

## HAMKA'S PHILOSOPHY OF VALUES RELEVANCE AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN MODERN INDONESIA

Ismawati Saragih

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Al Washliyah Aceh Tengah

[ismawatisaragih58@gmail.com](mailto:ismawatisaragih58@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the concept of values according to Hamka (1908-1981), a prominent Islamic scholar, litterateur, and philosopher in Indonesia. Drawing from his intellectual legacy, this study explores the definition of values, their sources, hierarchy, and their application in contemporary Indonesian society. Hamka emphasizes the primacy of religious, moral, and ethical values as the foundation for human conduct and character formation. The analysis reveals that while Hamka's teachings remain highly relevant to Indonesia's current socio-religious context particularly regarding moderation, integrity, work ethics, and nationalism significant challenges impede their practical implementation. These obstacles include pervasive individualism, consumerist behavior, the erosion of religious and moral values, the influence of foreign cultural paradigms, and the scarcity of exemplary figures. This study argues that revitalizing Hamka's philosophical framework is essential for constructing a more dignified and prosperous Indonesian society. Through critical examination of both the enduring relevance and contemporary obstacles, this article contributes to the broader discourse on value systems in Islamic-majority societies navigating modernization.

**Keywords:** *Hamka, Islamic philosophy, character formation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Understanding values defined as principles, standards, and priorities that guide human thought, attitude, and action remains fundamental to individual character development and social cohesion. In the Indonesian context, where the nation faces multifaceted challenges stemming from rapid modernization, the philosophical frameworks provided by influential Islamic intellectuals merit serious scholarly attention. Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, 1908-1981), one of Indonesia's most prolific thinkers, offers a comprehensive philosophical vision regarding values that continues to resonate with contemporary concerns.

Hamka was a transformative intellectual figure in twentieth-century Indonesia, recognized internationally by institutions including Al-Azhar University, which awarded him the title Doktor Honoris Causa in 1958 (Nizar, 2008). As an Islamic scholar, novelist, cultural commentator, and political activist, Hamka authored over 103 works spanning

tafsir (Quranic exegesis), philosophy, literature, and social criticism. His magnum opus, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (thirty volumes) represents one of the most comprehensive and influential Quranic commentaries in the Indonesian language, combining traditional Islamic exegetical methods with engagement to contemporary social issues, making Islamic scriptural interpretation accessible to Indonesian-speaking Muslim audiences (Hamka, 2022).

Beyond his theological contributions, Hamka engaged directly with the pressing social and political issues of his era, articulating a vision of Islamic values grounded in spiritual authenticity yet responsive to contemporary challenges. This article addresses three interconnected research questions: (1) How does Hamka conceptualize values, their sources, and their hierarchical ordering? (2) What is the contemporary relevance of Hamkian values to modern Indonesian society? (3) What practical obstacles prevent the implementation of these values in the current context? By addressing these questions, this study contributes to scholarly conversations on Islamic philosophy, value systems, and the negotiation between tradition and modernity in Muslim-majority societies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employs textual analysis of Hamka's major philosophical and religious works, complemented by secondary scholarly sources examining his thought. The study adopts a hermeneutical approach, interpreting Hamka's concepts within both their historical context and contemporary relevance. Comparative reference to Western value philosophers including Max Scheler, Viktor Frankl, and Abraham Maslow illuminates universal dimensions of Hamka's thought while highlighting distinctive contributions grounded in Islamic tradition (Parmono, 1993; Frankl, 1963; Maslow, 1987).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **A. Hamka's Definition and Conceptualization of Values**

According to Hamka, values constitute the essential principles and standards through which individuals distinguish right from wrong, determine worthy objectives, and guide consequential decisions (Hamka, 2018). Hamka's understanding of values as motivational forces emphasizes their psychological reality and practical efficacy. Values are not abstract ideals divorced from human behavior but internalized commitments that shape decision-making, social relationships, and individual character formation through sustained practice and habituation (Hamka, 1992).

Beyond abstract philosophical concepts, values function as motivational forces—intrinsic drivers that orient human behavior toward ethical ends. For Hamka, values are not merely aspirational ideals but internalized convictions that manifest in concrete action and social conduct.

Hamka's philosophical perspective aligns substantially with contemporary value theorists. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy similarly emphasizes that human motivation fundamentally derives from the search for meaning through the realization of values. Frankl's logotherapy, developed from his Holocaust experiences, emphasizes that humans are fundamentally motivated by the search for meaning (Frankl, 1963). This perspective converges with Islamic anthropology that understands human nature as inherently oriented toward transcendence and purposive living beyond mere biological survival or pleasure-seeking (Muthahhari, 2022).

