RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE MODERN WORLD

An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick

Edited by
SHARADA SUGIRTHARAJAH

Religious Pluralism and the Modern World

Also by Sharada Sugirtharajah

IMAGINING HINDUISM: A Postcolonial Perspective

John Hick's Principal Writings

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE, 1957, 1966 (2nd edn), 2009 (reprinted)

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION, 1963, 1991 (4th edn)

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, 1964 (*edited*)

FAITH AND THE PHILOSOPHERS, 1964 (*edited*) (reissued 2011)

CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY READINGS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION, 1963, 1990 (3rd edn) (*edited*)

EVIL AND THE GOD OF LOVE, 1966, 1977 (2nd edn), 2007 (3rd edn), 2010 (reissued)

THE MANY-FACED ARGUMENT, 1967, 2009 (reissued) (*edited, with Arthur McGill*)

CHRISTIANITY AT THE CENTER, 1968

ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, 1970

GOD AND THE UNIVERSE OF FAITHS, 1973

TRUTH AND DIALOGUE, 1974 (*edited*)

DEATH AND ETERNAL LIFE, 1976

THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE, 1977 (*edited*)

GOD HAS MANY NAMES, 1980

CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS, 1980 (*edited, with Brian Hebblethwaite*)

THE SECOND CHRISTIANITY, 1983

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD? 1983 (*with Michael Goulder*)

THE EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, 1985 (*edited, with Hasan Askari*)

PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM, 1985

THE MYTH OF CHRISTIAN UNIQUENESS, 1987 (*edited, with Paul Knitter*)

THREE FAITHS, ONE GOD, 1989 (*edited, with Edmund Meltzer*)

GANDHI'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR TODAY, 1989 (*edited, with Lamont Hempel*)

AN INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION, 1989, 2004 (*2nd edn*)

DISPUTED QUESTIONS IN THEOLOGY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION, 1993

THE METAPHOR OF GOD INCARNATE, 1993

THE RAINBOW OF FAITHS, 1995

THE FIFTH DIMENSION, 1999

DIALOGUES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION, 2001, 2010 (reissued)

JOHN HICK: An Autobiography, 2002

THE NEW FRONTIER OF RELIGION AND SCIENCE, 2006, 2010 (reissued)

WHO OR WHAT IS GOD? 2008

BETWEEN FAITH AND DOUBT, 2010

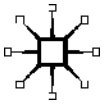
Religious Pluralism and the Modern World

An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick

Edited by

Sharada Sugirtharajah
University of Birmingham, UK

palgrave
macmillan



Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2012 978-0-230-29669-5

First published 2012 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited,

Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-33386-8 ISBN 978-0-230-36013-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780230360136

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12

Dedicated to John Hick in whose honour these essays have been written

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Acknowledgements ix

Notes on Contributors x

Introduction: Religious Pluralism – Some Issues 1
Sharada Sugirtharajah

Part I Religious Pluralism and Global Perspectives

1 Religious Pluralism and the Need for an Interreligious Theology 19
Perry Schmidt-Leukel

2 Which Is It? Religious Pluralism or Global Theology? 34
Marilyn McCord Adams

3 Virtuous Comparativists Are Practicing Pluralists 46
Paul F. Knitter

4 Pluralism Revisited 58
Keith Ward

5 Faith Triumphant? The Problem of a Theology of Supersession 68
Julius Lipner

Part II Religious Pluralism and Practical Concerns

6 The Value of the Symbolic Jesus for Christian Involvement in Interfaith Dialogue 83
Alan Race

7 Interreligious Prayer between Christians and Muslims 95
Gavin D'Costa

8 Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World 107
Ursula King

9 The Mahatma and the Philosopher: Mohandas Gandhi and John Hick and Their Search for Truth 121
Sharada Sugirtharajah

Part III Theological and Philosophical Orientations

10 John Hick: Theologian or Philosopher of Religion? 137
Chester Gillis

11 Humane Spirit: Towards a Liberal Theology of Resistance and Respect 152
George M. Newlands

12 Mediating Relativism and Absolutism in Tillich's and Hick's Theories of Religious Truth 164
Mary Ann Stenger

13 John Hick's Pan(en)theistic Monism 176
Yujin Nagasawa

14 Faith, Evidence, and Evidentialism 190
Stephen T. Davis

15 Keeping Hick from Hell: Answering the Isolationist Objection to Hick's Universalism 204
Timothy Musgrove

16 Suffering As Transformative: Some Reflections on Depression and Free Will 215
Anastasia Philippa Scrutton

Part IV John Hick's Writings and Their Impact

17 The Revival of Philosophy of Religion and the Contribution of John Hick to This 229
Paul Badham

18 John Hick and Chinese Religious Studies 241
Wang Zhicheng

19 John Hick's Religious Interpretation of Religion: An Unexplored Resource for Religious Educators 253
Geoff Teece

Index 267

Acknowledgements

I have had the good fortune of having been one of John Hick's students, and I would like to express my deep gratitude to John, whose profound scholarship and graciousness continue to have an impact on me and many others. I would like to thank all the contributors not only for readily accepting the invitation to contribute to a volume of essays in honour of Professor Hick, but also for their enthusiastic participation in the project, and for sending their chapters on time. My sincere thanks go to Priyanka Gibbons, the senior commissioning editor of Palgrave Macmillan, for taking a keen interest in this project from its inception and then seeing it through with great care and efficiency; to Melanie Blair for promptly sorting out editorial queries; and to Ralph Broadbent for formatting the essays with utmost care. I am deeply grateful to my long-time friend Lorraine for her invaluable guidance and ongoing support of my work. Finally, my deepest gratitude to my husband Sugi for his unfailing intellectual support and personal care and interest, without which I wouldn't have been able to embark on any of my academic pursuits.

Contributors

Marilyn McCord Adams is Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. In addition to numerous publications in various academic journals, she is the author of *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (1999), *The Metaphysics and Systematics of Christology* (1999), *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (2006), and recently, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham* (2010). She is currently working on two books: *St. Anselm on the Goodness of God* and *Revealed Theology and Aristotle's Categories: An Exploration of Medieval Method in Philosophical Theology.*

Paul Badham is Emeritus Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David (Lampeter Campus). His doctoral dissertation was supervised by John Hick. He has published several books and articles in academic journals. Besides his edited volumes, *A John Hick Reader* (1990) and *Verdict on Jesus* (2010), his recent publications include *Is There a Christian Case for Assisted Dying?* (2009), and *Religious Experience in Contemporary China* (2007, with Xinzhong Yao).

Stephen T. Davis is Russell K. Pitzer Professor of Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California. In addition to numerous journal articles, he has authored several books, including *God, Reason and Theistic Proofs* (2003) and *Christian Philosophical Theology* (2003). His co-edited volumes include *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ As Redeemer* (2004), and *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (2002).

Gavin D'Costa is Professor of Catholic Theology, University of Bristol. He has published extensively on Christianity's relationship to other religions and cultures. His publications include *John Hick's Theology of Religions: A Critical Evaluation* (1987), *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (2000), *Sexing the Trinity: Gender, Culture and the Divine* (2000), *Theology in the Public Square: Church* (2005), *Christianity and the World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (2009), *The Catholic Church and the World Religions* (2011, editor), and *Only One Name? Christian Theology and the Religions: A Critical Conversation* (2011, co-authored with Paul Knitter and Daniel Strange). He is currently

writing a book on the hermeneutics of Vatican II. He advises the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City and the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales.

Chester Gillis is the Dean of the College at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. A member of the faculty in the theology department at Georgetown since 1988, he is the initial holder of the Amaturo Chair in Catholic Studies and founding director of the Program on the Church and Interreligious Dialogue at the university's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. In addition to numerous journal articles and book chapters, he is the author of *A Question of Final Belief: John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Salvation* (1989), *Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology* (1993), *Roman Catholicism in America* (1999), *Catholic Faith in America* (2003), and editor of *The Political Papacy* (2006).

Ursula King is Professor Emerita of Theology and Religious Studies and Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Bristol. She is also a Professorial Research Associate, Department of the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, and a Fellow of Heythrop College, both at the University of London. She has written extensively on women and spirituality, gender issues in world religions, and on the French thinker Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Her recent book is *Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions: Spirituality and Mysticism in an Evolutionary World* (2011). Earlier publications include *The Search for Spirituality: Our Global Quest for a Spiritual Life* (2009), *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages* (2004), *Gender, Religion and Diversity* (co-edited with Tina Beattie, 2004), and her edited volume *Spirituality and Society in the New Millennium* (2001).

Paul F. Knitter is the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions, and Culture at Union Theological Seminary, New York. He has published extensively on religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. He is best known for his ground-breaking book, *No Other Name?* (1985). His recent publications include *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (2009) and *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (2002), while his edited volumes include *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy* (2002), and *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration* (2005).

Julius Lipner is Professor of Hinduism and the Comparative Study of Religion, and Fellow of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge. In addition to numerous journal articles his publications include *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (1994, 2009), *Anandamath, or, The Sacred*

Brotherhood (with Bankimcandra Chatterji 2005), and *The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja* (1986).

Timothy Musgrove works in cognitive linguistics. He was the Senior Research Fellow of CNET Networks prior to becoming the Chief Scientist of TextDigger, Inc. He has a PhD in Philosophy of Religion from the Claremont Graduate University, and his doctoral thesis was on 'Problems of Religious Language'.

Yujin Nagasawa is Reader in Philosophy of Religion at the University of Birmingham. In addition to numerous journal articles, his publications include *God and Phenomenal Consciousness: A Novel Approach to Knowledge Arguments* (Winner of the Templeton Award for Theological Promise, 2008), *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion* (with Erik Wielenberg, 2008) *The Existence of God: A Philosophical Introduction* (2011) and *There's Something about Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument* (with Peter Ludlow and Daniel Stoljar, 2004).

George M. Newlands is Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Honorary Professorial Research Fellow, University of Glasgow, UK. His recent publications include *Hospitable God* (with Allen Smith, 2010), *Faith and Human Rights* (with Richard Amesbury, 2008), *Christ and Human Rights* (2006), *Traces of Liberality* (2006), and *The Transformative Imagination* (2004).

Perry Schmidt-Leukel is Professor of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology, University of Münster, Germany. He has published extensively on religious pluralism, inter-faith theology, and Buddhist–Christian dialogue in both German and English. His recent English publications include *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-Faith Encounter Changes Christianity* (2009) and *Understanding Buddhism* (2006). His edited volumes include *War and Peace in World Religions* (2004), *Buddhism, Christianity and the Question of Creation: Karmic or Divine?* (2005), *Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue* (2005), and *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions* (2008). He co-edited *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations* (2007).

Anastasia Philippa Scrutton is Frederick J. Crosson Research Fellow at the Center for Philosophy of Religion in Notre Dame, Indiana. Her research interests lie in the interfaces between theology, spirituality, philosophy of religion, philosophy of emotion, and mental health. In addition to journal articles and book chapters, her recent publications include *Thinking through Feeling: God, Emotion and Passibility* (2011).

Mary Ann Stenger is Professor of Humanities, University of Louisville, Kentucky. She has written extensively on Paul Tillich and religious pluralism. In addition to numerous book chapters and journal articles, she co-authored *Dialogues of Paul Tillich* (2002).

Sharada Sugirtharajah is Senior Lecturer in Hindu Studies in the School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham, UK. Her publications include chapters in edited volumes, journal articles, and entries in reference works. She is the author of *Imagining Hinduism* (2003) and is currently working on a commissioned book on orientalists, missionaries and nationalists.

Alan Race was Dean of Postgraduate Studies at St Philip's Centre, Leicester, and is now Rector of St. Margaret's Church, Lee, in south London. He has published widely in the fields of Christian theology of religions and interfaith dialogue through books and articles, and is the Editor-in-Chief of the international journal *Interreligious Insight: A Journal of Dialogue and Engagement*. His publications include *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (2nd edn, 1993), *Interfaith Encounter* (2001), *Religions in Dialogue: From Theocracy to Democracy* (edited with Ingrid Shafer, 2002), and *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (edited with Paul Hedges, 2007, 2009).

Geoff Teece is Lecturer in Religious Education and Director of Studies for Initial Teacher Education, University of Birmingham, UK. His doctoral thesis was on the potential of John Hick's interpretation of religion for religious education. In addition to articles in various academic journals, he is the author of *A Primary Teacher's Guide to RE* (2001) and *Pocket Guides to the Curriculum: RE* (2001). He was winner of the Shap Award in 2005.

Wang Zhicheng is Professor and Deputy-Director of the Institute of Christianity and Cross-Cultural Studies at Zhejiang University, China, and Professor of the Institute of Foreign Philosophy. He has published extensively on religious pluralism and has translated John Hick's and Paul Knitter's works into Chinese. He is the author of numerous publications, including *A Commentary on Shankara's Atmabodha* (2010), *The Unavoidable Dialogue: The Encounter of Religions* (2008), *Interpretation, Understanding and Religious Peace* (2007), *Towards the Second Axial Age* (2005), *Eager for Peace: Contemporary Theories of Religious Dialogue* (2003), *Interpretation and Peace: A Study of Religious Pluralism in John Hick's Writings* (1999), and *Interpretation and Salvation: An Introduction of John Hick's Religious Pluralism* (1996). His recently translated works into Chinese include John Hick's *Who or What Is God* (2010), *The Rainbow of*

Faiths (2000), *Interpretation of Religion* (1998), as well as Paul Knitter's *Jesus and the Other Names* (2007), *One Earth Many Religions* (2003), *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (2004), and *Patanjali's Yoga Sutra Translated with a New Commentary* (2006).

Keith Ward is Professorial Research Fellow in Philosophy at Heythrop College, London. In addition to numerous journal articles, his recent publications include *More Than Matter?* (2010) and *Is Religion Irrational?* (2011). His earlier works include *What the Bible Really Teaches: A Challenge for Fundamentalists* (2004), *Pascal's Fire: Scientific Faith and Religious Understanding* (2006), *Is Religion Dangerous* (2006), *Rethinking Christianity* (2007), *Why There Almost Certainly Is a God* (2008), *Divine Action: Examining God's Role in an Open and Emergent Universe* (2008), and *The Big Questions in Science and Religion* (2008).

Introduction: Religious Pluralism – Some Issues

Sharada Sugirtharajah

This *Festschrift* for Emeritus Professor John Hick had its genesis in what started off as a personal, in-house project to mark the occasion of his ninetieth birthday. The idea was to organize a one-day seminar mainly involving scholars based in the United Kingdom. This eventually turned into a two-day international symposium, drawing scholars from Europe, America and China. This metamorphosis reflects not only the global, academic reputation of John Hick, but also the great affection for him held by many, especially by the contributors to this volume. The earlier volume of essays in honour of Hick, *God, Truth and Reality* (edited by Arvind Sharma) was published by Macmillan, 1993. This current volume offers an up-to-date scholarly engagement with Hick's ideas. It brings together eminent as well as emerging scholars who have interacted with the varied aspects of Hick's voluminous work.

At the outset I should make it clear that this volume is not a comprehensive appraisal of John Hick's scholarly contribution. That has to wait for a later date. The essays assembled here focus mainly on John Hick's philosophical and theological explorations and concerns. His espousal of religious pluralism was not simply a matter of theory but was grounded in practical realities. Since his move in 1976 to the multicultural city of Birmingham, where he was H. G. Wood Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham, Hick has been actively involved in multi-faith work.[1] Those familiar with his work will immediately notice one aspect of it that is strikingly missing from this collection, namely, his earlier involvement, in the 1970s, with anti-racist activities in the Birmingham area. This was the time when new immigrants from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent were arriving in the United Kingdom, raising questions of integration

and community relations. Even before phrases like 'academic impact' and 'public involvement' became fashionable 'university speak', John Hick was one of the few theologians to, not only become involved in a number of community organizations working in Birmingham, but also to draw attention to the reigning racial politics of the time. He had the courage to expose the criminal record of those who were whipping up racial hatred at that time. The two of Hick's pamphlets which offered a succinct Christian critique of British racism were *The New Nazism of the National Front and National Party: A Warning to Christians* (1977) and *Christianity and Race* (1978). To these one needs to add a third, *Apartheid Observed* (1980), which was not only Hick's reflections on the brutal treatment of blacks by the white South African government, but also an illustration of his wider commitment to anti-racism. While most British theologians at that time were responding to abstract ideals of secularism, John Hick spent his energies tackling the menace of racism, offering a theological critique as well as practical guidance on what could be done about it. He was at the forefront of race relations in Birmingham. He was the founder member of All Faiths for One Race (AFFOR) and played a pivotal role in promoting community and interfaith relations.

This volume explores the impact of Hick's writings in the fields of philosophy of religion and theology – his twin interests. Hick's fame as a philosopher of religion was established when he published his succinct but significant volume *Philosophy of Religion* in 1963. It not only introduced countless numbers of undergraduates both in the UK and abroad to the nuances of philosophy, but also taught them how to think philosophically. The book has been translated into many languages and sold more than 500,000 copies worldwide. Even if John Hick had not written a single book after this volume, his *Philosophy of Religion* would have assured him a permanent place in the field of religious philosophy. In addition, his ground-breaking book *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989), based on Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh, which won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award in 1991, offers a compelling philosophical approach to religious pluralism and conflicting truth claims. Among his numerous other publications, *Evil and the God of Love* (1966) stands out as a leading theological classic which continues to occupy a preeminent place in current discourses on philosophical theology. The book that neatly summarizes Hick's idea of religious pluralism for a popular audience is *God has Many Names* (1982), the seeds of which had been sown in an earlier volume, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977), edited by Hick. In *God has Many Names,* John Hick challenged the cherished triumphalistic

Christian views of the non-Christian Other. Since I was a non-Christian Other, I was fascinated to watch how the debate developed.

The essays in *God Has Many Names* offer a wide range of incisive theological and philosophical reflections on religious pluralism and related themes. There are many forms of and approaches to religious pluralism, but the current volume focuses on John Hick's version of pluralism, a topic which continues to be a thorny issue in Christian theological discourse, as can be seen from the plethora of books and articles on the subject. Most of the essays in this volume engage, either explicitly or implicitly, with Hick's religious pluralism from varied Western Christian theological and philosophical perspectives. But the book also addresses themes and issues, such as liberalism and universalism, which form a crucial part of John Hick's theological and philosophical thinking. In addition, these essays address important questions, such as how to articulate a Christian faith which is not exclusive, how to speak about salvation in a way which is not triumphalistic, and how to uphold the goodness of God in a world riddled with suffering, evil and injustice.

There are both advocates and critics of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. The aim here is not to rehearse their arguments but rather to focus on some issues that emerge from the essays. For want of space, I focus on just three issues: (a) Hick's philosophy of religious pluralism; (b) the interface between religious pluralism and comparative theology, to which the notion of a global theology is linked; and (c) whether a pluralistic view of religions is imperialistic and has relevance for the modern world.

First, one question which constantly surfaces is whether Hick's theory of religious pluralism falls within the area of theology or philosophy of religion. While Hick himself might not see any contradiction in being both a philosopher of religion and a theologian (the former for him being primary), his distinction between theology and philosophy of religion helps to clarify his approach to religious pluralism. In his view, the philosophy of religion has to do with '*philosophical thinking about religion*' (italicized in original)[2] which can be undertaken from a religious or non-religious standpoint. In other words, 'philosophy of religion, is accordingly, not a branch of theology (meaning by "theology" the systematic formulation of religious beliefs), but a branch of philosophy'.[3] Hick, however offers 'a religious interpretation of religion', which he distinguishes from a 'confessional interpretation of religion in its plurality of forms'.[4] One can understand the world both in a religious and non-religious, or naturalistic, way. In other words, Hick subscribes to

a broad understanding of religion – distinguishing between its inner (experiential/mystical) and outer (institutional) aspects. He takes a non-doctrinal approach to religion and therefore to religious plurality.

The second issue has to do with the relation between what is called 'comparative theology' and religious pluralism. The term 'comparative theology' has a long and complex theological history, and it is used in different ways. As Cantwell Smith has pointed out, present-day comparative theology is the natural outcome of earlier mission theology. The term 'theology' is now being applied to other religions although there is no corresponding word for it in the Hindu, Buddhist or Jewish traditions.[5] Historically speaking, the notion of comparison as a method of studying the 'Other' was established towards the end of the eighteenth century, although comparative studies of one kind or another had been going on in earlier centuries. In other words, the exploration of thematic and doctrinal differences and similarities between religions is not a new phenomenon. The field of comparative studies has come a long way since the colonial days when religions of the 'Other' were studied, compared, graded and exposed for what was seen as their moral bankruptcy. The chief aim then was to conquer and convert the 'Other'. Now in the post-imperial context, the encounter with the 'Other' is seen as necessary for gaining a greater understanding of and for enriching one's own faith.

For most Christian comparativists, being rooted in one's tradition (doctrines and scriptures) appears to be an essential prerequisite for engaging with religious diversity. In other words, a faith-oriented approach, or *'faith seeking understanding'* is what is called for.[6] While some older questions are redundant, others resurface and are cast in a more dialogical fashion. One main challenge has to do with maintaining the distinctiveness of one's own cherished beliefs while being open to other, non-Christian perspectives. An inclusive comparative theology has its merits, but at the same time it accepts the Other in terms of a predetermined doctrinal framework. A scripture-oriented comparativist approaches other texts with an open mind and is willing to be challenged and transformed, but this is meant to happen without allowing one's own sacred text to be deconstructed or demythologized.[7] One is more conscious of one's own religious identity in a way that one is not when reading literary texts. If one's location in a particular faith is a precondition, then there are limitations in that one can be located simultaneously in more than one tradition by birth, choice, or both. It appears that there is not much room for a comparative pluralist who might want to take a non-doctrinal approach to texts.

In the last couple of decades there has been a move to place religious pluralism within a global perspective. Terms such as 'universal theology', 'world theology', 'global theology', and 'interreligious theology', have been pressed into service to articulate the relations between religions. These terms can be misleading in that they give the impression that they are aimed at constructing a unified theology or a single, world theology, although admittedly this need not be the case. Strictly speaking, the term 'theology' is not applicable to some religions, such as Buddhism, which does not speak about 'God', and certain strands of thought in Hinduism. Furthermore, some forms of Eastern thought do not lend themselves to the distinction between philosophy and theology that underpins Western Christian theological discourse. In this connection, it is interesting to note that while the term 'theology' is applied to non-Christian thought, the term 'philosophy' is mainly used for Western thought. In other words, non-Western ways of thinking cannot be rightly called 'philosophical' or 'philosophy' in the first place.[8] If this is the case, can there be a philosophy of religion? Philosophers of religion remind us that 'although the philosophy of religion in the west has until fairly recently meant in practice the philosophy of the Christian religion, or more broadly of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it's subject matter is properly religion in all its variety of forms around the world and throughout history'.[9]

Hick uses the term 'global theology' with great caution. He does not rule out the possibility of a 'global theology' but does not subscribe to a single universal theology or a 'new global religion, the same for everyone'.[10] If a global theology is feasible, it has to be seen in a 'Copernican' way.[11] No one theology of religions can encompass other theologies. Challenging all forms of explicit or implicit religious absolutism, Hick declares that 'we really do have to make a choice between a one-tradition absolutism and a genuinely pluralistic interpretation of the global religious situation.'[12] Such a project is an arduous and ambitious one and will require the cooperative effort of diverse traditions (both religious and secular). Hick sees the need 'for a theory which allows us to see, and to be fascinated by, the differences as well as similarities between the great world faiths ... But at the same time it must be true to the basic awareness of our time that in all the great traditions at their best the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality centeredness is taking place; so that they can be seen as embodying different perceptions of and responses to the Real from within the different cultural ways of being human'.[13]

The third issue is that in certain circles, especially among postmodernists, it is claimed that a pluralistic view of religious diversity is a Western form of imperialism which is linked to the rampant rise of capitalism. Hick himself has refuted this critique by pointing out that it overlooks the fact that religious pluralism did not originate in the West. It has a long history in Eastern streams of thought which go back to the time of the Buddhist emperor Ashoka in the third century CE, even earlier.[14] There is a crucial difference between the earlier Indian and current Western forms religious pluralism. The latter emerged precisely to challenge Western forms of Christian imperialism, and Hick's contention is that his version of religious pluralism challenges what it is being accused of. Hick's point is that he is not claiming any privileged position for his pluralistic view. On the contrary, he is challenging any truth-claim that smacks of theological finality. He does this by interrogating doctrinal claims and proposing a metaphorical understanding of cherished religious beliefs. This does not go down well with most faith adherents, but what prevents Hick's pluralistic hypothesis from becoming relativistic is his view of the Transcendent as being beyond all human thought and his acknowledgement of the soteriological dimension within various traditions. In other words, he openly acknowledges that other traditions, too, have a liberative potential and that they don't have to be validated by the notion of salvation of any one particular tradition.

About this volume

The essays assembled here reflect the philosophical and theological concerns of John Hick. They are divided into four sections. Given the disparate nature of these essays, they do not fall neatly into fixed sections and some of them could easily fit into more than one slot.

Part 1, 'Religious Pluralism and Global Perspectives', addresses a theme which is central to John Hick's philosophical and theological thinking and which has (in equal measure) caused much celebration and controversy.

Perry Schmidt-Leukel, in 'Religious Pluralism and the Need for an Interreligious Theology', answers postmodern critics, especially those comparative theologians who question the serviceability of religious pluralism. Their charges against pluralist theologies of religions are that they are indifferent to differences between religions and the genuine otherness of other religions; that they are not free from Christian/Western assumptions; and that they predetermine the outcome of interreligious dialogue. Challenging these charges, Perry Schmidt-Leukel

demonstrates how the version of religious pluralism envisaged by John Hick not only enables 'truth-seeking dialogue' but also provides a compelling foundation for what Perry Schmidt-Leukel calls 'Interreligious Theology', which is also variously known as 'Universal', 'Global' or 'World Theology'. He also cautions that these terms are not to be seen as indicating a unified global religion or theology, rather a theology that embraces all religions with their differences.

Unlike Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Marilyn McCord Adams finds Hick's pluralistic hypothesis problematic. In 'Which Is It? Religious Pluralism or Global Theology?' she sees Hick experimenting with two moves: a 'change-of-status' and a 'change of content' – the former puts all religions on a par and treats them as culturally conditioned responses to the one Reality that transcends them all. The latter compares and contrasts beliefs and reduces truth-claims 'to a minimalist metaphysics'. Her point is that Hick is moving between these two positions, leaving her unsure whether he is advocating 'religious pluralism, Global theology, or some mixture of the two'. She finds Hick's pluralistic hypothesis tricky in that it succeeds in promoting religious tolerance, and does so by practising metaphysical intolerance. As a metaphysical realist, she distances herself from these two positions and advocates a non-aggressive universalism. Her thesis is that a Christian Trinitarian position could also promote tolerance and 'celebrate sainthood wherever it is to be found'.

Keith Ward, in 'Pluralism Revisited', admits the usefulness of the threefold classification – exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism – which has become the standard template in the Christian discourse on religious pluralism. He adds, however, a few qualifications to make them more flexible. He also warns that this triune division should not be used as a way of pigeonholing theologians. His essay revisits issues related to pluralism, truth-claims and salvation. He finds pluralism attractive in many ways, but the problem is that it is achieved by excluding historically untenable and morally perverse ideas embedded in one's religion and embracing the elements which enlarge our perception of a transcendent reality that is so defectively grasped by all human beings. Ward does not see all religions as moving in the same direction or intending to reach the same goal. Yet he strongly encourages a creative and critical study of one's own and other religions, and he has sympathies with John Hick's pluralistic project of seeing religion in a global perspective. He is keen for religious beliefs to be open and to engage 'with wider social, social, moral, and cognitive currents of human thought, but to be strongly committed to moral and cognitive

ideals which have arisen from and developed historically within the Christian tradition'.

Paul Knitter's 'Virtuous Comparitivists Are Practising Pluralists' captures the fascinating and often animated debate going on between 'theologians of religions' and 'comparative theologians'. His contention is that when comparitivists practise the virtues of their profession, they are directly or indirectly engaging with and incorporating 'theological ingredients of what is known as a pluralist theology of religions'. Critically drawing on the 'virtues' (such as doctrinal humility, empathy, commitment) of a comparative theologian, as outlined by Catherine Cornille in *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,* Knitter demonstrates that most comparitivists are pluralists. In other words, they are 'anonymous' Hickians.

Julius Lipner's essay, 'Faith Triumphant? The Problem of a Theology of Supersession', addresses a very pertinent issue that impedes genuine Christian dialogue with other faiths. His contention is that both the theology of supersession and different versions of fulfilment theology are concerned with transforming or converting the 'Other' into Christian faith. He calls for a radical doctrinal revision of Christian theology that does not smack of soteriological finality, yet at the same time remains true to its core beliefs. While acknowledging significant merit in Hick's pluralist paradigm, Lipner finds Hick's use of such neutral expressions as 'the Transcendent' or 'the Real' as weakening the core-specificity of the Christian faith. To overcome this Lipner suggests that such cherished Christian concepts as Christ, Fatherhood of God, and the Trinity need to be reconfigured without either absolutizing or relativizing them. In other words, Lipner is calling for the inclusion of more enlarged and sophisticated notions of truth and of insights based on experience. Given that doctrinal reformulations have historical precedents, Lipner suggests that such a paradigm shift on the part of the institutional church would allow for a genuine acknowledgement of soteriological activity within various religious traditions. In other words, the challenge of supersession must be addressed if the Christian message is to make a meaningful contribution to the lives of those who inhabit a pluralistic world.

The essays in Part II, 'Religious Pluralism and Practical Concerns', explore issues that constantly feature in a multi-faith context, such as the place of Jesus among other religious figures, participation in interreligious worship, and the spirituality of other people.

Alan Race reopens the complicated and contentious issue of Christology in interfaith dialogue in 'The Value of the Symbolic Jesus for Christian

Involvement in Interfaith Dialogue'. Writing out of a long-time experience of interfaith dialogue, Race points out that the traditional construal of Jesus as both human and divine, and the projection of this figure as unique among other saviour figures, are both artificial and abstract. As a way of going beyond the impasse caused by the traditional approaches, Race proposes a Jesus figure which goes beyond the traditional Christ of Faith but which is currently endorsed by biblical scholarship – Jesus of history – Jesus as a mystic, prophet and sage. Whilst Lipner calls for a radical reformulation of a doctrinal-based approach to religious plurality, Race urges Christians to move beyond such doctrinal refinements and conceive of Jesus as a human figure of history alongside other saintly persons 'as a symbol of human involvement with the transcendent reality'. This religious figure 'from below', Race reckons, could offer an alternative model rather than simply comparing doctrinal Christologies.

The next two essays in Part II deal with the practical aspect of Christians' participation in other people's worship and spirituality. Gavin D'Costa addresses the question which often comes up in interfaith meetings – can Muslims and Christians pray together? In the first section, he clarifies two basic types of Muslim–Christian joint prayers. One is the 'multireligious prayer' where Muslims and Christians pray together, but using their own respective prayers without participating in each other's prayers. The other is the 'interreligious prayer' where 'mutual praying takes place using each other's prayers or hybrid versions of each other's prayers'. Confining his analysis largely to Roman Catholic documents, D'Costa shows how these two forms of prayer are viewed by the ecclesial authorities, with the 'interfaith prayer' regarded as more problematic than the 'multi-faith prayer'. Then he goes on to examine the difficult question related to interfaith prayer – is the same God being worshipped? – a question that continues to pose problems in the twenty-first century.

While D'Costa offers a cautious approach to interfaith worship, Ursula King's essay actively encourages an interfaith spirituality which draws on multiple traditions and goes beyond the notion of 'double belonging'. In 'Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World', King examines interfaith spirituality and sees it as a natural outcome of John Hick's religious pluralism. She draws on the idea of 'interspirituality' advanced by Wayne Teasdale (1945–2004), which allows sharing of religious, especially mystical experiences from diverse religious traditions across the world. She sees such interfaith or 'interspirtuality' as a result of the development of postmodernism

which argues for a multi-layered and pluralistic history and tradition rather than a single universal foundation and history.

In the last essay in this section, Sharada Sugirtharajah focuses on two eminent thinkers whose perspectives on religious pluralism have attracted much attention: Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), John Hick (1922–). These two important personalities have been studied apart but not together. In 'The Mahatma and the Philosopher: Mohandas Gandhi and John Hick and Their Search for Truth', Sugirtharajah finds striking resonances in their approaches to religious pluralism. Her primary aim is to identify and explore significant correspondences in their thinking on religious pluralism, rather than engaging with the contentious debate their positions on religious pluralism have ignited in Western Christian theological discourse. Situating them in their respective contexts, she draws attention to concurrences in their notion of religion, concept of Truth/Real, and their approach to conflicting truth-claims.

Part III, 'Theological and Philosophical Orientations', contains essays which address the twin interests of John Hick – philosophy of religion and theology. Although some essays in this volume do not directly deal with religious pluralism, they address themes which religions continue to grapple with in the modern world – themes such as God, evil and suffering.

As was mentioned earlier, the question that has caused endless debate among the followers of Hick is whether his works fall within theology or within philosophy of religion, or both. Chester Gillis' essay, 'John Hick: Theologian or Philosopher of Religion', further probes this dilemma. Gillis' view is that this is largely complicated by Hick himself, whose writings effortlessly straddle these two disciplines. There has been a tendency to view the philosopher of religion through a theological lens, and vice versa. For a fair assessment of Hick's works, the clue or answer lies in 'knowing when he is one and not the other'. Although much of Hick's dual academic enterprise has been equally appreciated and negated by theologians, religionists and Church people, Gillis' point is that Hick's project of religious pluralism is best understood as fuelled by the philosophy of religion. His conclusion is that the agenda set by Hick will have an enduring impact on the work of both current and future theologians and philosophers of religion.

At a time when Christian theology is under severe scrutiny, George Newland's 'Humane Spirit': Towards a Liberal Theology of Resistance and Respect' not only makes a spirited defence of it but also demonstrates how Christian theology could be revived to meet current

challenges. Placing John Hick's work within liberal theology, Newlands argues how important it is to re-imagine a creative liberal theology for the future of Christian faith and for the wider society. He reminds Christians that liberal theology, as Hick has shown, need not be dry or confined to rationality. Hick's concerns for social issues and human rights have been central to his theology, and this stance provides a framework for committed interreligious dialogue and engagement in the public sphere.

Mary Ann Stenger's thesis is that although both Paul Tillich and Hick come from different theological positions, they acknowledge the rationality of religious belief, the complex nature of religious life, and a fundamental correlation between religious confirmation and experience. In 'Mediating Relativism and Absolutism in Tillich's and Hick's Theories of Religious Truth', Stenger shows that both Tillich and Hick opt for a broad definition of religion; both recognize Truth in the religious and the in secular contexts, and give importance to religious experience in approaching issues of truth and conflicting truth claims. Both envision one Ultimate reality that transcends all finite expressions of Truth. Stenger's point is that it is the absoluteness of Tillich's 'Unconditional' and Hick's 'Transcategorial Real' that prevents their approaches from being relativistic. Both call for the application of ethical criteria – justice in the case of Tillich and the Golden Rule in the case of Hick, the latter being linked to the soteriological criterion of transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. Stenger concludes by saying that although neither Tillich nor Hick addresses the issue of power and privilege, their theories of religious pluralism have implications for liberation and feminist theologians. Their openness to multiple versions of Truth, and the religious and ethical criteria they employ to affirm the liberation potential within each tradition, have the potential to challenge unjust structures.

Yujin Nagasawa, in 'John Hick's Pan(en)theistic Monism', perceives a tension between dualistic and monistic elements in Hick's metaphysical system. His contention is that Hick subscribes to the dualism of mind-body, and yet Hick maintains that there is one single Reality. When it comes to religions and religious pluralism and religious experience, Hick moves towards monism which regards everything as 'part of a single *indivisible* whole', whereas with regard to the mind-body problem, Hick remains a dualist. Nagasawa explores possible ways of reconciling this tension that would allow Hick to maintain his monistic view about the whole without relinquishing his mind-body dualism. Nagasawa's thesis is that the answer does not lie in physicalism or physicalist monism,

but in a form of pantheistic or pan(en)theistic monism. Whether Hick's metaphysical system can be convincingly argued in terms of pantheism or panentheism is something Nagasawa does not tackle in this paper but leaves for another occasion.

Stephen Davis' essay 'Faith, Evidence, and Evidentialism' examines 'evidentialist objection' to religious belief on the grounds that it is not 'based on evidence' or is 'based on insufficient evidence' and therefore irrational. He draws attention to two types of evidentialist objections to religious belief: 'those who hold that the available scientific and philosophical evidence decisively refutes belief in God' and 'those who hold that the evidence for and against God is ambiguous'. Drawing on Hick, Davis tackles the evidentialist objection by demonstrating that 'it is possible to interpret the world in either the religious or irreligious way' and that believers and non-believers are capable of rational defence of their respective standpoints. Then, by examining the nature of evidence, good and bad uses of evidence, and the distinction between private and public evidence, Davis demonstrates the limited applicability of evidentialist objections to religious beliefs. He also shows how evidentialists themselves resort to double standards in their critique of religious believers in that they don't apply the same criteria when it comes to their own philosophical statements.

In 'Keeping Hick from Hell: Answering the Isolationist Objection to Hick's Universalism', Timothy Musgrove address the conventional arguments against Hick's notion of universal salvation which has not found favour with Evangelical Christians who prefer a 'softer' version of hell – 'a place where souls voluntarily isolate themselves permanently against God'. Musgrove calls this the 'isolationist objection' which he finds that Hick has addressed, but not in any full measure, leaving it to the reader to undertake the exercise. Musgrove attempts to complete the exercise by drawing on various psychological and existentialist analyses in order to show that the isolationist view of hell does not fit in with an Anselmic notion of God who does not allow souls to perish, unless one makes major doctrinal changes in theodicy and soteriology. Musgrove's contention is that since most evangelicals are unwilling to make such doctrinal adjustments, their only choice is to leave Hick's universalism untouched.

Anastasia Philippa Scrutton's essay complements Musgrove's essay in that she addresses the theme of suffering and eschatology. In 'Suffering as Transformative: Some Reflections on Depression and Free Will' Scrutton examines two notions of transformative suffering – aetiological and non-aetiological. While the former is concerned with offering

an explanation for suffering, the latter uses suffering as a practical tool for interpreting and dealing with depression in a meaningful way. Her argument is that while there is merit in seeing the transformative potential of suffering itself, there is a need to shift the focus to the subject's response to suffering. But this does not solve the problem either. Her point is that an aetiological view of transformative suffering is helpful to a certain extent, but not in cases of mental illness where there is a diminished sense of free will. In cases of diminished free will, she suggests 'that solution to this problem can be found in a diachronic perspective on the suffering life and in an appeal to eschatology,' and this is seen as having 'implications for both philosophical debates on theodicy and for pastoral care'.

Finally, Part IV, 'John Hick's Writings and Their Impact', brings together essays which highlight the far reaching significance of Hick's voluminous output. The first two essays in this section complement each other. Both look at the impact of Hick's work on specific constituencies. One focuses on the Western academic milieu, and the other on the Chinese context. The last essay explores the significance of Hick's religious interpretation of religion for religious educators.

Paul Badham's essay, 'The Revival of Philosophy of Religion and the Contribution of John Hick to This', has two parts. The first provides a succinct picture of the status and development of philosophy of religion both in British universities and in schools in Britain, as well in the USA, Europe, Russia and China. Among factors that helped to transform the discipline, according to Badham, are the demise of logical positivism, atheistic communism, and the emergence of new physics, each of which reopened new cosmological and teleological arguments. The second part explores Hick's enormous contribution to philosophical discourse on themes such as God, evil, mind-body dualism, religious pluralism, and the afterlife, all of which have enlivened the current philosophical debate, and Badham draws particular attention to the immense global influence of Hick's writings on the Philosophy of Religion.

Wang Zhicheng, who has translated many of Hick's works into Chinese, offers a fascinating survey of how Chinese scholars have responded to John Hick's writings in his essay 'John Hick and Chinese Religious Studies'. While outlining some of the important translations of and doctoral theses on Hick's works, Zhicheng also provides an assessment of how Hick's idea of religious pluralism has been welcomed as well as questioned by various Chinese scholars. In Zhicheng's view, Hick has made an enduring contribution to the growth and development of Chinese philosophy of religion. Besides energizing the Chinese

philosophy of religion, Hick's writings have also helped Chinese scholars to look within the traditional Chinese culture for resources to address religious pluralism and for working towards a harmony of religions.

Geoff Teece's essay 'John Hick's Religious Interpretation of Religion: An Unexplored Resource for Religious Educators', attempts to rectify the omission of John Hick's work in religious education. Even those who have sought to engage with his writings have criticized his religious pluralism in a way that makes a mistaken link between Hick's pluralist hypothesis and the philosophy of religious education. Teece's contention is that when Hick's interpretation of religion is seen as a second-order explanatory framework, it can offer a valuable resource for religious educators who are striving to establish a distinctive identity for their discipline, an identity which goes beyond merely being a form of citizenship education. Although there are other frameworks, Teece finds the Hickian framework to be more appropriate in that it promotes the teaching of religion in a way that conveys the *religiousness* of a tradition to young pupils. To provide such a framework, Geoff draws on Hick's religious interpretation of religion and his emphasis on the soteriological dimension in various religious traditions which 'provide the means for humans to transcend incompleteness and achieve spiritual liberation'.

To bring this section to a close, let me reiterate that these essays do not merely engage with Hick's ideas, but develop them in order to face the challenges of a world which is becoming increasingly intolerant and illiberal.

In conclusion, I would like to draw attention to two concerns which may not be excitingly new but are worth raising here:

One has to do with the uneven playing field in the current interreligious discourse. Although informal dialogue is a feature of everyday life, formal or academic interreligious dialogue as it is practiced today has largely been initiated by Western Christian scholars, and it addresses specifically Christian theological concerns. Whilst most participants in interreligious discourse happen to be academically trained Christian theologians or scholars of religion who are well versed in one or more religious traditions, only a minority of Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains happen to be professionally qualified scholars of religion or theologians.[15] There are scholars from different religious backgrounds in the Humanities who participate in and contribute to interreligious dialogue but are not necessarily specialists in religion or theology. It is only recently that a minority of scholars from other faiths have been engaged in an 'academic study' of religion, and even among these perhaps

only a small number engage with Christian theology. Given this scenario, formal interreligious discourse tends to be lopsided. Scholars from other religious traditions find themselves in a position of having to interact with an already prescribed agenda or to engage with some of the assumptions undergirding Western Christian theological approaches to interreligious dialogue. Unless more professionally trained Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jain specialists from these respective traditions enter the academic discourse, interreligious discourse will continue to be directed by Western and Christian theological and philosophical concerns.

The other concern has to do with the paradigms used in current interreligious discourse, paradigms which reflect Western theological and philosophical assumptions. There has been a tendency to privilege doctrinal and textual aspects of liberal Christianity. While Western interpreters profess considerable interest in engaging with other religious traditions, there has been little attempt to interact with or explore the applicability of the interpretative models available within other traditions which might offer different views on interreligious discourse. At a time when there is an impasse in the field of dialogue, there is a need to explore other theoretical frameworks which might, not only illuminate the discourse, but also help to move the debate on to the next stage. Such a move would not only keep Hick's pluralistic vision alive but would also get his endorsement.

Notes

1. As chair of various committees, Hick was instrumental, not only in creating an awareness of the presence in Britain of people of diverse faiths and their contribution to the country, but also in making the educational authorities recognize the value of a multi-faith syllabus in the RE curriculum. He was appointed as chair of the Steering Committee of the Statutory Body which created the new multi-faith curriculum for RE.
2. John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd edition, Englewood Cliffs: NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983, p.1.
3. Ibid., p.1
4. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, London: Macmillan, 1989, p.1.
5. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, London: Macmillan, 1981, pp.107 & 128.
6. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*, 2010 Wiley-Blackwell, p.9.
7. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., 'Reading the World in Christ: From Comparison to Inclusivism', in Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, 1990, New York: Orbis Books, p.78.

8. Julius Lipner, 'Philosophy and World Religion' in Brian Davis OP, ed., Philosophy *of Religion: A Guide to the Subject of Religion*, 1998, London: Cassell, p.311.
9. John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths*, London: SCM Press. 1995, p.43.
10. Ibid., p.41.
11. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976, p.33. Also see pp.29–34.
12. John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths*, London: SCM Press. 1995, p.43.
13. John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980, p.9.
14. John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths*, London: SCM Press. 1995, p.35.
15. There are a few contemporary scholars from the Hindu background in Western academia, such as Arvind Sharma, Anantanand Rambachan, Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi and Seshagiri Rao, who are involved in interreligious dialogue. Among these scholars, Arvind Sharma has especially engaged with John Hick's philosophy of religious pluralism. See Sharma '*The Philosophy of Religion and Advaita Vedānta: A Comparative Study in Religion and Reason,* University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

Part I

Religious Pluralism and Global Perspectives

1

Religious Pluralism and the Need for an Interreligious Theology

Perry Schmidt-Leukel

1 Interreligious theology as the objective of religious pluralism

For my part, I am convinced that the architects and defenders of a pluralist theology of religion[1] have successfully pointed out the essential flaws and, I suppose, incurable deficits of exclusivist and inclusivist theologies[2] – the existence of which even some of the most outspoken critics of religious pluralism have to admit.[3] Moreover and more importantly, the proponents of religious pluralism provided a viable alternative. This is underlined by a simple argument: It can never be expected that a member of a particular religious tradition *x* is able to endorse either the exclusivist or inclusivist version of the superiority claim of some other religion *y* without converting to *y*; whereas, it is possible – and has already started happening[4] – that members of different religious traditions *x*, *y* and *z* can jointly hold, each in a specific manner reflecting his/her own religious background, versions of a pluralistic approach. In other words, the exclusivism or inclusivism of a particular religion can never be shared by people from other religions, which means that exclusivist or inclusivist claims are always set against one another. Pluralism, however, can be affirmed jointly. Or, more simply, religions cannot agree on the unique superiority of one specific religion, but they can agree on their equality in diversity. Insisting on either an exclusivist or inclusivist theology of religions implies that, in the end, the correct interpretation of religious diversity is only found in one's own tradition; whereas, endorsing religious pluralism implies that the correct interpretation of religious diversity can be shared by religions which see each other as equally valid. Apart from a non-religious interpretation of religious diversity, no further alternative is left.[5] So

at the end of the day, exclusivism and inclusivism still harbour, either explicitly or by logical implication, the ideal of converting everybody to one religion, thereby overcoming religious diversity; whereas, the ideal of pluralism is mutual learning, enrichment and transformation. This implies that pluralist theology of religions is not an end in itself. Rather, it provides the ideal foundation for what has been variously called 'universal' or 'global' or 'world' theology or – as I prefer – 'interfaith' or 'interreligious' theology.

In 1981, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000) published his book *Towards a World Theology* in which he expounded the need for an interreligious theology and described his vision of what one would be:

> Theology is critical intellectualization of (and for) faith, and of the world as known in faith; and what we seek is a theology that will interpret the history of our race in a way that will give intellectual expression to our faith, the faith of all of us, and to our modern perception of the world.[6]

Future theology should not rest on merely one particular segment of the history of religions, for example the Jewish, the Christian, the Muslim, the Buddhist, the Hindu or the Confucian traditions, but – as Smith said in a programmatic paper from 1984 – on the whole history of religion.[7] This, however, can only be achieved through a kind of ongoing interreligious colloquium, in which the different perspectives, as they developed within the diverse strands of religious history, need to be explored and – as far as possible – integrated.[8]

Interreligious theology or 'world theology' is therefore not meant to be the theology of a future unified world religion. It rather means that in a process of ongoing, open-ended dialogical exchange and theological reflection, people from the different religious traditions incorporate insights they have gained from other religions into their own. As Smith himself remarked, this new theology will still be recognizable as, for example, Christian or Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist, but at the same time it will be 'Christian plus', 'Muslim plus', 'Hindu plus', 'Buddhist plus'.[9]

Smith's *Towards a World Theology* goes back to the Cadbury Lectures he held in 1971 in Birmingham at John Hick's invitation.. At the time Hick was already working on his largest book ever, *Death and Eternal Life,* which first appeared in 1976. He explicitly characterized the method of this book as a contribution to a 'global theology' and related it to his parallel efforts to develop a new theology of religions (later

called 'religious pluralism') that would overcome the older 'ptolemaic' views because of their 'solipsist' inability to recognize significant truth beyond the borders of their own faith.[10] In an article dating from 1977, Hick wrote,

> [I]nter-religious dialogue undertaken just like that, as two (or more) people bearing mutual witness to their own faiths, each in the firm conviction that his is the final truth and in hope of converting the other, can only result either in conversion or in a hardening of differences – occasionally the former but more often the latter. In order for dialogue to be mutually fruitful, lesser changes than total conversion must be possible and must be hoped for on both (or all) sides.[11]

Hick specified the latter as a

> truth-seeking dialogue in which each is conscious that the Transcendent Being is infinitely greater than his own limited vision of it, and in which they accordingly seek to share their visions in the hope that each may be helped towards a fuller awareness of the Divine Reality before which they both stand.[12]

In this sense, Hick affirmed in 1984 that

> we need a pluralistic theory which enables us to recognize and be fascinated by the manifold differences between the religious traditions, with their different conceptualizations, their different modes of religious experience, and their different forms of individual and social response to the divine.[13]

Yet more than once it has been questioned whether Hick's version of religious pluralism really serves this end. The opposite has even been claimed, as for example when Kathryn Tanner accused Hick's version in 1993 of being 'colonialist', a theory that 'undermines ... respect for the other religions *as other*' and called its defenders 'crypto-imperialists'.[14] Similar accusations had been made three years earlier by Kenneth Surin[15] and were later repeated, though in a milder form, by Mark Heim, who denied that pluralist theologies of religions could do justice to the real diversity and plurality of religions, and therefore demanded a 'more pluralistic' theology than religious pluralism.[16] This type of criticism is still invoked in some of the most recent contributions to the theology of religions debate, as for example, in the context

of establishing 'comparative theology'[17] or in delineating a theology of religions based on process-philosophy.[18]

Usually, this critique involves the following three interrelated objections:

1. Pluralist theology of the 'older' (so K. Kiblinger) or 'identist' (so D. Griffin) type, allegedly exemplified in the works of John Hick or Wilfred Cantwell Smith, dismisses genuine differences between religions by presupposing 'that all religions are fundamentally saying the same thing'[19] and hence does not really grapple with the distinctive otherness of other religions.
2. Pluralist theologies of religions are, as much as exclusivist or inclusivist models, derived from inner Christian or Western philosophical presumptions, and not developed by concrete engagement with the religious other.
3. Pluralist theologies of religions predetermine the outcome of actual interreligious dialogue, thereby making the latter superfluous. They claim to know beforehand what can, at best, only be known at the end.

In what follows I will take a closer look at this line of criticism. In defending John Hick's version of pluralism against the foregoing objections, I hope to show that pluralism not only provides a valid foundation for interreligious theology but, conversely, requires interreligious theology for corroborating its own validity.

2 Pluralism and otherness

In response to the *first objection* the crucial question is: What counts as a genuine difference in or the real otherness of the other, and hence as its true recognition?

Sometimes this objection is closely connected to the general postmodern refutation of so-called metanarratives or grand narratives.[20] Grand narratives – so the argument goes – are bound to a specific perspective. They not only violate the grand narratives that emerge from other particular perspectives; they are 'totalising theories, which subsume the local and particular to universal concepts'.[21] Grand narratives therefore are never really universal. At best, they turn out to be naïve and illusory; at worst, they are a form of power play, assuming control of all others by enforcing a particular perspective, namely, their own

culturally conditioned view, on all and everything.[22] Thus, in all their variants, 'grand', or metanarratives fail to recognize genuine difference in or the true otherness of the other.

Yet what is the implication of such criticism? The objection seems to presuppose that true otherness is only recognized if it is seen as something that can never become part of a universal theory. This presupposition, however, is self-refuting in that it determines, as a kind of metanarrative, what true otherness, or its recognition, has to be like.[23] Maybe the other is not that other as the postmodern theorist decrees him or her to be. Further, the fact that grand or metanarratives might be in conflict with other rival grand narratives can hardly count as an argument against the possibility (and possible truth) of these grand narratives. As far as the pluralist theology of religions is concerned, it never claimed to be compatible with all and everything. It is quite clearly at variance with atheist/naturalist, exclusivist, or inclusivist interpretations of religious diversity. If a pluralist account renders a broadly true picture, it inevitably excludes the truth of a particular religion's exclusivist or inclusivist superiority claim or the truth of the naturalist view that religious diversity is in its entirety a diversity of lie and error. When, for example, Gavin D'Costa argues that pluralists hold 'truth claims which exclude truth claims other than their own',[24] this neither has anything to do with an inability to admit true difference nor is indicative of any inconsistency of religious pluralism; instead, it underlines its character as a meaningful and possibly true theory.

Has not every religious belief – in so far as it explicitly or implicitly contains some universal claims – already an element of a grand or metanarrative? If a theory, assumption or belief about at least some features of the universe and our role in it were to be rejected because it involved statements about others that those others might not support, the verdict of metanarratives would hit not only pluralist theologies but any theology or religious doctrine with universal implications as well. Adopting this kind of postmodernist argument from a religious perspective and using it as a tool for critiquing religious pluralism might therefore be suicidal. How, for example, can one legitimately believe in a divine creator ('divine creation' being a typical exemplar of a grand narrative) on the premises of this objection? Belief in a divine creator involves belief that the creator also created those who don't believe in a creator, and is therefore at variance with those 'grand narratives' that deny creation. But does that count against the possibility or possible

truth of these two grand narratives? Moreover, how can one reasonably hold a belief according to which the divine creator created only those who believe in their createdness by that divine creator? More than once the implications of some postmodernist misgivings turn out to be rather irrational, which presumably doesn't bother those who see rational standards as another kind of grand narrative or metanarrative from which they feel one should abstain. But I suggest that it is a virtue, not a vice, if pluralists don't share that feeling.

More often, the accusation that all grand narratives dismiss or neglect real otherness is not part of the general postmodernist critique (and the irrational tendencies behind it), but is levelled specifically against the pluralist hypothesis that the major religious traditions are related – in different though equally valid and salvific ways – to the same ultimate reality. If it is this specific assumption that gives rise to the objection, the implication being that genuine difference or real otherness is only sufficiently acknowledged if one denies that other religions could be related to the same transcendent source in an equally liberating way. Thus, if the critic at the same time holds that her own religion is indeed salvifically related to the transcendent Real, then 'acknowledging real otherness' would become equivalent to assuming the falsity or deficiency of the other religion. Quite aprioristically, it is presupposed that only exclusivist claims (holding that other religions must be false because they differ from one's own) or inclusivist claims (holding that other religions are deficient to the extent they differ from one's own) would count as 'appreciating real difference'.

Why should the concept of 'real difference' or 'genuine otherness' be limited to those versions of otherness which involve incompatible and irreconcilable difference? Can diversity and otherness between human beings only be truly acknowledged if one human being denies others their humanity? Whether a pluralist theology that seeks to combine the recognition of difference with the acceptance of equal validity does really dismiss or neglect genuine differences, or whether it legitimately interprets them as not ultimately incompatible, can only be shown by discussing concrete examples and not on aprioristic assumptions about how 'other' the other has to be. This, however, implies that pluralist theologies may enhance their credibility by testing their theories against concrete examples. That is, they need to be rooted in 'interreligious theology': in each specific case it needs to be fleshed out how differences that appear to conflict can either be interpreted as being in fact reconcilable or, if not, how irreconcilability might or might not affect the pluralist theory.

3 The alleged apriorism of religious pluralism

So what about the *second objection,* which insinuates that this kind of specific engagement with other religions is precisely what religious pluralists – at least those of the 'old sort' as Kristin Kiblinger puts it – have missed to do? I think that this objection is simply baseless and perhaps stems from a lack of information.[25] While it is well known that some of the major models of exclusivism and inclusivism were admittedly derived entirely from inner-Christian doctrinal assumptions, such as in the case of Karl Barth[26] and Karl Rahner,[27] this is not true of the major pioneering pluralist theologians.[28] Raimundo Panikkar, for example, turned his earlier inclusivist theology into a form of pluralism under the pressure of his growing insight into Hinduism.[29] Wilfred Cantwell Smith changed from his earlier exclusivist attitude to pluralism precisely because of his encounter with Islam. His expertise in Islamic studies and a good deal of other religions stands unquestioned.[30] Paul Knitter founded his soteriocentric version of pluralism on the concrete recognition of the liberative potential in other faiths.[31] John Hick, too, moved from his earlier exclusivism to pluralism under the impact of his experience with other faiths,[32] and has demonstrated more than once a sound knowledge, particularly of Hinduism and Buddhism.

What is more important than pointing out such biographical facts is that pluralist theologies usually understand themselves to result from the thwarting of traditional Christian approaches by the concrete reality of other faiths. Religious pluralism – as Hick emphasizes – is arrived at 'inductively'.[33] Or, in other words, pluralist theologies are not – as James Fredericks insists – 'sealing themselves off from the transformative power of non-Christian religions'[34]; on the contrary, they are precisely the result of letting one's theology be transformed by the encounter with the religious other. They are a fruit of interreligious theological learning. Given that, on the one hand, Fredericks accuses pluralist theologies of being bulwarks against the 'transformative power' of other religions, it is all the more surprising that, on the other hand, he reproaches them for having become unfaithful to the Christian tradition.[35] In the case of the pluralist theology of Stanley Samartha, Fredericks is fully aware that it is the result of Samartha's substantial learning from Indian religions.[36] Nevertheless, he continues claiming that 'Pluralism does not ask Christians to think of these differences [i.e. between the religions] as opportunities to deepen their faith by revising their religious views.'[37] This clearly contradicts his other line of criticism according to which pluralists have revised and transformed Christian views far too much.

So it is not the case that pluralist theologies prevent transformations triggered by an in-depth encounter with other religions; it is rather the specific transformations themselves that Fredericks is not happy with. If he finally suggests that one has to live with the unresolved tension 'between our commitments to the Christian tradition' and 'openness to other religious truths'[38] the suspicion arises that it is not pluralism but his own verdict against pluralism that is meant to seal Christians off 'from the transformative power of non-Christian religions'.

4 Pluralism and dialogue

Is it then, as the *third objection* holds, the case that pluralism determines the possible outcome of any concrete dialogue, making dialogue redundant? Interestingly, this third objection has been forwarded not only by Christian critics,[39] but also by the Buddhist 'theologian'[40] Takeda Ryusei. Takeda presents the objection in two steps: (1) The statement that all major religions are salvifically related to the same ultimate reality could only be made as the outcome of a global interreligious dialogue that has reached its perfect end. Taking it as a hypothetical presupposition of dialogue might 'limit and distort the dialogue itself'; and (2) the pluralist hypothesis will render dialogue 'meaningless', for if *ex hypothesi* the same ultimate Reality is salvifically present in each of the major traditions, '[i]t is, then, totally unnecessary to learn new things from other religious traditions.'[41]

Takeda gives no further explanation of how or why a pluralist theology would have a limiting and distorting impact on interfaith dialogue. Particularly, if pluralism is not stated dogmatically but as a hypothesis, the pluralist implies that his assumptions might be false. After all, Hick has always been very clear about the religiously ambiguous character of the universe.[42] We can neither prove nor disprove the existence of an ultimate reality, which – as Hick says – 'transcends everything other than itself but is not transcended by anything other than itself.'[43] So it might be possible that in the end all 'theologies' of any religion are false. Perhaps we are unable, under pre-eschatological conditions, to determine with infallible certainty that pluralism (and equally so exclusivism or inclusivism) is right or wrong. Yet it can be meaningfully discussed which of the models is more likely to be true in the sense that it accounts better for the data that we encounter in the history of religions.[44] In this sense, Hick has claimed that the pluralist hypothesis is 'considerably more probable' than its rivals,[45] while others, like James Fredericks, see it as 'a rather implausible assertion' given 'a vast amount

of concrete data suggesting the contrary'.[46] Yet, whether a Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist version of exclusivism or inclusivism or a basically pluralist model is more capable of accounting for the data is something that in and through an ongoing and theologically deeper-going dialogue might become clearer.

In 1992, Schubert Ogden suggested that apart from exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, there would be a fourth option, which according to him is different from pluralism in that it does not claim 'that there actually *are* many true religions, but only that there *can be*.'[47] Such a 'potential' or 'possible pluralism' is to my mind not really a different option but the same option expressed in a different modality and hence another way of underlining the hypothetical status of the pluralist position: What *can be* or could be the case is precisely that there *are* many true religions. However, what is important about Ogden's suggestion – something that the discussion on it has often overlooked – is that Ogden understood his proposal as warranting 'a certain optimism about all the specific religions ... Indeed, it gives one every reason to look for signs of the actuality of the pluralism.'[48] Presumably, every religious person entering interfaith dialogue will bring to it 'some theological assumptions about the other'. This, as Kristin Kiblinger rightly holds, 'is not tantamount to saying that one's theological presuppositions are set in stone; rather, they are revisable, in light of the findings.'[49] Perhaps we cannot expect that these 'findings' will provide many knock-down arguments that would rule out some options entirely. Yet it might become clearer under which further assumptions and presuppositions the various models of exclusivism, inclusivism, or pluralism may retain their consistency and some of these assumptions may heavily reduce the plausibility of the respective model. In any way, I cannot see how this discussion would limit or distort a multilateral interfaith dialogue. The opposite is the case: interfaith dialogue becomes crucial in assessing the explanatory force of the pluralist hypothesis or any other rival theory.

What then about the second part of Takeda's critique? Does pluralism at least render interfaith dialogue religiously 'meaningless' because it makes learning something new from other religions irrelevant ('totally unnecessary') to our salvation? It is quite right that according to the pluralist position, learning from other religions is not seen as indispensable to one's salvation. Saying the opposite, as Hick himself has pointed out, would amount to the old exclusivist theory that learning from 'us' (whatever religious community that may be) is indispensable for the salvation of 'them'.[50] Denying an exclusivist type of relevance, however,

is not the same as holding that interreligious learning is unnecessary. It is necessary and even indispensable for arriving at a fuller, a more truthful understanding of the religious situation of humankind, of our neighbour's faith, and of our own. This even touches upon the soteriological dimension. If one feature of the salvific process is how we relate to our neighbour (as not only Christianity holds), then being open to the possible truth in the testimony of our neighbour's life to the religious experience enshrined and enacted in his or her religious tradition, is far from being something totally unnecessary or redundant. Presumably it will not completely disable, but it will certainly not foster a salvific transformation, when religions cultivate a mentality that is marked by distrust of what is most important to the heart and mind of the religious other – particularly in the current context in which interfaith encounter is becoming a standard feature in the day to day life of ever more people. Yet the words 'openness to other religious truths' are empty if this openness does not lead to the joint effort of integrating the various insights without shying away from the transformation of some traditional views wherever and whenever this becomes inevitable. This seems to be a pretty good description of what 'interreligious theology' might be.

