

RELIGIOUS SKEPTICISM IN THOMAS PAINE'S ESSAY ENTITLED *THE AGE OF REASON (PART I)*

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ABSTRACT

Esai *The Age of Reason (Part I)* merupakan sebuah tulisan yang berisi pandangan Thomas Paine mengenai agama. Dalam esai ini, Paine mengungkapkan argumennya mengenai hubungan antara keberadaan Tuhan dan kebenaran sebuah agama. Argumen-argumen tersebut disusun berdasarkan kepercayaan Paine terhadap paham Deisme. Pada akhirnya, paham Deisme lah yang membuat Thomas Paine menjadi seseorang yang skeptis terhadap agama.

Skripsi ini menganalisis sikap skeptis Thomas Paine terhadap institusi agama. Penulis memilih esai *The Age of Reason (Part I)* yang ditulis oleh Thomas Paine sebagai objek penelitian. Hal yang menjadi fokus dalam skripsi ini adalah bagaimana argumen-argumen Thomas Paine menunjukkan keyakinannya terhadap Deisme, dan membuatnya menjadi seseorang yang skeptis terhadap agama. Untuk mengetahui hal ini, penulis menggunakan pendekatan filsafat agama dengan memakai teori *Religious Skepticism* milik J. L. Schellenberg.

Dari analisis, dapat disimpulkan bahwa keyakinan Thomas Paine terhadap Deisme memiliki arti penting terhadap sikap skeptisnya pada agama. Deisme yang mengutamakan penggunaan akal dalam memahami agama menemukan banyak kesalahan yang terdapat pada institusi agama sehingga membuat sikap skeptis Thomas Paine terhadap agama semakin besar.

Kata kunci: *agama, deisme, sikap skeptis pada agama*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

There is a lot of ways to convey opinion about a certain issue. It can be done in writing or orally. Essay is the most common written form to express human's thought. Blake and McBee state that essay is a kind of literary work reflecting the writer's idea towards certain issues. Moreover, essay has various characteristics depend on the issue that is brought up by the writer. It may discuss an important issue or a strange one. On the other hand, the form of essay also can be differentiated into systematic and casual. Furthermore, there are four types of essay: description, exposition, argumentation, and narration (Blake and McBee, 1981: xi). *The Age of Reason (Part I)* by Thomas Paine is an example of argumentation essay. An argumentation essay is a type of essay that conveys the thought of the writer towards a certain issue, and it usually heads for persuading public assumption to choose pros and cons for that issue (Blake and McBee, 1981: xi).

The Age of Reason (Part I), actually called *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*, expresses Thomas Paine's thought about the orthodox Christianity. Published in January 1794, *The Age of Reason (Part I)* helped popularized deism (Foner, 1995: 846). Through this essay, Thomas Paine explains that there was too much political power and was often corrupt in the institution of the church (Bakhtiar, 2007: 91). His refusal towards the church authority leads him to a doubtful feeling towards religion. He refuses every idea about God that comes from divine revelation. According to him, the only way to utter God's existence is by using the human reason (Bakhtiar, 2007: 91). This idea attracts the writer to make further study to religious skepticism towards organized religions.

Therefore, the writer wants to discuss the issue of religious skepticism in Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason (Part I)*. It is because the writer wants to show Thomas Paine's idea towards religion, especially organized religions throughout the world.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE TUDY

The main aim of the study is to understand the issue religious skepticism in *The Age of Reason (Part I)*. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to observe the concept of religion and discuss the idea of deism proposed by Thomas Paine in *The Age of Reason (Part I)* that leads him to be a skeptic towards religions.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. METHOD OF THE STUDY

2.1.1 METHOD OF RESEARCH

The writer uses library research method to get the data for the paper through books, internet website, and e-books in discussing the problem on this paper. According to Hikmat, method of research is a systematical steps required to carry out a research (Hikmat, 2011: 98).

2.1.2 METHOD OF APPROACH

Semi states that method of approach is a view or comprehension that is applied in observing and analyzing the object of the study (Semi, 2012:79). The writer uses the philosophy of religion approach in this thesis. Philosophy of religion is an effort in discussing the main elements of religion. Moreover, this effort should be visceral, rational, comprehensive, systematic, logic, and free (Bakhtiar, 2007:14).

