IN THE NAME OF GOD

International Journal of Hekmat

A Critical, Intellectual Journal

Volume 1. Autumn 2009

Editorial Board

Hossein Kalbasi Ashtari (Ph.D)
Hamid Reza Ayatollahi (Ph.D)
Ebrahim Dadjoo (Ph.D)
S.Javad Miri (Ph.D)
Siavosh Naderi Farsani (Ph.D)
S.Mohsen Sadat Kiaei (Ph.D)
Shahriar Shojaeipour (Ph.D)
Mohammad Hossein Sorouraddin (Ph.D)
Hadi Vakili (Ph.D)

International Editorial Advisory Board

Prof. Reza Davari Ardakani (Iran)
Prof. William Chittick (United States)
Prof. Yanis Eshots (Latvia)
Prof. Ibrahim Kalin (Turkey, United States)
Prof. Muhammad Legenhausen (United States, Iran)
Prof. James Morris (England)
Dr. Parvin Peyrovani (Pakistan, United States)
Dr. Hossein Ziyaeyan (Iran, United States)

Editorial Executive

Editor Manager: Ali Akbar Rashad
Editor-in-Chief: Ali Reza Qaeminia
Assistant Editor: Parvin Kazemzadeh
Editor: Sadrodin Moosavi Jashni
Designer: Amir Hossein Heidari

The International Journal of Hekmat is being distributed internationally in subjects including: Philosophy, Epistemology, Religious Research and Comparative Studies with Analytical-Critical point of view for studying the most important contemporary issues and theoretical questions and with the intention of establishing a space for dialogue among the thinkers of the foresaid areas. This Journal is published by Islamic Research Institute for Culture and Thought in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Themes of the next issues are as follows: Globalisation (Religion & Culture), Hermeneutics, The language of Religion, Religious Philosophies, Philosophy of Culture, Philosophy of Media, The language of Holy Books, Philosophical Foundations of Political Ethics, Religious Science, Science and Religion.

Mailing Address: Islamic Research Institute for Culture and Thought, No. 2, second St.(Pajouheshgah St.), Ahmad Qasir Ave. Tehran, Iran.
Postal Code:1514615911, **FAX**: 0098 21 88764792.
E-mail: info@alhikmah.org
URL: www.alhikmah.org
ISSN: 2008-577x

Instruction for Contributors

In preparing the manuscript for submission to ***The International Journal of Hekmat***, please note the following simple procedures to ensure that we receive your submission in a standard format that is easy to edit and process. The editors of ***Hekmat*** reserve all the rights to make final decisions regarding papers submitted for possible publications.

Submission of a manuscript to ***Hekmat*** is understood to imply that the manuscript is not under consideration by any other journal – even any site - and is offered to ***Hekmat*** for first publication.

Articles should be typed for submission to the editor on standard 8x11-inch paper, double-spaced, one-inch margins around. If you are printing from a word processor, please use letter quality printing (Please note: A4 size paper is also acceptable). Notes should be placed at the end of the article.

Illustrations: Tables and Figures should be saved as separate files. Each file should be named clearly and logically. We prefer figures to be saved in either TIFF (tagged image file format) or EPS (encapsulated postscript) formats. Illustrations should be scanned and saved at 300 dots per inch in order to obtain the best quality reproduction possible. High quality reproducible (i.e. high resolution output) hardcopy paper print-outs must be supplied for all figures/illustrations tables, and must be identical to the file versions.

We prefer Microsoft Word, but can also accept texts in Word Perfect. Please clearly indicate which word processing program you used, along with the version (i.e., Word Perfect 6.01). This makes the conversion process much easier.

Where to send the Articles: Send two hardcopies plus file(s) on removable media or email copy to: Islamic Research Institute for Culture and Thought, No .2, second St. (Pajouheshgah St.), Ahmad Qasir Ave. Tehran, Iran. Postal Code: 1514615911, FAX: 0098 21 88764792, E-mail: ***info@alhikmah.org***

Each author will receive two copies of the issue of ***Hekmat*** in which his or her article appears.

Abstracts and Keywords: Due to the growing number of people using online versions of journals and due to the growing amount of articles available online, we ask that you write a 100 word Abstract for your article. Likewise, we ask that you create 5 to 6 key words by which would-be interested readers can find your article through a web search. The abstracts should appear before your article and keywords should follow.

Documentation: Where abbreviation is appropriate, use the standard abbreviations for books of the Bible, and other ancient documents. If these are not available to you, write out full titles and the editors will abbreviate. Please do not abbreviated titles of journals or books in your text or notes, rather, provide full titles.

Endnote form follows of Chicago Manual of Style. It is necessary to include words such as "Press" or "Publishing Company." Please italicize book titles rather than underlining.

Thematic or other major articles are limited to approximately 10-15 pages (on standard 8x11-inch papers, double-spaced, one-inch margins around) or 3500 to 7000 words.

Book reviews are limited to a maximum of 1,000 words. Please include the following in the title of the review: book title, author, publisher, year and page count.

Table of Contents

Articles

On the Plurality of Religious Pluralisms 5
Muhammad Legenhausen
Is Mowlana Jalal al-Din Rumi a Religious Pluralist? 43
Ali Akbar Rashad
Religions: Unity or multiplicity? 59
Alireza Qaeminia
Religious Ambiguity in Hick's Religious Pluralism 73
Amir Dastmalchian
Tryst with Pluralism: Rhetoric and Practice of Religious… 89
Chakraborty Amitava
Hick, Pluralism, and Category Mistake 101
Reza Akbari
Civilizational Clash or Co-Existence: An Islamic Perspective 115
Noor Mohammad Osmani
Pluralism definition - What does pluralism mean? 133
Abdul Sattar Shaikh

Book Review

Religious Pluralism in John Kick's Philosophy… 149

On the Plurality of Religious Pluralisms

Muhammad Legenhausen[*]

Abstract

There is an overwhelming plurality of varieties of pluralism. In this paper types of pluralism are distinguished so that we can understand what is meant by religious pluralism. Even after religious pluralism is distinguished from other sorts of pluralism, a variety of positions could be considered versions of religious pluralism. Among the different sorts of religious pluralism, we may distinguish reductive from non-reductive varieties. The proponents of reductive forms of religious pluralism attempt to identify a common element among different religions on the basis of which the religions are successful in some specified way, while non-reductive pluralists hold that God's guidance through the various religions need not be confined to elements common to them. Religious pluralisms may also be divided between equality pluralisms and degree pluralisms. Pluralisms may be focused on doctrines, practices, institutions, communities, or individual believers. Seven major types of religious pluralism are divided with regard to the types of values that are disputed: soteriological, normative, epistemological, alethic, ethical, deontological, and hermetic.

Keywords: *religious pluralism, non-reductive religious pluralism, soteriological pluralism, normative pluralism, epistemological pluralism, alethic pluralism, ethical pluralism, deontological pluralism, hermetic pluralism.*

---

*. American Professor, Teaching and doing research at The Imam Khomeini High Education and Research Institute, Qom, Iran. E-mail: legenhausen@yahoo.com

I. Introduction

There is an overwhelming plurality of varieties of pluralism. In what follows, I will attempt to distinguish among them so that we can understand what is meant by *religious* pluralism. I will argue that even after religious pluralism is distinguished from other sorts of pluralism, a variety of positions could be considered versions of religious pluralism. Among the different sorts of religious pluralism, we may distinguish *reductive* from *non-reductive* varieties. The proponents of reductive forms of religious pluralism attempt to identify a common element among different religions on the basis of which the religions are successful in some specified way. According to non-reductive religious pluralism, to the contrary, God guides whomever He will,[1] not only by virtue of features common to several religions, but by their unique divine qualities, as well. More specifically, while reductive pluralism is the position that what is good about religions is what is common to a plurality of them, non-reductive pluralism is the view that each of a number of religions has unique features through which God may guide people, even if there is no common essence to all religions.

II. History of Pluralism

The term *pluralism* was first used to signify a metaphysical doctrine by Christian Wolff (1679-1754), and later popularized by William James (1842-1910). A different but related sense of pluralism is *moral pluralism*. While metaphysical pluralists hold that there is an irreducible plurality of types of substance, truths, or original principles, *moral pluralists* hold that there is an irreducible plurality of independent moral values. The two sorts of pluralism, metaphysical and moral, are eloquently linked in the work of Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997). Berlin defended moral

pluralism throughout his long career. Political theorists use the term for systems in which a variety of ways of life are permitted to coexist or are encouraged. Perhaps the best place to look for a discussion of pluralism in this sense is in the more recent writings of the late John Rawls (1921-2002), particularly in his *Political Liberalism*.[2] Rawls speaks of competing comprehensive systems of thought and value (for example, various religious systems, various theories of socialism, ethical humanism, etc.) whose differences can be expected to persist in democratic societies.i Rawls then attempts to show that reasonable people who hold differing comprehensive views will develop an overlapping consensus with regard to basic procedural principles of justice as fairness. Finally, there is religious pluralism, or rather, there are religious pluralisms, for the label has been used for different and often confused claims. Some writers use the term "religious pluralism" for a theological view that allows salvation for the adherents of different religions and concedes some sort of validity to a plurality of religions. Many other writers, however, use the term in a political sense, for a position that advocates the acceptance of and respect for the followers of different religions. All too often, the different uses of the term are confused.[3]

III. Equality and Degree Pluralisms

We can give a rather abstract definition of religious pluralism by saying that it is a doctrine according to which some sort of favorable attribution is ascribed to a plurality of religions. This definition has the advantage of making it crystal clear that we can expect to find a wide variety of positions that could be described by the term *religious pluralism*. The variety is so wide that the claim that someone accepts religious pluralism in this sense is almost trivial.

To hold that some favorable attribution is properly ascribed to a religion is to say that there is some value of which the religion partakes. One could, for example, say that the regular practice of some religion is good for one's psychological health. In this case we could say that there is a value, psychological health, and that the religion in question partakes of this value or has a salutary effect in achieving this value.

Some formalism will help to add precision to the types of pluralism and exclusivism discussed (and to scare away the fainthearted). The main purpose of the logic is not to prove specific theses about pluralism and exclusivism, but as an instrument to help keep the varieties from being lumped together; so, rules of inference and other niceties will not be introduced. The formalism is that of a standard second order logic with second order quantification limited to monadic predicates. Quantifiers are restricted in the manner stipulated with the introduction of different kinds of variables. Unbound variables are used as constants.

The claim that a religion, *r,* is subject to a favorable estimation due to some value, *V,* will be abbreviated as *Vr*. We may then formulate a minimal religious pluralism (MRP) as follows:

MRP: *3r 3r' (r:t:-r')* & 3 *V(Vr* & *Vr')*

Here we let *r* with or without primes be used for religions and *V* for values. The definition just says that there are at least two religions that share some value. I am tempted to say that no one would deny minimal religious pluralism, but since fanaticism is not rational, caution is to be advised. We may, however, assert that no one could reasonably deny minimal religious pluralism (given the fairly obvious assumptions that there is more than one religion, and that more than one is not completely devoid of any value).

In order to go beyond minimal religious pluralism toward

versions of pluralism about which there may be reasonable differences of opinion, two parameters must be specified: (1) the sort of value to be considered, and (2) the scope of the plurality attached to this value. There are all sorts of positive status that can be claimed for one or more religions. Religions are said to contribute to mental health, to facilitate social arrangements, to lead to salvation, to be true, to be ordained by God, to have a long and rich tradition, and many other things.

If *V** is some value that is considered particularly crucial to a religion by its followers, we could formulate a minimal religious pluralism with respect to that value as follows.

MRPV: 3r 3r′ (rt:-r′)* & *(V*r* & *V*r′)*

This merely says that at least two religions have the favored value. This, however, would be consistent with an ecumenism that holds that salvation, for example, can be gained through various evangelical churches, but not through the Catholic Church, and not through Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. Religious pluralism with regard to salvation is normally understood to allow that all the major faith traditions provide avenues to salvation.

RPV: VrV*r*

Some of the positive things said about religions make specific reference to their adherents, while other attributions apply to the doctrines, rituals or historical features of religions without making any claims about their followers. For example, with regard to adherents it has been claimed that some religions provide a framework of beliefs and practices within which some their followers have mystical experiences of various kinds. A different sort of example is the claim that the adherents of different religions are entitled to certain rights, e.g., rights of worship. With regard to the content of religions it is said that

some religions prescribe beautiful ceremonies, of some it is said that their creeds are true, and of some that the rules they prescribe are morally commendable.

An important way of stopping short of pluralism is to claim that although each of several religions has some particular positive status, they do not have the status *equally*. For example, a Buddhist might hold that all the major religions of the world provide means to obtain peace of mind, but that the means provided by Buddhism is more efficient, or leads to a deeper sense of peace of mind, or brings quicker or longer lasting peace of mind. I don't know of a name that anyone has given for this sort of position, although it has been held by many philosophers and theologians. We might call it *degree pluralism,* but we should keep in mind that many modem defenders (as well as opponents) of religious pluralism would not call this a form of pluralism at all. They define pluralism in terms of a strict *equality* of status. Peter Byrne, for example defines religious pluralism as a three part claim:

(1) All major religious traditions are equal in respect of making common reference to a single transcendent, sacred reality.

(2) All major traditions are likewise equal in respect of offering some means or other to human salvation.

(3) All major traditions are equal in their inability to provide a norm for interpreting the others, and offer limited, revisable accounts of the nature of the sacred.[4]

Byrne's position might be described as a kind of *equality pluralism,* as opposed to *degree pluralism.*

We might abbreviate the claim that religions rand *r'* are equal in the degree to which they have the value *V* as *d(Vr)=d(Vr').* Minimal equality pluralism (MEP) could then be defined as follows:

MEP: *3r 3r' (n=r')* & 3 *V(d(Vr)=d(Vr');;t:O).*

Byrne's equality pluralism mentioned above is actually a form of equality pluralism defined with reference to three specific values, but with the religions being restricted to the "major traditions". So, Byrne's equality pluralism (BEP) stipulates that for any rand *r',* if each of them is a major tradition (MT), then with respect to the values mentioned in his three clauses *(Vi, v2, V3),* both rand *r'* will have all three values to the same positive degree.

BEP: *VrVr'((MTr* & *MTr')--+(d(Vir)=d(Vir'):t:O* &
d(V2r)=d(V2r'):t:O &
d(V3r)=d(V3r'):t:O)

It would seem to be an unlikely coincidence if all the major religions coincided on these three values, referring to a transcendent reality, offering a way to salvation, and giving norms and an account of the sacred. One could still be an equality pluralist by holding that the average degree of the values of all the major religions are the same. One might be better at salvation, and another at norms, and another at describing the sacred, but on average, the merits and deficiencies of each average out to the exact same value. While this sort of view would be more plausible than BEP, it still seems to require a leap of faith. Why should we expect the average value of all the major traditions to be exactly the same? It would be another thing to say that an impartial observer subject to certain restrictions or limited information might be incapable of deciding which of competing traditions has greater average value, but we will examine this epistemological version of religious pluralism in greater detail below.

MEP is a not really a stronger claim than MRP, because for any value *V* we could define an absolute version of this value, *V',* as follows:

V'r if and only if *d(Vr»O.*

A degree pluralism (DP) with respect to some value *V* could be defined by saying that there are a plurality of religions each of which has the value *V* in excess of degree *n*. (Here and in what follows we can consider *r* to range over some class of religions, such as Byrne's "maj or traditions" with respect to which claims of religious pluralism are debated.) We abbreviate the claim that *r* has value *V* exceeding degree *n: d(Vr»n.*

DP: *3r 3r' (n=r')* & *d(Vr»n* & *d(Vr'»n.*

Whether or not one admits to a degree pluralism with respect to a given value for a variety of religions, one may hold that a unique favored religion, *r*,* has this value to a degree not matched by any other religion. This could be considered a kind of religious *exclusivism.* This sort of claim may be considered a version of degree exclusivism (DE), the view that a favored religion has superiority to all others with respect to the value *V,* and it could be formulated as follows:

DE: *d(Vr*»n* & *~3r(d(Vr~d(Vr*)).*

This says that one's favored religion, *r* * exceeds some degree of the value *V* under consideration, and that there is no religion that exceeds or equals the degree to which *r** possesses *V* DE and DP are compatible, that is, one could hold that there are a variety of religions that exceed a standard degree of value, although one religion has that value to a greater degree than any other. This may be formulated as follows.

DE + DP: *d(Vr*»n* & *3r ((r:t:r*)* & *d(Vr»n)* & *~3r(d(Vr~d(Vr*)).*

The favored religion exceeds the standard degree of value *V;* another religion also exceeds this standard, but no religion has *V* to an equal or greater degree than the favored religion.

A more substantive form of degree pluralism (SDP) that

remains consistent with DE could be formulated by stipulating that for some standard degree of value, *n, all* the maj or religions have the value (or values) in question to a degree surpassing *n*.

SDP: Vr *d(Vr»n.*

Even if all the major religions meet the same value standards, it could still be the case that one of them far outshines the others. This would seem to characterize the view ofIbn 'Arabi (1165-1240) who wrote:

> All the revealed religions *[sham'i]* are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions: that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the light of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null *(bati!)* by abrogation - that is the opinion of the ignorant.[5]

Just as we defined an almost trivial version of religious pluralism (MRP), we could also define a minimal version of religious exclusivism (MRE), according to which there is at least one value that the favored religion possesses uniquely.

MRE: ::3 *V(Vr*& Vr(Vr-H=r*)).*

This says that the favored religion has some value that no other religion has (i.e., that for any religion, if it has this value, then it is the favored one). Just as MRP and MEP are equivalent (as long as we can define our values as we like), so too, minimal religious exclusivism is equivalent to what might be called minimal superiority exclusivism (MSE).

MSE: ::3 *VVr(r#*~dVr*>dVr).*

Obviously, MRE implies MSE, because if *r** has a value that no other religion has, then it has that value to a degree greater than that of any other religion. MSE implies MRE because if *r** has a degree *n* of *V* that is not matched or exceeded by any other religion, we may define another value *V′* such that *V′r* if and only if *di/r>»,* and then *V′* will satisfy the definition of MRE.

It is not plausible to deny MRE and MSE. Each religion that has any value at all probably has its own unique values. Recall that value is to be understood here as that in virtue of which any positive attribution is made about a religion. One might hold that a given religion is valuable because of the holy days or ceremonies that are unique to that religion. In order to go beyond such empty formalism, one must move beyond these considerations to examine specific values and their merits.

As mentioned earlier, Byrne does not speak of the equality of religions, but of religious traditions. The difference can be crucial. For Muslims, religion, or *din,* is what God has revealed to guide us to Him. Religious traditions, however, include all sorts of things that humans have gathered in their attempts to follow religion. One might be an equality pluralist about religious traditions (with regard to some specific value) while taking a more exclusivist view about religions; that is, one could hold that God's guidance for man is to be found in a single religion, but that the religious traditions of mankind fall so far short of what God offers us that none of these manmade traditions can be said to be any better than any of the others. On the other hand, one could take the reverse sort of position and hold that although God has revealed several distinct forms of guidance for human beings, so that there are several true and divinely revealed religions, the followers of all but one of these

religions have gone astray by adding and subtracting to and from divine guidance in their cumulative traditions, while there is one religious tradition that has remained faithful to divine guidance in a manner superior to the other major religious traditions. I do not intend to defend either of these positions, but the difference between them needs to be kept clear when we attempt to evaluate religious pluralism.

Before we decide whether to be in favor of religious pluralism or not, we have to determine exactly what value is being attributed to what multiplicity of religions or religious traditions. Although people have said some pretty silly things about religion, no one would reasonably agree to absolute religious pluralism (ARP), that is, no one has ever claimed that anything good that can be said of any religion can be said of all of them, with a few important exceptions. Some atheists contend that this is vacuously true of all religions. Some religious believers define *religion* and *religious* in such an exclusive manner that they contend that there is only one religion and only one religious tradition, and so would agree that whatever is good about one is good about all religions, just because they think there are no others. Other people with a much more embracive attitude reach the same conclusion by holding that there is only one religion, which includes all of what are commonly called "religions" and only one religious tradition, which is the religious heritage of all mankind. Most reasonable people, however, will agree that various good things can be said about different religions and about different religious traditions. They will differ about what good things can and cannot be said about them.

Implausible absolute religious pluralism may be formulated as follows:

(ARP): $VVVrVr'(Vr{\sim}Vr')$

which is equivalent to:

V *VVrVr'(d(Vr)=d(Vr'))*.

Given the assumption that there are at least two religions, MRE implies the denial of ARP. If ARP is true, all religions have the same values, so, if any religions have any values, and there are at least two religions, there will not be any value that is possessed exclusively by just one religion. So ARP implies a denial of MRE, given plausible assumptions.

One could also define an implausible absolute religious exclusivism (ARE) that under plausible assumptions is incompatible with minimal religious pluralism.

ARE: *VrVV(Vr~r=r*)* & *::3V(Vr*)*

This says that any religion that has any value will be the favored religion, and that there is some value that the favored religion does have. ARE implies that MRP is false, and since MRP is plausible, ARE is implausible. The denial of ARE implies MPR under the assumption that the favored religion does have some value.

We might strengthen minimal religious pluralism to state not merely that there are different religions with shared positive characteristics or values, but that there are religions other than the favored religion that share values with it. This is still pretty uncontroversial.

::3 *V3r(r7'r**& *Vr* & *Vr*)*

We arrive at a more robust version of pluralism (RRP) if we are willing to allow that any value that the favored religion has is shared with another religion.

RRP: *VV(Vr*~::3r(r#**& *Vr))*

I don't think it is very likely that this version of religious pluralism will be widely accepted, because believers generally hold that their own traditions have some unique valuable

features, even if they are pluralists. Prof. Byrne observes: "We should be clear from the outset that pluralism is not as such committed to saying that all major religions are equal in every aspect of cognitive endeavour…„[6] Byrne claims that what is required by religious pluralism is the three part equality claim mentioned above, while relative superiority in other respects may be allowed. Other advocates of religious pluralism have defined their versions of pluralism with regard to other features. John Hick, for example, places considerably more emphasis than Byrne on the moral function of religion, [7]" while Fritjof Schuon contends that the transcendental unity of religions is to be found in their esoteric dimensions.[8] All of them, however, seem to favor a form of equality pluralism.

A more reasonable form of pluralism would be one based on SDP, defined earlier to state merely that all the religions under consideration exceed some standard with respect to some selection of values.

IV. Pluralisms Divided by Seven Types of Value

Often, when religious pluralism is discussed, the value attributed to a variety of religions is left somewhat vague. Worse than this is equivocation that begins by pointing out some common feature among religions and concludes with the claim that the religions are all the same in relation to some other feature. In order to avoid this sort of fallacy, at least the following seven sorts of pluralism should be distinguished. Other dimensions of religious pluralism could also be defined, but the following seem more pertinent to contemporary discussions of religious pluralism.

1. Soteriological religious pluralism (SRP) is defined in terms of salvation.

According to an equality soteriological pluralism, a plurality of

religions are equally effective in guiding people to salvation. A degree pluralist in this regard would hold that people may be guided to salvation through a plurality of religions, although some ways will be more effective than others, either by providing guidance that is easier to follow, or that leads to a higher degree of salvation, or that is more suitable to guide a greater number of people, or by some other criterion could be judged superior in bringing people to salvation.

SRP may be defined as a version of DP (DPSRP) simply by letting V stand for the value of leading to salvation. DPSRP states that there is some standard degree of guidance to salvation that at least two different religions surpass. A stronger form of SRP would result from its combination with SDP to state that all the major religions pass a certain standard in the ability to guide people to salvation. This would be consistent with a moderate exclusivism, to the extent that might claim that one's own religion is more effective at leading to salvation than others.

A word of caution is required here with regard to aims and goals. Not all of the major religious traditions aim at what Christians call "salvation". One might find analogues in other religions to salvation, such as nirvana, but it would be a grave mistake to put them on a par. A Buddhist might agree that Christianity, by its own lights, provides a better vehicle to salvation than Buddhism provides its adherents to nirvana. But the Buddhist might argue that nirvana is a much more lofty goal than mere salvation. So, if the soteriological value in terms of which religions are compared is taken to be the ultimate goal of the religion, whatever that may be, the fact that one religion claims to provide an easy way to its goal does not show that this religion is superior to one that aims at a more difficult goal with a lower success rate.

In Christian discussions of religious pluralism, it often seems

that it is assumed that other religions aim at something analogous to salvation, and pluralists claim that all the major traditions are about equal in terms of effectiveness in guiding their followers to their respective goals. This is a bizarre claim, since none of the religions recognize the goals of all the others. This sort of soteriological pluralism would then seem to require commitment to beliefs that are rejected by all the major traditions.

When Peter Byrne defines religious pluralism as including the clause, "All major traditions are likewise equal in respect of offering some means or other to human salvation." room is left open for inequalities in what is achieved in the afterlife. If being saved means escaping the fire of hell, there are still traditionally seven heavens, or various level of divine reward for which one may hope. Would Byrne suggest that a soteriological pluralism is true only for the bare minimum of salvation, or might the holy men and women of different faiths find themselves enjoying first class lodgings in the afterlife? This way of putting the problem is rather crude, but there is a serious point here. Aristotle speaks of the goal of man as a happy life, and Christianity and Islam have used the *termfelicity (sa 'adati* for ultimate success. Sometimes Christians have used the term *beatific vision* for the highest goal to be attained by the saint, and Muslims speak of a divine encounter *(liqa Allah).* Both Christianity and Islam claim to offer a program of living through which the believer is *sanctified* or *purified (tazkiyyah al-nafs),* and while it is possible that what the Muslim achieves through this program might be considered sanctification by the Christian, each program has its own unique features and emphases. The question is not merely one of being kept out of sacred precincts because one does not have the right sort of membership card, but that the ways of life prescribed by the different religions

yield different sorts of spiritual results.

However, we could also look at the question of pluralism with respect to a specific goal defined within a particular tradition. Often pluralists take heaven to be the goal, and ask whether God is going to allow Buddhists in. Pluralists claim that God is very liberal and will allow Buddhists to reach the Christian goal of felicity. Equality pluralists will then have to make the incredible claim that Buddhism provides an equally effective means for guiding its followers to a goal that they do not seek as Christianity provides for its followers to a goal that they do seek. Very seldom is this question posed with respect to the perspective of a religion other than Christianity or Islam. It is expected that Christians and Muslims should allow that Buddhism provides a way to salvation, but it is not expected that Buddhists should admit that Christianity and Islam provide an effective way to reach nirvana. Indeed, it would be absurd to think that a religious life that does not provide an effective means for the extinction of desire (according to sects of Buddhism, at least,) might provide a way for Christians and Muslims to reach nirvana.