5 Summary and outlook

The aforementioned three standard objections, set out to deny pluralism's capacity to substantiate a fruitful basis for learning from the religious other, can be shown as unjustified. Firstly, pluralist theologies do not dismiss genuine differences between religions, but they deny the hidden assumption that only irreconcilable differences count as genuine differences. Secondly, pluralist theologies are often the result of interreligious learning; they are not arrived at aprioristically but inductively. Thirdly, pluralist theologies do not predetermine dialogue but can be understood as suggesting a hypothesis whose credibility can be enhanced or reduced through dialogue, a hypothesis which is, on its own premises, a strong encouragement of dialogue as a way of mutual learning and enrichment.

If interreligious learning and enrichment is meant to be – in a wider sense – 'theological' learning, three requirements need to be met[51]: First, no one religion must be seen as perfect; otherwise there would be nothing to learn. Second, there must be genuine difference and otherness; otherwise nothing new could be learned. Third, difference must nevertheless be related to some common theological ground; otherwise

nothing new could be learned about the theologically crucial reality. Pluralist theologies meet these requirements by emphasizing a distinction that, as Hick has often said, lies at the centre of religious pluralism: the distinction between ultimate reality (the Real) as such (or *an sich*) and ultimate reality as humanly thought of and experienced – a distinction which is not 'Hick's distinction' but one to which he has drawn our attention. It is this distinction which meets the three requirements. In pointing out the transcategoriality,[52] and hence ineffability, of the Real *an sich*, the first requirement is met: it is ensured that no religious system can justifiably claim to possess the fullness of truth, a complete and accurate picture of the ultimate, which would leave no space for learning anything meaningful about the Real from others. Further, the distinction relates the various conceptions of the ultimate, its different personifications and impersonal representations, to one and the same ultimate reality, so that these conceptions can also be meaningfully related to each other. The distinction is not to sever the concrete personal and impersonal absolutes of the religions from the true yet inaccessible ultimate, but rather to see these absolutes as possibly[53] united in a common ultimate ground.[54] This is how pluralism meets the third requirement. Yet this relating of the various absolutes to their common ultimate ground is not done by naively suggesting that all the different Gods and impersonal Absolutes are just different names and concepts for the same thing, as some critics have held. In a far more realistic and interreligiously fruitful way, Hick's suggestion is that they relate to '*different* manifestations of the Real', i.e. to 'different phenomenal realities',[55] different experiences of and with the Real, which became part – and in fact changeable parts – of the different strands of that living process which forms the religious history of humankind. In this, pluralism meets the second requirement. It is through learning and understanding how these different manifestations of the Real mediate – each in its specific way – salvific relations to the Real, that interreligious dialogue can and will lead to mutual enrichment and a fuller awareness of the impact of the Real on all sides.

All of this leads to the conclusion that religious pluralism requires concrete dealings with other religions, or better, the dealing of different religions with each other in a form of dialogical interaction that can be called 'interreligious theology' as part of its own justification and as the conclusion of its own presuppositions. To me, it seems likely that future theology will to a large extent take the form of 'interreligious theology'[56] – a development for which John Hick has provided an immensely fruitful foundation.

Notes

1. On pluralist theologies of religions. see P. Schmidt-Leukel (2008) 'Pluralisms' in A. Race, P. Hedges (eds.) *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (London: SCM Press), pp. 85–110; idem. (2010) 'Pluralist Theologies', *The Expository Times,* vol. 122:2, 53–72.
2. For an extensive discussion of exclusivism and inclusivism, see P. Schmidt-Leukel (1997) *Theologie der Religionen. Probleme, Optionen, Argumente* (Neuried, Germany: Ars Una), pp. 99–235; idem. (2005) *Gott ohne Grenzen. Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus), pp. 96–162 (an English translation of the latter work will appear as *God Beyond Boundaries*).
3. See for example J. Fredericks (1999) *Faith among Faiths* (New York: Paulist Press), p. 8: 'the proponents of the pluralistic approach have been very successful in exposing the inadequacies of more traditional views of Christianity in relation to other religions.' Nevertheless, Fredericks recently had to 'admit that I am a Christian inclusivist'. See J. Fredericks (2010) 'Introduction' in F. Clooney, *The New Comparative Theology* (London/New York: T&T Clark), pp. ix-xix, p. xv.
4. Cf. J. Hick, H. Askari (eds) (1985) *The Experience of Religious Diversity* (Aldershot, UK: Gower House); P. Knitter (ed.) (2005) *The Myth of Religious Superiority. Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis).
5. For a reconstruction of the tri-polar classification as a logically comprehensive scheme, see P. Schmidt-Leukel (2005) 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism. Pluralism' in P. Knitter (ed.), *The Myth* (as in fn. 4).
6. W.C. Smith (1989) *Towards a World Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis) (1st edition 1981), p. 125.
7. W.C. Smith (1987) 'Theology and the World's Religious History' in: L. Swidler (ed.) *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis) pp. 51–85.
8. Cp. Smith (1989) *Towards a World Theology*, pp. 100ff, 130–151, 193.
9. Cp. Smith (1989) *Towards a World Theology*, p. 125.
10. Cp. J. Hick (1985) *Death and Eternal Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) (1st edition. 1976), 29–34.
11. J. Hick (1980) *God Has Many Names. Britain's New Religious Pluralism* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press), p. 85.
12. Ibid. p. 81.
13. J. Hick (1984) 'Religious Pluralism' in F. Whaling (ed.) *The World's Religious Traditions. Current Perspectives in Religious Studies* (FS W.C. Smith) (Edinburg: T&T Clark), pp. 147–164, p. 158.
14. K. Tanner (1993) 'Respect for Other Religions: A Christian Antidote to Colonialist Discourse', *Modern Theology* 9, 1–18, pp. 1f and 16.
15. For example: K. Surin (1990) 'A 'Politics of Speech'' in G. D'Costa (ed.) *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), pp. 192–212.
16. Cf. M. Heim (1995) *Salvations. Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), especially pp. 114–157.
17. See, for example, F. Clooney (ed.) (2010) *The New Comparative Theology* (as in fn. 3), pp. 27, 44f, 51ff.

18. See D. Griffin (2005) 'Religious Pluralism. Generic, Identist, and Deep' in *idem*. (ed.) *Deep Religious Pluralism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox), pp. 3–38.
19. H. Nicholson (2010) 'The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism' in F. Clooney (ed.) *The New Comparative Theology* (as fn. 3), 43–62, p. 45, referring to Fredericks.
20. Cp. P. Hedges (2008) 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-modern Perspectives' in P. Hedges, A. Race (eds.) *Christian Approaches* (as fn. 1) 112–135; J. Fredericks (2004) *Buddhists and Christians. Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), p. 102; idem. (2010) 'Introduction' in F. Clooney (ed.) *The New Comparative Theology* (as fn. 3), p. xv.
21. P. Hedges (2008) 'Particularities', p. 114, summarising J.-F. Lyotard.
22. Cp. ibid.
23. For this line of counter-critique see ibid. p. 120f.
24. See G. D'Costa (2000) *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), p. 46.
25. Against such criticism Kristin Kiblinger herself feels the need to point out (but referring only to second hand information) that W.C. Smith and J. Hick – among others – have been quite knowledgeable in the field of other religions. Cp. K. Kiblinger (2010) 'Relating Theology of Religions and comparative Theology', in F. Clooney (ed.) *The New Comparative Theology* (as fn. 3), 21–42, p. 25, fn. 15.
26. Famously stated by Barth when he affirmed in conversation with DT. Niles that he doesn't need to know Hindus in order to know that Hinduism is unbelief. See D.T. Niles (1969) 'Karl Barth – A Personal Memory', *The South East Asia Journal of Theology* 11, pp. 10–11
27. Cp. K. Rahner (1976) *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder), p. 304. Yet Rahner saw this a deficit and demanded that the apriorist arguments of the Christian systematic theologian need to be – as far as possible – confirmed by the historian of religions (ibid.).
28. Nor is this true of all exclusivist or inclusivist theologies. H. Kraemer, H. Netland, or the early Panikkar, for example, tried (or still do) to support their exclusivist or inclusivist positions by evidence derived from specific interreligious comparisons.
29. Panikkar's change from his earlier inclusivist to a pluralist position is particularly evident in the comparison of the 1st edn. of his *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1964) with the 2nd. revd. edn. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1981).
30. See, for example, W.C. Smith (1987) 'Theology and the World's Religious History' in L. Swidler (ed.), *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 51–72, p. 63: 'Mind you, I did not start my studies with the conviction that other communities' lives were lived in God's grace. I have come to this recognition only slowly, as I got to know the people and carefully studied their history.'
31. See especially P. Knitter (1995) *One Earth Many Religions. Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis).
32. See J. Hick (2002) *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oneworld), pp. 159–226
33. J. Hick (1984) 'Religious Pluralism' (as fn 8), p. 156f.
34. J. Fredericks (1999) *Faith among Faiths* (as fn. 3), p. 110f.

35. E.g. ibid. pp. 52f, 120ff; idem. (2004) *Buddhists and Christians. Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), pp. 12ff.
36. Cp. J. Fredericks (1999) *Faith among Faiths* (as fn. 3), pp. 89–99.
37. Ibid. p. 114 (my insertion).
38. Ibid. p. 170.
39. E.g. Fredericks (1999) *Faith Among Faiths* (as fn. 3), p. 115: 'The purpose of interreligious dialogue is hard to imagine from a pluralist perspective.'
40. For a justification of the term 'theologian' in a Buddhist context see R. Jackson, J. Makransky (eds.) (2000) *Buddhist Theology* (London: RoutledgeCurzon), 1–21.
41. R. Takeda (2004) 'Mutual Transformation of Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity: Methodology and Possibilities in the Light of Shinran's Doctrine' in A. Bloom (ed.) *Living in Amida's Vow. Essays in Shin Buddhism* (Bloomington: World Wisdom), 255–287, p. 283. For a similar criticism see J. Fredericks (1999) *Faith among Faiths* (as fn. 3), p. 115f.
42. See J. Hick (1989) *An Interpretation of Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), 73–125.
43. J. Hick (1993) *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), p. 164.
44. When James Fredericks (*Faiths Among Faiths*, p. 106f) denies that Hick's version of pluralism is a genuine hypothesis (because there would be nothing to falsify it), he ignores the possibility of eschatological falsification, e.g. if some form of religious exclusivism should turn out to be true eschatologicaly; cp. J. Hick (1995) *The Rainbow of Faiths* (London: SCM Press), p. 74f.
45. J. Hick (1985) *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), p. 100.
46. J. Fredericks (1999) *Faith among Faiths* (as fn. 3), p. 107. With this remark Fredericks points out exactly the kind of discourse within which the pluralist hypothesis *and its rivals* can be meaningfully balanced: How well or bad will they fare in interpreting the data of the religious history?
47. S. Ogden (1992) *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press), p. 83.
48. Ibid. 103.
49. K. Kiblinger (2010) 'Relating Theology of Religions and comparative Theology' in F. Clooney (ed.) *The New Comparative Theology* (as fn. 3), 21–42, p. 25.
50. J. Hick (1997) 'Five Misgivings' in L. Swidler, P. Mojzes (eds.) *The Uniqueness of Jesus. A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 79–84, p. 81.
51. All three requirements are also underlined in Catherine Cornille's important study: C. Cornille (2008) *The im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad Publ.).
52. See, for example, J. Hick (2010) *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; reissue), pp. 76–89.
53. I say 'possibly', because for Hick specific criteria need to be matched in order to assess a putative manifestation of the Real as genuine. Cp. J. Hick (1989) *An Interpretation* (as fn. 42), pp. 297–376.
54. Hick made this very clear by explaining in which way he employs the Kantian distinction between *noumenon* and *phainomenon*, namely that 'the noumenal world exists independently of our perception of it and the

phenomenal world is that same world as it appears to our human consciousness. ... Analogously, I want to say that the noumenal Real is experienced and thought by different human mentalities, forming and formed by different religious traditions, as the range of gods and absolutes which the phenomenology of religions reports.' J. Hick (1989) *An Interpretation*, p. 242.

55. J. Hick (1995) *The Rainbow* (as fn. 44), p. 43.
56. Cp. the most recent consultation process within the ETWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians): J.M. Vigil (ed.) (2010)*Toward a Planetary Theology* (Along the Many Paths of God V) (Montreal: Dunamis Publ.).

2

Which Is It? Religious Pluralism or Global Theology?

Marilyn McCord Adams

I Fostering tolerance

Perhaps no one has been more insistent than John Hick that Anglo-American philosophers of religion face the facts: not only one but many ancient and culturally entrenched religions are practiced worldwide. Each has produced saints. Each has had adherents who promoted it as "the one true faith" and justified cruelty and oppression in the name of religion. Liberal that he is, Hick finds the degrading treatment of other human beings to be the acid test of what is absolutely intolerable. In many of his books, but quintessentially, in *An Interpretation of Religion,*[1] Hick seeks to alleviate the practical problem by furnishing a theoretical framework that would make religious toleration reasonable. What liberal theologian, what liberal citizen would not welcome this 'consciousness-raising', the many constructive debates that Hick's books have fostered, and the civil and religious policy changes that they have inspired?

Nevertheless, I cannot say that I agree with Hick's theoretical frame, partly because I have not been able to get clear in my mind which of several proposals he is making. Roughly speaking, 'religious pluralism' suggests what I might call a *change-of-status* move. Where many if not all of the world's great faiths each thinks of itself as 'absolute' and the others as erroneous, the pluralist hypothesis would put them all on an equal footing by relativizing them as each culturally significant responses to an Absolute or Real that transcends them all. By contrast, 'global theology' is a *change-of-content* move, which compares and contrasts belief elements in the world's great faiths and tests them against empirical evidence, all to uncover a stripped-down content (and perhaps praxis) that could be substituted for what the world's great faiths offer. On my reading, Hick seems

to experiment with both moves, leaving me unsure which he advocates – religious pluralism, global theology, or some mixture of the two.

II Hick's proposed framework of interpretation

***The Variety Problem*:** In both of Hick's monumental works – *Evil and the God of Love*[2] and *An Interpretation of Religion* – the pervasive ambiguity of the universe looms large. What Hick has in mind is the variety of characteristic ways in which humans interpret the world, where interpretation is not merely cognitive but also affective, not merely or primarily theoretical but a way of experiencing and living in the world.[3] The 'naturalistically versus religiously' divide was salient in Hick's soul-making theodicy, where the ambiguity of the world contributes to soul-making by opening the possibility for humans to make a free response.[4] Important for present purposes is the fact that humankind gives and has given the world many religious interpretations. Hick's theoretical focus is on the great so-called axial/post-axial religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[5] Hick takes over Robert Bella's contrast between pre-axial and axial/post-axial, where the aim of practicing the former was to keep cosmic and social orders in place, while the point of the later is the cosmologically optimistic one of fostering individual but also collective soteriological progress, to move forward into a realm of "limitlessly better possibilities."[6] Hick's theory of religions does not apply to pre-axial religions, although he does briefly note how it might apply to new religious movements.[7]

The presenting problem is analogous to that raised for the veridicality of sense perception, which arises from the fact that ostensibly the same thing appears to have different sizes, shapes, colours at one and the same time. Such data cannot *all* represent the thing as it really is. It cannot really be cardinal red and mauve and grey all over; it cannot really be round and elliptical, bigger than my hand and smaller than a dot at one and the same time. Therefore, the perceptions cannot all be literally veridical. The remaining theoretical choices are to privilege one (say, the one got under 'standard conditions of perception'), to discredit the lot, or to give some qualified credit to each or most (the same thing looks to be round under these conditions, elliptical under those conditions; red under these, mauve under those, and so on).

Hick argues that we have no rational grounds for privileging one over all the others: not the naturalistic over the religious, or vice versa; (especially) not Christianity over Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, or Islam.[8] Instead, Hick's *pluralistic hypothesis* seems to put naturalistic and

religious world views, each and all of the world's great religions, on a par by granting each and all a kind of qualified credit (the change-of-status move).[9]

***A Quasi-Kantian Solution*:** Hick develops his proposal by drawing an analogy with a popular interpretation of Kant, according to which Kant is seen to distinguish things in themselves from things as they appear to us. Theoretical reason has no cognitive access to things in themselves. But things in themselves impact human cognitive faculties to produce intuitions, whereupon the human mind organizes these inputs in characteristic ways to yield the world of our experience. Science is rescued from Humean and other scepticisms because the proper object of its study is not things in themselves but the phenomenal world of our experience.

Likewise, Hick's pluralistic hypothesis distinguishes the Real in itself from the worlds of our experience.[10] The impact of the Real in itself on human beings is mediated by human cultures and languages and gets organized by human individuals and collectives in different ways to produce, not only naturalistic world views, but the world's great religions.[11] The Real in itself is not cognitively accessible to humans. It is transcategorial, beyond the binary opposites (e.g. personal versus impersonal, substance versus process) and conceptual cubbyholes that the human mind invents. We can devise linguistic machinery to refer to it that permits us to make only 'formal statements' about it. Thus, the belief systems of the world's great religions cannot be *literally* true about the Real in itself. But the world's great religions – their belief systems and manifold practices – represent some characteristic human responses to the Real in itself, just as (allegedly for Kant) the space-time world studied by science represents the human cognitive response to things in themselves.[12]

Descartes seems to have thought that physics studies things as they are in themselves, and he maintains that we have innate ideas that enable us to know the essence of things in themselves. Medieval Christian school theologians thought that while no human mind will ever be able to *comprehend* Godhead, still, in this present life it is possible to know that God exists, to analyse Divine attributes, to model Divine Tri-unity and the Incarnation, and so on. In short, they did not think that human concepts were utterly inadequate. They were confident that they were making true statements about how Godhead is in Itself and not merely about how it appears to human beings in experience. Many of the other world religions have had adherents who thought their beliefs captured the Ultimate in Itself.

Hick stands opposed to this. Just as – relative to the conception of Descartes, – Kant's proposal relocates science, maintaining that science is about the phenomenal world ordered by the mind; so Hick repositions religious discourse: it cannot be literally true about the Real in itself, even though it has a significant function within the context of religious experience and praxis, insofar as it is imbedded in a characteristic human religious response to the Real.

Complicating Disanalogy: There is a significant 'dis-analogy' between the popular Kant of our school days and the quasi-Kant of Hick's religious pluralism, however. Popular-Kant tacitly assumes that the ways of organizing perceptual intuitions (the schemata and the categories) are common to all human beings, perhaps even built into human nature. This allows him (tacitly) to suppose that there is one way the phenomenal world really is, inter-subjectively. The claims of well-conducted science can be literally true by correspondence with the phenomenal world that is their proper subject matter, and will be the same for all humans. Literal truth is what the sciences aim for, even though they are not about, and should not claim to accurately describe, things in themselves.

For Hick, the presenting theoretical problem is the variety of religious experience within and among the world's great religious faiths.[13] Generally speaking, the beliefs and categories belonging to one don't fit or frame experiences within another. The corresponding pragmatic problem is that it doesn't seem possible for an individual to practice all religions at once (the attempt would produce a hybrid, which would be something else again).[14] The different religions foster conflicting interpretations of life and commend incompatible ways of seeing and being in the world.

Soteriological Criterion: Hick notes a further difficulty. Partly because human responses to the Real are culturally mediated, and hence historically located and developmental, Hick thinks that merely being a characteristic and settled response to the Real is not enough to make a response rational, tolerable or commendable.[15] Religions as wholes, religious beliefs and practices piecemeal, are to be measured – not by their literal correspondence or failure to correspond with the Real in itself, but by how well they perform their function. Hick argues that the function of axial and post-axial religions is *soteriological*. Surveying the world's great faiths, Hick identifies what he takes to be their common purpose: *to move their adherents towards self-transcendence,*[16] *from self-centredness to Reality-centredness*.[17] Religions as wholes, religious beliefs and practices, are to be evaluated by the soteriological criterion of whether they foster

transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness in those who practice them.[18]

Hick suspects that the world's great religions are equally productive of saints (those who make significant progress from self-centredness to Reality-centredness).[19] Hick infers that beliefs that would be incompatible if they were taken to be literally true as well as historical beliefs that may or may not be literally true (e.g. stories about Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac, about the Buddha or Mohammed flying, about Jesus walking on water) may pass *the soteriological test* of fostering spiritual growth towards Reality-centredness.[20] Thus, Hick proposes to count religious beliefs that meet the soteriological criterion as *mythologically true*, while those that are soteriologically counterproductive, he counts as *mythologically false*.[21] In his later book, *The Fifth Dimension,* Hick re-emphasizes, 'mythological religious truth is instrumental truth, consisting in its capacity to evoke and develop appropriate human responses to the Ultimate'.[22]

Even (especially?) in the world's great faiths, not everything passes soteriological muster. Prominent among the 'flunkies' is the belief that one's own religion is superior to all others and/or that the practice of it necessary for salvation. In *The Fifth Dimension*, Hick documents how each of the world's great faiths has a history in which belief that its myths are literally true has been used to justify doing serious harm to outsiders.[23] Likewise, the practice of human sacrifice (referred to in the Hebrew bible) and the torture of heretics and infidels (as carried out in the Inquisition) fall soteriologically short.[24] Hick thinks it is incumbent on adherents of religious faiths to weed out those cultural accretions in them that fail to pass soteriological muster.

Putting his quasi-Kantian thesis together with his soteriological criterion, Hick draws the pragmatic inference that *it is rational for persons who experience the world religiously according to one of the world's great faiths to live into that interpretation of the world with its beliefs and practices, to the extent that they are soteriologically productive.* Hick seems confident that 'soteriologically weeded' versions of each and all of the world's great faiths will pass this test. The playing field will be levelled and tolerance can reign.

III Philosophical incongruities

On my reading so far, Hick seems to emphasize religious pluralism with its change-of-status move: let the content of the world's great faiths be what it is; 'downgrade' each and all 'to a less absolute status.'[25]

Mostly, their religious dogmas will not be literally true, and at best, mythologically true. Mostly, their religion-specific practices will not be necessary for salvation. For each religion, persons can become progressively saintly by practicing some other religion instead. But each religion represents a way of being in the world that is soteriologically productive. The change-of-content move comes in only insofar as the soteriological criterion weeds out the abusive and otherwise soteriologically unproductive elements of each tradition.

Metaphysical Mythology? There is a fly in the ointment, however. Hick recognizes that the world's great faiths bring along beliefs of many different kinds. Among the narratives, some are purely mythological, while others are legendary, and still others purport to be historical. Likewise, each religion makes characteristic claims about the Real/Ultimate, and about the nature and destiny of human beings. Most if not all of these religions have had theologians who have worked within that tradition to give its beliefs and commitments clear and coherent formulation. Some of these theologians have been philosophical theologians, who have translated some of these beliefs into metaphysical claims. Moreover, these philosophical renderings of religious dogmas have not remained in the ivory tower, but in many cases have worked their way down into religious praxis (e.g., Christians regularly recite in worship services, not only the Apostles', but also the Nicene and sometimes the Athanasian creeds). My worry is about how Hick proposes to treat such metaphysical claims.

There is, of course, the fact that the metaphysical claims of some philosophical Hinduisms and Buddhisms are incompatible with each other and with those of medieval Christian school theology. In *An Interpretation of Religion,* Hick sometimes seems to 'hive off' philosophical theses as being 'secondary' and going beyond the experiential base-line of the religion.[26] But other times, he seems to recognize their integration into the praxis of their respective religions.[27] Folding such religion-specific philosophical beliefs together with the other belief elements of the religion (including non-philosophical, religion-specific beliefs that, if taken for literal truth, would be incompatible with one another), Hick 'downgrades' them from literal truth or falsity to mythological truth or falsity. Thus, both the belief that God is personal and the belief that the Ultimate is non-personal may pass the soteriological criterion and be counted mythologically true, while two-natures Christology is mythologically false because it is guilty by association with the religious imperialism of Christian colonizers and missionaries.[28] Leaning on the soteriological criterion again, Hick

emphasizes that none of these metaphysical beliefs is necessary for salvation.[29]

As a universalist, I find Hick's contention that such metaphysical beliefs are not necessary for salvation easy to concede. But Hick's treatments of religion-specific, metaphysical beliefs strikes me as philosophically peculiar. For – like popular Kant – Hick's quasi-Kantian pluralist hypothesis involves a metaphysical claim. Hick rejects a D. Z. Philips–style anti-realism about religion. Besides human linguistic and cultural practices, there is Reality with a capital 'R' – what Hick calls 'the Real' or 'the Ultimate'.[30] Without claiming to disprove them, Hick rejects social-science approaches that reduce religions to complexes of human cultural practices.[31] Moreover, Hick makes metaphysical claims about the Real: it is trans-categorical, not the kind of thing that could be conceptualized by the human mind, and so not the kind of thing about which the theological claims of the various religious could be literally true. This stripped-down metaphysical claim bears a family resemblance to Maimonides' *via negativa*. In his later book *The Fifth Dimension,* Hick finds affinities between his quasi-Kantian hypothesis and the Neoplatonism of Pseudo-Dionysius.[32]

My first point is that *Hick's pluralism involves* – as he seems to admit – *a substantive if economical metaphysical claim*. My second point is that *historically, such claims have been seen as metaphysical competitors of cataphatic theologies*. For example, Aquinas learns from Pseudo-Dionysius, but in the face of Maimonides, mounts arguments against and finally rejects both views, precisely because Pseudo-Dionysius and Maimonides do not allow us to make positive claims about the Divine essence. Likewise, Scotus defends univocal predication, not only of being, but also of the pure perfections (goodness, wisdom, justice, etc.), of God and creatures. Again, in 1880, Pope Leo XIII declared Aquinas the patron of Catholic Schools, in part to bring an end to the use of German idealist philosophy with its Absolute beyond binary opposites as the baseline for theological formulation.

My first conclusion is that *trouble arises for Hick's religious pluralism, not because the religion-specific metaphysical claims are incompatible with one another, but more fundamentally because they are incompatible with the metaphysics of Hick's imbedding quasi-Kantian frame*. So, far from being congruent with each and all of the world's great religions, Hick's pluralist hypothesis involves a metaphysical thesis that is incompatible with at least some of them. Hick's urging of the pluralist hypothesis seems tantamount to saying 'My metaphysics is the only one that is literally true!' – which sounds oddly parallel to religious practitioners advancing

theirs as the one true faith. What is more peculiar is that Hick's pluralist hypothesis doesn't dignify the competitors by calling them being literally false. Instead, it invites them to eat a metaphysical humble pie by withdrawing any claim to cognitive content and 'downgrading' their systems of philosophical theology to the status of mythological truth (or falsity). Odder still is the fact that Hick's arguments in favour of his quasi-Kantian hypothesis speak more in favour of its mythological truth or falsity than its literal truth or falsity.

Metaphysical realist that I am, I have no interest in downgrading metaphysical hypotheses to merely mythological status (although I have no objection to Hicks making observations about their soteriological advantages or disadvantages). In my mind, well-formed metaphysical hypotheses are either literally true or literally false. If I were persuaded to endorse Hick's quasi-Kantianism, I would not want to hold onto my metaphysical claims about Divine personality or the Trinity or two-natures Christology. In 'converting' to his Real in itself, I would pull myself together and admit the error of my ways by confessing how my former views had turned out to be false. I would not find it soteriologically wholesome to embrace a belief system which is chock-full of literal falsehoods. Put otherwise, my second conclusion is this: *given that the world's great religions pack into their philosophical theologies metaphysical claims that are incompatible with Hick's quasi-Kantian metaphysical thesis, it does not make sense to characterize conversion to Hick's quasi-Kantian thesis as a change-of-status move. It is bound to be a change-of-content move that launches converts into the project of global theology!*

IV Tolerant alternatives

Global Theology After All? Interestingly, in his earlier book *Death and Eternal Life*, Hick embarks on just such a project. There he divides religious discourse into 'its central affirmations concerning the nature of reality' – not only his quasi-Kantian hypothesis about the transcendent Real, but also his claims about human nature and destiny – and the mythology or poetic elaborations and cultic expressions that grow up alongside the affirmations in the cultural soil of their surround. Hick allows that the status of a religion's claims about the nature of reality are 'true or false' – evidently, they are the kind of claims that are either literally true or literally false. Because no one religion gets everything right, Hick reckons it will be profitable to compare and contrast theses forwarded by the different religions and set them up against the

findings of the empirical sciences, with hopes of synthesizing a global theology.[33] He describes its research program this way:

> The project of global theology will then be the attempt to use these different affirmations, and the modes of religious experience on which they are based, as the data for the construction of comprehensive religious theories. Such a theology would consist in a body of hypotheses about the nature of reality, expressing the basic common ground of the world religions, and receiving mythic expression and devotional content in different ways within different historical traditions.

The hope for global theology is 'the hope for' 'a common core of ultimate beliefs.'[34] In *Death and Eternal Life,* Hick does not focus on his quasi-Kantian hypothesis, but on finding a common core account of human nature and destiny. His conclusion – as he admits – is closer to some Hindu conceptions, positing as it does a basic dispositional character structure that gets embodied in successive empirical egos whose finite birth-to-death careers are shaped by and also contribute to the basic dispositional character structure that is passed on for another round in the journey from self-centredness to self-transcendence. Hick endorses a similar hypothesis in *The Fifth Dimension*.[35] In *Death and Eternal Life,* Hick envisions an end state in which there remains a plurality of centres of consciousness, but all coinhere in the way the persons of the Trinity are said to do in traditional Christian theology so that there is all-inclusive community.[36] In *The Fifth Dimension,* Hick speculates instead that '[p]erhaps ultimately, with the fulfilment of the creative process, finite personality will have served its purpose and become one with the eternal Reality.'[37]

Important for present purposes is how Hick sees his quasi-Kantian thesis and his soteriological diagnosis – that the human project is to grow from self-centredness towards self-transcendence – as the foundation of global theology. Tolerance of the variety of religious experience is to be won by recognizing the world's religions as soteriologically productive human responses to the Real. Where the second metaphysical tenet – about the nature and destiny of human beings – is concerned. Hick thinks that the details – whether different centres of consciousness remain or whether each and all are ultimately united with the Real – are speculative. Epistemological humility should be enough to make us tolerant.[38]

Hick's consciousness of the soteriological function of religion reasserts itself. Beliefs and practices are instrumental, merely skilful means.

While he recognizes that religious practice generally will be culturally immersed and that many adherents will continue to believe their dogmas to be literally true, Hick also hints that the process of spiritual maturation might well involve a stripping down to soteriological essentials. Thus, he writes,

> at a certain state of spiritual growth one may find it helpful, even necessary, to hold steadfastly to the idea of incarnation, the Trinity, the atonement, the Virgin Birth, the bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus and his second coming, the primacy of the Popes as successors to St Peter, or the absolute authority of Church or bible, or the efficacy of prayer to Mary and the saints. But believers who are spiritually and intellectually alive find that their beliefs change over the decades. A different way of seeing things can gradually develop within us. Ideas that were important and sustaining in adolescence, in the first flush of conversion, in some life crisis, or whilst living within a particular community or a particular set of circumstances, may lose their grip and be either discarded or (more often) allowed quietly to fall into the background. Although furiously attacked by fundamentalist believers as apostasy, this is normally a healthy and mind-expanding process of growth.'[39]

He concludes the book with the declaration that all we need to know to live now 'is the way of love, witnessed to by the saints and mystics of all the great traditions.'[40]

***Sceptical Realisms*:** Hick's pluralist hypothesis wins through to religious tolerance by practicing metaphysical intolerance. Specifically, its change-of-status move forces religion-specific metaphysics to 'downgrade' and so to eat metaphysical humble pie. Hick's experiments in global theology secure religious tolerance by change-of-content manoeuvres that strip down literal-truth claims to a minimalist metaphysics and envision eventual simplifications of praxis as well. Where the thesis about human nature and destiny is concerned, tolerance is guaranteed by epistemological humility: people can agree to differ about details because there are not sufficient proofs available to convince every rational person.

When all is said and done, I find myself unwilling to follow either the religious pluralist or the global theology path. My reasoning is that humble pie comes in at least two flavours. Where the appetite is for tolerance, epistemological humble pie will satisfy. As a *metaphysical* realist, I take metaphysical claims to be literally true or literally false. As a

sceptical realist, I recognize that all philosophical claims are inherently controversial. Almost nothing of interest can be cogently defended in such a way as to command the ascent of every human being. The task of philosophical theologians is to develop their assumptions with as much clarity and rigor as possible, the better to display the costs and benefits of her/his point of view. Because competing theories provoke deeper appreciation of what is at stake and prompt more fine-grained elaborations of our own view points, we have every incentive not to dismiss or disdain, but to dig in and try to understand religions other than our own. Faithfulness to philosophy breeds tolerance, because philosophy is the love of wisdom, and its goal is to understand.

A Christian metaphysical realist can heartily confess that God is a Trinity and that Christ has two natures in one person and yet – especially if she is a universalist – not be obnoxious by forcing her religion down anyone else's throat. Universalism can reinforce the tolerance that sceptical realism fosters, and ready her to celebrate sainthood wherever it is to be found.

Notes

1. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Basingstoke and London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989).
2. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
3. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, I, ch. 1.1, 1; 1.5, 12; II, chs 5–7, 73–125.
4. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love,* IV, ch. 14.7, 316–327.
5. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, I, ch. 1.1, 2.
6. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, I, ch. 2.2, 22–23, 26–28, 30, 32–33, 36; I, ch. 4.2, 56–57, 61; III, ch. 10.4, 164–165.
7. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* V, ch. 17, 307–308.
8. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* IV, ch. 14.1, 235–236; ch. 14.4, 248–249.
9. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* III, ch. 13.1, 211; 13.3, 214–216; 13.5, 223–224; 13.6, 227–229.
10. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, I, ch. 1.5, 15; IV, ch. 14.3, 241–243.
11. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, III, ch. 10.4, 163–173.
12. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* IV, ch. 14.4, 246. See also John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm* (Oxford: One World, 1999), Introduction, 9–10.
13. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, IV, ch. 14.3–14.4, 244–246.
14. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* V, ch. 20.4, 373.
15. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, IV, ch. 16.1, 278.
16. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, V, ch.19.4, 356.
17. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* IV, ch.16.1, 278–279; V, ch. 17.1, 299–300.

18. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* V, ch. 17.4, 307.
19. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* V, ch. 17.2, 301; 17.4, 327–328. In his later book, *The Fifth Dimension,* Hick expands this theme into five chapters (Part V, chs 19–23, 173–216).
20. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, V, ch. 19.1–2, 347–348; ch. 19.3, 351; ch. 20.2, 365.
21. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* IV, ch. 14.4, 248; V, ch. 19.3, 351; ch. 19.4, 356.
22. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension*, III.9, 78.
23. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension,* VI, ch. 24, 226.
24. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, V, ch. 17.5, 311–312.
25. Hick uses this language in *The Fifth Dimension*, VI, ch. 24, 225.
26. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, IV, ch. 15.2, 259–263.
27. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, V, ch. 19.3, 352; ch. 19.4, 359; ch. 20.4, 372–374.
28. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* V, ch. 20.3, 371.
29. *John Hick, An Interpretation of Religion*, V, ch. 19.3, 352; 19.4, 359; V, ch.20.3, 369–70.
30. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* I, ch. 1.5, 14; III, ch. 12.5, 204–208.
31. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, II, chs 5–7, 73–125.
32. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension*, III, ch. 9, 79–86.
33. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, 1976), I, ch. 1.4, 29.
34. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, I, ch. 1.4, 30.
35. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension*, VI, ch. 26, 244–254.
36. John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life,* V, ch. 22.3, 461–462, 464.
37. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension*, VI, ch. 26, 254.
38. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension*, IV, ch. 24, 224–225.
39. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension,* VI, ch. 24, 225–226.
40. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension,* VI, ch. 26, 254.

3

Virtuous Comparativists Are Practicing Pluralists

Paul F. Knitter

One of the most serious, prolonged, and some would say, successful criticisms of the pluralist 'Copernican revolution' that John Hick proposed back in the 1970s is embodied in the multiple forms of what is called 'comparative theology'. In the following reflections, I poke my nose into the hornets' nest of discussions between 'theologians of religions' and 'comparative theologians'. They've been arguing among themselves about 'who comes first?' or 'what's more important?' or 'isn't it time to bury one and carry on with the other?'[1] Grateful that theological hornets don't sting, I'm going to boldly propose that when a comparative theologian practices the 'virtues' of her/his trade, s/he will be endorsing, expressly or implicitly, the theological ingredients of what is called a 'pluralist theology of religions'. Thus, a truly virtuous comparativist is a practicing (though perhaps anonymous) pluralist. Really, what I'm claiming is that comparative theologians, perhaps to their great embarrassment, are disciples of John Hick!

Comparative theology: a thumbnail sketch

To be sure we know what we're talking about, I need to make clear what I understand by 'comparative theology' (CT) Much has been written on this relatively new growth in the theological garden[2]; I myself tried to take an aerial photograph of the terrain of comparative theology in *Introducing Theologies of Religions*.[3] But a more updated, and insightful, summary of what comparativists have been up to and where they have arrived is offered by Hugh Nicholson in his article 'The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology'.[4]

Nicholson describes three of the essential requirements for a theologian before s/he can be admitted in the comparativist theological work force:

1. The comparativist is animated by the conviction that 'a serious engagement with one or more non-Christian faiths is integral to contemporary interreligious theological reflection'.[5] I would remove one word from that otherwise succinct statement. If I understand comparativists like Frank Clooney and James Fredericks correctly, such engagement with other faiths is integral not just to *interreligious* theological reflection but to *all theological reflection*. This is what I believe is both disconcerting and at the same time en-spiriting in this new theological movement: it announces to all Christian theologians that they cannot really do their job of understanding 'the Christian fact' unless they are interpreting it in conversation with other religious facts. A daunting, but exciting proposition.
2. In order to do what it hopes to do, 'Comparative theology's empirical method implies a willingness to revise theological judgments in light of the particular teachings of other traditions'.[6] There is a lot of theological dynamite packed into that word 'revise'. That, too, is daunting and exciting, but also promising and risky.
3. Reflecting the postmodern world in which it was born, CT evinces a 'resistance to generalizations about religion ... [and] eschews the kind of abstract theorizing about religious truth characteristic of the theology of religions'.[7] Here we hear resonances of the way comparative theologians (who generally belong to this generation) chide their theologians-of-religions colleagues (who, like John Hick and me, are generally older than they) that they, the elders, have been doing their theology in armchairs. Comparativists want to do their theology in the trenches. And any broader, or general, conclusions they will make will be wrung from the thick descriptions of particular texts, issues, projects. Fredericks even calls for a 'moratorium' on all theologies of religions, urging theologians like John Hick, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Alan Race, and myself to cease and desist from all theological conclusions until we have left our armchairs and done our homework in the fields of comparative theology and actual engagement with other religions.[8]

So, there we have the three qualities and motivating energies of CT: engage the other, be ready to revise, avoid theological generalizations.

The virtues of a comparative theology require the theory of a pluralist theology

In what follows, I try to substantiate my claim that when a theologian really lives up to the defining guidelines of CT (especially the first two), she or he will look and act pretty much like a pluralist theologian. To make my case, I will work with a recently published book that serves, I believe, as a kind of *vademecum,* or handbook on the virtues, of a comparative theologian. It was written by one of this generation's foremost comparative theologians, presently Professor of Comparative Theology at Boston College, Catherine Cornille. Her *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* has been broadly acclaimed as a pioneering work that shifted the conversation about 'the many religions' from theological models to personal virtues.[9] Rather than asking what are the theological presuppositions for engaging other religions, she asks what are the necessary virtues or human dispositions. Like a true comparativist, she insists that we must engage before we can theologize. But her unique contribution is to ask further: what are the virtues necessary for such an engagement?

She lists and explores five such virtues. I would like to follow her in the exploration and understanding of each of them. But in doing so, I want to make my case that her comparativist or dialogical virtues require a pluralist theology. Simply put: To practice comparative theology one has to endorse, maybe unconsciously, a form of pluralist theology. So as succinctly as possible, let's look at each of Cornille's comparativist virtues.

Humility

Here is my one-sentence summary of the first of Cornille's virtues, humility: *We have to recognize (and act accordingly) that in all matters, but especially religious matters, there is always more to learn.*[10]

Cornille's description of the 'doctrinal humility' that she feels is a pre-requisite for the work of comparative theology could be taken, I suggest, right from the mouth of pluralists like Hick and Race:

> It is this belief in the absolute and final truth of one's own teachings and practices that prevents one from listening to, let alone learning from other religious traditions.[11]
>
> Insofar as one's own religious tradition is regarded as the ultimate truth and the norm against which the truth of the other may be discerned, dialogue becomes primarily a means of rendering the other aware of the actual truth of its own tradition.[12]

And even more boldly, in a paper delivered at the American Academy of Religion in November 2009, Cornille points out that contemporary comparative theologians, unlike their predecessors of the nineteenth century, no longer hold to the 'firm conviction of the superiority of one's own (Christian) faith'.[13] She also recognizes that such humility presupposes a theology that 'may run against the grain of much traditional religious self-understanding'.[14] Indeed, pluralist theologians, especially Roman Catholics (who happen to be Jesuits), have found that to be the case.[15]

What Cornille is announcing as a condition for the possibility of CT has been a foundational plank in the platform of pluralist theology since its inception. Both because religion deals with Mystery that always exceeds all human comprehension and because claims of 'having it all' hamstring the dialogical possibility of learning 'something more', pluralists have questioned all religious truth claims that are absolute or final or unsurpassable. 'Doctrinal humility' and proclamations of exclusive or inclusive finality are simply incompatible. On that, it seems, comparativists and pluralists are in agreement.

Commitment

Again, let me provide a one-line description: Cornille's second virtue, commitment, calls for *Comparative to theologians bring to their task a given, and a chosen, core commitment and religious identity that have to be recognized and preserved*.[16]

Here, too, I believe that comparativists and pluralists will be on the same psychological and theological page: to have a real interreligious dialogue we need to engage interreligious *believers* – participants who are not only well informed about their religious tradition but committed to it. The virtue of commitment is therefore required not only out of 'hermeneutical necessity'[17] (that is, because these are the 'cultural glasses' through which I happen to see the world) but out of existential necessity (these are the cultural-religious glasses that I have chosen and that enable me to see). More specifically and, for me, more personally: The 'mind of Christ' is not just my socially constructed perspective; it is the mind that I hope infuses my mind and that I try to put on daily. This is my choice. I cannot imagine giving up the centrality of Christ in my life.

Cornille honestly notes the inherent tension between such existential commitment and doctrinal humility; but I don't think she fully confronts this tension. In her description of the virtue of commitment she notes 'a lurking sense of incompatibility between firm commitment

to a particular religious tradition and openness to other religions'.[18] For me, as I pondered her book, that incompatibility not only 'lurked'. It stood out starkly and confusingly. I fear that her understanding of commitment seems to contradict her description of humility.

When she states that '[c]ommitment to the truth of one religion logically excludes recognition of the equal truth of others', one might debate with her whether such exclusion is logical.[19] But when she goes on to insist that '[r]eligions indeed presuppose that the fullness of truth is concentrated in their own conception of ultimate reality', then the incompatibility of this presupposition with the presupposition of humility not only lurks but slaps one in the face. She told us earlier that any 'belief in the absolute and final truth' of one's own religion 'prevents one from listening to, let alone learning from, other religious traditions'. And she expressly said earlier that 'humility must also entail a certain abandonment of all preconceived knowledge of God and of all theological or doctrinal pride'.[20] So I have to ask Cornille and Christian comparativists such as Clooney and Fredericks: how can one be doctrinally humble and doctrinally full or final at the same time?

In her American Academy of Religion (AAR) paper, Cornille implies an answer to my question (one that I didn't find that neatly stated in her book). But in doing so, I think she reveals her unavoidable proclivity toward a pluralist theology. She admits that although a comparativist may have to recognize 'the essential teachings and norms of one's own tradition', still, one really doesn't know which norms or claims are 'the essential core of one's own tradition [or] the extent to which these teachings may be reinterpreted'.[21] In other words, if we have to bring to the comparative task our claims of full and final truth, we don't know clearly and fully what these truths really are or what they require. That we can know only in the dialogical and in the comparative task. This echoes something Cornille did recognize in her book when she quoted from the Vatican document *Dialogue and Proclamation*: 'The fullness of truth received in Jesus Christ does not give individual Christians the guarantee that they have grasped that truth fully'.[22]

Here Cornille is describing the theological model that, if we want to talk about 'models' (and it seems that we eventually have to), would best describe the theological foundations for CT; she calls it 'open inclusivism'. This is a perspective that recognizes the inclusive character of all interreligious engagement; we start from our own inclusive positions that, in one way or another, claim 'normativity' and 'fullness'. But because we recognize that what is full and normative 'quoad se' (in itself) is not full and normative 'quoad nos' (insofar as we can know

it), we are ready and open to reassess and even correct our own truth claims through interaction with others. To be honest with you, I don't see much difference, if any, between such 'open inclusivism' and a 'perspectival pluralism' (i.e. a pluralism that recognizes that one is always standing somewhere when one looks elsewhere – and that therefore one embraces the other from one's own particular commitments). Again, comparative theologians who call themselves 'open inclusivists' are really calling themselves 'pluralists' (and, of course, vice versa).

Trust in Interconnectedness

Here is my one-sentence description of Cornille's third virtue: *We have to trust that, despite the often incommensurable differences between religions, there is 'something' that makes it possible for religious believers to understand each other and to challenge each other.*[23]

I would suggest that any comparativist who practices this virtue of trust in interconnectedness shares the same theological genes as his or her pluralist colleagues. They're theological siblings, for in the practice of this virtue, comparativists trust in, and search for, that which the religious traditions of the world, despite their overwhelming and incommensurable differences, *have in common*. In our *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* John Hick and I suggested that there are 'three bridges' by which we might enter into the exploration of the shared sources, or the shared vitality, or the shared goals, of differing religions. We spoke of the 'philosophical, mystical, and ethical bridges'.[24] In the following statement from Cornille's AAR paper she clearly endorses the possibility and the necessity of identifying (really but never fully) that which connects and is therefore shared by all religions, even suggesting three movements that could proceed on our three bridges:

> Comparative theology indeed starts from some degree of implicit or explicit belief in the *common ground* or *goal* of all religions, and in the possibility of attaining to at least an approximate understanding of the other [philosophical bridge]. This common ground or goal may be located outside or inside the religions, in a common struggle for social, economical, or ecological causes [ethical bridge], or in a deep spiritual connection [mystical bridge].[25]

This is a foundational presupposition and a heuristic guideline of all the various expressions of a pluralist theology of religions – that no matter how different religions are and will always be, they have something in common that enables them to talk to each other. Yes, there are

very real dangers in too facilely or conclusively identifying that which grounds and connects us all in our diversity, whether we call it 'Theos' or 'Soteria'. This is why John Hick has proposed the mystical, the inherently evasive but inviting term 'the Real' as the noumenal Mystery that is actively and revealingly present in all phenomenal reality.

Here, let me point out what seems to be an irony: in our postmodern academy, one can get a lot more mileage out of Cornille's notion of 'interconnectedness' than out of Hick's talk of the 'Really Real'. I see them, however, as two fingers pointing to the same moon.

Empathy

The fourth virtue that Cornille recommends for comparative theologians, empathy, might be thus summarized: *We can and we must try to 'get inside' the other religion and understand it not just with our head but also and especially with our heart.*[26]

With this virtue, she describes carefully but beautifully the personal complexity and challenge of what comparative theologians – indeed of what anyone who engages in dialogue across religious identities – are attempting. Stressing the crucial role of the analogical imagination in the practice of the virtue of empathy, Cornille attests that we can 'enter into the world of symbolic and mythical representation' and we can 'conceive of forms of symbolic expression different from our own'. Empathy is possible and it 'frees us from the imprisonment in our own determined experiences'.[27]

Cornille goes so far as to suggest that through the use of an analogical imagination and the empathy that it empowers, we can experience what Husserl called a 'disempowering decentering'.[28] We are decentered from our own limiting perspectives and enabled, or even propelled, into the centering vision of a world that is not ours and that stood, previously, beyond the horizons of our vision.

By affirming the possibility of practicing empathy, Cornille is providing pluralists like John Hick and myself with the means to respond to the criticisms we have received from so-called particularists, such as George Lindbeck and S. Mark Heim, or from our inclusivist friends such as Gavin D'Costa.[29] Although we certainly are conditioned by our linguistic-cultural ways of looking at the world, although language determines experience, the virtue of empathy tells us that it is possible to enter, through the analogical imagination, into the language and symbols of other cultures, and so into their experience. In other words, we are *not* trapped in our cultural-linguistic worlds; we can be decentered, and so we can 'pass over' to other, totally different, religious worlds.[30]

(Which is the reason why I was somewhat perplexed by Cornille's rather cavalier dismissal of John Dunne's notion of passing over and passing back as a 'naïve epistemological position no longer tenable'. If empathy is possible, I think Dunne's proposal, made some 30 years ago, is tenable.)[31]

And if empathy is possible, and if it can do what Cornille claims it can, then it seems to me that we have at our disposal one of the essential conditions for the possibility of not only a pluralist theology of religions but also of what is now talked about as 'double belonging'. Because of the possibilities of passing over that the virtue of empathy provides, and also because of the limitations and inadequacies that so many religious seekers are experiencing in their own religious tradition, it is promisingly possible, not only to *study* and investigate another religion, but also to *practice* and live it. We can be nourished and sustained by being religious within two very different religious languages and practices. Despite the postmodern restrictions and prohibitions of George Lindbeck and Paul Griffin, we can be religiously bilingual! (Even though, so it seems, our fluency in one religion will remain greater than in others.) This phenomenon of multiple religious belonging is what I tried to explore in my own recent effort at CT: *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*.[32]

Hospitality

For Cornille, to be truly hospitable toward the religious others means: *We have to be as* open *to the possible truth of the other religions as we are* committed *to our own*.[33]

She calls this virtue 'the sole sufficient condition for dialogue' and for comparative theology'.[34] It calls us to 'the generous openness to the (possible) presence of truth in the other religion,' and requires 'an attitude of openness and receptivity to those very differences as a possible source of truth'.[35] Note that the truth that we should be hospitable to is to be found in 'differences'. In other words, the truth that we meet is not just another version of our own truth, dressed in different cultural clothing. It is more than what we say is the 'fullness' of truth in our own traditions.

Again, I find that in the way Cornille describes the practice of this virtue of hospitality, she ends up with a theology that is profoundly compatible with, if not identical to, what has been called the pluralist model. We must disarm ourselves of claims of fullness and finality and be ready to be surprised by truth that comes from the Other. Her understanding of this 'sole sufficient condition for dialogue' requires that the

comparative theologian must be as firmly committed to her own truth as she is genuinely open to the possible truth of others.

This, it seems to me, is what is contained in Cornille's concluding proposal for a hermeneutics of 'negative dynamic normativity'.[36] Taking the lead from Roger Haight, she suggests that the norms from our own tradition that we bring to the comparative task are *negative* norms: unlike a positive norm, which excludes alternatives, a negative norm excludes 'only those alternatives that contradict it'. But these negative norms are also *dynamic* – that is, they are in process, open-ended, ready to be 'deepened' (that's her word) and 'corrected' (that's mine).[37] But here again, Cornille is endorsing a pivotal tenet of pluralist theology (articulated by Roger Haight, a notorious pluralist theologian)[38]: there is a difference between universal truth claims and absolute truth claims. The former are essential to the comparative task. The latter threaten it in more ways than one – which brings me to my conclusion.

Comparative theology and theology of religions: the challenge of double belonging

I can imagine some of my pragmatic colleagues, whose concerns are primarily ethical not theological, looking back at all this and asking: So what? What's the point of arguing that virtuous comparativists are practicing pluralists? Comparativists, after all, are concerned with the practice of virtue, not with the theory of theology.

At their peril! Here I appeal to critical concerns about where CT is taking us, or what it may be dangerously avoiding. Such concerns have been masterfully and pointedly summarized in the article by Hugh Nicholson that I mentioned earlier.[39]

The lurking danger of hegemony

Nicholson's primary concern is simple and sharp: If we do not include theological reflection within the comparativist task – or, to use the terms of my paper, if we do not allow the practice of dialogical virtues to lead us to theological reflection – we run the risk not only of maiming our comparativist goals but of contributing to, or sustaining, broader structures of hegemonic power. In Nicholson's words, 'the new comparative theology exhibits parallels with its older namesake that temper any expectation that the problem of theological hegemonism will magically disappear simply by adopting an empirical method and refraining from excessive generalization.'[40] In other words, to call a

moratorium on talking about theological models is, probably unawares, to allow one's own model to sneak in through the back door.

And Nicholson warns that the theologian who sneaks in through the back door will probably be the owner of the house in which the comparative or dialogical encounter of diverse religions is taking place: 'we might ask whether comparative theology, as a form of postmodern discourse that celebrates the fluidity and porosity of cultural and religious boundaries, finds itself uncomfortably aligned with the 'winners' in the processes of globalization'.[41] Even more pointedly Nicholson suggests that all the emphasis of comparative theologians on the particular rather than the universal may leave the actually dominant but hidden universal comfortably in place:

> Just as the reduction of political action to local struggles places the global economic system outside the range of political challenge, so too, in an analogous way, a comparative theological method that focuses on the localized reading of texts leaves the doctrinal superstructure of the compared traditions, with their typically absolutist and oppositional claims, safely intact. One might argue that a comparative theological method that indefinitely postpones theological conclusions – a 'patient deferral of issues of truth,' as Clooney eloquently puts it – ends up supporting the theological status quo by default.[42]

A double belonging of comparative theology and theology of religions

Whether one really ends up a so-called pluralist by practicing the virtues of comparative theology that Cornille outlines is, of course, open to debate. What I hope is not open to debate is the importance of engaging such questions as I have tried to lay out in this essay. As Hugh Nicholson warns, to dismiss or avoid the theological suppositions that ground our comparative or dialogical efforts or that result from our practice of comparativist virtues is to imperil our shared commitment to comparative theology.

Comparative theologians and theologians of religions must practice, if I may put it this way, a kind of theological double belonging. To engage exclusively either in the particularities of comparative theology or in the generalities of theology of religions is to walk on one leg. It's possible, but we'll limp. So, although I have my friendly criticisms of aspects of Catherine Cornille's book, I can offer a resounding 'Amen' to a statement from her AAR paper: a 'theology of religions … forms an indispensable partner in the exercise of comparative theology'.[43]

But the theology that the comparative theologian partners with will bear striking resemblance to the pluralist vision that John Hick began to elaborate way back in the 1970s.

Notes

1. Francis X. Clooney (1993) *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology (*Albany, NY: SUNY); James Frederickson (1999) *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, Chapters 7 and 8); Stephen J. Duffy (1999) "A Theology of Religions and/or a Comparative Theology?" *Horizons* XXVI, 105–15.
2. As I write this, Frank Clooney, S.J., who would be thoroughly embarrassed to be called the 'Father of Comparative Theology', has recently published what I suspect will be the 'textus classicus' for comparativists: (2010) *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders (*London: Wiley-Blackwell).
3. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002, pp. 202–14.
4. (2009) *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* LXXVII, 609–46.
5. Ibid*,* 619.
6. *Loc cit.*
7. *Loc. cit.*
8. James L. Fredericks (1995) 'A Universal Religious Experience? Comparative Theology as an Alternative to a Theology of Religions', *Horizons,* XXII, 83–84.
9. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2008.
10. *Im-possibility,* 9–58.
11. *Im-possibility,* 10.
12. *Im-possibility*, 196.
13. 'Criteria for Comparative Theological Thinking in Light of Contemporary Studies in Interreligious Dialogue and Religious Pluralism,' unpublished paper given at the American Academy of Religion, Nov. 2009.
14. Ibid., 3.
15. Among the Catholic theologians who have gotten into trouble with the Vatican (really, Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI) for their Christological explorations, the majority bear 'S.J'. behind their names: Roger Haight, Jacques Dupuis, Jon Sobrino, Michael Amaladoss, Aloysius Pieris.
16. *Im-possibility,* 59–94.
17. *Im-possibility*, 79.
18. Ibid., 59.
19. Ibid., 84.
20. Ibid., 127, 10, 26.
21. 'Criteria for Comparative Theological Thinking', 12.
22. *Impossibility*, 37.
23. *Im-possibility,* 95–136.
24. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds, (1987) *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), vii–xi.
25. Criteria for Comparative Theological Thinking', 7. Emphasis mine.

26. *Im-possibility,* 137–76.
27. *Im-possibility*, 162–63.
28. Ibid., 161.
29. George Lindbeck (1984) *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press); S. Mark Heim (1995) *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), Chapters 1 & 3; Gavin D'Costa (2000) *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 19–52.
30. I find it hard to reconcile what Cornille says about the decentering power of empathy with her later assertion that 'it is difficult to see how the religious criteria of another religion may be become normative for one's own'. (*Im-possibility*, 202) It can happen precisely through the process of decentering.
31. Ibid., 141. John S. Dunne (1986) *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religions,* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
32. Oneworld Publications, 2009.
33. *Im-possibility,* 177–210.
34. Ibid., 177. From her descriptions of this virtue, I would suggest that a more appropriate name for this virtue would be *openness* rather than hospitality.
35. *Loc. Cit.*
36. *Im-possibility,* 203.
37. *Loc cit.*
38. Roger Haight (1999) *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 405–10.
39. These concerns, and his own response to them, are contained in Nicholson's new book: (2011) *Comparative Theology and the Rivalry of Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press).
40. Nicholson, 'The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology', 620.
41. Ibid., 627.
42. *Loc. cit.*
43. 'Criteria for Comparative Theology Thinking', 4.

4
Pluralism Revisited

Keith Ward

John Hick is justly renowned for his clear and carefully articulated statement of what he called the 'pluralist hypothesis'. This is the hypothesis that all the great world faiths are different ways of stating the nature of ultimate reality and that they form different paths towards that reality. The hypothesis offers a way of overcoming the imperialistic ambitions of many religions, and of adopting the humbler role of presenting one path to the ultimate spiritual goal among others. It also opposes the claim often made by Christians that there is only one path to salvation, and that those who do not explicitly confess Jesus as their Lord and Salvation are precluded from eternal life.

I am wholly in sympathy with John's position, and am grateful for the careful and sensitive way in which he sets out the views of various religious traditions and shows their strengths and the way in which they often complement traditional Christian beliefs. Sometimes, however, discussion of the more open position that he recommends gets locked into a threefold compartmentalization of possible views into exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. This division is certainly useful in drawing attention to some major positions that are possible on questions of truth and salvation in the many diverse religious traditions of the world. But like all such classifications, there are many ways in which the scheme can be partly deconstructed, and what I want to do in this paper is to lay out one or two qualifications that by no means destroy the scheme, but show how it may sometimes be helpful to use it in a rather flexible way.

There is New Testament support for a very exclusivist view that very few people will be saved, but that support may carry some surprises for Christians. Jesus teaches that the righteousness of those who are saved must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus said, 'The gate is

narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few' (Matthew 7: 14). Most religious believers are in fact excluded from salvation – they cry 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?', but Jesus says, 'Depart from me, I never knew you' (Matthew 7: 22–23). Entry to salvation is by visiting the sick, caring for the homeless, and feeding the hungry, as the parable of the sheep and goats, in Matthew 25, should make very clear. The sheep (the saved) are not those who are filled with faith in Jesus. They are those who practice justice. The narrow way is the way of total commitment to self-giving justice, not a way of hymn singing and emotional commitment to Jesus. Jesus is in fact presented in the synoptic Gospels as a teacher of the most rigorous moral conduct. The saved will be those who are truly just (very few indeed).

It is true, however, that added to them are a much greater number of those who are truly penitent, and who accept the coming kingdom of God. Absolute righteousness is demanded, and few attain it. But Jesus came to save sinners, and penitence is accepted where righteousness fails. The point is neatly summed up by the story of the rich man visiting Jesus and refusing to give his goods to the poor. Jesus says, 'It is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle' (that is, it is absolutely impossible). But then Jesus adds that 'with God, all things are possible' (Matthew 19: 26). As with so many of Jesus' sayings, this is cryptic and mysterious. On what conditions, if any, will it become possible for the rich to enter the kingdom? We are not told. I think the point is that it is humanly impossible, but divinely possible. That is, humans cannot enter the kingdom by their own efforts, but only by God's forgiveness and gracious love.

So, we may say, the gate is narrow that opens onto the kingdom, and few enter by their own efforts. But with God all things are possible. By God's power, people can enter if they accept God's offer of forgiveness. If they reject God's power, they remain excluded, condemned by their own selfishness and greed to lives of misery and anguish.

Now ask the question: can people who have never heard of God, or of Jesus, or of God's offer of forgiveness in Jesus, be saved? It is humanly impossible. But with God all things (*panta*) are possible! That means everything is possible for God. Therefore God can, if God wills, save everyone who exists, even if their salvation is humanly impossible, totally impossible without God.

But does God want to save everyone? On this, there is the verse: 'God, who desires everyone to be saved' (1 Timothy 2: 4). That seems definitive. God wants everyone to be saved. All things are possible for God

(Mark 10: 27). Therefore God can save everyone. It is not said that God will save everyone, even those who have no desire to be saved, who reject love, and who reject God with all their hearts. But it is said that God wants everyone to be saved, and that it is possible for God to save everyone.

So again we have to ask, on what conditions will God save everyone? The answer suggested by the Gospels is that God will save those who repent and believe that the kingdom, the power and presence of God, will work in them what they cannot work in themselves, bringing them to final union with the divine love. Are we then back to an exclusive gospel, which condemns most of earth's population just because they have not even heard the Christian gospel? After all, Mark's Gospel ends with the words, 'he who does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16: 15). That does sound as if condemnation is the lot of all those who do not positively believe the gospel of Jesus. The most frequently quoted verse in this regard is John: 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me' (John 14: 6). Taken together and in isolation from the rest of the New Testament, these passages sometimes result in the doctrine that all humans (millions and millions of them) are condemned to eternal suffering, except for a tiny few who believe that Jesus is indeed the Son of God who died for their sins.

The problem is that such an interpretation is in glaring contradiction with the basic gospel message that 'God is love' (1 John 4: 8). The nature of God's love is spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount, where we are told to 'be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5: 48). The sermon spells out that perfection, and it includes love of enemies (Mat. 5: 44) and forgiveness, which is elsewhere said to be without limit (Mat. 18: 22). God cannot be less perfect than we are called to be, and so we must believe – and this is indeed good news for most of us – that God loves even God's enemies, and forgives them without limit.

Whatever love of enemies is, it is not torturing them in flames forever. It has to include caring for their welfare, never giving up on them, and endlessly seeking to turn them towards life and joy, if at all possible (and all things are possible for God). It is not just those who happen never to have heard of Jesus, it is even those who are enemies of Jesus, that God will continue to love, whose ultimate welfare God will continue to seek, whom God will endeavour to turn towards repentance and acceptance of the divine love into their lives. Perhaps they may resist. Perhaps they may resist forever, for all we know. If they do, then perhaps they do indeed place themselves under condemnation, the condemnation of being excluded, by their own decision, from the

kingdom of love and joy. But God, being a God of love, cannot ever cease trying to overcome that resistance for as long as such overcoming remains possible.

This entails that no condemnation needs to last for ever. We condemn ourselves by turning from God – 'this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light' (John 3: 19). But God will never give up on us. There is judgment; there is the pain of loss, of exclusion from the feast of the kingdom; there is the burning of the flames of disordered desire. But there is also the love of God, seeking to turn us to penitence and to fill us with divine life and love. Nothing, not death or hell, not anything in the whole of creation, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8: 38–39).

