

THE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM OF JOHN HICK: A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis examines and evaluates religious pluralism as represented by John Hick. The thesis concludes that religious pluralism is a poor view to espouse.

Religious pluralism defined maintains that all the great world religions can lead one to God, or as Hick would say, the "Real." Hick believes this to be the case on two grounds: a moral ground and an epistemological ground.

I disagree with Hick's moral grounds for the following reasons. First, his view is arbitrary and weak. His perceived view of morals he sets up as a standard to prove his point. Also, his view is hard to measure. Second, using his own pluralistic criteria, one can conclude differently than Hick. I can account for moral equivalence differently than Hick by using his own epistemological criteria.

I also disagree with Hick's epistemological grounds. First, his views are epistemologically and linguistically self-refuting. Second, his pluralism is religiously intolerant. Pluralists wants all major religious views to be tolerated, but does not tolerate a view that differs from pluralism. Third, his views are religiously inconsistent.

Pluralism is supposed to be a non-exclusive religious claim. However, it really is an exclusive religious claim and that other views (Islam and Christianity) are wrong. Plus, his epistemological conclusion does not follow from his epistemological premises.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Langdon Gilkey, the current theological landscape has changed regarding Christianity and world religions. At one time Christian uniqueness was a dominant ideal. In the past, Christians held a faith over love perspective. Gilkey notes, "[P]reviously, 'defending the faith' and its purity against other religious viewpoints was regarded as an unquestionable Christian demand, one that clearly outranked the obligation to love the other...." He cites the historical case of Calvin versus Servetus.

However, the faith over love perspective changed and was seen as "a new assessment of how God views these requirements." Commenting further Gilkey adds, "In the modern period-largely, I think, with the help of the Enlightenment this dominance faith over love shifted: love became the major obligation, and the one who killed in defense of the purity of faith was regarded not as heroic but as morally dubious, as a misguided fanatic."¹

Overlooking the emotional, harsh words Gilkey uses to describe an exclusivistic position in the tradition of

¹ Langdon Gilkey's chapter "Plurality and Its Theological Implications" in **The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions**, eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, (New York: Maryknoll, 1987), p. 38.

Calvin; Gilkey may be right the way people have changed towards the relationship of Christianity and other world religions.

Recognizing the perspectives by Gilkey, one realizes the crucial problem that faces the Christian community in the twenty-first century. The problem is not new, but it is demanding our present attention to preserve the Gospel message of Jesus Christ from attack. However, that statement assumes that Christianity is under attack on its most crucial message. The present thesis prepares to affirm that the Gospel of Christ runs counter to current pluralistic discussion. Furthermore, this thesis critiques religious pluralism. The thesis will specifically focus on the work of John Hick.

CHAPTER ONE: THE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM OF JOHN HICK

Pluralism Stated

At the end of the twentieth century Christianity is in deep crisis.

-John Hick

Pluralism Defined

With a changed attitude in place towards Christianity and world religions, pluralism states that all major world religions can lead one salvifically to God.² John Hick says, "the pluralistic hypothesis is not a new religion seeking to supplant the existing religions. It is a philosophical interpretation of the global religious situation. It leaves each tradition as it is...."³ Although adherents in world religions worship God

² John Hick, **A Christian Theology of Religions** (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 18. Hick writes, "I suggest that this is the central concern of all the great world religions. They are not primarily philosophies or theologies but primarily ways of salvation/liberation. And it is clear that salvation, in this sense of an actual change in human beings from natural self-centredness towards a recentring in the Divine, the Ultimate, the Real, is a long process...and that this process is taking place not only within Christianity but also, and so far as we can tell to a more or less equal extent, within the other great traditions."