Even if we compare Christianity with Islam, we find that there is much more emphasis on *salvation* among Christians than among Muslims. Perhaps the reason for this is because of the Christian doctrine of original sin. According to many Christians, as a result of original sin, one cannot gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven unless one is baptized into the church. For Muslims, however, man may be lost without religious training, but this is quite different than needing to have one's sins washed away in the blood of the lamb. Islam emphasizes the need for guidance, without denying that a savior will come at the end of time, while Christianity emphasizes salvation, without denying the need for guidance.

If the question of soteriological pluralism is raised exclusively within Christian or Muslim theologies, one may ask whether the adherents of different denominations or even those who follow no religious path at all may be granted some sort of divine reward according to the theologies of Christianity and Islam. The strongest case for pluralism on this interpretation could be made by arguing that God rewards all those who do good regardless of their religious beliefs. Something along these lines seems to be indicated in the following *ayah* of the Glorious Qur'an, although there is controversy about the proper interpretation, and what kind of reward can be expected by non-Muslims in the next life.

> *(Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans-those of them who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously-they shall have their reward near their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.t (2:62)*

2. Normative religious pluralism pertains to how adherents are to treat the followers of religions other than their own. Here it might be supposed that a religion has a peculiar sort of value by virtue of which a certain kind of respect is to be shown to its adherents. However, this does not seem to be what the religious pluralist has in mind. The pluralist is not arguing that equal respect should be shown to the followers of the major traditions but not to members of weird cults or atheists; rather, the pluralist argues that difference in religious belief should not be reason to deny the human dignity of the others. The normative exclusivist might be understood as one who holds that the favored religion has a particular value that confers dignity on its members or that creates obligations to them. Other religions lack this value, and so their adherents might be denied rights given to the followers of the preferred religion. Normative exclusivism (NE) may be defined generally in terms

of persons, x, to whom obligations or rights *(0)* of some sort are not due if x is a not a follower of a religion *r, Fxr* that has a certain value.

NE: ::3 *V(Vx(<3r(Vr* & *Fxr)--+~Ox)* & *Vr(Vr~r=r*))*

According to NE, there is some value such that no persons who do not follow a religion with this value are due obligations. An equality pluralist in this regard does not claim that all the major traditions have the sort of virtue that creates obligations, so as to advocate the replacement of the second conjunct ofNE by *VrVr,* rather they deny that there is any value of a religion such that those who do not follow a religion with this value have no rights or obligations due to them. A normative equality pluralism (NEP) might thus be defined as the denial of the first clause of NE. The normative equality pluralist will hold that there is no value such that failure to believe in a religion that has it implies that one has no rights or obligations due to them.

NEP: *~3VVrVx(Ox~(Vr* & *Fxr))*

A proponent of NEP would claim that there should be no difference at all in one's behavior toward persons of different religious beliefs. If carried out strictly, this would prevent any sort of participation in a particular religious community, for such participation requires a special sort of cooperation based on religious affiliation. It is supposed that members of a religious community have special obligations to one another, and recognize special rights for one another under various conditions. The opposite extreme from equality pluralism would be the view that seems to have been held, unfortunately, by some Muslims as well as Christians, that one has no obligations whatsoever toward those who are not of one's own faith, that their blood is permitted to be shed and their property taken. More reasonable would be the view that we are bound by certain

obligations toward all human beings, although we may have additional special obligations to our co-religionists.[9]

Even within a specific religion, different rights and obligations for members are prescribed. Catholics hold that the right to administer some sacraments is restricted to priests, Hinduism is notorious for its caste restrictions and privileges, and, at the very least, only the administrators of specific religious organizations are permitted to attend certain meetings. So, what is at issue with regard to normative religious pluralism is the sort of rights and obligations that are owed to people with regard to their religious affiliations. In other words, both NEP and NE may be acceptable for different interpretations of O.

It is reasonable to hold that with respect to basic rights, NEP is correct, and with respect to specific rights and duties pertaining to special obligations owed to members of one's religious community, NE would be correct. Many jurists hold that according to Islam, different rights accord to Muslims, other "Peoples of the Book", and other human beings regardless of their religious views. One might accordingly consider Islam to prescribe a sort of normative degree pluralism by issuing duties in accord with levels of religious value. If basic human rights and duties due to persons are represented by *o:* rights and obligations due for People of the Book are *O',* and rights and duties for Muslims are *Om,* and if the degree of value assigned by Islam to religions of People of the Book is *p* and the degree assigned to Islam itself is *m,* the position could be formulated by the three clauses below.

'v'x ObX (All persons have basic rights.)
'v'r (d(∨r)4J~'v'x(Fxr~avx)))
'v'r (d(∨r)~~'v'x(Fxr~Omx)))

Notice that despite the historical facts linking exclusivist views on salvation with intolerance, soteriological pluralism and

normative pluralism are logically independent, (although this is not to deny that there may be social-psychological influences or tendencies).

Various forms of normative religious pluralism have been the focus of attention of a number of writers, some of whom use the term *religious pluralism* exclusively for various forms of normative religious pluralism. For example, Francoise Champion understands *religious pluralism* to be a political principle, and describes how it has gained currency as such in France over the last fifteen or twenty years among socialscience researchers, political analysts and sociologists. She distinguishes two main types of (what I would call) *normative religious pluralism,* which she terms *emancipatory pluralism* and *identity-based pluralism.* Emancipatory pluralism is the claim that the adherents of different religions should be granted equal individual rights. Identity-based pluralism is an attempt to go beyond the liberalism of emancipatory pluralism by recognizing an equality of group rights, as has been suggested by some communitarian thinkers.[10]

Champion is concerned with *political* versions of normative religious pluralism, but we should also consider *moral* versions and *religious* versions. We may consider when differences in behaviour toward others are morally and religiously justified on the basis of religious beliefs. One may hold that members of some deviant religious group should be shunned according to one's own *religious* beliefs. One may hold that it is morally justifiable to give preferential treatment to members of one's own religious community with respect to personal relations, but not in a manner that causes harm or significant offence to others, even when such treatment does not violate any law. The relations between legal, religious, and moral considerations are complex. Norms to be adopted may also be studied descriptively

or prescriptively. We could ask, for example, what legal privileges are given to the established church in England, which would be descriptive; or what laws should be enacted in England with regard to establishment, which would be a prescriptive question. Likewise, one may ask descriptive questions about the moral norms in a given society, or argue about what morality should be understood to require of us. Again, we could ask about what religious rules there are regarding those outside one's denomination, or one could, prescriptively, make a theological argument in favour of the abrogation or adoption of some rule.

3. Often discussions of religious pluralism focus on epistemological issues.[11] ***Epistemological religious pluralism*** is the view that all the major religious creeds are equally justified according to some proposed criteria of epistemological justification or warrant. This way of putting the matter focuses on the beliefs regardless of who holds them, as though the beliefs themselves have the capacity for being held as justified or warranted beliefs. We could call this *epistemological belief pluralism* and contrast it to *epistemological agent pluralism,* which would be expressed by the claim that the followers of no particular religion have any epistemological advantage in their beliefs over the followers of other religions. This could be an *equality pluralism,* since we should not think that the followers of any of the major religions are a bunch of dummies, but are, generally speaking, epistemic peers. An epistemological *degree pluralist* would hold that the adherents of several religions differ to some degree in being justified or warranted in holding their beliefs, but that these differences are not sufficient for only one group to be justified and the rest unjustified. Again, this could be defined as a belief pluralism or as an agent pluralism. It would be reasonable to expect to find differences in degree of average intelligence of the followers of different denominations,

but these differences do not seem so great that we could reasonably claim that the adherents of one faith alone have justified beliefs while the rest don't know how to think properly. The issue becomes more contentious when we consider *belief pluralism*. Some religious beliefs seem to be intrinsically harder to justify than others. Perhaps every religion has its difficult beliefs and easy beliefs, and perhaps they balance out in the end. But it would not be unreasonable to suspect that there could well be differences on the whole in the justifiability of different creeds.

Suppose that *p* is a part of the doctrines or religious teachings of *r*. Let this be abbreviated as *Trp*. An optimistic view of the justification of one's favorite religion's dogmas would be:

*Vp(Tr*p~Jp)*

Atheists hold that religious beliefs are false, not that they are never justified. But some atheists also have argued that religious beliefs are unjustified. This form of atheism might be initially formulated as follows.

V *r(Trp~~Jp)*

However, believers and atheists might agree on some teachings, e.g., that murder is wrong. An atheist might hold that it is doctrines about which religious believers differ that are not justified, but some religious believers, such as Therevada Buddhists, do not believe in God, and atheists would not say that this belief is unjustified. Perhaps the atheist position is better captured by the statement that some religious teachings of all the religions are unjustified. We could call this position *epistemic belief atheism* (EBA).

EBA: *Vr3p(Trp* & *~Jp)*

One may be characterized by epistemic belief exclusivism (EBE) if one is an epistemic belief atheist with respect to every

religion but one's own.

EBE: *Vr(r#*~3p(Trp & ~Jp))*

An implausible pluralism would be *universal epistemic belief pluralism* (UEBP) according to which all the beliefs of all the religions are justified.

UEBP: *Vr(Trp~Jp)*

A more restricted form of epistemic pluralism would hold that the teachings of all and only those religions that have a certain epistemic value, V, are such that their main beliefs are justified, and that the major religious traditions all fall into this category. Epistemic belief exclusivism could then be formulated as the position that it is only the favored religion that has the value V. One might hold a degree pluralism according to which higher degrees of V correspond to better justification of beliefs. One might then hold a degree pluralism in this regard by claiming that all the major religious traditions' main beliefs are justifiable to some degree past a standard. A degree exclusivist could hold that there is one religion whose degree of V surpasses that of all others.

The calculation of different values of V is complicated by the fact that there are several scales on which it might be measured, the degree of justification, the number of justified beliefs, or the number of justified important or essential beliefs. Suppose that one decides to evaluate V in such a way that *d(Vr»O* if and only if all essential beliefs of *r* are justified; and the value of *d(Vr)* is greater when these beliefs are better justified, and is greater when additional non-essential beliefs are also justified. There is no ready rule on the basis of which one could say that a belief system whose essential beliefs meet some minimal standard of justification but in which all peripheral beliefs are also justified is in better or worse epistemic shape that a belief system in which

the essential beliefs are justified to a very high degree although a fair number of peripheral beliefs are not justified. Then there is the problem of how to distinguish among and count beliefs. Furthermore, the distinction between essential and non-essential beliefs may be vague or be better viewed as a spectrum of beliefs with varying degrees of importance or centrality. Additionally, one should consider that the epistemic value of a system of beliefs may be far more than the sum of its parts. Finally, due consideration should be given to the sustained argumentation by William Alston that epistemic evaluations may be made according to a number of different criteria that are often confused under the label "justification".[12]

Complications become increasingly manifold when we switch from belief pluralism to agent pluralism. If we seek to understand whether two religions are on an epistemic par by considering the justification that believers have or lack with respect to the teachings of the religion. It may be that believers in one denomination have better justification for their religious beliefs than believers in another denomination because they are better educated. We might decide, then to examine only the beliefs of the top theologians in the various denominations. The exclusivist might claim that the highest justification for religious beliefs is found in the justification that the top scholars of the favored religion have for their religious beliefs. Perhaps the exclusivist could propose a rather Piercean form of religious exclusivism with the claim that the favored religion is epistemically superior to all others in the sense that a community of impartial investigators would come to accept the essential beliefs of that religion in the long run if they devoted themselves to a quest for religious truth.[13] This, however, would only be a hypothesis, and for the time being, there is no convergence of religious opinions in sight.

What is visible is the opportunity for rational discussion about points of religious difference. In order for such discussion to advance fruitfully, it is necessary for participants to treat one another with a certain level of epistemic respect, at least in the sense that we should not assume that someone does not adjudicate beliefs rationally merely because they adhere to a different religion than we accept. So, there is a prima facie moral reason for holding that the followers of the major traditions should not be assumed to be unreasonable in their beliefs. This may be considered a version of normative epistemic agent pluralism.

4. Alethie religious pluralism is about the truth of beliefs rather than their justification. Unlike epistemological pluralism, there is no division here between belief pluralism and agent pluralism. An equality pluralism here would be the position that all the major religions are equally true. This position could be interpreted in a number of different ways. It would not make much sense to say that all the statements in the creeds of every major religion are equally true, because they contradict one another. Of course, one could adopt a relativist position on truth, but that seems a pretty heavy price to pay. Another way to accept contradictory religious claims would be to adopt what logicians call *dialetheism,* the view that some propositions are both true and false.[14] Although dialetheism seems to be accepted by the great Sufi theoretician Ibn 'Arabi,[15] it does not appear to be an especially promising way to resolve interreligious contradictions. The ordinary way to be an equality pluralist about truth is to claim that the same amount of truth is to be found in the creeds of every religion. The obvious problem here is that we have no way to measure relative amounts of truth. We cannot just add up the beliefs and see how many come out true on each list.

John Hick has suggested another way to defend alethic equality pluralism by regarding all of the different religions as imperfect reflections of an ineffable reality.[16] Hick's view has been criticized by Alston and Plantinga.l The difficulties in the various attempts to reconcile the contradictions in doctrine among the various major religious traditions should not blind us to the fact that there are many important claims that are shared by the believers of different faiths, such as the rejection of materialism and the acceptance of a variety of common moral truths. The interpretation of statements made in very different religious traditions can be so perplexing that Alston urges his readers "to exercise caution in supposing that, even granting commonality of subject, what is said of God in Hindu perceptual reports contradicts what is said of God in Christian perceptual reports.[17]

We might begin to characterize an atheistic position as one that denies all religious teachings, but as we saw in the discussion of epistemological pluralism, this would not be tenable because of the existence of truths affirmed by both religious believers and atheists. By analogy to *epistemic belief atheism,* we might define *alethic atheism* (AA) as the view that all religions teach some falsehoods.[18]

AA: *Vr3p(Trp* & *~p)*

Following the analogy, one may be characterized by *alethic exclusivism* (AE) if one is an alethic atheist with respect to every religion but one's own.

AE: *Vr(r:;cr*~3p(Trp* & *~p))*

It may be argued that this is a consequence of the assertion of the truth of the teachings of one's own religion and recognition that some of these teachings will be in contradiction with some of the teachings of every other religion, for otherwise they would not be different religions (the religious teachings of no

religions are a subset of the teachings of any other religion). If so, AE could also be formulated as:

AE2: $Vp(Tr^*p \sim p)$

One might deny AE[2] while continuing to profess belief in r^*, although this would seem to involve something like the *preface paradox*. However, there are various ways to defend the rationality of admissions that the totality of what one asserts may contain errors, even when one affirms each assertion individually. If one is going to admit that one's own religious school of thought propagates errors (e.g., hadiths may be accepted in one's school that are not accurate), caution will be needed to avoid denying one's religion. One might claim that the basic teachings of the religion are secure from error, but admit that scholars may make mistakes about the finer points of some doctrines or historical details.

Universal alethic pluralism (UAP) would be untenable because it would require the affirmation of contradictory statements.

UAP: $Vr(Trp \sim p)$

A trivial form of alethic pluralism (TAP) might be formulated as the claim that every major religion teaches some truths.

TAP: $Vr\exists p(Trp \,\&\, p)$

A more substantial form of alethic pluralism (SAP) might claim that every religious denomination fails to teach some truths that are taught in other religions, although it is difficult to imagine how such a view could be defended.

SAP: $Vr\exists r'\exists p(\sim Trp \,\&\, Tr'p \,\&\, p)$

5. Religions are not theories, nor can they be reduced to their creeds. They also have a practical side. The practical aspect of religion can give rise to two sorts of pluralism. First, one might claim that the major religions counsel equally noble moralities,

either with regard to the values they instill, the obligations they place upon their adherents or the virtues they encourage. Let's call this ***ethical religious pluralism.*** Like epistemological pluralism, ethical pluralism may take the form of an *agent pluralism* or a *precept pluralism.* Agent ethical pluralism holds that the adherents of no particular religion have any significant moral distinction over the adherents of any other major religion. Precept pluralism is the claim that the moral precepts taught by the major faith traditions are equally right. Once again, this sort of pluralism can be formulated as an equality pluralism or a degree pluralism. There are two main approaches to ethical precept equality pluralism. One way is to accept a version of moral relativism. Each religion's morality is excellent by its own lights, and there is no absolute position from which one could be said to be better than any other. The other way, which is more commonly proposed, is to claim that the fundamental moral principles of all the major religions boil down to some common set of moral principles such as the golden rule, and that the particular differences in moral systems are relative or of less significance than what is common.

6. The second sort of pluralism that arises in consideration of the practical aspect of religion pertains to specifically religious obligations instead of moral obligations. Is it possible to fulfill one's religious obligations equally through adherence to any of a plurality of religions? A negative answer is given by those who reject ***deontological religious pluralism.*** They hold that God has commanded all of mankind at the present time to accept a specific religion. Choice of religion is not a matter of personal preference, but of obedience to divine prescription.

Here we should also mention a distinction that may be made between *diachronic* religious pluralism and *synchronic* religious pluralism. Although this distinction could be applied to any of

the various types of religious pluralism mentioned in this paper, it is particularly relevant to deontological religious pluralism, because many of the most staunch exclusivists will accept some form of diachronic religious pluralism, according to which the value of a religion may be judged differently at different times, so that, for example, Christianity might have the value of being required by God for a people for a specific period of time, but not prior to that time. Diachronic religious pluralism is more easy to accept for those with exclusivist tendencies because there is no question of religious choice being arbitrary. What seems to motivate much exclusivist thinking is the idea that the choice of one's religious commitments should be made in accordance with what God prescribes and not as a matter of personal taste or whimsical preference.

Those who defend religious pluralism usually take religious choice to be a matter of personal preference because of the normative pluralistic claim that no one should impose or force any religion on anyone. However, normative and deontological pluralism should not be confused. One may endorse normative pluralism while denying deontological pluralism, that is, one may affirm that people should make their religious commitments in accord with their own personal consciences, and reject the notion that whatever they decide is in accord with the commands given by God through revelation. Indeed, I would argue that this sort of position is more consistent with a sound Islamic theology than a blanket acceptance of pluralism.

Epistemic agent pluralism is closely related to deontological pluralism.

Deontological exclusivism hold that it is only by adherence to a favored religion that one is able to fulfill one's religious duties. There may be a general obligation imposed by God to humanity to accept a given religion, while at the same time the obligation

may be suspended under certain circumstances. We Muslims believe that we are obliged to observe certain dietary restrictions, for example, but that these restrictions may be lawfully violated in case one is dying of thirst or hunger. One is not obligated to do what is not possible for one to accomplish. If one is unable to provide epistemic justification for belief in Islam, and hence is unable to believe, then we cannot expect the obligation to believe to apply to this person. Ought implies can. If one cannot, any obligation is suspended.

In consideration of the epistemic factors concerning the obligation to believe, we can consider a distinction between deontological belief pluralism and deontological agent pluralism. According to deontological belief pluralism (DBP), God permits human beings to pick from among the major traditions any religion they like. There is no religion to which God commands adherence to the exclusion of any other. Let's say that religion *r* is permitted by God for humanity at time *t* and location *I* with the abbreviation *Prtl*.

DBP: $\forall r(t=now \ \& \ l=our\ location \sim Prtl)$

This formulation is consistent with the idea that God may have allowed only one religion to be adopted in the Egypt of Moses or in the Punjab of Nanak, but at the present time and locale, all the major religious traditions are acceptable.

Deontological belief exclusivism (DBE), to the contrary, holds that at any given time and locale, there is one religion that God requires for all of humanity.

DBE: $\forall NI\exists r\forall rl(Prltl \sim r=r')$

Deontological agent pluralism, on the other hand, is a view of what God permits for a given agent with respect to the adoption of a religion, given the agent's epistemic situation and other limitations. Let's abbreviate the proposition that God permits *x*

to adopt religion *r* at *t* and *I* as *Pxrtl*. We can distinguish two sorts of agent pluralism. According to the first type (DAP 1), God allows some agents to pick from any of the major traditions.

DAP1: *'v'x'v'r'v't'v'l (Pxrtl)*

According to the second type (DAP2), God merely allows that different agents may be permitted to adopt different religions given their circumstances.

DAP2: *3x3y3t313r3r'(Pxrtl* & *Pyr'tl* & *r#')*

Note that DBE is compatible with DAP2. It may be the case that God commands Islam for all of humanity at a given time and location, while allowing individuals who are unable for some reason to accept Islam to be guided by Him through some other faith tradition.

Other variants could also be formulated, e.g., according to which God allows some agents to pick from a limited number of religions, or according to which God requires different religious beliefs from a single individual in different circumstances, as, according to Islam, God required Christianity of some people before the advent of Islam, and Islam afterward.

7. The sort of pluralism advanced by writers such as Ramakrishna (1834-1886), Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891), Rene Guenon (1886-1951) and Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) could be called ***hermetic religious pluralism.*** According to this sort of religious pluralism, although religions are different exoterically, they share a common esoteric core. Although the thesis of hermetic pluralism is characteristically left rather vague, it is often presented as the claim that the major religions lead to the same goal, which is a certain perennial wisdom that comprises various metaphysical principles. A hermetic pluralist could claim that the religions are equally effective means for reaching this knowledge, or merely that the ultimate wisdom is

the same, or that some essential portion of it is common to the esoteric traditions of the major religions.

V. Reductive and Non-Reductive Pluralisms

Religious pluralisms of any of the varieties described above may be either reductive or non-reductive. Reductive pluralists hold that all the major religious traditions or at least some plurality of denominations share some degree of a value in terms of which different sorts of pluralism are defined because of some element that is common to them. So, for example, the hermetic religious pluralists generally claim that different religions lead to the same goal because of common esoteric principles. This sort of religious pluralism is *reductive* because it reduces the essence of a religion to the common elements it shares with other religions. What is not held in common with the other religions is seen as window dressing or cultural accoutrements.

Non-reductive religious pluralism, on the other hand, holds that what is unique to a variety of religions may be what gives them value. An extreme form of nonreductive religious pluralism would hold that whatever value any religion has must be due to elements unique to it.

There is no reason for thinking that this sort of pluralism might be true. Indeed, very good a priori reasons can be found for rejecting extreme non-reductive religious pluralism. Suppose that one holds that a value in terms of which religions are to be judged is their encouragement of their followers to lead moral lives. Extreme nonreductive religious pluralism would be committed to the view that there could be no common elements in the moral systems supported by different religions that have this value, and such a view is patently absurd.

A more moderate form of non-reductive religious pluralism

would hold that God guides people through the unique features of the various religions He prescribes for them in combination with features that are shared by other religions.[19]

When the varieties of religious pluralism are set out and analyzed, it seems that there are many forms that will not stand up to analysis. With regard to soteriological pluralism, for example, the problems of the diversity of religious goals seems to make the question quite problematic. It would seem that both exc1usivism and pluralism with regard to soteriology require a rather childish view of the religious life and its goals. We might affirm pluralism as a rejection of the simplistic view that one will be damned by God for lacking membership in some favored congregation. But this should not be confused with the idea that it makes no difference what religion one holds to where one will end up in the afterlife. Surely, the choices one makes with respect to religious affiliation will have an effect of what one ultimately makes out of one's life. More than this, we can only leave to God's mercy and wisdom.

With respect to normative religious pluralism, I would urge a non-reductive religious pluralism. Respect should be shown to the members of different religious traditions not merely because of our common humanity, but because of what is unique in each community. This is completely consistent with an admission that we owe members of our own community special obligations.

With regard to epistemological religious pluralism, if we take into account the various standards of rationality that may be found in communities that have different standards of logical reasoning (e.g., *Nyaya,* Aristotelian logic in the Islamic tradition, modem symbolic logic, etc.) a case could be made for a non-reductive interpretation of the normative epistemic agent pluralism suggested earlier. Believers in different traditions may have justifications for their beliefs that at least in part are

dependent to cognitive standards that are unique to their own traditions.[20]

With respect to alethic pluralism, I am skeptical of the attempts make by Hick and others who have sought to reconcile conflicting religious truths. I think it is not unreasonable nor theologically unacceptable to allow that SAP may be true, although I would be cautious about such an affirmation, because it seems to me that it would be an impossibly difficult task to find sufficient evidence for it.

A non-reductive version of SAP (SANRP) would hold that every religion teaches some truths unique to it.

SANRP: $\mathcal{V}r\exists p(Trp \ \& \ p \ \& \ \mathcal{V}r'(Tr'p \sim r=r'))$

Perhaps this view could be defended in Islamic theology by arguing that in each religious tradition there are truths taught about the founder of that tradition that are not taught in any other tradition. Ayatullah Misbah, for example, has suggested that there might be some truths about Jesus (peace be with him) that are taught by some Christians but that cannot be found the narrations about Jesus in the Shi'i collections. This may be so either because the Imams and the Prophet (salutations upon him and his progeny) considered these truths unnecessary, or because the narrations were lost, or for some other reason known only to God. This insight could be expressed by speculating that what might be correct may be a more moderate form of alethic nonreductive pluralism (MANRP) that would merely claim that there are some different religions each of which teaches truths unique to it.

MANRP: $\exists r\exists r'\exists p\exists q(r \neq r' \ \& \ Trp \ \& \ p \ \& \ \mathcal{V}r''(Tr''p \sim r=r'') \ \& \ Tr'q \ \& \ q \ \& \ \mathcal{V}r''(Tr''q \sim r'=r''))$

As for ethical religious pluralism, the agent variety this would seem to be explicitly denied by claims of the moral superiority of

the Prophet *(s)* over all human beings. This would still be compatible with a non-reductive agent ethical pluralism according to which each prophet has some peculiar praiseworthy moral character trait that is unique to him alone. As for precept pluralism, it would not be hard to show that a diachronic version of non-reductive precept pluralism is consistent with the teachings of Islam. If a synchronic version is to be defended, the most plausible position would be a degree pluralism in which various moral systems are accepted as passing some minimal standard, although it is allowed that the morals taught by our own religion are superior to all rivals. This could be formulated in a non-reductive version according to which each moral system that passes the standard has features unique to it.

With regard to deontological religious pluralism, a non-reductive version of DAP2 would seem plausible.

A non-reductive form of hermetic pluralism could be formulated according to which truths are divided into the esoteric and exoteric and MANRP is held to be true when the propositional variables are taken to range over esoteric truths.

In conclusion, a survey of the range of types of religious pluralism that could be debated by reasonable theologians of various traditions would indicate that it is a mistake for one to characterize one's position as an endorsement or denial of religious pluralism. Indeed, the area that has been given the most attention in philosophical theology, soteriological pluralism, is one in which pluralistic and exclusivist claims often tum out to be absurd. With regard to the other area that has generated the most discussion, normative pluralism, what is most significant is not whether one is a pluralist or not, because everyone will agree with pluralism with respect to some rights and obligations. The question to consider is what rights and obligations are to be considered specially do to one's coreligionists, and whether such

special obligations can justify political measures to establish a particular denomination as the official religion of the state. Such arguments will take different forms when they are based on English law and Anglican theology and when they are based on Islamic law and theology. The differences, however, should not be cast as a debate between pluralism and exclusivism.