What follows, then? I think what follows is that God wants everyone to be saved. From this it follows that God will make it possible for everyone to be saved. And from this it follows that the possibility of salvation cannot depend upon having ever heard of Jesus or of the gospel. How, then, does God make salvation possible even for the enemies of God? In the end, salvation is through Christ alone. For Christ is the authentic human expression of the eternal love of God, and it is only through the power of God's own love that humans can be brought into union with the divine life. Ultimately, there is no other way. But the path to that ultimate union may be long and winding, and it may begin from many different places, in many diverse historical situations.

The Gospel is that God offers, and will continue to offer, to absolutely everyone some beginning of a path that will lead to ultimate salvation. It is completely opposed to the spirit of the Gospel to confine salvation to Christians, and it is even worse to confine it to some particular sect of Christians, whether that is the Roman Catholic Church or the born-again separated strict and particular Baptists.

What is that beginning? We cannot know – remember Jesus' teaching that we should not judge, for we do not know the secrets of human hearts. But we may suppose that God requires at least four things of humans. First, we must be open to the truth as it seems to us to be. Truth must not be distorted by prejudice, hatred, or selective and partial judgments. We must follow our conscience, even if we happen to be objectively in error, though we must also always seek to make our conscience, our moral sense, more sensitive and informed. Second, we must seek to respond to the claims of altruism and benevolence, and turn from selfishness and greed. Third, we must find some liberation from the imperious claims of anger, hatred, passion, and attachment to

possessions and pride. We must be selfless and mindful, compassionate and non-attached, and in that way become sensitive to the beauty and wonder of the world. Fourth, knowing the weakness of our hearts, we must be penitent for our failures to seek truth resolutely, to practice altruism genuinely, and to achieve fullness of life. We must be aware of our limitations and failures, as far as we can, and yet resolve to go on with patience, endurance, and hope in facing the challenges our lives bring to us.

None of these things is explicitly religious. It may sound rather odd to say that an atheistic humanist can be saved. It is rather odd, for to be 'saved', in the Christian sense, is to know and love God fully and intensely, and to share without restriction the divine life of joy, wisdom, and love. On that definition of salvation, however, hardly anyone is saved during this life. We may believe in God and feel the presence and power of God to some extent, but we should scarcely claim to be filled with God's presence and power. That is for the saints alone, and they are indeed few, and the path to sainthood is hard.

We then, almost all of us, are not yet saved, but we are, we hope, on the path to salvation, to knowing and loving God fully. But we may as Christians think that we are securely set on that path, since we know what God is in Christ, and we sense at least some of the love and power of God through the Spirit. Are humanists on the path to salvation too? They may well resent being told so, since they do not think there is a God, and probably would reject God as they understand God (perhaps as a tyrant or heavenly dictator). It is only from a Christian point of view that humanists can be said to be on such a path. Or perhaps we should not pretend that they are on the same path. They are truly on a different path. Yet that path opens them to the possibility of salvation by a different route. Christians should resist the temptation to say, 'You are on the same path as we are, only much further back, and you have a much longer way to go.' That does sound arrogant and paternalistic. A less patronizing metaphor may be to accept that paths are genuinely diverse, but to affirm that in the end they will all converge. After all, in the end humanists think that too, but for them all paths converge in death, when the truth at last emerges – though, unfortunately, it cannot then be known by anyone – that there is no God and no life beyond the grave.

Christians have to say 'we believe there is a God, that Jesus reveals God and the Spirit makes God present to us. Further, the ultimate goal for all humans involves having these beliefs, if they are true, for when we are saved, we will necessarily know what is true'. Perhaps we should

say that all human beliefs are inadequate and fallible, and will need to be changed by the final vision of God that we Christians hope awaits all of us. We are all at the beginning of a long journey, and we must all follow the truth as we see it, and seek to be just in ways we think are right. In this world we follow different paths, and they do not all lead, nor are they intended by their adherents to lead, to salvation as conceived by Christians. What we need to stress is that humanists are not condemned by God, or cut off from God. God is working in them, as in all of us, to turn them to the true and the good. What we will all discover is that the true and the good (the Way, the Truth, and the Life) is God and the Wisdom of God, and it may be quite different than we thought it would be. Yet Christians are bound to believe that they see something genuine of God in Jesus Christ, and that there they find a light that will attract all who do not explicitly reject it.

This is a positive gospel, good news for everyone and not for a favoured few, and good news which does not condemn and exclude, but invites all to greater life and joy. The good news is that God draws near in the person of Jesus to offer the gift of eternal life to all. And that offer really is to everyone without exception. Not all will hear of Jesus, or will understand what he is, but Jesus is not one who limits eternal life to the few who hear and understand him. Jesus is the particular historical pattern on this planet of God's universal action to liberate intelligent beings from anger, greed, and ignorance and unite them to the divine life of wisdom, compassion, and love. What the life of Jesus shows is not that God loves and redeems only a few lucky individuals. Jesus' life shows that God loves and wishes to redeem every created personal being. His message is not one of condemnation, but of liberation – that is the open gospel which Christian churches have by no means always clearly seen, but which they have held in trust for two thousand years.

This is admittedly just one Christian view among others, though I think it is the heart of the gospel. But it is a fairly widely held Christian view – Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, and Karl Rahner are just three of the major Christian theologians who have held it. But, looking now at John Hick's triad of exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism, where does this view fit? I think the answer is, nowhere very easily. It is not exclusive in the sense that it only allows a few to be saved – quite the opposite. It is not pluralist in the sense that it allows many diverse paths to salvation, for it holds that ultimate salvation is indeed in Christ alone, and all will recognize it as such. It is not inclusive in the sense that it somehow includes all religions (and even atheistic humanism,

presumably) as more inadequate versions of what is fully found in some branch of Christianity. So what is it?

This is where the qualifications have to be made. To begin with, it may be helpful to distinguish questions of truth from questions of salvation, or of personal spiritual attainment. There is a clear distinction to be made, for we may have lots of true beliefs, yet be spiritually stunted. On the other hand, we can be morally heroic and spiritually integrated while having many false beliefs. With this distinction in mind, it seems that being pluralistic about truth is not greatly attractive. If I affirm that there is a personal life after death, I cannot consistently say that it is equally true that there is no personal life after death. My truth may be very inadequately formulated, but at least it excludes lots of other claims that contradict it. My truth cannot sensibly said to include a contradictory truth either, so it looks as if truth claims are necessarily exclusive. Truth necessarily excludes anything which contradicts truth.

On the other hand, it is very unlikely that the exact way we state and understand things is an adequate representation of the truth. Our knowledge is fallible and corrigible, and almost certainly arises within a particular historical perspective that may place real limitations upon it. It may need supplementation by other models of spiritual reality that pick out aspects of the divine that we may have overlooked. Moreover, many of our statements about God are metaphorical or sometimes metaphysically crude. Such statements are more like attempts to gesture towards the unsayable than descriptions. And might we not need many such attempts, from diverse perspectives? So our beliefs may not be exclusive in the sense of stating definitive truths which exclude all others as simply false.

Religious language may be more diffuse and opaque than that, a matter of models expressing insights in specific personal and historical circumstances, so that it may be a positively good thing to have a variety of models to enlarge our spiritual understanding. In this respect pluralism is attractive, for it encourages a variety of models for transcendence, and the exploration of personal visions and perspectives in a creative and imaginative attempt to express realities which are not fully comprehensible conceptually. Yet there are very definite limits to pluralism, and it is quite difficult to say what these are. Not every path leads towards truth, goodness, and God. The worship of wealth or power, for example, does not, yet there are religions which encourage such worship.

I think different people will draw the boundaries of what is acceptable within a pluralist scheme at different places. I am tempted to draw

a boundary around religions which aim to promote conscious human union with or relationship to a reality of supreme wisdom, compassion, and bliss. This would include some forms of most major religious movements in the world today, and it would exclude other forms of those same religions. In other words, the boundary would not be between religions as such, but between sorts of understanding which may be shared between adherents of different religions. For instance, the sort of open gospel that I have set out would share much with a similarly open version of Islam or of Vedanta, but would have little in common with more judgmental and imperialistic forms of Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism. The divergence is not between religions, but between religious attitudes.

John Hick is now a Quaker. He has a metaphorical interpretation of the incarnation, does not regard the Bible as inerrant, and would reject literalistic understandings of resurrection and the end of the world. I largely agree with him on these topics, but of course that means that we would both reject (exclude) many Christian beliefs that contradict these beliefs. We are not, then, pluralists in the sense that we think different religious beliefs are more or less equally good or acceptable. We categorically reject many religious beliefs, common in our own faith tradition, as both false (Noah did not build an Ark) and morally perverse (the divinely recommended slaughter of Canaanite women and children).

The sort of pluralism we recommend is a liberal and open-minded acceptance of new moral and factual insights from a wide variety of sources, while wanting to preserve some sense of valuable insight and development in our own tradition. We exclude many religious views, and embrace pluralism only insofar as it enlarges our understanding of transcendent spiritual reality that is so imperfectly understood by virtually all human beings.

As for inclusivism, this is a difficult view even to state, if one has questions of truth in mind. Very few truths include other truths, and certainly the truth claim, in Christianity, that there is a creator of the universe does not in any sense include the claim, in Buddhism, that there is no such creator. There simply are incompatible truth claims, and it is not plausible to suppose that all of them are really moving in the same direction, though they do not realize it. They are moving in different directions, and presumably many (in fact most) of them are mistaken.

We might say, then, that the Christian view I have expounded is ultimately exclusive, since it affirms that all will be saved by Christ, and not by Siddartha Gautama or Krishna. It is, however, proximately

pluralist, since it encourages finding diverse perspectives on spiritual truth from many different religious traditions. And it may well admit that there is no objective, universally accepted, way of finding one religious tradition to be epistemically superior to another. One attracts us more than others, for many converging and complex reasons, and we commit ourselves to its truth. But we may accept that it is reasonable and justifiable for others to come to a different conclusion. As far as our lives in this world are concerned, then, we may accept a sort of epistemic pluralism – accepting the fact that a pluralism of religious beliefs is likely to continue, for there are many ways to approach the idea of a transcendent or divine reality which cannot be ranked in any neutral way. We just have to do the best we can to refine and deepen and expand the belief system we find natural and plausible, and wait and see what happens. This is part of what Keirkegaard meant when he spoke of making a passionate commitment in objective uncertainty.

When we come to consider the matter of salvation, the view of the Christian gospel that I have taken seems to be salvifically inclusive, since it includes all human beings in the group of those for whom salvation is possible and desired by God. Yet to call it inclusive would be misleading, if it led anyone to think that there is one superior religion on earth that possesses every spiritual truth of significance, so that there is little to learn from other religious systems. To call the view exclusive would also be very misleading if it led anyone to think that it excludes some people from the possibility of salvation. And to call it pluralist would be misleading if it led anyone to think that every religion is more or less equally adequate in its understanding of spiritual reality, or of what salvation truly is. Nevertheless, it is clear that people in different faiths can be equally spiritually mature and morally heroic, so there is a sort of pluralism in the sense that different faiths can be more or less equally efficacious in leading people to deeply spiritual lives. We might say that the view of salvation I am seeking is ultimately inclusive, for all beings who assent (and all will have the chance to assent) will be included. But it is proximately pluralist, for it affirms that believers from many different religious traditions can be spiritually profound.

The moral seems to be that we should not allow the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist model to become a set of inflexible categories into which we have to fit various theologies of religion. I do not for a moment suppose that John Hick would want us to do that. The model has proved itself to be a readily accessible, immediately appealing, useful starting point for thinking about attitudes to religion in a global context. I am only suggesting that we should not be too anxious to fit all theological

attitudes neatly into an appropriate box. Once we have learned from the model, we can be free to adopt a rather more flexible and permeable attitude towards the world's religious traditions.

It is possible, for instance, to be a religious believer who accepts a fairly mainstream interpretation of a specific religious system (an exclusivist strand); yet whose views are open to revision in the light of greater knowledge of other traditions, and of wider scientific and moral culture; who accepts that there are radically different ways of understanding human life, and allows that there is something valuable to learn from the existence of many of these ways (a pluralist strand); and who thinks that salvation is possible for everyone, whether they belong to your own religion or not (an inclusivist strand).

In the light of this, would I say that I accept the pluralist hypothesis? I would not feel quite comfortable with that, for I do not think that all religious paths are intended to reach the same goal, however vaguely drawn the goal is. Yet I would want strongly to encourage the study of religious traditions in a global perspective, because I believe that such a study would deepen and enlarge one's own religious understanding, and place one's own religious beliefs in a wider and more illuminating context. And I would want to encourage a critical attitude to one's own religious tradition, being aware of its limitations, its historical development, and its blind spots. I think this means that all my sympathies are with John Hick's enlightening and helpful project of striving to see religion in a global perspective as the complex and diverse human phenomenon that it is. I want my religious beliefs to be open and engaged with wider social, moral, and cognitive currents of human thought, but to be strongly committed to moral and cognitive ideals which have arisen from and developed historically within the Christian tradition, and which set a trajectory of further creative development towards an open future. To employ a metaphor that John has sometimes used, I have crossed the Rubicon (and adopted a global perspective on religious faith), but I have brought my Christian baggage with me.

5
Faith Triumphant? The Problem of a Theology of Supersession

Julius Lipner

As is well known, John Hick has been a leading figure in the area of interreligious studies and dialogue for over half a century, and it would be no exaggeration to say that his contributions to this subject have established new paradigms for discussion and changed the thinking of many. In this essay, I wish to consider an issue that is implicit in much of Hick's interreligious work and that is becoming a central question directly or indirectly for people of faith in the twenty-first century. This is the theological question of "supersession", viz. the entrenched view that the faith of one's own religious tradition is destined to displace or supersede the faith of the adherents of other religious traditions, and that one's faith achieves its purpose when this occurs. But first we need to set the scene.

It was a growing belief towards the end of the nineteenth century and more emphatically in the first six decades or so of the twentieth – with the rise of various forms of rationalism, the positivist scientific approach, and the secularist ideologies of communist and other regimes – that religion would soon become a visibly declining force first in the Western world, and then gradually around the globe as other civilizations caught up. How wrong this prognosis turned out to be! The rise of postmodernist views with their hermeneutic of suspicion against notions of a universal rationality; the wholesale dismantling of communism; the evangelical counterblast, especially in the United States and in Africa; the resurgence of Islam; New Age spiritualities; and the widespread migration to Europe and North America of peoples east of Suez and from Latin America with an active commitment to their faiths, ensured not only the survival of religion but a tenacious growth of faith. It seems then, not least in what is called the West, that religion will be a major force in the cultural landscape for the foreseeable future,

and it is best to confront the implications of the beliefs of some of the major religious players on the world stage rather than to ignore them.

Because we live in an irreversibly globalizing world, that is, in a world of growing interaction and porosity of boundaries – religiously, politically, ecologically, scientifically, economically – the effects of this globalization have increased the pressure to respond to the changes it brings in its train. And because this process seems to be evolving fastest in Western cultures, it is for thinkers in this domain of globalization to take the lead in responding to changing circumstances. Peoples at all levels in Western pluralist societies who wish to pass on the prospect of a worthwhile and peaceable future to their descendants realize that it is now time to come to terms with the rapid effects of globalization, and events in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (2001) in the United States, the London bombings of 7/7 (2005) in the United Kingdom, and indeed, the political upheavals in north Africa and the Middle East of recent times demonstrate how crucial the religious dimension will be in this reconstruction. In this essay, I propose to indicate what the role of (mainstream) Christianity should be in helping shape a dialogic future for our everyday lives.

Especially in the twentieth century, significant numbers of adherents of most of the established world religions other than Christianity, for example Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam and Judaism have migrated to Western-style societies, challenging Western Christians and their leaders to acknowledge the claims these other faiths put forward. In this context, one of the most pressing and intractable problems, as I see it, not only for Christianity, but also in particular for Islam is the consequential problem of 'theological supersession or displacement'. As noted earlier, this is the problem generated by the belief that one's own faith must displace or supersede all others soteriologically.

Thus Christians of any mainstream denomination (and most fringe denominations too) are taught to believe that the revelation of God in Christ is final, that Christ alone is the saviour of the world, and that sooner or later all human beings must acknowledge this. There can be no compromise on this matter. Muslims of any recognizable orthodox group are taught that the Prophet Muhammad is the 'Seal of the prophets', and that the faiths closest to them theologically – the so-called Abrahamic faiths of Judaism and Christianity, which are also 'religions of the Book' – have distorted Allah's disclosure of salvation originally given to the prophets sent to them, and which has subsequently been revealed in its true and final form to Muhammad. As a pillar of Islamic belief, there can hardly be any compromise on this.

Already, in his book of essays published under the title, *God and the Universe of Faiths,*[1] Hick pointed obliquely to the problem, with special reference to Christianity in his groundbreaking essay, 'The Copernican Revolution in Theology'. Hick asks: "Do we regard the christian way as the only way, so that salvation is not to be found outside it; or do we regard the other great religions of mankind as other ways of life and salvation?" (1973: 120). He then speaks of an earlier stage of his belief: "Certainly this view, or rather this assumption [of theological finality], was present in my own mind for at least twenty-five years. I assumed it to be a central christian position that salvation is through Christ alone, and therefore that those who do not respond to God through Christ are not saved, but, presumably, damned or lost" (1973: 121).

Of course, major Christian denominations have developed various strategies, some of which we note later, and which Hick himself goes on to acknowledge (but not accept), to obviate the conclusion set out in the last sentence of his statement. But it is on the basis of the central intractable problem of theological finality that Hick builds his new paradigm of the 'Copernican Revolution' in theology in the essay mentioned, and this has acted as the lynchpin of his thought subsequently on interreligious understanding and dialogue, though it has been refined in various ways with the passage of time.

This belief of supersession is a *consequential* belief because it tends to foster (or is perceived as) arrogance on the one hand, and intolerance and disrespect for the faith of others on the other – not to mention an impoverished conception of a universally provident Supreme Being. And it encourages the impulse to crush or convert the other. It is interesting to note that both Christianity and Islam evoke the divine love or compassion towards all, and strive to maintain an encompassing rhetoric of human rights, freedom of conscience and universal good will. But ultimately this is done only on their own terms, and in a way that has engendered down the centuries to the present day a culture of aggression towards dissenters, both theologically and physically. One has but to read the theological works or histories of these faiths to appreciate how true this is. Historically, it is true even for the relationship between the two faiths, the Crusades being a salient and still rankling example. But it is equally true with respect to their relationships with other traditions – consider the colonizing projects, doctrinally and otherwise, of Christian and Islamic regimes in history.[2]

I am not claiming that teachings of teleological displacement or its consequential violence do not exist in other world religions; there may well be such.[3] But these other religions, notwithstanding their internal

diversity, lack the systematic and uncompromising quality of the supersessionist theology of the two faiths in question. Hinduism, for example, has many sectarian divisions and a long history of religio-philosophical disputation between the adherents of these divides, in some cases virulently so, but there is no concept of a 'holy war', doctrinally or otherwise, driving the perception of difference. Overcoming this bellicose mentality is one of the main challenges facing the Christian tradition in its main expressions – my prime concern in this essay – in the increasingly plural societies we inhabit today (not least because certain kinds of Christians have shown us how easily they can call upon political backers – in the name of their faith – who have ready access to weapons of mass destruction).

In my argument, the theology is not being driven by postmodern liberal and egalitarian considerations – a criticism that many who continue to espouse supersessionist views like to make against increasingly theologically accommodative stances. This would be to put the theological cart before the doctrinal horse. But is it not possible, indeed likely, that the dispensation of the original revelation of a provident Supreme Being might well accommodate – through methodologically more penetrative interpretive procedures – new insights, generated in the human intellect with the passage of time, that do fuller justice to the divine intention of this revelation, as the human family – the intended beneficiary of the revelation – is brought closer together by changing world circumstances? Certain postmodern insights could well be providential candidates for informing the new interpretive procedures that by common consent have illumined in recent decades our understanding of the production of time-honoured texts, religious or otherwise. And some of these insights could well be those that undermine the traditional articulation, doctrinally, of supersessionist views.

Our fuller understanding of what it is to be religiously human in our increasingly globalizing world presents us with two large challenges in the Christian context of this essay: first, that of initiating *a culture of dialogue,* not least in official hierarchical circles, as an integral part of the commitment to being a Christian. This is the necessary condition for inquiring into a theology of supersession with a view to updating doctrine. For unless we understand the other *qua* other through systematically acquired, accurate information about that other, and then – as a separate epistemic act – seek in this light to *evaluate* what we have learned about the other's faith on the basis of genuine methodological respect, how can we expect to engage with the other as the object of providential salvific concern in a realistic way? Too many

theological arguments supporting the superiority of one's own faith are formulated a priori – but this is to miss the point of authentic theology. For such arguments are exocentric: they inevitably tend to lack that self-critiquing element that should lie at the heart of theological inquiry.

Consider a test case with reference to the pastoral outreach of the Roman Catholic Church, my own religious denomination. Has the magisterium of the Church, we may ask, issued directives to the thousands of schools, institutions of higher learning and bishoprics and parishes under its jurisdiction to take practical steps – steps that cost money – to learn and teach about other faiths within the context of a culture of genuine, ongoing dialogue as described earlier? Does every parish or educational institution have, under direction of the Church's magisterium, a trained dialogue officer – perhaps shared with another parish or educational institution or two – to guide the process of dialogue with an eye to local circumstances and needs? The answer is no to both questions.

As a follow-up to the first challenge, the second challenge facing official Christendom, an internal challenge if you like, is this: coming to terms with the doctrine of supersession inherent in Christian teaching. Let me focus on this challenge now.

Supersession or displacement of the other's faith implies a belief in the soteriological paramountcy of one's own faith, however that is expressed or emphasized. With respect to Christianity, for example, this might entail the finality of Christ's saving act or Person, or of the incontrovertible 'truth' of the divine revelation or scripture, or of the expressed salvific will of God (i.e. in his sovereignty, God can and does will the supersessionist supremacy of one's faith). On these conceptual pivots a host of subsidiary and dialogically intractable notions have been made to hang: those of a special covenant, for instance, or of a Church to which the adage *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* applies ('outside of which there is no salvation'), or of election by grace, or of the Chosen People, and so on. In Christian tradition, pastoral theology has generally derived from doctrinal theology. Reconstruct the latter, and one transforms the former. So the task becomes, in our limited context, to tackle the doctrinal issue of finality anew.

In the past (and, to an overwhelming extent. in the present), Christians have preserved a theology of finality in several ways:

By annulling the other: This is usually an attempt at *theological* annihilation, but it has not always been so. During the Catholic Inquisition, for example, human beings who did not accept (or who were perceived

not to accept) the requisite faith were first tortured and then killed. But the usual method is theological annihilation. This entails branding the other's faith as 'false' (*religio falsa*) or salvifically unviable, and then annulling it theologically, and sometimes also psychologically or physically, by such devices as ridicule or derision or the issuing of prohibitions to practice one's ancestral religion, and the like. One is reminded of the Baptist Joshua Marshman's belligerent tirade in 1824 against the Hindu faith of those who had extended to him the hospitality of living among them:

> Nothing ... can be more opposite than the Spirit of the Gospel and the spirit of Hinduism whether manifested in the grossest idolatry or in the highest refinement of the Vedanta. That Gospel which is founded on the doctrine that 'every imagination of man's heart is evil, is *only* evil continually' ... that 'an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit' – must be death to the spirit of Hinduism, to the pride of man in every false religion ... [for Christ] maketh intercession for none but those who renouncing all their righteous deeds ... and counting them 'loss and dung' trust in his blood for the forgiveness of sins.[4]

The only (theological) alternative becomes to embrace the preferred faith. Never mind the fact that from an interested but dispassionate observer's point of view there was and is so much internal dissension and mutual condemnation amongst Christians themselves about the true doctrines of salvation, that it becomes hard if not impossible, to say the least, to know which Christian saving path to follow! For all the Christian protagonists claim divine legitimacy for their particular set of beliefs, often on the basis of an impassioned but simple declaration of faith – though on occasion an attempt may be made to support such belief through somewhat tendentious argument. Faith, after all, though it may claim to be a kind of cognition, is not a form of that veridical cognition on which we rest our everyday notions of truth. Hick indicated as much long ago in his important essay 'Religious Faith as Experiencing-as' in *God and the Universe of Faiths*.

There is another strategy to preserve the finality of one's faith among Christians:

Some form of 'fulfilment' theology. This entails a more sophisticated approach of displacement, and is capable of further distinction. In general, however, a fulfilment theology makes the claim that though the faith of the other is salvifically deficient in its own right, it contains, through God's providence, valid insights that can service the building of

an edifice of saving Christian belief. A classic example of this approach occurs in *The Crown of Hinduism* by J.N. Farquhar, who declares:

> In the philosophy and theistic theology of Hinduism there are many precious truths enshrined; but ... the ancient Hindu system ... effectually prevents them from leavening the people. This hard, unyielding system must fall into the ground and die, before the aspirations and the dreams of Hindu thinkers and ascetics can be set free to grow in health and strength. ... Hinduism must die in order to live. It must die into Christianity. (1913:50–1)[5]

The metaphor of the seed needing to die to yield a rich harvest is taken from Christ's teaching in the Gospel of John (12: 24). How ironic then that Christians should so readily apply their Master's words of radical transformation to the faith of others, without first contemplating the possibility of similarly revising their own faith. The end product of a fulfilment theology is always the same, irrespective of the apparent tolerance of its approach – the vaunted triumph of the Christian stance. And the consequence of such implicit or explicit triumphalism is once again negative for the other – a sense of alienation from one's ancestral tradition and/or community within the context of an alien, adopted belief system.[6]

In recent times, there has been some advance on these approaches it is true, at least among the less Evangelical Christian denominations. Whilst the fulfilment approach has not been repudiated – indeed, it is still the official stance of the Catholic Church – new strategies for a form of coexistence with other faiths are being haltingly formulated by the more venturesome among both Catholic and Protestant thinkers. Here valiant (and sincere) attempts are made, not to directly displace the faith of the other, but in some way to accommodate it theologically *as other* – though not always with obvious success.

To exemplify, let us take a particularly knotty issue for Christians: the theological relationship with Judaism. To put it somewhat simplistically, Christian churches of various denominations have acted generally as if the validity of God's revelation to the Jews (acknowledged to apply to the Old Testament) came to a close, or at least was definitively superseded, with the delivery of the Gospel message. In this view, the divine interaction, theologically, with Jewry in the last two millennia or so has been an irrelevance at best or has occasioned a defiance of the divine will by the Jews *en masse* at worst. But today, among some Christian theologians, a paradigm shift is taking place.

Some Catholic theologians, for instance, are groping – hardly with official endorsement – towards a theology of maintaining the validity simultaneously of God's 'new covenant in Christ' and of God's ancient covenant with the Jews. For a promising if preliminary discussion in this regard, see, for example, the exchange between Edward Kessler, who is Jewish, and the Catholic theologian, Gavin D'Costa, in the pages of the Catholic journal *The Tablet* in 2005.[7] There had even been exploration, for example by H. Schlette in an earlier generation or so, of the idea of a divine 'cosmic covenant' with the whole of humankind (expressed presumably through non-Jewish and non-Christian faith(s))[8] – though whether such language also entails a genuine salvific revelation for the other in Schlette's reckoning remains unclear. Roman Catholic theological categories, such as 'anonymous' Christians and the 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' ways of salvation (the former pertaining to non-Christians and the latter to Christians) championed by such thinkers as K. Rahner and Hans Küng, have helped lay the foundation for the new inclusive way of thinking. But much of this theology needs to be fleshed out in a systematic way *that is endorsed by hierarchical authority,* and that, as such, filters down in a new accommodative language towards the faiths of other people, liturgically and doctrinally. But both the former and the latter tasks have hardly begun. Officially (and not only officially, but also in wide-ranging swathes of what passes for systematic theological discussion in classrooms and publications), Christian thinking remains, soteriologically, unreconstructed and inward looking.[9]

How then might the process of formulating a non-, or at least, a substantially less- supersessionist Christian theology be taken forward, beyond the first, halting steps we have reviewed? Note, the object of this exercise cannot simply be positive relations with adherents of other faiths; this is a sociological goal, worthy though it may be. The end must be genuinely theological. If indeed, the God of the Christians wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2: 3–4), and if this is to be an effective will in the context of the further scriptural teaching that Christians are co-workers with God in the economy of salvation (1 Cor. 3: 9), then it is incumbent upon Christians to do all in their power to make the Christian message an effective one. This can only be achieved by allowing seminal dogmas to die periodically so that, with the infusion of new insights, they may be transformed into more efficacious and truthful teachings. The suggestions I offer here can at best be indicative, given the limited space available.

First, I do not commend John Hick's 'hard' pluralist paradigm encapsulated in his 'Copernican Revolution' for theology, a paradigm that has

been finally refined and argued for in the second edition of his magnum opus, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. This is because the doctrinal revision it proposes is too drastic, and it ultimately eschews all specific religious 'revelational' language used to describe the Supreme Being in favour of such 'neutral terms' as the 'Transcendent' and the 'Real'. Such discourse, I have argued elsewhere, eviscerates the core of specific faith belief and makes genuine commitment to a particular faith virtually impossible. Authentic dialogue by Christians can be conducted on the basis of allowing members of different religions to retain the core specificity of their faiths, but in a manner that helps obviate or mitigate the charge of displacing these faiths, through a reconstructed language of finalistic doctrines. Since I am focusing on the Christian tradition here, a number of the issues I raise below are specific to Christianity.

First, Christian theology needs to develop a more realistic notion of what may be called religious truth. I have indicated earlier that what we may term religious 'truth' cannot be like our conventional notions of truth. Conventional truth – however it may be categorized: as forms or combinations of 'correspondence' or 'coherence' or 'pragmatic functionality' or whatever, or as foundational or anti-foundational – requires the acid test of publicly approved principles of testable evidence before it yields the fruits of psychological satisfaction and public legitimization. Religious truth is too subjective for that. (John Hick's notion of 'eschatological verification' is an acknowledgement of this point). Religious truth – if it is to allow genuine *faith* to breathe – can in this world be only prospective, not retrospective, and our notions of and language concerning religious truth – in homiletic discourse no less than in academic exchange – must acknowledge this fact. If this caveat were to be followed, how much would the seductive verisimilitude of supersessionist discourse with its aggressive implications be emasculated!

Second, the formulation of Christian doctrine relies overmuch on the scrutiny and analysis of words. The guardians of doctrinal orthodoxy have made a fetish of this (consider the virulent and exhaustive debates in this respect of Church Councils and Proclamations). I am aware, of course, that attentiveness to language and meaning is important, but what is overlooked in such scrutiny is that truth – religious or otherwise – does not lie simply in the formulation of words, that language evolves continually, that the meanings of words are time- and context-specific, and that because of this, formal declarations, rather than being enshrined through anathemas, need constant updating. If this were done, we would not use words so easily to pin down truth and to

exclude and dominate in the articulation and defence of our faiths. Of course, the use of specific words/language as tokens of group identity is one way of affirming solidarity in poly-ethnic and pluralistic contexts, but it is fraught with the ethos of divisiveness. Is it too much to ask religious leaders and theologians to seek a more mature and responsible way of collective self-assertion in the twentieth-first century?

This leads, third, to the need to revise – among Christians – the understanding of certain pivotal terms and concepts that provide ammunition for supersessionist attitudes. Let us begin with the concepts of 'Jesus' and 'Christ'. Though the two must overlap in important ways, the concrete particularity of the first cannot be co-extensive with the wider universality of the second. It is this disjunction that gives theological depth to the name, 'Jesus Christ' (which is more properly extended to 'Jesus the Christ'). In particular, I suggest that cognitive space must be created in the concept of 'Christ' in two ways: (1) so as to transcend the meaning of 'Jesus', the historical individual, in such a way as to accommodate the soteriological functions of saviour figures of other faiths, and (2) at the same time, in this very act of accommodation, to indicate the 'self-transcendence' of the Christ concept itself, as a notion pointing beyond, to the Ultimate.

Matching revision is called for in the doctrinal formulations of such concepts as the Trinity (which remains androcentric),[10] 'election', 'the people of God' and so on. I do not wish to deny theological validity to and the psychological usefulness of continued recourse to such concepts and even to the terminology that derives from them. Rootedness in tradition can be an aid to faith. But again such rootedness, if we can revert to our earlier metaphor, must spring anew from seeds that have died to live, and must engender a more mature grasp of the language of faith. The adamantine quality of such language must be appreciated for what it is – a 'confessional and liturgical and doxological language ... a kind of caressing language by which we express our devotion with abandon and joy'[11] – that is, an expression of the psychology of personal and collective conviction of what, nevertheless, is perceived to be *really true* but as sharing in an overarching grasp of a truth that is understood to be still provisional and developing in the context of new insights.

Such reformulation is quite feasible under the appropriate authoritative direction. After all, fairly radical changes to Christian doctrine have been in progress, continuously if stealthily, for centuries. Consider, for example, and not least in the teachings of the Catholic Church, the doctrines that pertain to the fate of the unbaptized, whether adults or babies, or indeed the salvific viability of non-Christian faiths. But

this endeavour of reconstruction needs to be taken much further, more systematically and with the active encouragement of official endorsement – then there will be less recourse, no doubt, to the somewhat intellectually dishonest practice of adducing 'epicycles' to update the formulation of doctrine which Hick has so justly derided in presenting his pluralist paradigm.

In this new understanding, space is created doctrinally for a *radical element of surprise* awaiting all, including Christians, not only in the ultimate experience of salvation – no one can second guess God – but also in one's ongoing spiritual life in this world. The Spirit blows where it pleases (Jn. 3: 8), distributing spiritual treasure in all the major faiths that have sustained men and women of good will down the ages, and the person who is dialogically open in this way can gain access to the spiritual wealth buried in all the world religions, without aversion and without prejudice. This reformulated theology needs to be fleshed out as rigorously as systematic thought allows in the circumstances of the times. Theologizing – articulating the faith – is an ongoing process, requiring sensitivity to the needs of a rapidly changing world; further, it must be informed, by a continuing and open dialogue, with the knowledge acquired through all forms of authentic human inquiry, whether scientific or other. Finally, it requires translation, with the endorsement of Church leaders, into a contextualized liturgy that nourishes religious faith. This is how the challenge of supersession can be recognized and met. And it is only on this basis that the Christian message will gain respect and plausibility in a non-Christian world, and make an effective contribution to the lives of all who inhabit our beleaguered planet, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Notes

1. The Macmillan Press, Ltd., London, 1973.
2. T. Winter gives a good summary of the issues involved in traditional Islamic context; see his 'The Last Trump Card: Islam and the Supersession of Other Faiths', in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue,* 9:2, 1999: 'An honest assessment of the Muslim body of scripture', he writes, '... appears to confirm the classical Sunnī reading of the revelation as a frankly supersessionist event, proclaiming the abrogation (*naskh*) of prior religion by Islam (p.137). ... The Koranic perspective, affirmed and elaborated in classical exegesis, appears to be that ... there is, in reality, a single religion (*al-dīn*), of which the various present-day faiths are the remnants and offshoots (p.138). ... [T]he historical legal practice of Islam cannot honestly be construed as an approbation, but as a confirmation of the theological verdict that Christian and Jewish versions of faith are no longer complete, although they are rooted ultimately in

revelation and hence merit some form of accommodation (p.140). ... Given that Islam explicitly disclaims categoric novelty, its very legitimacy would be questioned were it not to point out deteriorations in its precursors (p.142)'. As the last sentence hints, Winter argues that Islam is theologically entitled to its supersessionist claims and that this need not involve intolerance and aggression at least towards adherents of some religious faiths; however, this is hardly a historically realist position.

3. For adversarial stances in Buddhism, see Perry Schmidt-Leukel (ed.), *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions,* St. Ottilien, EOS-Verlag, 2008.
4. In his 'Reply to Rammohun Roy's Final Appeal against the Atonement and the Deity of Christ', in the quarterly periodical *Friend of India,* Serampore 1824.
5. Oxford University Press, London etc., 1913.
6. The Brahmin convert Nehemiah (formerly Nilakantha) Goreh (1825–1885) who eventually joined the Anglo-Catholic Society of St. John the Evangelist and who was to the end a staunch defender of his Christian faith, could not help admitting, in reference to the alien nature of his faith, that he often felt 'like a man who has taken poison' (see Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth-Century India,* Indological Institute, University of Vienna, Vienna, 1981, p.171).
7. E. Kessler, 'Common Ground with the Chosen People', October 22, 2005 and G. D'Costa's reply, 'Through a glass, but not quite so darkly', October 29, 2005.
8. H.R. Schlette speaks this way in Part III of his *Towards a Theology of Religions,* London, Burns & Oates, 1966.
9. There are honourable exceptions, both Catholic (as indicated above) and Protestant. Here, with regard to the Catholic, we may add the later work of Paul Knitter; with respect to Protestant thinkers, see the writings of Keith Ward. See also Knitter's article, 'Christianity and the Religions: A Zero-Sum Game? Reclaiming "The Path Not Taken" and the Legacy of Krister Stendahl', in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 46:1, Winter 2011. According to Stendahl, 'We are heirs to traditions that have – it seems – in their very structure the negation if not the demonization of the Other. So the serious theological question is: What to do? How do we counteract the undesirable effects of the supersessionist instinct?' (op.cit.:10).
10. An important beginning has been made in this regard by Raimundo Panikkar in some of his writings.
11. Knitter quoting Stendahl in the article cited in note 9 (p.17).

Part II

Religious Pluralism and Practical Concerns

6

The Value of the Symbolic Jesus for Christian Involvement in Interfaith Dialogue

Alan Race

The publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate* in 1977 marked a watershed in British theology, not least because of its inclusion of a chapter by John Hick on the Christian reflection about the figure of Jesus in relation to the emerging discussion in the theology of religions. One critic of the *The Myth*, John A. T. Robinson, thought the juxtaposition ill-conceived.[1] The complaint seemed to be that only by having some properly honed view of who Jesus is for Christian faith could we then pursue how we are to apply this in the interpretation of a religiously plural world. Moreover, what good would it do for Christian theologians to merely present a set of disputed Christological questions for engagement in interreligious dialogue?

Over 30 years later, that innovative move by Hick seems vindicated and Robinson's objection as belonging to a former era. Roger Haight, in his magisterial *Jesus, Symbol of God* (1999), confirms the new move neatly: 'Many theologians now acknowledge that the narrow Christological problem must be addressed within the framework of an estimation of the place of Jesus Christ among other religions.'[2] I might add that, after all, this was the case in the first centuries of Christian faith; only now we are required to reflect on the meaning of Jesus in the vastly different circumstances of religious plurality in our own times – so different, I would argue, that a more root and branch reworking of inherited doctrine is required of theologians than is often thought necessary.

But Robinson's objection in fact lives on in the complaint that this harnessing of Christological thought so closely to issues of religious plurality already sells the pass. What could it mean to have an 'estimation of the place of Jesus Christ *among* other religions [my italics]'?

This looks like comparative religious studies and not theology proper. More seriously, levelling out the religions, and seeming to place the revelatory focus of Christian faith on a par with other similar figures of revelation, is tantamount to according a salvific legitimacy to other religions which compromises Christian absolutism. What would be the grounds for according such legitimacy? The religions all have different descriptions of what is awry with the human condition and how to remedy it. Such might be the expressed hesitations over Hick's and Haight's move.

Strategies for resisting the levelling out, and therefore the yoking, of the 'estimation of the place of Jesus Christ' to issues of religious plurality, are well known. So, neo-orthodoxy dialectical theology, of the kind associated with Karl Barth, sought to protect Christian absolutism by sharply distinguishing the concepts of revelation and religion, preserving a role for the former reality as judge over the latter. But most theologians now would recognise this sharp distinction as itself unwarranted, for how is revelation appropriated apart from its embodiment in some form of religious experience?

In alternative recent moves, still reminiscent of Karl Barth, those who call themselves particularists, or comparativists, or tradition-specific theologians, generally choose to ignore the neo-orthodox distinction but retain the protest against any hint of levelling out the salvific stakes. Jesus, they maintain, is not one among many other revelatory instances because all such revelations and/or religions are simply incommensurate at the level of their core characters and epistemological relevance. But there is a price to be paid for this corralling of the religions into separate compounds, especially if it rules out any possibility of mutuality in seeking religious truth in a plural world. I argue that we are creatures of empathy, capable – given sufficient patience and attentiveness – of feeling and knowing something of what motivates other human beings within different world outlooks. Religions, moreover, are not fixed but evolving systems, as history proves. Phenomenlogical difference among religions is no reason for the silo mentality.

The most popular strategy for maintaining Christian absolutism while according salvific legitimacy to other religions is an inclusivist one. This view retains the superiority of Christ but simultaneously acknowledges the worth of the religious imagination manifest in other forms and histories. However, the difficulty with this view is that there seems no sensible meaning in assigning a saviour role for Jesus from Nazareth to spiritual transformations taking place within the matrices of, say, Buddhism or Hinduism, either before or since Jesus' lifetime.

Yet this is precisely what is implied in Christian absolutism. It seems therefore that the time has come to look again at Christian absolutism.

Christian absolutism not needed

My thesis can be stated simply: our newly acquired receptivity to religious plurality, as witnessed by the mushrooming of interreligious dialogue, compounds the impact which critical thinking in its many forms – historical, philosophical and ideological – had already made on Christian absolutism as exemplified by *The Myth of God Incarnate*. This was the signal which lay at the heart of Hick's innovative move and Robinson's anxiety over linking christology and the place of Jesus in relation to world religions. The tension this has created within Christian absolutism has been highlighted sharply by the Vatican's International Theological Commission report of 1997, 'Christianity and the World Religions':

> How can one enter into an interreligious dialogue, respecting all religions and not considering them in advance as imperfect and inferior, if we recognize in Jesus Christ and only in him the unique and universal Saviour of mankind?[3]

This very question itself harbours an intuitive prima facie case that Christian absolutism is not sustainable in the new context of religiously plural critical consciousness. It is not that interreligious dialogue per se undermines Christian absolutism or assumes its redundancy, but as part of an outlook which is suspicious of a priori approaches to truth, it does place the burden of proof on those who wish to retain it.

Historically, Christian absolutism has been encased and guaranteed by the formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), where Jesus was declared 'at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man'. But there are fewer full-blown defenders of this classical Christological *locus* than there used to be. Hick himself has been keen to stress that Jesus did not teach it (how could he have?), that New Testament scholars cannot assemble the evidence for it, and that philosophers have been hard-pressed to make decent sense of it. If Chalcedon means anything, says Hick, we should think of the dual identity of Jesus as metaphorical, and not metaphysical.[4] But we might press a general factor about historical consciousness further. Chalcedon makes sense within the terms of the first Christian centuries, with its cosmological, scriptural, eschatological, political and philosophical

assumptions, but outside these paradigmatic assumptions it seems highly abstract. In particular, the notion of Jesus' pre-existence represents an impenetrable puzzle, and yet it was the lynchpin behind Chalcedon's formula. It might therefore be best to heed the remarks of the theologian, Harry Kuitert:

> God-on-earth is first of all an interpretation, a view which people attributed to the Jesus of the Gospels in a particular time and culture, a phase in reception history, albeit one which lasted a long time and left deep traces. Nevertheless, it is a phase.[5]

Inevitably, some will sense apostasy here. Yet, might there also be release – release from an abstract formulation masquerading as a mystery? If so, one of the beneficiaries could well be Christian participation in interreligious dialogue.

Christian faith is not the religion of Jesus, any more than it is a religion merely about Jesus. Yet it does incorporate elements of the religion of Jesus and characteristics about Jesus, such that he becomes the 'symbolic means' by which Christians pursue the spiritual quest. Historically, he stands at the fount of the Christian response to God; theologically, he is the one through whom response to God is made. Exactly how the two sets of languages, historical and theological, cohere is not always clear.

In order to avoid the abstraction of the dual identity of Jesus, I suggest that it may be easier to approach the interpretation of Jesus for Christian faith by shifting the emphasis away from philosophical problem-solving about his divine and human origins to exploring how it is that he has become a symbolic figure. For loading a person with symbolic significance is not confined to the religious sphere, as the following examples illustrate. It may happen because of an inheritance through birthright (such as a royal child inheriting a royal throne), by force of personal attraction (as when a pop star or sports personality becomes a hero or role model), by becoming a focus of hope at a time of immense cultural change (as when a figure such as Gandhi combined intellectual and political skills with religious practice in the struggle for India's independence from Britain), or because a person has achieved a lasting insight into the human condition (as in the description 'Freudian' for a whole way of interpreting unconscious human motivations beyond the initial creativity of Freud himself). Given that the religions provide a worldview within which human experience is interpreted as a whole, they are bound to invest certain key figures with symbolic significance

in a scope which is all-embracing. This certainly happened to Jesus, as it has happened also to many other iconic figures – for example, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), Nanak (Guru), Muhammad (Prophet), Mahavira (Great Hero, Ford-Maker).

Approaching our subject through a consideration of how persons achieve symbolic significance has not been the usual Christian route for thinking about the figure of Jesus. Yet there are pressures in our culture, deriving from 'bottom-up' modes of thought, which press us towards this approach. It also opens the door for dialogical studies with other seminal revelatory figures through history.

The symbolic Jesus and religious plurality

The reasons different persons achieve symbolic significance are strongly related to the different human needs that they are seen to meet. This relationship between symbolic achievement and human need can be clarified by exploring both the historical triggers that have given rise to a particular symbolism and the purposes that have been served through the significance of the symbolism that has accrued. This distinction is analogous to the usual distinction between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith', the fissure which opened up with the rise of critical historical studies. Yet this fissure is always a negotiated fissure. As the New Testament Jesus-scholar, John Dominic Crossan, puts it:

> Christianity must repeatedly, generation after generation, make its best historical judgment about who *Jesus* was *then* and, on that basis, decide what that reconstruction means as *Christ now*.[6]

If this is correct – and I believe that historical critical studies drive us in this direction – and if our context is ineradicably religiously plural, then we cannot separate our estimation of Jesus' identity and import from his place in relation to other figures and centres of revelatory importance.

New Testament pictures and implications for dialogue

My contention is that a theory about how religious figures become symbolically potent is a creative method for exploring Christology in relation to religious plurality. I wish to pursue this line of enquiry with reference to what might be discerned from both New Testament studies and Jesus of history research in a manner which might have relevance for the growing dialogue between religious commitments.

Let me begin with the New Testament. We have long been used to the view that the New Testament provides a number of portraits of Jesus from Nazareth – he is the one who brings salvation by fulfiling the prophecies of the ancient Hebrew scriptures, and acts on God's behalf at the dawn of the new age in order to transform the human condition and eventually the whole world.

In their depictions, some writers are almost wholly conceptual in their approach (for example, Paul and the writer to the Hebrews), and others use more of a story/narrative style (for example, the gospel writers). As the cultural framework and theological worldview informing their portrayals are largely alien (despite any familiarity with them) for twentieth century human beings, appreciating its impact requires a huge act of imagination. But by paying careful attention to the ways in which the writers create their portraits of Jesus, it is possible to see how each used images and titles for Jesus and moulded them according to their own particular outlooks and theological symbolisms. It is worth recalling some of them in brief.

For Paul, Jesus was the agent of God for the purpose of bringing about the salvation of Jews and Gentiles, in what he saw as the new age in Christ. Paul said virtually nothing about Jesus at the historical level, but he explained God's action by applying to Jesus a number of images and terms, all present in his Jewish background, which picked up on the sense of divine agency. They included, for example, the term 'son of God', which echoed the important role Jewish thought at the time gave to significant figures in Jewish life – 'sons of God' could be used for kings of Israel, angels, holy exemplars of faithfulness, and even Israel as a whole. But as Paul applied the term to Jesus, he was *the* son of God through whom all people could find their relationship with God as adopted sons (and daughters). We should not equate Paul's use of this term with what the later tradition made of it in Christian doctrine – God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, existing in heaven before appearing on earth as a divine human being. Other titles that Paul employs, such as second Adam, Saviour, and Lord, function in a similar way, each picking up a Jewish term or symbol and seeing Jesus as bringing its potential sense to a head – in traditional language, fulfiling it.

The gospels, though looking like historical narrative, are in fact saturated with symbolism at every turn, and we can see this as we have learned to accept the theological integrity of each writer as a whole. So Mark, the earliest, depicts Jesus as a challenging, angular figure, who announces the Kingdom of God, and who presents himself as the 'son of man', a suffering servant who accepts the inevitability of his death

as the paradoxical gateway to the arrival of the coming Kingdom. For Matthew, Jesus is primarily a teacher of a new and more demanding divine law, a new Moses. For Luke, Jesus is the ideal model of human obedience, compassion, and self-sacrifice before God, the exemplar given for all to emulate. The idealism reaches untold proportions, for example in the forgiveness that Jesus pronounces, even as the nails are driven into his hands on the cross – 'Father forgive them for they know what they do.' By the time of John's gospel, at the end of the first century, Jesus becomes the 'word' of God, the one beside God at the dawn of creation, bringing order out of chaos. In a famous verse, Jesus is said to be the very clue to the creative purposes of God: he is the 'word made flesh'.

These thumbnail sketches portray Jesus in their own colours, and endow him with symbolic significance according to the particular perceived meaning they give to the religious reality of the salvation he brings. I ask now: are there any implications from this scholarly endeavour for interreligious dialogue? Let me make three suggestions. First, it allows us to feel the full weight of the strangeness of Jesus and his times, and that helps us guard against using him as a religious backing for our favourite ideological or political campaigns in the present. We continually remake our heroes in our image, and this can be quite prevalent in interreligious dialogue. New Testament study reveals how the contours of the figure of Jesus were continually redrawn to meets the needs of changing circumstances. This must surely have been the case with other seminal figures – Buddha, Muhammad, Nanak, and others. Therefore, taking seriously the strangeness of the past might stimulate a dialogue which liberates its participants from slavishly having to repeat the past or from viewing the present always through the lenses of the past.

My second lesson from New Testament studies is that it reminds us how symbolic figures undergo a certain mythologizing. Identifying Jesus as God's Word, Wisdom or Image through a process of personification was a means of projecting him as the one who embodied the creativity and character of God from all eternity. In other words, we are dealing with a figure whose transforming impact was total, as also has happened with other seminal figures. Again, if we were to allow ourselves to benefit from this perspective in dialogue, we might approach our symbolic figures less woodenly and less competitively; we would see the sacredness with which we surround them as partly our own making.

My third suggestion is that we can see that Jesus' symbolic significance arose within a certain context. Human need, social and political

conditions, intellectual assumptions and historical memory are all factors which are never static but combine to produce any era's estimate of the Jesus figure. If the same is also true of other figures, then our dialogue needs to become more nuanced than it often is. Religious messages cohere, at least initially, with particularities of many kinds, and they colour the direction of development in beliefs, ethics and practice thereafter. But take a lesson from New Testament studies, and we might surmise that interreligious dialogue could be less about rival claims than about different cultural expressions of symbolic sacredness.

An hermeneutics of symbolism

The effect of the historical approach to our subject is that it gives us a glimpse behind the scenes to see the factors at work in any Christian assessment of Jesus. It is too wooden simply to say that the Christian view of Jesus is that he is the 'Messiah' or the 'Son of God'. Who Jesus is for Christians is a combination of at least three factors: (1) the theological worldview in which his followers are set; (2) the outline of him which comes through the grid of the New Testament; and (3) the salvation he is believed to enact. These factors are all variable, depending on the historical circumstances, and they have been at work continuously through Christian history in the presentation of Jesus as a symbolic saviour figure.

For theologians who want to give due weight to the symbolic value of Jesus, how might these three elements of an hermeneutics of symbolism, so to speak, yield further results in the new context of interreligious dialogue?

First, in relation to a contemporary Christian theological worldview and taking full account of the critical thinking mentioned earlier, my inclination is to locate the sense of God's transcendence immanently in the midst of historical and human affairs. We do not look to God to intervene in human affairs from outside our humanity, but we know God arising in the midst of life as part of human experience. This view is intended to remain open to the validity of other experiences of what it means for 'God' (note now the inverted commas) to arise from within our concrete experience. It is a view which maximizes both the mystery of the transcendent Other and the limited ability of human minds to grasp fully what is involved. In which case, such a view is also incipiently pluralist. Drawing out the implications in a religiously plural world, I have been fond of citing some words of Stanley Samartha, the

former Director of the Sub-Unit on Dialogue at the World Council of Churches:

> If the great religious traditions of humanity are indeed different responses to the Mystery of God or Sat or the Transcendent or Ultimate Reality, then the distinctiveness of each response, in this instance the Christian, should be stated in such a way that a mutually critical and enriching relationship between different responses becomes naturally possible.[7]

More needs to be said for a full-blown pluralist picture. But Samartha's description at least has the merit of retaining distinctiveness with mutuality in relationship, two facets of an emerging religious landscape with which the experience of dialogue concurs.

Second, what of the outline of the historical figure of Jesus himself? Of course there is no settled picture of the historical Jesus among scholars and it is notoriously difficult to know with any accuracy exactly what Jesus said and did, and what place he could occupy within the varied pattern of first-century Judaism. But central in all portrayals is the recognition that he taught and enacted the present and emergent Kingdom of God through both stories and parables, with an emphasis on the social inclusion of outcasts, especially through his healing activities. These were teachings and activities which generated an energy for spiritual empowerment and urgent social change. He set his face against the collusion of religious and Roman imperial power, and this led to his death. Yet through the experience of what his followers called his 'resurrection' the empowerment for the Kingdom continued to grow.

My interest here is with how the symbolic Jesus, drawing on a broad outline of New Testament scholarship, sits alongside other symbolic figures. In this respect, Marcus Borg has drawn attention to a typology of religious figures, many of the main features of which Jesus seems to have displayed. Borg lists these as follows:

1. The spirit person – one whose awareness of living within and from an experience of the sacred was all-embracing; such a person can also be known as a mystic.
2. The teacher of wisdom – one whose words were subversive of conventional assumptions and heralded an alternative view of society.
3. The prophet – one who criticizes and confronts the elites in society, especially when their interests work to entrench privilege and oppression for the least.

4. The movement founder – one whose impact yields a whole vision for society which is more inclusive and egalitarian than what existed before it.[8]

The first three of these descriptions cover the classic typology of seminal figures known in the history of religions: mystic, sage and prophet. (One might also add the shaman, which for Borg is included as part of mystic consciousness). Borg then sums up the comprehensive interweaving of these types as follows:

> [Jesus] was a spirit person, subversive sage, social prophet, and movement founder who invited his followers and hearers in to a transforming relationship with the same Spirit that he himself knew, and into a community whose social vision was shaped by the core value of compassion.[9]

The effect of this kind of assessment concerning the historical figure of Jesus is to set aside the debate about the uniqueness of Jesus, with all its attendant ramifications about exclusivity. Not all features of the mystic, prophet and sage can be exhibited completely in one figure, but all figures will display degrees of the characteristics associated with these types. Jesus is neither the same as nor wholly different from others. But what he stands for and unleashes in history can make its presence felt in interreligious dialogue without prior assumptions of superiority or absolutism but be open to comparison, contrast and critique in a respectful encounter.

Third, turning to the issue of salvation, what meaning can be ascribed to this in the context of a historically-based symbolic understanding of Jesus? To a large extent the contours of this have already been highlighted in the previous section. His spirit-impact empowers his followers internally, his prophetic social vision inspires them externally, and his subversive wisdom negotiates the praxis of both. Salvation means that which transforms in the widest sense. It is, in the Jesus-shape, to experience the presence and power of the sacred as foundational; to be inspired by a constant orientation on the vision of inclusivity in the face of religious and political systems which militate against human well-being; and to know oneself confronted by a summons which undermines our human stubbornness in the face of the need for change, whilst at the same time knowing oneself upheld by the compassionate desire of the divine for a world of justice, peace and sustainability. The meaning of salvation today has to do primarily with coming to a fulfilled humanity

and with a liberation from the forces which kill the spirit of life. These forces might have material-sounding names, such as poverty, the denial of human dignities, disease and fear for the very possibility of human survival. Or they might have other names, unfortunately familiar in a world bent wholly on material consumption and free-for-all economics, such as despair, loneliness and meaninglessness. Salvation is not a rescue operation, but a preparedness to take responsibility, in the light of religious vision, for the future of life on earth.

In relation to interreligious dialogue the concept of salvation outlined here is roughly already a shared hope, at least in circles which promote global cooperation for the greater good. Precisely what proportions of mystical spirit, social prophecy and subversive wisdom we will need in order to inform an all-embracing dialogue necessarily focused on global transformation will be something the dialogue itself will need to address. In other words, a shared future requires a shared dialogue about what salvation means in terms of religious vision and practice.

Conclusion

There are advantages in approaching the place of Jesus in Christian faith by exploring how it is that figures of history achieve symbolic significance. It rescues us from the philosophical problem-solving mentality that has dogged discussion about Jesus for centuries and keeps us close to historical honesty. It helps to connect our religious pictures about salvation to culturally changing contours of human aspiration and the quest for meaning. It opens up possibilities for participation in the growing dialogue between the world religions without prejudice about which spiritual vision nourishes for what purpose and for whom.

When John A. T. Robinson expressed his methodological caution about placing reflection on the historical figure of Jesus within discussion about how to interpret religious plurality, he was being unnecessarily anxious. Since then, the realities of plurality have impressed themselves on us with greater urgency. There seems no turning back to an era when the religions can think of themselves as separately providing all that is needful for a future which in reality is going to require cooperation between cultures and religions at profound levels. Of course, Christian faith must reflect on the meaning of Jesus as a result of the continuing experience of his influence in Christian lives. But given the paradigm shift in our awareness of transcendent vision and human transformation, taking place in many places and through the matrices of many forms, there are numerous advantages in reflecting

on the Jesus figure *with* others and not apart from them. Moreover, the dialogue itself could become more enriching as a result.

Notes

1. John A. T. Robinson (1979) *Truth Is Two-Eyed* (London: SCM Press), 120–21.
2. Roger Haight, S.J. (1999) *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 395.
3. Vatican International Theological Commission (1997) 'Christianity and the World Religions,' 15.
4. See John Hick (2005, 2nd edition) *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press).
5. Harry M. Kuitert (1998) *Jesus: The Legacy of Christianity* (London: SCM Press), 129.
6. John Dominic Crossan (1995) *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (Harper San Francisco), 200.
7. Stanley J. Samartha (1991) *One Christ – Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press), 86.
8. Marcus J. Borg (1995) *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperCollins), 30.
9. Marcus J. Borg (1995) *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperCollins), 119.

7

Interreligious Prayer between Christians and Muslims

Gavin D'Costa

Introduction

John Hick is a pioneer in raising the most important questions regarding interreligious relations. He is also a key person who has helped me think about these questions, and although my answers vary from his, I am deeply indebted to John.

It is important to clarify some conceptual terms so that we can get to the heart of the question to be explored: can Christians and Muslims be involved in interreligious prayer? I accept that conceptual clarity can easily suffocate the complexity of the realities on the ground. Actual practices of interfaith prayer move fluidly between different conceptual spaces and sometimes render such spaces problematic, even if the practices are deeply satisfying to those involved. In what follows, I want to make a distinction between two basic forms of prayer meeting that might happen when Muslims and Christians come together. I use the term 'multi-religious prayer' (MRP) to indicate the meeting of Muslims and Christians who will pray together, but each using their own prayers and explicitly not joining in with the other's prayers. MRP can happen in a structurally organized and public fashion (SOPMRP), or in a private spontaneous or pre-planned manner (PMRP). Within MRP, there are further distinctions, such as serial MRP (when each person takes a turn at praying, while the others listen and possibly silently participate in whatever manner they choose), or simultaneous MRP (when each person or persons is allocated a different space in a building, and prays there for the same cause or concern, for example, world peace, with other adherents of their faith – while adherents of the other faith are also praying for world peace simultaneously). I use the term 'interreligious prayer' (IRP) to indicate the mutual praying together by Muslims

and Christians using each other's prayers or hybrid versions of each other's prayers. This can happen in a SOPIRP, or it can happen privately between two friends or a small group of friends (PIPR). I use the term 'privately' in the sense that others are not usually invited to join in because the togetherness is related to a very specific context.

I exclude cultic liturgical prayer from this discussion, understood as prayer that is defining of the cultus, such as the Eucharist. Here Trinitarian Christians are not yet able to fully share this liturgical form, let alone share it with non-Christians. Some cultic liturgies do have people from other religions participating, such as in a mixed marriage between a Catholic and Muslim undertaken in a Catholic Church or a mixed congregation at a Christian funeral – but as it stands there are liturgical forms for these events that do not constitute either IPR or MRP. There may be slight parallels between the Muslim distinction between *salat* (ritual prayer) and *du'a* (invocation). Furthermore, in what follows I am primarily concerned with IRP, and only secondarily with MRP, for two reasons. First, most mainstream Christian churches in the UK have accepted forms of MRP, with varying degrees of qualification and caution. Some have hesitantly accepted IRP (e.g. in the Anglican Communion in the UK), and some think it out of the question (e.g. the Catholic Church in the UK), so this is a deeply contentious area.[1] Second, I want to see if there are overlapping arguments/conditions regarding MRP and IRP, and why one group accepts both and another accepts only MRP.

One other set of clarifications before I proceed: the answer to the possibility of IRP will depend on quite a few factors, and here I treat only the Christian considerations (obviously, a Muslim response to the question should eventually be investigated if the Christian finds grounds for IRP). First, it will depend on how strictly the theologians in question adhere to their church's guidelines on IRP (if their church has them). I approach IRP as a Roman Catholic theologian and limit myself to appropriate literature, although in a fuller study it would be wise to look at the Church of England, the World Council of Churches and some regional Lutheran Churches which have issued guidelines on these matters. This exercise is not meant un-ecumenically, but recognizes the varying constraints upon different ecclesial communities. Second, our attitude to IRP will depend upon our situation, whether we are in war-torn Palestine, in Washington at high-level meetings between Muslim and Christian intellectuals, living in a monastic community in the Algerian mountains amongst Muslims, or are a middle-class Christian Asian in Bristol committed to interreligious dialogue – and being on two

occasions being involved in IRP with Muslims quite spontaneously. The most that can be done is to articulate principles that might 'normally' cover most situations, but delightfully, life never behaves as we expect it to, and novel situations constantly emerge. In due course, there may be a need for the universal magisterium of the Catholic Church to pronounce on this issue, but until then it is a disputed question without formal resolution.

MRP: some clarifications; and laying the foundations for IRP?

It would be fair to say that the official Catholic Church was capitulated into MRP by the actions of Pope John Paul II in calling the Assisi prayer meetings, first in 1986 and then again in 2002. The first meeting caused deep controversy amongst Catholics. This controversy meant that John Paul II had to provide further theological commentary on the matter, which was delivered as a Christmas address to the Curia in December 1986.[2] He gave two basic reasons for calling the Assisi meeting and a clear definition of what it was (MRP), and what it was not (IRP). The two reasons given were (1) the event was unitive of religious life; there was the importance of having a witness by the world religions that they are committed to peace in a world torn by war and strife, and this witness was aptly provided in their coming together in prayer; and (2) the event signified the workings of the Holy Spirit; that the Holy Spirit is present in these prayers, for 'every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person. This, too, was seen at Assisi: the unity that comes from the fact that every man and woman is capable of praying, that is, of submitting oneself totally to God and of recognising oneself to be poor in front of him'.[3] This argument, repeated in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (no. 29) four years later, was given a broader context. The key paragraph is worth citing in full, as it has an authority well beyond a Christmas message to the curia and is part of 'magisterial' teaching.