³ John Hick, **More Than One Way?** Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips eds. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, p. 51.

differently, they all worship the same God. John Hick notes, "I could see that within these ancient traditions men and women are savingly related to the eternal Reality from which we all live."⁴ Therefore, any religion that claims to be the only true religion must be deemed false. Tolerance toward differing religious perspectives should be embraced, and exclusivistic views shunned. An exclusivist position such as Christianity becomes intolerable; change and challenged assumptions should be the new mindset of those engaged in Christianity.⁵

The Importance of Pluralism

Hick voices very strong conclusions regarding pluralism as it means to him and what it will mean for others. Religion, to Hick, is a human expression of an individual conception of the Divine or "Real"; therefore, all great world religions are equally valid attempts toward salvation.

⁴ Hick, **God Has Many Names** (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), p. 18.

⁵ Ibid, p. 16. Hick says, "But I believe that anyone who is born or 'born-again' into the conservative-evangelical thought world, and who has a questioning mind, will find that he has to face challenges to the belief system within which his Christian faith was first made available to him, and that he will almost certainly be led by rational or moral considerations to modify or discard many of its elements." Furthermore, Hick says, "But in wrestling with the problem of evil I had concluded that any viable Christian theodicy must affirm the ultimate salvation of all God's creatures" (p. 17).

To Hick, the strong conclusion is no one particular religion(s) can claim supreme right to that salvific truth, not even Christianity. All great traditions are equal routes to the Real, meaning a great deal of theological change has to take place within religions that are traditionally known as exclusivistic, like Islam and Christianity.

Hick believes that the Christian who accepts pluralism will have "a greater intellectual honesty and realism and a more mature Christian faith."⁶ When a Christian rejects his traditional exclusive claim to salvation, other doctrines must be revised as well.⁷ After Hick explains a true picture of the Incarnation, Trinity, and Atonement;⁸ he concludes:

Unlike the traditional doctrines, all this is compatible with religious pluralism. We can see Jesus as the one who has made God real to us, who has shown us how to live as citizens of God's kingdom, who is our revered spiritual leader, inspiration, and model. We can do this without having to deny that other spiritual

⁶ Hick, "A Pluralist View", p. 51.

⁷ Ibid, p. 52. Hick says "[T]o revise the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation is thus, by implication, to revise also the traditional Trinity and Atonement doctrines." Furthermore, "the three pillars of traditional orthodoxy [Incarnation, Trinity, and Atonement] inevitably come under criticism in any attempt to develop our theology in the light of the realization that Christianity is not the one and only salvific path, but is one among others."

⁸ Ibid, pp. 52-58.

leaders and other revelatory histories function in the same way and to the same extent (so far as we can tell) for other people within other religious traditions.⁹

There are two major portions to Hick's position: a moral part and an epistemological part.

Moral Considerations

... the traditional assumption of Christian moral pre-eminence... cannot in fact be substantiated.

-John Hick

In one of Hick's latest writings,¹⁰ he begins his defense of pluralism by considering the moral behavior of people in the major world religions. Therefore, we consider the moral commentary made by Hick.

Apparent equality of morals

The moral part to Hick's pluralism maintains that every major religion has its very own definition of saintly and spiritual individuals. Hick views moral behavior among many people of many religions as equal with one another:

Coming to know both ordinary families, and some extraordinary individuals, whose spirituality has been formed by these different traditions and whose lives are lived within them, I have not found that the people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians. They seem on average to be neither better nor worse than are

⁹ Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 39.

Christians.¹¹

Hick maintains that people of other religious traditions are not necessarily noticeably better people than Christians, nor are they necessarily worse people either.

We find that both the virtues and the vices are, so far as we can tell, more or less equally spread among the population, of whatever major faith - and here I include Humanism and Marxism as major (though secular rather than religious) faiths.¹²

Not only the lives of people influenced Hick's theology of religions, but also the literature of these people influenced him. Hick says, "and reading some of the literature of the different traditions, both some of their scriptures and philosophies and also some of their novels and poetry portraying ordinary life, has reinforced this impression."¹³

Importance of equality of morals

The importance of moral equality to Hick is very crucial. If all the great world religions are equally valid morally¹⁴, then there can be no one group claiming moral

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hick, **A Christian Theology of Religions**, p. 13.