Forms of religious pluralism that look promising or at least worthy of further consideration include the versions of non-reductive religious pluralism mentioned above, including versions of non-reductive normative pluralism, non-reductive normative epistemic agent pluralism, epistemic degree pluralism with respect to various forms of justification, SANRP as a version of alethic pluralism, analogous forms of non-reductive ethical pluralism, diachronic deontological pluralism and DAP2, both of which would be non-reductive in the sense that they are not based on some common element that is sufficient to secure the relevant permissibility, and an esoteric version of SANRP.

So, although I have argued that several plausible forms of non-reductive religious pluralism might be defended, the main contours that debates about religious pluralism have taken are misleading because they gloss over important distinctions, which, when uncovered, reveal that the moral and theological positions that motivate the debate would be more appropriately addressed by considering such issues as the nature of salvation, divine guidance, and the rights and obligations for religious groups in various societies. With regard to such questions, religious pluralism turns out to be less significant than is often imagined.

Notes

1. *Their guidance* is *not your responsibility; but Allah guides whomsoever He wil~ 2:272.*
2. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, 36-

37.

3. For an overview of definitions gleaned by surfing the internet, see B. A. Robinson, 'Quotations Showing Various Definitions of the Term *'Religious Pluralism;"* URL = http://www.religioustolerance.org/relplurl.htm
4. See Peter Byrne, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, 12. I have changed the wording of the third clause to stress he equality condition.
5. *Futuhat,* III, 153.12, translated in William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al- 'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity,* Albany: SUNY Press, 1994, 125.
6. Byrne 1995, 5.
7. The definitive statement of Hick's view is spelled out in his *An Interpretation of Religion,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
8. Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendental Unity of Religions,* revised edition, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975.
9. For more on the notion of special obligations, see the entry by Diane Jeske, "Special Obligations', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2002 Edition];* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL=www.plato.stanford.edu/ archives/ win2002/ entries/ special-o b ligations/.
10. Francoise Champion, "The diversity of religious pluralism," MOST Journal on Multicultural Societies, Vol. 1, No.2, 1999, URL = www.unesco.org /most /vlln2cha.htm
11. An issue of the journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers, *Faith and Philosophy,* Vol. 14, No. 3, July 1997, was devoted to "The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism," by John Hick.
12. William P. Alston, *Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.
13. See Charles Sanders Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," in *The Essential Peirce,* Vol. 1, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian K1oese1, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, 52.
14. See Graham Priest, "Dialetheism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 1998 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = www.p1ato.stanford.edu/archives /win1998/entries/dia1etheism/.
15. See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 66, 112-116,324.
16. See Hick, 1989.
17. See William P. Alston, *Percieving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, 262-266, and Alvin P1antinga, *Warranted Christian Belief,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 43-44. I have also criticized Hick's view of this issue in Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism,* London: A1-Hoda, 1999, 124-129.
18. Alston, 1991, 257.
19. This view is defended in Legenhausen, 1999.
20. This sort of point may be supported to some extent by the sort of argumentation one finds in Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

Bibliograghy

Alston, William P*, Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Alston, William P, *Percieving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience,*Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Chittick, William, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,*Albany: SUNY, 1989.

P1antinga, Alvin, *Warranted Christian Belief,* NewYork: Oxford university Press, 2000.

Peter, Byrne, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion,* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Rawls, John, *Political Liberalism*,New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Schuon, Frithjof, *The Transcendental Unity of Religions,* revised edition, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975.

Is Mowlana Jalal al-Din Rumi a Religious Pluralist?

Ali Akbar Rashad[*]

Abstract

Some scholars like John Hick assume Mowlana not only as a religious pluralist, but also as the founder of religious pluralism. One can prove by various reasons that this perception is incorrect. In ascribing an idea to a person the attention should be paid to the evidences and rules of personality analysis, and the all aspects of his/her ideas. Considering Mowlana's monotheistic Muslim personality, he severely insisted on the legitimacy of the name of Islam, he is a realist and intellectualist philosopher and an eastern man who belongs to the pre-Kant era.

In addition, he firmly believes in universalism as revealed in his verses and rejects and disowns other religions – except Islam – and thus, he cannot be regarded as a pluralist.

In this article the evidences by which religious pluralism has been ascribed to Mowlana are scrutinized and the author demonstrates that pluralistic interpretations on Mowlana's poems and books are not tenable.

This article has been presented at the Conference on Mowlana that was held in Greece (Athens) on November 18, 2007.

***Keywords**: Mowlana, John Hick, religious pluralism, right, wrong, exclusivism, inclusivism, naturalism.*

---

*. High Scholar, Mujtahid & Associate professor at Islamic Research Institute for Culture and Thought , Tehran , Iran. E-Mail: Rashad@iict.ir

Introduction

Some scholars such as John Hick think of Mowlana as a religious pluralist and even consider him as the founder of religious pluralism. We think that this view concerning Mowlana is seriously false. In this short paper, we try to unveil falsity of this view.

Before beginning our discussion, we define religious pluralism which is one of the theories concerning the problem of "other religions". Then we will begin our main discussion.

Concerning questions such as

1. "what is the reason behind diversity of religions?"

2. "are all the existing religions true, or some of them true and the others false?"

3. "are all of them a combination of falsity and truth?"; and

4. "are all of them false with no true religion?", four theories have been presented:

Naturalism: this theory says that the religion cannot not be true, then nor is there a true religion;

Religious exclusivism says that there is only one true religion, and other religions are false;

Inclusivism says that a particular religion is true; and even if other religions contain some true ideas, the true religion contains all true ideas.

Religious pluralism. Let us explain religious pluralism in more details, since it is the subject matter of the present article.

Meaning and Kinds of Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism may have various principles and consequently various meanings and instances. For example, religious pluralism may be based on the assumption of the plurality of religion in factual world, i.e. it may be based on the assumption that the essence of religion is, as a matter of fact,

plural; also religious pluralism may be stemmed from belief in inevitability of the diversity of understandings and acquisition of various kinds of knowledge of religion. Also, it may mean acceptance of possibility of similar functions for religions or various spiritual traditions. The first kind may be called "ontological religious pluralism", the second kind "epistemological religious pluralism", and the third kind "functionalist religious pluralism".

In ontological pluralism in which plurality refers to the external existence of the subject, three states may be imagined:

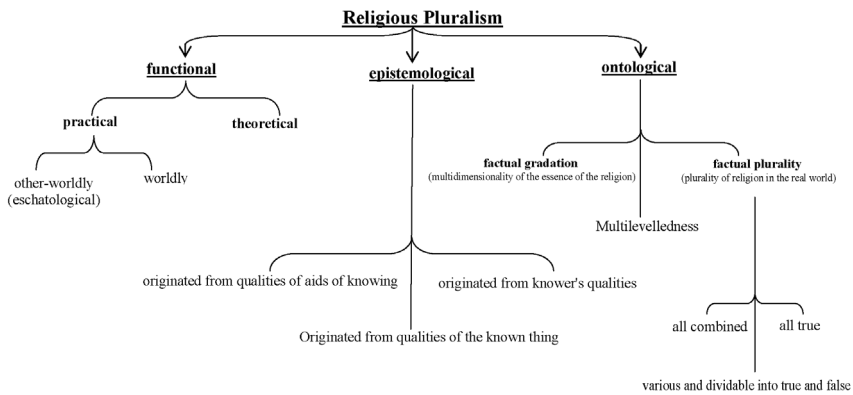
1. Factual plurality of the essence of the religion which means acceptance of existence of some religions in parallel; **2.** multidimensionality of the essence of religions which means that though the essences of religions are the same, the religion has different factual manifestations; **3.** gradation of the fact and essence of the religion. In the first state, three possibilities may be imagined: the first is that all the existent religions are true; the second is that some of them are true and some others are false. The third is that none of the religions are absolutely true or false, but combinations of truth and falsity. The same three possibilities may be thought of concerning two other assumptions, i.e. different aspects of the religion and factual religion.

Epistemological religious pluralism is realized influenced by different factors. The series of factors may be classified under "triple foundations involving in development of knowledge". Triple foundations are as follows: **1.** knowing subject, **2.** known thing, and influencing external factors which I call them "aids of knowing". By "aids of knowing", I mean factors out of the essences of two main foundations of the development of knowledge (i.e. knowing subject and known thing) which play their role as aids of, or obstacles to, the process of development of knowledge. (This division is based on a particular

epistemological theory I believe in it)[1].

Since religions and quasi-religions have various worldly and other-worldly functions in the fields of knowledge, life, guidance, and salvation, to find their similarities and dissimilarities, different and identical functions, these systems are compared with each other. Thus, functionalist pluralism may be deemed as one of the images and interpretations in the field of religious pluralism. In this case, based on the kind of the function taken as a basis for pluralism, various kinds of functionalist religious pluralism may be imagined.

The set of expected and existent possibilities and ideas concerning religious pluralism may be depicted as follows:



In addition to the above division which is based on the "kind of fundamental hypothesis" for acceptance or realization of plurality, typology of religious pluralism may be based on other criteria as well; for example according to narrowness or extent of the field of pluralism, religious pluralism may be classified in three ways:

1. Maximalist way in which no religious knowledge or tradition will be out of the coverage of pluralism;

2. Intermediate way according to which only revelatory religions such as Abrahamic ones or only great traditions or Eastern traditions or Western traditions fall within the field of pluralism, or only legitimacy or right to life of those religions is recognized which have been victorious in debates made with their rivals (in other words, pluralism is accepted only for those schools whose demonstrative fight has shown sufficiency of their arguments; their claims have become antinomic) or pluralism is accepted only in the field of religious traditions or religious knowledge and not in the field of factual (revealed) religions.

3. Minimalist pluralism according to which pluralism is accepted and applied only in a very narrow field; for example, plurality is recognized only for various schools of the same religion such as Shi'ism and Sunnism within Islam and Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism within Christianity. Minimalist pluralism, then, may be called "pluralistic inclusivism" or "family pluralism".

Now, Mowlana and Pluralism

In order to ascribe an idea to a certain person or to deduce a particular claim from a certain text, many authenticate scientific evidence and rules should be taken into consideration and appealed to. Not all ideas may be ascribed to all persons, and not all texts may be interpreted in whatever way.

To explain, it should be said that to ascribe an idea to a theologian, his ideological, intellectual characteristics, and temporal, cultural, social conditions of his environment, limits and kind of his knowledge and the like should be taken into account; and according to suitability (or unsuitability) of that idea for those conditions, that idea may be ascribed to (or, negated of) him.

To interpret a text as well, it should be understood and interpreted according to a series of rules and evidence. For example, principles such as the following five ones are necessary: **1.** Principle of "knowledge of the nature of the text"; for example, whether it is a religious or a scientific one; **2.** the principle of "the text being a whole" (each text is consistent and has a focal claim; and claims introduced in it are, in principle, related and even coherent). **3.** the principle of "similarity between the text and author"; for example a work of a monotheist mystic is not the same as that of an atheist; **4.** the principle of "appropriateness of the text with climatic, historical, epistemic, and scientific containers; emergence of the text should be understand by taking into account historical and scientific conditions of its development; 5- literal and rhetoric rules.

An atheist saying, therefore, cannot be ascribed to a faithful monotheist one. Also, a modern scientific claim cannot be ascribed to the one who had lived in the Stone Age. Also, a sacred Divine text cannot be interpreted in an atheistic way; or conflicting claim cannot be- without sufficient evidence- ascribed to the same book; or meaningless points cannot be- without sufficient evidence- extracted from a writing ascribed to a rational and mindful man. (though he may commit errors, but this is an exception; and exception cannot be regarded as rule, nor can it violate the rule).

In ascribing pluralism to Mowlana, one should notice that he was a faithful and monotheist Muslim, a wise and clever man, a rationalist and realist philosopher who lived in the Middle (pre-Kantian) Ages in the Islamic East. And one with such characteristics cannot be a pluralist concerning his religious ideas; for, because of his being a Muslim, he insisted seriously in the exclusive or inclusive truth of the religion of Islam.

He believes that Islam is a global and eternal religion having

maximalist truth; and all names and fames other than the name of Islam will be vanishing. If there are some truths in other religions, all truth are contained in the religion of Islam. And relation between Islam and other religions is like the relation between the number 100 and tens under it all of which are contained in the number 100. Having Islam we have all truths.

"The names of kings are removed from the dirhems, (but) the name of Ahmad (Mohammed) is stamped on them for ever

"The name of Ahmad is the name of all the prophets: when the hundred comes (is counted), ninety is with us as well[2].

He blames Christians who think that Jesus Christ has been crucified and at the same time regards him as God; he says that those who have crucified him (Jews) may not be saved by taking refuge to him!

"See the ignorance of the Christian appealing for protection to the Lord who was suspended (on the Cross)

"Since, according to his (the Christian's belief), he was crucified by the Jews, how then can He protect him?[3]

According to him, man is free and his freedom has led to his greatness; and based on his own knowledge and free will, he chooses either disbelief or belief; either guidance or deviation:

"Because We *have honoured* Man by (the gift of) free-will: half (of him) is honey-bee, half is snake;

"The true believers are store of honey, like the bee; the infidels, in sooth, are a store of poison, like the snake;

"Because the true believer ate choice herbs, so that, like a bee, his spittle became (a means of giving) life;

"(While), again, the infidel drank sherbet of filthy water: accordingly from his nourishment poison appeared in him.[4]

He is a realist (and not a skeptic or relativist) philosopher; thus, he thinks that acquisition of knowledge is possible, and there is a methodology for this; he regards true knowledge a knowledge

corresponding to the reality; after narrating the famous parable of the "elephant and blind men", he says that if they did not content themselves to senses and if they consult their reasons, they would be able to understand the reality.

"If there had been a candle in each one's hand, the difference would have gone out of their words[5].

In another place, he regards the reason as a touchstone to evaluate sense perceptions:

"Get (learn) the distinction between evil and good from reason, not from the eye that tells (only) of black and white;

"The eye is beguiled by the verdure on dunghills, (but) the reason says, "Put it to my touchstone"[6].

Based on a naïve realism, he thinks that rational understanding of the external world is possible

"An intellect giving light like the sun is needed to wield the sword that never misses the right direction[7].

For him, reason is light, and to gather rational experiences will lead to twofold unveiling of truth:

"(If) the intellect is paired with another intellect, light increases and the way becomes plain[8].

He thinks that sense perceiving eye is unable to understand the truth and acquire knowledge; and regards particularist empiricism as an enemy of the religion and reason:

"Throw dust on your sense perceiving eye: the sensuous eye is the enemy of intellect and religion[9].

He thinks that reason and religion are of the same kind and two wings of life and salvation; he recommends his addressee to take only reason and religion as her/his guides:

"Do not mount the restive horse without a bridle: male Reason and Religion your leader, and farewell[10].

But as is well-known, the theory of religious pluralism has nothing to do with the Mowlana's era, but it is a theory of the

20th Century and it has been emerged in the modern era. Its social and cultural backgrounds and epistemological, philosophical and religion-philosophical principles are entirely modern. Relation and contacts between religions which may lead to unpleasant social consequences may be entirely found in the contemporary era[11]. The discipline of philosophy of religion, among whose issues is pluralism, is less than 200 years old[12]. The main philosophical and epistemological justification of this theory has been taken from Immanuel Kant's epistemology.

In addition to all above points, it should be noted that religious pluralism is based on the "essential plurality of religions"; Mowlana, however, insists upon "gradational unity of religions"

Also, evidence provided from Mowlana's works and poems to confirm religious pluralism does not prove this claim; on the contrary some evidence suggests against the claims of claimants; and even in his works, there are many points in criticizing pluralism.

From among pieces evidence appealed to for ascribing pluralism to Mowlana according to which they have tried to ascribe some sort of critical realism to him and then to call him "pluralist" is some parables and allegories he has made uses of them in Mathnawi to explain philosophical, epistemic, mystical and moral concepts[13]. Here, I will explore and evaluate some cases: 1- the parable of the elephant and blind men; 2- the parable of the same light and various lamps or shining of the sun on various places.

Before going to analyze, it should be noted that allegories and parables may only be suitable to facilitate understanding of claims; but they never prove the claims; for parable is generalization of a particular judgment to another particular judgment, without there being a certain common point between similar parts or a known reason behind the judgment; in allegory

as well, similarity may be in an aspect, but there may be difference and even opposition in other aspects; that is why they have said that allegory is in one aspect intimating but in many aspects it increases distance. In the fourth book of the Mathnawi, Mowlana emphasizes this point[14].

But how about the parable of elephant and the blind men to which in epistemological issues is appealed to prove impossibility or relativity of knowledge?

Firstly, one may mention another parable suggesting that truth is accessible, though (and even) by chance or through an ignorant and imitative motion. In the second book of his Mathnawi, Mowlana speaks of a man who has lost his camel and is searching for his lost camel, desert by desert, town by town; and another man, without losing his camel, is imitatively, or to ridicule him, accompanying him claiming that he has lost his camel as well! Whatever the former says or asks, and whenever he runs, the imitating lying man says or asks, and runs.

When the truthful man, after knowingly attempts, finds his lost camel, he sees that there are two camels; and suddenly the imitating ignorant man notices that one of them is his own camel, but he has not known that his camel had been lost; and truly he has not been searching for the camel and he has found there his camel accidentally! From this story Mowlana concludes that

"When a liar set out (to journey) with a truthful man, his falsehood turns to truth of a sudden

"That imitator became a true searcher when he saw his camel browsing there[15].

Secondly, the parable (of elephant and blind men) is to reject authenticity of senses to acquire knowledge, and to criticize sense-sufficiency or to emphasize the necessity of appropriateness between tools of knowledge and subject of knowledge; and notes that true knowledge of the members of elephant is possible

through the vision and not by hand and touching faculty.

Thirdly, if the object of knowledge is the elephant and not its members (which is typically what is considered), the parable is to show defects and inefficiency of one-dimensional and particularist views in acquisition of knowledge, i.e. a defect of which suffer most human hypotheses and theories –in particular in our time-; knowledge of the elephant, which is a whole, is possible through a universal-seeing eye (an eye which sees beyond and comprehensively). In other words, the whole truth is grasped through a universal-seeing philosophical look and not through empiric attempts which are praticularist and one-dimensional. That is why to conclude from this parable, Mowlana says:

"On account of the (diverse) place (object) of view, their statements differed: one man entitled it "*d'al*," another "*alif*"

"If there had been a candle in each one's hand, the difference would have gone out of their words

"The eye of sense-perception is only like the palm of the hand: the palm hath not power to reach the whole of him (the elephant)[16].

According to the other interpretation, mistake committed by, and difference between, blind men were caused by superficialism, obstinacy, and selfishness of blind men and their negligence of esoteric points and guidance made by the spiritual guide.

"If a master of the esoteric had been there, a revered and many language man, he would pacified them.[17]

Fourthly, if the object of knowledge is elephant, the parable will not prove that each and every knowing subject has acquired a portion of reality (even though negligible) and knows one of the dimensions of the elephant. For, in this parable none of the touching men has understood a part or dimension of the truth; and even they have gone further from the truth and all of them have equally committed mistakes; and their states are much worse

than those who have not yet touched the elephant. For the latter ones have no imagination of the elephant; but those who have touched the elephant have misunderstood him; and simple ignorance is less worse than the complicated ignorance. For the simple ignorance may be likened to the ground zero, while complicate ignorance is like a position under the ground zero!

Fifthly, even if we accept that blind men's knowledge shares a portion of truth, that truth is not a truth concerning the elephant; but rather the truth acquired by each one of them is a knowledge concerning the member touched by him. In this case, each one of them has come relatively close to the truth concerning his own object of knowledge; for he has, at least, understood corporality, sensibility, its form and volume, hardness … of the body touched by him.

(Anyway, as seen, a parable may be interpreted in various ways and suggest different and even conflicting claims; in any case, this parable does not suggest critical realism, we do not mention religious pluralism).

Other Parables

The other parables appealed to for ascribing religious pluralism to Mowlana are as follows: "The single light of the sun being a hundred in relation to the house-courts (on which it shines)"[18], which suggests that a single light source creates hundred lights; but if we remove walls, it will become clear that there is only one light (Book 4). We may mention the parable according to which "if there are ten lamps in the same place, apparently there are ten lamps and the light of each one of them is other than those of the others; but, since light is light, all of them are the same thing; and when we take into account instead of lamps, light, we cannot distinguish them from each other.[19]

Also, like the light of moon which rises in the dark night and

shines through windows on houses, though each one of the lights shined through each window is apparently an independent light, whenever one of them disappears, the others disappear as well. And this shows that there is but one light.[20]

Concerning these parables can, and should, be said that:

First of all, presupposition of religious pluralism, as its name shows, is plurality of religions (and not their unity). Mowlana is a religious man who believes in the unity of religions and in these parables he has emphasized the unity of religions- true religions and truth of religions. In the beginning of this part of Mathnawi, Mowlana appeals to the holy verse "The believers are naught else than brothers"[21] and the hadith "true scholars are like one soul", and inspired by the holy verse "We make no distinction between any of them [prophets]"[22], he emphasizes that denial of one of the prophets is the same as denial of all of them, and mentions that truth and people of truth are but one.

Secondly, Mowlana believes in the true unity of prophets and revealed and genuine religions (before being altered); and there is no one of the people and followers of the revealed religions who denies this point. He believes that plurality and diversity of interpretations and alterations are caused by the role played by human beings' understanding in the field of realized religions and religious knowledge. That is why he says:

"On that account these companions of ours are all at war, (but) no one (ever) heard of war amongst the prophets

"Because of the light of the prophets was the Sun, (while) the light of senses is lamp and candle and smoke.[23]

This means that the light of the prophets is like the light shone by the Sun, and there is no difference between them. Then, there is no plurality so that pluralism may be necessitated). Human epistemic tools, however, are smoking and dark sources of light.

Thirdly, these parables are aimed to make a distinction

between Lord lights (revealed religions) and sense and none-Divine lights (i.e. thoughts whose source is not Divine revelation); and this has been expressively mentioned by Mowlana. He considers the Divine lights as one light, and non-Divine lights as plural lights. Also, he calls non-Divine lights unstable, and incapable of showing the truth.[24] In other words, religious pluralism is founded on a view which assumes plurality of religions. Even if such plurality may be imagined, it is in the non-revealed schools (schools which are not connected to the source of revelation). Such schools are not representing the truth.

Finally, I emphasize that by appealing to such parables, Mowlana can never be called relativist, pluralist, and religious pluralist. Within the frame of Islam, however, Mowlana has supra-sectional ideas, and we think that he cannot be confined within the frame of one of the schools stemmed from Islam.

Notes

1. For more details, see Rashad Ali Akbar, Principles of, and Obstacles to Religious Theorization, Qabasat Journal, No. 34.
2. The Mathnawi of Jalal al-Din Rumi, translated and edited by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, 1: 1105-1106
3. Ibid, 2: 1393-4
4. Ibid, 3: 3289-3291
5. Ibid, 3: 1266
6. Ibid, 6: 2965-6
7. Ibid, 5: 668
8. Ibid, 2: 26
9. Ibid, 2: 1599
10. Ibid, 4: 465
11. Though sometimes in the course of history there had been debates between believers in various religions, meeting between religions has, because of extensive exchanges between human societies, turned into one of the main problems in our times. That is why some thinkers like Mr. John Hick has mentioned such conditions as their motivation to present the theory of religious pluralism. (Problems in Religious Pluralism, First Chapter).
12. See, History of Philosophy of Religion.
13. In his books, John Hick mentions such allegories many times.
14. Differences and difficulties arise from this saying, because this is not a

(complete) similitude: it is (only) a comparison.
Endless are the differences between the corporeal figure of a lion and the figure of a courageous son of man.
But at the moment of (making) the comparison consider, O thou who hast good insight, their oneness in respect of hazarding their lives.
For, after all, the courageous man did resemble the lion, (though) he is not like the lion in all points of the definition, Mathnawi, ibid, 4: 419-422.

15. Ibid., 2: 2980 and 2983.
16. ibid, 1265-67.
17. Ibid, 2: 3674; for this interpretation, see Este'lami, Mohammad, Ta'iqat, Third Book, pp 274-5.
18. Just as the single light of the sun in heaven is a hundred in relation to the house-courts (on which it shines).
    But when you remove the walls, all the lights (falling) on them are one.
    When the (bodily) houses have no foundation remaining, the Faithful remain one soul. (ibid, 4: 416-18). It should be noted that for Mowlana, faithful is the same as Muslim. He has said:
    It is because of their different viewpoints, O thou the core of existence, that there are difference between the believer, Gabr and Jew (this couplet is translated by the translator of the present article).
    So long as the sun is shining on the horizon, its light is a guest in every house;
    Again, when the spiritual Sun sets, the light in all the houses disappears (ibid, 4: 459-60)
19. If ten lamps are present in (one) place, each differs in form from another.
    To distinguish without any doubt the light of each, when you turn your face towards their light, is impossible (ibid, 1: 678-9)
20. Again, when the moon is born from the Hindu, Night, a light falls upon every window.
    Count the light of those hundred houses as one, for the light of this (house) does not remain (in existence) without (the light of) the other. (ibid, 4: 456-7)
21. The Holy Quran, 49: 10.
22. ibid, 3: 84.
23. ibid, 4: 450-1.
24. At night a lamp is placed in every house, in order that by its light they (the inmates) may be delivered from darknes.
    "The lamp is (like) this body, its light like the (animal) soul; it requires a wick and this and that.
    That lamp with six wicks, namely, these senses, is based entirely upon sleep and food.
    Without food and sleep it would not live half a moment; nor even with food and sleep does it live either.
    Without wick and oil it has no duration, and with wick and oil it is also faithless (transient), (4: 425-9)
    The animal soul does not posses oneness: seek not thou this oneness from the airy (vital) spirit (ibid, 4: 411)
    The souls of wolves and dogs are separate, every one; souls of the Lions of God

are united (4: 414)
I have told you the purpose of this lamp of animal sense-perception. Beware of seeking to become one (with it in spirit). (4: 447)
If this lamp dies and is extinguished, (yet) how should the neighbour's house become dark?
Inasmuch as without this (lamp), the light in that house is still maintained, hence (it follows that) the lamp of sense-perception is different in every house
This is a parable of the animal soul, not a parable of the Divine soul (4: 454-6)

Bibliogeraphy

* The Holy Quran
Hick, John, *Problems in Religious Pluralism*, Tebyan, Tehran, Iran, 2008.
Mowlavi, Jalal al-Din Mohammad, *Mathnawi: Ta'liqat* (Book Three), edited by Mohammad Este'lami, Sokhan, Tehran, Iran,2008.
Mowlavi, Jalal al-Din Mohammad, *Mathnawi*, translated and edited by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, Hermes, Tehran, Iran, 2005.
Rashad, Ali Akbar, *Dialogue with John Hick* ,Qabasat Journal, No. 37, Research Institute for Culture and Thought, Tehran, Iran, 2005.
Rashad, Ali Akbar, *Principles of, and Obstacles to, New Understanding of Religion and Religious Theorization,* Qabasat Journal, No. 34, Research Institute for Culture and Thought, Tehran, Iran, 2004.