> 29. Thus the Spirit, who 'blows where he wills' (cf. Jn 3: 8), who 'was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified,'[43] and who 'has filled the world, ... holds all things together [and] knows what is said' (Wis 1: 7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place. [44] I have repeatedly called this fact to mind, and it has guided me in my meetings with a wide variety of peoples. The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated

> by a twofold respect: 'Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man.' [45] Excluding any mistaken interpretation, the interreligious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that 'every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart.' [46]
>
> This is the same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a *preparation for the Gospel* [my emphasis, 47: Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 16.] and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit 'so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things'. [48: Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 45; cf. Encyclical Letter Dominum et Vivificantem, 54: loc. cit., 876.']
>
> Moreover, the universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the body of Christ, which is the Church. Indeed, it is always the Spirit who is at work, both when he gives life to the Church and impels her to proclaim Christ, and when he implants and develops his gifts in all individuals and peoples, guiding the Church to discover these gifts, to foster them and to receive them through dialogue. Every form of the Spirit's presence is to be welcomed with respect and gratitude, but the discernment of this presence is the responsibility of the Church, to which Christ gave his Spirit in order to guide her into all the truth (cf. Jn 16: 13).'

The citation of the tradition of *preparatio evangelica* (and Vatican II's authority behind this) puts this affirmation in quite a traditional context that sees all of history (before and after the incarnation) as pointing to the incarnation and the Church for its fulfilment and meaning. The Spirit ceaselessly works to bring all men and women to the paschal mystery and the fullness of redemption.

Drawing on these two sources, the theological argument for MRP could thus be stated in three steps: (1) all people are created in God's image, which means there is a fundamental unity between all peoples; (2) in so much as God's presence is acknowledged in differing

and manifold ways as preparing the adherents of world religions, at their best, for their fulfilment in Christ and the Catholic Church, then Catholics should attentively and respectively listen to this Spirit in any 'authentic prayer' that might take place in MRP; and (3) this basic theological argument is then supplemented by the addendum: in so much as the human spirit seeks for peace and prays for peace, as only the God brings a peace beyond understanding (the world's own resources), then such prayers are 'authentic'. One might have a variant on the addendum: peace could be replaced by justice, love, consolation of those who suffer, and strength in times of hardship – as all these virtues stem from the grace of the true God. It should be underlined that MRP is substantiated by Christian theological evaluation of the significance of the non-Christian religion, which would not require any assent from the other religion to establish the validity of the argument. In so much as there is no mingling of the cultus, there is no question about the integrity of Christian prayer and no justification per se for IRP.

This 'magisterial' argument is indeed the plank for advocating MRP by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales (CBEW) in their teaching document, *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger*, 2010 (pp. 57–65). MRP is applauded, and clearly distinguished from IRP, building on the Assisi principle:

> We don't come to pray together, but we come together to pray.' As each religion prays, thus expressing its own faith, the others do not join in: they respect and silently give encouragement to those who are praying, and are in quiet solidarity with them on the basis of their own belief, and of the inner prayer that flows from it.' (59)

The bishops urge Catholics to be wholeheartedly involved in MRP: 'Catholics should thus feel confident, and be encouraged to "come together to pray" with those of other religions' (59). Why such encouragement? Because it serves the unity of all people and their unity with God, and it is thus part of the mission of the Church and an 'expression of love for our neighbour, and of respect for the integrity of the religions involved, and shows attentiveness to the universal presence of the Holy Spirit.' (59) All this is held without denying the importance of mission, the truth of the Catholic faith, and the *preparatio* status of the world religions.

What of IRP? It is not possible: 'There is an old Latin saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (our prayer is an expression and ratification of our belief). For that reason we cannot literally pray together, because prayer is an

expression of faith, and we do not share one faith.' (58) The document does not differentiate between cultic/public IRP or ad hoc private IRP. It may be that this public–private distinction is artificial for the *Catholic Catechism* recognizes all prayer to be the prayer of the Church.[4] But there is surely a distinction to be drawn between a public IRP event open to all and advertised in the press, and two brothers from different religions praying together as one dies of cancer in a hospital ward, or a husband and wife praying together for their sick child? Nevertheless, for CBEW there is a clear distinction and a closed gate between MRP and IRP. But we find an interesting text that might raise a question about the bishop's guidance on IRP.

IRP: a possible step forward?

The text is by a Catholic theologian, one Joseph Ratzinger. This text has no formal authority as he was not writing in his official capacity (Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). Ratzinger, an objector to Assisi 1986, writing in 1992, discusses MRP and IRP. He declined the invitation to be present at Assisi 1986 – an MRP event. Of Assisi 1986, he says critically there were 'undeniable dangers', and it was easily open to being 'misinterpreted by many people' (107). Further: 'Those who meet also know that their understandings of the divine, and hence their way of turning to him, are so varied that shared prayer would be a fiction, far from the truth' (106). Positively, Ratzinger says, it expressed what these groups had in common: 'an acute concern for the needs of the world and its lack of peace; they share a longing for help from above against the powers of evil, that peace and justice might enter into the world' (106). Notice his stress on the anthropological and unitive, rather than the theological reasons given by John Paul II. There is no mention of the Holy Spirit – and none of God.

Ratzinger concludes that MRP, while permissible, must fulfil two basic conditions: first, it 'can only exist as a sign in unusual situations, in which, as it were, a common cry for help rises up, stirring the hearts of men, to stir also the heart of God' (107). As Pope he has said he will be present for the twenty-fifth anniversary in October 2011, which is a surprise, although details for his participation are not public at the time of this writing. Ratzinger's position is in interesting contrast to the CBEW document which positively encourage Catholics to be involved in MRP: 'Catholics should thus feel confident, and be encouraged to "come together to pray" with those of other religions' (59). Is

the different a matter of prudential judgement while working from the same principle?

The second condition is that MRP 'almost inevitably leads to false interpretations, to indifference as to the content of what is believed or not believed, and thus to the dissolution of real faith. ... That is why [MRP needs] a careful explanation, of what happens here and what does not happen' (107). It is clear that Ratzinger has deep reservations about the dangers signalled by MRP. However, unlike CBEW, Ratzinger does not rule out IRP and actually considers three conditions under which it could in principle happen, although he believes IRP is very unlikely: 'Is [IRP], in all truth and in all honesty, possible at all? I doubt it' (108). It is worth specifying these three conditions as they take us to the heart of the problem, despite Ratzinger's grave reservations.

The first, relates to the 'object' of prayer: the true God. One might say this implies co-intentionality in both parties, although Ratzinger focuses on the objective rather than subjective aspect. But both are actually required. IRF, Ratzinger argues, would require that both partners had the same object of prayer: 'We can pray with each other only if we are agreed who or what God is and if there is therefore *basic agreement* as to what praying is: a process of dialogue in which I talk to a God is who is able to hear and take notice' (108, my emphasis). Strangely, Ratzinger does not specify a Trinitarian God, but chooses references that facilitate a 'Jewish' monotheism, that can be held by non-Jews, regarding Israel's God: 'As in the case of Abraham and Melchizedek, of Job, of Jonah, it must be clear that we are talking with a God above all gods, with the Creator of the heaven and the earth – with my Creator. ... The First Commandment is true, particularly in any possible interreligious prayer' (108). On this criterion, might Ratzinger be open to IRP, even when the bishops in England and Wales rule it out a priori, at least in relation to Jews? I want to see if we can push the boat out further.

Fourteen years later as Pope, Ratzinger would pause in the Blue Mosque in Turkey (2006), standing alongside an imam in silent prayer. Days later back at the Vatican, Benedict said it was 'a gesture initially unforeseen', but one which turned out to be 'truly significant'. Complex reality does shatter our conceptual lenses. In Jerusalem, in 2009, Benedict prayed at the Temple Mount/Wailing Wall and said afterwards that faith demands love of God and love of neighbour; 'it is to this that Jews, Christians and Muslims are called to bear witness in order to honour with acts that God to whom they pray with their lips. And it is exactly this that I carried in my heart, in my prayers, as I visited in Jerusalem the Western or Wailing Wall and the Dome of the Rock, symbolic places respectively of

Judaism and of Islam.'[5] Here, the common theism is extended to Islam. Neither gesture by Benedict amounts to IRP, but the first is a form of MRP. The informal commentary Benedict provided on the Jerusalem event suggests the possibility that the object of worship for Muslims is the same: 'that God to whom they pray', and thus could fulfil one condition of IRP. Ratzinger is clear that for non-theistic traditions, prayer to a personal God is not possible (106). But in the case of Islam, my concern, are we reaching an opening in the forest?

One interesting text related to this question that does have dogmatic authority is *Lumen Gentium* 16, propounded at Vatican II, which tactfully says of Muslims: 'They profess to hold the faith of Abraham' (*qui fidem Abrahe se tecere profitentes*); which is the reporting of a self-description of Muslims, but with no Catholic assent or judgement. It is clear that there are serious differences between the two religions. But the sentence continues with a remarkable phrase: 'and along with us they worship the one merciful God who will judge humanity on the last day'. (nobiscum Deum adorant unicum, misericordem, homines die novissimo iudicaturum).[6] There is no change from the perspective of John Paul II, which is a basic fulfilment approach, but what we find here is that despite serious differences of belief, including the Catholic Church's claim to be the true Church and the source of salvation to the world, nevertheless, it is being affirmed that Muslims worship the one merciful God who is judge, and Catholics worship that God too. This is a phenomenological statement with a normative theological judgement.

This breakthrough is reiterated in *Nostra Aetate* 2, which has no dogmatic status but is nevertheless important in identifying what the Church has 'in common' (1) (*mutuum consortium*) with others, perhaps Ratzinger's 'basic agreement'? This does not call into question deep differences between the religions, nor the truth claims of the Catholic Church about God's definitive activity in Christ and in itself, and that other religions are *preparatio evangelica* at best. The claim about Muslims seeks to identify true features (that a Muslim would assent to) and affirm them from a Catholic perspective: 'The Church also looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God.' There is no concession to Islam's claim to belong to *this* covenant tradition via Abraham and Ishmael, although Abraham's unquestioning faith and concern to

do God's will is a model held in common. But these further predicates help identify the one true God that is shared. Are these sufficient for a basic agreement on the God that is prayed to?

Before turning to this question, the central question, what of Ratzinger's two other stipulations regarding IRP? Ratzinger's second stipulation is that apart from the shared doctrine of God, 'there must also be fundamental agreement ... about what is worth praying about and what might be the content of prayer' (108). And for this, the Lord's prayer is 'the measure' (108). Anything that was in conformity with the Lord's Prayer would in principle be worth 'praying about' together in IRP. Presumably, the supplications for peace and justice, two characteristics of the kingdom; forgiveness; and the strength to resist evil would all qualify. While this needs much unpacking, we can see possible ways in which this condition might be met, obviously in conjunction with the first stipulation – see the Muslim prayers provided by Kenneth Cragg.[7] The third stipulation is that any event of IRP 'must be arranged that the relativist misinterpretation of faith and prayer can find no foothold in it' (109). This is finally a pragmatic requirement and thus potentially surmountable, although it is difficult to imagine how. Participants could wear tea-shirts: 'We are not relativists; X is the true religion,' or they could publish a press release identifying this matter clearly if it is a public event; or, if it is an informal private event, they may have already accepted these conditions beforehand in conversation and discussion. So while difficult, it is not insurmountable. So let us return to the central problem for IRP: do we worship the same God as a Muslim?

The same God?

When we speak of the 'same God', how do we explicate this? There are a number of levels on which this explication operates: the narrative accounts of this God's actions; the philosophical-theological reflective process upon this God's characteristics, potentially based upon these narrative accounts, although this might not always be a necessary stipulation; and finally, the authoritative teaching bodies that state what minimum must be held about this God, if indeed such teaching bodies exist. We are not questioning the presence of the Spirit in such prayers, but the object of worship in these prayers.

On the narrative level the Qur'an actually provides grounds for seeing that there is a same God operative in Christianity and Islam. Of course, Christians do not recognize this narrative as authoritative or

true in all its parts. The Christian narrative account might accept some of the story at a chronological level up to the time of Abraham, and then an attenuated version of the narrative account after that point. But even this much could still account for two covenants with the one God that have taken place in the Christian account, and the one covenant established with Adam and repeated with others in the Islamic account. These narrative features are partially shared in the Muslim account: the covenants between Adam and Noah. Do these express a 'shared' spiritual heritage and narrative history? Yes and no, because on the narrative level the whole story must be told to make sense of the parts, so that serious differences about the narrative of 'God' cannot be obscured. This problem is indeed already present in the Christian–Jewish context, where despite sharing the same scripture (the Old Testament and the Hebrew Bible, respectively), Christians read that text as inspired in so much as it points to Christ, typologically, allegorically, and morally, and thus the story is read, as it were, from a different 'conclusion'. It is like a detective story with two incompatible endings. But this has not meant that Christians claim they have a different God from Jews, despite the Christian narrative developing a Trinitarian twist with the founding of the Church as the beginning of a new paragraph in the story. If this level of dissonance is allowed in the Jewish–Christian encounter viz. 'God', then surely there is some analogical similarity regarding the differences with Islam that might act as a hinge for a possible similarity?

The Vatican II passages do not rest the hinge of commonality on the narrative account, at least in so much as neither the Qur'an nor Muhammad are mentioned in either of the two documents. This may well indicate the importance from the Catholic side that accepting that God is worshipped by some Muslims would not require accepting the authority of the Qur'an and Muhammad. That helps or we begin to enter into serious self-contradiction. Rather, the hinge is based on predicates of God that can be found in the philosophical-theological traditions that might or might not draw upon the authority of the Qur'an and Muhammad for their basics. A creator God who is just, who rewards the good and punishes evil, is what is being located (and that may well be related to the tradition in Acts that requires this minimal as the prerequisite for authentic theistic belief). Indeed, at some level, the *shahada* makes two sets of claims: one is about the oneness of God and is a metaphysical statement; and the other is about Muhammad and is a historical statement. ('I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and I bear witness that Mohammad is Allah's servant.') Can the first part be true without the second part being true? Is the first part actually

logically dependent on the second? The first part even bears analogy to the first paragraph of the *creedo,* although 'Father' is problematic term for Muslims. But the similarities here, as with the narrative accounts, also mask a range of deep dissimilarities: that God is Trinitarian and that God has become incarnate in Jesus Christ (and on the historical level, therefore, the Qur'an's account, as traditionally interpreted, cannot be true). Clearly, there will be reciprocal modifications required by Muslims if they are to say of Christian worship, yes, this is to the true God.

Can there be a shared belief in God under these very difficult conditions, given that each community/person will recognize falsity within the other's beliefs in God, while also recognizing truth? The answer is clearly dependent on the level of dissonance and dissimilarity that can be tolerated, so that what is held in common might be affirmed together. This is the central issue to be resolved. The Catholic Church seems to have gone in this direction in Vatican II, in the search for what is held in common. But in that same Council it also made abundantly clear that it was the true Church, instituted by Christ, and a sign of salvation to the nations. It sought to convert all nations peacefully and in love. Hence, it accepted dissonance and similarity between itself and the religions. Hence, whether this level of commonality suffices for IRP is one question, and whether it suffices to overcome the cultic communality issue raised by the CBEW is yet another. And it may well be, in some situations of grave natural or human disaster where communities come together, that IRP may on that occasion be acceptable, while under normal circumstances it is not. There clearly is a space, but a complex and difficult one, whereby co-intentionality is possible without it affirming co-equality in terms of the truth of revelation. In the coming centuries, this is an area that will be examined with both a pastoral heart and a sharp intellect, for the questions are central to living peacefully and lovingly together in multi-religious societies.

Notes

1. Interfaith Consultative Group, *Multi-Faith Worship?* (London: Church House), 1992; Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Meeting Friend in God and Stranger,* (London: Catholic Truth Society), 2010.
2. See *Bulletin*, 64, 1987, for the full text.
3. Ibid. p. 60.
4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman), 1994, para. 2767.

5. For both quotes see, Jan 2011: http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1100061.htm).
6. Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Volume Two. Trent to Vatican II*, (London & Washington: Sheed & Ward & Georgetown University Press), 1990 – both English and Latin text.
7. Kenneth Cragg, *Alive to God: Muslim and Christian Prayer Compiled with an Introductory Essay*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1970.

8

Interfaith Spirituality or Interspirituality? A New Phenomenon in a Postmodern World

Ursula King

John Hick's large corpus of writings is centred on the analysis of religious pluralism and the multiple ways in which human beings of different religious and cultural traditions approach God, or what Hick describes as the 'ultimately Real'. His defence of the rationality of religious belief includes a nuanced discussion of religious and mystical and also aesthetic experience, but it does not include an examination of different spiritualities, a subject that has raised wide debate in recent years. A perusal of the indices of Hick's works points to the absence of entries on 'spirituality'. It is therefore all the more surprising that the brief Epilogue of his award-winning book *An Interpretation of Religion* refers not only to the future growth of the pluralistic outlook and of world ecumenism, but finishes with the statement that 'the kind of *spirituality* [emphasis added] that is appropriate to the contemporary pluralistic vision is one that is basically trusting and hopeful and stirred by a sense of joy in celebration of the goodness, from our human point of view, of the ultimately Real'.[1]

Such spirituality is closely connected with the growing practice of interfaith dialogue, which many adherents of different traditions recognize as the spiritual journey of our time. Out of this journey a *new interfaith spirituality* is emerging that draws on more than one religious tradition and goes beyond the much discussed phenomenon of 'double' religious belonging.[2] Brother Wayne Teasdale (1945–2004) has coined the term 'interspirituality' for this new development, which he understands as the sharing of religious, especially mystical, experiences across

different traditions. Others have developed similar ideas, but prefer the term 'interfaith spirituality', 'convergent spirituality', or other expressions, to that of 'interspirituality'.

What is the significance of these developments? I agree with Alan Race when he speaks of 'the notion of spirituality as a dialogical challenge for Christian faith',[3] but I consider the unprecedented rise of interest in spirituality to be a challenge affecting all faiths, as well as secular culture. I am here particularly concerned with the meaning of 'interspirituality', which I understand as a phenomenon of the postmodern world, as is the contemporary understanding of religious pluralism itself. I therefore commence with some reflections on postmodernism in relation to interfaith dialogue and spirituality.

Dialogue and postmodernism

For many, postmodernism is associated with a denial of meaning, a nihilistic attitude that is destructive of the traditional values of a religious faith. It is therefore especially important to reflect on the relationship between postmodernism, religion and spirituality in order to see the challenges posed by the postmodern condition, and the opportunities that have opened up for a renewed appropriation of religious and spiritual values.

Philosophically speaking, postmodernism denotes the limits of reason, especially the instrumental reason that is so sure of itself in modern science and technology, but is also evident in some forms of rationalistic theological thinking. As a movement of ideas, the postmodern critique is bound up with the decline of the belief in progress and the rejection of scientism as a narrow, one-sided over-rating of the benefits of science and rationality to the exclusion of other human experiences. The modern emphasis on subjectivity and rationality is profoundly questioned, and so is the representation of 'the Other', and of other cultures and traditions.

Postmodernism is not only very eclectic, but it is also closely associated with advanced modern capitalism, consumerism and with Western-originated global trends. While postmodern critical articulations have clearly shown that the West does not possess one single, universal foundation and tradition, but is multi-layered and pluralistic in its history and heritage, there is no doubt that, intellectually, postmodernism remains Western-derived and Western oriented, in spite of all attempts to accord more recognition to the otherness of others. Given the formative, exclusively Western matrix of postmodernism, it cannot

be sufficiently well equipped to account for alternative non-Western beliefs and practices.

Writers on religion, ethics, theology and spirituality have come rather late to a serious consideration of the postmodern predicament and its effects on our world. Though the advent of postmodernism has created much fluidity and decentredness, and also highlighted the disposability of all culturally created ideas and things, its influence on religion must not be judged only in a negative light, for postmodernism can also be seen positively, as an opportunity, even a gift, for religion in the modern world.

The postmodern world seems haunted by the absence of the Divine. Yet in some curious way, this absence can at the same time become transparent for a new kind of presence. In criticizing the individualism and dualism of modernity, postmodernism makes room for a more holistic and organic understanding of human existence, with its personal, communal and ecological dimensions linked to the sacredness of life.

The religious and spiritual possibilities embedded in postmodernism – including those of interfaith dialogue – invite close analysis and discerning interpretation, so that we can meet the challenges and respond to the new opportunities that postmodernity provides in the realm of spirituality.

Dialogue and interfaith spirituality

The forces of globalization have brought different societies, cultures and religions much closer into contact with each other, so that the contemporary awareness of ethnic, social, racial and religious diversity is now much greater than in the past. It is almost painful to realize how profoundly different major religious and secular worldviews are, and what a myriad of traditional, contemporary or alternative forms of religions and spiritualities exist in our world today. It is no longer a question of whether dialogue between different religious, secular and spiritual worldviews is possible; it has become an absolute necessity if humankind is to achieve greater justice, peace and ecological balance. There exists now a 'dialogical imperative' to promote dialogue above all else – among cultures and civilizations, among religious and secular people, among women and men, among rich and poor.

Many religious groups now welcome dialogue, but they can only foster it through persuasion, not coercion. It is democracy in practice, at grassroots level, that provides the spiritually enabling context for

fostering mutually enriching dialogue. Although the interfaith movement began more than 100 years ago, the dynamic growth and expanding horizon of interfaith dialogue today represent an important strand of the pluralism and fluidity of postmodernity. Thus interfaith dialogue can be seen as an integral part of the globalization process that affects all aspects of contemporary life.

So far, interfaith dialogue has been mainly commented upon from theological and philosophical perspectives, rather than from those of spirituality. The theology of religions concerns itself far more with comparative aspects of religious beliefs and practices than with spiritual growth and transformation. Moreover, the widespread interest in spirituality has produced more publications on spiritualities of the self, spirituality of liberation and resistance, and ecological spirituality than on spirituality in relation to interfaith dialogue. But spiritual growth and renewal happen when people of different faiths encounter each other and reflect together on the spiritual meaning of their beliefs and practices, and even more when they come together in interfaith worship, prayer and meditation, meet in retreats, or share in-depth some of the most personal experiences and struggles of their lives.

Although rarely mentioned in writings on dialogue, a vibrant *interfaith spirituality* is at present emerging with growing clarity and strength. The movement *towards* such a spirituality is still in its early stages, but it will eventually assume greater fullness and maturity. Thus we can only discern its general dynamic and direction rather than give a definite description of this newly emerging spiritual path forged by dialogical encounter that leads to new forms of spiritual discernment and practice in a global world of unprecedented pluralism and convergence.

Spiritual experience and praxis emerging within and out of interfaith dialogue are still comparatively rare phenomena, since believers of different faiths engaged in the experiential process of dialoguing are, numerically speaking, still relatively few. Immersed in a new venture, they are exploring a 'spirituality across borders', thereby discovering new paths by deep personal engagement with their own faith and that of others. John Hick is a living example of this.

A new spirituality nourished by interfaith dialogue has perhaps been furthest developed in the dialogue between Christians and Buddhists. A wide variety of Buddhist teachings and practices, particularly the different forms of Buddhist meditation, have deeply influenced Christians from diverse denominational backgrounds. Other examples could be given, since the number of people who find a spiritual home in more than one faith is slowly but steadily growing.

Well-known Christians who have pioneered interfaith spirituality are, among others, Swami Abhishiktananda, a French Benedictine who took on an Indian identity; the British Benedictine Bede Griffiths, and the American Trappist Thomas Merton. Their lives and that of other interfaith pioneers have influenced many people to explore the spiritual depths of a faith other than their own, and through the practice of interfaith dialogue they have gained vibrant new spiritual insights. In addition to actually meeting each other personally in dialogue, the general availability of and access to each other's religious texts and sacred writings is of prime importance in developing a new interfaith spirituality. Given our multiple means of communication, we can now study the *sacred sources* of many different traditions. But these scriptures, sutras, and commentaries are not so much read from an insider's perspective, where sacred writings are foundational for one's beliefs and practices, as they are drawn upon as globally available *resources* that have become accessible to outsiders as well as insiders, nourishing a new, more holistic spirituality.

By now a large amount of spiritual advice has been gathered out of interfaith experiences. This is a rather fluid body of knowledge that is informally transmitted through small retreats or gatherings, through teaching, initiation and participation, through reading and discussion, A growing number of Western Christians have explored in some depth what they can learn from the spiritualities of Eastern religions, whether those of India, China or Japan. The writings of the Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris, grounded in the Christian experience of Buddhism, have exercised a wide influence, as have those of the Spanish-Indian Raimon Panikkar, which are more oriented towards Hindu spirituality. The teachings of Zen Buddhism have also attracted special interest, and so have the spiritual practices of Tibetan Buddhism. Catholic monks and nuns, especially those from the Benedictine Order, but also Cistercians and Trappists, are deeply involved with the pioneering Intermonastic Dialogue between East and West. This fosters a sharing of monastic life, with Benedictine monks and nuns staying in Japanese Zen monasteries or in Tibetan monasteries in India. In turn, Japanese and Tibetan monks have come to share the spiritual practices of monks and nuns in the West, whether in the United States, England, Scotland, France or Germany. Others have been strongly attracted to Islam, especially the teachings of Sufism conveyed by modern Sufi masters who came to the West, such as Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan and his Sufi Order International. These are just a few examples of new spiritual encounters that are now widely documented and shared.

Participatory involvement in dialogue leads to a new kind of spirituality which is more complex and internally multifaceted than is a spirituality based on one religious tradition alone. This raises the question of what words are most appropriate for describing this newly emerging process. Is 'interfaith spirituality' sufficient, or should we look for another, more suitable expression?

Dialogue and interspirituality

Interfaith dialogue is sometimes characterized as a dialogue of three 'H's', a dialogue of head, hands and heart.[4] So far, much progress has been made in the dialogue of 'head and hands', that is in the intellectual and practical field, but the dialogue of the 'heart' – of the deepest and most central part of human beings – remains largely to be developed.

It may be indicative that the symbol of the heart figures in several interfaith publications of the twenty-first century, for example Wayne Teasdale's *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions,*[5] Beverly Lanzetta's *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred,*[6] and Marcus Braybrooke's *A Heart for the World: The Interfaith Alternative*.[7] Since Teasdale connects the symbol of the heart, mystical experience and a universal spirituality with his understanding of interspirituality, what are the characteristics of this 'interspirituality'? Reflecting on 'the interspiritual age' after the 1993 Chicago Parliament of the World's Religions, he described interspirituality as 'the assimilation of insights, values, and spiritual practices from the various religions and their application to one's own inner life and development'.[8] It arises from an encounter at the level of religious experience, especially mystical experience, considered as an invaluable resource for transforming human awareness, and for purifying human will and intention. But the idea of interspirituality is linked to the present time, and to the new consciousness of the global, a novum in human history and part of the effort to advance a 'community of cultures and religious traditions'.[9]

The notion of 'interspirituality' is more fully developed in Teasdale's book *The Mystic Heart*, where interspirituality is on one hand seen as a 'universal, communal spirituality' (236) linked with 'the rise of community in the interfaith movement', and with the emergence of a global spirituality based on 'the openness, mutual trust, goodwill, and generosity of the members of the world's diverse traditions' (238). On the other hand, interspirituality is closely identified with the mystical life,

described as 'contemplative, interspiritual, socially engaged, environmentally responsible, holistic, engaging of other media, and cosmically open' (238). This is an impressive list, but as Teasdale himself recognized, it will require institutions and structures, and the creation of a new interspiritual age. He mentions the Catholic Church as one matrix of interfaith encounter, but also proposes a 'universal order of sannyasa' or renunciation, understood as an interspiritual order of monastics or contemplatives open to people from all faiths or none, united in their desire to seek a deeper, more meaningful life (247–50).

Wayne Teasdale embraces a deeply mystical vision which has communal dimensions, but it focuses nonetheless primarily on the development of a personal spirituality. For Teasdale interspirituality is ultimately identified with 'intermystical spirituality' (231). The mystics 'are heralds of the Interspiritual Age' (232), and it is the mystic who 'becomes the guardian of interspirituality' (233). As he explains right at the start of *The Mystic Heart,* 'interspirituality' and 'intermysticism' are the two terms he has coined

> to describe the increasingly familiar phenomenon of cross-religious sharing of interior resources, the spiritual treasures of each tradition. Of course everyone isn't participating: really it is only a minority, but its members are the more mystically developed in each tradition, and they each hold great influence. In the third millennium, interspirituality and intermysticism will become more and more the norm in humankind's inner evolution.[10]

This passage reveals clearly that interspirituality remains a *desideratum,* an inspiring vision that needs concrete embodiment, since it is also dependent on many external requirements – on humanity's inner *and* outer evolution.

Beverly Lanzetta, an ordained American interfaith minister, scholar of religion and spiritual director, shares some common perceptions about global spirituality and the mystical heart with Teasdale and other interfaith practitioners. Yet she prefers the term 'intercontemplative dialogue' to 'intermonastic dialogue' or 'interspirituality' because it signifies for her 'mature interiority and one not confined to the professional monk'. Perhaps similar to Raimon Panikkar, she thinks that 'monastic consciousness and the capacity to dwell in silence are common to humanity, allowing us to think of the monk as a universal dimension in all people'.[11] Teasdale understood this well when he spoke of himself as a 'monk in the world'.[12]

Lanzetta's understanding of 'intercontemplative dialogue' sounds very open and welcoming, in fact, very postmodern, although she does not use this term when she writes:

> The idea that in interreligious dialogue we discover a reality not precontained in any prior truth, a reality that is accessible only through the expansion of our souls, spoke directly to my experience. I attended and was ordained by an interfaith seminary, because the principles upon which interfaith ministry are based provide an experimental atmosphere within which the mystical point of unity among all peoples and religions can be celebrated and practiced. (19)
>
> ...The ordination was not to a religious institution or even to a community of believers. It was rather to a contemplative practice and a social and spiritual acknowledgement that the Divine now was at the center of one's life. (20)

For those not familiar with the idea of interspirituality and interfaith seminaries, these quotations from Teasdale and Lanzetta flesh out a little what their understanding of interspirituality entails. They highlight the spiritual significance of interfaith dialogue and show the hopes some of its practitioners attach to the rise of a new global spirituality. Much of their writing is highly exploratory and suggestive, being marked by a tension between what is and what is not yet, a postmodern fluidity which needs to be much more explicitly acknowledged.

Nourishing the heart: a newly emerging spirituality

Mystic literature of different faiths often makes use of the image of the heart. We only have to think of the *Heart Sutra* of Buddhism or the quiet prayer of Hesychasm in Christian Orthodoxy, referred to as 'the prayer of the heart', or the 'sacred heart' of Jesus as the focus of Catholic devotions, or Swami Abhishiktananda's reference to 'the cave of the heart'. The heart is the central organ to the human being, but beyond its essential biological function of circulating the blood in our bodies, animating and maintaining our physical and mental life, the heart is often symbolically regarded as 'the centre of thought, feeling, and emotion, (esp. love)', as the 'central or innermost part of something', 'the vital ... essence (*the heart of the matter*)'.[13] But can we so easily assume that there is an essential, underlying unity, a 'mystic heart' to the different faith traditions, as some writers on interspirituality seem to think?

To me, this seems the wrong assumption, more akin to the position of perennial philosophy than to that of an evolving universe. If we think of the heart in its metaphorical use, does it mean an already existing centre, in Lanzetta's words 'as old as life itself' (20), or an organic, dynamic, living reality that grows and is bound to change? If we reflect on this analogy, we must remember that the human heart grows from that of a small foetus and newborn baby to one in a mature, adult human being. This involves ongoing growth and change. By analogy, the same could be said about the 'mystic heart' of our faith traditions. It is not fully developed yet, but needs to grow much larger to reach its full maturity, especially within an evolving humanity.

The writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin also include references to the heart, seen as a symbol of the divine, as the centre of a convergent universe and as the focal point of evolution. This finds a powerful expression in his spiritual biography 'The Heart of Matter' which opens with the statement:

> At the Heart of Matter
> A World-heart,
> The Heart of a God.[14]

As I have shown elsewhere,[15] Teilhard was actively involved in interfaith dialogue in the late 1940s in Paris, but he reflected much earlier on the significance of world faiths, especially on the place of mysticism in the planetization of humanity now covering the whole globe. He acknowledged the diversity and complementarity of the world's faiths, but he also recognized that in an evolutionary universe, religions themselves have to evolve further. To make a comparison, he thought that in many ways religions are still stuck in the Neolithic age. A spirituality for individuals is no longer enough; we need a religion of humankind and the earth, commensurate with our understanding of an evolutionary view of the universe and of all life.

This is a global vision which incorporates but also transcends the realities of religions as we have known them traditionally. That also applies to the understanding of a newly emerging, not yet fully existing 'interspirituality'. It represents a heart that needs to be nourished and expanded to larger dimensions, rather than one that exists already fully formed. Teilhard de Chardin's ideas about the convergence of different religious streams can be set into creative contrast with some of the assumptions underlying Lanzetta's assertion of 'the mystical point

of unity among all peoples and religions' (19) and Teasdale's notion of 'a universal spirituality' encapsulated in a 'mystic heart'.

Much of this newly emerging spiritual dynamism is aptly captured in the 'Interreligious Insight Paradigm' published in 2005 in *Interreligious Insight*.[16] This programmatic text outlines the cultural evolution of the twenty-first century and presents interreligious dialogue as a way to truth, but also advocates interreligious engagement linked to a moral code of practice. The paradigm is offered 'as a new means for understanding the religious complexity that is emerging in our times' and is grounded in the belief 'that we do stand on the threshold of a different way of being religious'. However expressed, this is the search for a new vision, the recognition that there are signs of positive change, and that we need to explore the different possibilities, and advance in collective understanding and action. But the heart must not be romanticized and essentialized as something merely to be discovered rather than something that still needs to be created.

As long as we understand 'the mystic heart' as a reality not already given and complete, but as an 'emerging heart' not fully formed but still growing,[17] a heart that, in Marcus Braybrooke's words, can truly become 'a heart *for* the world',[18] we may become sufficiently energized to work together in community for such a heart to emerge out of our diverse traditions. This also requires an in-depth dialogue with our contemporary postmodern culture, a dialogue which so far exists only at the margins of interfaith dialogue and interspirituality.

Conclusion: Interspirituality as a new phenomenon in a postmodern world

Modernity and postmodernity have led to an increasing privatization of religion whereby long established religious institutions have lost much of their social and political power. This loss of public influence is simultaneously accompanied by many fundamentalisms as well as a remarkable rise in the interest in spirituality.

The rise of postmodernism has also radically changed the understanding of spirituality in the West, where spiritual practice has become much more autonomous and independent. Yet it is doubtful whether spirituality can be seen as entirely, and permanently, divorced from religion, as some have argued. Historically and structurally, religions possess a powerful spiritual core and still nurture much human spirituality on our planet, although the relationship between spirituality and religion is now very different from what is was in the past. For

many people, spirituality has come to be seen as more open, inclusive and important than traditional religions. This development has opened the door to being spiritual and religious in a new way, so that we can speak about a new paradigm in the understanding of spirituality in the postmodern world.

It is not only the heart, but spirituality itself that must not be understood in an essentialist manner. I work with an open-ended, general definition whereby plurally conceived spiritualities quite simply connote the ideas, practices and commitments that nurture, sustain and shape the fabric of human lives, whether as individual persons or communities, drawing them to realities and responsibilities greater than themselves. Such an understanding has much room for the new developments of *interfaith spirituality* and *interspirituality,* whose emergence can be seen as a postmodern phenomenon. The first – *interfaith spirituality* – is tied to the fruitful encounter and collaboration between people of different faiths; whereas the second – *interspirituality* – goes beyond this by being more inclusive and neutral in its openness to a diversity of non-religious and secular beliefs, as well as religious ones. Because of this potentially larger circle and vision, I prefer the term 'interspirituality' to 'interfaith spirituality'. Yet both ideas have their usefulness. Interspirituality is probably the more open-ended concept, with larger possibilities of interpretation. In 2001, Alan Race concluded his study *Interfaith Encounter* with a chapter on 'Interspirituality in the Waiting'[19] – a pregnant expression which still characterizes much of our situation a decade later.

Committed interfaith practitioners often think that solutions to most contemporary global problems can be found through the creative collaboration of people of different faiths. But this view is too narrow, too exclusive of much of the secular and scientific world. While the global collaborations of people of faith make an important, indispensable contribution to meeting the spiritual challenges of our time, they are not sufficient for the creation of a universal, planetary civilization or for the emergence of a truly global 'interspirituality', since the religions themselves need to undergo radical transformation.

The most important point for the emergence of a new kind of dialogue and a new social/cultural/spiritual/moral/ethical paradigm is the involvement of all human beings, as far as possible, by their participation in creating a new world, and in fostering a life-affirming spirituality for the whole human community. Part of the fundamental paradigm change is this huge responsibility we have, not only for our

own future and that of the planet, but also for our global religious heritage and its creative transformation. That must involve all people, and especially women, who so far have mostly remained excluded from official interfaith dialogue, where restrictive gender patterns are still deeply embedded.[20]

The danger with the notion of 'interspirituality' – especially its equation with 'intermysticism' and a 'mystic heart' of the religious faiths – consists in it being too restrictively interpreted as a personal spiritual quest, without a consideration of the larger social and planetary implications. The flight of many individuals into inwardness, without much connection to the life of the outer world, is a reaction to the excessive despiritualization of contemporary society. But if spirituality is primarily, and sometimes exclusively, understood as occurring at the level of interiority, it soon becomes an escapist form of spirituality, which is not at all the new interspirituality we need.

In the current context of religious, ethnic and cultural pluralism, much affected by the ongoing processes of globalization, the different faiths are faced with similar challenges of modernity and postmodernity. These can only be met by initiating thorough-going reforms and by fostering a genuine openness to new developments. Yet in many cases quite the opposite occurs. A nostalgic return to the 'fundamentals' of a faith leads to the rise of very conservative, traditionalist stances, some of which find expression in militant fundamentalisms. Such returns to 'tradition' are often accompanied by narrow, restrictive spiritualities that do not foster, but hinder human growth. They make dialogue and collaboration with people outside one's faith impossible. What the world needs instead are transformative approaches, new visions to build a better future, a world more at peace with itself, more accepting of the diversity of its people, cultures, and religions.[21]

John Hick has exercised a wide influence by arguing that all theological and philosophical reflections regarding the religious traditions of humanity must now be conducted in a global context. Some may find this threatening, but I feel inspired and strengthened by what he calls 'the cosmic optimism of each of the great traditions'. Hick has described this optimism as being intensified today, when we see the religious traditions as 'pointing to the possibility of a limitlessly better existence and as affirming that the universe is such that this limitlessly better possibility is actually available to us and can begin to be realised in each present moment.' Ethically, he links this to the practice of love and compassion, and politically, he supports the search for changing

the structures of society 'so as to promote rather than hinder the transformation of all human life.'[22]

For me, this comprehensive view is a true clarion call for transformative consciousness and action, for a truly changed heart, alive with the zest of an energizing spirit. It is an activating vision that is germane to what others have perceived as an emerging 'mystic heart', a universal, convergent spirituality emerging out of the world's religions, whose members are encountering each other while learning to work together with head, hands and heart.

Such possibilities became first adumbrated at the dawn of modernity, but have now largely become possible through the conditions of postmodernity. It is a vision with a very seductive appeal, although it can leave a discerning mind with the nagging question of whether this vision carries sufficient intellectual strength to convince and motivate people to work for its realization.

Can the creation of interspirituality be generative of the action needed to really change our world? This is a postmodern question. Much further intellectual and practical work is needed to make the future potentialities of interspirituality come truly alive.

POSTSCRIPT: When John Hick first published *An Interpretation of Religion* in 1989, the word 'interspirituality' did not yet exist. But his reflections pointed in the same direction when he affirmed in his 'Epilogue: The Future' what he called 'the cosmic optimism of each of the great traditions', stating that 'the kind of spirituality that is appropriate to the contemporary pluralistic vision is one that is basically trusting and hopeful' (380).

'Cosmic optimism' is also a position associated with the evolutionary humanism and spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin. I greatly value the works of both thinkers, John Hick and Teilhard, and especially appreciate the opportunity to contribute a paper to this symposium in honour of Professor John Hick. I owe him a profound gratitude for being such an insightful and appreciative examiner of my Ph.D. thesis on Teilhard de Chardin thirty-four years ago.

Notes

1. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1989, 380.
2. See Catherine Cornille, ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
3. Alan Race, *Interfaith Encounter. The Twin Tracks of Theology and Dialogue*. London: SCM Press, 2001, p. 145.

4. I first encountered the triad of three 'H's' in Wan-Li Ho's essay 'Rice, Medicine, and Nature. Women's Environmental Activism and Interreligious Cooperation in Taiwan' in *Off the Menu. Asian and Asian North American Women's Theology and Religion,*(eds, Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan & Seung, Ai Yang) Louisville: Westminster Knox, 2007. Others may have come across it elsewhere.
5. Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart. Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001.
6. Beverly Lanzetta, *Emerging Heart. Global Spirituality and the Sacred*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
7. See Marcus Braybrooke, *A Heart for the World. The Interfaith Alternative*. Ropley, Hants.: O Books, 2006.
8. Wayne Teasdale, 'The Interspiritual Age: Global Spirituality in the Third Millennium' in Wayne Teasdale and George F. Cairns, eds, *The Community of Religions. Voices and Images of the Parliament of the World's Religions,* London and New York: Continuum, 1996, p. 209.
9. Ibid.
10. Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart,* 10.
11. Lanzetta, *Emerging Heart,* 93.
12. See Wayne Teasdale, *A Monk in the World. Cultivating the Spiritual Life*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2002.
13. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 544.
14. P. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter*. London: Collins, 1978, p. 15.
15. See my article 'Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Global visionary for our times', *Interreligious Insight. A journal of dialogue and engagement* 3/2 (April 2005), 14–21.
16. See Alan Race, Jim Kenney, Seshagiri Rao, 'The *Interreligious Insight* Paradigm. An invitation', *Interreligious Insight* 3/1, January 2005, pp. 8–19.
17. This is why I find the formulation of Lanzetta's book title of 'Emerging Heart' more felicitous and appropriate than Teasdale's 'Mystic Heart'.
18. See note 6 above.
19. Chapter 8 in Alan Race, op. cit., pp. 144–163 (see note 3 above).
20. For an in-depth study of women's intellectual and practical involvement in interfaith dialogue see Helene Egnell, *Other Voices. A Study of Christian Feminist Approaches to Religious Plurality East and West*. Studia Missionalia Svecana C., Uppsala 2006. See also Pauline Webb, 'Interfaith and Women's Spirituality', *The Way* Supplement 78 (1993): 23–31.
21. These ideas are treated at greater length in my book *The Search for Spirituality. Our Global Quest for a Spiritual Life*. New York: BlueBridge, 2008 & Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009.
22. John Hick, op. cit. p. 380 (see note 1 above). This is the concluding sentence of *An Interpretation of Religion*.

9

The Mahatma and the Philosopher: Mohandas Gandhi and John Hick and Their Search for Truth

Sharada Sugirtharajah

In the present-day multicultural context, religious pluralism continues to be a contentious issue. This chapter focuses on two eminent thinkers whose perspectives on religious pluralism have attracted much attention: Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), known to the world for his non-violent campaign against British rule, and John Hick (1922–),[1] a renowned British theologian and philosopher of religion. These two important personalities have been studied apart but not, to my knowledge, together. No scholarly attention has been paid to the striking resonances in their approaches to religious pluralism. My primary aim is to identify and explore significant correspondences in their thinking on religious pluralism, rather than engaging with the contentious debate their positions on religious pluralism have ignited in Western Christian theological discourse.[2] The debate has been well documented, and the intention is not to repeat it here. Situating them in their respective contexts, this chapter attempts to draw attention to concurrences in their notion of religion, concept of Truth/Real, and approach to conflicting truth claims.

Two thinkers and their starting points

Although Gandhi and Hick are not contemporaries and their views have been shaped by different contextual factors and situations, there are nevertheless points of convergence in certain areas, especially in their approaches to religious pluralism. They were formulating their ideas on religion in different historical contexts and in response to different situations, yet we find some striking correspondences between their approaches to religious pluralism. Gandhi's views on religion and

religious pluralism developed over a period of time and in varied settings, such as Kathiawar, London, South Africa, and more importantly, in the colonial-missionary context and the Indian independence struggle. Hick's views have gone through various phases, too. His philosophy of religious pluralism emerged in the British post-imperial context at a time when diasporic communities from diverse religious traditions posed new theological questions. Gandhi was not engaged in an academic study of religions, but his entire life was devoted to the pursuit of truth. As a philosopher of religion, Hick holds a pre-eminent position in the academic domain, and his ideas are not divorced from practical concerns. Like Gandhi, Hick, began as a law student, but eventually Hick became a professional philosopher. Both were drawn to Theosophy but did not embrace it for different reasons.

Gandhi was born into and grew up in a religiously pluralistic environment, Kathiawar in Gujarat, a place sacred to Vaishnavites, Buddhists, Jains, and others. For Gandhi, religious pluralism was not a problem, and he was engaged in dialogue not only with members of other faiths but also with his own. Although Hick was born into a predominantly Judeo-Christian milieu, in 1967 he moved to Birmingham which at that time was turning into a multicultural city – where he was H. G. Wood Professor of Theology of Religion at the University of Birmingham.[3] His encounters with people of various faiths and their distinctive forms of worship led him to regard religious plurality as a blessing rather than a problem. Earlier, when Hick was a student at University College in Hull, he went through a conversion experience and 'became a Christian of a strongly evangelical and indeed fundamentalist kind',[4] but this stance did not last long. In 1973, some years after his move to Birmingham, Hick made a paradigm shift from a Christo-centric to a theocentric position, and eventually to a more nuanced pluralistic view of other faiths as constituting valid and genuine responses to the one ultimate Reality.[5] Finally, there are striking concurrences between Gandhi's and Hick's perspectives on Christianity, which I have dealt with elsewhere.[6] Both thinkers subscribe to a metaphorical reading of religious beliefs. It is interesting to note that Hick was still in his evangelical mode of thinking when Gandhi was already articulating in metaphorical terms his views on virgin birth and Jesus' life, death, and bodily resurrection.

Notion of religion

There are some remarkable similarities in Gandhi's and Hick's understanding of religion. First, they both see religion in terms of a personal

religious experience of the Real or the Ultimate, rather than in terms of a rigid set of beliefs and practices. They distinguish between outer (institutional) and inner aspects of religion, and although both are interdependent, they see the inner dimension as primary. Second, they focus on the human awareness of the Real and point to human finitude in the perception of it. Third, they do not subscribe to a literal interpretation of scriptural texts. Fourth, they focus on 'fruits' rather than belief to draw attention to the transformative efficacy of what appear to be incompatible religious beliefs. In other words, they see 'fruits' as an appropriate criterion to demonstrate the liberative potential inherent within various religious traditions.

Gandhi's concept of 'Truth' and Hick's concept of the 'Real'

Gandhi uses the word 'Truth' in a wide variety of senses, but my concern is with Gandhi's notion of Truth in relation to religious pluralism, which has some resonances with Hick's notion of the Real. While Gandhi's view of religious pluralism is largely shaped by Indian philosophical traditions, especially Jain pluralistic metaphysics, Hick's pluralistic hypothesis draws on aspects of Kantian thinking and applies it to the domain of the epistemology of religion. Both Gandhi and Hick are more concerned with human conceptions and experiences of Truth/Real than with speculating about its nature. For both, personal religious experience is the starting point when talking about the Real.

Although Gandhi is not a philosopher in the conventional sense of the term, his concept of Truth is not without a philosophical basis. Drawing on insights from the Indian philosophical traditions, Gandhi uses the Sanskrit term *satya*, or Truth, to refer to God. He remarks: 'The word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat*, which means "being." Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most appropriate name of God.'[7] In 1931 he came to prefer the formulation 'Truth is God' to 'God is Truth'. He felt that no other name was appropriate for God than *satya* and that not all of us understand or mean the same thing by the word 'God'. Gandhi uses the term *satya* not as a substitute for or an attribute of God, but as a term that defies all descriptions and formulations. It is possible to deny the existence of God, but not of Truth. It was primarily Gandhi's encounter with atheists that led to this decisive shift in emphasis in his formulation of Truth. The moral integrity of atheists such as Charles Bradlaugh convinced him that even those who did not hold religious beliefs could be earnest

seekers after Truth, in the sense that they were striving to become better human beings and to make this world a more humane one.[8] Hick would agree with Gandhi that non-believers need not be seen as morally less conscious than religious believers, for they, too, are concerned with the welfare of human beings and the world.

If Gandhi came to prefer the formulation 'Truth is God' to 'God is Truth', Hick's spiritual quest led him to move from a Christo-centric/theocentric view of the universe of faiths to a Transcendent/Real-centred one. He preferred to use the term 'Real' or 'Transcendent', rather than the word 'God', which in the Western monotheistic tradition is generally associated with the idea 'of a limitless all-powerful divine Person'.[9] Both Gandhi and Hick, in their distinctive ways, made the journey to a larger vision of Truth/Real.

Among other things, Gandhi was influenced by the Jain theory of *anekāntavāda*, or the 'many-sidedness of reality', and the fragmentary nature of our perception of Truth. In Jain philosophical thinking, every substance has many attributes and can be seen from different standpoints, and no one conception of Truth can be taken as absolute and all-comprehensive. In other words, reality is too complex to be described in categorical terms. It can be perceived from many different perspectives which may appear to be contradictory. Gandhi remarks: 'I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Mussalman from his own standpoint and a Christian from his.'[10]

Gandhi's thesis is that Truth in itself is absolute, but we cannot, being imperfect ourselves, claim to have grasped Truth in its entirety. He remarks in his autobiography: 'But as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it. That relative truth must, meanwhile, be my beacon, my shield and buckler'.[11] Our differing accounts of the Truth or the Ultimate are based on glimpses which are partial. His point is that our encounters with the divine Reality or Truth are to a great extent shaped by our *svabhava*, or own individual natures, and the context in which the encounter takes place. Therefore, there are bound to be differences in our perceptions and experiences of Truth. Gandhi remarks: 'In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions'.[12] Although Gandhi now and then uses Advaitic language when he speaks of 'the absolute oneness of God and, therefore, of humanity', of many bodies but one

soul, he does not undermine the distinctiveness of different responses. He is keen not to obliterate the differences, but to show that they share a common source: 'The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source.'[13] As Margaret Chatterjee explains:

> The idea of one soul is advaitic no doubt. But the image of the rays of the sun is pluralistic. To speak of a common source is not to speak of identity. In this statement, Jain and Advaitic themes seem to strive for predominance in Gandhi's mind. ... Gandhi is advaitic only to the extent that he believes in the oneness of all that lives, and that this oneness has to be realised by man in the sense that he has to become *aware of* it. ... Unity for Gandhi, strictly speaking, is *shown* in the way we live rather than merely *known*.[14]

As with Gandhi, Hick emphasizes that any one view of the Truth is bound to be limited. He distinguishes the Real in itself and the Real as experienced by human beings. Drawing on the Kantian distinction between the noumenal world and the phenomenal world, Hick remarks: 'We are not directly aware of the divine reality as it is in itself, but only as experienced from our distinctively human point of view. This is inevitably a partial awareness, limited by our human finitude and imperfections.'[15] What we know is Truth or the Real as experienced by humans, but Truth in itself will always remain a mystery, beyond human comprehension. He prefers to speak of the Real in 'transcategorial' terms.

Common source and Truth claims

What most find problematic with the pluralistic view is the reference to the one Reality as the common source underlying diverse religious traditions. The use of the phrase 'common source' has no doubt caused tremendous confusion because there has been no consensus over the nature of the source. Since different conceptions and experiences of the Real seem to contradict one another, it is held that different paths lead to different goals. First, it is important to note that Gandhi and Hick point to a 'common source' that transcends all religious labels and expressions. In other words, Truth is more than Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, or Sikh notions of it, or is, to use Hick's terminology, 'transcategorial'. Since both Gandhi and Hick begin with the premise that there is one transcendent Reality underlying all forms of life, they view differences in conceptions and experiences of Truth in a relational manner. Gandhi

remarks: 'The forms are many, but the informing spirit is one. How can there be room for distinctions of high and low where there is this all-embracing fundamental unity underlying the outward diversity.'[16] To the question of conflicting truth claims Gandhi's answer is 'that what appear to be different truths are like countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree'.[17] In his dialogue with an American missionary on the equality of religions, Gandhi remarks that not all branches are equal, but all are growing, and he cautions that 'the person who belongs to the growing branch must not gloat over it and say, "[m]ine is the superior one." None is superior, none is inferior, to the other'.[18] Gandhi's line of reasoning is that 'we are all thinking of the Unthinkable, describing the Indescribable, seeking to know the Unknown, and that is why our speech falters, is inadequate, and even often contradictory'.[19]

Both Gandhi and Hick look upon all religions as being equally genuine and at the same time far from perfect. Gandhi's concept of 'equality of religions' is likely to be misunderstood if it is not seen in the light of his conception of the relation between *satya* and *ahimsa* (non-violence). 'It is only through ... a reverential approach to faiths other than mine', says Gandhi, 'that I can realize the principle of equality of all religions.'[20] Although Gandhi initially used the word 'tolerance', he was not all that comfortable doing so for it implied 'a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, whereas *ahimsa* teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter'.[21] This marked change was evident in his various correspondences and discussions from the later 1930s onwards.[22] Gandhi himself testified to this change: 'I have, of course, always believed in the principle of religious tolerance. But I have gone even further. I have advanced from tolerance to equal respect for all religions.'[23] Gandhi at times, especially when talking about Indian religious traditions, appeared to be an inclusivist rather than a pluralist. Like many Hindus, Gandhi regarded Hinduism as the most all-embracing and tolerant of all religions. In fact, he saw Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism as part of Hinduism, and this has not gone unchallenged.[24] Later in his life he gave up referring to Hinduism as the most tolerant and inclusive of all religious traditions and started speaking in terms of 'equality of religions'. Gandhi was articulating his views on religion and religious pluralism at a time when forging a national unity, for him, seemed paramount. Gandhi's thinking evolved over a period of time and needs to be seen in relation to the context in which he was making certain statements. Gandhi himself was aware of the inconsistencies, but pointed the reader to his later statements to

know his stance on a particular issue. Although Gandhi's views clashed with those of some Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, he was not for a Hindu India, an India that looked upon Christianity and Islam as alien. He was keen to break down walls rather than erect them.

Like Gandhi's concept of 'equality of religions', Hick's concept of pluralism is likely to be misconstrued if it is not seen in the light of his primary emphasis on 'fruits'. Hick states: 'Subject to the "fruits" criterion, which rules out violent fanatical sects (including those within the world religions themselves), pluralism regards all the "great world faiths" as equally authentic and salvific.'[25] In fact, Hick calls for a Copernican revolution in Christian approaches to other religions.[26] His pluralistic hypothesis requires that Christianity as well as other religions occupy the periphery. It is the Real or the Transcendent which is at the centre and all the religions revolve around it.[27] The Real he is referring to is one that transcends all human conceptions and experiences of it.

Both Gandhi and Hick reject the notion of a single world religion. They aim not at fusion but at a healthy coexistence of different religions. Gandhi remarks: 'I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e., to be wholly Hindu, or wholly Christian, or wholly Mussalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another.'[28] Hick, too, echoes a similar view: 'So long as mankind is gloriously various – which, let us hope, will be always – there will be different traditions of religious faith with their associated forms of worship and life-style ... And ... the religious traditions will increasingly interact with one another and affect one another's further development, enabling each to learn, we may hope, from the others' insights and benefit from the others' virtues'.[29]

Both Hick and Gandhi look at the problem of Truth claims from a practical and cognitive standpoint. For Gandhi, if what is truth to one appears untruth to another, it is because 'the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all.'[30] Gandhi's point is that each one perceives Truth according to his or her own light. This is in accord with Hick's thinking that 'our awareness of something is the awareness that we are able to have, given our own particular nature and the particular character of our cognitive machinery'.[31] To put it, as Hick does, in the words of Thomas Aquinas: 'The thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower.'[32] Neither Gandhi nor Hick implies that our beliefs are simply human projections or illusory. On the contrary, they are keen to establish that the human awareness of the transcendent is largely conditioned by our modes of thinking, cultural context, and other factors.

'Fruits' criterion: moral and spiritual transformation

The most striking aspect of Gandhi's and Hick's pluralistic approach is that it adopts a criterion of 'fruits' rather than beliefs. For both Gandhi and Hick it is not so much a matter of reconciling incompatible beliefs as it is of looking at their transformative efficacy. Gandhi points to *ahimsa* (non-violence) as the means to test our conceptions of Truth. Gandhi's use and application of the term has its own distinctive stamp. *Ahimsa*, for Gandhi, has far deeper implications than the word suggested by non-injury or non-killing. 'In its positive form', says Gandhi, *'Ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity'.[33] For Gandhi *'ahimsa* and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin ... Nevertheless *ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end.'[34] What is implied here is that Truth which is the ontological reality cannot be separated from *ahimsa*, for it is an essential component of Truth itself. Gandhi believes that the application of *ahimsa* will enable the adherents of different faiths to see their errors and rectify them. For Gandhi, the means and the end are inseparable, 'for the means to the goal becomes also the test of progress and is essentially inseparable from the goal, partaking of its very nature.'[35] If we disagree about our goals, it is because we absolutize our conceptions and make exclusive claims for them. As Raghavan Iyer puts it: 'The attainment of truth is the ultimate end of all men, but the practice of non-violence is the immediate test, the universally available means to the pursuit of truth. Men may legitimately disagree about the truth while they are still engaged in this endless quest, but they must agree at all times about the need for non-violence.'[36]

Hick would go along with Gandhi's emphasis on and application of *ahimsa* in our pursuit of Truth. Hick calls for a move from ego-centredness to Reality-centredness: 'If every Christian and Muslim, every Hindu and Buddhist, fully incarnated their respective ideals, they would live in a basic acceptance and love of all their fellow human beings. For they would have turned away from the self-centeredness which is the source of acquisitiveness, dishonesty, injustice and exploitation.'[37]

Assessing religions

Gandhi and Hick draw attention to the difficulty of assessing the comparative value of religions. First of all, the idea of a perfect human being or religion has no place in their thinking. Although the inspiration behind religions may have to do with spiritual experience, religions

are essentially human constructs, and over the course of their histories they have developed into powerful institutions and have a good share of both positive and negative aspects. Gandhi held that it was not only 'impossible to estimate the merits of the various religions of the world' but also 'harmful even to attempt it'. He saw each of them as embodying 'a common motivating force: the desire to uplift man's life and give it a purpose'.[38] To the question of whether he would consider Jesus the most divine, Gandhi's reply was that even if data were available, it would be ridiculous to conclude that one religious figure was more divine than another: 'To say that Jesus was 99 per cent divine, and Mahomed 50 per cent, and Krishna 10 per cent, is to arrogate to oneself a function which really does not belong to man.'[39] Gandhi's point was that each of them is distinctive and 'their achievements differed, because they lived in different times and under different circumstances'.[40]

If Gandhi is not enthusiastic about assessing the comparative value of religions, it is because he holds that 'we are imperfect ourselves' and therefore 'religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect'.[41] He holds that all religions contain 'a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect, and liable to error'.[42] But this does not mean that Gandhi is insensitive to the question of criteria. On the contrary, it is his awareness and recognition of finitude that makes him sensitive to the question of truth and conflicting truth claims. Being finite human beings, we cannot claim to have grasped Truth in its totality: 'If we had attained the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be mere seekers, but would have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of our imperfection.'[43] Being a seeker after Truth, Gandhi believes in the freedom to experiment with Truth in all areas of life. As Iyer points out: 'The significance of Gandhi's distinction between absolute and relative truth lies in the acceptance of the need for a corrective process of experimentation with our own experience, and this presupposes our readiness to admit openly our errors and to learn from them.'[44]

Hick, too, is keen to draw attention to human finitude in perception and experience of the Real. He warns that the idea of grading the varied spiritual experiences and visions of Reality is fraught with difficulty in that such an undertaking cannot be attained by any intellectual scrutiny. 'The test', in Hick's view, 'is whether these visions lead to the better, and ultimately the limitlessly better, quality of existence which they promise'.[45] This is not to say that one cannot apply the tool of reason to examine and compare such aspects as the internal consistency and coherence, of the great theological and philosophical systems

of Aquinas or Shankara. But Hick doubts that they 'can realistically be graded in respect of their intellectual quality'.[46] The point is to focus on the transformation of human existence that these speculative philosophies have effected, rather than merely on their philosophical excellence. As with Gandhi, Hick looks for the criterion in 'fruits', rather than in persuasive philosophical arguments.

Conclusion

In an age when postmodernism tends to dominate and various discourses and grand narratives have come to an end, a pluralistic vision may seem to be imperialistic and to reinforce meta-narratives such as 'universal truths'. It would be fair to say that neither Gandhi nor Hick is proclaiming a Hindu or a Christian universalism.[47] Their version of universalism is different from the one espoused by some Western Orientalists and missionaries and certain Hindu thinkers during the height of the empire. Both Gandhi and Hick postulate a Truth that transcends particular versions of Truth, and therefore no one view is privileged. Gandhi declares: 'It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies.'[48] Hick's pluralistic hypothesis calls for a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centred model to the Real-centred model of the universe of faiths: 'And we have to realize that the universe of faiths centers upon *God* [the Real], and not upon Christianity or upon any other religion.'[49] Hick challenges any form of religious absolutism and draws particular attention to the link between Christian superiority and Western imperialism.[50]

The distinctiveness of their approaches lies in seeing the relation between the particular and the universal in a non-exclusive way. Gandhi and Hick would see themselves as advocates for religious pluralism – partakers rather than supervisors of it – offering an explanation, rather than privileging their own view. Neither is positing his own religious tradition as the only true one. Both recognize that truths are particular and context-specific, but do not stop there as postmodernists would do.[51] The very fact Gandhi calls his autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* is indicative of this. The distinguishing feature of Gandhi's and Hick's approaches to pluralism is that they start from the human rather than the metaphysical end. In emphasizing human finitude, they do not lose sight of the larger vision of Truth – Truth that is beyond all human and religious formulae. Although Hick is a trained philosopher-theologian,

he, like Gandhi, is more concerned with 'fruits' than with sorting out the 'Ultimate', which can mean many things to people. In other words, one can endlessly argue about the nature of Truth (personal or non-personal, or both, or whatever), without focusing on the means. Both Gandhi and Hick shift the emphasis from 'belief' to 'fruits'. Gandhi is an activist whose thinking is not without a philosophical basis, and Hick is a philosopher of religion whose thinking is not without a practical basis. Unlike postmodernists, Gandhi and Hick do not see particular truths as ends in themselves, but as a means to an end.