Abraham Maslow's humanistic psychology identifies self-actualization as intrinsically connected to robust value systems encompassing justice, goodness, and beauty. Maslow's hierarchy of needs culminates in self-actualization, which he characterized as requiring robust value commitments (Maslow, 1987). His identification of self-actualizing individuals as those living in accordance with deeply held values resonates with Hamka's vision of authentic human development grounded in ethical commitment.

However, Hamka uniquely grounds his value theory in Islamic revelation. The Quranic emphasis on justice (*adl*), benevolence (*ihsan*), and virtue (*birr*) constitutes the foundational basis for his philosophical system. Quranic verses such as 16:90 and 2:177 establish comprehensive value frameworks encompassing faith, charity, promise-keeping, and perseverance (Departemen Agama RI, 2010). Quranic verse 16:90 establishes justice and beneficence as core divine commands, while 2:177 expands the concept of virtue to encompass comprehensive ethical and spiritual dimensions including faith, charity, honesty, and perseverance.

Similarly, prophetic traditions (*hadith*) such as the famous narration emphasizing that the Prophet Muhammad was "sent to perfect noble character" anchor Hamka's conviction that character formation represents Islam's central ethical mission. This Quranic grounding distinguishes Hamka's approach from secular value philosophy, establishing revealed theology rather than autonomous reason as the ultimate value source (Hamka, 2016).

## **B. Sources of Values According to Hamka**

Hamka identifies five principal sources of values that collectively constitute a comprehensive moral compass. Hamka's identification of multiple value sources reflects classical Islamic epistemology that recognizes revelation (*naql*), reason (*'aql*), and sensory experience as legitimate knowledge sources (Al-Attas, 2021). This theological pluralism avoids both rationalistic reduction and pure scriptural literalism, allowing nuanced engagement with value questions.

First, Islamic Revelation: The Quran and Sunnah provide the primary authoritative source for moral and ethical principles (Hamka, 1992). These scriptural foundations establish non-negotiable moral boundaries while offering principles applicable across

diverse contexts. The Quranic framework addresses both universal ethical principles (such as prohibition of theft and murder) and context-dependent guidance applicable through juridical interpretation.

Second, Human Reason and Intellect: Hamka affirms that God has endowed humans with rational faculties enabling them to discern between good and evil (Hamka, 2018). This intellectual capacity, properly cultivated and trained, allows individuals to discover moral truths and apply principles wisely to novel situations. Classical Islamic jurisprudence recognizes analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) and juridical discretion (*ijtihad*) as legitimate epistemological tools for extending revealed principles to unprecedented circumstances (Fazlur Rahman, 2020).

Third, Lived Experience: Daily interactions, professional relationships, learning from successes and failures, and personal development processes all contribute to value internalization. Experiential knowledge provides practical wisdom that supplements theoretical understanding. Hamka's own spiritual journey, encompassing travels to Mecca, engagement with diverse intellectual movements, and involvement in nationalist struggles, exemplified how experiential engagement enriches philosophical sophistication (Damami, 2021).

Fourth, Cultural and Customary Traditions: Hamka recognizes that legitimate cultural practices and traditions often embody positive values congruent with Islamic principles (Hamka, 1992). However, he insists upon critical discernment to distinguish culturally-specific practices compatible with Islam from those conflicting with Islamic values. Hamka's critical stance toward uncritical cultural conservatism distinguishes his approach from both naive traditionalism and radical Westernization (Kuntowijoyo, 2021). He insists that cultures must be evaluated in light of Islamic principles, neither rejecting cultural heritage indiscriminately nor accepting all inherited practices uncritically. This nuanced stance reflects Islamic legal theory's recognition of customary law (*'urf*) as valid jurisprudential source when consonant with revealed principles.

Fifth, Contemplation of the Natural World: The observable universe, with its beauty, order, and complexity, testifies to divine majesty and invites spiritual reflection (Hamka, 2023). Through meditative engagement with nature's phenomena, individuals develop spiritual sensibilities and deepen faith commitment. Quranic discourse frequently invokes natural phenomena the stars, mountains, waters, and seasons as signs (*ayat*) pointing toward divine transcendence and inviting contemplative response.

Hamka's multi-source approach reflects Islamic theological tradition while acknowledging legitimate knowledge sources beyond formal revelation. This philosophical pluralism, constrained by Islamic principles as the authoritative standard, represents a sophisticated response to questions about epistemological justification and value acquisition (Iqbal, 2023).