Religions: Unity or multiplicity?
(A critique of Transcendental Unity of Religions)

Alireza Qaeminia[*]

Abstract

Traditinalists have special view on the diversity of religions; called 'Transcendental Unity of religions'. This view is rooted in Schoun`s work with the same title. This essay illustrates the foundations of traditionalists` view and then criticizes these foundations. According to the author, there is no difference between this view and religious pluralism. Pluralism is the main pre-assumption of traditionalists who maintain no doubt about it. The pre-assumption is among the achievements of the new trend of thought and modernism.

***Keywords**: Traditionalism, Transcendental unity of religion, prennial philosophy, Absolute Truth, Esoteric aspect of religion, Exoteric aspect of religion.*

Traditionalists have a special perspective on religious multiplicity which they call 'Transcendental Unity'. The issue was expanded by Schoun, a traditionalist scholar, in a work of the same title. The same topic has been also explained, though implicitly, in the works of Genon. But schoun has laid a special foundation for the issue and in fact the most important role played by him in

*. Assistant Professor,Department of Philosophy,Baqir al-Ulum University, Qom, Iran. E-mail:Qaeminia@yahoo.com

traditionalism is determination of the relations between and among religions and explaining their relations to Truth.

Religions do differ from one another in significant aspects and according to Schoun these differences have prevented mutual understanding of religions. In his opinion one of the main causes of such differences lies in the approach to the Absolute Being which has a different station in every religion in such a way that comparison of these stations renders the issue illusory and unrealistic.

As a whole Schoun stresses four aspects of religions including **1.** diversity of revelations and religious forms, **2.** Orthodoxy, **3.** distinction between exoteric and esoteric realms and relationship between the two, and **4.** the transcendental unity of religions. He has repeatedly reiterated these aspects in his works stating their application to religious issues.[1]

Traditionalists consider one of the functions of prennial philosophy to observe truths beyond the veil of multiplicity and to grasp the unity from which all Divine rituals and rites emanate. That is why they resort to a certain kind of hermeneutics. Nasr has the following to say on the issue.

"Achieving this objective is possible only through resorting to that metaphysical knowledge which leads to a knowledge of existential degree and manifestation of the truths of the Sublime Plane in this lowly world of matter. It is only in the light of hermeneutic knowledge, which is aware of inner dimensions and objective truths which are at times veiled and unveiled by phenomena. And these objectives may be achieved beyond all the psychological, historical and linguistic confusions covering many things even the very concept of hermeneutics in recent years. Another objective of this effort is to discover the truth shining in the heart of all religions and manifests the Absolute Being in its own framework; the Being without whom no religion has any credibility."[2]

Diversity of Revelations and Religious Forms

Schoun's first claim is that religious diversity should be looked upon within the framework of separation from the Absolute Truth. Religions or revelations or traditions are all forms of the Absolute Truth. Yet, the Absolute Truth is beyond these forms. As such, every religion or tradition is a peculiar form of the Truth and multiplicity takes place in the realm of forms as there is no multiplicity in the Absolute Being. When we talk about multiplicity in fact we are referring to forms. Therefore , the Truth, revelation and trandition are not synanimous terms.[3]

Oassionlly Schoun has expressed the said point in these words;"Various revelations have been conveyed to humans through different Divine languages and as we must avoid the idea of 'true and false' languages, we also need to understand the necessity and credibility of diversified revelations."[4]

Not all minds may grasp the principle of diversification of revelation and, the implications will remain detestful for majority of the faithful , and this concerns the very nature of affairs.

Yet, from the perspective of traditionalism, everyone who wishes to understand religions as well as the inner relations of various traditions in exact terms has no way other than accepting this principle decisively.

Regarding the term 'revelation' it is necessary to mention here that in the traditionalism's terminology it carries a special meaning. Revelation is different from visioning and discovering God. Revelation always signifies the formal origin and springhead of a tradition. Also, revelation differs from inspiration and this distinction is felt in various traditions.

According to traditionalists, every revelation or religion has a dual nature. All revelations contain in themselves all affairs necessary for man's salvation and is then complete from this aspect while each is addressing a certain number of human

beings in certain conditions. From the latter point of view every religion is deficient and limited in scope. Among the traditionlists Nasr offers the most exact description in this connection:

"Every revealed religion is both absolute and special. It is absolute because it has the Absolute Truth and means of accessing it within itself and, is special because it lays stress on spiritual and psychological needs of a certain community of human beings who are the addressees of that religion and as such, it emphasizes a certain aspect of truth."

Elsewhere and under what he calls "The Universality Principle of Religion" Nasr discusses it as an important principle and bases his debate on the Quran and narrations. According to a prophetic narration, God has sent 124000 messengers to various nations and communities as stated in the Quran (Yonus, 49). "There has been a prophet assigned to every community" and "We did not send any messenger unless (he spoke) in the language of his people" (Ibrahim, 4). The universality of prophethood which has been relayed so clearly in the Quran is tentamount to the universality of tradition or religion and this means that all proper religions have descended from the celestial plane and are not man – made. This principle not only testifies to the presence of Divine revelation in the Ibrahimic tradition but also among all nations. As such, the Quran believes in the principle of universality of religion in explicit terms.[5]

Of course the universality principle does not indicate that all present religions are truthful. The principle only says that every tribe and community has had a messenger. In other words this principle only speaks of the all-encompassing presence of Divine revelation but it never says that revelations have been left untampered and undistorted.

The essence of Religion

The most fundamental question brought about in the realm of religion is: What is religion? From the perspective of traditionalists no response may be provided to this question without referring to the concept of revelation and tradition. From the traditionalist's view every religion is in fact a combination of two elements or two pillars and foundations. These two are: A doctrine that draws distinction between absolute and relative, or, absolute right and relative right and, between what is of an absolute value and what is of relative value. The other element is a method of concentration on Truth for one to connect oneself to the absolute and, living according to the Divine will and in proportion to human destination and objective.[6]

Drawing distinction between relative and absolute right takes meaning in the framework of traditionalism. Thus the above statement is a theoretical definition of religion; that is religion becomes meaningful only in a certain theoretical framework and loses its credibility when taken out of that framework. So, these theoretical definitions are creditable only to those who accept the related theory.

Today there have been many definitions offered on the philosophy of religion dealing with the quality and nature of religion which can be compared with the above-mentioned definition so that the weak and strong points of each of them may come to light.

Distinction between Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy

One of the most important problems for which the traditionalist should find a solution is presentation of a criterion for distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The

traditionalists do not welcome heterodoxy as they regard it a deviation from orthodoxy which does not comply with the original tradition hidden in the heart of religions. But on what criterion is this distinction or separation based? In this connection we are faced with three different criteria:

A. Heterodoxies usually have a mundane and unholy form and at times are presented in the form of mystical schools whose contents are egotistic illusions. Schoun writes:

"Heterodoxies either put forth a deceptive, unholy and humanistic form of religion and/or are presented in the form of mystical schools whose contents are nothing but ego and illusions."[7]

B. Heterodoxies lack suitable teachings. The suitability of the teachings is merely determined by a metaphysical insight that has been nourished within complete traditions.[8]

C. The third criterion is to consider the so-called fruits of the schools. Traditionalists lay stress on two kinds of 'fruits'. Firstly, every orthodox tradition breeds great saints and men of wisdom who bear witness to the spirituality of that tradition. Secondly, the sacred art is one of the most significant fruitions of orthodoxy.[9]

But a question comes to mind at once. How do Orthodox traditions view each other? Obviously they accuse one another of heterodoxy.

For instance from Buddhism's perspective Hinduism is not an orthodox school. But within Buddhism too, existing heterodoxies aside, only the main school is considered as orthodox. This in fact leads to a paradox. Because a tradition has to be orthodox and heterodox, i.e., truthful and false both at the same time. The solution to this paradox should be sought in the role played by formal elements of religions. In the opinion of traditionalist these elements may never be applied in a literal way

beyond the perspective adopted by the tradition itself.

This paradox originates in our literal application of framework provided by the tradition itself. Schoun presents the issue in the following words:

"Traditional orthodoxy means to be in compliance with a doctrinal or ritualistic form and more importantly, it means to be concordant with the truth embedded within all revelational forms. As such, the essence of every orthodoxy is its intrinsic fact".[10]

Exoteric Dimension Versus Esotric Dimension

The most significant part of Schoun's viewpoint is the separation of exoteric dimension of religion from its esoteric side. This separation is indicative of the impact of mystical debates on Schoun's view. Separating the exoteric side from the esoteric is among the theoretical mysticism's key points and Schoun uses this distinction as a model for understanding relations among religions. He draws a decisive distinction between exoteric and esoteric realms of religions. This so-called demarcation does not concern the fundamental difference between religions. Rather, this line is a horizental one that divides all religions into two categories of exoteric and esoteric levels.[11]

In Schoun's view, existence has various levels and grades. Above all the levels and forms of existence is God or the Absolute Being.

Religions meet each other in that point because they are convergent at Absolute Being.

But the more distant religions become from this focal point, the more divergent they shall be from one another. So, religions reach one another at the esoteric level and become convergent while at the exoteric level they turn divergent and sink in

differences.

It should be noted that mystics believe in two levels of separating exoteric from esoteric:

1. Semantic Level: This level concerns the meaning in the Quranic text. The Quran has exoteric and esoteric meanings. Mystics usually do not believe in any end for the esoteric meanings of the Quran.[12]

2. Ontological Level: Existence has inner and outer levels, so has every being. All beings are indeed manifestations of existence and are only the 'appearance' while the Absolute Being is their 'hidden' or 'innermost' aspect.

That is why some mystics have said:

"Verily the inner part of every creature is Absolute Truth or the very appearance of Truth is creation.[13]

Schoun employs the said mystical distinction to separate religions from each other in exoteric and esoteric aspects.

Religions may be considered truthful from an esoteric aspect but from an exoteric angle no religion enjoys absolute credibility. Exoteric elements are exclusive to each religion and cannot be applied beyond the scope of that religion. Now for a religion to be regarded as truthful from an esoteric side, certain criteria must be applied. In Schoun's idea such criteria include: **1.** The religion should rely on a sufficient and clear doctrine regarding the Absolute Being; **2.** The religion should praise and materialize a kind of spirituality which is on equal footing with its doctrine; **3.** The religion should enjoy a Divineand not philosophical a origin, and **4.** The religion should be in inundated with a holy or blessed presence which shall be manifested especially in miracles and sacred art.

Obviously the above perspective requires relativism in the exoteric aspect of religions as they contain the Absolute Truth

only esoterically and, the exoteric components of religion are creditable only within that religion itself and become relative.

We cannot then compare exoteric elements as they stand valid only in the realm of their related religion.

Even if we condone the problem of relativity we still face another problem: whence has Schoun brought the said criteria? Why should a religion meet the four mentioned criteria if it is to b considered esoterically trueand not other criteria? Are these criteria gained out of a review of certain religions or are they based on a certain set of evidences and justifications?

There also exists a special ambiguity in this trend of thought concerning the relationship between the exoteric and esoteric aspects. What is the connection between the two? We may say the two aspects have no relationship and are totally alienated from one another.

This assumption opens the door to a series of problems: If the formal (exoteric) components are alien from the esoteric truth, then why they are not found only in one religion? Clearly there is a relation between those elements and the esoteric truth; otherwise we have no bridge to cross over from the exoteric to the esoteric. But if we accept the existence of a relationship between the two, then we have to also believe in some kind of absolute value for the exoteric elements as well.

The Gem and the Shell of Religions

At times to indicate the difference between the esoteric truth and exoteric aspects the traditionalists speak of the gem and the 'shell' of religions. Every religion has a shell and a gem within it. The gem has unlimited imperatives because it emanates from the Absolute Being. But the shell is a relative issue with limited imperatives. According to Schoun:

"In spite of realizing the above, two realities cannot be condoned. Firstly, at the level of mere appearances nothing enjoys absolute value; secondly , as far as the faithful in other religions are concerned the literalist and exclusivist interpretations of religious messages are denied by the relative ineffectivity of these messages. This of course does not take place in the realms of expansion of those messages that have been prescribed by God."[14]

At times Schoun uses the following debate to prove his point, saying: "If the claim of literalist Islam were absolute and not relative no well intentioned man could oppose it and anyone opposing it would be a heterodox as the situation was in the early days of Islam when no one, other than a deviant, could prefer magical idols to the purified God of Abraham. For instance Saint John of Damascuss held a high office in the Caliph's court in that city without having to embrace Islam. in the cases of Franciss of Assizi in Tunisia, Saint Lewis in Egypt or Saint Gregory Palamus in Turkey, none of them had embraced Islam. It may then be concluded that those saints were either ill-acting individuals – and this is meaningless because they were saints – or, the claim of Islam, like those of other religions, is relative to some extent"[15]

The manner of reasoning, however, does not prove Schoun's assumption. Those saints were great men in their own religions on the basis of intrinsic criteria of those religions. Yet, it cannot be deduced from this reality that all those individuals were absolutely truthful in their religious claims. In other words the dilemma (they were either ill-acting, or, Islam's claim is relative like those of other religions) presented by schoun is a false dilemma. Another form may also be perceived: Those individuals have been saints while Islam's claim is not relative. A

religion may speak of Absolute Truth and this has no discrepancy with the existence of saints in other religions. Those saints are saints because they meet the intrinsic criteria of their own traditions. Being a saint is not collateral with arriving at Absolute Truth.

Schoun's Geometrical Allegory

Literalism and exclusivism are applied to the exoteric level of religions. At times to indicate limitations arising from the 'shell' (l.e.,outer layer) of religionschoun uses a geometrical allegory: "As a certain geometrical form is in capable of demonstrating all space-related possibilities neither is a certain religious message able to go beyond limits imposed on it by its shell."

Schoun's geometrical allegory does not prove his claim and appears to be a taken for granted allegory.

We may find a multitude of allegories like this which indicate certain limitations. But what reason is there to believe in the similitude of the allegory to the relationship between exoteric and esoteric aspects of religion.

In other words mystics offer many allegories for showing the kind of relation between the limited (exoteric) and unlimited (esoteric); allegories such as the 'wave' and 'sea', letter a and other alphabets, etc., But such allegories never justify their claims. Schoun has accepted this assumption implyingly that the objective of religions is to show the Absolute Truth and the Divine Being but no religion is able to indicate that Absolute Truth and Being in exoteric terms.

As such that Truth is intrinsically embeded in religions and other issues are Just external elemements accompanied with limitations. On the basis of such a pre-sumption Schoun claims

that religions are united at the esoteric level which reflects the Absolute Truth while differences concern the exoteric aspects. This pre-assumption has a special significance in the Transcendental Unity of religions and serves a foundation on which the whole idea is built.

A question may be posed at this pre-assumption. What reason is at hand for this implied claim that the objective of all religions is to reveal the Absolute Truth and Being? One of the important points lies in the very difference existing between the objectives of religions.

Major differences separating religions in this connection prevent us from busying ourselves with generalities.

Schoun also employs the mystical separation of exoteric and esoteric aspects for proposing another point about religions too. But the above statement clarifies the difference between Schoun's idea and that of the mystics. The mystics, by putting forth the issue of pantheism and stating that the universe is a manifestation of Divine Truth, have demonstrated the relation between Indefinite (God) and finite (the manifest), The manifest beings are limited but all are intrinsically united. The esoteric side of the universe is the Absolute Being. Now if we employ, like he mystics, the same model to depict the manner in which God and universe are related, still its imposition on religions and using it for understanding their multiplicity is faced with problems.

Lack of Rationality

Shoun and traditionalists in general, do not prove their points of view in a logical way and fail to offer rational evidences to support them.

"Transcendental Unity of Religions" is not an exception to this

general practice of traditionalists and no conventional rationalization is offered on it. Schoun only proposes a special model by resorting to the mystical separation of esoteric from exoteric in order to understand religious multiplicity. But no view shall be all organized by offering a model only. The model should be proven as a sound one.

Why other models are unable to explain the multiplicity of religions? what prerogative does the idea of Transcendental Unity of religion have as compared to other models? Schoun has no acceptable response to such questions. He has just accepted a pre-assumption and bases his model of understanding religions multiplicity on that. His pre-assumption is that all religions are truthful and demonstrate the Divine Reality and Absolute Being.

Pluralism is the main pre-assumption of traditionalists who maintain no doubt about it. The pre-assumption is among the achievements of the new trend of thought and modernism. Moderm societies have accepted pluralism as an applied principle. Though against the new trend of thought, traditionalists are also influenced by it in looking at religions. Of course the terms they use differ from those employed by advocates of new trend of thought but traditionalists follow the former in the said pre-assumption.

Notes

1. Oldmeadow, *Traditionalism*, 2000, p. 69.
2. Nasr, 2005, p.40.
3. Schoun, *Gnosis*, 1959, p.25.
4. Ibid, p. 29.
5. Ibid, p. 117.
6. Ibid, p. 13-14.
7. Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions,* 1984, p.218.
8. Oldmeadow, 1974.
9. Ibid.
10. Schuon, 1959:I.
11. Schuon, 1984: xii, xiii.

12. Ibn fanari, 1984: p. 5.
13. Al-Kashani, 2000.
14. Schoun, 2004: p.30.
15. Ibid: p.32-33.

Bibliogeraphy

* Quran
Edwin, Hohn, *The philosophy of S.H. Nasr*,; Auxier & Stone, Open Court 2001.
Frithjof, Schoun, *Islam and Prennial Philosophy* Tr. F. Rasekhi- , Hermes Publications, Tehran,Iran, 2003.
Frithjof, Schoun, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, U.S.A. 1984.
Frithjof, Schoun, *Gnosis*; Divine Wisdom, Great Britain, Maekays of Chatham 1959.
Frithjof, Schoun, *Wisdom and Wisdom of Wisdom*, Tr. Babak Alikhani, Hermes Publications Tehran, 2005.
Kashani, K.A, *Lata'if* , Mirath Maktub Center 2000.
Kenneth, Oldmeadow*, Traditionalism*, U.S.A. 2000.
Nasr, S.H, *Knowledge and Spirituality*, Tr. Enshaallah Rahmati, Sohravardi Publications, Tehran,Iran. 2001.
Nasr, S.H, *Need for the Sacred Knowledge*, Tr. Hassan Mianclari, Entesharat, Qom,Iran, 2000.
Nasr, S.H, *Prennial Wisdom*, V.l, Soroush Co., 2003.
Nasr, S.H, *The Sufi Teachings* , Qasideh Sara, 2003.

Religious Ambiguity in Hick's Religious Pluralism

Amir Dastmalchian[*]

Abstract

Much has been said on the religious pluralism of John Hick but little attention has been given to a key step in his argument for religious pluralism. This key step is the observation that the universe is religiously ambiguous. Hick himself is ambiguous about what he means by 'religious ambiguity'. In this essay I will attempt to rectify this ambiguity by analysing the notion of 'religious ambiguity' and arguing what interpretation of this term Hick must commit himself to.

***Keywords**: John Hick, pluralism, diversity, ambiguity, epistemology, philosophy, religion.*

Introduction

John Hick is arguably the foremost philosophical proponent of religious pluralism today. *An Interpretation of Religion* is widely viewed as the final statement of his theory of religion.[1] In this book Hick expresses the idea that religious experience (construed very broadly) provides a justification for adopting religious beliefs. This is because, Hick claims, it is rational for a

*. Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London, United Kingdom. E-mail: amir.dastmalchian@kcl.ac.uk

person to adopt religious beliefs in accordance with his experience. But different people have different experiences so how can they all be rational in their conflicting beliefs? This is the epistemic problem of religious diversity. Hick's solution to the problem is to recognise that people have different, yet equally justified, experiences of the same ambiguous reality. Furthermore, all religions are partially correct with no religion being completely correct. No religion is completely correct because any human interpretation of reality is very limited.

Hick is not altogether clear on what he means by 'religious ambiguity', even though it is an important part of his argument for his interpretation of religion. Hick says,

By the religious ambiguity of the world I do not mean that it has no definite character but that it is capable from our present human vantage point of being thought and experienced in both religious and naturalistic ways.[2]

However, Hick speaks of the "objective ambiguity" of the universe as if to say there is something in the character of the universe which is ambiguous:

the universe, as presently accessible to us, is religiously ambiguous in that it is capable of being interpreted intellectually and experientially in both religious and naturalistic ways. [...] [T]he objective ambiguity of our environment consists in the fact that it is *capable* of being interpreted in a variety of ways [...].[3]

So, on the one hand Hick seems to speak of the universe having a definite character, and on the other hand he speaks of the universe having an indefinite character.

This essay is aimed at discovering how exactly we should interpret Hick. I will begin by outlining Hick's interpretation of religion. Secondly, I will discuss what 'religious ambiguity' could mean. Thirdly, I conclude by stressing that the success of Hick's interpretation of religion depends on further argument.

Hick's Interpretation of Religion

The Justification for Religious Belief

At the beginning of his argument for the reasonableness of religious belief Hick makes it clear that it is by way of religious experience that religious belief can be made to seem reasonable.[4] According to Hick, for a person to undergo religious experiences is for the person to make a choice about the way he interprets the universe that surrounds him. In a phrase, a person who undergoes religious experience lives by faith and not by sight such that he, for example, feels as if his life is lived in the presence of God.[5] Hick does not aim to show that religious experiences are veridical but rather that it is reasonable for those who have them to suppose that they are veridical. Hick points out that we have to rely on our sensory experiences even though we cannot logically prove them to be veridical. There is no logical proof, suggests Hick, of an external world yet it is reasonable to believe in our sensory experiences.[6] Similarly, we have to rely on our religious experiences even though we cannot prove them to be veridical.

From Hick's discussion of the reasonableness of religious belief it transpires that he is referring to epistemic justification deontologically construed. Hick is under no pretence that a person cannot be wrong about his religious experience.[7] The point Hick is trying to make is just that it is reasonable for a person who undergoes religious experience to suppose that his experiences are veridical.[8] In this regard Hick specifically mentions entitlement.[9]

The foregoing resonates with the approaches of other contemporary analytical philosophers of religion. For example, the doxastic practice approach of Alston[10], Plantinga's basic belief apologetic,[11] and Swinburne's Principle of Credulity.[12] Alston, Hick, Plantinga, and Swinburne all believe that, generally speaking,

religious experiences can be trusted. However, Hick (unlike the others) has a partly Kantian epistemology; for Hick religious experience cannot be trusted to give information about reality in any straightforward sense of reality, as will soon be discussed.

The Epistemic Challenge from Religious Diversity

As I have explained, Hick affirms that religious experience justifies religious belief. However, different people have different religious experiences and this has given rise to different religious beliefs. Can all the different beliefs, which may even contradict each other, be justified? If not, it would seem that Hick's suggestion has been defeated. If yes, then it would seem that there is an anomaly.

For Hick, neither religious epistemic exclusivism nor naturalism can solve this problem.[13] Religious epistemic exclusivism is the view that one particular religious ideology is exclusively true or justified. Naturalism here refers to the view which rejects religious experience as delusory. Hick feels pushed to find a path to religious epistemic pluralism which is the view that more than one particular religious ideology is true or justified. Although Hick believes that it is reasonable for a person to trust his religious experiences to be veridical and to form beliefs on the basis of them he maintains that it would be arbitrary to hold one's own religious experiences as reasonable to the exception of all others, in the absence of good reasons.[14] As Hick (in debate with fellow Christians) says, the alternative to some kind of religious pluralism is to leave unexplained the immensely significant fact that the other great world faiths are as epistemically well based as Christianity; and also that they seem, when judged by their fruits, to be morally on a par with Christianity.[15]

Indeed, for Hick, epistemic pluralism saves the credibility of religious belief. Were it not for the pluralist explanation for

religious diversity, suggests Hick, we would have to doubt the reliability of religious experience and therefore religious belief.[16] After all, mutually inconsistent reports of an event would create doubts concerning the reliability of each report. Similarly, mutually inconsistent religious ideologies create doubts concerning the reliability of each ideology.

Hick's Religious Epistemic Pluralism

At this juncture in the essay it is appropriate to present in more detail the understanding of religion which Hick believes solves the epistemic challenge of religious diversity. Hick's understanding of religion results in various types of pluralism, of which epistemic pluralism (defined above) will be of interest to me in this essay.

Hick builds his interpretation of religion, which has both epistemological and non-epistemological aspects, upon a simple Kantian distinction which he claims is one of Kant's most basic epistemological insights.[17] The distinction is between two types of reality: reality as it is in itself and reality as it is perceived by a subject. The former type of reality may be called 'actuality' but Kant calls it the 'noumenon'. The latter type of reality involves the interpretation of the mind of the subject and is therefore called 'phenomenal' by Kant. So, the noumenal world is that which exists independently of human consciousness whereas the phenomenal world is the world as it appears to human consciousness. Hick claims that the idea that the mind contributes to the character of its perceived environment has been "massively confirmed" by cognitive and social psychology and in the sociology of knowledge.[18] According to Hick the Kantian distinction between noumenal and phenomenal is also supported by the realisation that it is quite normal to expect something to appear differently to different people depending

upon their location, their sensory and mental faculties, and their interpretive habits.[19]

Hick appeals to this distinction to argue for a pluralist "hypothesis". The hypothesis is that each of the great religious traditions of the world is based on an attempt to understand the noumenon but each great religious tradition only manages to construct a partially adequate understanding of the noumenon in its own cultural terms. In other words, the understanding of the noumenon in each religious tradition is only how the noumenon appears to the people in that tradition.

For the pluralist hypothesis Hick replaces reference to the 'noumenon' with reference to the 'Real' as it is in itself.[20] The 'Real' is Hick's preferred term for the 'Ultimate', the 'One', or 'Ultimate Reality', and so forth. The equivalent of phenomenal reality in the pluralist hypothesis is the Real as variously understood by different religious traditions rather than as it actually is.

The Real as it is in itself transcends positive characterisations by humans; it can only be known *via negativa*, that is, by saying what it is not.[21] For example, the Real is not finite and is not fully knowable by humans. The Real as it is in itself cannot be experienced by humans therefore there are no human concepts which are applicable to the Real as it is in itself.[22] It follows that no human descriptions of the Real can be literally true.