¹³ Ibid, p. 14.

¹⁴ Hick, "A Pluralist View", p. 39. Hick writes, "I have not found that people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians. They seem on average to be neither better nor worse than are Christians." Furthermore, Hick says on page

superiority for their particular religious tradition, including Christianity. Hick mentions the importance of his position stating, "This conclusion, although a modest one, is in fact extremely significant for the argument that I want to develop."¹⁵ The argument Hick employs claims that there can be no claim to moral superiority by any of the world religions, especially Christianity. Hick critiques Christian belief regarding moral superiority and salvific superiority. If Christianity was the true and only approach to God, then we as individuals would recognize the vast moral difference of Christian behavior than the moral behavior of other religious individuals. This difference should reveal that Christians behave better than others. Hick concludes that given the conclusion is hard to support, he nonetheless maintains that religious people are equally moral; therefore, all the great religions are valid routes to God.

42, "I conclude that it seems appropriate to come to the modest and negative conclusion that one cannot establish the unique moral superiority of any one of the great world religions." These statements imply that other great religions are potentially morally equivalent because no one religion should claim moral superiority. These quotes do not necessarily say all religions are equal morally, but that they imply equality because of the "neither better nor worse" behavior of those who are not Christians.

¹⁵ Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, pp. 14, 15.

If there is not one way to God, but many, then salvation also is not exclusive to any group. Through Hick's personal observation and reading, he says that "we should think of salvation in more universal terms than has been customary in Christian theology."¹⁶ Salvation should not be considered salvation in Christ alone because of His meritorious death and resurrection, but rather we should

define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifested in the "fruit of the Spirit," then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions -- and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent.¹⁷

So as Hick sees things on the moral plane, all people of the great world faiths are on par with one another concerning their moral behavior. There is no room for moral superiority to be claimed by any one group.

¹⁶ Hick, "A Pluralist View", p. 43.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Epistemological Considerations

And we indeed, rightly considering objects of sense as mere appearances....

-Immanuel Kant

After discussing the moral considerations of Hick's pluralism, the next important feature to his pluralism is his epistemological considerations. This argument from epistemology is integral to Hick's position.

Hick's reinterpretation of Kant

For Hick's background to his religious pluralism, he relies heavily on a major piece of Immanuel Kant's epistemology. The part of Kant's epistemology that Hick makes use of is Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal realms.¹⁸ Kant addresses the point as follows:

Since the oldest days of philosophy, inquirers into pure reason have conceived, besides the things of sense, or appearances (phenomena), which make up the sensible world, certain beings of the understanding (noumena), which should constitute an intelligible world.

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, **Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics** (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1950), pp.61, 62.

Furthermore, he adds,

And we indeed, rightly considering objects of sense as mere appearances, confess thereby that they are based upon a thing in itself, though we know not this thing as it is in itself but only know its appearances, namely, the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something.¹⁹

Kant maintains that there is a real world out there but we only know this world as appearances, as objects of our senses. We do not, according to Kant, know these objects as they are in themselves. Consider again the remarks of Kant:

When therefore we say, the senses represent objects as *they appear*, the understanding as *they are*, the latter statement must not be understood in a transcendental, but only in an empirical signification, that is, as they must be represented in the complete connection of phenomena, and not *according to what they may be*, apart from their relation to possible experience, consequently not as objects of the pure understanding. For this must ever remain unknown to us.²⁰

Hick believes in this sort of distinction as he writes, "[W]e therefore have to distinguish, as Immanuel Kant did, between a thing as it is in itself and that thing as humanly perceived - that is, as phenomenon."²¹

Not only do we not know things as they are in themselves, but we ourselves with our mind shape the knowledge given to us. Therefore, we only know things as

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 166.