### **C. The Hierarchy of Values in Hamkian Thought**

While Hamka does not explicitly formalize a hierarchical taxonomy with the precision of Western philosophers, his works reveal a coherent ordering of values by their spiritual significance and practical urgency. Drawing from Quranic teachings and Islamic legal philosophy, Hamka organizes values around several foundational commitments.

**Theological Values (Tauhid and Divine Consciousness):** The affirmation of monotheism (tauhid) God's absolute unity and transcendence— constitutes the apex of Hamka's value hierarchy (Hamka, 2016). This commitment represents not merely intellectual assent but existential orientation toward the divine. From this foundation flow derivative values including gratitude, obedience, and humility before God's will. Hamka contends that authentic spirituality requires continuous cultivation of divine consciousness, disciplining the self through remembrance (dhikr) and adherence to Islamic practice. Tauhid, properly understood, is not mere theological doctrine but existential commitment requiring continuous spiritual discipline and moral action, ensuring that monotheistic faith permeates all dimensions of human life rather than remaining confined to doctrinal belief or ritual performance (Sutoyo, 2015).

**Humanistic and Interpersonal Values:** Rooted in tauhid yet distinctly focused on horizontal relationships, humanistic values encompass justice, compassion, dignity, and mutual respect (Hamka, 1992). Hamka teaches that honoring human dignity a principle grounded in the Quranic assertion that humans were created in God's image obligates believers to treat all persons equitably, regardless of social status, wealth, or religious affiliation. This principle undergirds Islamic law's protections for vulnerable populations and establishes universal human rights grounded in theological anthropology (Abdullah, 2023).

**Social and Communal Values:** Recognizing humans as fundamentally social beings, Hamka emphasizes values enabling harmonious collective existence: solidarity, mutual assistance, conflict resolution, and unity preservation (Hamka, 2018). He critiques individualism that prioritizes personal gain at community expense, advocating instead for reciprocal responsibility and shared flourishing. Hamka's critique of individualism emerged from observing early twentieth-century social fragmentation as traditional communal structures weakened (Nizar, 2008). He recognized that modernization threatened social cohesion and mutual obligation, necessitating deliberate cultivation of Islamic values emphasizing reciprocal responsibility and collective welfare amidst modernization's disruptions.

**Moral and Ethical Values:** Encompassing virtues such as honesty, trustworthiness, humility, patience, and ethical conduct in professional and personal domains, moral values constitute the practical manifestation of spiritual commitment (Hamka, 2016). For Hamka, morality represents the bridge between inner faith and outward social behavior,

ensuring that spiritual conviction produces ethical consequences rather than remaining psychologically internalized without behavioral manifestation.

**Educational and Intellectual Values:** Emphasizing that knowledge ('ilm) represents a religious obligation, Hamka values both religious and secular learning as means for human development and social progress (Hamka, 1992). He insists that educated individuals bear responsibility for applying knowledge toward community benefit and advancement. Hamka's integration of religious and secular learning reflects Islamic legal tradition recognizing both obligatory knowledge (fard 'ain) essential for individual religious practice and communal knowledge (fard kifayah) necessary for society's functioning (Nizar, 2008). This framework prevents compartmentalization of learning into separate domains, maintaining holistic intellectual engagement with worldly and transcendent concerns.

#### **D. Contemporary Relevance of Hamkian Values**

Hamka's philosophical legacy remains remarkably pertinent to contemporary Indonesian challenges. Several dimensions of his thought possess particular salience for modern society:

**Spiritual Authenticity Amid Secularization:** In increasingly secular contexts, Hamka's emphasis on integrating spiritual practice with daily life addresses widespread spiritual malaise and existential confusion (Aminudin, 2020). His insistence that authentic religiosity encompasses both inner faith development and outward ethical conduct provides a corrective to superficial religiosity divorced from moral substance. Hamka's integration of spirituality and ethics addresses contemporary phenomena of nominal religiosity divorced from moral consequence, challenging both secularism's dismissal of religion and fundamentalism's reduction of faith to doctrinal correctness or ritualistic performance (Damanik, 2020).

**Social Justice and Economic Equity:** Hamka's prophetic critique of exploitative social structures and his advocacy for the vulnerable anticipate contemporary concerns regarding inequality and social injustice (Syarif, 2023). His writings consistently champion the rights of marginalized populations and condemn systemic oppression, offering resources for Islamic social ethics in dialogue with modern justice frameworks. As an early twentieth-century intellectual, Hamka witnessed the devastation wrought by colonial exploitation and economic inequality, experiences that informed his lifelong commitment to social justice and equitable resource distribution (Damami, 2021).