Although literal descriptions of the Real are not possible Hick does allow for non-literal descriptions of the Real. Hick calls these 'myths'.[23] A true myth appropriately relates us to the Real by causing us to behave appropriately in relation to the Real and to have an appropriate attitude regarding it. In practice an appropriate relation to the Real is for a response to any one of its manifestations to be appropriate. The manifestations of the Real are the various personal deities and impersonal absolutes of

the world religions such as Allah, God the Father, Shiva, and Brahman.

Hick says the Real is a required postulate in order to solve the challenge of religious diversity.[24] However, others have criticised the concept of the 'Real' by saying either that it is such a vague concept that it is useless or that it is defined through so many negations that it amounts to nothing. Aslan considers the concept of the Real to be the most problematic aspect of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis.[25] But it occurs to me that the problem of affirming and describing a transcendent ineffable being is not unique to Hick. For the introduction to the second edition of *An Interpretation of Religion* Hick lists the objections which have been made to his book and accordingly offers responses. The first objection and response is in fact regarding the concept of the Real.

As alluded to above, Hick's interpretation of religion, applies to the great religious traditions, but what distinguishes great religious traditions from non-great religious traditions? It is the ability to transform a person from self-centredness to reality-centredness. Hick says,

Religious traditions in their various components – beliefs, modes of experience, scriptures, rituals, disciplines, ethics and lifestyles, social rules and organisations – have greater or less value according as they promote or hinder the salvific transformation [*sic*].[26]

With the pluralist hypothesis in place Hick discusses various theistic and non-theistic conceptions of the Real and argues in some detail that they are all consistent with his hypothesis. Hick's claim is that the distinction between the Real as it is in itself and as experienced is present in each of the great religious traditions, but to differing degrees.[27]

Hick's pluralist interpretation of religion appears to solve the

challenge of religious diversity with a simple postulation, specifically, the postulation of the Real. The pluralist hypothesis maintains that it is not just the core beliefs of one religious tradition which are true but rather that the core beliefs of all the great religious traditions are true (at least mythically or non-literally so). Although the pluralist hypothesis advocates that some changes need to be made within religious traditions in order to accommodate the hypothesis these changes, it is argued, are not alien to the religious traditions. It is not advocated that such radical reinterpretations of religion be made as those of anti-realists such as Braithwaite, Cupitt, Feuerbach, Phillips, and Randall (all of whom are discussed by Hick).[28]

Religious Ambiguity

What is Religious Ambiguity?

Ambiguity can be construed in two main ways. On the one hand it can mean that those aspects of the universe which can be experienced appear ambiguous to humans as a result of ignorance (which is potentially 'overcomable'). I will call this temporary ambiguity. On the other hand 'ambiguity' can mean that the experiencable universe is itself ambiguous and will always be ambiguous however much knowledge humans obtain. I will call this permanent ambiguity. The first meaning of 'ambiguity' invokes a sense of the unknown and the second meaning invokes a sense of the unknowable.

I define temporary religious ambiguity as follows. The experiencable universe is temporarily religiously ambiguous if, at a given time, and despite the best of human intellectual efforts, one religious ideology cannot be distinguished from others on truth-conducive grounds, without there being reason to suggest that this stalemate must necessarily be the case for all time.

As for permanent religious ambiguity, it can be defined

similarly. The experiencable universe is permanently religiously ambiguous if it is inescapably the case in this life that one religious ideology can never be distinguished from all other religious ideologies on truth-conducive evidential grounds.

That many people of intelligence subscribe to different religious ideologies suggests that the universe is at least temporarily religiously ambiguous, for if it were otherwise then intelligent people would not have disagreed on how it should be conceptualised. In the case of temporary religious ambiguity only one of a number of incompatible religious ideologies will be true. But perhaps the subject matter of religion is too complex to be either true or false in which case the idea that the world is permanently religiously ambiguous becomes credible. A person could, for example, reasonably interpret reality as created rather than an uncreated brute fact; mystical experience as veridical rather than hallucinatory; or a person may interpret his life in terms of destiny rather than chance. If there are no facts of the matter regarding these differing interpretations of features of the universe then a permanent religious ambiguity thesis would seem appropriate.

One likeness of permanent ambiguity is that of the physical ambiguity of light. Light can in cases correctly be interpreted as being a particle and in other cases correctly be interpreted as being a wave. Another likeness of permanent ambiguity is that of the duck-rabbit puzzle picture which can be correctly experienced as either a rabbit or as a duck.

If the experiencable universe is temporarily ambiguous it means that the universe has a precise and definite character but is nevertheless understood in different ways due to incomplete knowledge about it. In this scenario, it could be said that humans are at present dumbfounded by the universe but an advanced race (such as the human race in 1,000 years time) may

find ways to calculate the answers to religious, ideological, metaphysical, and philosophical questions akin to the way we now calculate complicated mathematical problems. For example, in principle there is a unique correct answer for $1{,}985{,}436^{4{,}353} \times e^{2{,}132}$, but in practice a human would require a computer to find the correct answer to a good level of accuracy.

If the experienceable universe is permanently ambiguous it has an imprecise and indefinite character and the property of being understood in different ways even if there is complete knowledge about it. Permanent ambiguity is about more than a thing having different aspects. For example, something as mundane as water has different aspects, that is, it can correctly be understood in different ways by chemists, sociologists, and economists, and so forth. But water is not permanently ambiguous because the understandings chemists, sociologists, economists, and so forth, have of water are not incompatible. Neither do each of the understandings claim to be comprehensive, that is, about all (or many) aspects of water.

There is yet another way to explain the two senses of religious ambiguity. The world is temporarily religiously ambiguous if an omniscient and perfectly reasonable being could judge one of the many differing human religious ideologies to be true. However, if an omniscient and perfectly reasonable being recognises that a number of the differing human religious ideologies are equally true then the world is permanently religiously ambiguous.

Permanent religious ambiguity could be due to human cognitive limitations rather than the way the universe is in itself. According to this idea, try as we might, we humans are just not capable of understanding the universe as it really is, that is, as an omniscient and perfectly reasonable being understands it. This is because humans interpret the experiencable universe by using

concepts and can therefore only see the universe, so to speak, through tinted spectacles and not as the universe in fact is.

The thesis that the experiencable universe is religiously ambiguous could be both an epistemological and a metaphysical thesis. It is clearly an epistemological thesis, in both its temporary and permanent forms, because it makes a claim about our knowledge: either that our religious beliefs are highly disputable or that there is no single correct way to think of, or give religious meaning to, the experiencable universe. I think the permanent religious ambiguity thesis could also be understood to be a metaphysical thesis if it says the universe is so constructed that it does not lend itself to unambiguous religious interpretation, even by a cognitive subject with unlimited powers and information.

Hick's Argument for Religious Ambiguity

Before determining the type of religious ambiguity Hick needs to commit himself to in order to make his pluralist hypothesis coherent, it would be prudent to acquire a deeper understanding of religious ambiguity in Hick's thought. This can be done by examining Hick's arguments for religious ambiguity.

Hick lends support to his observation that the universe is religiously ambiguous by way of two theses which will be explained below. There is also an additional idea which can be gleaned from his work. This will be presented below also.

Cognitive Freedom

According to Hick our environment is capable of being interpreted, or given meaning, in a variety of ways.[29] Hick identifies three aspects, or levels, of the universe to which humans respond.[30] These levels are the natural (or physical), the

social (or ethical), and the religious. We have great liberty to interpret the universe at the religious level and also at the social level. Hick calls this liberty 'cognitive freedom'.

The appropriateness of a person's response to the physical aspect of the universe is largely determined. If a person responds to the physical aspect of the universe in an inappropriate way, that is, does not understand it correctly or does not find it meaningful then he may well die. In contrast to the physical level of universe, the appropriateness of a person's response to the ethical aspect of the universe is largely (but not completely) undetermined. When a person interacts with others he has an inclination to treat them as people also. Anything other than this would be hardhearted to say the least. However, he can subdue or go against his inclination that the humans he interacts with are people and that he has a duty to behave ethically toward them. Hick points out that people often manage to convince themselves strongly that unethical behaviour is ethical behaviour.[31] At the religious level people are able to completely ignore any religious yearning or tendency to interpret life experiences in a religious way.

Hick develops a concept of 'experiencing-as' from Wittgenstein's concept of 'seeing-as' in order to explain how a person gives meaning to the universe.[32] The outcome in consciousness of interpreting the universe is that an object is experienced as such-and-such. This is true, according to Hick, for all conscious experience. For example, the famous duck-rabbit puzzle picture which can correctly be experienced in different ways. Other examples include experiencing a building as a house, or experiencing a figure near the letterbox as a human who is a postman. 'Experiencing-as' can also be called 'recognising' or 'identifying'. In sum, Hick maintains that all conscious experience is "concept-laden" because people,

through use of language, have created conceptual structures with which they have interpreted their experiences.[33] The different conceptual structures present among people reflect the different cultures of the earth and allow scope for there to be different interpretations of the universe.

Theism vs. Naturalism

Hick further argues for religious ambiguity by assessing arguments for and against theism. Hick uses theism as an example to illustrate that arguments for religious viewpoints are not definitive. Hick assesses numerous arguments for theism and numerous arguments for naturalism and finds that none of them are definitive and therefore feels forced to conclude that the universe is religiously ambiguous.[34] In other words, for Hick, religious ambiguity is the best explanation for religious diversity. This is rather like a pessimistic meta-induction: because all of the main arguments for theism or for naturalism can be interpreted in different ways all such arguments will be interpretable in different ways.[35] Not only can the phenomena which are used to support a religious outlook of the universe have their persuasive force neutralised, so too can the phenomena which are used to support a non-religious outlook of the universe have their persuasive force neutralised.

Gödel's Theorem

Gödel's first incompleteness theorem shows that any formal system that includes enough of the theory of natural numbers is incomplete. This means that the system contains statements that are neither provably true nor provably false. Hick speculates that perhaps there is something like this in metaphysics.[36] So, for any system of religious belief there is at least one belief which is

unprovable. After all, religious systems of belief seek to conceptualise that which we, as humans, are ourselves a part of, namely religious reality. Perhaps it is theoretically impossible for us to ever comprehend religious reality in its entirety.

Conclusion

Having presented Hick's pluralist interpretation of religion, and having distinguished between two types of religious ambiguity, we are now in a position to ask whether Hick advocates temporary religious ambiguity or permanent religious ambiguity. From the two quotations in the introduction it would seem that Hick advocates both types of religious ambiguity! This, of course, is something which is not possible.

In my view, the plausibility of Hick's religious epistemic pluralism depends on the presence of permanent religious ambiguity in the experienceable universe. This is because if the experiencable universe is temporarily religiously ambiguous a religious epistemic exclusivist may still have confidence in the truth of his own religious beliefs – perhaps expecting that they will eventually be shown to be true – but if the experiencable universe is permanently religiously ambiguous he will have grounds for no such hope and his exclusivism will be misplaced.

There is scope for Hick to offer clarification on which type of religious ambiguity he subscribes to. But if he does subscribe to permanent religious ambiguity, as I have suggested he should, he faces the challenge of providing an argument for this. Furthermore, the plausibility of Hick's interpretation of religion, and consequently his religious epistemic pluralism, will depend on the success of any such argument

Notes

1. Hick, John, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1989, 210. A second edition has been published with a new introduction where Hick responds to some key criticisms, see John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent,* 2nd ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
2. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 73.
3. Ibid., 129.
4. Ibid., 210.
5. Ibid., 210-211.
6. Ibid., 213, 214.
7. Ibid., 210, 212, 223.
8. Ibid., 211-212.
9. Ibid., 216.
10. Alston, William P, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991.
11. Plantinga, Alvin, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
12. Swinburne, Richard G, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.
13. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 234-235.
14. Hick, John, "The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism," *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 3, 1997: 278, Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent,* 235.
15. Hick, "The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism," 279.
16. Ibid., 278.
17. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 240.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 242.
20. As often as not, Hick speaks of the Real 'an sich' which is German for 'as it is'.
21. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 238, 239.
2. Ibid., 246.
23. Ibid., 248.
24. Ibid., 249.
25. Aslan, Adnan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998.
26. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 300.
27. Ibid.
28. See Ibid., ch. 12.
29. Ibid., 12, 129.
30. Ibid., 12, 132.
31. Ibid., 150-151.
32. Ibid., 140.
33. Ibid., 142.

34. Ibid., part 2.
35. The phrase 'pessimistic meta-induction' is the name given to an argument in the philosophy of science. The argument objects to scientific realism on the basis that past theories have proven false.
36. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 354.

Bibliogeraphy

Alston, William P. *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Aslan, Adnan. *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Richmond*: Curzon Press, 1998.

Hick, John. "The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism." *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 3, 1997, 277-286.

Hick, John, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1989.

Hick, John, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. 2nd ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Swinburne, Richard G. *The Existence of God. 2nd ed.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.

Tryst with Pluralism: Rhetoric and Practice of Religious Pluralism in India

Chakraborty Amitava[*]

Abstract

India has a long history marked by both religious dogmatism and pluralism. This article aims at offering an introduction to some important moments of the pluralist experience and expression of Indian tradition. The essay begins with a discussion into Anekantavada, the pluralist epistemological and ontological theory of the Jains, an ancient religion; followed by an account of the pluralist experimentation of the medieval Mughal emperor Akbar. This study of examples selected from distant times is expected to introduce the reader to two of the finest moments of pluralist experiments and conceptualizations in India. The article ends with some speculations regarding the relevance of the experiences and conceptualization discussed above.

Keywords: *Jain, Anekantavada, Syadvada, Naya, Akbar, Din-i-Ilahi, Rah-i-Aql, Sufism, Pluralist Religious Policy.*

1

While religious clashes of various volume pose threat to even

*. Associate Professor, Department of Modern Indian Languages and Litrary Studies,University of Delhi, India. E-mail: amitavaz@yahoo.com

the most cohesive of contemporary societies and take the character of civilizational clashes more than often, nothing could be best thought of but revisiting the pluralist rhetoric and experiences of various religions. Understanding contemporary religions from a pluralist perspective, even remodeling religious practices from such an understanding must be felt fit by most; given the usually monolithic disposition that mark religious traditions; however, what could be better if we could locate pluralist sanction in the tradition itself? With this understanding, present article offers a tour into the Indian tradition, a search into the rhetoric of pluralism available in this tradition. This is not to deny that Indian religions have often postulated, accommodated, preached and practiced religious dogmatism; nevertheless, there is aplenty of moments of pluralist postulations and practices as well. As Harold Coward has noted in an interesting study on pluralist experience of modern India: "India is perhaps the world's oldest and most interesting 'living laboratory of religious pluralism"[1] In this paper, some moments of religious pluralism experimented in that laboratory are explored to provide an insight into the valuable pluralist utterances which shall serve the purpose of a better understanding of the Indian religious tradition, and, offer useful terms for dealing with the contemporary preachers of the religious dogmatism. The survey, therefore, offers a descriptive introduction to moments of religious pluralism as experienced and manifested in diverse productions of religious culture, like epistemology, religious practice and state policy, chosen from various epochs of Indian history. In a chronological mode, we propose to discuss the *Anekantavadi* epistemology postulated by the Jains, an ancient religious tradition of India and the religious experience and policies of Akbar, the 16th century Mughal emperor, as part of a cultural location with a complexly

interconnected history.

2

Jainism, a religion with a history of more than two thousand years, tracing its beginning back to Mahavira (599-527 BC), had postulated a theory of reality and knowledge which was essentially pluralist. Jain theory of *Anekantavada*, supported by *Syadvada* and *Naya*, makes possible an epistemology of pluralism to its best. Explaining the etymological meaning of the term *Anekanta,* Samani Charitrapragya comments*:* "The term *anekanta* consists of two words "*aneka"* (more than one) and *"anta"* (qualities, attributes or ends)."[2] *Naya* means "the method of comprehending things from particular standpoints"[3] adopted by the inquirers. *Nayavada* regards ordinary, non-omniscient knowledge claims as limited by the particular standpoint on which they are based. This epistemological position was reasonably linked with a pluralist ontology, as manifested in Siddasena's assertion: "Since a thing has manifold character, it is (fully) comprehendible (only) by the omniscient. But a thing becomes the subject matter of a naya, when it is conceived from one particular standpoint."[4] Siddhasena accepts the partial truth of all possible standpoints, and also their partial fallibility: "All the standpoint (*nayas*) are (sic) right in their own respective spheres but if they are taken to be refutations, each of the other, then they are wrong. But a man who knows the 'non-one-sided' nature of reality never says that a particular view is absolutely wrong."[5] Jains also introduced the concept of *Syat*, which stands for "multiplicity or multiple possibilities" and "allows us to logically express or determine the nature of modes from different perspectives"[6] Bhadrabahu, a fourth century Jain preacher, explained the principle of *Syadvada*. The principle of

Syadvada maintains that manysidedness of reality and limitations of given standpoint of truth claims require that all knowledge claims be qualified in various ways.[7] From the abovementioned understanding of *Naya*, Jains propose a sevenfold reality and propositions about reality, depending on the *naya* or standpoint of the inquirer. Samantabhadra's *Aptamimamsa* describes such possible forms of reality and proposition: A thing *is* existent – from a certain point of view; It *is non*-existent – from another point of view; it is *both* existent and non-existent *in turn* – from a third point of view; It is *indescribable* (that is, both existent and non-existent simultaneously) – from a fourth point of view; it *is* existent and *indescribable* – from a fifth point of view; it is *non-existent* and *indescribable* – from a sixth point of view; it *is both* existent and *non-existent* and *indescribable* – from a seventh point of view. *Syadvada* mandates qualifying each proposition with the property of probability, formulating the sevenfold proposition as follows: May be, it is; may be, it is not; may be, it is and it is not; may be, it is indescribable; may be, it is and yet it is indescribable; may be, it is not and it is also indescribable; may be, it is and it is not and it is also indescribable.

It is notable, how the Jain epistemology also accommodates the 'inexpressible' as a possible description of reality. The statement accommodating the possibility of the inexpressible is considered to be the most important one in the Jain epistemology as that type accommodates even the most bizarre of the positions possible in argumentation. By recognizing possibility of various positions and descriptions of reality, Jains, however, do not propagate exclusivity or relativism, rather mandate assuming other perspectives. According to Jains, as nyays offer only partial understanding, only a combination of *nayas* can lead one to a total understanding of the truth. The valid means of knowledge for Jains is therefore *Pramana* which

takes into cognizance all possible standpoints. An *anekantavadi* position would necessarily take care of all propositions as expressions of partial truth. Siddhasena writes: "All the *nayas,* therefore, in their exclusively individual standpoints are absolutely faulty. If, however, they consider themselves as supplementary to each other, they are right in their viewpoints…(I)f all the nayas arrange themselves in a proper way and supplement each other, then alone they are worthy of being termed as "the whole truth" or the right view in its entirety."[8] Based on such an epistemology and ontology, pluralism becomes a precondition for attaining Truth for the Jains. It is this pluralist attitude which is manifested in Mahavira's saying: "Those who praise their own faiths and ideologies and blame that of their opponents and thus distort the truth will remain confined to the cycle of birth and death."[9] Jainism thus mandates an acceptance of the truth claims of religions, including those of Jainism, to be true, albeit partially, and also mandates an accommodative appreciation of all probable religious positions for an understanding of the whole truth. Pluralism thus becomes a precondition for reaching at true knowledge in Jain epistemology. This characteristic could enable the followers of Mahavira to promulgate open positions like the following: "I have no bias for Mahavira, and none *against* Kapila and others. *Reasonable words alone are acceptable* to me, whosever's they might be."[10] It is needed to be appreciated that such utterance, made about the founder of the respective religion was made possible only due to the specific epistemology of that religion, which was impossible to be decreed as an expression of disrespect from that theoretical perspective, rather should be considered as a logical and necessary formulation.

3

Centuries after Jains formulated their pluralist ontology and epistemology, they were invited to deliberate on their religion in the court of a Muslim Emperor, Akbar (1542-1605), who himself was then involved in the most fascinating experiment with religious pluralism in Indian history. The sixteenth century Mughal emperor was in search of a religious code which could accommodate the best of all religion and stay free of limitations. He considered the search of a collective religious code as a divine duty. Abul Fazal quotes him saying : "Although I am the master of so vast a kingdom, and, all the appliances of government are in my hand, yet since the greatness consists in doing the will of God, my mind is not at ease in the diversity of sects and creeds: and apart from that outward pomp of circumstance, with what satisfaction in my despondency can I undertake the sway of the empire: I wait in coming of some man or principle, who will resolve the difficulties of my conscience."[11] His experimentation started with the process of understanding the comparative acceptability of the thesis of different existent sects of Islam, plenty of them by then; and soon extended to consulting other religious groups resulting in the promulgation of a new code of belief and practice, known as *Din-i-Ilahi*, assimilating traits from various religions, guided by the Sufi policy of *Sulah-i-Kul*, universal peace and toleration, and his own policy of *Rah-i-Aql*, the path of reason.

Akbar built a Hall of Worship (*Ibadat Khana*) in 1973 for holding discussion on theological and philosophical questions. Different groups of Islamic theologicians, Sheikhs, Sayyids and Ulama were given different places for debate. Soon, Akbar also started inviting scholars and preachers of other religions, Brahmin (Hindu)-Jain-Parsee-Bauddha-Christian, for deliberation and debate. They were granted space for offering prayer and preaching. As Abul Fazal, his

biographer[12] writes: "A proclamation was issued that on that night of illumination, all orders and sects of mankind those who searched after spiritual and physical Truth, and those of common public who sought for an awakening, and the enquiries of every sect – should assemble in the precincts of the holy edifice, and bring forward their spiritual experiences and their degrees of knowledge of the Truth in various and contradictory forms in this bridal chamber manifestation. …Sufi philosopher, orator, jurists, Sunni, Shia, Nazarene, Jew, Sabi (Christians of St. John), Zoroastrians thus enjoyed exquisite pleasure by beholding the calmness of the Assembly, the sitting of the world-lord on the lofty pulpit and the adornment of the pleasant abode of impartiality."[13] His quest resulted in his proclamation of the pluralist religious code of *Din-i-Ilahi*. Surely, history has rarely witnessed an emperor taking such pain to reach at the Truth, through the interaction of preachers and practitioners of all affiliation; pluralist attitude was glowing at its best.

In this process of interaction with other religious groups, he also granted them some rights and concessions which transformed his administration into a supporter of religious pluralism, exceptional amongst the known empires of medieval era. Brahmans like Debi and Purushottam visited Akbar. Akbar "praised the truth-seeking of the natives of India and eloquently described the companionship of fidelity, property, life, reputation and religion which are reckoned as comprising the four goods of the world market."[14] Akbar adopted some practices of the Hindu religion, like, putting an auspicious mark (*Tilak*) on the forehead, decreeing the slaughter of cows a capital offence. He, along with royal ladies, made grants for Hindu temples. He liked the teachings of the Parsees that one can approach God through any religion and that the prophets had

been so numerous only to show that there were different ways to God; he paid veneration to the Sun, ordered that a sacred fire be kept burning under the supervision of Abul Fazal, learnt some religious terms and rules of the old Parsees, adopted the Parsee calendar and some Parsee festivals. He offered honor and grant to Parsee religious leaders. Akbar also honored Jain preachers like Padma Sunder, Buddhisagar, Shuddhakirti, Hir Vijay Suri, Jai Chandra Suri, and Bhanu Chandra Upadhyay. He ordered the release of caged birds and prisoners, abolished the confiscation of the property of deceased persons, abolished Jezia tax, a tax levied on Non-Islamic pilgrimages, and, another tax on non-Islamic pilgrimage;[15] prohibited the slaughter of animals on certain days, and, vowed not to eat flesh on Fridays. He liked the Jain idea that God is one but differently named in different faiths. He requested the Portuguese authorities of Goa to send Christian missionaries to his court. Two Jesuit fathers, Rodolfe Aquaviva and Antonio Monserrate visited Akbar; the emperor placed Bible on his head after removing his turban and then kissed it. He allowed the Jesuits to build a church and made building of synagogue, idol temple, Parsee tower of silence etc permissible. The experimentation resulted into the proclamation of the code of Din-i-Ilahi,[16] in a General Council in 1581, in which Akbar could accommodate the traits of various religions which he felt of value, accumulated through his interaction with these religions. *Din-i-Ilahi* was perhaps the most important test of the pluralist attitude of Akbar, which being his conceptualization, which he believed to have concentrated the best of all religions, could be made compulsory with all good intention. But, Akbar proved to be an ideal pluralist in preaching the new code. He continued to support other religions and sects,

showed no dishonor to his officers who preferred not to accept the new code, and did not ask the disciples of Din-i-Ilahi to denounce belief in their own religion. Though Din-i-Ilahi was proclaimed in 1981, he honored Parsee religious leader Dastur Ardhesir in 1592, who stayed for five years in Akbar's court; in 1594, he sent an ambassador to Goa to ask for a mission to instruct him in the doctrines of Christianity, and received the mission with due respect in 1595; in 1591, Jain saint Jai Chandra Suri was invited by the emperor, and was offered due honor. Surely, Akbar had no intention to impose Din-i-Ilahi on his subjects, nor was his quest and interaction with other religions end with the proclamation of Din-i-Ilahi. His tryst with religious plurality continued and as the emperor, he was practicing the policy of religious pluralism in a manner suitable to an Anekantavadi at his best.

4

Jainism had a history of more than thousand years; centuries have passed after Akbar had his pluralist experiment; yet, assaults on religious pluralism has continued to grow, taking lives of thousands of innocent people in its cruelest manifestation and constraining free exchange of ideas and practices in its subtle operation. Arguing for pluralist understanding of religion, therefore, remain the most important agenda of the contemporary world. Liberal intellectuals cannot more stress upon the need of revisiting the concept of Anekantavada, or, the mission of Akbar. Koller explains how Jain epistemology is the ideal one for conflict resolution by foregrounding its pluralistic bend: "The ideological dogmatism underlying violence is grounded in knowledge claims that though limited and only partially true,

are mistaken for absolute truth. Therefore, to avoid violence, one key step is to find an alternative theory of knowledge, an epistemology, (sic) that can support dialogue and negotiation among people of diverse perspectives and claims. Such an epistemology, that includes the truths of multiple perspectives, is made possible by the Jain philosophy of Anekantavada (non-absolutism)."[17] Some scholars had argued that true pluralist approach is impossible as all worldviews claim some truth added to it, leading to the position of moral relativism or religious exclusivism: "(T)here is no such thing as pluralism because pluralists are committed to holding some form of truth criteria and by virtue of this, anything that falls foul of such criteria is excluded from counting as truth (in doctrine and in practice). Thus, pluralism operates within the same logical structure of exclusivism and in this respect pluralism can never really affirm the genuine autonomous value of religious pluralism for, like exclusivism, it can only do so by tradition specific criteria for truth."[18] Vallely, however, argues against this position, stressing upon the fact that-- "*anekanta* is a way out of this epistemological quagmire, and … a genuine pluralist view is possible without lapsing into extreme moral relativism or exclusivity."[19] As already exposed, Anekanta not only allows pluralism, rather, mandates a pluralist attitude. And, while *Anekantavada* works at the level of scholarly conceptualization, Akbar's experience brings into fore a state policy of pluralistic tolerance and interaction. Amartya Sen reasonably feels "It is worth recalling that in Akbar's pronouncements of four hundred years ago on the need for religious neutrality on the part of the state; we can identify the foundations of a non-denominational, secular state which was yet to be born in India or for that matter anywhere else." Thus, Akbar's reasoned conclusions, codified during 1591 and 1592, had universal implications. Europe had just as much reason to listen to that

message as India had."[20] And, given the contemporary scenario of religious conflicts and one would agree that it still has universal implications. Jain theories and Akbar's policy experiment offer a multifarious exposure to religious pluralism, touching upon all possible areas of our existence, private as well as public, practical as well as theoretical, individual as well as collective.

