid as long as the result of that explicitation reveals part of the text's reality. For example, interpretations regarding the nature of God across religions, or between sects within the same religion, can be seen as the efforts of believers to understand God. This explicitation or effort to understand is never complete because it always contains an element of ignorance. This means that explicitation regarding God is never complete; nevertheless, it remains true as long as it continues to reflect the divine attributes. Knowledge of God is total and complete only in the realm of implicit knowledge. By simply stating that "God is God" (implicitly), no error in explanation occurs; however, if God is described as A, B, or C in this way or that then an error is inevitable. This is because the explanation does not encompass the entirety of God's nature and essence. This is explicit knowledge true but incomplete. With this awareness, the interpreter is able to willingly postpone certainty regarding meaning while awaiting the emergence of a new interpretation that is relatively more accurate and complete.

Third, Snijders' concept of the human search for truth reaffirms that humans are not God. God possesses a complete and detailed perspective and knowledge. Nothing escapes God's knowledge. This is very different from the human perspective. Humans are not God. Although human knowledge is not limited in its implicit aspects, it is limited in its explicit aspects. Thus, the (complete) identity and (incomplete) non-identity of human knowledge constitute a paradox of knowledge that must be accepted with humility. Therefore, at the end of the search, it is wise to say that "only God knows," "wallahualam bissawwaf." Snijders' basic assumption regarding human truth can serve as a reminder that, no matter how sophisticated interpretive efforts may be, they still imply that the interpreter is human, complete with all their shortcomings. This understanding, once again, allows for the cultivation of moderation in the realm of understanding.

Conclusion

This study shows that the dynamic, paradoxical, and multidimensional nature of knowledge in Snijders' thought is relevant as a foundation for the development of epistemic certainty among individuals and groups in understanding religious texts and phenomena. If Snijders' concepts are truly adopted as a guide in the search for truth, they will lead to an acceptance of interpretive plurality and a willingness to postpone claims of certainty or the finality of meaning. This attitude guides people of faith toward moderation in religious understanding. Another of Snijders' concepts relevant to moderation in religious understanding is that humans are not God, whose knowledge is free from error; therefore, it is inappropriate to treat religious interpretations as absolute, since only God is absolute.

Although the findings of this study can serve as a theoretical basis for strengthening moderation in religious understanding, in practice, Snijders's ideas are difficult for believers to internalize. Therefore, the recommended follow-up research focuses on strategies to raise awareness of the dynamic, paradoxical, and

multidimensional nature of knowledge. This research recommendation is important because an understanding of these characteristics of knowledge is a prerequisite for individuals to adopt a moderate stance.

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