2.2. DISCUSSION

2.2.1 DEISM IN *THE AGE OF REASON (PART I)*

The Age of Reason (Part I) is a form of critic towards religious proposition, specifically Christian proposition. In the essay, Thomas Paine shows his disagreement towards the Christian proposition by presenting the concept and example of deism. He persuades his readers by showing some examples of reasonable thought about religion. Through giving an explanation and critical thinking towards deism to his readers, then, he captures the fallacies in Christian proposition that leads him to religious skepticism. There are four main points of deism that he presents in his essay. These ideas of deism are the basic device for him to dig out the fallacies in the Christian religion system.

According to Paine, a deist believes in the existence of one God who has great power, wisdom, and kindness to His creatures. A deist is also able to comprehend the attributes of God through His immense creation. Moreover, after comprehending the attributes of God, a Deist will respond by copying those attributes and applying them in the daily life. That is the way how a deist becomes a religious person. In comprehending the attributes of God, humans need to use their reason so that the religious attitude will not contradict to it. Reason is the basis for humans to comprehend religious proposition. The religious proposition based on reason will not cause any doubts towards that proposition. In other words, the more logic that is used, the stronger religious proposition that is believed.

According to Thomas Paine, the main idea about deism above has four supporting ideas. These ideas are the pillars of deism that is explained in this essay. The first idea is the existence of God as the ultimate cause of the universe. The second is The Creation and its complex mechanisms as the evidence that the God exists. The third idea is deists' refusal towards revelation, miracle, and mystery. The last idea is the deists' response to God's beneficences.

2.2.2 RELIGIOUS SKEPTICISM IN *THE AGE OF REASON (PART I)*

Deism believed by Thomas Paine makes him put the Christian religious proposition into question. From the four ideas of deism conveyed in his essay, he starts to doubt the truth of Christian religious proposition. In *The Age of Reason (Part I)* he discusses matters in Christian religious proposition and the Bible that seems strange to him. The strange matters in Christian religious proposition are discussed by presenting the fallacies in the elements of Christian religious system, namely: creed, code, cultus, and community. Nevertheless, in his essay, Paine discusses more fallacies in creed than any other elements. It is for the reason that creed is the most basic belief of a religion. By means of creed people believe and convince a religious proposition. Therefore, Thomas Paine skepticism or doubt pays more attention of creed in his essay.

3. CONCLUSION

The result analysis shows that religious skepticism in *The Age of Reason (Part I)* has strong relation to deism concept that is believed by Thomas Paine. The four

ideas of deism have important roles for Thomas Paine to formulate his skeptical attitude towards religion in his essay. The existence of God as the creator, His Creation and its mechanisms, the refusals towards supernatural things, and the good deeds to other men as the reflection of God's kindness to humans are the four ideas that play major role to form Thomas Paine's religious skepticism. Through the ideas, it is concluded that contemplating religion should be done by using reason and sense.

The priority of using reason and sense in contemplating religion causes so many doubts and questions towards religion, in this case Christian. Creed, code, cultus, and community are the elements of Christian religious proposition that are discussed by Thomas Paine in *The Age of Reason (Part I)*. Thomas Paine mentions that there are a lot of fallacies in the elements of Christian religious proposition if people involve sense and reason in contemplating religion. The sacred stories, the rules, the rituals, and even the people who have important role in the religion are put into questions. On the other hand, Thomas Paine also refuses the fact that Bible is the word of God because there is not enough valid evidence that can prove the Bible is the word of God. Paine says that the creation that people see is the genuine proof of the word of God.

From the analysis, the writer concludes that Thomas Paine prioritizes the using of sense and reason in contemplating religion. As the result, there are a lot of fallacies found in the Christian religious proposition. Those fallacies makes Thomas Paine possesses doubts towards Christian religious proposition. Thus, those doubts lead

Paine to be a religious skeptic. Moreover, Thomas Paine believes in the existence of God as the creator of the universe and its mechanism, and so does he believe in the existence of religion that preaches the proposition which agrees with the concept of deism. Therefore, this believe makes him a categorical religious skeptic.

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