Notes

1. Coward : 1987 : xi
2. Charitrapragya : 2004: 80
3. Vidyabhusana: 1920:181
4. Siddhasena, *Nyayavatara, 29*
5. Siddhasena, as cited by Matilal : 1981 : 31
6. ibid p. 81
7. Koller:2001:90
8. Siddhasena Divakara: *Sanmati Tarka*, cited by Trapnell:1998:220
9. Sutrakrtanga 1.1.2.23, cited in Trapnell: 1998 : 219
10. Maibhadra, cited in Chatterjee and Datta: 1968: 105
11. Abul Fazal: Akbar Nama, III, Beveridge:1973: 386
12. Abul Fazal was more than a chronicler of Akbar's reign, he was a Sufi who believed in the policy of Sulah-i-Kul, and had, along with his father Sheikh Mubarak and brother Faizi, persuaded the emperor to adopt the policy of Sulah-i-Kul.
13. Abul Fazal: Akbar Nama, III, Beveridge:1973:158
14. Abul Fazal, III, Beveridge:1974:371
15. Akbar, however, re-imposed the Jezia tax in 1975.
16. Scholars are divided on the issue whether Akbar meant Din-i-Ilahi to be a new religion. Prasad argue that Akbar remained a Muslim, Din-i-Ilahi being only an attempt at reform of the received tradition. "The *Din-i-Ilahi* must be treated as a sect in the same way as the Mutzalia sect or the Ismaili sect or the Roshni sect. It is so treated in the *Dabistan.* (Prasad: 1974: 397) *Dabistan Mazahib* was written by Mohsin Fani fifty years after the death of Akbar. (Trns. David, Shea and Anthony Tryer. 1843. Oriental Translation Fund)
17. Koller:2001:86
18. D'Costa: 1996: 226, in Vallely: 2004: 225-26
19. Valley: 2004: 100
20. Sen:2005:287

Bibliography

Beveridge, H, *The Akbar Nama Of Abul Fazl (Hisotry of the Reign of Akbar Including an Account of His Predecessors* (Trns), Vol- III, Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 1973.

Charitrapragya, Samani, *Mahavira, Anekantavada and the World Today*, in Tara Sethia, 2004.

Chatterjee, S and Datta, D, An Introduction to Indian Philosophy, Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1968.

Coward, H. G, *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.

D'Costa, G, "*The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions*," Religious Studies, 32, 1996.

Koller, J.M, *Why is Anekantavada Important*, in Mahaprajna: 2001.

Mahaprajna, Acarya, *Anekanta: Reflections and Clarifications*, Ladnun: Jain Vishva Bharti Institute, 2001.

Matilal, B.K, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anekanata-vada)* Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology31, 1981.

Prasad, Ishwari, *The Mughal Empire* , Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1974.

Prawdin, Michael, *The Builders of the Mogul Empire*, London: George Allen Unwin Ltd, 1963.

Sen, Amartya, *The Argumentative Indian*, England: Allen Lane England, 2005.

Siddhasena, Divakara: *Nyayavatara, 29*, A. N. Upadhye (ed). Bombay, Jaina Sahitya Vikas Mandal, 1971.

Trapnell, J.B, *"Indian Sources of a Pluralist View of Religions",* Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 35:2, Spring, 1998.

Vallely, A, *Anekanta, Ahimsa and the Question of Pluralism* in Sethia: 2004.

Vidyabhusana, Satis Chandra, *A History of Indian Logic: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Schools*, Delhi: Motilal Banarassidas Publisher, 2002.

Hick, Pluralism, and Category Mistake

Reza Akbari[*]

Abstract

John Hick's theory concerning plurality of religions is an ontologic pluralism according to which all religions are authentic ways for man to attain the "real an sich". Gods of religions are real as perceived and veridical hallucinations; while the "real an sich" has ineffable substantial and trans-categorical properties. Hick's view suffers from several problems. As a second order analysis of religions, Hick's view is not a correct one. To reject naturalism, it falls into an epistemological circle, where distinction between formal and substantial properties fades away. It seems that Hick is captured by a category mistake in the presentation of his own theory concerning authenticity of all religions to attain the "real an sich".

***Keywords**: pluralism, formal properties, substantial properties, category mistake, trans-categorical.*

Introduction

Through a review of various religions, we would easily find that God, man, and relation between the two are portrayed in various ways; and these images are, sometimes, in absolute

*. Associate Professor,Department of Philosophy and Theology, Imam Sadiq University, Tehran, Iran.E-mail: r.akbari@isu.ac.ir

opposition to each other. Conflicts between religions are not confined to theoretical issues but extend to practical points as well.

Concerning diversity of religions, numerous theories have been proposed.

In recent times, discussion about diversity of religions has turned into a philosophical one; and for the same reason, it is more accurate. Today, we find four main theories: naturalism, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

1. A Review of Hick's View

John Hick is the founder of one of the most important pluralist theories. John Hick's theory is among ontologic pluralist ones, which, as compared to epistemic pluralist theories, poses a stronger claim. Ontologic pluralist theories claim that truth of all religions is a factual one; whereas epistemic pluralist theories claim that no religion is able to prove its own validity for other religions; and since we have no reason, we assume that all religions are true and authentic; but that whether all religions are factually true and authentic is a point about which we cannot speak.

John Hick's theory contains the following claims:

A. In theoretical discussions of all great religions of the world (whether monotheistic or else) there is a combination of true and false claims.

B. Man's salvation is attained through going from self-centeredness to Real-centeredness and all religions are seeking to do so.

C. All religions have been, to some extent, successful in guiding man towards Real-centeredness.

D. All religions share the idea that possibility of man's salvation is based on belief in the Ultimate reality of the world;

the same reality which is called in various religions variously "Allah", "Jehovah", "Sacred Trinity", and "Brahma".

E. Based on the items A-D, all religions are considered authentic ways for man to relate to the same Divine Reality.

To demonstrate the strength of his own pluralist theory, Hick has appealed to various arguments. Appealing to God's grace and strengthening it on sociological foundations is one of such arguments.[1]

It should be noted that this argument is merely for rejection of giving rewards to the followers of a single religion and punishments to the followers of other religions, and it does not prove the truthfulness of claims of all religions. But two bases taken by Hick (which may be taken as two arguments to prove pluralism) are aimed to prove the truthfulness of claims of all religions. The first basis is the term "experiencing as" which may be considered as a generalization of Wittgenstein's term "seeing as". Wittgenstein introduces the term "seeing as" in puzzle pictures[2]; Hick, however, applies the term "experiencing as" to all human perceptions.[3] This term means various presuppositions which are not in many cases in man's control and impose themselves on man, influence his perception; for the same reason and based on different presuppositions, a single ultimate reality is perceived under various names such as Allah, Yahweh, Brahma, and the like; thus the difference between gods of religions is not an external one; rather all religions perceive the same reality; and differences lie in presuppositions.

The second basis is the Kantian distinction between noumenon and phenomenon and making use of it to perceive the Ultimate reality of the world.[4] Hick calls the Ultimate reality of the world faced by the followers of all religions "real an sich". For him, each and every religion makes a picture of the "real an sich" through its own cultural, social, historical, and

geographical eyes; and this is only a picture of the "real an sich.

Given acquisition of God's pictures in various religions through facing the "real an sich" and through perceptional glasses, Hick calls gods of religions "veridical hallucinations"; and since gods of religions have no correspondence with the "real an sich", he calls the real an sich "ineffable" and "transcategorical".

To demonstrate the strength of his two bases concerning Hick appeals to a famous parable mentioned in the ancient books, i.e., the parable of elephant and blind men. Having made use of this parable, Hick identifies positions of religions on the "real an sich" with those of men who are seeking to know the elephant in darkness.[5]

Now let us take some of the most important problems in Hick's view.

2. Main Problems in Hick's View

Attempts have been made in the present article to present the most important problems in Hick's theory, which will be followed by a discussion of the most important problem, i.e., "category mistake".

1. In Hick's theory there is no direct reference to the real God or the "Real an sich". This is in conflict with the fundamental faith of all religious men in all religious traditions; for no religious man believes that he is worshipping a god which is forged by his own mind. Since Hick's view is a general one; it covers even the relation between prophets and mystics and God. According to Hick's theory, prophets see God through cultural, social, historical, and linguistic eyes; thus, they are never related to the "real an sich". Since Hick considers properties of the "real an sich" as being beyond human understanding, we will have to deny prophets' speaking with God. The followers of Abrahamic

religions, in particular Judaism and Islam, believe that God has communicated necessary commandments to human beings through speaking with chosen men, prophets. Now, if Hick's view concerning the "real an sich" is accepted, believers will have to believe that the prophets have not found the "real an sich" at all, and what they have presented is a product of their speaking with a god which is forged by their own minds.

One may say that the followers' understanding of the prophets' speaking with God is a false one and John Hick's theory has revealed this falsity. This reply however seems to be false. Our main question is "What is John Hick's main concern in the theory of pluralism?" Is he seeking to make a synthesized religion and then to call the entire mankind to believe in it? Is John hick seeking to present a new religion other than the existing ones to people? Having studied John Hick's writings, we find that neither he seeks to present a synthesized religion nor a new one to the people. The reason is that he asks all followers of each religion to be faithful to their own religious traditions and to accept that other religions too will lead to salvation. So it seems that he is seeking to provide a second order analysis of the existing religions. This analysis should, like all other second order analyses, fulfill two points so that it may be considered as an authentic one. Firstly, it should have internal consistency; secondly, it should be consistent with the field analyzed. Hick's theory, however, seems to have problems in both cases. It has no internal consistency; and this will be shown in the next objections to his theory. And, John Hick's theory is not consistent with the field analyzed (i.e. various religions). Each and every religion claims that the image presented by it of God is an objective one; but Hick considers gods of religion as mental ones, and introduces the real God as a transcategorical one.[6]

2. Hick says that noumenon or the "real an sich" is ineffable

and beyond human understanding. Now, the main objection is that if the "real an sich" is ineffable and beyond human understanding and man has no direct contact with it, how can existence of such reality be accepted?[7] What is said by Netland is what is wrong with each and every theory which accepts indirect realism concerning perception. John Hick says that various images made of God by religions as a matter of fact stem from man's perceptual interaction with the "real an sich". For the same reason, such images may be considered as verifiable hallucinations. Netland's objection is: "If there is no relation between divine images of the "real an sich" on the one hand and the "real an sich" on the other, why do we call such images as real-like hallucinations?" Perhaps it is better to call them merely "hallucinations". In this way, it may be concluded that there is no "real an sich" and this means to be entrapped by naturalism.[8]

Hick is, somehow, aware of this objection; and for the same reason, in his theory he has tried to evade this objection. He says that the existence of the "real an sich" has been known through an inductive methodology and by a pragmatic criterion. Since all religions have managed to upbring moral men, it becomes clear that gods of religions are not mere hallucinations; but they unveil the existence of a reality beyond human understanding. This is what Hick says in reply to Dr. Phillip Almond's article concerning the parable of elephants and the blind men. Almond says that the blind men cannot claim that all of them are holding the same thing, i.e., an elephant; rather this can be claimed by the one who is not blind and at the same time sees the blind men and elephant. Almond's objection is that in John Hick's theory all human beings are like blind men and cannot speak of the existence of the external elephant. Thus, Almond says that John Hick's theory is inconsistent.[9] In reply to Almond, Hick says that the parable of the blind men and elephant does not

mean that he has an advantageous position, rather this parable is aimed only to reject naturalism; and the existence of "real an sich" has been known through an inductive methodology which results from study of the performance of various religions in upbringing moral men and mystics.[10] Having taken this position, Hick falls into a vicious circle to reject naturalism; and as long as naturalism which rejects the "real an sich" is not rejected by an authentic method, pluralism cannot be proved.

3. Hick makes a distinction between two kinds of the properties of the "real an sich": substantial and formal properties. Hick maintains that formal properties do not speak of the nature of the "real an sich"; and only allow us to be able to speak of the "real an sich". For example, he mentions some formal properties of the "real an sich" among which one may mention "being able to be referred to"[11] The other example is the following notion: existence of the "real an sich" in a way to which the substantial concepts cannot be applied.[12] What Hick says in this regard has been thoroughly criticized by Insole.[13] Having used the term coined for the first time by Alston (fingers in jam pot), Insole says that if Hick is to keep his fingers out of the jam pot (if he does not want to violate his own view concerning non-applicability of the substantial concepts about the "real an sich"), he will have to make uses only of formal properties. Insole says that Hick has not been committed to this, and in many cases he has made use of the substantial concepts when speaking of the "real an sich" and put his fingers in the jam pot.[14] As an example, Insole mentions Hick's statement suggesting that the real an sich is, in terms of its content, so rich that it can be experienced only in a limited manner and through particular and unsatisfactory ways described by the history of religions.[15]

Having arguably insisted on the property of "richness", Insole

says that "richness" is a substantial property of which Hick has made use to speak of the "real an sich". He argues: if Hick accepts that the property of "richness" is a substantial one, he has violated his own view; and if he considers this property as a formal one, properties such as good, bad and the like should be considered as formal ones as well; and this means to remove the borders between formal and substantial properties.

Now, let us assume that we have accepted formal properties and separated them from substantial ones. Thus, the most essential question is: "what is the criterion to distinguish formal properties from substantial ones?" Hick does not provide a clear definition for formal properties. Hick's closest statement to such definition is perhaps as follows: "logically generated properties"[16]. In addition to this statement, Hick provides us only with examples of formal properties; properties such as:

A- To be a referent for a word.

B- Being in such a way to which the substantial concepts could not be applied.[17]

Hick calls such properties "logically generated properties", but it seems that this is not the case. What is logically generated is what is analytic; but the second property, for example, is not so. The only way to consider such properties as being analytic is to define God in this way: "A being to which our substantial concepts cannot be applied". Since to predicate definiens to definiendum is a primary predication and provides us with an analytic proposition, if we define God in this way, the above-mentioned property would be an analytic one; but, the problem here is that we have repeated our claim. According to the above definition, we have taken our claim as presupposition.[18] And we are, as a matter of fact, entangled in a vicious circle.

By applying formal properties to the "real an sich" we have presupposed application of the substantial properties to this

"real"; though we have avoided verbal application of the substantial properties to the "real an sich".

Insole strengthens his own objection through a study of Aquinas' views concerning God. Aquinas maintains that religion's language to qualify God by attributes such as goodness and power is an analogous one; then these words should not be taken for their conventional senses.[19] Having employed Aquinas' literature, Hick presents a special interpretation of his [Aquinas'] view. According to this interpretation of Aquinas' view only formal properties may be applied to God. Insole says that according to Aquinas' view, application of attributes such as goodness and power to God is because of God's simplicity; and this latter property is a substantial one. Thus, application of formal properties to God presupposes substantial property (properties) of the "real an sich"; even though this is not mentioned verbally. Having studied Aquinas' view, Insole says correctly that application of formal properties to the real requires knowledge of some things about the real, and all those things are substantial ones.

Hick's expression that the substantial properties are not applied to the "real an sich" is, therefore, false, for this very expression requires knowledge of the "real an sich", and in it, we have applied the substantial properties to the "real an sich", even though we have not spoken of it.

3. Hick and Category Mistake

Taking into account the term coined for the first time by Gilbert Ryle (1949), we find one of the most important problems in Hick's theory. Ryle employs this term to mention falsity of the theory of those believing in soul. He maintains that they are in category mistake. What is meant by "category mistake"? Assume that someone asks you to show him the

Tehran University, and you show him all faculties, halls, and the like. Now, assume that he tells you: "What is shown by you is not the Tehran University, but faculties, halls…, but I wanted to see the University and not such things". According to Ryle, he is in category mistake. He thinks that the University is other than faculties, halls and the like; and in the same way that faculties, halls … have their own existence, university has its own realization as an independent category, and it can be seen like faculties, halls, and the like. Ryle maintains that those believing in soul are in such a mistake; for they think that man is something other than material body and behaviors issued from it.

Ryle's view concerning the relation between the psyche and body is false; but what we are seeking to introduce here is to show this mistake in Hick's thought. As said, Hick mentions the religions efficiency in upbringing moral and great men as a common property of religions; and to say this, he makes use of Wittgenstein's term "family resemblance". Also as mentioned above, for Hick, theoretical issues of religions are completely unimportant. What is wrong with this notion is that if we consider upbringing moral men as a reason for efficiency of the religions and put theoretical points of each and every religion aside and take them as being stemmed from cultural, social, and geographical… conditions, and think that like some glasses they cause the "real an sich" to be inaccessible from perception, we have committed a category mistake in using the term "religion"; for when we are using the term "religion", we mean nothing other than "schools". In reality, the religion of Islam is not other than schools which are covered by the general name of Islam. Thus, instead of saying that religions have managed to upbring moral and better men, it is better to say that schools have been successful in doing so. Now, let us look at this second claim. A through study of the second claim, would demonstrate that this

claim suffers from a category mistake as well, for schools are not other than sects consisting them. When we make use of the term "Shi'i", we mean nothing other than Imami, Zaydi, Isma'ili, … sects. Thus, it is better to say that sects have managed to upbring moral men; but the category mistake is still seen, for sects are not other than branches. Religious men are covered by various branches.

One may conclude that on the basis of what was discussed above if we want to put aside the theoretical issues of the religion and look at the practical effects of the religions and take them as reasons for efficiency of the religions, we will have to change our approach from religions to persons. It is through coming into the field of persons that one can avoid category mistake. In this way, however, we will face another problem. If we look at the persons who are classified under the various branches, we will find that in addition to moral men, there are immoral persons among them. Not all followers of the religions are moral men. On the other hand, if we look at persons who are committed to no branch of religious schools, we will find that, in addition to immoral men, there are moral men among them. This comparison shows that among both groups of the religious men and atheists there are, in addition to moral men, immoral men as well. Through this comparison, the religion loses its own place; for the same thing which is shared by the followers of the religions is shared by the opponents of the religions and agnostics as well.

This problem indicates that Hick's view, which concerns diversity of the religions, is reduced to a view concerning persons; and then one has to say that morality of men (whether religious or atheist or agnostic) is a sign of the truth of their beliefs, which is opposite to intuition of each one of us.

Conclusion

A study of Hick's theory shows that his pluralist theory

concerning the religions is internally inconsistent. From among objections to Hick's theory, the most important one is perhaps category mistake. Hick's motivation in introducing his theory is a valuable one, his epistemic tool to attain his goal is, however, an inefficient.

Notes

1. Hick, John, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, London: St. Martin's Press, 1985, ch. 5.
2. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Invastigation,* trans. G E. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell Publisher Ltd. 1953, 185.
3. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1989, 12.
4. Hick, 1372, pp. 274-276.
5. Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths,* London: SCM Press, 1995, 61.
6. Robert Mckim, "Could God Have More Than One Name", Faith and Philosophy, October 1988: 383; Harold A. Netland, "Professor Hick on Religious Pluralism," *Religious Studies* 22, June 1989: 254-55.
7. Netland, 261.
8. for other versions of this objection see: Richard L. Corliss, "Redumption and the Divine Realitties: A Study of Hick and an alternative," Religious Studies, 22, 1986: 235-49; Eliot Deutsch, "Review of Hick's An Interpretation of Religion" Philosophy East and West 40, 1990: 551-63.
9. Almond, Philip, "John Hick's Copernican Theology". *Theology* 86, 1983: 37.
10. Hick, 1985, 97.
11. Hick, 1989, 239.
12. Ibid.
13. Chrisopher J. Insole, "Why John Hick Cannot and Should not Stay Out of the Jam Pot," *Religious Studies* 36, March 2000: 25-33.
14. Insole, 26.
15. Hick, 1989, 247.
16. Hick, 1989, 239.
17. Hick, 1989, 239, 246.
18. Insole, 28.
19. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton Pegis, in on the Truth of the Catholic Faith, Book 1, Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1955, 130-4.

Bibliogeraphy

Almond, Philip, "John Hick's Copernican Theology", *Theology*, January, 1983.

Alston, William, "Realism and Christian Faith", *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 38, 1995.

Corliss, Richard L., "Redemption and the Divine Realities: A Study of Hick, and an Alternative", *Religious Studies* 22, 1986.

Deutsch, Eliot, "Review of Hick's An Interpretation of religion". *Philosophy East and West* 40, 1990.

Hick, John, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*. London: St. Martin's Press, 1985.

Hick, John, Philosophy of Religion, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall; 4th edition, 1990.

Hick, John, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1989.

Hick, John , *The Rainbow of Faiths*. London: SCM Press, 1995.

Hick, John, "Ineffability" *Religious Studies* 36, 2000.

Insole, Christopher J., "Why John Hick Cannot and should not Stay Out of the Jam Pot." *Religious Studies* 36. March 2000.

McKim, Robert, "Could God Have More Than One Name", *Faith and Philosophy* 5, October 1988.

Netland, Harold A, "Professor Hick on Religious pluralism", *Religious Studies* 22, June 1986.

Ryle, Gilbert, *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson, 1949.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton Pegis, in *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith, book* 1. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1955.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigation* trans, G. E. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell Publisher Ltd, 1953.

Civilizational Clash or Co-Existence: An Islamic Perspective

Noor Mohammad Osmani[*]

Abstract

Right after the Cold-War a lopsided dominance of the Western civilization took a shape in reality, creating an invisible division of the West and the rest. This imaginary division, in affect, triggered a cultural domination of the Western culture and traditions, undermining other cultures. Hence there took a turnabout in history from a 'physio-psychical' war to a 'psycho-cultural' war.

Huntington argued that there will be seven – eight civilizations ruling the next century, thus resulting to a possible clash among them. And among these, West faces the greatest threats from the Islamic civilization.

The purpose of this research is to examine the perceived clash between civilizations and the criteria that lead a civilization to precede others from both Islamic and Western perspective. The research would conduct a thorough study of the available literatures, analyze historical facts and data and make a critical evaluation.

On the basis of the criteria for civilizational hegemony from an Islamic view point, this paper argues that there should be no clash, rather a co-existence of civilizations.

Keywords: *Islamic Civilization, Western Civilization, Religious pluralism, Culture, Identity.*

---

* Associate Professor, Department of Qur'an and Sunnah Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia. E-mail: abusajid@yahoo.com

Introduction: From WWI to the Cold-War

Exercising power or the practice of dominionship became a trend of the Western foreign policy, especially the US, since the beginning of the 20th century. The first of these traumatic exercises took place in the European nations and the surrounding seas in the war of 1914-1918, which pitted the Great Britain, France and Russia against Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey. The US entered the war on the British side only in 1917, when the strength of the main protagonists was nearly exhausted. Russia was defeated and had a communist revolution later the same year.

A truce was signed in 1918 where European borders were re-arranged mainly based on language. Poland, Finland, the new Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and many other nation-states were created anew. To be noted, one of the influential participants of this peace truce was the then US president Wilson.[1]

The 1939-1945 war was the second great trauma of the 20th century. It claimed some 52 million lives. The United States, still regarding 'isolationism' as the most profitable policy –to excel in business and also to save American lives- kept out of the war until December 1941, and might well have kept out longer had US not been attacked at Pearl Harbor. By then Britain was almost down on its knees and dependent on American supplies. France had surrendered already in 1940. On the other hand, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 diverted his soldiers, resulting him a failure in taking over England. Thus the over-confidence and greed of Germany and Japan probably prevented their victory.

By the time they were finally defeated in 1945, the United States was the only power of global economic stature. Britain, France, Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union were totally

exhausted by the war and their economic infrastructures had suffered enormous damage.[2] US could virtually dictate the rates of their economic revival. The prime American aim was to prevent a revival of Great Britain as a dominating power in its own axis and to limit the aptitude of France to influence events on the continent of Europe. US also played significant roles in dissolving the nations and breaking up the colonial powers after the World-War II in 1945. This was, again, to actualize its goals in preventing other powers from dominionship.

On the other part of the world the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Stalin, was able to establish its hegemony in creating a bipolar world. It lasted for forty years, which was destroyed in the hands of Mikhail Gorbachev. With this, there came the end of the 'Cold- War' era.

After the dissolution of the colonial powers and the traumatic age of the Cold-War, a lopsided dominance of the Western civilization took a shape in reality; creating an invisible division of the West and the rest. Hence there took a turnabout in history from a "physio-psychical war" to a "psycho-cultural war."

Huntington (1996) argued that there will be seven/eight civilizations ruling the next century, thus resulting to a possible clash among them. And among these, West faces the greatest threats from the Islamic and the Sinic civilizations.[3]

Since the emergence of Huntington's theory, which is widely known as "the clash of civilizations," it caught proper attention of the mass; be it in the form of media such as radio, television and various internet sites, be it at the particular level of research, study and discussion in circles of research, studies and decision support, be it in faculties and universities, in intellectual forums, in political and cultural encounters, or in specialized and non-specialized conferences dealing with the international issues on

the international scene at this stage which was and still is unquestionably one of the most talked issue in the history of mankind. Though Huntington's theory is widely known as "Clash of Civilizations," this term was, however, used decades before him by Basil Mathews when he marked in his book that Islam needs Christ to save them from the ignorance, and the clash they face.[4]

Huntington's theory is considered a biased one, as he tried to reflect his own presuppositions about other cultures in general and Islam in particular.[5] From an Islamic view point, there could be no clash among civilizations, as civilizations are not to clash but rather to cross-breed and succeed, indeed. They complement each other, succeed and continue, for they are the synthesis of human intellect, man's creativity and the movement of history which is, in the Islamic conception, God's law in the Universe.[6] Here, this paper tries to investigate the stance of Islam in the midst of the so called "clash" by the western thinkers like Huntington.