Since both Gandhi and Hick make clear that one cannot possibly know Truth in itself, they are suggesting a more dialogical way of looking at the relationship between different religious traditions and different ways of being aware of the presence of the Real. Even if their pluralistic stance has its limitations, it does not suffer from the dogmatic absolutism that one finds in exclusivist approaches to religious plurality. Neither claims he is privy to the complete picture of Truth; rather, each points to a larger vision that is not restricted by particular views. This larger vision that they share is not arrived at a priori, but emerges from their personal encounters and experiences of differing faiths. Their pluralistic hypothesis requires all religions to re-examine their claims and shed any exclusive claims to uniqueness.

Notes

1. This is a shortened version of the paper entitled, 'Gandhi and Hick on Religious Pluralism: Some Resonances' to be published in *International Journal of Gandhi Studies,* 2011.
2. For a critical appreciation and defence of Hick's religious pluralism, see Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*. London: SCM Press, 1983. For critics of Hick's religious pluralism, see Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.
3. See Introduction, pp. 1–2.
4. John Hick, *God Has Many Names,* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, (1982 [1980]), p. 14.
5. Hick has great admiration for Gandhi. In a recent personal conversation John Hick said: 'Had I been born in India, I would have been a follower of Gandhi'. See Hick 'Introduction to Part I' in John Hick and Lamont C. Hempel, eds, *Gandhi's Significance for Today*, London: Macmillan, 1989, pp. 21–23. See also Hick 'The Significance of Mahatma Gandhi for Today', Occasional Paper No. 19. Birmingham: The Institute for Advanced Research in Arts and Social Sciences, University of Birmingham, 1999.
6. For a fuller treatment of this aspect, see 'Gandhi and Hick on Religious Pluralism: Some Resonances', *International Journal of Gandhi Studies*.

7. M.K. Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed., Shriman Narayan, vol. 4 (6 volumes), Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House. 1969 [1968], p. 213.
8. Gandhi, *Truth Is God,* comp. R. K. Prabhu, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1955, pp. 14–15.
9. John Hick, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science: Religious Experience, Neuroscience and the Transcendent*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 36.
10. Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* vol. 6, 1969, pp. 107–108.
11. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth,* trans., Mahadev Desai, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1969 [1927], p. xi.
12. Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* vol. 6, 1969, p. 268.
13. Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections,* comp. and ed., Krishna Kripalani, New York: Continuum, 2005 [1980], p. 75.
14. Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985 [1983], p. 105 (emphasis in original).
15. Hick, *God Has Many Names,* p. 67.
16. Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers,* p. 66.
17. Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* vol. 4, p. 214.
18. Ibid., pp. 267–268.
19. Gandhi, *Truth Is God,* p.12.
20. Ibid., p. 63.
21. Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* vol. 4, p. 240.
22. For a discussion of Gandhi's change in attitude, see J. F. T. Jordens, 'Gandhi and Religious Pluralism' in Harold G. Coward, ed., *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 7–13.
23. Gandhi, cited in Ibid., p.11.
24. For a critique of Gandhi's approach to Sikhism, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, 'The Mahatma and the Sikhs' in Harold Coward, ed., *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, pp. 171–191.
25. Hick, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science,* p. 153.
26. Hick, 'The Copernican Revolution in Theology' in John Hick, ed., *God and the Universe of Faith*, London: Macmillan, 1988 [1973], pp. 121–132.
27. Hick, *God Has Many Names,* pp. 36–39.
28. Gandhi, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi,* comp. and ed. R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1967 [1945], p. 67.
29. Hick, *God Has Many Names,* p. 21.
30. Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme,* comp. and ed. V. B. Kher, Vol. 1 (3 volumes) Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1961, p. 12.
31. Hick, *God Has Many Names,* p. 49.
32. Thomas Aquinas, cited in Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 49.
33. Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* vol. 6, p. 154.
34. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 219.
35. Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978 [1973], p. 228.
36. Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* , p. 250.
37. John Hick Grading Religions', *Religious Studies* 17: 4, 1981, p. 464.

38. Robert Ellsberg, ed., *Gandhi on Christianity,* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, p. 28.
39. Gandhi, M. K.,. *What Jesus Means to Me,* comp. R. K. Prabhu, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House 1959, p. 8.
40. Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* vol. 5, pp. 343–44.
41. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 240.
42. Ibid., p. 241.
43. Ibid., p. 240.
44. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi,* p. 160.
45. Hick, On Grading Religions', p. 462.
46. Ibid., p. 462.
47. For a detailed and succinct discussion of postmodern critique of religious pluralism, see John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths,* London: SCM Press, 1995, pp. 31–56.
48. Gandhi, *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* vol. 6, p. 263.
49. Hick, *God Has Many Names,* p. 71; emphasis in original.
50. Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity' in John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, London: SCM Press, 1987, pp. 17–20.
51. For a detailed discussion of multiple religious ends and religious pluralism, see Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* , B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

Part III

Theological and Philosophical Orientations

10

John Hick: Theologian or Philosopher of Religion?

Chester Gillis

Introduction

Some in the theological community consider John Hick a bête noire; others, a visionary. This chapter explores some of the grounds upon which he is condemned or extolled, having as its unifying element the intention to address one fundamental issue in the work of John Hick as well as the readings of Hick by both his critics and sympathizers. That issue is whether Hick's work is Christian theology, or even a theology of religions, or whether it is philosophy of religion. I think that much of the criticism of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis has understood his effort to be a Christian theology of religions. This is not what it is. While I think that it can correctly be claimed that Hick has undertaken constructive theological work in his lengthy career, particularly in such works as *Death and Eternal Life* and *Evil and the God of Love*, it is inappropriate to judge his likely most enduring work, *An Interpretation of Religion,* as a work of Christian theology. Determining clearly that his work on pluralism is philosophy of religion and not theology will go a long way toward clarifying much of the discussion on the validity of his pluralistic hypothesis. It will not, I realize, stem the debate over or the criticism of his work, but I hope it will clarify what type of analysis and criticism is appropriate and on what grounds such reflection can be undertaken.

A number of articles debating the merits and deficiencies of John Hick's work lead me to address and clarify some of the issues within this debate.[1] While I still maintain some criticisms and disagreements, which I will make clear here, this chapter is intended as a defence of the necessity for, and the helpfulness of, his overall project in interpreting the salvific character of the various religions. I am motivated by the

desire to correct misinterpretations of his work and to offer an accurate and sympathetic reading. At the same time there are questions which Hick has avoided or has not responded to adequately, and I will try to sharpen the focus of these questions in the hope that he will address them more fully in the future.

Philosophy of religion versus theology

The key factor differentiating philosophy of religion from theology, and more specifically, the theology of religions, is the perspective from which a scholar analyses other religions. On the one hand, a theology generally presumes the scholar to stand explicitly inside one tradition, in this case the Christian tradition, and to approach other traditions through the lens of Christian categories. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen provides a clear definition of the theological approach:

> Theology of religions is that discipline of theological studies which attempts to account theologically for the meaning and value of other religions. Christian theology of religions attempts to think theologically about what it means for Christians to live with people of other faiths and about the relationship of Christianity to other religions.[2]

Philosophy of religion, on the other hand, attempts to analyse religion from outside any one confessional system of beliefs. Wayne Proudfoot defines the discipline as follows:

> Philosophy of religion is the philosophical scrutiny of religion ... Current work in the field can be divided into two types: (1) assessment of the rationality of religious beliefs, with attention to their coherence and to the cogency of arguments for their justification; and (2) descriptive analysis and elucidation of religious language, belief, and practice with particular attention to the rules by which they are governed and to their context in the religious life.[3]

Whether the religious neutrality inherent in philosophy of religion is possible or not has been a matter of debate since the discipline emerged in the late twentieth century. Because the discipline has developed in the modern West, Proudfoot highlights that it is not uncommon that '[t]heistic assumptions are embedded in the criteria by which individuals identify an experience or a phenomenon as religious. These assumptions may be masked by claims that the philosophy of religion

ought to concern itself with description and analysis while remaining neutral with respect to the justification of other religious beliefs and practices.'[4]

Whether Hick successfully achieves the neutrality inherent in the philosophical approach continues to warrant debate. However, for the purposes of this discussion, it is important to differentiate between the two questions regarding Hick's work: First, how well does he achieve the religious neutrality required for a philosophy of religion, and second, is he is attempting a philosophy of religion or a theology. The first question is not our concern here; rather, our concern is the latter question. As I stated initially, to understand Hick's pluralistic hypothesis correctly, one must deem his work to be a philosophy of religion. Hick himself urges his readers to adopt this lens:

> Behind this endeavor lies the belief that a philosopher of religion must today take account not only of the thought and experience of the tradition within which he or she happens to work, but in principle of the religious experience and thought of the whole human race.[5]

In order to argue that Hick's mature work in *An Interpretation of Religion* must be understood through the lens of philosophy and not theology, I will first discuss the theological-philosophical ambiguity inherent in Hick's earlier writing. Then I focus upon his approach in *An Interpretation of Religion* by outlining and answering select criticisms of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. In this analysis I hope to illuminate the reasons his work can only be fully understood in a philosophical context.

Hick as theologian and philosopher

The discussion of religious pluralism and its implications for Christian theology has intensified since the publication of *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*.[6] The subtitle of *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 'Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,' as well as elements of Hick's individual contribution, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity,' have added to the confusion as to his role as theologian or philosopher. In his contribution to the book, Hick, supporting a move to pluralism, wrote of a 'theological Rubicon' which the participants were facing and being asked to cross. The substance of this metaphorical crossing of the Rubicon is, briefly summarized, the move from the exclusivist position in which one needs explicitly to be a Christian in order to be saved, or the inclusivist position in which Christ is the saviour of all persons

whether or not they are Christians or acknowledge Christ, to the pluralist position which accords salvific parity to all of the major traditions without reference to Christ or Christianity for salvation/liberation/fulfilment. The very language of a theological Rubicon places this work in a theological perspective.

In the chapter Hick briefly chronicles the history of the Christian disposition that salvation exists only within Christianity (the exclusivist position) and the slightly more open successive position that salvation is available to all religious persons through the merits of the death and resurrection of Christ who came to save all humankind (the inclusivist position). Although he is aware that other religious traditions have propagated similar positions, he made it clear that his contribution is as a Christian when he wrote: '[I] am writing here as a Christian specifically about our Christian attitude to other religions, and accordingly I shall be concerned with Christian rather than with other forms of religious absolutism.'[7] This in itself is not necessarily subject to misinterpretation, as it is quite acceptable for a Christian to write philosophy of religion that focuses on Christian claims. However, it is the final paragraph of Hick's chapter that could engender some confusion:

> Finally, in this chapter I have been treating the question of the place of Christianity within the wider religious life of humanity as a topic in Christian theology. ... But when one stands back from one's own tradition to attempt a philosophical interpretation of the fact of religious pluralism one has to take full account of nonpersonal as well as of personal awareness of the Ultimate. I have tried to do this elsewhere; but it was not necessary to complicate this study, as an intra-Christian discussion, in that way.[8]

This passage is ambiguous regarding the perspective from which Hick is writing. Is he standing back from his own acknowledged tradition of Christianity in order to do philosophical analysis of some of the claims of that tradition vis-a-vis other religious claims and traditions, or is he standing within the tradition of Christianity as a voice not only from, but of, that tradition? The question of nature and applicability of salvation is a topic both of and in Christian theology. It is important to theologians and believers alike since it carries significance for this life and the next and requires belief to be eligible for the benefits of salvation. It appears that Hick's treatment of Christianity in this regard is as one from the Christian tradition who analyses the claims of the tradition philosophically, and not one who speaks for the Christian tradition as

a theologian. But his further nuance that this is an 'intra-Christian discussion' which need not be complicated by philosophical interpretations may confuse the reader. Does philosophical interpretation have no relevance to Christian faith? If so, then who is Hick trying to convince when he constructs his pluralistic hypothesis – only philosophers of religion or theologians as well? Does he intend to influence how Christian theology is constructed? It appears that he intends to change the way that Christian theology is developed by making it necessary to consider the effects of other religions when considering Christian soteriology.

Such ambiguity is further suggested by his discussion of christology in the article. To examine philosophically the claims of classical christology is one enterprise; to offer an alternative interpretation via an inspiration christology is another, *theological*, enterprise. By an inspiration christology, Hick, following closely the work of D. M. Baillie,[9] suggests that God's grace was at work in Jesus' human nature in a perfect way. Following Geoffrey Lampe,[10] Hick suggests that God inspired the human spirit of Jesus in such a unique way that Jesus represents the full realization of the relationship between God and humankind. An inspiration christology does not rely on or include the claim of two natures in one person. Hick thinks that this inspiration christology is a more comprehensible understanding of the nature of Christ and recommends that it replace the traditional Chalcedonian explanation of christology of two natures in one person which Hick finds incomprehensible.[11]

In instances such as this Hick blurs the lines between philosophy of religion and theology. For, while it is certainly proper for philosophy of religion to analyse the concepts and claims of a particular theological tradition such as Christianity, it is generally not the role of philosophy of religion to offer alternative constructive positions designed to reshape the tradition from within. Occasionally, Hick engages in such internal reconstructions and thus takes upon himself the task of the theologian whose charge it is to speak for and from within the tradition and not simply about the tradition. Hick does this in *Evil and the God of Love*, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, *The Second Christianity*, and *The Metaphor of God Incarnate,* as well as other writings. In these texts, he opens himself to legitimate criticism from theological sources. However, in *An Interpretation of Religion,* he is clearly acting as a philosopher, not a theologian.

Hick as philosopher

In his small, widely read book *Philosophy of Religion*,[12] Hick distinguishes philosophy of religion from natural theology and apologetics.

Natural theology attempts the rational demonstration of the existence of God, and apologetics attempts the 'philosophical defense of religious beliefs.'[13] Philosophy of religion then is 'philosophical thinking about religion.'[14] Among other things it studies the concepts of the religions. Hick describes philosophy as a second-order activity which stands apart from its subject matter. However, he also notes that this activity need not be, but can be, undertaken from a religious standpoint.

Hick approaches philosophy of religion in his work from a religious standpoint and a commitment to the fundamental religious claim that some transcendent (unspecified) exists. This is why he terms his project in *An Interpretation of Religion* as 'the development of a field theory of religion from a religious point of view.'[15] However, while his religious commitment is that of a Christian, his philosophical analysis of religion and the religions is not specifically Christian. Thus, he is attempting what he calls 'a religious but not confessional interpretation of religion.'[16] He writes: 'It has been customary to treat the view of religion from within, through the eyes of faith, and the view of it from without, through the eyes of anthropological, sociological and psychological theory, as mutually exclusive. It has accordingly been assumed that one can understand religion either religiously or scientifically but not in both ways at once. However, a contemporary religious interpretation of religion requires us to do precisely that.'[17]

The reason it is important to clarify the perspective from which Hick is writing is that many Christian theologians have criticized *An Interpretation of Religion* as if it were Christian theology, when in fact it is not. I myself made this mistake when delivering a paper before the Catholic Theological Society of America. Hick was present at the event. In a courteous manner he corrected my misinterpretation of *An Interpretation of Religion* as a work of Christian theology; he indicated that it is a philosophy of religion done from a religious, but not exclusively Christian, perspective. As Sumner Twiss makes clear, it is perhaps the fact that Hick dismisses the projectionist theories of religion as credible in favour of a transcendent referent which religious experience confirms, that allows one to think of Hick's work as philosophical theology more than philosophy of religion.[18] I think that this is the approach that Hick is taking in his work on the pluralism of religions and the significance of a serious encounter between the religions.

Using these definitions, it is possible to read Hick as a philosopher of religion who attempts to understand the claims of the Christian religion. Further, he is attempting to understand and interpret those claims in the light of different and sometimes competing claims by other religions. He

does all this within the parameters of philosophy of religion. If, however, he attempts to revise the claims of the Christian tradition, even in conjunction with a philosophical appraisal of the claims of that tradition, then he is no longer properly engaged in the discipline of philosophy of religion but has crossed over into theology. In instances in which Hick does this he is engaging in the task of theology. But he does not engage in this enterprise in *An Interpretation of Religion*.

In instances in which Hick proffers a theological, and specifically Christian, opinion, I think that his ideas should be accepted or resisted on the grounds of theological thinking. However, in those instances in which he is argues philosophically about the nature and substance of religion and religious belief, his work should be subject to critique on philosophical and not theological grounds.

Issues, critics, and defenders

With the distinction between theology and philosophy of religion in mind, I want to pursue issues of theological and philosophical importance that are treated by Hick. The whole idea of the possibility of knowledge of God (or the Real) in Hick requires further scrutiny. In understanding how Hick approaches the possibility of knowing God, Hick's role as philosopher, not a Christian theologian, becomes clear. There is a significant tradition of apophatic theology (both Eastern and Western) to which Hick can legitimately appeal on this issue which will yield support for his argument. Curiously, Hick cites Aquinas to support his epistemology of the Real, that is, that 'the thing known is known according to the mode of the knower.'[19] This is an accurate quotation, but it does not fully represent the thought of Aquinas on the question of our knowledge of God. For Hick, absolute and certain knowledge of the Real is not possible. Thus one cannot make cognitive claims about the nature of the Real, even minimal claims such as that the Real is good and not evil, or that the Real is favourably disposed towards humankind. In Hick's pluralist epistemology one cannot make any cognitive claim about the nature of the Real for there is no certain knowledge of the Real *an sich*. One can only engage or know particular manifestations of the Real as they are encountered in human existence. And, as Kant instructed, the human mind is an active agent in the cognitive process, which affects the capacity to know. Therefore, one never knows the *noumenon* or *ding an sich*, but one only knows the *phenomenon* or the thing in the mode in which it is received by the knower.

Kant's insights on this matter are well taken and I do not dispute them. However, I do not find evidence in Aquinas for the same claims when applied to God. For contrary to Hick, Aquinas thought that one could have knowledge of God, albeit not full knowledge, since Aquinas wrote that 'it must be granted absolutely that the blessed see the essence of God.'[20] Aquinas did make a distinction between knowledge and comprehension; this distinction preserves the integrity of the apophatic tradition that is also evident in Aquinas. He wrote: 'Hence it does not follow that He cannot be known at all, but that He transcends all knowledge; which means that He is not comprehended.'[21] Further, Aquinas argued that God's essence cannot be seen or understood through any created likeness.[22] It is only after death that one can see God in God's essence. This would further support Hick's understanding. However, Aquinas does not simply leave it there. Instead, he argues that it is possible to know God, though not by means of the human intellect alone. What is necessary to know God, albeit partially and not fully, is grace. 'Therefore, to see the essence of God is possible to the created intellect by grace, and not by nature.'[23] Aquinas calls this increase of the natural intellectual powers via grace the 'illumination of the intellect.'[24] While Hick cites Aquinas correctly, he does not give the full context for Aquinas' claim that 'things are known according to the mode of the knower.' Hick's reading of Aquinas coupled with the epistemological categories of Kant makes knowledge of God in Godself impossible for the raw human intellect. Thus, it follows that it would be improper to make cognitive claims about the nature of God. For Aquinas, however, the intellect is not left to its own inventions, but is capable of being brought to a higher level, a level on which it is possible to have knowledge of God. This level is achieved through grace, and God is the active agent in the dispensing of grace. Aquinas wrote that 'a created intellect cannot see the essence of God unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it.'[25] Again, he does not claim complete comprehension of God, so God in God's fullness remains unknown, but one can say that God is not simply unknown – God is the known unknown.

In addition to grace, which originates in the divine, revelation allows one to claim certain attributes of God, such as the triune nature.[26] Aquinas' reliance on revelation in order to know God can allow one to pose further questions about what kind of knowledge of the Real is possible according to Hick. It seems that revelation in Hick's schema has the limited role of disclosing phenomena of the Real.[27] But those varying phenomena are not to be equated with the Real, nor do they reveal

any attributes or cognitive qualities of the Real. There is some parallel with the notion of Aquinas that the effects of God reveal that God is, but not what the nature of God is. However, Aquinas holds that revelation is more than the effects of God's creation. Revelation adds to the knowledge possible through the use of the unaided intellect. For Hick revelation has no such role.

Gerard Loughlin rightly points out that Hick ignores the category of grace.[28] Hick also limits the category of revelation. Both of these theological oversights point to his role as philosopher, not theologian. Hick's soteriology is very Pelagian when viewed from a Christian perspective, or it is Buddhist when viewed from a world religions' perspective. In either perspective, the human person achieves his or her own salvation/*nirvana* by individual and independent effort. There is no need for divine assistance in the process. Hick's understanding of revelation is also quite different from the traditional Christian understanding. For Hick, revelation does not afford the recipient particular knowledge of the nature of the Real, it only serves to indicate that the Real is.

While such conceptions may strike the Christian theologian as odd or deficient, it is important to keep in mind that Hick is writing, in *An Interpretation of Religion*, as a philosopher of religion and not a theologian. He is not committed to, or writing from, the theology or language of a particular religious tradition. This is not to deny his Christian and Western background and context. Rather, the point is, in fairness to his project, to distinguish his work in this area from the constraints of loyalty to a particular theological tradition. This, I think, is what separates Hick from many of his critics who are explicitly Christian theologians and who thus view and criticize the issues in strictly Christian categories.

Loughlin claims that 'Hick has always engaged in the process of re-reading his previous work from the vantage point of his present view, re-locating the past in the light of the present.'[29] While scholars often strive to incorporate new data into their perspective, I do not find any evidence at any time on which to claim that Hick's work constitutes, or was intended to constitute, a theological system as Loughlin suggests. Calvin's *Institutes*, Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre*, or Barth's *Dogmatics* clearly constitute systems, but even the works of major theologians like Augustine, Luther, or Rahner neither constitute systems nor were they intended to do so. The maturation of thought, the addition of new evidence, and the changing circumstances of the context in which the works are written, to name a few influential variables, all give reason for changes, corrections, and new views in the works of a single author over

the span of decades of productivity. Hick's writings should not be conceived as independent parts of a larger scheme or theological system. Even though some writings deal with issues of systematic theology, this by itself does not constitute a system. The penning of new prefaces to existing texts hardly constitutes an attempt to harmonize the conflicts between his earlier and later publications.

Hick's pluralistic hypothesis is neither a theological system nor an alternative belief system. Gavin D'Costa claims that Hick's conception of the Real can only result in a 'transcendental agnosticism' in regard to the nature and cognitive content of the Real.[30] S. Mark Heim argues that Hick's pluralistic hypothesis is an 'invisible, imperceptible matter pervading space'.[31] Heim argues that Hick provides no evidence that this space exists. According to D'Costa, Heim, and other critics, Hick allows that the Real can be known indirectly through its various manifestations, yet these do not equate with the Real itself. His continued reliance on an eschatological verification of the existence and nature of the Real does not provide sufficient evidence or incentive for belief if one cannot now know minimally that the Real is in its ontological character, for example, good rather than evil. This may permit Hick to adopt a 'tolerant agnosticism regarding truth claims among religions',[32] as Sumner Twiss suggests, but such agnosticism will not satisfy the exigencies of belief. If one were seeking to understand Hick's hypothesis as an alternative belief system or theology that is superimposed above all religions, then it would be necessary to provide evidence of this belief system and/or incentive for belief in it. In many traditions, revelation has played this role. However, Hick is not suggesting an alternative religion or an alternative Christian theology; on the contrary, he is suggesting an epistemological approach to understanding how one can reconcile the existence of many religions.

Sumner Twiss has offered one of the most tightly written defences of Hick to date; as evidenced by his defence it becomes clear that Twiss correctly understands Hick as a philosopher of religion in *An Interpretation of Religion*, and not a theologian. Employing Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic and propositional-realist categories, Twiss lays out Hick's structure as a combination of non-cognitivist and cognitivist dimensions in order to avoid one-sided misreadings. He argues that these normally incompatible categories are woven throughout Hick's works in such a manner as to create a seamless garment. Twiss then goes on to argue (against George Netland and Richard Corliss[33]) for the adequacy of Hick's hermeneutics and epistemology, and the coherence of his postulate of a Divine Noumenon. In upholding the hermeneutics employed

by Hick, Twiss defends the use of second-order language and reflection on a particular tradition's first-order language and self-understanding. In other words, he claims that Hick's pluralistic hypothesis that espouses the core unity of the religions in regard to the Real *is Hick's hypothesis* and is not, and need not be understood as, an account of each religion's self-understanding or description. If Hick's hypothesis is an explanatory hypothesis rather than a descriptive one, as Twiss, drawing upon the insights of Wayne Proudfoot,[34] argues, then Hick is justified in employing his own language and formulation of what the religions are claiming about the Real. This is, I think, a valid and helpful analysis of Hick's project, one which responds to the objections of several critics. It is also one that supports the understanding that Hick has developed a hypothesis and not a definitive description and that this work is philosophy of religion and not theology or specifically, a theology of religions, as some incorrectly read it.

After this lucid defence of Hick's method Twiss himself criticizes Hick for not distinguishing clearly between instances when he is writing as a Christian theologian and those in which he is writing as a philosopher of religion. This criticism is understandable given two factors: (1) the corpus of Hick's writings up until *An Interpretation of Religion*; and (2) Hick's consistent epistemological defence of the legitimacy of religious belief in all his work including *An Interpretation of Religion*. However, what is important to note is that while Hick claims the religious belief that a transcendent referent (the Real) exists, he does not specify the content of that referent. Hick does not base his hypothesis that the Real exists on theological grounds; rather, he bases his explanation (whether sufficient or not) on epistemological grounds. His Kantian epistemological analysis in *An Interpretation of Religion* points to the potential existence of the Real. His epistemological analysis does not suggest that the Real is an absolute truth or a Christian transcendent. The fact that there is no specific treatment of christology in this work is evidence that Hick is not writing Christian theology. There is extensive treatment of the soteriological aspects of religion and of the process of salvation/liberation/fulfilment, but this is not a study restricted to Christian categories or experience. It is an examination of this phenomenon across the religions. Hick is proposing a 'philosophical ground-plan' as a 'philosopher of religion'.[35]

Conclusion

Theological interpretations of *An Interpretation of Religion* often misread the work and Hick's intentions specifically as an attempt to make a

contribution to Christian theology qua theology. Hick's philosophical conclusions about the equal salvific efficacy in multiple world religions inevitably challenge certain soteriological suppositions in established Christian theology and elicit defences of the tradition from theologians and critics of Hick's project. Some of these may be warranted on the basis of Christian theology. However, they are less appropriate when meant as a critique of philosophy of religion since this disciple accepts no predetermined theological claims.

John Hick's work has been subject to much criticism. I am suggesting that this criticism should be directed properly. When and where Hick is offering an interpretation of an element within the Christian theological tradition, or is suggesting a reinterpretation or redirection of Christian theological understanding, then his work should be subject to criticism on theological grounds. And there are many instances in which these criteria can apply in his work on christology and theodicy for instance. However, when he is offering a philosophical interpretation of religion and/or religions, as he does in *An Interpretation of Religion*, then the criterion of Christian theological adequacy does not apply and should not be applied to his work.

The attention that Hick's work has commanded, particularly on the question of the pluralism of religions, is testimony to both its importance and its controversial nature. I am not suggesting that an uncritical acceptance of his pluralistic hypothesis is appropriate, but I am defending his work from unsympathetic theological criticism that evaluates his project on theological grounds. Perhaps from a theological perspective Hick's work appears misdirected or misinformed. However, his project on the question of religious pluralism is not that of a Christian theologian but is that of a philosopher of religion who resides within the Christian tradition and who takes belief in a transcendent being or order seriously.

The line between theology and philosophy of religion is sometimes a fine one, but it is one that must be respected when examining the work of Hick. In their attempts to defend traditional Christian theological claims, a number of critics have blurred the lines between theology and philosophy of religion. Others such as Twiss, while not without criticism of Hick's hypothesis, have correctly analysed his work as a philosophical analysis. A philosophical lens is necessary in order to appreciate Hick's epistemological contribution to discourse surrounding the possibility of salvation within multiple religious traditions in the world. As John Hick notes on his own website, he is a philosopher and a theologian[36]; knowing when he is one and not the other goes a

long way towards understanding his perspective and his enduring contributions to both philosophy and theology.

I would hope that even those who disagree with Hick's philosophy of religion and its implications for theology of religions, would agree with me that his contribution to both philosophy of religion and to theology of religions is original, provocative, and as this conference testifies to, enduring. We all, supporters and critics alike, are in his debt and owe him our most profound thanks for initiating and informing a conversation about religions and salvation/liberation/fulfilment that has set an agenda for philosophers and theologians of our generation and the next.

Notes

1. For example, P. Griffiths & L. Delmas (1983), 'On Grading Religions, Seeking Truth, and Being Nice to People: A Reply to Professor Hick', *Religious Studies* 19:75–80; J. Hick (January 1990), 'Straightening the Record: Some Response to Critics', *Modern Theology* 6(2):187–95; S.B. Twiss (October 1990), 'The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism: A Critical Appraisal of Hick and His Critics;, *The Journal of Religion* 70(7):533–68; T.R. Stinnett (October 1990), 'John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Religion', *The Journal of Religion* 70(4):569–88; G. Loughlin (October 1990), 'Prefacing Pluralism: John Hick and the Mastery of Religion', *Modern Theology* 7(1):29–55; J. Hick (October 1990), 'A Response to Gerard Loughlin', *Modern Theology* 7(1):57–66; H. Netland (1991), *Dissonant Voices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans); G. D'Costa (1993), 'Whose Objectivity? Which Neutrality? The Doomed Quest for a Neutral Vantage Point from Which to Judge Religions', *Religious Studies* 29:79–85; S. M. Heim (1995), *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis); J. H. Lee (July 1998), 'Problems of Religious Pluralism: A Zen Critique of John Hick's Ontological Monomorphism', *Philosophy East and West* 48:453–477; J. Ratzinger (May 1996), Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today, Meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the presidents of the doctrinal commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America, Guadalajara, Mexico; P. R. Eddy (2002), *John Hick's Pluralistic Philosophy of World Religions* (Brookfield, VT: Ashfield); R. N. Nash (2004), 'Is Jesus the Only Savior: The Answer to Religious Pluralism', *Christian Research Journal* 27(2), available from: http://journal.equip.org/articles/is-jesus-the-only-savior- (accessed 9 September 2010).
2. V. Kärkkäinen (2003), *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 20.
3. W. Proudfoot (2005), Philosophy: Philosophy of Religion, in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd edition (vol.10:7122), Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 7122.
4. Ibid., 7128.
5. J. Hick (1989), *An interpretation of Religion*: *Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan), xiii.

6. J. Hick & P. F. Knitter (Editors), (1987), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis). For example, the following publication is a direct response to the Hick/Knitter volume: G. D'Costa (ed.), (1990), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
7. J. Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 18; see also page 24 for a similar instance in which Hick refers to himself as a Christian.
8. Ibid., 34. For examples of the other texts to which Hick refers, see J. Hick (1993), *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: Oxford); J. Hick (1982), *God Has Many Names* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox).
9. D. M. Baillie (1948), *God Was in Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons).
10. G. Lampe (1977), *God as Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
11. Hick argues that the notion of two natures in one person was a creation of the early church and far removed from the 'thought world and teaching of Jesus himself.' *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 31.
12. J. Hick (1990), *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall).
13. Ibid., 1.
14. Ibid.
15. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, xiii.
16. Ibid., 1. The grounds for such an enterprise have been questioned by a number of critics who claim essentially that it is impossible to be religious in a generic sense without being confessional with its implications of particularity theologically, historically and culturally. Kenneth Surin argues against the effectiveness of a 'decultured' and 'placeless' assessment of religion in his contribution to *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, 'A "Politics of Speech": Religious Pluralism in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger'. See D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, 192–212.
17. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 1–2.
18. S. B. Twiss (October 1990), 'The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism: A Critical Appraisal of Hick and His Critics' *The Journal of Religion* 70(7):533–68.
19. T. Aquinas (1947), *Summa Theological*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province in 3 Volumes (New York: Benzinger Brothers), Question 12, article 4.
20. Ibid., Question 12, article 1.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., article 2.
23. Ibid., article 4.
24. Ibid., article 5.
25. Ibid., article 4.
26. Ibid., article 13.
27. The Real *an sich* impinges on culturally conditioned human consciousness as Twiss says. Twiss, 552.
28. Loughlin, 43.
29. Loughlin, 31.
30. G. D'Costa (1990), 'John Hick and Religious Pluralism: Yet Another Revolution', in *Problems of Religious Pluralism*: C*ritical Studies of the Work of John Hick*, edited by Harold Hewitt (London: Macmillan).

31. Heim, 398.
32. Twiss, 537.
33. See G. A. Netland (1986), 'Professor Hick on Religious Pluralism', *Religious Studies* 22:289–301; R. Corliss (1986), 'Redemption and Divine Realities: A Study of Hick and an Alternative', *Religious Studies* 22:235–48.
34. W. Proudfoot (1985), *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
35. Ibid., xiii.
36. John Hick: The Official Website, available from: http://www.johnhick.org.uk/jsite/ (accessed 9 September 2010).

11

Humane Spirit: Towards a Liberal Theology of Resistance and Respect

George M. Newlands

I

John Hick has made ground-breaking contributions to many areas of theology and religious studies. Much attention has deservedly been given to his work in interfaith studies. Here I reflect on the some aspects of the liberal tradition in Christian theology, a tradition in which John's work continues to be important, a tradition currently out of fashion, but in my view, vital for the future of Christian faith and community, for interfaith engagement, and for engagement with a wider society.

Faith comes in many forms. Its diversity is also its continuing strength. Currents of faith stream through cultures and civilizations. They are dammed and disappear underground. Often they reappear in unlikely guises. There are many sorts of faith – here we shall be concerned with Christian faith, and the specific contributions that liberal Christian faith has made, is making and will make to the future of the churches and society.

There are a number of recent studies on the future of liberal Christianity. Sensibly they note the decline of liberal theology and liberal congregations, and the difficulties of effective renewal. This paper would not be possible without a considerable debt, conscious and unconscious, to existing work. Surveying the roadblocks, we might try to suggest new routes through which liberal Christian presence may continue to make sustained contributions to the understanding and the service of the Gospel and humanity. Our paradigm case is Christianity, but an inclusive faith is always open to learn from engagement with people of other faiths and none.

This chapter is designed to reflect upon the substantial and complex reality of liberal Christian presence in the past and in the present, and to encourage its development through new currents of engagement in the future. The attempt to produce a 'pure' liberal presence inevitably constitutes a rather attenuated expression of Christian faith. Liberal presence permeates Christian life, and is hugely influential even in unlikely places – readers who doubt this need only look at Augustine through the eyes of Eric Gregory. Our task here is to trace this powerful current and to suggest new ways of harnessing its continuing energy in the future.

As is well known, John Hick studied philosophy as a fairly conservative evangelical Christian, gradually developed more liberal perspectives, and became increasingly concerned with interfaith issues. In the theology of religions he has been a pioneer – indeed, it is ironic that many of his most severe critics in that area would probably not receive the attention they currently enjoy without his earlier initiatives. His engagement with issues and people outside the churches has not been limited to intellectual issues – social and human rights have been in the centre of his concern at least since his arrival in Birmingham. He has been in every sense an immensely humane scholar, a characteristic exemplified not least in his constantly irenic responses to his often extremely abrasive critics. Though Hick has developed his own distinctive positions in theology, he has never made exclusive claims for his work. The much excoriated *Myth of God Incarnate*, for example, reflects perspectives which differ and in some areas disagree with each other. In the serious search for truth, dialogue and argument are encouraged.

II

How can we benefit from the insights which the work of Hick and other liberal scholars have given us, and take this legacy forward? First, we may recall the context in which the marginalizing of liberal theology has occurred – reaction against 'the Enlightenment' and 'Enlightenment rationality.' This critique is itself in large measure a product of the critical rationality of the Enlightenment, a multifaceted phenomenon which clearly had its limitations, explored by the Romantic movement, by Karl Barth, and by the radical orthodox tradition and similar movements. Alasdair Macintyre, Stanley Hauerwas, Richard Neuhaus and John Milbank have been central to this reaction to Enlightenment. Hans Urs von Balthasar and Josef Ratzinger have once again become influential authorities, along with appeal to Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin

and Barth. Academic theology has been paralleled by movements in the churches. In the Roman Catholic church, the progress of Vatican II has been systematically dismantled . In Orthodox churches there has been a solid reaction, for example, in the World Council of Churches (WCC), against Western liberalism. In the Anglican Communion the Covenant process, supported strongly by the senior clergy, breathes a very different spirit from that of the bishops of the previous era – Runcie, Montefiore, Jenkins, Robinson and others. In American Protestant circles, conservative evangelicals have powerful influence, intellectual and economic, at home and abroad – not least in Africa.

There are reasons for this reaction to Enlightenment. The world has moved on since the eighteenth century. Defects in Enlightenment thought have been identified. The validity in alternative visions had been recognized. We shall not attempt a comprehensive response to this critique here, though we shall have occasion to examine some specific issues. In any event, a liberal perspective such as I espouse attempts to learn from criticism as well as from commendation. The major thrust of this book is a constructive exploration and development of liberal theology over a very broad field. I am concerned to demonstrate that the liberal project is not vulnerable to sophisticated demolition based on any narrow focus of study. It is a project with widely spread roots, and as such it can safely withstand serendipitous attack from narrow standpoints.

Given the strong position of anti-Enlightenment theologies in prestigious university departments, it might seem that liberal theology is obviously moribund, and that is the end of a conversation. However, as has been forcefully pointed out, notably by Gary Dorrien and Philip Clayton in the United States, there is a great deal of imaginative and creative liberal theology in America today – in the work of the successors of Cobb and Hick, Hodgson and Tracy and others. I want to draw equal attention here, in no particular order, to a previous generation of phenomenally gifted liberal scholars, for example Lietzmann, von Soden and von Campenhausen, Ebeling and Kaesemann in Germany; Ronald Gregor Smith and the Baillies in Scotland; Lampe and the Cambridge theologians of the Sixties; the Christian Realists in the United States; and Rahner, Schillebeeckx and Tracy in the Catholic world. Here is a galaxy of people who were both devout Christians and immensely erudite scholars, each with distinctive perspectives, yet each committed to a humane, liberal, Christian vision. This is the broad base on which each generation of liberal Christians stands, from which it continues to draw inspiration and to move ahead. This was no narrow liberalism.

These scholars were able to draw on writers who espoused different positions. Their interests overlapped with those of writers who straddled different schools of thought – Bonhoeffer is a classic case. They listened, they argued, and they did not neglect the spiritual and pastoral dimensions of their faith. When one compares the professional achievement and expertise of this array of great scholars from different academic and church traditions with the currently fashionable despisers of Enlightenment, it is hard to conclude that liberal theology has been refuted.

Citation of authority is never enough. The wisdom of the past may simply have been rendered obsolete – though oddly enough, theologians who ignore much of the past two hundred years of academic scholarship are often those who stress most vigorously the importance of tradition. It seems that authentic tradition stops with Aquinas, or at least, with Calvin. It is as though the Holy Spirit took early retirement around 1300 AD, and certainly would never be associated with any thought which might have been influenced by the proton pseudos of all modern thought, Immanuel Kant.

III

Liberal Christianity is often portrayed as a rather shallow form of theology and spirituality pursued by a fringe collection of theological amateurs. I turn to just a couple of particular examples of the strength of the liberal tradition, beginning with my first graduate supervisor, Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen.[1] Born in 1903 on the family estate in East Prussia, he was banished to Siberia in 1919, escaped to Berlin when his father was shot by the Bolsheviks, and became a student of Harnack, von Schubert, and Lietzmann. Refusing to join the Nazi party, he was disqualified from a number of chair appointments in the 1930s, joined the Confessing Church in 1935, spent the war as a lance corporal in Czechoslovakia, and was elected Rector of the University of Heidelberg in 1947. I was his student in 1966–1968. Campenhausen was and remained a devout Lutheran, and preached regularly in the University Church, the Peterskirche. He wrote books on Ambrose of Milan, on martyrdom in the early church (a topic not without resonance in the Germany of the 1930s), on ecclesial power and spiritual authority in the early church, on the formation of the Christian Bible, on the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, on the church fathers, on humour and theological jokes – he regarded cheerfulness as a true Christian virtue – and on countless topics in early

church thought. Demanding but unfailingly kind and hospitable to his students, Campenhausen was one of the last examples of that great scholarly tradition which knew the patristic writings intimately in their original languages and within the thick culture of the ancient Mediterranean world. Entirely absorbed in Enlightenment critical procedures, he was also steeped in the theology and spirituality of Martin Luther.

In England I detect a very similar perspective in the work of Geoffrey Lampe, a senior colleague in Cambridge till his tragic early death in 1980.[2] Lampe had a curiously similar shadow cast over him by war. In 1914 his German father returned from Brighton to Germany and was killed in the war. Lampe was educated in Devon and Oxford, won an Military Cross in the 1939–1945 war, and became a professor in Birmingham (a predecessor of John Hick and a pro–vice chancellor) and in Cambridge. Also a distinguished patristic scholar, he edited the definitive *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, wrote on baptism in the early church, on the Holy Spirit and on the church, and spent much time as a Cambridge University representative on the General Synod of the Church of England, where he campaigned tirelessly for the ordination of women. Lampe was a large man with an equally large spirit, tolerant to a fault and immensely generous. Cambridge at that time was fortunate to have a number of impressive liberal Christian scholars. Maurice Wiles, Hugh Montefiore, John Robinson, Arthur Peacocke, Don Cupitt and John Hick contributed greatly to the theological discussion. Impressive, too, but scarcely acknowledged, was Norman Pittenger, an American transplanted to Cambridge, and the author of numerous solid liberal works on Christology and other central doctrinal themes. Pittenger wrote in support of gay Christians long before it became respectable to do so.

IV

In contrast with the above, here is a classic example of the tensions involved in debate about liberal Christian faith – attitudes to human rights. Liberal perspectives in theology and politics have frequently been attacked in modern thought, famously by Pius IX and John Henry Newman. Human rights have become for many people in the last decades a central concept for ethical reflection. The churches have maintained a seriously ambivalent attitude to human rights, in theory and in practice. On the other hand, where the language, culture and enactment of human rights has been absent, oppression and even atrocity flourish. The adoption of democratic procedures, which might be expected to

encourage human rights action, has not always done so – conservative majorities in church and society have sometimes overturned progress already made. It is good to recall that John Hick was a very active supporter of action against racial discrimination during his tenure of the Birmingham chair and in Claremont.

In recent years I have written extensively on human rights, on one project together with another Claremont scholar, Richard Amesbury,[3] and on hospitality as a path to extending human rights into a thick culture. Human rights have of course been much criticized, most recently by Samuel Moyn,[4] who has argued that rights are a cultural concept of very recent origin and will soon be succeeded by other cultural paradigms. Hospitality was famously critiqued by Derrida as impossible to actualize. I am still persuaded of the crucial relevance of an impossible ideal, provided that it can be embedded in specific and particular locations. In this there is encouragement in Amartya Sen's recent reflection on human rights and global imperatives[5] in which he defends both the continuing seminal importance of human rights and the need to instantiate them in particular cultures. Conversations in various parts of the world suggest that churches are often still highly suspicious of the work of human rights commissions. This often reflects sensitivities about their own structures of power and control, not least on issues of gender and sexuality.

It is a strength of progressive traditions that they welcome reasoned critique and conversation. In his challenging essay, 'Against Human Rights', John Milbank[6] argues robustly against liberal notions of human rights. In doing so, he seeks to refute various arguments recently advanced by Jennifer Herdt and Nicolas Wolterstorff about subjective rights. He argues that subjective rights were not central to medieval notions of *ius*. They could be alienated and reconciled with authoritarian control of society, both in medieval and in Enlightenment polities. Where they were of value, the value is derives from Christian theological notions and do not exist without the Christian context. Much more promising is a development of Plato's concept of right order. We may readily agree that all notions of rights could be and were exploited in feudal society, and also by the absolute monarchs of the eighteenth century. Jonathan Israel in particular has underlined the limited nature of what he terms 'the moderate Enlightenment'. We may also agree that liberal traditions were not the exclusive source of movement on rights issues in the last three hundred years. Yet to privilege a highly exclusive interpretation of Christianity, while eschewing all interaction with a secular society, and failing to recognize the constructive aspects of

secularization, can hardly be seen as a step forward. To deny the significant positive role of liberal Christian faith on the basis of an argument from a very narrow area of interpretation of medieval tradition is at best a doubtful strategy.

John Milbank sharpens his case by maintaining of Wolterstorff on justice that '[r]eally he is involved in a common Christian-American doublethink'. (24) The argument is developed with a polemical assessment of the Franciscan theological tradition, from Bonaventure through Scotus to Ockham. 'This led them into fantastic depths of double hypocrisy.' (29) The stakes are doubled throughout. Liberalism is the deeply flawed progeny of a deeply flawed nominalism. 'A utilitarian "do-gooding" is an eventual upshot of the Franciscan approach.' (38) We are therefore forced to seek for 'an alternative modernity'.

How are we to assess this brilliant piece of characteristic radical orthodox writing? It is of the essence that liberal theology should be open to challenge and subject to reassessment and change. Liberalism values tradition, but it values it as a tradition of disruption as well as continuity. Liberal thought is certainly indebted to Enlightenment – Schleiermacher is the archetypal liberal Christian – and is therefore committed to critical assessment of Enlightenment's failures.

Liberal Christian faith is built on much more than particular philosophical trends. It is built on a broad band of the appropriation of revelation, reason and experience stretching back to the early church. It is built on the interpretation of scripture, on critical rationality, on the experience, shared by millions of Christians through the ages, of the presence of God in Jesus Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit within the Christian community. It is ecumenical and emancipatory. Liberal Christian faith is grounded in trust that God is equally near to every generation, in times of flourishing and of suffering. God has indeed not opted for early retirement around 1300 AD, and we expect to revise our understanding of God as we are led to deeper understanding in the future. That is why faith's commitments are both serious in their engagement and yet provisional in their formulation. Some sorts of certainties must await the eschaton.

V

Liberal faith need not be unexciting. It will be expressed differently in different religions.[7] In a Christian context it may be liberal evangelical or liberal catholic in its liturgical expression, or somewhere in between. Far from being dryly rational, it may be conceived as a theology of the

Spirit. It will express humility but will also express confidence. In the context of a Christian theology it will be Christomorphic, a theology of resistance which opposes firmly whatever is not Christlike. It will be a theology of respect, which values the dignity of all human beings equally. It will be a theology of risk, which engages with serious issues in solidarity and identification.

Liberal faith is committed to the church as a centre of worship and pastoral care. But it does not confuse the church with the Kingdom of God, and is aware of the shortcomings of the church throughout the ages. It has no brief for ecclesial triumphalism or for prejudice confused with obedience to God. Liberal faith is committed to dialogue and engagement with people of other religious faiths or none. It is always open to learning, but not abandoning the contribution it brings to the dialogue. It can assimilate neither with atheism on the one hand nor religious fundamentalism on the other. It remains committed to historical and philosophical enquiry, and cannot revert to pre-modern perspectives. This does not mean that it cannot learn from other perspectives, notably non-Western perspectives. It serves as a community of inspiration and support to fellow liberal Christians, and is there as dialogue with specific contributions to bring to the table. Humanism is a term from a valuable tradition of faith. I prefer to speak of humane Christianity, the fruit of a humane spirit which brings faith to the service of a wider humanity, a spirit which depends on the existing presence of the spirit of God. This liberal spirit may be seen one of the currents of the spirit of Christ-likeness which flow through human history and are the bearers of surprise and resurrection, the source of unlimited energy and unlimited love.

I have mentioned non-Western perspectives. The Abrahamic tradition is important, and particularly since 9/11, there has been a concerted effort in Europe and the United States to focus on a dialogue between Christianity and Islam, and to a lesser extent with Judaism. But it must be borne in mind that much of the world's population has no contact with the Abrahamic tradition, which can also be regarded as the product of a particular cultural development in a limited geographical environment. Hundreds of millions of people, equally valuable human beings in the sight of God, are steeped in traditions of Eastern religions. And there are many millions who have simply no belief in any transcendent source of being. Despite appearances, there may be more atheists in the East than in the West.

These are highly general notions. Most of the time liberal Christians are there to play their part in local community, and where possible in

global solidarity, with individual people, a modest witness to the incarnate love of God delivered into human hands. And they bring this faith into their social and professional lives, without labels or manifestos, as an integral part of their understanding of discipleship.

A note of caution. Liberal Christianity has clearly not always been effective. This has sometimes been because of inherent limitations, sometimes arrogance, triumphalism and a variety of fundamentalism among liberal Christians themselves. It has also been the case that illiberal views have prevailed, and the winners have written the master narrative, and the truly 'left behind' have sunk into voiceless anonymity. Years later, many of the injustices have been rectified, not without a sense of satisfaction. Yet we should not forget the innumerable human beings whose lives have been wrecked while institutions have gone down blind alleys or waited for a process of 'discernment' to take place. Sometimes the 'left behind' have developed the diplomatic agility and toughness required to resist conformity and to influence Christian thought and action. But in Christian community toughness should not be the necessary criterion for respect and affirmation. Liberalism may have its difficulties. Its absence often makes space for tolerance of the intolerable.

Hospitable Spirit, Holy Spirit. In the face of the rise of conservative thought and practice in the twenty-first century, and the huge media attention such views often attract, it is sometimes good to remind ourselves of the immense richness of liberal perspectives, an encouragement to renaissance and reconstruction, and of the obstacles to this. Here is a cascade of concepts which may remind us that progressive thinking in theology, in the academy and in the religions is not quite dead. It resurfaces, often in unexpected forms.

Though among the churches ecumenical effort has almost vanished in recent decades, the vision of unforced consensus and mutual recognition is still there, an aspiration for a future implementation. Despite continuing intolerance, notions of constructive rather than destructive conflict have been established and will not go away. In theology, concepts which have led churches to turn in upon themselves against others are at least on occasion open to reasoned argument. The development of new themes – the multiple identities of God, theological humanism, the taking up of older notions such as the form of Christ in the world, signal a continuing liberal theology of resistance and respect. Compassion and flexibility, rather than control and the competitive exercise of power, are persistent themes in theology.

The turn to art and film, literature and music, long banished to the sidelines of theology, and the development of comparative theology

can be seen as enlarging rather than diluting fidelity to long-standing traditions. Warhol, Cage, and Updike may point to creative interruption in the traditions, alongside Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin. Anxious as they were to make their contributions to contemporary communities, the latter might well have turned to You Tube, Facebook and Twitter had these been available to them. The post-foundational and the meta-modern alert us to the less than obvious. The religious and the secular are not always in complete antithesis, in a conceptuality which can match fluid, liquid concepts and structures with rigour and precision. So often, striving for a pure religious vision falls into an unreflective framework of deeply secular culture. Post-colonial reflection has re-imagined the practice of hospitality without being patronizing, while learning that the reverse of the colonial is not always sufficient for substantial development. Good theology is continuing conversation rather than imposition. A thick culture of hospitality intensifying may begin to replace confrontation, in a medium where conflict is often endemic. Typical of the rethinking of traditional tensions is Richard Kearney, with his notion of anatheism. 'The sacramental moment of anatheism is when finally the hyphen is restored between the sacred and the secular'.[8]

I make no apology for this long list. Deeply conservative religion is highly vocal, not only in the United States, where it is difficult to imagine the huge influence of such books as the *Left Behind* series, but also in Africa and in Asia. In this context it is important to foster religious inclusion and the varieties of religious inclusion. Inclusion and pluralism may not always be exclusive alternatives. This is a task which will require the efforts of more than the theological professionals alone. It is still unfortunately worth commenting that the progressive is not inevitably the antithesis of the evangelical. The impressive development of evangelical programmes on social justice issues is a reminder of the significant role of this movement. Despite the difficulties real and apparent, it is manifestly odd to be enthusiastic about dialogue with exotic religions while avoiding engagement nearer home.

For Christianity, there is a huge challenge and opportunity for progressive Christian influence through professions other than theology. Liberal Christian lawyers can speak authoritatively about the potential for Christian influence on legal issues. Medical ethics develops a complexity which has resulted from increasingly complex medicine, and is another area, vital to maximizing human capability, where religious input may be important, and where a liberal contribution is crucial. Christian education, seriously developed in the United States, often

remains critically weak in the United Kingdom – faith does not mature simply through osmosis. At the same time, this only underlines the need to foster faith and action through liberal Christian preaching and worship – an increasingly vulnerable gap – the need for liberal theology and spirituality to encourage faith. Progressive spirituality need not be an exercise in reductionism. Faith does not flourish by gathering around the aspidistra to utter vacuous platitudes. Much professional theology is increasingly specialized and opaque to non-specialists. One avenue for such interaction might be the nexus of church, academy and human rights. Such a project, a humanitarian theology persisting with the relevance of an impossible ideal might be one way of taking forward the progressive religious culture into the future.

In the writings of a white Western Christian it is unsurprising that liberal thought should reflect its cultural context. But it should be stressed that the liberal notes of compassion and understanding which faith inspires need not always be expressed in a Western context. In the lives and actions of non-Western Christians there are important lessons to be learned from the absence of Eurocentric and North American preoccupations, not least around the Pacific ocean.[9] But it is not for this writer to presume to speak for progressive Christians who can speak eloquently for themselves. However we envisage the development of liberal theology, it is always essential to find fresh ways of continuing to remain aware, and to draw strength from the sense that the God of compassion and unconditional love is the source and goal of our lives. Human life is, as David Kelsey[10] has strikingly put it, an eccentric existence, centred in God the incarnation of humane spirit, the source of all hospitality and humane action.

This brings me back to the life and work of John Hick at 90. John would be the last person to want liberal Christians to be minor clones of himself. Yet he has been an inspiring, unfailingly generous and modest example to liberal faith for many people of different faiths and of no faith. More we cannot ask: *multos felices annos*.

Notes

1. R.Slenczska, ed., *Die "Murren" des Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen*, Books on Demand GmbH, 2005.
2. C.F.D. Moule, ed., *G.W H.Lampe: A Memoir by Friends*, London: A. R. Mowbray, 1982.
3. R. Amesbury and G. Newlands, *Faith and Human Rights*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008; G. Newlands, *Christ and Human Rights*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006; G. Newlands and A. Smith, *Hospitable God: The Transformative Dream*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010.

4. S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. Harvard University Press, 2010.
5. A. Sen, *The Idea of* Justice, New York: Allen Lane, 2009.
6. J. Milbank, 'Against Human Rights', The Centre of Theology and Philosophy, University of Nottingham, 2009.
7. M. Siddiqui, ed., *Islam* (4 vols*),* London: Sage Publications, 2010; 'Between God's Mercy and God's Law: Human Dignity in Islam' in: *The God of Love and Human Dignity*, ed. P Middleton, London: T&T Clark, 2007, 51 ff.
8. Kearney, R (2009) *Anatheism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
9. C. Pearson, ed., *Faith in a Hyphen-Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*. Parramatta, NSW: UTC Publications, 2004.
10. D. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (2 vols.) Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

12

Mediating Relativism and Absolutism in Tillich's and Hick's Theories of Religious Truth

Mary Ann Stenger

Issues of religious truth are central to the theologies and philosophies of both Paul Tillich and John Hick. Both respond appreciatively to questions from secular theorists while holding a personal, critically informed religious faith. Their work shares the challenges of supporting faith as rational and verifiable in response to philosophical and naturalistic critiques and of how to approach the plurality of religions. One underlying issue in their discussions is how to mediate relativism versus absolutism, with both men positing one absolute and offering criteria for judging among religious truths.

A. Responding to challenges from the secular context and from the plurality of world religions

1 Response to the secular

For Tillich, the challenge of truth in secular culture arises in relationship to philosophy, art, science, politics and psychology. For Hick, the challenge comes from empirically rooted philosophies as well as from theories in the natural and social sciences. Tillich's response stems from his definition of religion as 'directedness toward the Unconditional'[1] – what he later names 'ultimate concern'.[2] Hick's response centres on the ambiguity of a universe that allows both religious and naturalistic ways of understanding, with both approaches being rationally defensible.[3]

In a 1919 lecture, Tillich uses his broad definition of religion to argue against religion as a separate sphere of culture. He sees the possibility of individuals or groups experiencing unconditional meaning that breaks through ordinary forms in any arena of culture. Religion, for Tillich, is 'the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion',[4] and his

theology of culture articulates such experiences of the Unconditional coming through various finite cultural forms. In defining religion in *An Interpretation of Religion*, Hick suggests 'that Paul Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern" ... can serve as a pointer in the right direction'.[5] Hick argues, and Tillich would agree, that lasting importance of something does not make it religious, but 'a sense of profound importance' is part of religious response.[6] Understanding religion as a family-resemblance concept, Hick argues that most religions affirm 'a salvific reality that transcends (whilst also usually being thought of as immanent within) human beings and the world'.[7]

Although Hick focuses mostly on the post-axial world religions, he shares with Tillich in recognizing a secular faith, such as Marxism, as related to more traditionally defined religions. In identifying belief in the transcendent, including both personal and non-personal views, Hick would appear to focus on just one part of faith from Tillich's point of view. In *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich analyses faith as 'an act of the total personality', including belief, psychological dimensions, rational elements, an ecstatic quality, emotional dimensions, an element of risk, an element of freedom, existential certainty, and more.[8] But, as we discuss later, Hick's understanding of experiencing-as in relation to faith includes several of these same aspects.

Both reject reductionist analyses of religion and faith as limited yet see some value in them. Tillich argues against intellectualistic distortions of faith that understand it as 'an act of knowledge that has a low degree of evidence' because such views fail to recognize the broader existential dimension of faith.[9] Similarly, views of faith as primarily an act of the will or as simply a matter of subjective emotions offer partial truth.[10] Hick, on the other hand, sees greater credibility in naturalistic accounts, in spite of their limitations, but argues that such approaches do not refute more appreciative theories of religious experience.[11] Similarly, while recognizing that various arguments for the existence of God do not necessitate belief in God or a transcendent power,[12] he argues that neither do arguments against God compel religious persons to deny faith. For Hick, the universe engenders both religious and non-religious responses.

Accepting the possibility of truth within both religious and secular areas, Tillich and Hick defend the rationality of religious faith, with experience being an important part of that defence. Tillich uses a broad, ontological understanding of reason as 'the meaningful structure of mind and reality' that enables a person to understand and respond to the world. Ontological reason also enables language, freedom, creativity,

ethical responses and actions, and the experience of ultimate concern, in Tillich's view.[13] Through ontological reason, humans are aware of 'potential infinity' that grounds ultimate concern or faith. The experience of ultimate concern includes an ecstatic awareness of that infinity beyond ordinary concerns. For Tillich, faith fulfils the potential in ontological reason rather than destroying reason.[14]

Hick's epistemology focuses on the mind/brain as 'actively interpreting' one's environment, and Hick often describes such interpretation as 'experiencing-as'. He argues that 'all conscious experiencing, including seeing, is experiencing-as'[15] which allows for both accurate interpretations and misinterpretations of the external information that comes before them.[16] Religious experience, then, is experience interpreted as having religious meaning, whether mediated through the material world or experienced as coming more directly from the Real.[17] Another person might have a very similar experience and offer a non-religious interpretation. Faith, for Hick, is a free (uncompelled) interpretative response to a dimension of experience, that is the Real, that grounds moral understanding and invites or challenges a person to 'a radical self-transcendence'.[18]

Both thinkers, then, accept truth in secular theories and cultural expressions. However, whereas Tillich allows for and sometimes accepts the interpretations of some secular approaches as religious, Hick keeps the secular and the religious fairly separate, except for each approach reflecting one side of the ambiguous universe. Experience, interpretation of experience, and freedom in faith are central to both theories. One common effect of their approaches is an openness to a multiplicity of truths, an openness that can also apply to the plurality of religions in the world.

2 Response to the plurality of religions

Both Tillich and Hick have roots in religious contexts that assumed the truth of Christianity as absolute truth, superior to other religious traditions. But encounters with ideas and people of diverse faiths led them to rethink that position.

At times, Tillich affirms the superiority of Christianity, and more specifically Protestantism; his claims rest on his understanding of the Christ and the Cross, as well as his conviction that critique is the ongoing legacy of the Protestant Reformation.[19] At other times, Tillich acknowledges the possibility of truths in the world's religions, rooted in his conviction that the Unconditional can manifest anywhere and that humans can respond religiously to that manifestation.[20] His overall

approach is to ask how Christian theologians should respond to the plurality of religions and what criteria theologians should use in judging religions – all religions, including Christianity. Although not stated directly, Tillich's concern with judgment is an effort to address the relativity of plural religions.

Hick's overall approach to the plurality of religions focuses less on judging them, and instead addresses the question of how to understand that plurality. In Hick's theory all religions centre in the Real. Following Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal dimensions of reality, Hick proposes the distinction between the noumenal Real in itself (*an sich*) and the Real that people experience in their varying religious contexts, in varying forms on the phenomenal level.[21] The Real in itself is presupposed in religious experience, but what people experience is one form or another of the phenomenal Real.

The Real in itself is not knowable in the ways that people know the Real in their religious experiences although, for Hick, the influence of the noumenal Real, with human interpretations, is the source of those experiences. The religious traditions serve as cognitive filters for their participants, offering 'not only concepts and images of God or of the Absolute ... but also systems of doctrine, ritual and myth, art forms, moral codes, lifestyles and patterns of social organization'.[22] This view relativizes all of the ideas and practices of the religions in relationship to the Real in itself. Thus, Tillich's and Hick's approaches affirm the possibility of secular and religious truths as well as truths in multiple faiths, and thereby raise the challenge of relativism.

B. Plurality of truths and the challenge of relativism

Tillich and Hick analyse the philosophical and theological implications of a plurality of religious truths and use their affirmations of an absolute to address the challenge of relativism. Recognizing the need for judging religious truths, both propose methods of verification rooted in experience and offer criteria for judging religious truths.

What prevents Tillich's approach from being pure relativism is his insistence on the Unconditional as the religious principle. Religiously and theologically, one challenge is how to hold that principle not simply abstractly but to allow for its breaking through concrete phenomena in people's experience. But the second challenge is how to prevent people from assigning absoluteness to the concrete phenomena through which they experience the Unconditional.[23] For Tillich, only the

Unconditional can be absolute and no finite phenomena can be. Some criterion of absoluteness is necessary.

Tillich's resolution of this problem centres in paradox, specifically in what he calls the 'absolute paradox' in some early writings and the Protestant Principle in later works. In a 1919 essay, Tillich argues for the absolute paradox that holds together unconditionality with something concrete, with no absoluteness granted to the concrete itself. The absolute paradox is the unity of the Unconditional and the conditioned,[24] the absolute and the finite, as experienced in religious moments, no matter the context of such a moment. This paradoxical structure, holding together Unconditional meaning and a concrete conditioned meaning or phenomenon, characterizes religious experience as well as religious symbols. One finds this throughout Tillich's writings but most notably in his discussion of the symbol of the Cross of Christ[25] or in the experience of the God above the God of theism.[26] The importance of this paradoxical structure for Tillich is not only its value in phenomenological descriptions of religious experiences or religious symbols but in its use as a criterion of religious truth.

In the absolute paradox, neither side loses its specific quality: what is conditioned should not be seen as unconditional or absolute in itself, and the unconditional does not lose its absoluteness in manifesting through something conditioned. Tillich repeats and clarifies this criterion in *Dynamics of Faith* (1957), claiming that the criterion is 'valid with respect to the whole history of religion and culture. The criterion contains a Yes – it does not reject any truth of faith in whatever form it may appear in the history of faith – and it contains a No – it does not accept any truth of faith as ultimate except the one that no man [sic] possesses it'.[27] Basically, this criterion stands over against all idolatry, all cases of finite things or events or persons being taken as absolute in themselves.