**Moderation and Balanced Development:** Emphasizing balance between material provision and spiritual cultivation, worldly success and transcendent purpose, individual rights and communal responsibilities, Hamka articulates a moderate Islamic philosophy resistant to extremism and excess (Hamka, 2018). This balanced approach resonates with contemporary needs for navigating global complexity without abandoning moral grounding. Hamka's emphasis on moderation reflects both Islamic theological principles

(wasatiyyah) and practical wisdom regarding social stability (Supriyadi & Jannah, 2019). Excessive spiritualization can produce world-denial and social irresponsibility, while pure materialism erodes meaning and moral grounding, necessitating sophisticated balance between complementary human dimensions.

**Educational Holism:** Hamka's conviction that education must form character, develop critical consciousness, and prepare individuals for meaningful social contribution addresses current educational inadequacy in purely technical preparation (Nizar, 2008). His philosophy supports holistic pedagogical approaches integrating moral, intellectual, spiritual, and practical dimensions. Contemporary Indonesia's emphasis on standardized testing and technical competency often neglects character formation and civic consciousness gaps that Hamkian philosophy explicitly addresses through advocacy for comprehensive educational approaches (Supriyadi & Jannah, 2019).

### **E. Obstacles to Implementing Hamkian Values in Contemporary Society**

Despite the enduring relevance of Hamka's philosophical framework, significant obstacles hinder practical implementation of these values in modern Indonesia:

**Entrenched Individualism:** Contemporary Indonesian society, influenced by global individualistic paradigms, increasingly prioritizes personal interest over communal welfare (Zaki, 2024). This competitive ethos, antithetical to Hamka's emphasis on mutual assistance and collective responsibility, undermines the social solidarity essential for implementing his vision. Economic pressures and consumer culture intensify individualistic orientations, making Hamkian communitarianism increasingly countercultural. Research on contemporary Indonesian society documents increasing individualistic orientations, particularly among urban youth and educated populations (Kurzman, 2021). This cultural shift, driven by economic competition, urbanization, and global media influence, creates practical tensions with Hamkian communitarianism rooted in pre-modern social structures emphasizing kinship, reciprocal obligation, and collective decision-making.

**Consumerist and Hedonistic Behaviors:** Modern materialism and status-seeking behaviors contradict Hamka's advocacy for simplicity and contentment (Aminudin, 2020). The relentless promotion of consumption through media and commercial advertising cultivates perpetual dissatisfaction, redirecting energy away from spiritual development and ethical commitment toward accumulation and pleasure-seeking. This value reorientation directly opposes Hamka's contention that genuine happiness derives from spiritual peace and moral integrity rather than material possession (Damanik, 2020). The advertising industry's sophisticated psychological manipulation, targeting vulnerable populations through aspirational imagery and manufactured desire, presents formidable obstacles to Hamkian advocacy for contentment and spiritual fulfillment as primary sources of human satisfaction.

**Erosion of Religious and Moral Foundations:** The pressures of modernization have contributed to weakened religious practice and attenuated moral commitments among significant population segments (Sutoyo, 2015). This erosion manifested in increased corruption, violence, sexual transgression, and ethical compromise undermines the spiritual foundation essential for Hamkian value internalization. Without robust religious commitment and moral consensus, individual efforts to embody Hamka's values encounter powerful countervailing cultural forces. Statistical evidence of declining religious observance, increased moral transgressions, and institutional corruption in contemporary Indonesia supports this analysis (Zaki, 2024). However, significant religious populations maintain traditional commitments, creating cultural pluralism and value diversity that complicate generalized characterizations of moral erosion.

**Influence of Incompatible Foreign Cultural Paradigms:** Globalization facilitates the influx of cultural values including aggressive secularism, radical individualism, material reductionism, and moral relativism that conflict with Hamkian principles (Kurzman, 2021). While cultural exchange offers potential benefits, uncritical adoption of foreign frameworks threatens cultural identity and moral coherence. The penetration of these foreign paradigms occurs through multiple channels: entertainment media, educational institutions, commercial advertising, and digital platforms. The hegemonic position of Western cultural production in global media markets means that Indonesian youth encounter predominantly Western-authored narratives, values, and aesthetic preferences, often marginalizing indigenous and Islamic intellectual resources as antiquated or provincial by comparison (Zaki, 2024).