The Post-Cold War and the Clash

Huntington argues that the post-cold war era will take a shape from a tri-polar world of the cold-war era to a multi-polar and a multi-civilizational world. He writes:

"In this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations. The rivalry of the superpowers is replaced by the clash of civilizations."[7]

His thesis concludes that the post-cold war era is a world of seven-eight major civilizations, where cultural commonalities and differences shape interests, antagonisms, and associations of states. For obvious reasons, power is slowly shifting from the long predominant West to the non-Western civilizations in a multi-polar and multi-civilizational political arena.

West threatened: Is there a new enemy?

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990-1991 left the world with one superpower and an explosive situation for some time. However, the West sees a rapid change in the global politics. It fears the rise of non-Western powers as threats to its monarchy. Ramati identifies the U.S. support for the Taleban in the 1979 war against Russia as one of the serious mistakes in wide opening the 'opportunities of anti-western Islamic Terrorism.'[8]

From the fears of Bernard Lewis (1990), expressed vividly in his article "The Roots of Muslim Rage," the West perceives Islam as 'aggressive, irrational, militant, terrorist, and always ready for jihad,' as it was portrayed throughout the article.[9] He asserts that 'Islamic fundamentalists' wage wars against secularism, capitalism, democracy and modernity as a whole, and perceive Western civilization as a threat to their way of life and culture.[10]

However, stereotype of Islam as such, is nothing new in the history of Islam-West relationship. Whether it is Dante's *Divine Comedy* or the *Arabian Night's Entertainment* in Richard Burton of 1885, or Weber's presentation of Islam as a 'national Arabic warrior religion' Islam has always been portrayed with biasness, prejudice, fear coupled with misunderstandings and ignorance.[11]

After all, the West discovered Islam as the 'new enemy' with the need of one in the post cold-war era. This is significantly replicated in Huntington's hypothesis of seven-eight civilizations dominating the next world, where he finds Islam and the Sinic civilizations are the most threatening.

Huntington and the "Clash"

Huntington sees the next century as an era of 'clash' and 'conflict' mainly of cultural distinctions.[12] However, what he sees

is basically enrooted in what he and the West 'desires to see' where essentially the whole problem lies there. He thinks that the West is and will remain the most powerful civilization for years to come, yet its power is slowly in decline. He further asserts that some societies attempt to emulate the West and to join or to 'bandwagon' with the West, with exceptions from the Confucian and the Islamic societies, which does not only try to resist western values but also try to expand their own economic and military power in order to check and 'balance' against the West.[13] However, more than the Chinese civilization, he perceives Islam and its revival as more threatening. He tries to justify his claims quoting western writers like Bernard Lewis who only observed a thousand years of constant threat from Islam to Europe.[14] Huntington asserts later that Islam is the only civilization which has put the survival of the West in doubt for at least twice.[15]

As a matter of fact, Huntington is in a constant fear of Islam, and assumed that Islam is the civilization to 'clash' with the dominionship of the west in the years to come. Islam is the new enemy to replace their old cold-war enemy.

Islam faces the West

Although Huntington is too concerned about the Islamic threat from a cultural dominionship, Hunter however, does not agree that the 'conflict' or the 'clash' between Islam and the West is mainly due to cultural and ideological differences alone.[16] The 'clash' is rather in terms of interests and power related issues; for a global power and global influence, more than it is for a global culture, "it is over the unequal distribution of world power, wealth and influence" as Graham Fuller writes.[17] Besides these, another important and crucial factor

behind the perceived 'clash' between Islam and the West is 'the marriage of Islam and oil.' Hunter rightly identified the western interest in the 'reservoirs of oil and gas' in the Muslim lands, which highly incites the west to continue its hegemonic attitude. This is further affirmed by political scientists like Zbigniew Brzezinski, who indicated the abundant natural resources in the Central Asian region as a means of the west to technically keep them destabilised.[18]

Islam and the West

The West-Islam relationship has been of a dualistic nature since quite long. The Western perception of the natural relationship takes the form of either 'ours' or 'theirs,' 'Occident' or 'Orient,'[19] 'in favour of' or 'against,' 'strong' or 'weak,' 'rich' or 'poor,' 'civilized' and 'uncivilized;' which later turned out to be in the form of 'masters' and 'slaves,' 'powerful' or 'puny,' 'rulers' or 'ruled' especially after the period of colonialism.[20]

A hostile view of Islam began during the 8th century when Muslims expanded into the Iberian Peninsula. Islam as a faith was rejected as a fundamental religion and seen as a direct theological and political threat to Christianity throughout the Middle Ages; Muslims were seen as heretics and their prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, a diabolical fraud.[21] The medieval Christian views of Islam as a heresy and its Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as an impostor have had a lasting impact on how Europeans came to see Islam and Muslims for over a millennia and this mode of perception continues to be a key factor in modern depictions of Islam in certain parts of the Western world.[22]

Karmi argues that this phenomenon of dualistic philosophy was adapted into the Western philosophies from the concept of 'Chosen' and 'Gentiles' of Judaism. This division continued to

dominate human thinking throughout the ages, till now, and those who are 'Chosen' are also rich, masters and mighty. And in the era of neo-colonialism, the same philosophy is applied from a micro level area to a macro level area, seeing the western (or to be precise, 'our' as the West sees) nation states as 'rich,' 'mighty,' and 'strong.'

This hegemonic attitude of the West does not end with the end of colonization. The era of neo-colonization takes a different shape of dominionship through mass emigration from the East or Orient to the West, ultimately creating crises of 'brain drain' to keep the divided nations ever poor with 'merit-less leadership'.[23] It does not only evacuate the 'brains' of a nation, but also keeps the nation eventually dependant on the Western 'brains.'

The Islamic perception of Islam-West relationship, however, is unlike the dualistic nature of the western view. Islam sees every other civilization as a part of the whole for a 'co-existence,' under the virtue of 'universal brotherhood' derived from the *'Tawhidic'* worldview. On the other hand, the 'Islamic civilization' embraces anyone from any locality under the banner of *'Ummah,'* which is purely antagonistic to the 'exclusivistic' attitude of 'dualism' of the West. *Ummah* is a universal brotherhood, a collective community, which surpasses all geographic, territorial, ethnic, racial, or any boundaries set, be it by language, colour or location. The focus of identity in the *ummah* is the Islamic ideology and Islamic philosophy, and is determined by its divine mission; as Ismail R. Faruqi cites it 'translocal,' 'transracial,' and 'transtatal'.[24] The Islamic concept of *ummah* is neither a 'chosen' people nor a 'saved' community as that of the Jews and Christians. Indeed, it's the *Ummah-tan- Wahidah* (holy Quran 30:30) of the believers by the virtue of final *Din; Din al-fitrah,* a community by decision, not by nature. It's anti-ethnocentric,

universal, totalistic, and mission oriented in nature.

Islam recognizes different religious faiths, cultures and civilizations and requires the people of all faiths to come together and have mutual understanding. Naderi Farsani vividly points out this issue deriving it from the Qur'anic *ayah* of *Surah al-Hujurat*, as Allah says: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)." (Al-Hujuraat 49: 13). Naderi asserts that Allah never asked people to follow only one religion or faith for any specific nation. Rather they were commanded to continue mutual understanding and respect for each other.[25]

As a matter of fact, there seems to be a different approach towards the so called perceived 'clash' from the Islamic philosophical viewpoint. The reason for the stemming differences in the philosophical discourses of West – Islam relationship and the 'clash' itself is mainly due the flawed foundations of western philosophy, and its materialistic worldview. Throughout the history, many of the appealing western philosophical ideas have again and again been refuted to be proven flawed. Consequently, a civilization based on jumbled and flawed foundations should naturally bring about incongruent ideas. It seems that what the West 'sees' has much to do with what the West 'aspires to see' and there the whole set of problem lies in.[26] The West 'aspires to see' them as the most powerful civilization ever remaining, is and to come.[27]

The sources of Western Materialism

Jameelah remarks that the medieval Christian Europe and the Muslim world shared a basic common heritage, the concern of salvation in the life beyond the grave, at least until the Renaissance, when man sought only to enjoy the pleasures of exercising intellectual curiosity to investigate the world around

them.[28] However, from the inception of Renaissance onwards, the intellectual atmosphere of Europe and the Muslim world drifted further and further apart. And the modern civilization, as we know, had born amidst the shift of developing the potentialities of each individual instead of attaining salvation in the Hereafter. As faith in the freedom of unaided human intellect replaced faith in God, pagan philosophies glorifying the jewels of the earth tied with the Church. At a stage, worldliness and wealth increasingly corrupted the Church itself to the extent that the luxuriously lead life of the popes and bishops were scarcely distinguishable from the secular monarchs.

This 'vacuum' of a sense of spirituality slowly grasped the whole of Western mode of life, giving a new meaning to its worldview. This was evident in the scientific discoveries to the writings and ideas of the philosophers. After Copernicus, the Western astronomers saw man as a puny speck on a tiny planet revolving around the tenth rate star, drifting aimlessly in an endless cosmic ocean. Since God, angels and Satan were not seen in their telescopes they concluded that man was completely alone in the cosmic machine, which resulted, perhaps, from an accident. Similarly, Western scientists like Descartes held that the nature was nothing more than a machine with no sense of spirituality. All living beings, including man, were mere a matter of automatic chemical reactions. Hume rejected all religious beliefs on the ground that they could not be proven by empirical facts or reasoning. This age considered morality as a science like any other sciences and branches of human knowledge.[29]

With the evolution theory of Darwin, the West experienced a new philosophy, a new scale of values; evolving in a constant state of flux and change from a lower category to a much complex category. The principles of biological evolution, when applied to human society, identified it with labels of 'modern,'

'up-to-date,' 'advanced,' 'progressive,' 'post-modern' and whatever they aspired. And Darwin's idea of 'survival of the fittest' seems to be the root of the Western worldview on the questions of race, identity, self and nationhood. Ahmed points out that the genealogy of this arrogant worldview is to be directly traced to Darwin, then nimbly skipping past Christ, to the Greeks back to Achilles the warrior, Homer the poet and Plato the philosopher. Darwin, to the European society, appeared like an iconoclastic revolutionary. However, he too, was echoing the Greeks when the Spartans left out their own frail babies to face the elements, and their death was a testimony to the Spartan philosophy.[30]

Another important factor that has contributed to the Western materialism is the secular understanding of worldviews, denying completely the place of religious beliefs and practices in a society. Esposito pointed out that few analysts have become 'conservative clerics' who treat religious beliefs and practices as 'isolated, freestanding realities.'[31] In such a superficial treatment of religion, particularly to Islam, represents a gross injustice to Islam, which is not a 'personal belief,' rather a 'way of life.' However, secular ideologies ultimately pave ways to materialistic worldview.

Esposito identified another important factor, the 'secular elite orientation,' in this connection. He observed that the tendency of the Western scholars to learn Islam from the like-minded Western-trained Muslim scholars, highly influences the understanding of Islam by the West, as 'prejudiced,' 'limited,' and 'confused'.[32] And, with no or less concern about Islam, this 'prejudice' leads, ultimately, to the feeling of superiority of the West.

And once again, the dualistic philosophy of 'Ours,' and 'theirs,' 'master,' and 'slaves,' plays the minds of the West.

The characteristics of Islamic Civilization

Similar to the human beings, every civilization consists of a body and a soul. The body of a civilization is the material achievements in terms of development, infrastructure, buildings, competence and advancement of the system, machinery and anything which reflects welfare and earthly advancement. Its soul is the set of creeds and concepts which condition the behaviors of individuals and groups, their mutual relationships and their worldview. These are the elements which constitute the characteristics of the Islamic civilization.

Altwaijri identified five main characteristics of the Islamic civilization that distinguishes it from other past and present civilizations. These characteristics form the fundamental identity of the Islamic civilization in other hand.[33]

The first characteristic is that it is a civilization founded on the Islamic faith, permeated with the values and principles of Islam itself. It is a civilization based on the concept of Tawhid, oneness of Allah Almighty, the Creator of all. It is also partly a man-made civilization, built on robust religious background of faith. The holy, righteous religion was, indeed, a strong factor which contributed to the rise and prosperity of this civilization.

The second important characteristic of the Islamic civilization is the fact that it is a universal civilization; as Faruqi mentioned 'translocal,' 'transracial,' and 'transtatal.' It is also 'translingual' and 'transcultural'[34] (See holy Qur'an: 12:104, 81:27, 74:31, 6:19, 14:52) .The Islamic civilization is also predicated on the idea that Man has precedence over the rest of Allah's creatures, that all human activities should lead to the happiness and welfare of Man and that any action intended to serve this goal is a God-blessed action, indeed a human action in the first place.

The next characteristic of the Islamic civilization is its being a 'generous civilization'(holy Quran 6:19) which contributed to the human society in large, with no exception or biasness. Its contributions are founded on the basis of the previous generations' and ancient nations' experiences, and are ranged from science, technology, knowledge, morality to any other aspect of human society, for any civilization of the society.

The fourth uniqueness of Islamic civilization lies in its 'median' and 'balanced' nature of the community, which is termed as *'Ummatan-Wasatan'* in the Qur'an (Al-Qur'an, 2:143) itself. The Islamic civilization is 'balanced' between rigidity and leniency, between extremism and rejection, and most importantly, between the spiritual aspects of human life and the material aspects of it. As Altwaijri writes, "it is a moderation built on justice and equity."[35]

The fifth characteristic of the Islamic civilization is a long lasting civilization;(see holy Quran: 30:30,12:40,9:36) it would last as long as Islam lasts. And Islam, as the final *Din,* will last until the end of the human history; hence the Islamic civilization is a permanent and perpetual civilization. Its perpetual nature is further affirmed by its strong and well-grounded foundation of *Tawhid,* unlike the other civilizations of materialistic philosophy.

Any civilization is the yield of all efforts made by humans to improve their living conditions, regardless of whether such effort is intentional or not or whether its outcomes are material or moral.[36] Therefore, the Islamic civilization is the blessed fruit of the efforts made by the Islamic *Ummah* throughout the different ages for the betterment of human conditions and living.

Conclusions: Towards a peaceful co-existence

In the 'clash' perceived among the civilizations and religious faiths, the fundamental source will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic, as Huntington views. Rather the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural and religious. But Hunter[37] argues that it is for a global power and global influence, more than for a global culture. Yet, Amartya Sen thinks that had there been any classification among the civilizations, it should be primarily epistemic and empirical, not based on religions as of Huntington's ideas.[38]

On the other hand, Islam does not perceive this as an obvious "clash." The Islamic philosophy of political dominionship or power is vicegerency (*Khilafah*) of human beings, whereas the sovereignty belongs only to Allah (swt). And thus the differences among the civilizations are only background to a healthy competition, not a conflict.[39]

However, it is clear from the Western philosophy's double standards, self centeredness and an apparent biasness, it has failed to convince the genuine minds and dominate ethically.[40] With a distinct failure of the Western secular-materialistic philosophy, the demand for a new philosophy has arisen to peak. This philosophy should comprehend science, politics, economics and other conventional knowledge with religious values and ethics, which is antithetical to materialistic and secular philosophy. In no means, none other than the Islamic philosophy apprehends the criteria required, thus is the only alternative to the Western materialistic philosophy.[41] This emphasizes the necessity of Islamic civilization, and demands the end of a self-centered, biased and imperialistic Western civilization, yet with no clash rather a peaceful co-existence.

Notes

1. Ramati, Yohanan, *The Islamic Danger to Western Civilization,* Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Western Defence. Accessed online, on 14th February, 2007, from: www.westerndefense.org/special/TwinTowers2001.htm.
2. Koreshi, S.M., *New World Order: Western Fundamentalism in Action*, Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies and Islamabad Publications, 1995, 29-42.
3. Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster. P. 1996, 31.
4. Mathews, Basil, *Young Islam on Trek: A Study in the Clash of Civilizations*, London: Church Missionary Society, 1928, 24.
5. Naderi Farsani, "Worldviews Dangle before Democracies", *Assisi*, Highlands Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought, Italy, 2007.
6. Altwaijri, A. Othman, *The Characteristics of the Islamic Civilization and its Future Prospects.* Rabat: Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2002, (ISESCO). Retrieved online, on 26th January, 2007, from: www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Characteritics/Chap5.htm.
7. Huntington: 28.
8. Ramati, op.cit. www.westerndefense.org/special/TwinTowers2001.htm
9. Lewis, Bernanrd, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1990.
10. Ibid.
11. Ali, Muhammad Mumtaz, *The Clash of Civilizations or Civilizational Peaceful Co-Existence: An Analysis of the Views of Huntington and Khurshid Ahmad*, Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2006, 32.
12. Huntington: 21.
13. Ibid: 29.
14. Lewis, Bernanrd, *Islam and the West*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 13.
15. Huntington: 210.
16. Hunter, Shireen, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilization or Peaceful Co-Existence?* London: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1998, 21.
17. Fuller, Graham, "The Next Ideology," *Foreign Policy.* No. 98. Spring, 1995, 150.
18. Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *The Grand Chessboard*, New York: Basic Books, 1997, 31.
19. Said, Edward W, *Covering Islam,* N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1981, 4.
20. Karmi, Hasan S, *Islam and the West,*.Rabat: ISESCO, 2004, 28.
21. Gainem, Alexander, "Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Lessons from History" *Islam Online,* Retrieved online, on 16th January 2007, from: www.islamonline.net/English/Views/2006/02/article09.shtml.
22. Kalin, Ibrahim, "Western Perceptions of Islam: Yesterday and Today", *Islam Online.* Retrieved online, on 27th June 2005, from: www.islam-online.net/english/Contemporary/2003/04/Article01a.shtml.
23. Jameelah, Maryam, *Western Imperialism Menaces Muslims*, Lahore: Mohammad

Yusuf Khan & Sons., 1978, 3.

24. Faruqi, Ismail R, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life,* Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 1984, 124-5.
25. Naderi Farsani, "An Investigation on the Possibility of Mutual Understanding in a Pluralistic World", (paper presented at the IX Conference, European Culture, Navara, Spain, 2007.
26. Ali, Mumtaz: 11.
27. Huntington: 29.
28. Jameelah, Maryam, *Islam versus the West*, Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1977, 5th ed., 7-8.
29. Ibid: 9-16.
30. Ahmed, Akbar S, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise*, London, N.Y.: Routledge, 1992, 110.
31. Esposito, J. L, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 200-1.
32. Ibid: 201-2.
33. Altwaijri, www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Characteritics/Chap5.htm.
34. Faruqi: 125.
35. Altwaijri, www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Characteritics/Chap5.htm.
36. Altwaijri, *Dialogue for Co-existence* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1998), 22-3.
37. Hunter, op cit.
38. Sen, Amartya, "Is There a Clash of Civilizations? Americans must Learn More About Real World History." *Slate*, 5th May 2006. Retrieved on 16th January, 2007, online from: www.slate.com/id/2140932/?nav=navoa.
39. Abu Rabi`, Ibrahim M. (Ed.), *Islamic Resurgence: Challenges, Directions and Future Perspective – A Round Table with Khurshid Ahmad.* Florida: World and Islam Studies Enterprise, (WISE), 1994, 32.
40. Rajamoorthy, T, "Double Standards, Selectivity and Western Domination", in *Dominance of the West over the Rest,* Kuala Lumpur: JUST, 1995, 73-82. Also at Jameelah, *Western Imperialism Menaces Muslims*, Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan & Sons, 1978, 1-23.
41. QaraÌawi, Yusuf, *Islam the Future Civilization (Al-Islam Hadaratul Ghad),* Cairo: El-Falah Foundation for Translation, Publishing and Distribution, 1998, 45.

Bibliogeraphy

Abu Rabi`, Ibrahim M. (Ed.), *Islamic Resurgence: Challenges, Directions and Future Perspective – A Round Table with Khurshid Ahmad*, Florida: World and Islam Studies Enterprise, (WISE), 1994.

Ahmed, Akbar S, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise*, London, N.Y.: Routledge, 1992.

Ali, Muhammad Mumtaz, *The Clash of Civilizations or Civilizational Peaceful Co-*

Existence: An Analysis of the Views of Huntington and Khurshid Ahmad, Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2006.

Altwaijri, A. Othman, *The Characteristics of the Islamic Civilization and its Future Prospects.* Rabat: Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2002 (ISESCO). Retrieved online, on 26th January, 2007, from: www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Characteritics/Chap5.htm.

Altwaijri, *Dialogue for Co-existence,* Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1998.

Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *The Grand Chessboard*, New York: Basic Books, 1997.

Esposito, J. L, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 200-1.

Faruqi, Ismail R, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life,* Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 1984.

Fuller, Graham, "The Next Ideology," *Foreign Policy.* No. 98. Spring, 1995.

Gainem, Alexander, "Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Lessons from History" *Islam Online,* Retrieved online, on 16th January 2007, from: www.islamonline.net/English/Views/2006/02/article09.shtml.

Hunter, Shireen, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilization or Peaceful Co-Existence?* London: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1998.

Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* N.Y.: Simon & Schuster. P. 1996.

Jameelah, Maryam, *Islam versus the West* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1977, 5th ed.).

Jameelah, Maryam, *Western Imperialism Menaces Muslims,* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan & Sons., 1978.

Kalin, Ibrahim, "Western Perceptions of Islam: Yesterday and Today", *Islam Online.* Retrieved online, on 27th June 2005, from: www.islam-online.net/ english/ Contemporary/2003/04/Article01a.shtml.

Karmi, Hasan S, *Islam and the West,*.Rabat: ISESCO, 2004.

Koreshi, S.M., *New World Order: Western Fundamentalism in Action,* Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies and Islamabad Publications, 1995.

Lewis, Bernanrd, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1990.

Lewis, Bernanrd, *Islam and the West*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Mathews, Basil, *Young Islam on Trek: A Study in the Clash of Civilizations*, London: Church Missionary Society, 1928.

Naderi Farsani, "An Investigation on the Possibility of Mutual Understanding in a Pluralistic World", paper presented at the IX Conference, European Culture, Navara, Spain, 2007.

Naderi Farsani, "Worldviews Dangle before Democracies", *Assisi*, Highlands Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought, Italy, HIARPT, 2007.

QaraÌawi, Yusuf, *Islam the Future Civilization (Al-Islam Hadaratul Ghad)*, Cairo: El-Falah Foundation for Translation, Publishing and Distribution, 1998.

Rajamoorthy, T, "Double Standards, Selectivity and Western Domination", in *Dominance of the West over the Rest,* Kuala Lumpur: JUST, 1995.

Ramati, Yohanan, *The Islamic Danger to Western Civilization,* Jerusalem: Jerusalem

Institute for Western Defence. Accessed online, on 14th February, 2007, from: www.westerndefense.org/special/TwinTowers2001.htm

Said, Edward W, *Covering Islam*, N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1981.

Sen, Amartya, "Is There a Clash of Civilizations? Americans must Learn More About Real World History." *Slate*, 5th May 2006. Retrieved on 16th January, 2007, online from: www.slate.com/id/2140932/?nav=navoa.

Pluralism definition - What does pluralism mean?

Abdul Sattar Shaikh[*]

Abstract

Pluralism is promoted as a system for the "common good" of all and It is a coming together with common recognition and credence to all beliefs and developments of modern social, scientific, and economic societies. All groups have to agree to a minimal consensus regarding both shared values, which tie the different groups to society, and shared rules.

Religious pluralism is a set of worldviews that stands on the premise that one religion is not the sole exclusive source of values, truths, and supreme deity. The concept of religious pluralism is not new; it has been discussed in one form or another by past philosophers and theologians of various schools. The great philosopher, Āyatullâh Murtadhâ Mut'ahharî, wrote his seminal work, `Adl-e Ilâhî (The Divine Justice) about thirty-five years ago, the debate on religious pluralism had not yet become that popular in Iran.

The most famous proponent of modern religious pluralism is John Hick, who abandoned his Catholic exclusivist view and formulated his specific theory in the seventies.

Keywords: *Pluralism, Religious Pluralism, Divine Justice, Theologians, Messengers, Religions, Islam, Judaism, Christians, Social,*

A pluralism definition has the basis in operating under the

*. Department of Art, Tarbiat Modares University,Tehran, Iran.
E-mail: Rajaasattar@yahoo.com

principles of acceptance and diversity. It is promoted as a system for the "common good" of all. It is a coming together with common recognition and credence to all beliefs and developments of modern social, scientific, and economic societies.

For pluralism to function and be successful in achieving the common good, all groups have to agree to a minimal consensus regarding both shared values, which tie the different groups to society, and shared rules. . ." This sounds good but is impractical and can we dare say impossible when there will always be certain truths that are non-compromising.

Religious pluralism is a set of worldviews that stands on the premise that one religion is not the sole exclusive source of values, truths, and supreme deity. It therefore must recognize that at least "some" truth must exist in other belief systems. This is one example of "they can't all be right."

The concept of religious pluralism is not new; it has been discussed in one form or another by past philosophers and theologians of various schools. However, with the increased interaction between followers of different religions and inter-faith dialogues, religious pluralism has taken a new life in the stream of current thought.

When the great philosopher, Āyatullâh Murtadhâ Mut'ahharî, wrote his seminal work, *`Adl-e Ilâhî* (The Divine Justice) about thirty-five years ago, the debate on religious pluralism had not yet become that popular in Iran.

What you have in your hands is the translation of *`Adl-e Ilâhî*'s last chapter on "Good Deeds of Non-Muslims". The more appropriate place to discuss religious pluralism and its related issues would be under the theme of "*nubuwwah* - prophethood" when discussing the finality of Prophet Muhammad's (S) prophethood, however the question "What happens to the good

deeds of non-Muslims?" is also connected to the theme of Divine justice; and so Āyatullâh Mut'ahharî has answered it at the end of his *`Adl-e Ilâhî*.

Nonetheless, before discussing that question in detail, Āyatullâh Mut'ahharî has also briefly stated his views on religious pluralism itself. As you will read yourself, he expresses the prevailing view of the Muslim theologians and philosophers that Islâm is the only right path. However, and more importantly, he cautions the readers not to jump to the conclusion that since Islâm is the only right path therefore all non-Muslims will go to hell. The exclusivist view of Islâm being the right path does not automatically and necessarily lead to the belief that all non-Muslims will go to hell.

In the last one and a half decades, the question of religious pluralism has been passionately debated among the Muslims in the West as well as the East. Some Muslim intellectuals have even tried to impose the concept of religious pluralism onto the Qur'ân itself!

we would like to take this opportunity to briefly present this discussion as a preamble to the writing of the great scholar, Āyatullâh Murtadhâ Mut'ahharî.

While discussing the concept of pluralism in the Islâmic context, it is important to define the term clearly. Pluralism can be used in two different meanings: "Social pluralism" in the sociological sense means a society, which consists of a multi-faith or multi-cultural mosaic.

"Religious pluralism" in the theological sense means a concept in which all religions are considered equally true and valid.

As far as social pluralism is concerned, Islam seeks for peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance between the people of different religions and cultures. Among the three Abrahâmic religions, it is only Islam, which has accorded recognition to

Judaism and Christianity.