This criterion rests on Tillich's understanding of the Unconditional as having no specific content. The Unconditional is not a separate reality but rather a principle or reality of meaning that manifests *through* something finite and conditioned.[28] As soon as concrete content is given to the Unconditional, that content must be seen as finite and subject to doubt. When all specific content has been doubted, there is, for Tillich is yet absoluteness or the Unconditional, experienced as the power of being, as the limit of doubt, and as the source of courage that enables radical doubt, i.e. the God above the God of theism.[29]

For Tillich, the absoluteness of the Unconditional prevents a pure relativism, but all concrete contents and specific affirmations of religious

truth remain finite and relative, subject to the criterion of the absolute paradox. Thus, there is still the question of judging truth within and among the truths of varying religious communities. Judgments of truth involve a process of verification grounded on the experiences of individuals, both personally and in relation to the larger religious community. In theology, Tillich sees theological norms as setting forth specific concrete content that aims toward the universally valid.[30] Such content takes account of past norms, aims for universally valid truth, and makes the truth concrete for the particular cultural situation. How true a particular norm is will be judged by the community for whom the theology is intended, both in terms of whether it holds truth that reflects universal principles of the community and in terms of how well it speaks to the concrete context. How true one finds a particular theological norm depends on experience. Even if a norm is accepted as valid by some, there will be others who find it untrue, sometimes inside the religious community and sometimes from a secular viewpoint. For Tillich, the criterion of the absolute paradox or the critique of idolatry stands over all such judgments. It counters relativism in its claim of the absoluteness of the Unconditional but maintains relativism for all finite, conditioned truths. With those finite truths, experiential verification and judgments of particular communities come into play.

Like Tillich, Hick addressed issues of truth and verification of religious claims throughout his career. While Tillich's focus was theological, guarding the absoluteness of the absolute from idolatry, Hick addressed philosophical critiques arising from more strongly empiricist and logical-analytical approaches, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. In that context, Hick argues that assertions of faith, such as the claim of the existence of God, 'must be experientially verifiable'.[31] He describes the process of verification as 'the ascertaining of truth by the removal of grounds for rational doubt'.[32] Such a process is both psychological and logical, he argues, especially when the content is theological propositions, where human experience is central. Although both Hick and Tillich address doubt as psychological, Hick focuses more on rational verification of religious propositions while Tillich centres on the existential experience of radical doubt.

In Hick's early writings focused on Christian propositions of faith, he argues that the Christian picture of the universe builds in the idea of eschatological verification, where future experience will verify or falsify the Christian understandings of God, the divine purpose for humans, and the future fulfilment of divine purpose.[33] Such eschatological verification depends on the acceptance of some kind of personal life after

death; thus, as Hick recognized, such verification would work for theists who are conscious of God and who have responded freely to God's revelation in this world.[34] In this early work, Hick centres Christian faith in 'the historical figure of Jesus, as known through the New Testament records' and the 'impact' of that Jesus who empowers people to experience life in a new way.[35] Thus, for Hick, experience is central to this verification – not simply waiting until one dies – but for the believer occurring in this life. The present impact of Christ on the Christian believer serves to confirm the Christian teachings. The believer's experience confirms, and verification rests on the Christian's doctrinal assumptions. The believer avoids relativism through the acceptance of the absoluteness of (the Christian) God and through the experience of absoluteness in faith. Later, when Hick analyses truth in relation to the post-axial world religions, the challenge of multiple religious truth claims becomes stronger and raises further questions of verification.

As we have seen, in his writings on religious plurality, Hick shifts to the Real as his term for the absolute and distinguishes between the noumenal Real, the Real in itself, and the phenomenal versions of the Real encountered in the various world religions. Qualities applied to the Real in various religions cannot be applied to the Real in itself. 'None of the concrete descriptions that apply within the realm of human experience can apply literally to the unexperiencable ground of that realm.'[36] In all religions, the Real in itself is presupposed but not knowable directly.

We note the parallel with Tillich's argument that the Unconditional (or the God above the God of theism) has no content. Moreover, just as the Unconditional serves as the ground and the goal of philosophical and religious thought and religious experience for Tillich, so too for Hick the Real in itself grounds religious experiences of varying kinds. Hick further argues that there can be only one ultimate, not a plurality of ultimates.[37] Similarly, Tillich affirms the singularity of the Unconditional as the ground not only of religious experience but of all being and thought.[38]

Hick's approach to the plurality of religious claims provides a basic response to relativism. The one Real in itself is the absolute that grounds multiple religious experiences, with its absoluteness preventing a pure relativism. And yet the phenomenal manifestations of the Real are relative in relation to the Real and leave us with numerous conflicting truth claims.

Hick addresses the issue of verification, with a distinction between direct verification and indirect verification or confirmation. The latter generally occurs through numerous observations, leading to a

cumulative confirmation. Religiously, the believer experiences the universe as confirming the reality of God and ideas associated with that, even while recognizing that the same does not occur for non-believers. As in earlier writings, Hick asserts eschatological verification as workable in those monotheistic traditions accepting life after death, even while recognizing the diversity of forms those traditions put forward.[39] For the non-theistic traditions, Hick argues that eschatological verification works for the Advaita Vedantic tradition in relation to the potential experience of unitary consciousness, for Theravada Buddhism with respect to the experience of enlightenment and for Mahayana Buddhist views of final Nirvana or experience of the Pure Land.[40] Even those following Buddhist meditation for inner peace engage in a form of experiential verification, he argues, even if more this-worldly than the various forms of eschatological verification.

Hick also addresses the challenge of judging among conflicting truth claims arising from the plurality of religious traditions. Aware of the epistemological implications of this, Hick considers differing historical truth claims as well as varying trans-historical truth claims. But finding these claims unresolvable in practice, he suggests living with the conflicts and looking at them in terms of his pluralistic hypothesis. 'My conclusion, then, is that the differences between the root concepts and experiences of the different religions, their different and often conflicting historical and trans-historical beliefs, their incommensurable mythologies, and the diverse and ramifying belief systems into which all these are built, are compatible with the pluralistic hypothesis that the great world traditions constitute different conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the Real from within the different cultural ways of being human.'[41] In the end, only the noumenal Real, without any concrete content, holds absoluteness, and all other religious truths are relative to traditions and to people's experiences within those traditions.

Still, Hick does propose a religious, or what he calls soteriological criterion, namely that religion should create opportunities where 'the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness can take place'.[42] The criteria for whether such transformations have taken place reside in the religious traditions themselves.[43] Calling people who have been so transformed 'saints', Hick suggests that one can use the existence of saints in a tradition as a valid soteriological criterion.[44]

Thus, both Tillich and Hick propose religious criteria centred in the absolute. Tillich's criterion of the absolute paradox that guards against

absolutizing the finite comes across as abstract and applicable either philosophically or theologically. But underlying it is Tillich's concern with people's religious and psychological response to religious experience. He sees people's desire for concrete absolutes, but he also knows the dangers of idolatry. Hick's soteriological criterion focuses on transformation of people, which also holds religious and psychological dimensions. But Hick's criterion is less abstractly stated and relates more directly to changes that might be observed by others. For both thinkers, more specific criteria arise within the various religious traditions.

Through most of Tillich's writings and lectures, the criterion of paradox serves as a principle for critiquing all examples of absolutizing the finite, wherever such absolutization occurs. But because Tillich sees the Cross as the primary example of the Protestant Principle, he, in effect, uses the criterion of the absolute paradox to affirm the truth of the Cross. Both in *Dynamics of Faith* and in *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, Tillich posits Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as an example of sacrifice of finite particularities.[45] Still, Tillich does state the criterion more universally, as when he argues that a religion will last 'to the degree in which it negates itself as a religion'.[46] In his last lecture, he speaks more generally of a 'Religion of the Concrete Spirit', which includes the experience of the Holy within the finite as the universal basis of religion, as well as critiques of 'concrete expressions of the Ultimate' or prophetic critiques that arise in several traditions.[47] He describes the history of world religions 'as a fight for the Religion of the Concrete Spirit, a fight of God against religion within religion'.[48] Tillich argues: 'The universality of a religious statement does not lie in an all-embracing abstraction which would destroy religion as such, but it lies in the depths of every concrete religion. Above all it lies in the openness to spiritual freedom both from one's own foundation and for one's own foundation'.[49] One cannot help but note the similarities to Hick in the emphasis on spiritual freedom, the idea of the Holy (or the Real) in the depths of diverse religions, the centrality of experience of that Holy, openness to seeing the possibility of that Holy in many religions, and yet also, critical commitment to one's own tradition.

Both thinkers also assert ethical criteria – justice for Tillich, and the Golden Rule for Hick. Tillich understands justice as central in religion, society, and politics, as evidenced in his religious socialist writings in his German period as well as in his later American writings on ethics. He grounds his idea of justice on his belief that the power of being is present in every person and his view that every person makes a claim on others to treat the person as a person, not as a thing.[50] Tillich connects

justice to the critique of idolatry: 'Justice is the criterion which judges idolatrous holiness.'[51] Tillich's examples range from the Hebrew prophets' critique of demonic forms of holiness to the Protestant Reformers to modern revolutionary movements against injustice.

Hick's soteriological criterion of transformation away from the ego-self includes a moral dimension that Hick connects to the Golden Rule, 'that it is good to benefit others and evil to harm them'.[52] Hick argues that the major world religions contain such a criterion but also have examples in their history of ideas and actions that have violated it. Thus he calls on believers to engage in moral critiques within their own traditions.[53]

While both Tillich and Hick engaged in critique of their own traditions, neither offered much response to liberationist theologies. But their openness to multiple religious truths directed toward the Holy or the Real can apply to various liberation theologies as well as to truths in various religions. Moreover, their criteria for judging religions – Tillich's critique of idolatry and Hick's soteriological criterion – can be used in critiques of theologies that relegated to secondary status the religious experiences of women, blacks, poor people, and other disenfranchised groups.

While both proposals for an ethical criterion could allow feminist and other liberationist applications, neither fully addresses the issues of power and privilege that arise in the world. The effects of power structures that privilege some and leave out others show up in the interactions of people from diverse religions and cultures, in gender relations around the world in every religion, in encounters across social classes, and in educational differences and political approaches. Applications of Tillich's and Hick's criteria to such inequalities would take us beyond the scope of this essay, but the need for such application points to present and future challenges for theories of religious truth.

In summary, although offering different arguments, Tillich and Hick agree on the rationality of religious truth along with secular truths, the ambiguity of knowledge and faith, the importance of experience to religious affirmations, the possibility of multiple religious truths in the midst of religious plurality, the centrality of one absolute without concrete content in the midst of relativity, and the need for criteria of religious truths. That their absolutes do not have concrete content gives them an abstract quality; yet, each thinker posits a dynamic dimension to the absolute that enables a breakthrough into the finite or an experience of influence in the phenomenal world. Such breakthrough or influence accounts for religious experiences and the development of religious traditions, but in the finite, phenomenal, ambiguous world, relativity of these multiple

traditions and claims to truth remains. Tillich's absolute paradox used in the critique of idolatry and Hick's criterion of transformation away from ego toward the Real offer some basis for judging among religious truths, and their ethical criteria of justice and the Golden Rule offer a further basis for judgment. We note that the proposals of neither man would satisfy fundamentalists, who would find the resulting relativism among traditions quite disturbing. And on the more liberal side, liberationist approaches can argue for attention to power differentials. But many of us find ourselves indebted to both Tillich and Hick for opening theology and philosophy of religion to take account of truths from secular contexts and from the diverse world religions and for offering criteria that help us mediate relativism and absolutism.

Notes

1. P. Tillich (1969) 'On the Idea of a Theology of Culture' (1919) in J. L. Adams (ed., trans.) *What Is Religion?* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row), p. 162.
2. P. Tillich (1951) *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), p. 10.
3. J. Hick (1989) *An Interpretation of Religion; Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), pp. 73–74.
4. Paul Tillich (1959) 'Aspects of a Religious Analysis of Culture' (1956) in R. C. Kimball (ed.) *Theology of Culture* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press), p. 42.
5. Hick (1989), p. 4.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 6.
8. P. Tillich (1957) *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.), p. 4.
9. Ibid., pp. 30–34.
10. Ibid., pp. 35–40.
11. Hick (1989), p. 1.
12. Ibid., chs. 5 and 6.
13. Tillich (1957), pp. 75–76.
14. Ibid., pp. 76–77.
15. Hick (1989), p. 140.
16. Ibid., p. 153.
17. Ibid., p. 154.
18. Ibid., pp. 160–161.
19. Tillich (1957), p. 98; and P. Tillich (1963) *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York and London: Columbia University Press), pp. 47–51.
20. Tillich (1963), pp. 4, 97 and P. Tillich (1966) 'The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian" in: J. C. Brauer (ed.) *The Future of Religions* (New York: Harper & Row, Publ.), p. 81.

21. Hick (1989), p. 243.
22. Ibid., p. 163.
23. Tillich (1969), p. 177.
24. P. Tillich, 'Justification and Doubt', (1919), in an English translation by Robert P. Scharlemann (Tillich Archive at Harvard Divinity School), p. 5. in German: P. Tillich (1999) 'Rechtfertigung und Zweifel', in E. Sturm (ed.), *Religion, Kultur, Gesellschaft: Unveröffentlichte Texte aus der Deutschen Zeit (1908–1933), Ergänzungs- und Nachlassbände zu den Gesammelten Werken von Paul Tillich*, vol. 10 (Berlin & New York: De Gruyter Evangelisches Verlagswerk), pp. 127–230.
25. Tillich (1957), p. 97.
26. P. Tillich (1952) *The Courage To Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), pp. 187, 190.
27. Tillich (1957), p. 98.
28. Tillich (1969), pp. 162–163.
29. Tillich (1952), p. 190.
30. Tillich (1969), p. 156. See also P. Tillich, 'The Philosophy of Religion' in (1969) *What Is Religion?*, p.46; 'Justification and Doubt', p. 4.
31. J. Hick (1966) *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd edition, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), p. 169.
32. Ibid., p. 170.
33. Ibid., pp. 176–177.
34. Ibid., pp. 179, 192.
35. Ibid., p. 199.
36. Hick (1989), p. 246.
37. Ibid., p. 249.
38. For Tillich, the one Unconditional or ultimate is what grounds both philosophy and theology. See P. Tillich (1955) *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), pp. 81–85.
39. Hick (1989), pp. 178–180.
40. Ibid., pp. 181–186.
41. Ibid., pp. 375–376.
42. Ibid., p. 300.
43. Ibid., pp. 300–301.
44. Ibid., p. 307.
45. Tillich (1957), p. 97 and (1963), p. 81.
46. Tillich (1963), p. 81.
47. Tillich (1966), pp. 86–87.
48. Ibid., p. 88.
49. Ibid., p. 94.
50. P. Tillich (1954) *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 63–64; and P. Tillich (1971) 'Basic Principles of Religious Socialism' (1923) in J. L. Adams (ed.) *Political Expectation* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers), p. 82.
51. Tillich (1951), p. 216.
52. Hick (1989), p. 313.
53. Ibid., p. 340.

13
John Hick's Pan(en)theistic Monism

Yujin Nagasawa

1 Introduction

John Hick endorses dualism as a response to the mind-body problem. He maintains that reality consists of two ontologically distinct types of entities – the mental and the physical – and that they interact with each other. Yet his religious pluralism entails monism because it claims that there is a single transcategorial ultimate reality that is variously experienced and construed in the world's religions. He also contends that he realized through his religious experience that he is part of, as monism says, a single indivisible whole. The aim of this chapter is to reconcile this apparent tension between the dualistic and monistic elements in Hick's metaphysical system by proposing a unique form of pantheistic or panentheistic monism.

This chapter has the following structure. In the following section, 'Hick's dualism', I discuss Hick's dualism in response to the mind-body problem. In the section 'Hick's monism', I discuss Hick's monism in response to the diversity of religion and his religious experience. In the next section, 'Reconciling monism and dualism', I discuss various possible attempts to reconcile the dualistic and monistic elements in Hick's metaphysical system. In the Conclusion, 'Hick's pan(en)theism', I introduce a form of pantheism or panentheism that is entailed by the successful attempt.

2 Hick's dualism

The mind-body problem is a perennial puzzle concerning the relationship between the mental and the physical. How can you raise your hand by thinking that you raise your hand, given that raising a hand is

a physical event while thinking about raising a hand is a mental event? How can you experience a colourful sensation when a certain neural activity takes place in a specific region of your brain, given that experiencing a colourful sensation is a mental event while the neural activity is a physical event? The mind-body problem is especially forceful when it is formulated in terms of consciousness rather than mental events in general. This is because it seems impossible to provide a complete, fully satisfactory physical explanation of conscious experiences in particular. Conscious experiences – such as a specific feeling that you have when you experience, say, a throbbing toothache or a specific feeling that you have when you taste, say, jellyfish – do seem fundamentally different from physical events and, in particular, from neural activities in the brain.

Physicalists, including identity theorists, insist that, despite its initial appearance of non-physicality, what we call the mental *is* ultimately physical and that this world is therefore ontologically uniform. Dualists, on the other hand, affirm the non-physicality of what we call the mental and hold that this world ultimately consists of both the mental and the physical. Hick rejects physicalism and endorses dualism:

> The alternative possibility, then, to consciousness/brain identity, and also to consciousness as a passive reflection of brain activity with no capacity to initiate thought or action, is that consciousness, plus the unconscious mind, exists as a non-physical reality in continual interaction with the brain.[1]

Hick emphasizes, however, that his dualism is distinct from Cartesian dualism:

> Is this a return to Cartesian dualism? Not Cartesian, for Descartes held that mind and matter interact in the brain's pineal gland – because all the other organs of the brain occur in duplicate in its two hemispheres, but there is only one pineal gland. He also held that animals have no minds, because for him the mind was the immortal soul and animals cannot be allowed immortality. So what I am proposing is a non-Cartesian dualism.[2]

Hick is right in saying that his view is not strictly Cartesian because he rejects Descartes's claims about the pineal glad and animal mind. Nevertheless, his view is Cartesian in a broader sense because it holds

Descartes's core thesis that the mind and the body are ontologically distinct entities that causally interact with each other. Hick continues:

> This requires the reality of consciousness and brain, and also their interactions. But how can mind/brain interaction occur? How can the physical affect the mental, and vice versa? If we have abandoned mind/brain identity we are already committed to there being such interaction, at least in one direction. How does this happen? We can only say that it happens in accordance with natural law. Normally, by the 'laws of nature' we mean the laws of the material universe. But if it is the case that the total universe includes mind as well as matter, and if these interact, at least in the human brain, then the laws of nature must include the laws or regularities in accordance with which they interact.[3]

Hick's dualism faces the following objection, which is a classical objection to any form of interactionist dualism: it seems impossible for the mental and the physical to have causal interaction given the dualist assumption that they are ontologically distinct; such an interaction would be a violation of the causal closure of the physical.[4]

In the above passage Hick suggests that the interaction between the mental and the physical is regulated by the laws of nature, rather than, for instance, the control of a supernatural agent, which parallelists and occasionalists typically postulate. Hick is silent, however, about exactly how any natural law can allow two ontologically distinct types of entities to interact causally with each other. Physicalism does not face this problem because it holds that everything in this world, including consciousness, is ultimately physical. If everything is ultimately physical, there is no violation of the causal closure of the physical. I do not intend to evaluate Hick's dualism itself in this paper, but I will eventually come back to the problem of causal interaction between the mental and the physical.

We have seen in this section that Hick endorses an interactionist form of dualism in response to the mind-body problem. In the next section, however, I show that his religious pluralism as well as an implication of his religious experience entail monism, which appears to conflict with his mind-body dualism.

3 Hick's monism

Hick is well known for his defence of religious pluralism, according to which all the world's religions are valid responses to transcendental

reality. According to him, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and so on, are all equally sound approaches to ultimate reality.

Religious pluralism contrasts with religious exclusivism and religious inclusivism. Religious pluralism diametrically opposes religious exclusivism, which says that only one religion is the true approach to transcendental reality. So, for example, religious pluralism opposes a version of Christian exclusivism, according to which only Christianity offers the path to salvation. Religious pluralism is more sympathetic to religious inclusivism, according to which while a specific religion is superior to others, other religions also offer a path to ultimate reality. However, religious pluralism disagrees with religious inclusivism about the superiority of one religion over others. Thus, for example, religious pluralism rejects the version of Christian inclusivism that says that while other religions might offer a path to salvation, Christianity offers the most direct path.

Hick analogizes religious pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism with cosmological models. For a long time scientists had accepted the geocentric model (the Ptolemaic model) of the universe. According to this model, the earth is the centre of the universe and the sun and other stars revolve around it. This view corresponds to religious exclusivism, which advocates the exclusive authority of a specific religion and religious inclusivism, which advocates the superiority of a specific religion. Cosmologists abandoned the geocentric model because the heliocentric model is more consistent with observations of the movements of the planets and stars. According to the heliocentric model, the Earth is not the centre of the universe; it is only one of many planets that orbit around the Sun. Similarly, Hick maintains that we should abandon religious exclusivism and religious inclusivism. With these analogies in mind, Hick calls the shift to religious pluralism the 'Copernican revolution in theology'.[5] If we analogize the Sun as the ultimate, transcendental reality, then each planet corresponds to a world religion. Religious inclusivism corresponds to the idea that a certain planet receives the strongest heat from the Sun because it is closer to the Sun than other planets are. That is, it says that a certain religion is more valid than others are because it offers a more direct path to transcendental reality. Religious pluralism says that all religions are equally valid, so it corresponds to an imaginary situation in which all planets remain at an equal distance from the Sun and receive an equal amount of heat.

In defending religious pluralism, Hick needs to explain why distinct religions often make conflicting claims even though there is only a single transcendental reality. For example, some religions hold

monotheism, saying that there is only one god, while other religions hold polytheism, saying that there are multiple gods. Yet others postulate no god at all. In order to explain this fact Hick offers an epistemological foundation of religious pluralism. This foundation relies on two notions: 'the transcategorial Real' and the Kantian distinction between the noumenon and the phenomenon.

Hick formulates his religious pluralism in terms of 'the transcategorial Real', or 'the Real' for short, which is, as opposed to 'God', religiously neutral. The Real is also sometimes referred to as 'the Ultimate', 'Ultimate Reality' or 'the One'.[6] While he acknowledges the diversity of the world's religions, Hick construes all of them as human responses to the Real, which is 'the postulated ground of the different forms of religious experience'.[7] Hick distinguishes 'the Real in itself' and 'the Real as humanly experienced (or manifested within the intellectual and experiential purview of a certain tradition). He says that the Real in itself is transcategorial or ineffable. That is, our limited human language and thought cannot grasp its true nature. In order to underpin his distinction between the Real in itself and the Real as humanly experienced he appeals to a more general epistemological distinction introduced by Immanuel Kant.[8] Kant distinguishes the noumenon and the phenomenon. A noumenon is a thing in itself, whereas a phenomenon is a thing as it appears in perception. According to Kant, the world *an sich*, unperceived by anyone, is distinct from the world as it is perceived by us.[9] Hick applies this idea to defend his religious pluralism. The Real is neither a person nor a thing but people from divergent religious or culture traditions perceive it differently – sometimes as a person, sometimes as a non-personal entity. That is why there is religious diversity even though there is only a single transcendental reality, the Real. Hence, although Hick is a pluralist about religion, he is a monist about ultimate reality.

Hick's sympathy for monism is even more manifest in his description of his own religious experience. Hick has practiced a meditation method that he learned from the Buddhist monk Nyanaponika in Sri Lanka. As a result Hick had a religious experience, which he describes as follows:

> I had been doing this [meditation], sitting at my desk after breakfast. When I opened my eyes everything was different, in two ways. Instead of there being me here and the surrounding would there, apart from me – shelves of books in the room and trees and sky outside seen through the window – *I was part of a single indivisible whole*. And the totality of which I was part, not just what I could see, was

> such that there couldn't possibly be anything to be afraid of or to be anxious about. It was extraordinarily joyous, liberating and uplifting and such that I can only use hackneyed words like wonderful, marvellous, sublime, even though for me it only lasted a very short time, perhaps less than a minute – it is hard to say. I think myself that the awareness of the 'friendliness' of the universe was the most important aspect of it. (emphasis added)[10]

So Hick's religious experience has taught him two things. The first is that he, and presumably everything else, is part of a single indivisible whole. The second is that there is nothing to be afraid of. Since our interest is in Hick's ontological view, the first is more relevant to us here. Hick is not explicit in the foregoing passage, but the single indivisible whole that he realized through his religious experience corresponds to the transcategorial Real.[11]

Let us recap Hick's three main claims:

1. The mental and the physical are two ontologically distinct entities that interact with each other (mind-body dualism).
2. There is a single transcategorial Real that is variously experienced depending on religious tradition (the notion of the Real according to religious pluralism).
3. Everything is part of a single *indivisible* whole (the monism revealed in Hick's religious experience).

This seems to show that there is a tension in Hick's metaphysical system. On the one hand, as (1) says, he thinks that the world consists of two ontologically distinct types of entities – the mental and the physical – but, on the other hand, as (2) and (3) imply, he thinks that the transcategorial Real is a single indivisible entity. In what follows, I propose a solution to this apparent tension between dualism and monism in Hick's system.

4 Reconciling monism and dualism

When we attempt to determine the nature of reality we need to specify how many entities and what types of entities exist. Consider first the following two views:

> Token monism: There is only one entity.
> Token pluralism: There is more than one entity.

Very few philosophers endorse token monism.[12] It seems highly counterintuitive to think that there is only one entity when we see uncountably many entities around us, such as tables, chairs, clouds, and so on. Physicalism and dualism agree with the majority that token pluralism is true. They affirm that there indeed are many entities in this world. Physicalism and dualism disagree with each other, however, as to how many *types* of entities there are in the actual world. Consider the following two views:

Type monism: There is only one type of entity.
Type pluralism: There is more than one type of entity.

Physicalism accepts type monism, saying that there is (ultimately) only one type – the physical type – of entities. It claims that despite the apparent diversity of reality everything in this world, including even consciousness, is ultimately of the physical type. Dualism, on the other hand, accepts type pluralism, saying that there are exactly two types – the physical type and the mental type – of entities. It claims that the apparent diversity of reality is veridical and that there are entities of the mental type as well as the physical type. As we have seen, Hick endorses dualism in response to the mind-body problem, which means that he endorses token pluralism and type pluralism. Yet it seems that Hick endorses token *monism* in response to the diversity of religion and through his religious experience. He says, again, that the transcategorial Real is a single ultimate reality and that we are all part of that *single indivisible* whole. At least initially, this appears to entail token monism, according to which there is only one entity. Token monism and token pluralism are, of course, inconsistent because while token monism says that there is only one entity token pluralism says that there is more than one entity.

What we have seen so far is the following: On the one hand, in response to the mind-body problem, Hick endorses both token pluralism and type pluralism. On the other hand, however, through religious pluralism and religious experience, he seems to endorse token monism. How can we resolve this apparent conflict between pluralism and monism in Hick's position? In what follows I discuss three possible solutions to this problem. I argue that the failures of the first two solutions lead us to the successful third solution, which entails a unique pantheistic or panentheistic form of monism.

Solution 1

As we have seen, Hick seems to endorse the following set of three views:

> In response to the mind-body problem:
>
> Token pluralism: There is more than one entity.
> Type pluralism: There is more than one type of entity.
>
> In response to religious diversity and religious experience:
>
> Token monism: There is only one entity.

Again, this is problematic because token monism is mutually inconsistent with token pluralism. The first way of resolving this inconsistency is to replace token monism with what I call the 'unity thesis', and hold the following set of theses instead:

> In response to the mind-body problem:
>
> Token pluralism: There is more than one entity
> Type pluralism: There is more than one type of entity.
>
> In response to religious diversity and religious experience:
>
> *The unity thesis: There is a single unity of all entities.*

According to this set, there are many entities, some of which are mental and some of which are physical. However, together they constitute a single unity. In this way Hick can defend mind-body dualism while maintaining that we are all part of the single whole. The whole contains multiple entities of the physical type and the mental type. We can illustrate this view with an analogy. Arguably, a person is a unity of mental and physical entities, the sum of various mental states and bodily parts. Similarly, the whole can be construed as a unity of mental and physical entities. In this way we can keep the unity of the whole while admitting the plurality of tokens and types.

The appeal to the unity thesis is, however, not compelling for several reasons. First, it does not capture Hick's claim that we are all part of the single *indivisible* whole. The unity of mental and physical entities cannot be construed as an indivisible whole because mental entities and physical entities are ontologically distinct. Second, it is unclear how mental and physical entities can be unified. The unity is not a mere collection of entities. There has to be a mechanism to bond mental entities and physical entities. It is

difficult to expect such a mechanism because there is no ontological continuity between the mental and the physical. Physicalists can maintain that a person is a unity consisting of mental states and physical parts. That is because they hold that ultimately everything, including what we regard as mental, is physical. If everything is physical, then there is no ontological gap within the unity to be filled. However, if Hick holds dualism, which consists of token pluralism and type pluralism, there seems to be no way to bind mental entities and physical entities into a single unity.

Solution 2

The second solution to the apparent inconsistency in Hick's metaphysical system appeals to the following distinction:

> Token *fundamental* monism: There is only one *fundamental* entity.
> Token *fundamental* pluralism: There is more than one *fundamental* entity.

Unlike token monism and token pluralism, token fundamental monism and token fundamental pluralism count, not the number of entities in the world, but the number of *fundamental* entities in the world. Token fundamental monism says that there is *ultimately* one fundamental entity, and token fundamental pluralism says that there is *ultimately* more than one fundamental entity. Token fundamental monism normally says that the whole is the single fundamental entity. Jonathan Schaffer calls this view 'priority monism'.[13] There are many entities in this world, such as tables, chairs and clouds, but they are all part of the fundamental whole, which is ontologically prior.

Token monism is initially counterintuitive because a whole is not normally regarded as being ontologically prior to its parts. For example, grains of sand (parts) are usually regarded as ontologically prior to a heap (the whole). Similarly, tiles in a mosaic (parts) are regarded as being ontologically prior to the mosaic (the whole). Schaffer points out, however, that there are other cases in which a whole is regarded as being ontologically prior to its parts.[14] For instance, we think that a circle is ontologically prior to semicircles of the circle or that a body is ontologically prior to organs of the body. This is because, according to Schaffer, our common sense distinguishes between *mere heaps* and *genuine unities*. A heap of grains of sand and a mosaic are mere heaps, but a circle and a body are, according to Schaffer, genuine unities. Similarly, we can regard the whole reality as being ontologically prior to its constituents.

Hick's ideas that the transcategorial Real is a single *ultimate* reality and that we are all parts of a single indivisible whole seem compatible with token fundamental monism. We can construe Hick's claim that everything, including himself, is part of a single *indivisible* whole in the sense that the whole is ontologically prior to its parts. Thus, Hick can hold token fundamental monism, instead of token monism, to preserve his monism while accepting token pluralism and type pluralism to preserve his mind-body dualism:

> In response to the mind-body problem:
>
> Token pluralism: There is more than one entity.
> Type pluralism: There is more than one type of entity.
>
> In response to religious diversity and religious experience:
>
> *Token fundamental monism: There is only one fundamental entity.*

This set has an apparent advantage over the previous one insofar as it eliminates the conflict between token monism and token pluralism. Hick can maintain consistently that while there are many (non-fundamental) entities there is only one fundamental entity, namely, the whole. This solution, however, is still unsuccessful because token fundamental monism and type pluralism are mutually inconsistent. If there is only one fundamental entity, then there has to be only one type, namely the type of which the fundamental entity is the only instance. If, however, there is only one type of entity, then type pluralism is false. (Notice that when we talk about type here we mean *ultimate* type. So, for example, physicalism claims that the ultimate type of everything is physical despite the appearance of two existing types – the mental type and the physical type.) This observation leads us to the third solution, which I believe is successful.

Solution 3

As we have seen, if token fundamental monism is true, then there can be only one type. This means that if Hick defends token fundamental monism he has to endorse type monism, instead of type pluralism. That is, he has to accept the following set of three views:

> In response to the mind-body problem:
>
> Token pluralism: There is more than one entity.
> *Type monism: There is only one type of entity.*

In response to religious diversity and religious experience:

Token fundamental monism: There is only one fundamental entity.

This set *is* consistent. There is more than one entity but everything is of one type. And there is ultimately one fundamental entity, the whole, which is ontologically prior to everything else. The whole is of that one type as well.

The above set, however, does not seem to capture Hick's view fully because it appears to fail to accommodate his mind-body dualism. Hick claims that there are two distinct types of entities, the physical type and the mental type, but type monism says that there is only one type. How can we resolve this problem?

I submit that Hick can accept the above set without giving up his dualistic stance. In order to do that, he can reuse the Kantian distinction between the noumenon and the phenomenon, to which he appeals when he defends religious pluralism. Recall that Hick uses this distinction to defend the idea that although there is a *single* Real, there are *multiple* religions with differing interpretations of the Real. This allows him to be a monist about the Real while being a pluralist about religion. We can adopt similar reasoning to preserve both the monistic and the dualistic – that is, pluralistic – elements of Hick's metaphysical system.

It *appears* to us that reality consists of two types of entities, the mental type and the physical type. The mental type, which is revealed in our conscious experience, appears ontologically distinct from the physical type, which is captured by physical sciences. However, this does not immediately entail that there actually are two ontologically distinct types of entities. By appealing to the Kantian distinction, we can say that the apparent duality is a reflection of our two contrasting ways of perceiving the same reality. Just as the Real perceived by Christianity differs from the Real perceived by Buddhism, reality perceived through conscious experience differs from reality construed by physical sciences. In this way we can maintain the spirit of mind-body dualism without endorsing it as a fundamental metaphysical principle. We can hold type pluralism, type monism and token fundamental monism by saying that though there are many entities, which appear to us to be of either the mental type or the physical type, there is only one fundamental whole of one type. The apparent duality of reality arises from our limitations in perceiving or construing the whole in itself. That is, the duality of reality is epistemic rather than ontological. In this way Hick can defend his monistic view about the whole without giving up his dualistic stance towards the mind-body problem. Neither conscious

experience nor physical sciences can exhaust reality in itself; each of them represents a limited way of perceiving it.

This view also preserves Hick's rejection of physicalism. The view says that physicalism, at least as typically formulated, is false because it is not the case that the whole is entirely physical. Physical sciences cannot capture the whole in itself any more than our conscious experience can. It is appropriate to call this view 'non-physicalist monism'. Non-physicalist monism agrees with dualism that physicalism is false. However, it disagrees with dualism that there are two ontologically distinct types of entity in the world. Non-physicalist monism also agrees with physicalism that there is one type of entity in the world. However, it disagrees with physicalism that the type in question is physical. According to non-physicalist monism, although the world consists ultimately of one type of entity, that type is neither physical nor mental in itself.

One notable advantage of non-physicalist monism over dualism is that it does not face the problem of mind-body interaction. As noted earlier, Hick fails to explain the causal interaction between the mental and the physical. Hick claims that the interaction must be regulated by the laws of nature but he is unable to explain exactly how the interaction can occur when the mental and the physical are ontologically distinct. Non-physicalist monism does not face this problem precisely because it does not admit the ontological distinction between the mental and the physical.

5 Conclusion: Hick's pan(en)theism

We have reached non-physicalist monism, which consists of the following four views:

Token pluralism: There is more than one entity
Type monism: There is only one type of entity.
Token fundamental monism: There is only one fundamental entity.
The epistemic plurality of reality: The mental and the physical are reflections of two distinct ways of perceiving reality.

As I have argued, non-physicalist monism captures Hick's monistic ontology, which he has developed in response to religious diversity and which he has realized through his religious experience. It also captures his dualistic and anti-physicalist stance with respect to the mind-body problem.

According to non-physicalist monism, though there is more than one entity, ultimately there is only one fundamental entity, the whole. In this sense, we can say that everything is ultimately part of an indivisible fundamental whole. Since there is only one ultimate entity, there is only one ultimate type as well. Non-physicalist monism is sympathetic to the dualistic intuition that our conscious experience and physical sciences appear to reveal that reality consists of two distinct types of entities. It denies, however, that there indeed are two ontologically distinct types; it says that the appearance of two distinct types reflects only our two contrasting ways of perceiving or describing the same reality in itself.

I believe that non-physicalist monism is an attractive view. As a form of monism, it avoids the most contentious claim that dualism makes: The mental and the physical can interact with each other even though they are ontologically distinct. As a form of non-physicalism, it avoids the most contentious claim that physicalism makes: Even consciousness is ultimately physical.

Interestingly enough, non-physicalist monism seems to entail a non-classical form of theism. Recall Hick's claim about his religious experience. He says that the experience taught him that he (and everything else) is 'part of a single indivisible whole' and made him aware of 'the "friendliness" of the universe'.[15] If we incorporate these thoughts and the notion of the Real into non-physicalist monism we obtain either pantheism or panentheism. Pantheism identifies the universe with God (or the Real or the whole in our context), while panentheism regards it as a constituent of God (or of the Real or of the whole). Thus whether non-physicalist monism entails pantheism or panentheism depends on whether we regard the universe as the Real (the whole) itself or as only a proper part of the Real (the whole). It would be interesting to determine which view Hick's metaphysical system entails and which view is more cogent, but I leave that task for another occasion.[16]

Notes

1. J. Hick (2006) *The New Frontier of Religion and Science: Religious Experience, Neuroscience and the Transcendent* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 111.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. The causal closure of the physical is the thesis that no physical event has a cause outside the physical domain – this is sometimes regarded as one of the most fundamental metaphysical principles.
5. J. Hick (1973), *God and the Universe of Faiths,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), p. 120.

6. J. Hick (2004, originally 1989), *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 236.
7. Ibid.
8. I. Kant (1958, originally 1781), *Critique of Pure Reason*, (trans.) N. K. Smith (London: Macmillan).
9. It should be noted that to defend his religious pluralism, Hick does not necessarily need to endorse the entirety of Kant's epistemology. In fact, Hick himself remarks that he can defend the same view by referring instead to, for example, the claim by Thomas Aquinas that '[t]hings known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower' (Ibid. p. 241).
10. J. Hick (2010) *Between Faith and Doubt: Dialogues on Religion and Reason* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 49.
11. Through personal communication, Hick has confirmed that he regards his religious experience to be compatible with his metaphysical views.
12. See T. Horgan and M. Potrč (2000) 'Blobjectivism and Indirect Correspondence', *Facta Philosophica*, 2, 249–70.
13. J. Schaffer (2007) 'Monism', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/monism/.
14. Ibid.
15. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
16. I presented this paper at three events in 2011: a symposium in honour of John Hick at the University of Birmingham, the 'Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century' conference in Krakow, and a conference of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. I would like to thank all in the audience. I would also like to thank Philip Goff and John Hick for helpful comments. This paper was written as part of my research project with Andrei Buckareff, 'Exploring Alternative Concepts of God', funded by the John Templeton Foundation. I am grateful to the Foundation for its generous support.

14
Faith, Evidence, and Evidentialism

Stephen T. Davis

I

Religious believers are often criticized on the grounds that their beliefs are not based on evidence or are based on insufficient evidence. I want to try to see whether that is a fair criticism. Following Alvin Plantinga,[1] we can call it 'the evidentialist objection' to religious belief.[2]

Among most human beings, the convention is that we believe what people tell us unless there is some reason not to. But sometimes we are suspicious; we wonder whether the claim in question is true, whether we should believe it. Let's call any such suspicious circumstance an 'evidence-situation.' A wide variety of evidence-situations occur. They often arise when the truth of some claim or assertion is challenged or when arguments or evidence for or against it are raised. But our behaviour in evidence-situations is usually guided by a principle that I call 'Russell's Principle' (in honour of Bertrand Russell, whose words they are):

> Give to any hypothesis that is worth your while to consider just that degree of credence that the evidence warrants.[3]

Russell's Principle seems to be an almost universally accepted criterion of rationality. That is, those who base their belief on evidence – both which propositions they believe and which they do not believe and the *degree* of their belief or lack of belief – are considered rational people. Those who do not are considered irrational. Accordingly, it looks as if Russell's Principle is a guide for cognitive attitudes and behaviours in evidence situations.

There exists a corollary of Russell's Principle, one that is much more commonly cited. It is from W. K. Clifford, a nineteenth-century philosopher and mathematician:

> It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.[4]

Clifford hardly mentioned religion in his essay, but it is perfectly clear that he was offering a version of the evidentialist objection to religious belief.

There seem to be five main categories of evidence-situations. Any proposition *p* whose truth is challenged or wondered about will fit into one of these five categories (or into one of the numerous sub-categories between 1 and 5 that surely exist):

1. There is sufficient evidence for *p* (that is, the evidence for *p* is as adequate or convincing as it can or need be).
2. There is some evidence for *p*, but not sufficient evidence for *p* (that is, the evidence that *p* outweighs the evidence that not-*p*, but not decisively).
3. Either there is no evidence available that is relevant to the truth or falsity of *p* or else the evidence for *p* is neither stronger nor weaker than the evidence for not-*p*.
4. There is some evidence for not-*p*, but not sufficient evidence for not-*p* (that is, the evidence for not-*p* outweighs the evidence for *p*, but not decisively).
5. There is sufficient evidence for not-*p* (that is, the evidence for not-*p* is as adequate or convincing as it can or need be).

It seems that Russell's Principle dictates roughly the following cognitive attitudes towards *p*: in case (1) a firm commitment to the truth of *p* (i.e. belief in *p*); in case (5) a firm commitment to the truth of not-*p* (i.e. belief in not-*p*); in case (2) a tentative commitment to the truth of *p* (e.g. weak belief in *p*); in case (4) a tentative commitment to the truth of not-*p* (e.g. weak belief in not-*p*); and in case (3) a refusal to commit oneself at all (i.e. suspension of judgment on the truth of *p*).

There appear to be two main types of evidentialist objectors to religious belief. The first group consists of those who hold that the available scientific and philosophical evidence decisively refutes belief in God. They hold that belief in God fits in evidence-situation 5; accordingly, they say that those who believe in God do so *against* the evidence.[5]

The second group consists of those who hold that the evidence for and against God is ambiguous. Belief in God fits in evidence situation 3; accordingly, they say that those who believe in God believe *more than* the evidence allows. The common ground is that both sorts of evidentialist critics claim that religious believers do not base their beliefs on evidence, as rational people must do; religious belief, in either case, is irrational.

There are some religious believers who accept the point that the evidence for and against God is ambiguous but go on to argue that belief in God can be warranted anyway. John Hick, for example, has argued that the available evidence is permissive of both religion and irreligion. Virtually anything that we observe in the world and virtually any event that occurs can be interpreted either religiously or irreligiously.[6] This is an important part of what Hick means by his claim that human beings are created at an 'epistemic distance' from God. For example, if a piece of good fortune comes one's way, the religious person can take it as a gift of God's grace and the irreligious person will take it as good luck; if a tragedy strikes, the religious person can say, for example, 'God is testing me' and the irreligious person will attribute the event to natural causes. Let's call Hick's claim 'the religious parity thesis'.

Naturally, I can hardly hope to prove anything as broad and all-encompassing as the thesis that religious believers and naturalists are in a position of rough epistemological parity. But I agree with Hick that the religious party thesis is true. So I will now suggest three other considerations that, at least to some degree, favour it.

The first consideration is the obvious empirical fact that there are intelligent people on both sides of the debate. A brief glance at the literature in the philosophy of religion in the past 30 or so years reveals that there are apparently quite rational people who believe in God (theists), as well as apparently quite rational people who either deny that God exists (atheists) or else suspend judgment (agnostics). People from both the religious group (theists) and the irreligious group (atheists and agnostics) seem to be able to defend themselves intellectually.[7] This point is not probative of the religious parity thesis, of course – we don't decide philosophical issues by lining up votes – but it is interesting nonetheless.

Second, there is the almost universally accepted fact that there exists no coercive proof or overwhelming public evidence in favour of or against any of the three positions just noted. In the history of philosophy, as we all know, there have been many attempts to prove the existence of God, as well as a few attempts to prove the non-existence of

God. But no such argument has commanded universal or even near universal consent.[8]

Third, there is the fact that both religious believers and non-believers can offer interesting explanations of the strange behaviour of people in the other group. Religious folks can suggest that non-believers are blinded by self-interest, pride, and their own sinfulness; they do not *want* God to exist so they deny that God exists. And sceptics can argue that religious folk are rendered naïve and credulous by their need to believe in a loving and kind Heavenly Father who cares for them and will reward them with eternal life in heaven. In a wider context, Basil Mitchell makes the point incisively:

> It is a characteristic of disputes involving profound conceptual differences that the disputants can always accommodate any evidence or arguments put forward by their opponents, which each interprets and assesses in terms of his own fundamental principles. The competing systems of thought are so ramified that it is difficult, if not impossible, to state the issues involved in ways that do not beg the question in favor of one side or the other. Hence the parties tend to 'talk through one another' and to be lost in mutual incomprehension.[9]

So it seems that something like the parity thesis is true. Neither believers nor non-believers are able decisively to defeat the other on intellectual grounds.[10] It is possible rationally to interpret the world in either the religious or the irreligious way.[11]

II

Both statements – the one from Russell and the one from Clifford – crucially feature the word 'evidence'. But what exactly is evidence? Intuitively, evidence seems to be something that provides rational support for a proposition or justifies a belief. Evidence is usually called for when someone is asked, 'Why do you believe that?' But it seems that there are (at least) two quite different ways that we might go in defining evidence. Let's imagine a proposition *p*. The first possibility is: (1) *Evidence for* p *is anything that tends to promote belief in* p. That is, when somebody gives putative evidence for *p*, the thing given is evidence if it tends to convince people that *p* is true. This is a broad and generous notion of evidence. Some will say it is too broad. On this definition, my hunch that the number 12 will win on the next spin of the roulette wheel counts as evidence that twelve will win on

the nest spin of the roulette wheel because it does tend to promote my belief in the proposition. And some will resist calling that sort of thing 'evidence'.

The other main way to go is to say (2) *Evidence for* p *is anything that makes* p *more likely or probable*. This definition is not so subjective as the first; the question is not whether anybody will believe *p* after being exposed to what is intended as evidence for *p* but whether the putative evidence really does support *p* or raise the probability of *p*, no matter what anybody might believe. But then we must face the question of who gets to decide whether a bit of putative evidence does or does not make *p* more probable. In concrete cases there will surely be disputes about that. Let's call our two notions of evidence E1 (tendency to promote belief) and E2 (tendency to increase likelihood), respectively.

Whichever way we go, whether with E1 or E2, we will have to make a further distinction: between 'weak evidence' or evidence that supports *p* weakly and 'strong evidence' or evidence that supports *p* strongly. A bit of evidence supports *p* weakly when it either tends to a certain extent to convince people of *p* or else makes *p* to some degree more likely than it would have been apart from the evidence. And a bit of evidence supports *p* strongly when it either tends decisively to convince people of *p* or else makes *p* more likely than it would have been apart from the evidence (i.e. it confirms *p*).[12]

So which definition of evidence should we opt for? One obvious consideration is the fact that there are good and bad uses of evidence. Suppose somebody says, 'My evidence for my belief that I will have good luck today is what I read in my tea leaves this morning.' The tea leaves might well count as evidence for this belief on E1, and many people would take that to be a reason to opt for E2 over E1. It's not *really* evidence – so they would say. But if somebody says, 'My evidence for the claim that Lincoln was the sixteenth president of the United States is that I read it in my history text book,' most folks would count that as evidence for the claim on either E1 or E2.

But what about less obvious cases? Suppose somebody says, 'My evidence for the claim that God exists is that my parents taught me that God exists.' Again, that could certainly count as evidence on E1, but what about on E2? I suspect that most believers in E2, and certainly most religious sceptics, would reply, 'What your parents taught you may constitute the historical reason for your belief in God but it does not really count as evidence that God exists.' That your parents told you that God exists does not make the existence of God more probable than it was before.

But I suspect that many people who believe in God do so because they believe that they have encountered God in their lives. They naturally and easily find themselves interpreting various events in their lives as instances of God's guidance, God's protection, or God's forgiveness. Hick argues that this sort of experience is the basis of much religious belief and that those who believe in God because of it are or can be rational. For the person who experiences God in such a way, Hick says it is 'entirely rational to believe that God is real; and indeed [it would be] irrational on his part not to. For unless we trust our own experience, we can have no reason to believe anything about the nature, or indeed the existence, of the universe in which we find ourselves'.[13] Still, this is an example of (what I will refer to below as) private evidence – my sense that God has forgiven my sins has little chance of convincing you that God exists.

One way to approach this definitional issue is to abandon E1 in favour of E2 and simply insist, as above, that hunches, the teachings of one's parents, and strong religious feelings, simply do not count as evidence, not at least in these sorts of cases. But there is another possibility too, one that I find more helpful: distinguishing between what I will call public evidence and private evidence.[14]

Let us say that *public evidence* in favour of *p* is evidence that is in principle available to all people and, if it is accepted as evidence in favour of *p* for one person, it ought to be accepted as evidence in favour of *p* by all people (or at least all rational people). There may be people who are not convinced that Lincoln was the sixteenth president by the mere fact that I read it in my history textbook, but they ought to accept that this fact at least counts as evidence in favour of the claim.

Private evidence in favour of *p*, on the other hand, is evidence for *p* that is available to only one person or a group of persons and need not be accepted as evidence in favour of *p* by another person or by people outside the group. There are two conditions here: if the evidence is private to me, (1) only I have access to it; and (2) I am the only one who finds it convincing or even counting as evidence. (As will become clear momentarily, I have doubts about the viability of the first criterion; accordingly, it is the second that I wish to emphasize.) The fact that my parents taught me that God exists may constitute evidence for me that God exists, but this need not be accepted as evidence in favour of God's existence by anybody else. Private evidence is evidence only to the person to whom it is private.[15]

The distinction between the two sorts of evidence is loose and slippery; it certainly raises questions that I am not going to try to answer

here. For example, what exactly is meant by 'access'? Can't other people have access to my evidence in the sense of clearly understanding it, even if it is only a hunch or the testimony of my parents? Moreover, it seems at least possible that someone else might find my private evidence convincing: 'Well, if you believe in God because you believe that God has guided your life, that is enough for me,' so this person might say. But even at this imprecise level, I think we will find the distinction between public and private evidence helpful.

It is obvious that there can be strong or weak evidence in favour of some claim, but can we make the same distinction with private evidence? Yes, I believe the distinction applies there as well. One person might be entirely convinced by the evidence of tea leaves, but somebody else might say, 'Well, what I read in my tea leaves this morning convinces me that I will have good luck today, but just barely; I may have read the leaves wrongly.' One person's conviction that God exists based on private evidence might be strong and another person's tentative.

III

One way of understanding the epistemic claims of Russell and Clifford is to read them as insisting that all people, on pain of irrationality, must base all their beliefs on nothing other than public evidence. But the problem here is that it is doubtful whether anybody actually follows this strong requirement. Doesn't everybody believe at least some things on the basis of private evidence? Philosophers notoriously hold strong beliefs (and even write articles defending those beliefs) about metaphysical and epistemological propositions and theories that cannot be proved and that are highly controversial in philosophical circles. Their evidence is not accepted by others. This would include beliefs, for example, about whether determinism is compatible with moral responsibility, whether humans have immaterial minds, or whether the correspondence theory of truth is defensible.

There are even beliefs that virtually every philosopher (and non-philosopher) holds that cannot be proved in a non-question-begging way, for example, that our senses are normally reliable, that other people have minds, or even that the external world exists. On this last point, note Kant's famous statement, 'It still remains a scandal to philosophy ... that the existence of things outside of us ... must be accepted merely on *faith*, and that, if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof.'[16]

Moreover, in the moral and political realms, not only philosophers, but virtually all people have beliefs that are confidently and even passionately held, which that cannot be proved and which are equally strongly opposed by other people. Is capital punishment ever morally justified? Should the United States have universal health care? Do animals have rights? We simply cannot show that our beliefs on these and other such points are based on conclusive public evidence – indeed, the evidence that convinces us is often not accepted by others – but we still hold them.[17]

No one will want to deny that there are areas of life where Russell's Principle should hold. In the court room, for example, and certainly in criminal cases, American juries are asked to convict the defendant only if there is no 'reasonable doubt' that the defendant is guilty. Similarly, in most scientific endeavours, the standards of evidence and of rational belief are and ought to be high.

But so far as religion is concerned, it seems to theists very much as if evidentialists are operating with a double standard; they are requiring higher epistemic standards for religious beliefs than they themselves hold for some of their own philosophical and ordinary beliefs. It seems that nobody should try or be expected to try to live on the basis of W. K. Clifford's dictum. Accordingly, one interesting question is this: Why are evidentialists tolerant of disagreement on moral and political issues (people who hold opposing views to one's own in those areas are not usually labelled ignorant or irrational or gullible or naïve) but intolerant of those who disagree with them on issues of God and religion?

IV

Is reliance on private evidence ever rationally allowable? There is no denying that it is sometimes relied upon, both by religious believers and religious sceptics. I would list three criteria for the allowable use of private evidence. Private evidence in favour of *p* can rationally be relied upon in evidence situations when:

1. The question whether *p* is true cannot be settled by public evidence;
2. There is no defeater for *p*; and
3. I have no rational choice but to decide between *p* and not-*p*.

Criteria 1 and 2 are closely related; if *p* is subject to a defeater (or at least to a public defeater), then it seems that the issue *can* be settled via public evidence. I keep the two criteria separate because some religious

sceptics are willing to accept the idea that the public evidence is in some way permissive of religious belief (you don't have to be irrational to be a believer) but still hold that there are crucial arguments that count against religious belief.

The third condition brings us back to Russell's Principle and the evidentialist position, noted above, that in cases of ambiguous evidence one should suspend judgement, that is neither believe nor disbelieve the proposition in question. In most cases, that advice seems sensible. But there are cases where one has no choice but to decide between *p* and not-p. So what do I mean by condition 3 above, 'I have no rational choice but to decide between *p* and not-*p*'? I am thinking of two sorts of cases. Both involve a pragmatic or prudential justification of belief.

1. *Forced options*. In his famous essay, 'The Will to Believe', William James contrasted what he called avoidable options with forced options.[18] An 'option' is a situation where we are asked to decide between two alternatives: 'For dessert you can have either ice cream or pie'; 'Either be a Democrat or be a Republican.' An avoidable option is one where there are other choices available than the two that are on offer. If somebody were to explain a theory to us and then say, 'Either call my theory true or call it false,' that is an avoidable option. This is because we can decide to follow some third course; we can call the theory 'intriguing' or 'novel' or we can decide not to call it anything at all. But if somebody were to explain a certain truth to us and then say, 'Either accept this truth or go without it,' that would constitute a forced option. This is because no matter what we do – even if we decide not to decide whether to accept this truth or go without it – we will in effect be embracing one of the two options on offer; we will go without it.

Do people ever face forced options in religion? Of course they do. Now certainly some religious options are not forced: 'Either believe in God or become an atheist'; 'Either become a Hindu or a Zen Buddhist.' These options are avoidable; in such cases other options beside the ones on offer are available. But 'Either believe in the Christian God or do not believe in the Christian God' is a forced option. And there are many other such religious options, not just logically possible forced options but forced options that are actually faced by actual people.

2. *The requirements of life*. I am thinking here of cases where, because of the circumstances and pressures of life, people strongly feel that they must make a decision between two alternatives, whether the options are forced or avoidable. I once knew a high school senior who had been accepted by several universities, had narrowed the choice down to two

of them, and was having a terrible time deciding what to do. She had the option of not deciding, of course, i.e. of deciding not to go to college at all that year, so it was an avoidable option. But that was not what she wanted to do; she felt strongly that she had to decide for one of the two schools that remained on her list. She had tried, again and again, to weigh the pros and cons of both schools, but so far as she was concerned, it was a type 3 evidence situation.

Are there cases like this in religion? Of course there are. I once had a long conversation with a college student who was torn: he was a hard-charging, high-achieving young man who longed for 'success'; he wanted to graduate, go out into the world, and make millions of dollars. But he also felt a very strong tug toward a certain Protestant sect that he had been meeting with and that demanded almost total commitment to its programs. He could not decide what to do.

Let me add two brief caveats. First, I think rationality requires that anyone who relies on private evidence in favour of *p* in order to justify belief in *p* must keep an open mind. Public evidence against *p* might well be forthcoming in the future and one may have to change one's mind.[19] Second, belief in *p* may be rational for some person on the basis of private evidence alone (i.e. where this person has no public evidence for *p*), but I think rationality requires that somebody in the community of *p*-believers must be able to make a public case for *p*, including answering objections to *p*.[20]

Do these criteria open the door too widely to irrational belief? That question will surely be asked by evidentialists at this point. Can't people who believe in astrology or who believe that the earth is flat or that alien abductions occur use these criteria to justify their beliefs? The answer is clearly no. The first two conditions make that clear. These beliefs, in my opinion, are subject to overwhelmingly strong defeaters.

V

But there is still the possibility that there is a good reason why moral and political (or even some philosophical) beliefs held on the basis of private evidence are allowed while similarly based religious beliefs are not. Evidentialists might reply: 'Well, my beliefs in morality and politics are based on evidence, even though I admit I cannot prove them, but religious beliefs are not.' But this is untrue. Religious beliefs are almost always based on evidence, some of it public and some of it private. The demand that one ought always to follow one's evidence[21] is one that religious believers will not mind admitting.

But the evidentialist objection to religious belief is not successfully answered merely by pointing out that religious belief is typically based on private evidence. Indeed, in one sense, evidentialists will claim that this fact is precisely the problem. We noted above that there are two criteria for a bit of evidence being private: it is (1) accessible only to the person or persons to whom it is private; and (2) it is normally convincing (or is even allowed as evidence) only to that person or persons. Evidentialists will focus not on condition (2) (they are quite used to the fact that some evidence is convincing to some people and not others) but condition (1). They will ask, 'How can I possibly evaluate the evidential value of your parents' testimony or your feeling that God has guided and protected you? That evidence is not accessible to me.'

But the religious person will reply: 'Fine; you are unable to evaluate the probative value of my evidence, so it is perfectly okay with me if you do not count it as evidence at all. But in the light of the fact that you yourself believe things both in philosophy and in politics and morality that are based on evidence that is not accepted by others' – so the person of faith will go on – 'it is nothing but intellectual imperialism for you to accuse religious believers of irrationalism for doing the same thing.'

It is at this point that evidentialists raise the following argument: 'In evaluating any claim – whether about religion or anything else – we must evaluate it on the basis of facts and evidence that all rational people agree on; accordingly, if theists are going to argue that God exists (and especially if the religious parity thesis is true), they cannot rationally base their arguments on private evidence (purported revelations, religious traditions, religious feelings) but on evidence that both theists and atheists agree on and will admit; if no such naturalistic evidence is forthcoming, we must rationally deny that God exists, just as we do with Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and Hobbits.'

But religious believers will never agree to accept that methodology. For one thing, naturalists and theists do not share the same set of beliefs about the world. Thus John Hick says:

> There is a sense in which the religious man and the atheist both live in the same world and another sense in which they live consciously in different worlds. They inhabit the same physical environment and are confronted by the same changes occurring within it. But in its actual concrete character in their respective 'streams of consciousness' it has for each a different nature and quality, a different meaning and significance; for one does and the other does

> not experience life as a continual interaction with the transcendent God.[22]

I do not wish to identify myself with any postmodern or anti-realist idea that believers and non-believers occupy different worlds, and I do not know whether Hick intended anything that robust. I think believers and non-believers occupy the same world but interpret it radically differently. But I do think that the naturalist demand just noted amounts to an insistence that theists make their case for God only on the basis of evidence that naturalists themselves will allow as admissible. No self-respecting theist is going to allow that.

It is often said that religious people believe all the same things as secular people, but just add a lot of extra stuff. But this is not true. As Peter van Inwagen points out, most religious sceptics believe in the existence of physical objects whose existence is not explained by any non-physical object (or is not explained at all).[23] Theists do not share this belief.

Moreover, the cases being compared here are not at all similar. We possess overwhelming evidence that Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and Hobbits do not exist. Although there are arguments that can be and are raised against God, they are not probative. If the case for the existence of God were about as strong as the case for the existence of Santa Claus, there would be no, or almost no, theists. Certainly I would not be a theist.

It seems then that the only recourse left to evidentialists is to accuse believers of being out of step with current thinking.[24] This is an appeal to majority vote, and it appears that majority vote is often appealed to these days against religion. And as long as the eligible voters are intellectuals and academics in contemporary America and Europe, it is clear that religious believers will be decisively outvoted. But even if this is true – even if religious believers are decisively in the minority in some circles – so what? Why should they be bothered by that fact? Moreover, everybody knows, as noted above, that we do not decide philosophical and religious issues by majority vote. So the challenge that I leave to evidentialists is to show that majority vote is not what their arguments against religion in the end amount to.

Let's return in conclusion to the question with which we began: is it a fair criticism of religious belief to charge that it is not based on evidence or sufficiently based on evidence? In the case of some religious believers, e.g. those whose beliefs are subject to decisive defeaters, the answer

is probably yes. But is the evidentialist objection a fair criticism of any and all religious belief? Certainly not.[25]

Notes

1. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 17.
2. In the present essay I am going to ignore two important questions about belief: whether it is dispositional and whether it is or can be voluntary.
3. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), p. 816.
4. W. K. Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, ed. by Leslie Stephen and Frederick Pollack (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1901), Vol. II, pp. 186.
5. The so-called New Atheists certainly fit in this category. I am not going to discuss them in the present paper, in part because the case they make against religion is often based more on bluster than argument, and in the case of many of them (e.g. Dawkins), when they do get around to giving actual arguments, the arguments are often amazingly weak.
6. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), p. 73.
7. Naturally, I am not implying that all religious people are theists.
8. Incidentally, I do not myself agree with the blanket claim that God's existence has never been and cannot be proved. See my, *God, Reason, and Theistic Proofs* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997).
9. Basil Mitchell. *The Justification of Religious Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).
10. This conclusion amounts to a rejection of the position of those who claim that belief in God and other religious beliefs are decisively refuted by the available evidence. The other, weaker, sort of evidentialism remains, of course.
11. For further discussion of the ambiguity point, see Robert McKim, 'On Religious Ambiguity,' *Religious Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec., 2008).
12. Obviously, there are important complications that I am avoiding here, e.g., are we talking about likelihood on the basis of the introduced evidence alone or on the basis of the introduced evidence plus our background knowledge?
13. *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 216.
14. This is a distinction that I discussed years ago in my *Faith, Skepticism, and Evidence* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1978), pp. 26–28.
15. I should make it clear that by the word 'private' in the term 'private evidence' I do not mean ontologically private, in the sense in which philosophers used to say that sense data are private.
16. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 34. In fairness, I should point out that the quotation just cited does not represent Kant's final position on this issue.
17. Peter van Inwagen makes this point in his 'Quam Dilecta,' in Thomas V. Morris, *God and the Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 42–46.