²¹ Hick, "A Pluralist View", pp. 46,47.

they are to us. As Kant says,

Hence if even the pure concepts of the understanding are thought to go beyond objects of experience to things in themselves (noumena), they have no meaning whatever. They serve, as it were, only to decipher appearances, that we may be able to read them as experience.²²

Kant is saying that our mind, or the concepts of understanding, do not help us get to know things as they are in themselves but only to help our experience. We have to "decipher" these appearances and that is what the mind does to help us understand reality as we know it.

This aspect of Immanuel Kant's philosophy plays a major role in the background of John Hick's religious pluralism. Hick draws so heavily from Kant that it would be hard to understand Hick's pluralism without a little understanding of Kant. The next step shows how Kant's epistemology helps to serve Hick and how Hick slightly revises Kant's position.

The importance of Hick's reinterpretation

As mentioned above, Hick has taken his pluralism through the avenue of Immanuel Kant. However, Hick has slightly modified Kant's view. As Kant's position applied mainly to the physical world, Hick employs Kant's method to the supernatural world. Hick explains,

²² Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, p. 60.

In modern times it was Immanuel Kant who has argued most influentially that perception is not a passive registering of what is there but is always an active process of selecting, grouping, relating, extrapolating, and endowing with meaning by means of our human concepts. This led him to distinguish between the noumenal world, the world as it exists unperceived, and the phenomenal world, that same world as humanly perceived, with all the difference that the act of perception makes. I am suggesting applying this insight to our awareness of the Real, by distinguishing between the noumenal Real, the Real *an sich*, and the Real as humanly perceived in different ways as a range of divine phenomena.²³

Similarly, Hick maintains,

Kant suggested that we are aware of our natural environment in terms of certain categories which the mind imposes in the formation of our conscious experience.... I am suggesting analogously that we are aware of our supernatural environment in terms of certain categories which the mind imposes in the formation of religious experience.²⁴

Hick borrows the Kantian epistemology of the noumenon/phenomenon distinction,

we may distinguish between...the single divine noumenon, the Eternal One in itself, transcending the scope of human thought and language, and, on the other hand, the plurality of divine phenomena, the divine personae of the theistic religions and the concretizations of the concept of the Absolute in the nontheistic religions.²⁵

²³ Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, p. 29.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Again, Hick asserts, "we must distinguish between the world as it is in itself, unperceived, and that same world as humanly perceived."²⁶ He believes that "all the major traditions" have maintained this perceptual distinction.²⁷

Hick makes a qualifying distinction in relation to the Kantian position. Some may wonder how one can make such claims such as the ultimate reality is ineffable, yet transcending our human thought forms. He maintains that such thinking is a "logical triviality." He states, "that purely formal statements can be made even about the ineffable" Furthermore, "Our systems of human concepts cannot encompass the ultimately Real. It is only as humanly thought and experienced that the Real fits into our human categories."²⁸

How does Hick then apply the method of Kant to religious experience? Since we do not know the world as it is in itself, Hick says neither do we know what God is in Himself. Our human thinking is inadequate when it comes to thinking about God: "[W]e have to recognize, with virtually all the greatest Christian thinkers, that the reality we

²⁶ Hick, "A Pluralist View", p. 46.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 49.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 50.

call God exceeds the scope of human thought."²⁹ In addition, "theology is a creation of the human mind."³⁰ Hick is "led to draw a distinction between, on the one hand, the Eternal One in itself, as the infinite reality which exceeds the scope of human thought, language, and experience, and, on the other hand, the Eternal One as experienced, thought, and expressed by finite human creatures."³¹

This creation of theology by humans also applies to the doctrine of Jesus' deity. Hick maintains that "Jesus almost certainly did not in fact teach that he was in any sense God...."³² Where then did such a notion come from? The answer is that the early Christians made up such a doctrine. They did this not to be deceptive. The transformation of the lives of those who came to Jesus caused this doctrinal development. "There can I think be no doubt that this deification of Jesus came about partly - perhaps mainly - as a result of the Christian experience of reconciliation with

²⁹ Ibid. p. 47.