In the Islâmic worldview, God sent many prophets and messengers to guide humankind. The first prophet was Ādam B and the last Prophet was Muhammad - the Prophet of Islam (S). However, not all the 124,000 prophets were of the same rank and status.[1]

Five of these prophets are given the highest rank in the spiritual hierarchy: and they are Nûh (Noah), Ibrâhîm (Abraham), Mûsâ (Moses), `Isâ (Jesus), and Muhammad (as). Almighty Allah says in the Qur'ân:

> *"And when We made a covenant with the prophets: with you, with Nûh, Ibrâhîm, Mûsâ and `Isâ, son of Mariam…"*[2]

A Muslim is required to believe in all the prophets; otherwise, he cannot be considered a "Muslim".[3] If a person, for instance, says that I believe in Muhammad, `Isâ, Ibrâhîm and Nûh but not in Mûsâ as one of the prophets of God, then he cannot be accepted as a Muslim; similarly, if a person believes in all the prophets but refuses to accept `Isâ as one of the prophets and messengers of God, then he is not a Muslim. That is why Islam considers the Christian and the Jewish communities as "the People of the Book" or "the People of Scripture" (Ahlul Kitâb). Islam has even allowed a Muslim man to marry a Christian or Jewish woman, but not those from the other faiths.

What is noteworthy is that Islam accorded this recognition to the Ahlul Kitâb fourteen centuries ago when there was absolutely no talk of tolerance among people of different faiths or an ecumenical movement among religions.[4]

On a socio-political level, a Muslim government would readily sign an agreement with its Christian and Jewish minorities. Imâm `Alî Zaînul `Ābidîn, the great-grandson of the Prophet, writes:

> *"It is the right of the non-Muslims living in a Muslim country that you should accept what Allâh has accepted from them and fulfill the responsibilities which Allâh has accorded them… And there must be a barrier keeping you from doing any injustice to them, from depriving them of the protection of Allâh, and from flaunting the commitments of Allâh and His Messenger concerning them. Because we have been told that the Holy Prophet said, 'Whosoever does injustice to a protected non-Muslim, I will be his enemy (on the Day of Judgement.*"[5]

Although Islâm does not accord to followers of other religions the same recognition that it has accorded to Jews and Christians, it believes in peaceful co-existence with them. One of the earliest messages of peaceful co-existence given by the Prophet Muhammad (S) to the idol-worshippers of Mecca is reflected in Chapter 109 of the Qur'ân:

> *Say: "O unbelievers! Neither do I worship what you worship; nor do you worship what I worship. Neither am I going to worship what you worship; nor are you going to worship what I worship. To you shall be your religion and to me shall be my religion."*

The treatment that Muslim societies have given to the minorities under their rule, especially the Christians and the Jews, is comparatively better than the way minorities were treated in Christian Europe.[6]

Religious Pluralism

The most famous proponent of modern religious pluralism is John Hick, who abandoned his Catholic exclusivist view and formulated his specific theory in the seventies. Hick's pluralistic hypothesis claims that each religion in its own way represents an authentic revelation of the Divine world and a fully authentic means of salvation. He believes that all religions are culturally conditioned responses to the same ultimate reality; and,

therefore, are equally valid, and salvation is possible through any of them.

Hick uses the famous story of the Hindu mystics to illustrate his point:

> *"An elephant was brought to a group of blind men who had never encountered such an animal before. One felt a leg and reported that an elephant is a great living pillar. Another felt the trunk and reported that an elephant is a great snake. Another felt a tusk and reported that an elephant is like a sharp ploughshare, and so on. And then they all quarrelled together, each claiming that his own account was the truth and therefore all the others false. In fact of course, they were all true, but each referring only to one aspect of the total reality and all expressed in very imperfect analogies."* [7]

There are many flaws in Hick's hypothesis. The most serious problem is of reconciling the conflicting truth-claims of various religions: for example, monotheism of Islâm as opposed to polytheism of Hinduism; death and resurrection of Islâm and Christianity as opposed to reincarnations and reaching the state of nirvana of Buddhism; salvation through Trinity as opposed to Tawhîd (Monotheism), etc.

In order to resolve the problem of conflicting truth-claims, Hick suggests that religious traditions differ on three issues:

1. on historical facts;

2. on trans-historical facts;

3. on conceptions of the Real.

Then he proposes the solution for these differences. For the disagreements on historical facts, Hick suggests that they are minor issues and they could be resolved by application of the historical method. As for differences on trans-historical facts (i.e., matters that cannot be established by historical or empirical evidence such as "is the universe temporal or eternal" or "death and then resurrection versus reincarnations"), he says that the resolution of such differences are not necessary for salvation

and that religions need to dialogue more in order to modify their beliefs. For differing conceptions of the Real, Hick assumes that all religious traditions are authentic manifestations of the Real and that each tradition's deity is an authentic face of the Real.[8]

Finally, Hick believes that any religious belief that would conflict with, and if literally true, falsify another religious belief, must be treated as mythological.

The end result of this theory is that in order to make it workable, Hick would have to redefine many religious beliefs in ways that the founders and followers of those religions would strongly protest! Take the example of the historical status of Jesus from Islâmic, Christian and Jewish perspectives:

Apart from the two first items (and that also only between Islâm and Christianity), all three Abrahamic religions have conflicting views on Jesus. According to John Hick's theory, the first two common beliefs would be considered as "facts" (at the least in Christianity and Islâm) whereas the other points of disagreements must be treated in two possible ways: Either these conflicting views should be resolved by historical/empirical inquiry or they should be put in the category of "mythology"!

The first solution will force the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims to reject many verses of their respective scriptures while the second solution will place many statements from the Bible and the Qur'ân into the category of "mythology". None would be acceptable to any of the three faiths.

I think this one example (that also of Islâm vis-à-vis Christianity and Judaism which are closer to one another than Islâm vis-à-vis Hinduism and Buddhism) suffices to show that Hick's theory of religious pluralism is not workable.

Based on Hick's solution for meta-historical facts (issues related to death and after), Muslims will be forced to consider more than five hundred verses of the Qur'ân on death, resurrection and afterlife as part of "mythology"!

Coming to the third type of differences on conceptions of the Real, Dr. John Hick wants us to believe that the Trinity of Christians, the multiples idols of Hindus, and the Tawhîd (Monotheism) of Muslims are equally valid and true! This hypothesis weakens the faith in one's religion and pushes one towards agnosticism if not atheism.

Using Immanuel Kant's view of dualistic categories, Hick says that there is a difference "between an entity as 'it is in itself' and as 'it appears in perception'." [9]

Something could be *completely* true "in itself" but when it is perceived by others, it is *relatively* true. Based on this idea, Hick wants all religions to accept all differing conceptions of God as equally authentic because none of them are absolutely true, all are only relatively true. The way Hick has used the story of the blind men and the elephant, he has assumed all religious people to be blind and that they lack the ability to know the complete truth. Unfortunately, he has missed the moral of the same story as given by Mawlânâ Rûmî on elephant.[10]

These men were groping in darkness and, therefore, they came with wrong description of the elephant; if they had used a "candle", they would have seen the light! In Islâm, God does not let a searcher for truth grope in darkness:

> ***"Allâh is the Protector of the believers, He brings them forth from the shadows into the light***." [11]

The Qur'ân and Religious Pluralism

Some Muslim intellectuals have attempted to read the theory of religious pluralism into the Qur'ân itself. The most famous argument used by them is that the term *"Islâm,"* in the Qur'ân, should not be taken as a noun but just as a verb. Sometimes they differentiate between "islam" (the act of submission) and

"Islam" (the religion); and say that the main message of God and the basis of salvation is submission to God, and that it does not matter whether the submission takes place through Ibrâhîm, Mûsâ, `Isa or Muhammad (as).

This is nothing new; even Āyatullâh Mut'ahharî, in the present work, writes, *"If someone were to say that the meaning of 'Islâm' in this verse is not our religion in particular; rather, the intent is the literal meaning of the word, or submission to God, the answer would be that undoubtedly 'Islâm' means submission and the religion of Islâm is the religion of submission, but* ***the reality of submission has a particular form in each age****. And in this age, its form is the same cherished religion that was brought by the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad). So it follows that the word 'Islâm' (submission) necessarily applies to it alone.*

> *"In other words, the necessary consequence of submission to God is to accept His commandments, and it is clear that one must always act on the final Divine commandments. And the final commandments of God is what His final Messenger [Muhammad] has brought."* [12]

"Islâm" in the Qur'ân [3:19-20]

When the Qur'ân says, for example:

some Muslim intellectuals say that it does not mean "**I**slâm" the religion that started in the seventh century by Prophet Muhammad (S). They say it means "**i**slâm," submission to God through any of the Abrahamic religions.

In their attempt to read a politically correct idea into the Qur'ân, they even ignore the context of the verse. Let us read the whole passage together:

> *"Surely the* religion *with Allâh is* al-Islâm. *And those who have been given the Book [i.e., the Christians and the Jews] did not show opposition but after knowledge had come to them, out of envy*

> *among themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allâh, then surely Allâh is quick in reckoning.*" [13]
> *"But if they dispute with you, say: "I have submitted myself entirely to Allâh and (so has)* everyone who follows me."
> *"And to those who have been given the Book [i.e., the Christians and the Jews] and to the idol-worshippers [of Mecca], say: "*Do you submit?*" If they* submit, *then they are* rightly guided; *but if they reject, then upon you is only the delivery of the message. And Allâh sees the servants.*"[14]

This passage clearly states the following:

"Al-Islâm" mentioned in this verse is the message of submission as brought by Prophet Muhammad (S).

The People of the Scripture (i.e., Christians and Jews) are in opposition of this version of submission to God.

The Prophet Muhammad (S) and his followers are followers of the Islâm which was brought by him.

The People of the Scripture are being asked to submit to God through Prophet Muhammad (S) even though they already are followers of Prophets Mûsâ (as) and `Isâ (as).

The same message is given to the idol-worshippers of Mecca.

If the People of the Scripture do not submit (as Prophet Muhammad (S) and his followers have submitted), then they are not "rightly guided".

So the term *al-Islâm,* in this verse, refers to "submission to God" through His final message brought by Prophet Muhammad (S) and not through previous prophets.

"Islâm" in the Qur'ân [3:83-85]

Another passage from the same chapter is also relevant for understanding the meaning of "Islâm":

> *"Is it then other than* Allâh's religion *that they seek while to Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the Earth, willingly or*

> *unwillingly, and to Him shall they be returned?"*
> *"Say: "We* believe in *Allâh, and* what has been revealed to us, *and what was revealed to Ibrâhîm, Ismâ'îl, Ishâq, Ya`qûb, and the Tribes; and what was given to Mûsâ and `Isâ and to the prophets from their Lord. We do not make any distinction between (the claim of) any of them, and t*o Him do we submit." *"And whoever desires* a religion other than Islâm, *it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers."*

This passage clearly explains basic beliefs of Allâh's religion: Among those basic beliefs is the requirement to believe in "what has been revealed to us" (i.e., the Qur'ân that has been revealed to Muslims).

"Islâm – submission" only follows when one accepts all the prophets and does not differentiate in the truth of any one of them, including Prophet Muhammad (S).

"Islâm" and "Imân "in the Qur'ân [2:135-137]

The following passage in Chapter Two of the Qur'ân further clarifies the meaning of "*islâm*–submission" as well as "*imân*–belief":

> *"And they say: "Be Jew or Christian and you will be guided aright."*
> *"Say: "Nay! (we follow) the religion of Ibrâhîm, the sincere, and he was not one of the polytheists."*
> *"Say: "We* believe in *Allâh, and* what has been revealed to us, *and what was revealed to Ibrâhîm, Ismâ'îl, Ishâq, Ya`qûb, and the Tribes; and what was given to Mûsâ and `Isâ and to the prophets from their Lord. We do not make any distinction between (the claim of) any of them, and t*o Him do we submit."
> "If they (i.e., the Jews and the Christians) then believe as you believe, then they are rightly guided; *but if they refuse, then they are only in great opposition; and Allâh will suffice you against them. He is the Hearing, the Knowing."*

These two verses clearly define the "*imân* - faith and belief" of the Muslims as opposed to that of the Jews and the Christians. Central to the *imân* of the Muslims is belief in the revelation of all the prophets, including the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (S). They clearly say that if the Jews and the Christians "believe as you believe," only then will they be rightly guided.

Sûratul Baqarah (2), Verse 285 also confirms this meaning of *"imân"*:

> *"The Messenger (i.e., Muhammad) has believed in whatever that has been revealed to him from his Lord; and the believers all believe in Allâh, His Angels, His books, and His messengers. (And they say:) "We do not differentiate between (the claim of) any one of His messengers."*

A note on "we do not differentiate between any one of the messengers" or "we do not make any distinction between any one of them": it does not mean that all the prophets and messengers of Allâh (S) are of the same rank and status. We have already mentioned that there are five prophets who rank highest in the spiritual hierarchy. Rather, this means that we do not make any distinction in the truth of any of the prophets; all are equally true in their claim. This is unlike the Jews who accept all the prophets but reject `Isâ (as) and Muhammad (S) or the Christians who accept all the prophets but reject Muhammad (S).

Prophet Muhammad (S) and Religious Pluralism

Those Muslim intellectuals who preach about religious pluralism in Islâm seem to be oblivious of some historical facts of Islâmic history and the Prophet's life. If Judaism and Christianity are concurrently valid paths of submission to God, then why did the Prophet Muhammad (S) work so hard to

convey his message even to the Jews and the Christians? If they were already on the Right Path *(Ŝirat Mustaqîm),* then why did the Prophet (S) feel it important to invite them to Islâm?

After the peace treaty of Hudaybiyya in 6 A.H., the Prophet of Islâm (S) sent emissaries to various rulers and tribes around and beyond the Arabian Peninsula with a distinct purpose of inviting them to Islâm. According to historians, around 25 letters were sent by the Prophet (S) to various rulers and tribes.[15]

Among those who were sent to the Christian rulers and tribes, we see the following names: Dihyah al-Kalbî sent to Heraclius, the Emperor of Byzantine; `Amr bin Umayyah Zamrî to the Negus, the King of Abyssinia; Hât'ib bin Abî Baltâ'a sent to the Muqawqis, the King of Egypt; and the tribes of Ghassan and Ĥanîfah (in northern Arabia). Three letters are important and relevant to our discussion.

In his letter to Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, the Prophet Muhammad (S) wrote: *"… Peace be upon him who follows the guidance.*

> *I invite you to accept Islâm. Accept Islâm and you will prosper and Allâh will give you double rewards. But if you refuse, then the sin of your people also will fall upon your shoulders.*
>
> *O' People of the Scripture, come to the word common between us and you that we shall not worship anything but Allâh, and that we shall not associate anything with Him, nor shall some of us take others for lords besides Allâh. But if you turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims."*

In the letter to the Negus, the King of Abyssinia, the Prophet Muhammad (S) wrote: *"… Peace be upon him who follows the guidance.*

Praise be to Allâh besides whom there is no other god, the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Preserver of Peace, the Keeper of the Faithful, the Guardian.

I bear witness that Jesus, son of Mary, is indeed a spirit of God and His word, which He conveyed unto the chaste Mary. He created

Jesus through His word just as He created Ādam with His hands. And now I call you to Allâh who is One and has no partner, and to friendship in His obedience. Follow me and believe in what has been revealed to me, for I am the Messenger of Allâh. I invite you and your people to Allâh, the Mighty, the Glorious.
I have conveyed the message, and it is up to you to accept it. Once again, peace be upon him who follows the path of guidance."

In the letter sent to the Muqawqis, the King of Egypt and a Coptic Christian, the Prophet Muhammad (S) wrote: *"…Peace be upon him who follows the guidance.*

I invite you to accept the message of Islâm. Accept it and you shall prosper. But if you turn away, then upon you shall also fall the sin of the Copts.
O' People of the Scripture, come to a word common between us and you that we shall worship none but Allâh and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him and that none of us shall regard anyone as lord besides God.
And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims."[16]

Even the arrival of the delegation from Christian Najranis and how the Prophet (S) invited them to Islâm and, finally, the *mubâhala* with them is in the same spirit of inviting the Ahlul Kitâb to Islâm.

All these letters and the meeting with Najranis prove beyond any doubt that if the Ahlul Kitâb (the People of the Scripture) were on *Ŝirât mustaqîm* - on the right path that leads to salvation - then the Prophet (S) would not have invited them to Islâm.

At the conclusion of this introduction, we would like to reiterate the caution that believing in Islâm as the only valid path of submission to God does not automatically and necessarily lead to the belief that all non-Muslims will go to hell. Neither does this exclusivist view of Islâm as the only *sirât mustaqîm* prevent us from promoting tolerance and peaceful co-existence

among the followers of various religions, especially the Jews and the Christians.

While talking about polytheist parents, Almighty Allâh says:

> *"And if they insist on you to associate with Me (someone as on object of worship) of what you have no knowledge, then do not obey them, however interact with them in this world kindly …"*[17]

Thus, a Muslim has to resist the un-Islâmic influence of non-Muslims, but still be kind to them. In other words, although your paths *in the hereafter* will be separate, that does not prevent you from being kind, merciful, and just to non-Muslims *in this world.*

Notes

1. Al-Qur'ân, Sûratul Baqarah (2), Verse 253; Al-Qur'ân, Sûrat Banî Isrâ'îl (17), Verse 55
2. Al-Qur'ân, Sûratul Ahzâb (33), Verse 7; also see Al-Qur'ân, Sûratul Shûra (42), Verse 13:
   "He has made plain to you the religion that He enjoined upon
   Nûh, and that which We have revealed to you, and that We have enjoined upon Ibrâhîm, Mûsâ, and `Isâ…"
3. Al-Qur'ân, Sûrat Āli Imrân (3), Verse 84
4. It took the Catholic Church almost two thousand years to recognize the non-Christians including the Muslims. The Second Vatican Council declared in 1964 that "Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience–those too may achieve eternal salvation." *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1975, p. 367.
5. Imâm `Alî Zaînul `Ābidîn, *Risâlatul Huqûq,* tr. SSA Rizvi, Vancouver: VIEF, 1989, p. 36.
6. Ira Lapidus writes: "The Ottomans, like previous Muslim regimes, considered the non-Muslim subjects autonomous but dependent peoples whose internal social, religious, and communal life was regulated by their own religious organizations, but their leaders were appointed by, and responsible to, a Muslim state." *A History of Islâmic Societies*, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 323. Also see Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islâm,* vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 306.
7. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faith*, London: Macmillan, 1977, p. 140.

8. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 364-365.
9. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* p. 241. In other words, we cannot really know God; what we know is our perception of Him. Muslim philosophers do not accept Kant's theory. For more on the theory of knowledge from the Islâmic perspective in English, see Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabâ'tabâ'î, *The Elements of Islâmic Metaphysic,* tr. S.A.Q. Qarâ'I, London: ICAS Press, 2003, p. 115-132 and also Part One of S.M. Bâqir as-Sadr, *Our Philosophy,* tr. Shams C. Inati, London: Muĥammadi Trust, 1987.
10. *The Essential Rumi,* translated by C. Barks, New Jersey: Castle Books, 1997, p. 525.
11. Al-Qur'ân, Sûratul Baqarah (2), Verse 257
12. See the discussion in this book. Āyatullâh Mut'ahharî's comment that "the reality of submission has a particular form in each age" is also key to the proper understanding of Sûratul Baqarah (2), Verse 62.
13. Al-Qur'ân, Sûrat Āli Imrân (3), Verse 19
14. Al-Qur'ân, Sûrat Āli Imrân (3), Verse 19-20
15. Muhammad Ibrâhîm Āyatî, *Târîkh-e Payghambar-e Islâm*, Tehran: Tehran University Press, n.d. p. 480-482.
16. Ibid, p. 483- 494.
17. Al-Qur'ân, Sûrat Luqmân (31), Verse 15

Bibliogeraphy

Al-Qur'ân

Āyatî, Muhammad Ibrâhîm, *Târîkh-e Payghambar-e Islâm* ,Tehran: Tehran University Press, n.d.

Hick, John, *An Interpretation of Religion*, New Haven: Yale University Press,1989.

Hick, John, *God and the Universe of Faith*, London: Macmillan,1977.

Hodgson, Marshall, *The Venture of Islâm,* vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1974.

Imâm `Alî Zaînul `Ābidîn, *Risâlatul Huqûq,* tr. SSA Rizvi, Vancouver: VIE, 1989.

Sadr, S.M. Bâqir, *Our Philosophy,* tr. Shams C. Inati, London: Muĥammadi Trust,1987.

Tabâ'tabâ'î, Muhammad Husayn, *The Elements of Islâmic Metaphysic,* tr. S.A.Q. Qarâ'i , London: ICAS Press, 2003.

Book Review: Epistemological and Theological Foundations of Religious Pluralism in John Hick's Philosophy

Wajih Qansu, Published by: al-Dar al-Arabiyah lil Ulum, Beirut, 2007. Introduced by: Zahed Veysi, Iran.

The book under review focuses on John Hick's philosophy concerning religious pluralism. In the first chapter, the author gives a brief account of John Hick's biography and biodata, and then he presents a summary of Hick's most important thoughts about the philosophy of religion. Also, a list of John Hick's writings is provided in this chapter.

In the first chapter, of course, not all Hick's ideas are presented; but the focus of his discussion includes his viewpoints, methodologies, and comparisons Hick has adopted

concerning religious pluralism and his theory of religious pluralism. For the same reason, in the consequent chapters, the concepts and points mentioned related to John Hick's religious pluralism which are dispersed throughout his writings are elaborated.

The second chapter which is titled "The Problem of Religious Pluralism" discusses the approach of Christian theology towards other religions. Also, in this chapter, the author speaks of the problem of religious pluralism and backgrounds of the theological revolution sought by John Hick.

The Third Chapter, "God between Transcendence and Experience", discusses the idea of God or transcendent reality in the great religions of the world, and elucidates various names and attributes of God in a comprehensive manner.

The Fourth Chapter, "Epistemological Pattern of John Hick", studies John Hick's attempts to construct an epistemological pattern similar to the epistemological pattern of Kant. This is, of course, aimed to recognize perceptional foundations and infrastructures to perceive Divine truth and make interpretation and understanding of religious experience possible.

Chapter five, "Conflict between Claims Concerning Religious Truths", studies the problem of conflict between claims concerning religious truths, and provides some solutions for such conflicts.

Chapter six, "the Problem of Salvation", discusses the concept of salvation, and attempts have been made in this chapter to shed light on the equal possibility of salvation for the followers of all religions.

Chapter seven, "Religion and Religious Experience", discusses the religious pluralism realized in the existing world. It also provides such definition for religion that may be suitable for the existing situation of religious pluralism. In the conclusion,

attempts made by John Hick to understand and interpret religious experience are illustrated.

Chapter Eight, "Christology and Religious Pluralism", discusses John Hick's challenge with the problems of "superiority of Christianity" and "Singleness of Christ". Also mention is made of his attempts to re-understand Christ, his opinion about equality of Christianity and other religions, his idea of the essence of Christianity, and new theological ideas concerning ransom, incarnation, and Trinity.

Chapter Nine, "Conclusion: Criticism and Evaluation" provides a critical reading of the main points of John Hick's pluralist pattern to understand religious experience.

The book describes religious pluralism and its branches based on John Hick's philosophy and his ideas in this regard. The main basis of this theory is that there are some sort of relationship between plurality of human societies and plurality of religions. The reason underling this argument is that religion is not something added to the society from without, but one of its institutions and historical foundations.

That religion has a hidden dimension does not mean that its truths are of particular kind, or are hidden, or are beyond the reality of human society. On the contrary, religion is always manifested in social frame, cultural structures, and linguistic and semantic systems where it finds its qualities as well. This means that religion is not merely a heritage of the prophets or a revelatory text received by the believer. Religion is a product of historical institutionalization of religious call which is realized after death of the founder (of that call). In this way, religion changes from a state of conscious awareness and spontaneous commitment to the teachings of the founder into an organized and rationalized state of awareness, and includes a series of common convictions and legislative and behavioral principles as

well as devotional acts. Religion includes frames organizing relationships between believers and between them and the world.

The chapters of the book and their contents have been already mentioned briefly, hence there is no need to repeat them again. However, a brief account of what the author has written about religious pluralism in John Hick's viewpoint is provided here.

Taking into account Hick's viewpoints, methodologies and comparisons made by him concerning religious pluralism on whose basis he founds his theory of pluralism, the author describes the main ideas of John Hick about pluralism. In addition, he mentions various concepts introduced by John Hick concerning religious pluralism. Such concepts, of course, are dispersed in John Hick's writings and works.

While discussing the issue of religious pluralism, the author describes the methodology of Christian theology with an eye on John Hick's stance towards other religions. He discusses religious pluralism in the same way.

It should be borne in mind that the term "pluralism" when used in the field of religion is to a great extent ambiguous. More clearly, the concept of "pluralism" came into existence when the religious conviction was the foundation of identity and the main link of social relations that tried to coordinate such relations. Later, the term was used to describe diversity of religious attitudes and plurality of creedal approaches within a single society so that religion may be taken as a personal choice.

Nevertheless, since moral values take their essence and significance from the divine laws, the moral issue proceeds to reproduce its own independent principles and commitment.

The main mistake of John Hick was his attempt to transform historical and objective reality of the religious pluralism existing within the precinct of world great civilizations to a rational and

creedal reality. In other words, he tried to found this pluralism on religious foundations with a religious justification.

Discussion about religious pluralism, of course, is not an attempt to prove legitimacy of the existing religious pluralism in the world, for this pluralism is an existing reality and it is not necessary to prove it. Hick's discussion about the truth of this pluralism is a theoretical endeavor.

The main context of John Hick's theory is reality and its data with all its dispersed segments. Thus he focuses on such data to construct a rational and theological system which interprets and depicts the universe concealed in these data.

Therefore, the epistemological question turns from a question of the competence of religious system into a question of historical situation producing the religious system and of rational and epistemological frames which are able to provide a proper understanding of its internal instruments, intrinsic structure, and historical developments.

One may, of course, raise an objection that Hick does not provide sufficient justification for moving from inclusivism to pluralism which considers the system of truths and sacredness existing in all religions to be on the same level.

It seems that the present book can be an important step towards understanding Hick's philosophizing for non-Westerners, in particular if we bear in mind that the way of religious understanding in Islamic World is different from what is thought by John Hick. Thus, this book seems to be an important work for filling the lacuna existing in the literature concerning this field.

Naturally, this subject with its extensive scope cannot be contained in such a small book. If the author speaks sometimes in brief and probably ambiguously, it is based on the presupposition that the reader is familiar with the main ideas of Hick. However, the book cannot be regarded as a textbook. Nevertheless, the scholars in the Islamic and Arab are

recommended not to miss this valuable source.