18. William James, *The Will To Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 3. James' overall argument in 'The Will To Believe' is analysed in some detail in Part II of *Faith, Skepticism, and Evidence*.
19. Is there an additional duty in such cases actively to seek out so far unknown evidence? Perhaps not – or perhaps only in cases where there is good reason to think that there is additional evidence to be had and that it will increase your chances of getting things right. See Richard Feldman, 'The Ethics of Belief,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LX, No 3 ((May, 2000), pp. 689–690.
20. See Stephen Wykstra, 'Toward a Sensible Evidentialism: On the Notion of 'Needing Evidence',' in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 2nd. ed., ed. by William Rowe and William Wainwright (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989).
21. Feldman states that this – 'one always ought to follow one's evidence' – as the thesis of his 'Ethics of Belief' paper. 'One ought to adopt an attitude that is supported by the evidence the person has at that time.' We should 'follow our evidence.' See pp. 678, 691, 695. In fairness to Feldman, however, I should point out that he probably did not have private evidence in mind.
22. John Hick, 'Religious Faith as Experiencing-As,' in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by N. O. Schedler (NY; Macmillan, 1974), p 28.
23. See his, 'Is God an Unnecessary Hypothesis?,' Andrew Dole and Andrew Chignell (eds.), *God and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 143.
24. Notice Daniel Dennett's preference for speaking of himself and people like him who reject God and religion as 'brights'. Those of us who believe in God are accordingly, one supposes, the 'dims' or the 'obtuse ones.' Is this move anything but intellectual snobbery?
25. I would like to thank the members of the Claremont Colleges philosophers' 'Work in Progress' group – and especially my colleagues Alex Rajczi, Dion-Scott Kakures, Rivka Weinberg, and Masahiro Yamada – for their helpful comments and suggestions about an earlier draft of this paper.

15

Keeping Hick from Hell: Answering the Isolationist Objection to Hick's Universalism

Timothy Musgrove

John Hick's arguments for universalism,[1] while devastating towards the traditional concept of hell, are nonetheless survivable by a 'softer' version of hell, for example, as a place where souls voluntarily isolate themselves permanently from God. This is what I refer to as the 'isolationist objection'.

The seed of this objection goes back as far as C. S. Lewis,[2] and has been picked up and refined by Stephen T. Davis,[3] Jerry Walls,[4] and others. There seem to be two classes of isolation scenarios, which I shall call the isolation of defiance and the isolation of despair. In the former, the soul stubbornly refuses Heaven because it is not to one's taste, because one begrudges Heaven's including of others whom one thinks it should not, or because one takes a sort of pleasure merely in knowing that one has foiled God's desire to 'force' salvation on oneself. In the latter case, one despairs of oneself being worthy of completing the soul's journey and therefore desires simply to quit. It is this latter type which I will focus on here (though I think many of the principles could be applied – with some changes – to the former case as well).

Although Hick has addressed the isolationist objection in a few places, it continues to be quite popular among Evangelicals. This is partly because Hick has given only the general direction of his response, and appears to have left some of the steps of his counter-argument as 'an exercise for the reader'. I wish to verify whether it is possible to complete that exercise, and to show more concretely how the soul-making process could virtually guarantee that no souls remain permanently stuck in isolation.

The isolationist argument holds valid unless Hick can show both how the soul-making process could work without violating free will, and

also how it could (virtually) guarantee that all souls eventually become Reality-centred. Hick's responses demonstrate in principle how these two conditions could obtain, but do not provide an account of the process that is sufficiently detailed to convince objectors that it is viable for the totality of souls. Hick seems stuck on the horns of a dilemma: either his soul-making process fails to preserve free will in the fullest sense, or it fails to guarantee that all souls will complete the soul-making process.

First I want to clarify that Hick's view is not that the soul-making process *absolutely* guarantees that all souls will be saved, but only that such outcome is *virtually* guaranteed. I take a *virtual* guarantee to be a practical certainty, such as when, through probabilistic reasoning, one can see that the odds are astronomically in favour of a certain outcome, for example believing that if one rolls a fair die an infinite number of times, one will eventually roll a six. On this basis, I wish to address whether the isolationist objection defeats Hick's claim that universal salvation is virtually guaranteed.

I am taking up this question in an Anselmic framework, meaning that rival interpretations of God need to be held to the test of which one shows God to be greater or more perfect in goodness, love, and power. Within such framework, the isolationist has a strong prima facie case to make against universalism. Holding that God pays the ultimate respect to individuals' free will by letting them be permanently left alone, if that is their wish, does not sound sinister. Moreover, if none but a few souls befall this fate, while the majority of souls make their way to God, then it would still seem that it was better, overall, for God to have created humanity, rather than not to have done so. For it would still be the 'best of all possible worlds' God could have made, in that there was nothing more that God could do – God could not force people to freely choose salvation any more than God could create a square circle. Granted, a few will choose to remain in a lonely, disconnected state forever – a state we may call isolationist hell. Since isolationist hell is not a place of involuntary torment, but rather is quite avoidable by souls who don't want it – in isolationist hell, the gates are always open – it therefore sounds like a coherent and religiously acceptable interpretation of the lot of some sector of humanity. Furthermore, it has the benefit of underscoring, pedagogically, the severe consequence of rejecting God, to a degree far beyond what the universalist can do, that is, it does not 'emasculate evil', as some of Hick's detractors have accused his universalist position of doing.

However, by our looking at the consensus arising out of the last one hundred years of work in the psychology of suicide, specifically on the

question of why human beings sometimes wish they did not exist (or at least *think* they wish so), and by combining (or really, supporting) these findings with certain existentialist treatments of despair and anxiety, such as some ideas of Kierkegaard that are in fact accepted by most evangelicals, we should arrive at the conclusion that if God plays fair, then an isolationist hell would likely capture *most, and possibly all souls ever created*. Ironically, the isolationist objection to Hick, if taken to its logical conclusion, is really an objection to the likely success of faith and of soul-making altogether. Those raising the isolationist objection have not, I think, realized what a profound cosmic pessimism follows if we apply anything resembling a well-grounded psychology to their view of possible human destinies while requiring that God fairly subject us all to comparably harsh conditions somewhere along our soul's journey.

I will give one example of how, when a decent psychological framework of despair and suicide is taken up, the isolationist position arrives at a shocking and absurd conclusion that we are all doomed. I will use Kierkegaard and Thomas Joiner, as I think their psychological views are compatible with the Christian evangelical views on human nature that are common among Hick's detractors.

Kierkegaard explicates at great length that (1) the anxiety (*angst)* borne of one's terror over one's radical human freedom is fundamentally constitutive of the human self, and therefore is a requirement in order for each of us to proceed on the path toward realizing one's full humanity, and (2) the despairs of possibility (fear of what ill might come) and necessity (mourning over opportunities lost) are the opposite poles of a psychological balancing act that is the only way to 'align the soul with God', such that if one does not have experience of both those poles, the balancing act is impossible. Kierkegaard's is just one of numerous examples of existentialist writers espousing that a deep, soul-shaking process is requisite to the realization of human potential. Even atheist existentialists such as Nietzsche and Sartre have their correlates to Kierkegaard's concepts (e.g. the polarity of facticity vs. transcendence in Sartre).

If one has theological objections to Kierkegaard, we could substitute here any model that holds human despair (or a similar state) to be essential to the soteriological process, which is something most Christian theologians are committed to in one way or another. For example, Barth mentions suicide as a possible outcome of our despair over a 'negative determination of our existence', even while he holds that there is another form of despair, a 'saving despair', which comes as

a gift of the Holy Spirit, because it is 'a saving exposure of our radical need of redemption'.[5] Tillich's theological system[6] makes reference to the anxieties of fate and death, of emptiness and meaninglessness, and of guilt and condemnation, together with the observation that they are all three inescapable, while being necessary in order to set the stage for faith. Pannenberg contends that we human beings, prior to trusting in God, face an 'anxiety' which leads to our withdrawing to an inward despair, from which we are saved only by our being 'repeatedly torn out beyond our ego by life'.[7]

Indeed, one has to wonder if any Christian theology worth its salt can entirely deny the basic existentialist point (i.e. existentialist with a small 'e') that human anxiety and despair are in fact unavoidable in the path to human fulfilment. This seems implicit also in Christologies that justify the passion of Christ in light of the need for Jesus to be 'completely human' in experiencing an acute sense of isolation (*lama sabachtani*). For my purposes, I will continue to hold Kierkegaard's model of human anxiety and despair as paradigmatic, as he went further than most in charting their territory, though I believe the argument I am about to make could readily be refashioned with a different theological account of such things, *mutatis mutandis*.

So for now, let us suppose that this is correct: an experience of utter despair is something we all will have to go through – excluding no one, not even Jesus. The extreme case of human despair has to be that which is linked to the taking of one's own life. So let us turn to the psychology of suicide.

In the last few decades, we have had great progress in understanding the conditions of suicide. While for a long time, Durkheim's[8] was the only systematic explanation of the phenomenon, now, though a few of his insights are still intact, much more thoroughly researched models are available. And there is a striking degree of consensus among the most dominant theories – they in fact are all rather compatible. Adding to Durkheim now are Shneidman,[9] Beck, Baumeister,[10] Linehan,[11] and Joiner.[12] The latter has done a fine job of synthesizing the insights of all the others, and his work is probably the definitive model today. I will therefore take his model, in capsule form, as our reference for this discussion. According to Joiner, the conditions of suicide are as follows:

1. Acute and prolonged emotional pain over both
   a. failed belongingness; and
   b. perceived burdensomeness to others

2. Hopelessness as to whether the aforementioned conditions can possibly get better
3. An acquired ability (which is not innate) to actually end one's existence, which is then taken as apparently the 'only' way of escaping the above conditions

What is remarkable about this set of characteristics is how well it predicts suicidal behaviour (meaning suicide as well as attempts or preparations for suicide). Much of the work in arriving at a satisfactory explanation of suicide was in making sure the theory did not result in false positives – cases where individuals exhibit all the characteristics of the model without being at risk of suicide. It seems that this has now been accomplished, for invariably, individuals who are not suicidal fail to fully exemplify at least one of the characteristics in the model above (e.g. they have at least a modicum of belongingness, or they have not acquired completely the ability to accomplish self-harm). Joiner's model is therefore very valuable for examining the conditions which would make an individual simply not want to live – which I take to include not wanting to continue in the soul-making process (and arriving at the putative isolationist hell which we are considering).

By combining Kierkegaard's observations with Joiner's, we can see how perilously close we all come to suicide, from a certain perspective. For failure to achieve the 'balancing act' described by Kierkegaard (and we all will fail at some point) necessarily thwarts an individual's sense of self and thereby prevents the self from feeling kinship with other selves, that is it results in failed belongingness. Even further, in preventing alignment with God, it prevents the self from feeling it 'belongs with' it's Creator. Finally, it envelopes the soul in hopelessness, because each pole presents a seemingly infinite cycle of self-doubt – of considering innumerable possibilities, or of pondering inescapable necessities. It is striking how far this all aligns with Joiner's model. The combination of failed belongingness and hopeless in a time of despair satisfies most of the conditions Joiner says lead to suicide. All that is missing is a perceived burdensomeness and an ability to take one's own life.

The latter two conditions are, however, very subject to environmental factors. For the latter of the two, one has to get used to the fear and pain of self-harm, which usually starts by being in an abusive environment or an environment in which others are often engaging in self-harm. Then there is repetition and practice, wherein one engages in some form of self-harm with increasing frequency. Without this conditioning, one will not be *capable* of committing the act of suicide: the

instinct of self-preservation has to be conditioned out by 'opponent processes', such as the sense of relief that self-harm can bring by being a distraction from deeper emotional pain. The relevant point for our discussion is that the capacity to begin this conditioning is dependent on environmental exposure to similar or suggestive behaviours of self-harm – and most of us are not given such exposure.

'Perceived burdensomeness' is also strongly environmental – it requires a sustained pattern of (real or imagined) ineffectiveness that creates significant detriment to others. In some cases, this may develop with multifaceted criticism from others, whether explicit or implicit, over a sustained period (essentially, emotional bullying); whereas in other cases, the perception of burdensomeness may develop internally from one's experience of repeated failures in his or her attempts to contribute to a group, partner, and so on. Clearly, most of us are not exposed to these environmental patterns.

If Kierkegaard and Joiner are *both correct,* then the relative rarity of these environmental factors is the only reason why suicide kills just 1 per cent of the population. Joiner gives a telling illustration, by analogy to his temporary failure on his football team. After taking time off from an injury, he returned to find out that his play was not nearly as good as before, owing to his tentativeness in wanting to avoid re-injury and being out of shape. This hurt his team, and his teammates knew it. But they also knew he would likely return to his former level of efficiency over time. Joiner asks, if he knew (or believed he knew) that he would never get any better and would always be a burden to his teammates, what would he do? The answer he gave, and that I think most of us would give, is to quit the team. We need only extend the situation to our lives in general: if you were, at every turn, failing to produce results in a way that made things worse for others, would you not want to 'quit'? This at any rate is part of the mechanism of suicide. Most of us never face such broad systemic failure that we perceive ourselves overall to be a burden, but those few of us who do are automatically at risk to take our own lives.

Most of us are blessed with enough talent, resources, and support that we do not perceive ourselves as outcasts nor as a burden on others, but these facts are largely matters of the 'hand one is dealt'. Yes, we still go through despair and anxiety, but because our environment gives us groups to which we belong, and because we find at least enough success in our endeavours that we do not feel excessively burdensome, we therefore continue to move forward. However, if each of us must necessarily go through all the conditions, save the environmental ones,

that would lead to our wishing we did not exist, then each of us who is not suicidal should be looking on those who are, and, seeing that the only difference between us and them is a set of environmental factors beyond our control, should say to ourselves, 'There but for the grace of God, go I.'

The isolationist argument amounts to saying that a soul may desire to commit spiritual suicide, or come as close to it as possible (permanent isolation). He or she will get stuck in despair and not ever be willing to move forward; however, with the psychology that I have outlined above, this would, given the right environment (or shall I say, given the wrong environment) make every one of us want to bail out of the soul-making process; conversely, only the lack of a (negatively) conducive environment would stop each one of us from creating his or her own isolationist hell. But if only some of us had to face the negatively conducing environment, would it be, in a word, fair? A God committed to cosmic fairness would have to make each of us, whether in this life or a future one, face the same harsh environmental factors which, when combined with our unavoidable passage through anxiety and despair, would land us in isolationist hell. Is there a way out of this sad result?

First, let us note that therapies such as dialectical therapy and narrative therapy have proven very effective in preventing suicide. These methods encourage the individual gradually to 'tell a different story' about him or herself so that hopelessness no longer is present. According to a religious point of view, hopelessness is *always* a fallacy – there is in fact hope so long as the soul is willing. If God allowed souls to permanently isolate (or even extinguish) themselves, they would be doing so out of a hopelessness that is mistaken. It would seem hard to have a theodicy that squares with this. If on the other hand, God acts as a divine therapist (as Hick has suggested), and helps the soul 'write a new narrative' – such as having a fresh start in a reincarnated life – then the best psychological evidence we have implies that the soul will pick itself up and move on.

Likewise, on any theodically defensible view, failed belongingness is also a fallacy – each of us without exception is to be counted among 'God's children'. There is not space to develop this idea in detail, but I would contend that most disputants in the current debate over universalism have already abandoned any view that holds that only a subset of humanity has been pre-ordained to be saved. Rejection of this is largely on the grounds that it makes theodicy impossible in an Anselmic framework. If all are equally called, then failed belongingness is an error of discernment on the part of an individual soul. Every soul

always already belongs with God and with one's fellow souls – despite any sort of misperception, denial or refusal about it.

So long as post-mortem choice making and continued maturation of the soul after death is not ruled out, the forces which would drive a soul to isolation are indeed stoppable. I believe this is the key to overcoming the isolationist objection while retaining a theodicy that operates on Anselmic terms. Because it has by now been made clear that the isolationist, in adopting the only kind of psychology acceptable for solid soteriology, must admit that our external circumstances are all that separate each one of us from collapsing at the inevitable points of despair we all must face. This means that for *anyone* to be saved, they must be protected from (or rescued from) the conditions which, when added to despair, result in a sense of hopelessness and an indefatigable willingness to 'quit'.

But why would a purely loving God insulate or rescue only some and not others? If one wants a solid theodicy (grounded in Anselmic notions of God's perfection) as well as a solid soteriology (grounded in a robust psychology of our self-formation), then one has to presume God eventually would address the environmental factors appropriately, so as to allow each of us to be freed from the kind of intense despair that could thwart the soul-making process. This is a satisfactory enough answer to the isolationist objection for me, because it lays bare that the view entails costly sacrifices in theodicy, soteriology, or both.

At this point, the anti-universalist might object that some souls could perhaps complete their soul-making journey without going through significant despair. That's a reasonable supposition, as we don't notice the whole of humanity falling sullen all the time. But people hide depression well. We're taught to make fake smiles and to answer 'just fine' when asked how we are doing. And we must consider that over multiple lifetimes, we might all have to face despair at some point or other, as a requisite step of the soul-making process. At any rate, if we are to claim that the path of salvation can avoid the roadblock of despair, then we are parting ways from many of the great philosophical theologians, including not only Kierkegaard but also Tillich and Pannenberg and Barth, and many of the great Christian mystics as well.

Even if we grant that it is possible to avoid despair altogether, we then still have to address what happens to those who *do* fall into such despair, and whether an all-loving and all-powerful God would not find a way to give such souls a fresh start. This brings me to the psychological and eschatological requirements of Hick's universalism, which I think have now been made clearer. To speak in theistic terms, God must

treat the despair of sick souls in a way that is analogous to how psychologists seek to intervene with patients who are suicide risks. In our mortal world, psychologists can fail at this, because their methods are imperfect and they have but one opportunity – if their patient commits suicide, there is no second chance. God would have the advantage here. With endless time and resources, it is indeed reasonable to conclude that each and every human soul will react positively to a fresh start (or to many, many fresh starts) in a different environment, until, of his or her free will, the innate desire to flourish and love will win the day. Not only a good psychologist, but also a good philosopher or theologian will hold that we have, besides free will, also an innate will to live, grow, and love. Given enough positive opportunities, it would then be against our very nature to choose to stay locked forever in isolation.

In describing isolation, I have been focusing on the isolation of despair, and it would be natural for the anti-universalist at this point to turn back to the isolation of defiance as the primary model for what lands souls in hell. However, there is reason to believe that much of what applies to the isolation of despair would apply also to the isolation of defiance. God, as an infinitely resourceful and boundlessly imaginative therapist, would not fail to present the soul with another way to write a 'new narrative' that no longer included defiance.

Let us see how the treatment of defiance might fit with the requirements of Hick's universalism. It is a result of the foregoing analysis that reincarnation must play a central role, because the only therapy that works reliably for the suicidal soul is that of writing a new narrative, and the only way to achieve that after death is by living another life. This might be even truer for the isolation of defiance, wherein the individual's stubborn refusal is linked to people or things in his or her existing narrative, for example refusing to share heaven with Mr. So-and-So from next door. Retaining the essential self while erasing (perhaps temporarily) the memories of Mr. So-and-So, might let the soul in question start from a clean slate, and forget his or her resentment. It is possible that near the end of the soul-making process, the memory of past lives could be restored, whereupon they would certainly be interpreted differently, effectively being re-woven into the overarching meta-narrative of the soul-making journey. Or it might be that only a single post-mortem life (perhaps purgatorial) will allow the soul a new 'narrative' and thus complete the soul-making process. In any case, God's treatment of either form of spiritual isolation – despair or defiance – would do much to explain why reincarnation (in some sense) might be required for soul-making.

Hick thinks God will never stop trying to offer a way to proceed in soul making, but the isolationist thinks God can recognize cases wherein it is pointless to continue. As Jerry Walls, one of the more prolific anti-universalists writes: 'By knowing a person's history, intentions, and so on, God could know a person's response was fully informed and deliberate. He could know when a person's character was so formed by his choices that in all likelihood it would never change. In such a case, I think we could fairly say God knows that person's response to grace is decisive'. Walls would have to put aside the various qualifying words ('in all likelihood', 'fairly') to get to the strength of conclusion that he really wants, but then he would reach the ironic result of God knowing absolutely that a person no longer will be able to change his or her mind about refusing grace – the irony being that the anti-universalist argument was originally motivated to defend unequivocally the free will of the individual soul, but now ends up declaring that some souls reach a point where such radical freedom has run its course and is alive no more, while it is Hick who defends the freedom to accept grace to the last, saying that there never comes a point where it is exhausted, and always will God continue to offer grace with a real possibility of its being accepted.

That there is a real possibility of its being accepted is because Hick 's view of human nature, like that of many philosophers, is that we are in some significant way predisposed towards good. This does not mean that God could have created us already fully good, so as to skip the soul-making process altogether. Rather it means that we are endowed with the capacity to take pleasure in doing good for good's sake. And because part of goodness is the fact of one's freely choosing it, we must in addition to our having an aptitude for enjoying the Good, make choices to accept and to pursue it. This means that we must embark on the long process of building or sculpting our virtues step by step. We're not like birds that can fly shortly after birth, without much learning. We're like birds that must grow and learn to fly when ready, and only awkwardly at first, and who get ourselves into trouble time and again, so that sometimes we give up flying altogether.

I once saw a crane near the beach accidentally get snared in a fisherman's line as he cast out. The crane's instinct was to fly, but such action only tightened the line and worsened the situation, causing pain. Eventually, having given up hope of freeing itself, the crane of its own free will chose to cease its attempts to fly and remained motionless on the beach. The fisherman then (and only then!) was able to disentangle the line without doing permanent harm to the bird. You can guess what happened next: the crane instantly flew off. Can we imagine that if the

crane is no longer impaired, it would not want to fly? It is like asking whether a fish on dry land, if put back in healthy water while still able to swim, would not immediately want to swim. Yes, the crane *could* choose to remain sitting there, but it is a practical certainty that she will fly. It is virtually guaranteed.

A reincarnated human soul may be very similar to the crane in one respect: it is unreasonable to suppose that a soul would not want to connect with others, find joy, and thrive, if given the chance, as much it is unreasonable to suppose a fish would not want to swim or a bird would not want to fly, given the chance to do so without critical impairment. Similarly, if one believes in an Anselmic God, as evangelicals are supposed to, then one should not suppose that such a benevolent and all-powerful Creator would deny souls the chance to fly again after freeing them from whatever snares had made them choose, at one point, not to fly at all, and neither should one suppose that such souls would not jump at the opportunity. None of this is incompatible with holding that every such act of flight is, in the moment of its beginning, freely chosen.

Notes

1. Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Macmillan (Reissued 2007); Hick, J. (1976). *Death and Eternal Life*. New York: Harper & Row; Hick, J. (1993). 'A Possible Conception of Life after Death' in: *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (pp. 183–96). New Haven: Yale University Press; Hick, J. (2008). 'Reincarnation', in: *Who or What Is God?* (pp. 53–64). London: SCM Press.
2. Lews, C. S. (1945). *The Great Divorce*. New York: HarperOne (Reprint 2001).
3. Davis, S. (2001). *Encountering Evil*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
4. Walls, J. (1992). *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
5. Barth, K. (2004). *Church Dogmatics,* Vol 1. London/New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, pp. 263–5.
6. Tillich, P. (1952). *The Courage to Be*. New Haven: Yale University Press
7. Pannenberg, W. (1970). *What Is Man?* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, pp. 63–4.
8. Durkheim, E. (1897). *Le Suicide: Etude de sociologie*. Paris: F. Alcan.
9. Schneidman, E. S. (1996). *The Suicidal Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.
10. Baumeister, R. F. (1990). 'Suicide as Escape from Self', *Psychological Review,* 97, 90–113
11. Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*. New York: Guilford.
12. Joiner, T. E. (2005). *Why People Die by Suicide*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

16

Suffering As Transformative: Some Reflections on Depression and Free Will

Anastasia Philippa Scrutton

Central to Hick's theodicy is the belief that suffering can be transformative. In addition to its expression in theodicy, this idea is found in a *non-aetiological* form in a number of religious traditions and spiritualities. For example, an episode of (what we would call) mental or physical illness is a condition of the Siberian shaman's vocation, since it provides the sufferer with the capacity for inspiration, insight, and other powers associated with being a shaman.[1] Again, Jewish discussions of *yissurn shel ahavah* (chastisements of love) sometimes involve the idea that affliction can promote personal growth, whether (as in the case of the Maharal) by breaking our attachment to the material or (as in the case of the Ran) by freeing us from the snares of wild imagination.[2] However, where the idea is found in non-aetiological contexts, it does not tend to attract philosophical evaluation, perhaps in part because of the elusiveness that derives from its pervasiveness. This is problematic because, although in some forms a potentially transformative view of suffering can reflect a realistic attitude towards the world and provide therapeutic conceptual resources for the subject to respond to her experiences, in other forms it can be sentimental and unrealistic, philosophically or theologically incoherent, pastorally insensitive, or even debilitating and destructive.

I shall consider the viability of a potentially transformative view of suffering, focusing on the specific experiences involved in (unipolar) depression. I hope that considering a *particular* kind of experience of suffering (rather than suffering in general) will highlight ways in which the theory corresponds to lived human experience and ways in which it does not. In focusing on depression, I seek to appeal to a set of

experiences that is more familiar (whether first hand or second hand) and therefore more accessible to most people than many other acute forms of suffering.

My religious sources are usually derived from the Christian tradition, since that is the tradition I am most familiar with. However, the theme of transformative suffering is widespread among the major world faiths and indigenous spiritualities, and (as none of the discussion requires a specifically Christian framework) this chapter is relevant to philosophy of suffering in other faiths and in pluralist theology.

After introducing a potentially transformative view within the context of the different ways in which Christian faith communities respond to mental illness, I shall raise three objections to it, arguing that the objections are not conclusive, provided that we root the transformative character of suffering in the subject's *response,* rather than in the suffering per se. However, the emphasis on response contains problems of its own. These emerge in conversations with people who have suffered from depression, who report a diminished sense of free will. This reflects the fact that suffering of different kinds can reduce our ability to respond freely. It calls into question whether and to what extent people who suffer acutely can choose to respond in a way that makes their experience transformative rather than meaningless. I conclude by pointing to some promising ideas that may help to respond to the problem of diminished free will.

Within Christianity, responses to mental illness vary widely. At one extreme, mental illness is seen as a symptom that the subject 'has not been saved' or is experiencing a judgement for sin. For example, in a Christian blog advising people on how to overcome depression, 'spiritual failure' is identified as one of several causes of depression, an identification attributed to psychologists.[3] This approach seems to be characteristic of and to have its roots in Evangelical Christianity, with its stress on spiritual warfare. As Hilary Clark shows, following his conversion to Evangelical Christianity, William Cowper's memoir of madness utilizes a 'comic' conversion plot that interprets his paranoid delusions and suicidal despair as a necessary stage in his return to God.[4] Aside from the damaging behaviour this kind of response can instigate, it can also overlook and negate potentially transforming or redeeming experiences.[5]

At the opposite extreme, mental illness is viewed as a sign of closeness to God, with religious explanations sometimes being given

priority over medical or social ones. For example, as one psychosis patient explains:

> I always seem to have an episode when I get close to Jesus Christ and when I pray a lot and make changes in my life by obeying the Holy Scripture and the Ten Commandments. I think that Christ wants me to experience how weak I am when he lets the devil attack me like he did, only so I could learn to surrender all of my control and power that I had in my life to Jesus and to trust in Jesus totally for every little and big thing in my life.[6]

This kind of response to mental illness seems to be more prevalent in Catholic writings, perhaps because of the (real or perceived) identification of mental illness and the experiences of some mystics (e.g. St Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, St John of the Cross).

A possible advantage of this response is that it can help sufferers to make sense and meaning of their experiences, and to find aspects of them transforming and redemptive. However, a negative implication is that it risks idealizing or romanticizing mental illness. At its worst, this view might not only be insensitive: in associating psychological distress with closeness to God, it may also hinder recovery by diminishing the subject's motivation.

A third option is closely related but significantly distinct from the second. This view emphasizes the potentially transformative nature of mental illness. A potentially transformative view can be characterized as a meaning-making response to mental illness, since it sees mental illness as symptomatic of more deep-rooted spiritual or psychological unfulfilment or dissatisfaction, and represents episodes of mental illness as in some way salvific or conducive to human flourishing. It opposes purely 'problem-solving' approaches which regard episodes of mental illness simply as problems to be solved, akin to physical ailments for which a cure is sought. A meaning-making view is not necessarily religious. For example,

> [a] main thing is that the, what, 9 symptoms of depression are also that of a good story. They all relate to potential change. They're about crisis. Which of course is opportunity. Except that true change or development is anathema to our society. (It may cause a hiccup in productivity. Oh no!) Hence the disease. In depression something is stirring in us. There's inner reaction against the way we are that

> wants to make it a way we were. It's happening to us whether we want it to or not. Old ways no longer work. Or the patches and fakery have given way. There's a chance for something good and new to come out of depression that the truly numb or clever can't see. Real cultures have rites of passage to handle this. We haven't found ours yet.[7]

Often twinned with a meaning-making view in the religious and psychological writings in which it is found is the image of the wounded healer, and the belief that there is something about 'woundedness' (which includes, but is not exhausted by, mental illness), that forms the basis of, and makes possible, the sufferer's healing of others.

One expression of a potentially transformative view of mental illness in a non-aetiological context is found in the work of the Roman Catholic priest and psychologist Henri Nouwen, developed in response to his own experience of depression. Looking back on the journal he kept during his breakdown, he writes:

> It certainly was a time of purification for me. My heart, ever questioning my goodness, value, and worth, has become anchored in a deeper love and thus less dependent on the praise and blame of those around me. It also has grown into a greater ability to give love without always expecting love in return. ... What once seemed such a curse has become a blessing. All the agony that threatened to destroy my life now seems like the fertile ground for greater trust, stronger hope, and deeper love.[8]

Many other expressions of a potentially transformative view of suffering in general and of mental illness in particular can be found within the Christian tradition and elsewhere. However, the view is open to serious objections, three of which I shall discuss here.

First, it raises the possibility of people claiming some kind spiritual superiority or authority on the basis of what they have suffered, or on the basis of having suffered a great deal. This would be not only manipulative, but also unrealistic, since it would ignore the fact that most, if not all, people have suffered and are wounded in one way or another. That this is the case is recognized in Nouwen's work, since (rightly or wrongly) he takes loneliness to be essential to the human condition and so universal to humanity. He suggests that it is not the woundedness itself, but the minister's self-awareness of his woundedness, and reflexivity in his relation to others' woundedness, which transforms

the suffering by allowing it to make him a good healer. Thus, Nouwen writes that the minister is called to bind the wound of loneliness

> with more care and attention than others usually do. For a deep understanding of his own pain makes it possible for him to convert his weakness into strength and to offer his own experience as a source of healing ... once the pain is accepted and understood, a denial is no longer necessary, and ministry can become a healing service.[9]

This suggests a significant qualification of a transformative view of depression: it is only once the wound has been accepted and understood that it can become transformative, and only then if it is understood in conjunction with the idea that other people are also wounded.

A second objection to a potentially transformative view is that it may be self-defeating in diminishing the sufferer's motivation to recover. Simply put, if experiences of suffering can be transformative, shouldn't the subject try to suffer as much as she is able, so that the transformative experiences and insights will be as profound as possible? I shall return to this objection below.

A third objection to a potentially transformative view is that it not only encourages people to experience suffering, but also fails to uphold the reality of evil as evil, instead idealizing or romanticizing it. This is related to a wider set of problems that have been raised in relation to meaning-making accounts of suffering in the context of theodicy. As John Swinton puts it:

> According to Hick, ... evil is not really evil at all! It just looks like evil. It is, in fact, a mode of goodness or at least a means of achieving goodness. ... Evil is really a force for good, or at least it acts as a way of accessing that which is good.[10]

A non-aetiological transformative view is answerable to the same criticism that, in emphasizing the good that can come from depression, we may cease to remember that, fundamentally, depression is an evil and not a good.

These latter two objections are not conclusive since there is no inherent contradiction between the idea that acute depression and other extreme forms of human suffering are evil, and the idea that they can become transformative or instrumental in personal growth. Suffering as evil and suffering as potentially transformative are compatible, provided that we hold that it is the subject's awareness of their wound,

rather than the wound itself, that is the basis of its transformative potential. This is part of a wider point about the subject's *response* in determining whether their experience becomes transformative or simply a meaningless period of suffering. As Nouwen says in the last of the journal entries he wrote during his breakdown:

> As you conclude this period of spiritual renewal, you are faced once again with a choice. You can choose to remember this time as a failed attempt to be completely reborn, or you can also choose to remember it as the precious time when God began new things in you that need to be brought to completion. Your future depends on how you decide to remember your past.[11]

So far, I have sketched a potentially transformative view of suffering and have responded to three objections to it. In my responses to these objections, however, the essential nature of a transformative view has been altered. I have argued that, to be pastorally responsible and philosophically tenable, a transformative view needs to stress the necessity that subjects have self-awareness of (rather than simply experiencing) their psychological wounds for the experience to become instrumental of personal growth. Consequently, the focus shifts from the experience itself to the subject's response. We have seen Nouwen describe this response as a choice, that is, as a *free* response. Notably, to be a free response it does not need to be a *reflective* choice; it is possible for responses to be voluntary without being conscious.[12] Therefore, while Nouwen was aware of having to make a choice, it is possible to have a choice about how to respond without being aware that this is the case.

This solution seems prima facie to be innocuous enough. However, it does contain a problem of its own. It is in the nature of suffering (or at least of some forms of suffering) to diminish, either directly or indirectly, the sufferer's free will, and therefore their capacity to respond or to choose to respond well rather than badly. One of the ways in which this is the case can be seen in connection with experiences of depression.

In so far as emotions are mental events, they can be characterized as beliefs that differ from non-emotional beliefs in being salient to our eudaimonia – to our goal of schemes and projects.[13] They are beliefs that concern our values in life, our particular sets of goals, and how we imagine ourselves flourishing as people. In non-depressive states, we perceive the world as replete with possibilities, many of which are significant to our flourishing. When we perceive entities, we don't just perceive what is 'there'; our perception also includes a composition of

potential experiences that we could actualize in relation to the entities through different actions. Consequently, our perception of entities is intrinsically value laden; as Husserl says:

> In ordinary life, we have nothing whatever to do with nature-Objects. What we take as things are pictures, statues, gardens, houses, tables, clothes, tools, etc. These are all value-Objects of various kinds, use-Objects, practical Objects.[14]

Emotions help us to structure our perceptual fields by conveying to us those things that are salient, and making them stand out from other things that are not.[15] As Proust puts it (in connection with falling in love):

> In the mind of M. de Charlus, which only several days before resembled a plane so flat that even from a good vantage point one could not have discerned an idea sticking up above the ground, a mountain range had abruptly thrust itself into view, hard as a rock – but mountains sculpted as if an artist, instead of taking the marble away, had worked it on the spot, and where there twisted about one another, in giant and swollen groupings, Rage, Jealousy, Curiosity, Envy, Hate, Suffering, Pride, Astonishment, and Love.[16]

In depressed states, we frequently experience a diminished sense of eudaimonia. We cease to have schemes and goals, or we can no longer imagine ourselves flourishing as people. This, in turn, affects our perception of significant possibilities since, if we have no set of goals to aspire to or maintain, all possibilities cease to be significant or salient.[17] This accounts for why people who suffer from depression often report the loss or erosion of their perception of salient possibilities. In the words of patients:

> It isn't possible to roll over in bed because the capacity to plan and execute the required steps is too difficult to master, and the physical skills needed are too hard to complete. ... Depression steals away whoever you are, prevents you from seeing who you might someday be, and replaces your life with a black hole. Like a sweater eaten by moths, nothing is left of the original, only fragments that hinted at greater capacities, greater abilities, greater potentials now gone.[18]
>
> It was as if the ... essence of each thing in the sense of the tableness of the table or the chairness of the chair or the floorness of the floor

> was gone. There was a mute and indifferent object in that place. ... It became impossible to reach anything. Like, how do I get up and walk to that chair if the essential thing that we mean by a chair, something that lets us sit down and rest or upholds us as we read a book, something that shares our life in that way, has lost the quality of being able to do that?[19]
>
> But among the bad and worse times, there were also moments when I felt, if not hope, then at least the glimmerings of possibility. ... It was like starting from the beginning. It took me a long time, for example, to understand, or to re-understand, why people do things. Why, in fact, they do anything at all. What is it that occupies their time? What is the point of doing?[20]

All three people in these accounts report feeling that possibilities are no longer salient or that they have a sense of diminished possibility. The experience is not just of no longer experiencing possibilities as salient, but of being *unable* to do so. As Matthew Ratcliffe points out, 'This loss is at the same time an impoverishment of freedom, of the world as a realm of possibilities that might be actualised by one's activities'.[21] It is interesting that, as Dorothy Rowe notes, while descriptions of depression vary greatly, the image of imprisonment, or being trapped or incarcerated, is virtually universal.[22] This underlines the respects in which depression seems to diminish free will or the perception of free will.

This naturally raises the question of whether the perception of diminished free will corresponds to the reality of diminished free will. It is impossible to answer this question, in much the same way as it is impossible to ascertain whether the perception of free will in non-depressed states corresponds to the reality of free will, or whether it is simply an illusion (as determinists argue). This is because it is impossible to 'get behind' the experience and perception of free will to the underlying reality, since there is no external basis or independent authority (such as science) to which to appeal. However, it does seem reasonable to suppose that free will, if veridical, is diminished in situations in which the experience and perception of it is diminished, and heightened in situations in which the experience and perception of it are heightened. In other words, the perception of free will may not just reflect, but also to some extent cause, the reality of free will. A person who is being tortured for information and believes he has no choice but to 'give in' is more likely to conform to his torturer's demands than one who believes that the choice is ultimately his own. Therefore, if we presuppose that free will exists in non-depressed subjects, a depressed person's perception

of diminished free will is likely to cause them to have diminished free will – at least to some extent.

The tendency of severe depression to limit free will reflects a similar tendency in other acute forms of suffering, though the ways in which suffering limits free will differ. For example, in the case of oppression, bullying and abuse, free will is often diminished because the person's perception of their own value and, concomitantly, of the gravity of their suffering, is reduced. As Martha Nussbaum puts it:

> [P]eople's judgments about what is happening to them can go wrong in many ways. Suffering and deprivation ... often brutalize or corrupt perception. In particular, they often produce adaptive responses that deny the importance of the suffering; this is especially likely to be so when the deprivation is connected to oppression and hierarchy, and taught as proper through religious and cultural practices.[23]

If someone's perception is distorted, then their free will is diminished, since they cease to have a reliable epistemological basis on which to make (conscious or unconscious) decisions about how to respond. To maintain the existence of free will in such situations is to uphold a purely abstract and metaphysical reality that has no relation to what is practically possible in the subject's lived experience.

So far, I have argued that we need to situate the transformative potential of suffering in the subject's response rather than in the suffering itself. Using first-hand accounts of severe depression, I have also argued that acute suffering diminishes or eradicates the subject's free will. Taken together, these two conclusions are problematic since, if the transformative potential of suffering depends on the subject's response, and if the subject has severely diminished free will, then the subject cannot choose to respond in such a way as to make their experience transformative rather than futile. It is significant that Nouwen wrote the journal entry on the role of choice (cited above) at the end of his breakdown. Presumably, this reflected his mindset when his depression was less severe, rather than when it was at its most acute. As Karp and Hornstein's patients attest, the possibility of choice seems to be precluded in the acute stages of severe depression.

Should we then conclude that potentially transformative views of suffering can be applied to mild or moderate instances of suffering (such as mild or moderate depression), but not to severe or extreme suffering? I want to avoid this conclusion, for several reasons. One is a religious commitment to divine sovereignty which entails that good

will ultimately triumph over evil, combined with the (perhaps modern) conviction that this should happen at the individual as well as the corporate level. This provides a reason for modern Christians and other monotheists to adopt a potentially transformative view, but it doesn't provide a reason for anyone outside this framework.

However, a second reason for adopting a potentially transformative view is more universally applicable. This is the fact that the belief that even evil experiences can be transformed is (whether true or not) helpful to sufferers. To take an analogy: in the absence of knowledge either way, telling a cancer patient that they might recover is more helpful (because more conducive to a positive mental state) than telling them that they cannot. Furthermore, this approach is not only more helpful in contributing to the patient's mental well-being. It might also be helpful if (as there is some evidence to suggest) a positive mental state actually increases the patient's chances of recovery (and so, retrospectively, the truthfulness of the initial optimistic prognosis). Likewise, in the absence of our capacity decisively to determine the veracity of a potentially transformative view one way or another, it seems reasonable to adopt a helpful theory (a potentially transformative view) over an unhelpful one (e.g. a pessimistically deterministic one). This is particularly the case if the helpful theory might in fact increase the theory's veracity (and, in turn, its helpfulness). In other words, a consequentialist reason may create an aletheic reason for adopting a potentially transformative view.

Given that there seems to be one good reason to prefer a potentially transformative view of suffering (outside of unverifiable religious convictions), how can such a view be reconciled to the phenomenon of a diminished free will that I have argued for in relation to severe depression and other acute forms of suffering? I suggest that the answer to this question can, in part, be found in the idea of diachronicity. Seeking to locate the free will to choose to respond (positively or negatively) at an isolated point in time is misleading, particularly if the specific point in time happens to coincide with an acute experience of depression. Considering experiences diachronically enables us to see the ways in which responses are chosen and cultivated over time. This is also true of emotional responses in non-depressed states. We may not be able to choose not to become angry at T1, but we can learn not to put ourselves in situations that we know will make us angry (reading a sensationalist newspaper; shopping on a Saturday when the shops are busy; discussing politics with one's mother) or to develop strategies (going for a run; counting to ten; focusing on a cause of happiness or compassion instead) that reduce our feelings of anger when they arise.[24] Likewise, choice in acute depression is negligible if we focus on an isolated point of time and so construe choice as analogous to turning on or off a tap.

The possibility of choice in depression is greatly heightened if we view it diachronically and construe choice as more akin to learning to dance – which involves learning and applying new skills and increasing in our ability to coordinate them into existing steps over time.

However, the emphasis on diachronicity only gets us so far in surmounting the problem of diminished free will for a potentially transformative view of suffering. This is partly because some experiences of acute depression are lifelong and constant rather than episodic. It is difficult to see how diachronicity increases the scope for choice in these cases. In addition, as the anger example indicates, cultivating responses over time involves a level of discernment and personal reflection that presupposes a certain level of conceptual ability. Not everyone has the requisite intellectual capacity for this. Consequently, diachronicity does not offer a solution to the problems raised in every instance of depression, but only in some (severe, but not permanent) instances.

It seems to me that this is where people who affirm the existence of an afterlife and people who deny the existence of an afterlife must part company. In the former case, the concept of diachronicity can be applied in the context of an afterlife (whether heaven, purgatory, or reincarnation) to people with life-long depression, and to people lacking the required intellectual capacities, to whom it cannot apply in this life alone.[25] In the latter case, this is not an option, and so ultimately a potentially transformative view of suffering is only relevant to some, and not all, situations.

To conclude, I have argued for a *qualified* potentially transformative view of suffering, suggesting that suffering should be rooted in the subject's response, rather than in the suffering itself. I have raised the problem of diminished free will, and have suggested that partial solutions to this problem can be found in a diachronic perspective on the sufferer's life, and in an appeal to eschatology.

Acknowledgements. Thanks go to Ioanna-Maria Patsalidou and Stuart Foyle for reading earlier drafts of this chapter, to Helen Deeming for her help on transformative views of suffering in Judaism, and to Stephen Burge for sharing his expertise on Islam.

Notes

1. Jackson, S., 2001. 'The Wounded Healer', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* 75(1), pp. 1–36.
2. Blau, Rav Y., n.d. 'The Relationship between Sin and Suffering' in: The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash. Avaliable at http://vbm-torah.org/archive/aggada66/14aggada.htm [Accessed on 26th January 2011].
3. Sanders, C., n.d. Defeating Depression'. Available at http://www.dailyshepherd.com/defeating-the-depression [Accessed 24 January 2011].

4. Clark, H. (ed.), 2008. *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, pp. 55–67.
5. Schreiber, J., 2002. 'A Sacred Fragility: Mental Illness and Spirituality, Initial Reflections'. Available at http://www.whosoever.org/v7i2/illness.html [Accessed 24 January 2011].
6. Christopherson, J., n.d. 'Mental Illness: Is It Spiritual?' Available at http://hubpages.com/hub/Mental-illness-is-it-spiritual, [Accessed 24 January 2011].
7. Contribution to the *Underground Literary Alliance* chat forum, cited in Kezi Benson, 'A Dark Web: Depression, Writing and the Internet' in: Clark, 2008, p. 150.
8. Nouwen, H., 2009. *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey through Anguish to Freedom*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, pp. 97–8.
9. Nouwen, H., 1972. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York: Doubleday, p. 87.
10. Swinton, J., 2007. *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p. 18.
11. Nouwen, 2009, p. 96.
12. See Sartre, J.P., 1989. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated from French by H. Barnes. London: Routledge; Solomon, R., 2003. *Not Passion's Slave: Emotions and Choice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 'Voluntary' and 'involuntary' and 'conscious' and 'unconscious' suggest an either/or approach in relation to responses. However, 'in/voluntary' and 'un/conscious' are better seen as extremes on a spectrum, with most responses inhabiting a position between them.
13. Nussbaum, M., 2001. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 52.
14. Husserl, E., 1989. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book*. Translated from German by R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer. Dordrecht: Kluwer, p. 29.
15. Wynn, M., 2008. *Phenomenology of Religion*. Available at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology-religion/ [Accessed 22 January 2011].
16. Proust, 1982, cited in Nussbaum, 2001, epigraph.
17. See Ratcliffe, M. 2012. 'Depression and the Phenomenology of Free Will'. In *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry*. Fulford, K. W. M., Davies, M., Graham, G., Sadler, J., Stanghellini, G. & Thornton, T. Oxford: Oxford University Press (forthcoming).
18. Patient quoted by Karp, D., 1996. *Speaking of Sadness: Depression, Disconnection, and the Meanings of Illness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 24–5.
19. Patient quoted by Hornstein, G.A., 2009. *Agnes's Jacket: A Psychologist's Search for the Meanings of Madness*. New York: Rodale, pp. 212–13.
20. Brampton, cited in Ratcliffe, M., (in press), 'Depression and the Phenomenology of Free Will', in the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
21. Ratcliffe, 2012.
22. Rowe, D., 1978. *The Experience of Depression*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, p. 30.
23. Nussbaum, 2001, p. 309.
24. Solomon, 2003, p. 199.
25. Hick, J., 2010. *Evil and the God of Love,* 2nd edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 262 ff.

Part IV

John Hick's Writings and Their Impact

17

The Revival of Philosophy of Religion and the Contribution of John Hick to This

Paul Badham

The changing situation in British universities

Over the past 50 years there has been a profound shift towards recognition of the importance of the philosophy of religion within both theology and philosophy. At the beginning of the sixties philosophy of religion was very much a fringe subject at most British universities. Fortified by Karl Barth's isolationist position, many theologians thought they could dispense with intellectual challenges to faith and focus on biblical and patristic studies. In Oxford, no philosophy of religion was included in the normal syllabus of the theology degree, which still described itself as 'Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology'. There was the possibility of taking philosophy of religion as an additional optional paper, but few tutors thought this advisable. In philosophy, the positivistic school led by A.J. Ayer took the view that religious claims were not so much false as meaningless. Writing about this situation, Ninian Smart suggested that there was a kind of 'holy conspiracy between theology and A.J. Ayer' to avoid discussion of metaphysical questions. (Smart 1962: 106). When Ian Ramsey left the Nolloth Chair of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion in 1966 to become Bishop of Durham, there was a strong movement not to appoint a successor on the grounds that the subject was not really needed. Fortunately, a decision was made to appoint Basil Mitchell to the Nolloth Chair and under him and his successors, Richard Swinburne and Brian Leftow, the subject has blossomed as never before.

The rise of religious studies in British universities

One important factor in the revival of philosophy of religion in Britain has been the development of degree schemes in religious studies in which the philosophy of religion is an important component. The first distinct department of Religious Studies was opened in Lancaster University in 1967 under the leadership of Ninian Smart. Since then the discipline has grown steadily. This has had a significant impact on departments of theology, almost all of which have responded by including elements of religious studies into their degree schemes and, indeed, most often by changing themselves into departments of theology *and* religious studies, in which the philosophy of religion is increasingly recognized as having an important place. Obviously, this is even more the case in universities which offer joint honours degrees in both theology and philosophy or in religious studies and philosophy. these changes have also influenced and been influenced by developments in school studies prior to university.

Developments in British schools

In Britain, admission to university depends on performance in three advanced-level subjects taken the in last two years of high school study by students between the ages of 16 and 18. Since 2010, philosophy of religion has been a major unit of advanced-level examinations in Religious Studies. It is one of the two modules normally taken in the final year. Since the A star grade, on which entrance to elite universities depends, is awarded solely on year-2 work, the study of philosophy of religion has become a key discipline for all students offering Religious Studies A level. Having been introduced to the discipline at School, many students now expect to take the subject further at university.

Philosophy of religion in Anglo-American context

These changes in Britain are part of a global expansion of philosophy of religion over the past 50 years particularly in Anglo-American contexts. Writing in a foreword to a recent book on the philosophy of religion, Professor William Abraham comments that when he began work as a graduate student in 1973, he little knew that he was 'at the beginning of a golden period in the philosophy of religion' in which believers could 'take a lead and create the intellectual space in which Christian belief could be taken seriously once again. The outcome over the last forty years, as seen in the wealth of material that has been published, has been startling in

its originality and depth'. The book for which this foreword was written is *The Agnostic Inquirer* by Sandra Menssen and Thomas Sullivan, two former agnostic professors of philosophy, who had gradually reasoned their way to a rational faith. They wrote their book to help fellow agnostic inquirers follow them to their new convictions.

William Abraham's assessment of the emergence of a newly confident Christian philosophy in the last 40 years is confirmed by the Canadian atheist philosopher Kai Nielsen. Writing in 1971, Nielsen had said that philosophers who took the claims of religion seriously were 'very much in the minority and their arguments have been forcefully contested' (Nielsen 1971: 19). But nearly 20 years later Nielsen's estimate of philosophical attitudes was quite different: 'Philosophy of religion in Anglo-American context has taken a curious turn in the past decade ... what has come to the forefront ... is a group of Christian philosophers of a philosophically analytic persuasion ... who return to traditional Christian philosophy and natural theology' (Nielsen 1989: 7).

We must not exaggerate this. It is significant that Nielsen describes this development as 'curious', indicating that he himself remains quite unconvinced. It is likely that that most main stream philosophers would share Nielsen's puzzlement about the re-emergence of philosophy of religion as a dynamic area of current philosophizing. Moreover, given that the works of Richard Dawkins, (Dawkins 2006) and Christopher Hitchens (Hitchens 2007) topped the bestseller lists for months, I suspect that the general public would be surprised to learn of the vitality of contemporary philosophy of religion. Nevertheless, I think Nielsen and Abraham were right in their assessment. Professor Charles Taliaferro wrote the introduction to the twentieth-century section of a five-volume *History of Western Philosophy of Religion*. He sums up the current situation as follows:

> One general observation seems secure: philosophical reflection on religion has formed a major vibrant part of some of the best philosophy in the past century. We now have a virtual library of a hundred years of first-rate, diverse philosophy of religion. At the close of the century there are more societies, institutions, journals, conferences and publishing houses dedicated to philosophy of religion than any other area of philosophy. (Taliaferro 2009: 1)

Philosophy of religion in Europe

Although Taliaferro was largely speaking of philosophy in the English-speaking world similar comments could be made of the situation in

Europe. Friedrich Nietzsche and many other leading European intellectuals including, Feuerbach, Marx, Freud and Sartre had all confidently predicted the imminent 'death of God in the hearts of men'. (Nietzsche 1882 : 95–96) This has not happened. According to Paul Johnson, author of both *History of Christianity* and *Modern Times,* 'The most extraordinary thing about the twentieth century has been the failure of God to die.... At the end of the twentieth century the idea of ... God is as lively and real as ever.' (Johnson 1996: 34–38) The profoundly influential philosopher Jurgen Habermas argues that today's secular citizens need to accept the insight that 'that they are living in a society that is epistemically adjusted to the continued existence of religious communities'(Habermas 2006: 15). Likewise the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo believes we are 'entering a new age where religion is taken seriously by philosophy' (Guarino 2009: 14).

Philosophy of religion in Russia and China

What is true of Europe is even truer of the revival of philosophy of religion in both Russia and China. I have had first-hand experience of both. In 1991, I was invited to speak on 'Faith and Reason' to the Philosophy section of the Russian Academy of Sciences and later gave the same lecture in the Department of Philosophy at the People's University in Beijing. My department at Lampeter subsequently obtained a grant from the European Commission to help in the transformation of a former 'Institute for Scientific Atheism' in Leningrad into an 'Institute for Religious Studies' in St Petersburg. It is significant that this kind of development has taken place throughout the former Soviet Union, and that it has been given priority. More recently, Professor Xinzhong Yao and I secured a four-year grant from the John Templeton Foundation to compare religious experience in Britain and China. Working with colleagues from seven Chinese Universities, we found that after 60 years of atheistic indoctrination, the number of firm atheists in China corresponded almost exactly with the number in Britain (in both cases, around 26%) (Badham 2007: 181). We were also told by several Chinese philosophers that, from being a banned subject 30 years ago, philosophy of religion is now the most popular area of philosophical inquiry in China.

Why philosophy has become less hostile to religious claims

Arguments about God remain strongly contested. The difference between now and 50 years ago is that now the arguments are taken

seriously on both sides. Factors which have changed the situation include the collapse of logical positivism and of atheistic Marxism, together with a distrust of Freudian analysis. Within philosophy, an important development has been the recognition that 'the justification of religious belief' depends on a recognition that knowledge cannot be simply confined to what we discover through the natural sciences, but that disciplines like history, law, literary studies, politics, sociology, aesthetics and philosophy as well as theology cannot provide logical certainty yet can still provide sensible arguments for the support of one position rather than another. This position, argued for very cogently by Basil Mitchell, has come to be widely accepted (Mitchell 1982). In all such cases certainty is not available, but argumentation may convince some that one view is more probably than its alternative.

Philosophy has also been affected by a recognition of the failings of Marxist ideology. As an economic theory Communism has failed to deliver in every country in which it has been tried. This has weakened confidence in the atheistic assumptions behind dialectical materialism. In the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe there is a new openness to religious ideas and a return to past convictions. Even in China it seems that of those who describe themselves as 'firm atheists' only 33.4 per cent continue to believe that 'religion is the opium of the people', while 31.3 per cent of the same 'firm atheists' think nevertheless that 'religion contains profound truth' (Yao and Badham 2007: 190–191).

The influence of the 'new physics'

Today there is a widespread consensus among scientists that the universe has not always existed. It came into being from nothing some 13,000 million years ago. Similarly, there is a scientific consensus that the universe appears to be 'finely tuned' for the emergence of life and mind, since, had the conditions just after the Big Bang been even fractionally different, the universe could not have evolved in the way it has evolved. Moreover, it seems to some as if there were an 'anthropic principle' at work in this process.

These developments have greatly revived interest in the cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God. Before these developments, most philosophers assumed that Hume and Kant had definitively answered such arguments and that there was little mileage in refuting them except as an introductory exercise for first year philosophy students. However, as Keith Ward pointed out in his *Turn of the Tide,* 'Just when philosophers had thought the argument from

design had gone forever, the physicist brings it back again' (Ward 1986: 45).

The clearest example of just how much the intellectual climate has changed may be gauged by comparing the 1948 debate on the existence of God between Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston (published in John Hick's *The Existence of God)* and the 1998 commemoration of that encounter by William Lane Craig and Antony Flew (published in Stan Wallace's *Does God Exist?)*. Bertrand Russell lived at a time when scientists assumed that the universe was eternal and hence uncaused. Consequently, when Copleston tried to argue that the universe had been created, Russell could just sit back, fold his arms and declare 'the universe is just there, and that's all' (Hick 1964: 175). Copleston could find no effective counter-argument. Russell clearly won. By contrast, Craig was able to put forward a new version of the cosmological argument based on the new physics, which proved highly effective. In his contribution to the book, the chair of the debate, Keith Yandell, thought that 'what consensus there is about the matter suggests that Craig won the debate'. William Rowe thought that Flew had been forced 'to give up so much ground' as 'virtually to concede the debate' (Wallace 2003: 14 and 70–71). Flew himself summed up his then position thus: 'If a cradle Roman Catholic believes that the universe has a beginning and will have an end, then acceptance of the Big Bang "surely does provide empirical confirmation of the first part of that belief". Likewise, if a person believes in a purposeful creation, then "it is entirely reasonable to welcome the fine-tuning argument as providing confirmation of that belief" (Wallace 203: 190). Six years after the debate, Flew went further and announced that he had come to believe in God. He 'simply had to go where the evidence leads', and it seemed to him that the case for God 'is now much stronger than it ever was before' (Flew 2005).

However, acceptance of the new physics does not necessarily lead to such a conclusion. It is salutary to recall that only 22 per cent of American astronomers believe in God (Mackenzie Brown 2003). Hence, philosophical arguments for belief based on astronomical findings about the origin and evolution of the cosmos cannot be regarded as coercive. The most one can validly claim is that the scientific belief that the universe came into being out of nothing and the Christian belief that God created the universe out of nothing fit very easily together. They are parallel beliefs, and it is entirely rational for a person to hold them both. Similarly, scientific belief in the fine-tuning of the universe does not require belief in God. But once again, one can legitimately say that the scientific belief in the fine-tuning of the universe and the Christian

belief in God as the mind behind the universe go very happily together. Contemporary philosophy of religion rarely holds that it is possible either to prove or disprove belief. But what it can legitimately seek to do is to argue that faith can be rational in the sense that it need not be incompatible with other well-established knowledge that we have about the nature of reality.

John Hick's contribution to faith and knowledge

The conclusion for which I argued in the preceding paragraph was developed in John Hick's first major contribution to the philosophy of religion: *Faith and Knowledge*. Hick sought to justify religious belief as one possible way of interpreting reality. He believed that none of the various arguments for God's existence succeeded, and concluded that we live in an ambiguous universe which can be 'experienced-as' a wholly naturalistic order, or, equally validly, 'experienced-as' the product of a divine creator. In this situation the believer is acting rationally if, on the additional basis of religious experience, he or she interprets the world religiously. But, equally, the sceptic who had not had a religious experience (or has not interpreted such experiences as they may have had as religious) is rational in espousing a naturalistic atheism. Hick believes that we were living at an 'epistemic distance' from divine reality. In other words, from the point of view of our theories of knowledge, we cannot know for certain that God exists (or as Hick would prefer to say now, that there is a transcendent 'Reality' to which the various religions of the world seek to respond) . There is enough light to enable the believer to rationally embrace the life of faith, but enough ambiguity for the sceptic to be rational in rejecting it. This is important so that faith can be a free response.

John Hick and the problem of evil

From the time of Epicurus the problem of evil has been a challenge to theism. It is an issue with which Christian thinkers have always had to wrestle. It has also been more influential than any other in leading to the rejection of belief. Consequently, it is naturally one of the most discussed topics in the philosophy of religion. *Evil and the God of Love* (Hick 1966) is arguably Hick's greatest contribution to philosophical discussion. Certainly, it is hard to imagine any serious discussion of the problem of evil which did not refer to its arguments. Googling 'books about John Hick's theodicy' yielded 4970 results, of which at

least 121 were books centrally focused on Hick's thought. Hick argues that a real, objective material world, governed by regular physical law, offers an environment more suited to the development of responsible agents than would an environment in which constant divine intervention always saved humanity from the consequences of its folly, or from the heartache and challenge implicit in any finite and physical existence. As a 'vale of soul-making' the hardships and challenges of life can serve a larger purpose, provided of course that there is indeed a soul to make and a larger purpose to serve.

John Hick on death and eternal life (Hick 1976)

During the 1950s, a major debate took place between a group of leading British philosophers on the issue of 'theology and falsification'. Antony Flew argued that, in practice, philosophically sophisticated believers accepted the same worldview as their atheist counterparts because, whenever Christian claims were seriously questioned, believers constantly gave ground so that what started out as 'brash, confident assertions' gradually 'died the death of a thousand qualifications' (Flew 1955: 97–98). To meet this objection Hick had proposed in *Faith and Knowledge* a theory of 'eschatological verification'. This states that there is a real difference between an atheistic and a Christian understanding of reality because one sees our journey through life as leading nowhere, while the other sees life as a journey towards an eternal destiny. These different perspectives affect our whole way of seeing reality, and shape our attitude to life. The Christian claim will either be verified, if eternal life is real, or falsified if it isn't. This theory meets the requirement of potential verification, even though if there were no life after death, no one would be in a position to verify it. It is, however, a meaningful claim and one which makes a fundamental difference to the way life is experienced.

In *Evil and the God of Love,* belief in an afterlife held an even more important place. Hick therefore turned his attention in his next major work to the issue of death and eternal life as a belief which was integral to the philosophical coherence of Christian theism. But belief in a destiny that transcends the limitations of our present existence is also characteristic of almost all the major religious traditions. So in writing *Death and Eternal Life,* Hick resolved to adopt a global perspective, and to draw on insights from any source which might aid our understanding. The result was that his book provides encyclopaedic coverage of human speculation concerning a possible future destiny. It has therefore been

a highly significant work in contemporary philosophy of religion and also draws together Eastern and Western sources to create a possible hypothesis about what sort of destiny might be imaginable.

The religious significance of other faiths for theology

In *Death and Eternal Life,* Hick consciously drew on a global religious perspective. This reflected a change in his religious understanding since moving to Birmingham in 1967. As a result of working with leaders of the Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Jewish communities and attending their worship, Hick came to believe that phenomenologically the same kind of activity was taking place in these communities as in Christian churches. Human beings were offering themselves up in dedication and praise to a personal God, addressed and reverenced as 'creator' and Lord. Naturally, however, such experiences swiftly affected his theological understanding, particularly in relation to the person of Christ. He could no longer believe that only those who were committed to Christ could be 'saved', nor could he believe that the revelation of God through Christ was different in kind from that in other religious traditions. He therefore came to re-evaluate fundamental Christian doctrines. At first he spoke of *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977). Later, and more helpfully, he talked of *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (1993).

The significance of religious pluralism for philosophy of religion

Hick believed that, by seeing the incarnation of Christ as a myth or a metaphor, Christians are better able to see God at work in other religious traditions. At first, based on his Birmingham experience, Hick claimed that *God Has Many Names* (Hick 1980). But after encountering Advaitic Hinduism in India and Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Japan, he felt that the word 'God' was too closely identified with Christianity and so he spoke of 'the Real' instead. This idea was developed initially in *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (1985), but was then systematically worked out in his Gifford Lectures, *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989).

Hick's philosophy of religious pluralism sees all religions as human responses to transcendent Reality. He was convinced that this Reality is objectively real. Hick believed that it would be fatal to religion if a non-realist understanding of religious discourse were to become normative. However, while the religious experience of humanity may enable

believers to affirm the existence of transcendent Reality, they cannot with the same certainty endorse what particular traditions say concerning it. Hence, each religion endorses a 'persona' or 'impersona' of the Real. As the study of world religions becomes more and more normative, so it becomes necessary for philosophy of religion to expand its remit to cover a plurality of religious traditions. This has greatly enhanced the discipline in recent years.