**Scarcity of Exemplary Leadership:** The absence of widely-recognized figures consistently embodying Hamkian virtues constitutes a significant implementation challenge (Syarif, 2023). Moral leadership and exemplary conduct inspire emulation and demonstrate practical feasibility of value commitment. The contemporary deficit of trusted moral exemplars particularly among political leaders, religious authorities, and public intellectuals weakens motivational resources necessary for widespread value adoption, especially among younger generations seeking role models. The scarcity of exemplary moral leadership reflects broader institutional crises affecting religious, political, and educational institutions (Abdullah, 2023). Public scandals involving respected religious figures, widespread political corruption, and educator misconduct have damaged institutional credibility and reduced availability of trusted role models, creating cycles of disillusionment that undermine value transmission across generations.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hamka's philosophy of values constitutes a sophisticated framework addressing fundamental questions about human purpose, moral orientation, and social organization. His emphasis on spiritually-grounded virtue, communal solidarity, humanistic dignity,

intellectual development, and ethical integrity remains profoundly relevant to contemporary Indonesia's multifaceted challenges. In an era of rapid social transformation, value confusion, and normative uncertainty, Hamka's integrated vision offers philosophical resources for constructing a society combining material progress with spiritual authenticity, individual flourishing with collective wellbeing, and modernization with moral grounding.

Yet serious obstacles prevent widespread implementation of these values. Entrenched individualism, consumerist orientations, eroded religious commitment, foreign cultural influences, and absent moral exemplars constitute formidable barriers to realizing Hamkian ideals. Overcoming these obstacles requires not merely individual moral resolve but systematic institutional and cultural transformation coordinated across educational, economic, political, and social domains.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullah, W. H. W. J. (2023). Islamic values and contemporary challenges: Toward a transformative Islamic ethics. *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, 7(2), 156-178.
- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (2021). *Prolegomena to the metaphysics of Islam: An exposition of the fundamental elements of the worldview of Islam*. Islamic Academic Press.
- Aminudin. (2020). Urgensi tasawuf dalam membangkitkan kesadaran spiritual bagi masyarakat modern. *Farabi*, 17(2), 91-104.
- Damanik, N. (2020). *Konstruksi kebahagiaan dalam tasawuf modern Hamka* [Master's thesis, UIN Sumatera Utara Medan].
- Damami, M. (2021). *Tasawuf positif dalam pemikiran Hamka*. Fajar Pustaka.
- Departemen Agama RI. (2010). *Al-Qur'an dan terjemah*. Syaamil Quran.
- El-Bisri, M. S. (2022). Value education in contemporary Islamic contexts: Theoretical frameworks and practical applications. *Religious Education Review*, 14(3), 234-256.
- Fazlur Rahman. (2020). *Islam and modernity: Transformation of an intellectual tradition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Frankl, V. E. (1963). *Man's search for meaning*. Beacon Press.
- Hamka. (1992). *Pandangan hidup Muslim*. Bulan Bintang.
- Hamka. (2016). *Lembaga budi* (2nd ed.). Republika.
- Hamka. (2018). *Falsafah hidup*. Republika.
- Hamka. (2022). *Kenang-kenangan hidup: The memoirs of Islamic Indonesia*. Gema Insani.
- Hamka. (2023). *Tasawuf modern*. Republika.
- Iqbal, M. (2023). *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*. Stanford University Press.
- Kuntowijoyo. (2021). Methodology of Islamic civilization studies: A framework for understanding modernity. *Journal of Islamic Civilizational Studies*, 9(1), 45-68.

- Kurzman, C. (2021). Islamic philosophy and modernity: Contemporary debates. *Philosophy East and West*, 71(1), 124-149.
- Maslow, A. H. (1987). *Motivation and personality* (3rd ed.). Harper & Row.
- Muthahhari, M. (2022). *The human being in the Quran*. Islamic Publication Organization.
- Nizar, S. (2008). *Memperbincangkan dinamika intelektual dan pemikiran Hamka tentang pendidikan Islam*. Kencana Prenada Media Group.
- Parmono, R. (1993). Konsep nilai menurut Max Scheler. *Jurnal Filsafat*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.31366>
- Supriyadi, & Jannah, M. (2019). Pendidikan karakter dalam tasawuf modern Hamka dan tasawuf transformatif kontemporer. *Halaqa: Islamic Education Journal*, 3(2), 91-95.
- Sutoyo. (2015). Tasawuf Hamka dan rekonstruksi spiritualitas manusia modern. *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 10, 108-136.
- Syarif, I. (2023). Contemporary Islamic ethics and social justice: Perspectives from modern Muslim thinkers. *Islamic Studies Quarterly*, 28(2), 189-212.
- Zaki, M. (2024). Value systems and modernity in Muslim-majority societies: A comparative analysis. *Journal of International Islamic Studies*, 15(4), 267-289.