Philosophy of religion and the mind-body problem

Within philosophy the relationship between brain and mind has been debated for centuries, and from his earliest writings Hick recognized the importance of such issues. In 1972, he delivered the Eddington Memorial Lecture on biology and the soul, much of which reappeared in *Death and Eternal Life*. However, Hick became aware that the issue was even more important to religious discussion in the twenty-first century because of the ability of neuroscience to show which parts of the brain are associated with religious experience or meditational practice. He addressed this in his most recent major work, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science* (Hick 2006). Hick sought show, however, that materialist conclusions go beyond the evidence; for, although it is true that our mental, emotional and religious life is intimately connected with brain processes and other bodily states, the reverse is equally true. Our thoughts, feelings, religious experiences and beliefs also affect our bodily states. Moreover, neuroscientists do not in practice believe that their own creative theorizing is simply the product of physical events within their brains. All wish to be taken seriously as conscious agents making out a rational case for physical determinism. Once again, Hick has identified a subject at the centre of current philosophical debate and made a significant contribution to ongoing discussion.

John Hick as a textbook author on the philosophy of religion

Although John Hick's greatest contribution to contemporary philosophy is through his major monographs, he has also made a massive contribution to the teaching of philosophy of religion. As a relatively young scholar he was invited to write a textbook on the philosophy of religion. His *Philosophy of Religion* (Hick 1963) was regularly reprinted and translated over the next 40 years, with a fourth edition appearing in 1990. Since this work alone has sold well over 600,000 copies and has

been distributed worldwide, it is probably through this more than any other work that Hick has influenced the development of the subject. Students all over the world have been introduced to the main themes of the philosophy of religion this book. Hick also edited a collection of *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, which likewise remains in print after 40 years, and his reader on *The Existence of God* (Hick 1964) has also been reprinted many times. Another valuable text book was on *The Arguments for the Existence of God* and Hick also co-edited an important collection of articles on the ontological argument (*The Many-Faced Argument)* (Hick 1968). A *John Hick Reader* (Badham 1990) which I edited on his behalf has proved a useful introduction to Hick's key arguments and is now available in electronic format. When one is assessing the impact of Hick's work as a philosopher it is important to remember the influence of these textbooks on generations of students and to recall that Hick's writings have been translated into at least 17 languages.

Hick has further influenced the philosophy of religion is in making time to attend and also to organize academic conferences, many of which have led to very useful collections of essays on major themes of contemporary philosophy. As editor of the Macmillan Library of Philosophy of Religion, he has also served as midwife to a long series of philosophical books covering a wide range of different philosophical perspectives by both established and newer colleagues. That philosophy of religion has become the most dynamic area of contemporary philosophizing owes an enormous debt to Hick's indefatigable zeal.

Bibliography

Abraham W. 2007 'Foreword' to Menssen S. and Sullivan T., *The Agnostic Inquirer,* Eerdmans

Badham P. 2007 in Yao X. and Badham P , *Religious Experience in Contemporary China,* University of Wales Press 2007

Dawkins R. 2006 *The God Delusion* Bantam Books

Flew A. & MacIntyre A 1955 *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* SCM

Flew A. 'My pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism http://www.biola.edu/antony-flew/flew-interview.pdf also see *Philosophia Christi Winter 2005*

Guarino T. 2009 *Vatimmo and Theology*London: T.& T. Clark p.14

Habermas J. 2006 'Religion in the Public Sphere' *European Journal of Philosophy*

Hick J. 1966 *Faith and Knowledge* Macmillan (1st edition 1957)

Hick J. 1964 *The Existence of God* Macmillan

Hick J. 1966 *Evil and the God of Love* Macmillan

Hick J. 1976 *Death and Eternal Life* Macmillan

Hick J. 1977 *The Myth of God Incarnate* SCM Press

Hick J. 1980 *God Has Many Names* Macmillan
Hick J. 1989 *An Interpretation of Religion* Collins
Hick J. 1993 *The metaphor of God Incarnate* SCM Press
Hick J. 2006 *The New Frontier of Religion and Science* Palgrave
Hitchens C. 2007 *God is not Great* Atlantic Books
Johnson P. 1996 'Peaceful-co-existence' *Prospect* 7 (April 1996)
Mackenzie Brown C. 2003 'The conflict between Religion and Science in Light of the Patterns of Religious Belief among Scientists *Zygon* : *Journal of Religion and Science* Vol . 38 no.3 September 2003
Menssen S. and Sullivan T. 2007 *The Agnostic Inquirer* Eerdmans
Mitchell B. 1982 *The Justification of Religious Belief* London: Oxford University Press
Nietzsche F. 1882 *The Gay Science'* Aphorism 125 cited from Kaufmann, L., *The Portable Nietzsche,* Viking 1954
Nielsen K. 1971 *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* Macmillan, 1971
Nielsen K. 1989 'Foreword' to Parsons, K. *God and the Burden of Proof* Prometheus 1989
Price H.H. 1968, 'Survival and the Idea of Another world' in Smythies J.R. (ed.) *Brain and Mind* Routledge
Smart, N. 1962 ' The Relation between Christianity and the Other Great Religions in Vidler A.R. (ed.) *Soundings,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Taliaferro C. 2009 'Introduction' in Oppy G. and Trakakis N. (eds) *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion* Volume 5 Acumen
Wallace S. *Does God Exist*? Ashgate 2003
Ward K. 1986 *The Turn of the Tide* BBC Publications
Yao X and Badham P. 2007 *Religious Experience in Contemporary China,* University of Wales Press

18

John Hick and Chinese Religious Studies

Wang Zhicheng

It is widely known that if a cultural tradition is to exert influence on another culture, it first requires a long process of entering another culture's tradition. And obviously, translation plays a key role in the process. For example, if the Buddhist sutras hadn't been translated into Chinese extensively during the past thousands of years, it is unimaginable what Chinese Buddhism today is. If no scholars had tried their best to translate great works of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, Hegel, Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sartre, Foucault, Derrida and Rorty, and so on, no one could predict contemporary Chinese philosophical discourse. Similarly, in the field of religious philosophy, religious pluralism and religious dialogue, if we hadn't translated the works of W. C. Smith, Paul Knitter, Raimon Panikkar, and so on, it would be impossible for us to understand the contemporary discourse in Chinese religious studies. This article focuses on John Hick and his contribution to the academic study of religion in China.

The Chinese translation of John Hick's works

In the early 1970s, John Hick's works were translated and introduced into Chinese academic circles. The first one to be introduced into China was *Christianity at Centre*, translated by Timothy Y. S. Liau and published by the Association of Theological Schools in Southeast Asia, Taiwan Branch. The book was re-published in 1986. However, perhaps because of its earlier appearance, or for other reasons, mainland Chinese scholars paid little attention to it.

Instead, the first book of Hicks's to absorb mainland Chinese scholars, *Philosophy of Religion*, translated by Dr. He Guanghu and published

by Beijing SDX Joint Publishing company in 1988, has had an indelible effect in on Chinese academic circles. The Chinese version of the book has allowed mainland Chinese scholars see what a real contemporary philosophy of religion is.

In fact, the study of religions in mainland China began after 1978, especially in the 1980s. And, just as many things needed to be done in China, the science of religion needed to be completely reconstructed. In a very short time, Western thought was pouring into China. John Hick's *Philosophy of Religion* was regarded as an enlightening work in the field of the philosophy of religion in China, and the research on the philosophy of religion gradually formed its own studying object, paradigm, access and the realm of issues.

More of John Hick's works began to be translated and widely introduced into Chinese academic religious-studies circles in the 1990s. Wang Zhicheng, a professor in Zhejiang University, opened a new page on Chinese translation of John Hick's works. In 1998, he translated *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Response to the Transcendent*, which is one of the most important of Hick's books. In this book, Hick clearly stated his philosophical system of religious pluralism. In fact, Chinese academics paid so much attention to this book that it has been put on the list of required reading for many university graduate students. Thereafter, these translations and studies entered a season of floruit in China.

In 1999, *The Rainbow of Faiths: Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism* was translated into Chinese by Wang Zhicheng and Sizhu. This book was written in a question and answer style and was very easily understood. When it was published by Jiangsu People's Publishing House, it was so greatly welcomed in academic circles that the first 4,000 copies quickly sold out soon, and in 2000, the book was reprinted. The book was also highly valued by The Museum of World Religions in Taiwan and very soon, in 2004, the museum published a version using traditional Chinese characters.

In 2000, Wang Zhicheng and Sizhu finished the translation of another of Hick's books, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age*, which clearly expresses Hick's thoughts on Christology. It was published by Jiangsu People's Publishing House too. Here, I especially appreciate Professor Hick's waiver of the copyrights of these two books.

In 2000, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm,* translated by Wang Zhicheng and Sizhu was published in Sichuan People's Publishing House. This book described Hick's systemic exploring of the

spiritual realm. I should especially point out that Professor Ren Jiyu, the Chinese philosopher and a pioneer of religious studies, praised *The Fifth Dimension*, as it had greatly promoted the development of Chinese philosophy. In 2001, Deng Yuanwei's translation of this book was published in Taiwan in traditional Chinese characters. In 2003, Chen Zhiping and Wang Zhicheng translated *Problems of Religious Pluralism,* published by Sichuan People's Publishing House. This is a thesis collection of John Hick's. In 2005, Wang Zhicheng finished translating *God Has Many Names* based on 1982 version, which was published by Renmin University Press. This book was published in two versions, but with different thesis collections in the philosophy of religion. In 2006, Wang Zhicheng and Zhu Caihong translated the thesis collection *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, in which Hick raised the "Copernicus Revolution" in Christian theology.

In September 2010, Wang Zhicheng and Ke Jinhua translated John Hick's latest thesis collection, *Who or What is God? And Other Investigations*, which is published by Religious Culture Publishing House. And at the same time, John Hick's other theses, that is, *Evil and Soul-Making* and *Religious Pluralism and Salvation* also have been translated into Chinese.

Research positions on Hick's thoughts in Chinese academic circles

The scholars in Chinese academic circles hold different positions on John Hick's philosophy of religion and religious pluralism. They are as follows:

Analysis and studying

At the very beginning, when the Chinese scholars met Hick's philosophy of religion and religious pluralism, China was at the earliest stages in the development of religion science. For instance, Zhang Zhigang objectively studied Hick's ideas in *The Dialogue between Owl and God.* Wang Zhicheng systematically described the context and the orbit of Hick's philosophy of religion and pluralism. So did Lai Shenchon in his book *Kant, Fichte and Young Hegel: Comment on Ethic Theology,* published in Taiwan in 1998. The above scholars based their theories on and objectively analysed Hick's thoughts instead of repudiating them. In fact, such study has never stopped, and even today, many scholars are still introducing Hick's thoughts in their own books. Furthermore,

Hick's other ideas, such as on theodicy, life after death, and so on, need to be described and analysed further.

Comparison and discussion

Most Chinese scholars compare Hick's ideas with the ideas of other scholars. For example, Zhou Weichi, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has compared Alvin Plantinga's exclusivism with Hick's pluralism. He pointed out that "according to Plantinga's hard exclusivism and Hick's hard pluralism, religious dialogue is impossible between them in that both of them have either presupposed a kind of that 'only mine is the truth' or 'none is different', hence dialogue is not necessary. However, a real dialogue perhaps is a process and overmuch presupposition has been eluded. In this process, all sides will find something new and new changes and all sides will be enriched and developed."[1]

Ou Li-jen compared Hick's philosophy of religion with Don Cupitt's ideas from the three perspectives of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethnics. In the comparison, he not only affirmed rationality and problems of Hick's critical realism, but he also affirmed the rationality and problems of Cupitt's non-realism at the same time. Then Wang Zhicheng discussed the rationality and problems between Hick's thoughts and those of other theologians, such as Paul Knitter, Raimon Panikkar, James Frederick and Gorge Lindbeck. Wang Zhicheng did some individual rethinking when he made his comparisons and discussions. Yang Leqiang did a similar systematic and comprehensive deep discussion. The above-mentioned Chinese scholars, such as Zhang Zhigang, Wang Zhicheng, and Zhou Weichi have systematically analysed exclusivism and inclusivism, which are related to pluralism. In the comparison, the three scholars took the position of relatively affirming Hick's pluralism.

Defence of pluralism

Wang Zhicheng has defended pluralism in different situations. In 1998, he responded to Alan J. Torrance's religious particularism in a paper he published in the *Regent Chinese Journal,* called 'The Academic Research of Religion and Truth'. When another scholar, named Dong Jiangyang, translated Wilfred Cantwell Smith's book *The Meaning and End* of *Religion* in which Smith defends particularism, Wang Zhicheng was inspired to write another paper defending Smith's and Hick's thoughts of pluralism systematically. He holds two positions to defend the pluralism. From the pragmatic viewpoint of religion, pluralism is better

than exclusivism and inclusivism, which Hick has criticized. From the position of philosophy, it is not only hard to persuade people to believe the theories of exclusivism and inclusivism, but these theories also do not reflect an objective attitude to history. To think with pure rationality, although pluralism is also hard to bear the reflections, when seen from the related facet, pluralism has much more rationality. Alan Du, an independent Chinese scholar accepts Hick's philosophy of religion, especially the idea of religious pluralism. In his book *The Way of Rational Faith: The Community of Human Religions* and in many other situations, Alan has defended Hick's pluralism. Sheng Kai, a senior monk from Nanking University, has been enlightened by Hick's pluralism and tries to look at the wisdom of pluralism and religious dialogue from the perspective of Buddhism in order to provide some ideas for the contemporary dialogue among civilizations.[2]

Critiques of Pluralism

In China, some Christian scholars reject Hick's pluralism. Their argument against it derives from their traditional faith and from some of the positions of Western Christian theologians. For example, Chin Ken-Pa , a scholar from Taiwan, has a post-liberal Christian position.. He pointed out that the pluralism of religion is still a proposition of modernized 'enlightenment thought' obtained from the notion of 'integration' in Kant's philosophical frame. Pluralism has theorized every kind of proposition, but has ignored the importance of religious self-identity. In Chin Ken-Pa's opinion, pluralism is a 'new' theory of religion. On the one hand, pluralism accepts the particularity of religions, but on the other hand, it supposes a common ultimate reality. Herein, the intercommunity was changed into a verbalism of the oppression of difference. Post-liberal theology claims 'incommensurability', which is a commitment to retain the differences and protect the existence ability of religions. Pluralists are all essentialists. The theory of pluralism is 'a language of ýcolonialism', whose purpose is to weaken differences and debilitate the self-identity of religions. Duan Dezhi affirmed Hick's pluralism, but at the same time criticized it for being utopian in some aspects. He said, "No doubt, Hick's pluralistic hypothesis is full of persuasions as a philosophical theory of religions. However, unfortunately, religion is not philosophy, though there's some relationship between them. The ultimate deficiency of Hick's hypothesis is that it confuses the philosophical theory and religious faith, which is divorced from the historical situation and development of religions. Hick's theory has

an obvious abstractness and non-historic or trans-historic characters, which gives it a distinct utopian character.[3] Du Xiaoan was influenced by Hick when he studied for his PhD degree at Birmingham University, but Du Xiaoan holds a position of inclusivism. He advocates religious integration and protests against pluralism, and he is critical of Hick's pluralism. He said "only address that the equal attitude and opening spirit to all religions will definitely resulted to aberrancy and defection ... finally slip into relativism and nihilism."[4]

Practice of Hick's pluralism

Some Chinese scholars try to use Hick's ideas about pluralism and religious dialogue to discuss and solve some problems. For instance, Wang Zhicheng analysed the ideas of *Laozi*[5] and discussed the construction of Chinese Christian theology by utilizing Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. "Firstly, religious pluralism has provided an ultimate foundation for Chinese Christian theology construction. ... Secondly, religious pluralism also has supplied an environment for Chinese Christian theology pluralistic construction. ... Finally, religious pluralism has supplied us the validity for Chinese Christian theology pluralistic construction."[6] Wang Yu deeply analysed the sources of religious pluralism in Chinese Tradition by using Hick's ideas on pluralism.[7] Peng Guoxiang found something consistent with Hick's pluralistic ideas in Chinese philosophy. He said, 'On the part of solving the conflicts among religions, if we could regard the intercommunication among different religions based on affirming the differences among religions as the best way, we could say, *Li as One Embodied in the Differentials* (Li Yi Fen Shu)' shares deep and vast discussions on the religious ideas and practices of pluralism. It will be a great contribution to solve the global conflicts of religions.[8]

Chinese Publications of Studies of Hick's Thoughts

Over the course of more than 20 years of development, Chinese academic circles have obtained fruitful results. Ten books written by Hick have been translated into Chinese. Such books, including the important works in philosophy of religion and religious pluralism, have embodied Hick's thoughts and systems.

I should say that the Chinese academic circles have devoted much attention to the study of Hick's theory. Based on the identification and critique of the philosophy of religion and religious pluralism, many scholars have focused on researching Hick's philosophy of religion.

Furthermore, there are a group of graduate students who also see Hick's theory as the jumping-off point of their academic studies or as a gate through which to enter the field of religious dialogue.

According to what I have known, in mainland China, it is Zhang Zhigang, a professor from Beijing University who is the pioneer in the study of John Hick's philosophy of religion. In his book *The Dialogue between Owl and God: The Questions of Christian Philosophy*, Zhang Zhigang first introduced John Hick's theory of theodicy and the language of religion.

Being an important representative in Zhejiang school of thought, Wang Zhicheng published his doctoral dissertation *Interpretation and Salvation: The Religious Pluralism* in 1996. In this book, he systematically introduced John Hick's biography and Hick's ideas, such as his arguments on existence of God, the epistemological foundation of religious pluralism, the philosophical construction of religious pluralism, the dialogue thoughts of religious pluralism and the various possible challenges to religious theory of pluralism.

Wang Zhicheng did not feel content with the introductions and discussions on Hick's pluralistic thought. He continued to carry out further exploration to solve some of the basic problems in religious philosophy. In 1999, he published another book of *Religion, Interpretation and Peace: A Constructive Study on John Hick's Philosophy of Pluralism*. Influenced by John Hick's ideas on pluralism and Raimon Panikkar's cross-culture dialogue, Wang Zhicheng has individually explored a series of questions for the philosophy of religion. Cooperating with Sizhu, a scholar studying the thoughts of Raimon Panikkar, Wang Zhicheng finished the book *Eager for the Holy: A Philosophy of Religion* in 2000, which is the first systematic work in mainland China since 1949. A few years later, in 2005, Professor Wang re-published a new version of this book, titled *Global Philosophy of Religion*.

Other famous Chinese scholars, such as Professor Duan Dezhi from Wuhan University, Professor He Guanghu from Renmin University, Professor Lai Shenchon from National Taipei University, Professor Shanchun from China University of Political Science and Law, Professor Zhuo Xinping and Professor Zhou Weichi from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Professor Kwan Kai Man from Hong Kong Baptist University, have expanded their studies on John Hick's theory. Some of them try to oppose, affirm, borrow or promote Hick's thoughts, and in this way, the study system on Hick's thoughts has been set up well.

Furthermore, we also find many graduate students at many universities who show interest in John Hick's thought. Many of them even choose Hick's ideas as their master's or doctoral dissertation subjects, which

promotes the deep study of his ideas. Wang Rongcang from Taiwan finished his graduate thesis, *A Study on John Hick's Pluralism Thoughts of Religions,* in 1986. It is the earliest thesis I could find in the Chinese academic circles. In 2002, Wang Tao from Shanxi Normal University wrote a master's degree thesis titled, *The Ultimate Reality and Religious Pluralism*; it is noteworthy that in it, he makes a response to what D' Costa oppugned in Hick. In his opinion, and specifically, the religious pluralism of religion is cultural attitude rather than an alleging of truth. Hence, we can't deduct that pluralism is an exclusion of exclusionism and inclusionism. The pluralist is not the 'anonymous exclusionist'. Pluralism originates not from the inner, but from the outer requirement of the religions. It should be a set of culture schemes to deal with the relationships among world great religions, which try to put different human faith systems into the discourse of human culture unity.

In 2005, Wang Li of Fudan University expressed his ideas in his master's degree thesis, *A Brief Comment on the Foundation of Religious Dialogue: Case Study on John Hick's Theory of Ultimate Reality*. He reviewed Hick's theory of religious dialogue, paying attention to the influence of postmodern theory on Hick's religious dialogue. And at the same time, to find a way out for the religious dialogue, Wang Li affirmed the rationality of Hans Küng's viewpoint of ethics and Paul Knitter's view of common suffering and the taking of global responsibility as the foundation of dialogue.

In 2007, Gao Lijuan of Peking International Studies University compared the theodicy of Richard Swinburne with John Hick's in her master's thesis, *The Problems of Evil: A Comparison Study between Richard Swinburne and John Hick*. In 2009, we find two master's degree theses and one doctoral dissertation talk about John Hick's theories. Dr. Yang Leqiang from Wuhan University published his doctoral dissertation, *Toward the Harmony of Interfaith: A Comparative Research on the Theories of Interfaith Harmony of Pluralistic Philosophy*. In this book he mainly studied John Hick's and Raimon Panikkar's thoughts.

Wang Chunyan, a graduate student from Peking International Studies University pointed out in her master's degree thesis, *A Brief Study on John Hick's Theory of Religious Pluralism*, that John Hick's theory of religious pluralism holds that every world religious tradition and system has different responses to the ultimate reality and that they share a common character in which the self-centred is transferred to the reality-centred. All religions have an equally available way of saviour. Religious pluralism advocates "harmony but not sameness, to seek common ground while reserving differences." This is a practice to aimed at maintaining peaceful

and harmonious relationships among different religious communities, which is valuable for meeting the challenges of the contemporary world and achieving peace among human beings. Hick's ideas have provided a brand new field for us to create a new path of peace.

Ma Songchao, a graduate student from Huaqiao University shares his understanding of John Hick's thoughts in his master's thesis, *The Character of John Hick's Religious Pluralism*. He wrote that religious pluralism is a general theory of the studies on philosophy of religion and the science of religion, including almost all of the categories and contents. Hick has focused the notion of transcendence and philosophical speculation on the reality of religious dialogue; hence he became one of the most important philosophers in the contemporary philosophy of religion. The author not only reviewed the theory of John Hick, but also analysed the structure and contents of Hick's pluralism and tried to expand Hick's theory into a new aspect of philosophy. The author also tried to discuss Hick's ideas in the field of Marxism to expand a wider reflection of theory so that to widen the related theory spaces.

Liu Ruiqing, an undergraduate student from Zhejiang University finished a bachelor degree paper of *A Critique to John Hick's Religious Pluralism*. She pointed out that, since the Second World War, a religious pluralistic context has become an increasingly obvious reality. Feeling that there was a gap between theory and reality, John Hick proposed the hypothesis of religious pluralism to relieve the tension among religions and to promote dialogue. The argument has never stopped since the theory was born, and it can be regarded as one of the most modern and vexing arguments. According to the main problems and the inner deductive process of the religious pluralism hypothesis, we find three principles, which have both constrained and nourished Hick's theory. The principle of humanity is embodied Hick's insistence on the universal character of ultimate salvation. The principle of rationality is expressed in Hick's seeking to clarify of the theory and consistency for the outer world. The spiritual principle is embodied by Hick's concern with the spiritual feeling enhancement and his notion of self-surpassing. The three principles have some tensions which are non-negotiable. But the pluralistic hypothesis is the very transigent theory result, which was consistently balanced by Hick.

In addition to the above-mentioned research achievements, there have been numerous papers on Hick's ideas published in important magazines and journals, for example, *World Religions Studies, World Religious Culture, Religious Studies, Journal of Zhejiang University, Journal of Wuhan University, Journal of Fudan University, Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology, Sino-Christian Studies: An International Journal of*

Bible, and *Theology & Philosophy.* Most of the papers discuss the idea of religious pluralism or relate to it. Famous Chinese scholars, such as those mentioned above, Professor Wang Zhicheng, Duan Dezhi, and Zhou Weichi, as well as others have written various theses John Hick's ideas of religious pluralism and philosophy.

Contributions of Hick to Chinese Science of Religious Studies

From the foregoing, we can see that John Hick's ideas have been a prominent subject in Chinese academic circles, through translation, introduction, analysis, and utilization. For any scholar concerned with the philosophy of religion, the relationships among religions and religious dialogue, it is impossible to avoid John Hick. Whether they take an attitude of affirming or opposing his ideas, Hick's thoughts have become a part of Chinese academia and are an important resource in religious studies. This great influence is mainly embodied in the deep reflection on and argument with Hick's thoughts, and in the discussions on the future development of Chinese religions.

Based on Hick's theory of religious pluralism, some Chinese scholars embarked on a new analysis of pluralism. Wang Zhicheng pointed out three types of pluralism, that is, the pluralism of humanity; pluralism of rationality, pluralism of spirituality.[9] For religious dialogue, Wang Zhicheng analysed every kind of dialogue model and developed a dialogue model of growth, which is based on the life growing of human beings.[10]

Dr. Yang Leqiang found an inner access to the path of communication between the philosophy of religious pluralism and Marxism. He said, "it is the orientation of value to the human care between the religious pluralism and Marxism: only do we catch the common purpose and the supreme principle which are interdependence and complementary and concerning about the human beliefs, can we achieve the unity valuable insight of self-existence and the whole life renewal. Through comparing and analysing the harmonious core subject among the faiths, it is necessary and possible to generally illuminate the faiths of human beings which could go toward harmony."[11]

In China, as scholars continue to promote the philosophy of religion and pluralism, an epoch-making argument concerning the ontology of religious philosophy is appearing. This argument has absorbed Chinese academics, who pay close attention on it. Some scholars have pointed out that such an argument has turned a new page in Chinese studies of religious philosophy, religious relationship and religious dialogue.

Professor Duan Dezhi pointed out in his paper *The Argument on the Ontology of Global Philosophy and Its Academic Meaning* that three arguments have developed in mainland China in 1949. The first asked the question, "Is religion an opiate or not?" The second also asked a question, "Is Confucianism a religion or not?" Third was the assertion that the argument on the ontology of global philosophy is part of the argument of philosophy in the world.[12]

Professor Duan said that the argument on the ontology of global philosophy mainly took place between Professor He Guanghu of Renmin University and Professor Wang Zhicheng from Zhejiang University. It was initiated in 2003. Duan said that such an argument was full of academic meaning, not only because of its international character, but also because of its profound international academic context, which also shows China is meeting the new challenges of times.[13]

It can be foreseen that Chinese scholars will continue the deep study of John Hick's thoughts and also will continue the academic argument of global philosophy. More detailed studies of Hick's thoughts will be preceded in the field of pluralism, philosophy, the science of religion and religious dialogue. For example, Dr. Wang Rong discussed which of Hick's ideas had deeply influenced Paul Knitter's ideas on religious dialogue by narrating the forming process of Hick's model of dialogue from God-centred to Reality-centred when she devoted her studies on Paul Knitter's thoughts of pluralism and religious dialogue. At the same time, she also reflected on the strengths and shortcomings of Wang Zhicheng's model of religious dialogue, that is, the model of growth, to point out that China now needs a new consciousness of life-centred dialogue and spiritual renewal.[14]

In short, the Chinese scholars have begun to have a new understanding of their traditional religions, and religion has become a popular topic today because of the enlightenment of John Hick's ideas. I should say Hick's religious pluralism is helping people to more systemically explore and excavate the resources of religious pluralism in Chinese traditional culture and to let those resources serve the harmony of religions in China and the world peace. Hick's thoughts have injected a new energy to the healthy growth of Chinese philosophy of religion.

Epilogue

In a word, John Hick has made an epoch-making contribution to the development of Chinese philosophy of religion. Obviously, by studying, reflecting on and arguing over his ideas, scholars have promoted the development of Chinese science of religion and philosophy. And at the

same time, Chinese religions will achieve the purpose of becoming harmonious and flourishing. The study of religions in China entered into a new ideal state once Hick's thoughts and research became a prominent subject in Chinese academic circles.

Notes

1. Zhou Weichi, 'A Contemporary Debate between Religious Pluralism and Exclusivism', *Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology*, No. 21, 2004, p. 222.
2. Sheng Kai, 'Towards Religious Pluralism and Dialogue in Buddhist Perspective', *World Religious Culture*, No. 5, 2010.
3. Duan Dezhi, *An Introduction to Religion*, Beijing: Renmin Press, 2005, p. 399.
4. Du Xiaoan, *The Integration of Christianity and Chinese Culture*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2010, p. 13.
5. Wang Zhicheng, 'A Brief Study on Laozi's Response to Ultimate Reality', *Philosophical Research*, No.9, 1994, pp. 59–62.
6. Wang Zhicheng and Si Zhu, 'Religious Pluralism and Chinese Theological Construction', *Yanjing Journal of Theology*, No. 2, 2001, pp. 76–84.
7. Wang Yu, A Study on Apologetics of Buddhism in Wei and Jin Dynasties, *Dialogue and Comparison of Religions*, ed. Zhuo Xinping, Beijing: Religious Culture Publishing House, vol. 4, 2003, pp. 199–212.
8. Peng Guoxiang, *Confucian Tradition: Crossing Religion and Humanism*, Beijing: Beijing University Press, chapter 7, p. 192.
9. Wang Zhicheng, 'Religious Pluralism and Principles of Cross-cultural Religious Ethics', *Journal of Zhejiang University* (Humanities and Social Sciences), vol. 31, No. 1, 2001.
10. Wang Zhicheng, *Eager for Peace: A Study on Contemporary Religious Dialogue*, Beijing: Religious Culture Publishing House, 2003, chapter 6, esp. pp. 373–81.
11. Yang Leqiang, *Toward the Harmony of Interfaith: A Comparative Research on the Theories of Interfaith Harmony of Pluralist Philosophy* Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2009, p. 350.
12. Duan Dezhi, 'Philosophical Debates of Religion over the Past 30 Years and Its Academic Achievements in Chinese Mainland', *Wuhan University Journal* (Humanity Sciences) No. 1, 2009, p. 20.
13. Ibid., p. 21.
14. Wang Rong, 'Rethinking the Religious Dialogue and the Second Axial Age: Comment on Wang Zhicheng's Interpretation, Understanding and Religious Dialogue, *Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology,* No. 31, 2009, pp. 325–38.

19

John Hick's Religious Interpretation of Religion: An Unexplored Resource for Religious Educators

Geoff Teece

Introduction

Writing in 1993, Professor Paul Badham[1] invited his readers to pick up any contemporary work in the philosophy of religion or modern Christian theology and count the number of references to John Hick in the index. Of course, it is well established that Hick has not only produced writings on a wide range of subjects that demand critical attention and acclaim, but that his work also has, according to David Cheetham, 'always addressed questions that interest people', which seems 'to make religious sense; that is, they are issues eminently worth bothering about'.[2] Badham makes a similar point when he writes:

> Many philosophers of religion discuss their subject without themselves understanding the workings of the religious mind or the things that matter to religious faith. This has never been true of John Hick, which is why his work has always been focussed on the central issues confronting faith in the world today.[3]

If Cheetham and Badham are correct in their analysis, then the attraction of Hick's work to the religious educator makes sense. However, the fact of the matter is that such interesting work has, until now, been largely ignored by religious educators. For if a religious educator were to do as Badham suggests theologians and philosophers of religion do, namely to pick up any textbook on the history of religious education over the past

50 years or so and count the number of references to Hick in the index, then a different story of influence (or lack of influence) can be told.

To give just a couple of examples: in reading the most recent survey of religious education in England and Wales, from 1944 to the present,[4] it is possible to conclude that Hick has had virtually no influence on the subject. Hick's name does not appear in the index. It does, however, appear once, on page 108, in a reference to the 1975 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for religious instruction: the first multifaith RE syllabus. In the 1996 publication *Christian Theology and Religious Education*[5]; a book in which one might expect to find substantial reference to so eminent a scholar as Hick, there are only two very brief references to Hick – one by Ninian Smart who likens Hick's pluralist approach to his and one note on page 75, where Hick is used to make a point about the difference, according to some, between theology and the philosophy of religion. In Michael Grimmitt's influential Religious Education and Human Development (1987)[6] there is one reference to Hick – a note on page 394.

Why is this? How can it be that an eminent thinker covering such a wide range of religiously interesting topics is absent from such works? First, of course, Hick has never written about Religious Education; the closest he has come being his chapter in honour of John Hull in Bates et al. (2006).[7] Secondly, and significantly, since Smart's original work on a phenomenological approach to RE,[8] few religious educators have looked to theology or the philosophy of religion to support a rationale for multifaith religious education.[9]

Religious education and disciplinary identity

Of course, there are many ways to study religion, and there are many different definitions of religion. Religion can be studied from a theological, philosophical, historical, sociological or psychological point of view, for example. In recent times, a key issue for religious educators has been that religion was being understood in religious education either 'religiously', but only from perspectives within one tradition, as in the type of religious education advocated in the post–1944 agreed syllabuses, or 'objectively and dispassionately'[10] as understood in modern phenomenological approaches. The problem with the former approach was that a theological perspective from one tradition could not do justice to other traditions, and hence this approach was rejected in the developments from the 1970s onwards. According to its critics, the problem with the latter was that an 'objective and dispassionate' interpretation of religion could result in *religious education* not only

losing its 'confessional' identity, but also failing to develop a new *distinctive* identity. For what was there to distinguish it from sociology or history or citizenship education?

So if the kind of Christian education that pre-dated modern approaches to the subject attempted to enable students to understand the world from a Christian point of view, what is it to understand the world from a broadly religious point of view? This is an important question for RE because if there is something distinctive about a religious view of experience, pupils should be enabled to understand it. But a continuing contested question for the subject has been, how does one conceptualize this?

Despite the obvious relevance of Hick's interpretation of religion as a religious but not confessional interpretation to this issue, nobody within the field of RE has attempted to apply it to the continuing search for the subject's distinctive identity. Discussions of Hick in RE literature have almost always been dismissive in that critics have focused on his pluralist hypothesis that the major religious traditions of the world are, as far as we can tell, historically and culturally determined responses to 'the Real', and are equally salvific. This is a mistake because Hick's pluralist hypothesis is not the starting point of his philosophy of religion, but the conclusion of over 50 years of scholarly research; however, in concentrating on the controversies that surround it, religious educators have failed to see the potential for RE in his interpretation of religion as human responses to the transcendent.

What is interesting for the religious educator about Hick's work is his attempt to articulate a *religious* interpretation of religion. In his chapter in Bates et al. Hick discusses the question, 'what is religion?', and develops the Wittgensteinian argument about family resemblance concepts, which he first outlined in *Interpretation of Religion*. Religion 'has no common essence but links together a wide range of different phenomena. ... The network can be stretched more widely or less widely.' In its widest usage, according to Hick, it can include Soviet Marxism, whilst in terms of a more 'compact' use religion 'requires some kind of belief in a transcendent supra-natural reality'. He goes on to say that the wider and narrower uses are relevant to different interests, so sociologists will be interested in flinging the net as wide as possible, whilst the 'great world faiths' will be interested in narrower usage focusing on the centrality of the transcendent. It is not the case that 'one usage is correct and the other wrong, but that they serve different legitimate purposes'.[11] This is interesting as it echoes a key philosophical issue in the theory and practice of religious education.

There is an important current debate in the United Kingdom as to the possibility of regarding RE as a discipline in its own right, rather in the way that history is regarded as a discipline. An alternative view is that RE would be better understood as employing a number of disciplines, such as philosophy, anthropology, and psychology, in its pursuit. This has been the traditional view handed down to the RE profession from such pioneers as Ninian Smart. The problem with this view is that if RE does not warrant being referred to as a discipline in its own right; if it doesn't possess what we might refer to as its own distinctive identity; and if it relies on other disciplines for its identity, then, potentially, it is prey to being blown hither and thither by the latest curriculum fashion. For example, under the previous Labour government religious educators were increasingly placing their subject alongside, or in some cases as a major contributor to, community cohesion and citizenship. The problem, of course, is that under the new coalition government the language of community cohesion and citizenship has disappeared; RE remains outside the current attempts to reform the curriculum, but it remains in the curriculum because it is compulsory, though seemingly no more significant than it is in some way important.

Baumfield put this succinctly: 'The status of religious education as the most controversial subject in the school curriculum, at least in the UK, remains unchallenged. ... The contested nature of religious education derives from three aspects: different perceptions of its aim and purpose; the fact that it is a compulsory subject in a secular curriculum; lack of agreement as to the domain of the subject.'[12] This chapter is an attempt to explore, with the help of Hick's *religious* interpretation of religion, what might be an appropriate domain for a subject called *religious* education.

A religious interpretation of religious education

Those in religious education who have written critically about Hick's supposed influence on the aims and purposes of RE have failed to take into account Keith Ward's point that Hick's work displays a number of pluralisms. These Ward refers to as 'hard' pluralism, 'revisionist' pluralism, and 'soft' pluralism. Ward believes that 'soft pluralism' as evident in Hick's work is coherent and worthy of consideration in contrast to 'hard pluralism' and 'revisionist pluralism'. The former appears to stress the apparently contradictory claims that the supreme reality is unknowable, but that all traditions (at least all the major ones)

manifest that reality in equally valid and authentic ways. The latter asks too much of religious believers to radically revise their doctrines in the light of modern scholarship and interfaith understanding.[13] 'Soft' pluralism includes the insight that there is a divine reality which is infinite and beyond human comprehension in its essential nature, but which nevertheless discloses something of that nature as it stands in relation to us in many religious traditions. In many (though not all) of these traditions human beings aim to overcome a self-, or ego-centred, life in relation to a supreme object of value which promises spiritual liberation or human transformation. Consequently, no one religious tradition has the completeness of truth about this supreme reality, and that it is wise and helpful for religious believers to look to other traditions to inform and complement their own. This particular version of pluralism is similar to the concept of 'positive pluralism'. This is a perspective that claims that there are 'useful insights and helpful teachings in all traditions'.[14] This is, of course, not the same as saying that such teachings are all the same or equally valid. My argument, therefore, is that this type of pluralism is evident in Hick's work and as such is a valuable contribution to RE.

Central to Hick's thesis, of course, is that the idea of human transformation lies at the heart of religion.[15] Taking 'soft pluralism' seriously would mean that in religious education pupils study religion critically and develop their understanding of what it means to be human in a religiously ambiguous world.

One might refer to this kind of pluralism as 'procedural' in that it informs the process of the subject but does not exclusively define the content. It is thus a second-order activity rather than a first-order commitment. That any interpretation of religion operates as a second-order explanatory framework rather than a first-order commitment is a necessary requirement if the aims of critical religious education are to be fulfilled.

Explanatory frameworks and the inevitability of reductionism

Of course, many criticisms of Hick involve accusations that his pluralist hypothesis is reductionist. Despite emphasizing its explanatory, second-order nature, it is difficult to argue that there is no element of reductionism in Hick's work. The issue is, rather, whether or not such reductionism is legitimate. According to Proudfoot: 'Reductionism has become a derogatory epithet in the history and philosophy of

religion.'[16] The objection appears to be that religious experience cannot legitimately be explained in historical, psychological or sociological terms. So explanations of religion by such as Freud (psychological) or Marx (sociological) are illegitimate because a 'distinctive subject matter ... requires a distinctive method'. This is because such methods fail to grasp the meaning of religious phenomena.

Proudfoot is illuminating here when he distinguishes between *descriptive reductionism* and *explanatory reductionism*. According to this distinction, descriptive reductionism is the failure to identify a religious experience by which the subject identifies it. So, '[t]o describe the experience of a mystic by reference only to alpha waves, altered hear rate and changes in bodily temperature is to misdescribe it'; or, '[t]o characterise the experience of a Hindu mystic in terms drawn from the Christian tradition is to misidentify it.' Consequently, such descriptive reductionism fails to provide an accurate account of the subject's experience. Explanatory reductionism on the other hand offers an, 'explanation of an experience that are not those of the subject and that might not meet with his [sic] approval.'[17] Proudfoot claims that this is perfectly justifiable and normal procedure. He gives an example from history whereby historians offer explanations of past events by employing concepts such as socialization, ideology, means of production and feudal economy; yet, 'seldom can these concepts be properly be ascribed to the people whose behaviour is the object of the historian's study'.[18] But this is not a problem, for the explanation stands or falls on how well it accounts for the available evidence. Indeed, the study of history could not proceed without such explanatory frameworks.

So the problem we are encountering with critiques of Hick's account of religion is the failure to distinguish between these two kinds of reductionism. Such a failure results in the claim that any account of religious emotions, practices, or experience must be restricted to the perspective of the subject and must employ only the terms, beliefs and judgments that would meet with his [sic] approval. This claim derives its plausibility from examples of descriptive reductionism but is then extended to preclude explanatory reduction. When so extended, it becomes a protective strategy.[19]

Consequently, the subject's perspective becomes normative. This being the case it is difficult to see how there can be a satisfactory account of the world's religions. It is difficult to see how the study of religion can proceed. Hick is concerned to present a *religious* interpretation of religion that leaves the religions 'as they are', so to speak, in a

descriptive sense while offering interpretations of human nature and its transformation in an *explanatory* sense. Hence it has great potential to contribute to a distinctively broad religious way of interpreting a variety of traditions, as opposed to a narrowly religious interpretation based on the religiousness of a single tradition.

Second-order explanatory frameworks in religious education

In religious education it can be said that there has existed a second-order explanatory framework of the kind typically derived from Smart's typology of dimensions of religion. However, seeking to interpret religion in such a way has sometimes led to a reduction in the descriptive power, and distortion, of the aspect of religion in question. Learning about and from ritual, ethics, myth per se is not the same as learning about and from particular examples of ritual, ethics or myth. If we merely learn about Hindu *puja* as an example of a class of ritual, we are not necessarily learning about Hinduism, nor are we necessarily learning from it. Furthermore, by merely looking at *puja* as a form of ritual, we could be accused of superficiality and of domesticating the religious tradition. We could be accused of descriptive reductionism. This has possibly been an area of confusion for teachers because learning about myth, ritual and symbolism per se does not, arguably, enable students to learn in a way that best enables them to understand what is *religious* about the religions. This can most effectively be achieved by selecting appropriate content from the religions themselves.

Despite criticisms of the way Smart's framework has often been utilized, second-order frameworks for religion can be useful, especially if such a framework interprets religions in the context of what, for the adherents, their religion teaches about what it means to be human. If we can identify this, then we can make some appropriate links between human experience and how we might deepen and broaden our pupils' understanding when they learn about the various religions. I suggest there are benefits from making use of Hick's second-order explanatory framework interpreting religions as providing an analysis of human nature, which is always imperfect, and the role that religion plays in transforming human nature from self-centredness to 'reality' centeredness based on an understanding of transcendence as understood in the various traditions.

Religious education and human experiences of the transcendent

What is distinctive about religions, according to Hick, is belief in transcendence.[20] As Otto pointed out, without transcendence or, as he put it, 'the holy' at its core, 'no religion would be worthy of the name'.[21] Eliade referring to the sacred, which has interesting implications for the debate about religious education, wrote:

A religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it – the element of the sacred.[22]

I suggest, therefore, that the central focus for religious educators should be on religions as expressions of human experiences of transcendence. It should be stressed that this does not mean that religious education merely focuses on the human experience. It is what human beings claim to know through their experience of the transcendent that is essential.

However, if this is to be achieved in a multi-religious context, then it would seem sensible for teachers to have some kind of framework in which to understand religions as expressions of human responses to transcendence in a global, rather than faith-specific, sense, and in a way that moves beyond mere appreciation of cultural differences.

The soteriological character of religions

Here, we can turn to Hick's Irenaean intuition[23] and his claim that what is distinctive about post-axial religions in general is that these human responses to the transcendent are soteriological in character. Religions are thus concerned, 'with the transformation of the self through an appropriate response to that which is most truly real.'[24]

It should be noted that Hick is not saying that *all* religions are soteriologically orientated. Indeed, what Hick calls pre-axial religions were 'concerned with the preservation of cosmic and social order' rather than salvation/liberation (Hick 1989, p. 22).[25] He also has an ethical criterion for determining the soteriological efficacy of individual traditions. What follows in this section is a brief and limited summary based on key concepts from the six 'major' post-axial religious traditions drawing on Hick's idea of a 'soteriological structure'[26] and other sources,

which illustrate understandings about human nature and its transformation. The intention here is to provide a general illustration of the nature of soteriology in the various traditions to emphasize the aspects of religion, namely transcendence and soteriology, that I argue should lie at the heart of religious education. Jackson[27] has shown how diverse religious traditions and identities can be. However, as he pointed out in the case of Hinduism, although it does not have, 'a universally accepted core, Hinduism does have a family of distinctive concepts and social structures.'[28] What I am suggesting below, therefore, is that although religious traditions are varied and complex it is possible to identify certain clusters of distinctive concepts that encompass the religion's soteriological dimension.

Human transformation may be understood in two dimensions. Firstly, all the 'major' religions conceive of human nature and experience as being essentially unsatisfactory. Indeed this is the meaning of the Buddhist term *dukkha*. Because humans are subject to *tanha* (craving) life is never satisfactory. We crave for that which we do not possess, which leads to a constant experience of life as less than satisfactory. This human experience is caused by our spiritual blindness, or *avidya*. This spiritual blindness is the first link in the chain of causes of human suffering, referred to as the doctrine of dependent origination.

Avidya is a key concept that underpins other indigenous religious traditions of India, such as Hinduism and Sikhism. In Hinduism *avidya* leads to *maya* (illusion about that which is truly real), leading to attachment to the world of *samsara*. It 'is the root cause of our unhappiness, and the reason for our seeking liberation'.[29]

For Sikhs, *avidya* and *maya* cause the condition known as *haumai,* which means ego, or I-centredness. A person who is subject to *haumai* is known as *manmukh*. According to Guru Nanak, it is *haumai* which controls unregenerate man to such an extent that it 'binds him more firmly to the wheel of transmigration'.[30]

In the Semitic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam this unsatisfactoriness is understood largely in moral terms. In human nature there is a tendency to 'fall away' from God. In Christianity, it is through the fallen-ness caused by the sin of the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. This causes human beings to live a life alienated from God.

In Judaism, whilst there is no conception of 'original sin', human beings are created with free will, with its constant tension between our evil inclination, *yetzer ha-ra*, and good inclination, *yetzer ha-tov*.

In Islam, although human beings are created with the capacity to understand and live by the absolute qualities of God, such as mercy, compassion and love, our earthly existence with its need for survival often causes us to be weak and fallible. Hence the tendency to be subject to 'forgetfulness of God', or *ghafala*.

However, the religious traditions provide human beings with a vision and a path towards a limitlessly better life, conceived in quite radically different ways, in which human beings may achieve liberation from and transformation of a self-centred and unsatisfactory existence. Hick refers to this as 'cosmic optimism'.[31] Religions provide a means by which humans may become liberated from such unsatisfactory dimensions of the human condition.

For the Buddhist, this consists of understanding the four noble truths, following the eightfold path and five precepts in a path of meditation and 'skilful living', developing the qualities of *metta* (loving kindness) and *karuna* (compassion) leading to the state of *nibbana*.

For Hindus, 'spirituality and daily life are practically inseparable'.[32] There are a variety of spiritual paths, or *yogas*; *bhakti yoga* (devotion), *jnana yoga* (spiritual insight and knowledge), *raja yoga* (meditation) and *karma yoga* (selfless service). These paths are not necessarily tightly compartmentalized but in their various ways lead the devotee to spiritual liberation (*moksha*).

For the Sikh, following a path of *nam simran* (keeping God constantly in mind) and *sewa* (selfless service) and hence developing *gurmukh* (God centredness) leads to a state of *mukhti*.

For Jews, the *halakhah* (Jewish religious law) provides the link between human beings and God. Mystical Judaism contains the idea of *tikkun olam*, whereby creation caused disunity in the world and 'divine sparks were scattered throughout the entire universe'.[33] Thus humanity's task is to repair the world and for the Jew that means bringing *kedusha* (God's holiness) into the world through the development of right relationships with fellow human beings and with God.

The Christian understanding of salvation is that although the human condition is a distortion of its true nature, God is at work in the world bringing individuals and indeed the whole of creation to its true destiny. What is distinctively Christian about this view of human nature is that most Christians believe that the salvation of humankind has been achieved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus humans can achieve redemption through faith in Jesus Christ and by the development of what St Paul calls the 'fruits of the spirit'.

For a Muslim, obedience to the will of Allah through religious practice based on the *shariah* and the inward spirituality of *tariqah* develops the virtues of an Islamic personality, leading to paradise.

Hence Hick's theory emphasizes that what the religions have in common is that they provide the means for humans to transcend incompleteness and achieve spiritual liberation. However, there is no attempt made by Hick to say that these various views about human nature and destiny are essentially the same. It should also be stressed at this point that I am not suggesting following Hick in saying that, as far as we know, the religions are equally salvific, although this is something that can be debated in the classroom. Each religion differs as to what the human spiritual defect is and in the spiritual path of transformation, and as to the goal to which this path eventually leads. Nevertheless, what they have in common, according to Hick, is this soteriological function. Whilst different from each other, they share similar patterns of interpretation of human nature and how it can be transformed. Thus I am arguing that any religious education worth its title should make sure that there is sufficient emphasis given to those dimensions which deal with these soteriological aspects, which I have argued lie at the heart of religion.

The question, therefore, that follows from this is how such a framework might be operationalized in the RE curriculum.

Reflecting the religiousness of religion in RE

Firstly, this would involve students coming to understand certain key concepts. So, to take Sikhism as an example, what is transformative in life is the overcoming of *haumai* (pride, self-centredness) by following a path of *nam simran* (the keeping of God constantly in mind) and *sewa* (selfless service) and developing *gurmukh* (God centredness) leading to the state of *mukhti* (liberation). Consequently, the material with the richest potential for pupils to learn from Sikhism in terms of this transformative dimension would be less likely to be found in raw information about the 'Five Ks' of Sikhism, but more in an exploration of *sewa*.

Let's imagine that a teacher takes a group to visit a *gurudwara*. During the visit the pupils probably sat together in the prayer hall listening to the *Guru Granth Sahib* being read, sat together and were served *langar*; they may have been taken on a 'tour' of the *gurudwara* and listened to Sikhs talk about their beliefs and how serving in the *gurudwara* influences the way they live their lives.

The teacher might want the pupils to respond to these experiences by reflecting on their thoughts and feelings during the visit. It is not unusual for a teacher to ask the pupils to undertake such activities as talking about special places they like to visit, considering the importance of worship to religious people and to consider the things that influence the way they live their own lives. The question that begs to be asked is how does the teacher intend these reflections to enable the pupils to learn from Sikhism? We can only answer this if we know what she intends the pupils to learn about Sikhism, and it is difficult to see how this might be achieved unless specific Sikh beliefs and concepts are unpacked for them. Without such specific concentration on Sikh beliefs and practices the above activities are merely about the pupils' experiences and are not necessarily related to what they might learn from Sikhism. For example, in order really to learn from Sikhism, they will have experienced Sikhs doing *sewa,* so pupils can reflect on ideas such as generosity, service, sharing and humility. From the experience of *langar* they might reflect on ideas of equality, willingness to give and receive, on caring for others. The experience of listening to the continuous reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* (*akhand path*) might lead to reflecting on the importance or not of God's word being continuously heard and on what in their view are the most important sounds in the world. Reflecting on the importance of the *Guru Granth Sahib* for Sikhs, the pupils might reflect on such ideas as respect, guidance, authority and what it means to be a teacher.

Conclusion

In recognizing that the work of John Hick has had little influence on how teachers think about, plan and teach religious education, I have suggested that in order for teachers to enable pupils to really learn about and from a religious tradition they need an explanatory/interpretive framework which reflects the *religiousness* of a tradition from which they can select appropriate beliefs, practices, and importantly, concepts. This chapter is an attempt to argue that Hick's explanatory framework can meet this need. There are of course other possible frameworks, such as the Smartian dimensions, but the point being made here is that Hick's framework offers greater opportunity than Smart's (for example) for teachers to teach about religion in a way that can communicate the *religiousness* of each tradition and hence give their subject a distinctive identity within the school curriculum.

Notes

1. Badham, P. (1993) "The Life and Work of John Hick" in: Sharma, *Arvinda (ed.) God, Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick*. London: Macmillan, p.5.
2. Cheetham, D. (2003) *John Hick*: *A Critical Introduction* and *Reflection*. Abingdon: Ashfield, p.8.
3. Badham, P. (1990) *A John Hick Reader*. London: Macmillan, p.2.
4. Copley, T (2008) *Teaching Religion: Sixty Years of Religious Education in England and Wales*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
5. Astley, J. and Francis, L. (eds.) (1996) *Christian Theology and Religious Education: Connections and Contradictions*. London: SPCK.
6. Grimmitt, M. (1987) *Religious Education and Human Development: The Relationship between Studying Religions and Personal, Social and Moral Education*. Great Wakering Essex: McCrimmon.
7. Hick, J. (2006) "The contribution of philosophy of religion to religious education" in: Bates, D., Durka, G., and Schweitzer, F. *Education, Religion and Society: Essays in Honour of John M. Hull*. London: Routledge. pp. 62–70.
8. Smart, N. (1968) *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*. London: Faber and Faber.
9. See Copley, *Teaching Religion*Ibid..
10. Smart, N. (1969) *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, p12. Smart, *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*.
11. Hick, "The contribution of philosophy of religion to religious education"Ibid, pp. 63–64.
12. Baumfield, V. (2005) 'Disciplinary Knowledge and Religious Education'. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 27 (1), pp. 3–4.
13. Ward, K. (1990) 'Truth and the Diversity of Religions'. *Religious Studies*, 26, pp. 1–18.
14. Cush, D. and Francis, D. (2001) 'Positive Pluralism to Awareness, Mystery and Value: A Case Study in Religious Education Curriculum Development'. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 24 (1), pp. 52–67.
15. Hick, J. (1989) *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. London: Macmillan.
16. Proudfoot, W. (1985) *Religious Experience*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.
17. Ibid., p. 197.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. See for example, Hick, 1989, pp. 5–9.
21. Otto, R. (1936) *The Idea of the Holy*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 144–145.
22. Eliade, M. (1958) *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. New York: Macmillan, p. xi.
23. This term was coined by David Cheetham in Cheetham, D. (2003) *John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection*. Abingdon: Ashfield.
24. Ward, K. (1987) *Images of Eternity*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, p.153.

25. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 22.
26. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 36–55.
27. Jackson, R. (1997) *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach*. London: Hodder.
28. Jackson, R. and Killingley, D. (1988) *Approaches to Hinduism*. London: John Murray, p. 23.
29. Klostermaier, K. (1998) *Hinduism*: *A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oneworld, p. 99.
30. McLeod, W.H. (1968) *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 182.
31. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 56–69.
32. Das, R. (2002). *The Heart of Hinduism: A Comprehensive Guide for Teachers and Professionals*. Aldenham, Herts: ISKCON Educational Services, p. 43.
33. Montagu, S. (1990) *Judaism: Teacher's Manual: The Westhill Project R.E. 5–16*. Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes, p. 26.

Index

Abhishiktananda, Swami, 111, 114
Advaita Vedānta, 171
advaitic, 124, 125
ahimsa, 126, 128
anekāntavāda, 124
Aquinas, Thomas, 40, 127, 130, 143, 144, 145, 153, 155, 161, 241
Aristotle, 241
Augustine, 145, 153, 161, 241
Ayer, A. J., 229

Baillie, D. M., 141, 154
Barth, Karl, 25, 63, 84, 145, 153, 154, 206, 211, 229
Baumeister, R. F., 207
Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 155
Braybrooke, Marcus, 112, 116
Buddhism, 3, 5, 25, 35, 39, 65, 69, 84, 111, 114, 126, 171, 179, 186, 237, 241, 245
  Theravada, 171
  Tibetan, 111
  see also Zen Buddhism

Calvin, 145, 153, 155, 161
Cantwell Smith, Wilfred, 4, 20, 22, 25, 241, 244
de Chardin, Pierre, Teilhard, 115, 119
Chatterjee, Margret, 125
Christian universalism, 130
Christology, 8, 39, 41, 85, 87, 141, 147, 148, 156, 242
Clark, Hilary, 216
Clayton, Philip, 154
Clifford, W. K., 191, 193, 196–7
Clooney, Frank, 47, 50, 55
Cobb, John, 154
comparative pluralist, 4
comparative theology, 3, 4, 22, 46–8, 51, 53–5, 160
Copernican revolution, 46, 70, 75, 127, 179
Copleston, Frederick, 234
Cornille, Catherine, 8, 48–55
cultural pluralism, 118

Dawkins, Richard, 231
D'Costa, Gavin, 9, 23, 52, 75, 146
Derrida, Jacques, 157, 241
Descartes, 36, 37, 177–8
Dorrien, Gary, 154
dualism, 7, 11, 13, 109, 176–8, 181–8
Dunne, John, 53
Durkheim, E., 207

Enlightenment, 153, 154–8, 171, 245, 251
exclusivism, 7, 19, 20, 25–7, 58, 63, 179, 244, 245

Farquhar, J. N., 74
Feuerbach, Ludwig, 232
Flew, Antony, 234, 236
Foucault, Michel, 241
Fredericks, James, 25–6, 47, 50, 244
Freud, Sigmund, 86, 232, 241, 258

Gandhi, M. K., 10, 86, 121–31
globalization, 55, 69, 109–10, 118
global philosophy, 251
global theology, 3, 5, 7, 20, 34–5, 41, 42–3
Griffin, D, 22, 153
Guoxiang, Peng, 246

Habermas, Jurgen, 232
Haight, Roger, 54, 83, 84
Hegel, G. W. F., 241, 243
Heidegger, Martin, 241
Heim, Mark, 21, 52, 146
hermeneutics, 54, 90, 146
Hick, John, *passim*
Hinduism, 5, 25, 35, 39, 65, 69, 71, 73, 74, 84, 126, 130, 179, 237, 259, 261
Hitchens, Christopher, 231

inclusivism, 7, 19, 20, 25–7, 50–1, 58, 63, 65, 179, 244–6
inclusivist theology, 19, 25
interfaith, 2, 8, 9, 20, 26–7, 28, 95, 107–18, 152–3, 248, 257
interfaith spirituality, 9, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 117, 118, 266
  see also spirituality
interreligious dialogue, 6, 8, 11, 14–15, 21–2, 26, 29, 48–9, 83, 85–6, 89–90, 92–3, 96, 114, 116
interreligious discourse, 14, 15
interreligious theology, 5–7, 19–20, 22, 24, 28, 29
interspirituality, 9, 107–8, 112–19
Islam, 25, 35, 65, 68–70, 102, 103–4, 111, 127, 159, 179, 225, 261–2

Jainism, 126
John of Cross (St.), 217
Joiner, Thomas, 206–9
Judaism, 35, 69, 74, 91, 102, 159, 179, 225, 261–2
Julian of Norwich, 217

Kaesemann, E., 154
Kant, Immanuel, 36, 37, 40, 143–4, 155, 167, 180, 196, 233, 241, 243, 245
Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti, 138
Kessler, Edward, 75
Kiblinger, K., 22, 25, 27
Kierkegaard, Søren, 206–9, 211
Krishna, 65, 129
Kuitert, Harry, 86

Lanzetta, Beverly, 112–15
liberation, 11, 14, 61, 63, 93, 110, 140, 147, 149, 257, 260–3
liberation theologies, 173
Lindbeck, George, 52–3, 146, 244

Maimonides, 40
Marshman, Joshua, 73
Marx, Karl, 232, 241, 258
marxism, 165, 233, 249, 250, 255
Mitchell, Basil, 193, 229, 233
monism, 11, 12, 176, 178, 180–8
Muhammad (the Prophet), 69, 87, 89, 104
Multi-religious prayer (MRP), 95–101

Nanak (Guru), 87, 89, 261
Nicholson, Hugh, 46, 54, 55
Nielsen, Kai, 231
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 206, 232, 241
Nirvana, 145, 171
Nouwen, Henri, 218–20, 223
Nussbaum, Martha, 223

Ogden, Schubert, 27, 155

panentheism, 12, 176, 188
Panikkar, Raimundo, 25, 111, 113, 241, 244, 247, 248
'perspectival pluralism', 51
philosophy of religion, 2, 3, 5, 10, 13, 14, 137–49, 174, 192, 229, 231–32, 235, 237–39, 242–50, 253, 254, 255
pluralism, 1–10, 13–14, 19–23, 25–9, 34–5, 37, 38, 40–1, 43, 58, 63–6, 110, 127, 130, 137, 139–40, 142, 148, 161, 181–2, 184, 187, 232, 242–51, 256–7, 266
  cultural, 118
  hard, 256
  revisionist, 256
  soft, 256–7
  token, 181–5, 187
pluralist hypothesis, 14, 24, 26–7, 34–6, 40–1, 43, 58, 67, 255, 257, 266
pluralist theologies, 6, 21–6, 28, 29, 48
postmodern, 6, 9, 23, 24, 47, 52, 53, 55, 71, 108–10, 114, 116–19, 201, 248
postmodernism, 9, 108–9, 116, 130
postmodernist, 6, 23–4, 68, 130, 131
Proudfoot, Wayne, 138, 147, 257, 258

Race, Alan, 8, 9, 47, 48, 108, 117
racism, 2
Rahner, Karl, 25, 63, 75, 145, 154
Ratcliffe, Matthew, 222
Ratzinger, Joseph, 100–3, 153

religious pluralism, 1–9, 11, 13–14, 19, 21, 23, 25, 29, 34–5, 37–8, 40, 107–8, 110, 121–3, 126, 130, 139, 140, 148, 176, 178–82, 186, 237, 241–3, 245–51
religious pluralists, 25
Robinson, John, A. T., 83, 85, 93, 154, 156
Rowe, Dorothy, 222
Russell, Bertrand, 190–1, 193, 196–8, 234
Ryusei, Takeda, 26–7

salvation, 3, 6–7, 12, 27, 38–40, 58–9, 61, 62–4, 66–7, 69, 70, 72–3, 75, 78, 88–90, 92–3, 102, 105, 140, 145, 147–9, 179, 204–5, 211, 249, 260, 262
  see also liberation
Samartha, Stanley, 25, 90, 91
Sartre, Jean Paul, 206, 232, 241
satya, 123, 126
Schillebeeckx, 154
Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 63, 145, 158
Sharma, Arvind, 1
Siddartha Gautama (also the Buddha), 38, 65, 87, 89
Sikhism, 69, 126, 261, 263–4
Smart, Ninian, 229, 230, 254, 256, 259, 264
Smith, Ronald, Gregor, 154
spirituality, 8, 9, 107–19, 155–6, 162, 250, 262, 263
  see also interspirituality
spiritual liberation, 14, 257, 262–3
Sumner, Twiss, 142, 146–8

Tanner, Kathryn, 21
Taoism, 35
Teasdale, Wayne, 9, 107, 112–14, 116
Teresa of Avila (St.), 217
theological Rubicon, 139–40
Tillich, Paul, 11, 164–74
tolalising theories, 22
Torrance, Alan J., 244
Tracy, David, 154
Trinity, 8, 41, 42, 43, 44, 77, 88

Wallace, Stan, 234
Weichi, Zhou, 244, 247, 250
Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 241, 255
World Theology, 5, 7, 20

Yuanwei, Deng, 243

Zen Buddhism, 111
Zhicheng, Wang, 13, 242, 243–4, 246, 247, 250, 251
Zhiping, Chen, 243