³⁰ Hick, **God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion** (London: The Macmillan Press LTD., 1973), p. 93.

³¹ Hick, **God Has Many Names**, p. 24.

³² Ibid, p. 28.

God."³³ This deification of Jesus was apparently natural as Hick explains that in the Christian community,

[T]here was thus a natural transition in their minds from the experience of reconciliation with God as Jesus' disciples, to the thought of his death as an atoning sacrifice, and from this to the conclusion that in order for Jesus' death to have been a sufficient atonement for human sin he must himself have been divine.³⁴

Following this, one comes to the situation of the people of other religions. Why are there different world religions? Hick refers to Thomas Aquinas believed the "thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower." Hick says further 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." The point being "that in ordinary sense perception 'the thing known' is known 'according to the mode of the knower.'"³⁵ Hick, therefore, sees each member of each world religion as perceiving God according to their perceptual, religious framework. For example, in Judaism God is known as Yahweh; in Islam as Allah; in

³³ John Hick, ed., **The Myth of God Incarnate**, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p. 176.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hick, **God Has Many Names**, p. 49.

Hinduism as Brahman; and Nirvana of Buddhism etc.³⁶

Concluding Hicks epistemological appreciation for Aquinas, he remarks: "To apply Aquinas' insight, the ultimate Reality is known in accordance with the cognitive mode/nature/state of the knower; and this varies, in the case of religious awareness, from one religio-cultural totality to another."³⁷

The traditional term "God" should be changed for a more broad concept such as the "Eternal One" because it is "a phrase which draws upon associations both with the mystical 'One without a second' of the Upanishads and the 'Holy One' of the biblical and other theistic faiths."³⁸ As Hick asserts, "Let us call the ultimate object of religious worship, experience, and contemplation the Eternal One"³⁹ This Eternal One "is infinite and is in its fullness beyond the scope of human thought and language and experience"⁴⁰ Since the Eternal One is beyond

³⁶ Ibid, p. 53. See also eds. John Hick and Lamont C. Hempel in **Gandhi's Significance for Today: The Elusive Legacy**, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. Hick says of Gandhi: "Gandhi taught Truth is God." Furthermore, "Thus, in his dictum that Truth is God, Gandhi was freeing the idea of God from particular images of the ultimate in the form of Vishnu or Shiva or Allah or the Heavenly Father etc., and was saying that God is sat, the Real" (p. 85).

³⁷ Hick, "A Pluralist View", p. 47.

³⁸ Hick, **God Has Many Names**, p. 22.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 42.

human thought and language, He must be encountered and expressed differently by different religious people. Therefore, mankind becomes the main vehicle to interpret religious pluralism, as Hick asserts "the human response to a transcendent divine Reality . . . is other than us," we should "try from this point of view to make sense of the fact of religious pluralism."⁴¹

To Hick there should be a "'Copernican revolution' in our theology of religions, consisting in a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered model to a God-centered model of the universe of faith."⁴² According to Hick, an evangelical position that is particularist or exclusivistic is a "custodial form of evangelicalism."⁴³ What makes more sense given current cultures and creeds, is a more open position.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, p. 18.

⁴³ Hick, "A Pluralist View", p. 90.

CHAPTER TWO: A CRITIQUE OF JOHN HICK'S PLURALISM

MORAL CONSIDERATIONS

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good

-Aristotle

Equality of morals reconsidered

The following is a critique to Hick's perspective on moral equivalence in other religions. His view that common moral behavior equals common salvation is arbitrary and weak. Hick equates the realms of moral behavior with salvation when there appears to be no good reason for doing so. To others, a good ethic does not necessarily mean an equal means of salvation. People like Douglas Geivett and Gary Phillips maintain that Hick's position confuses a goal of religion for a criterion of religious truth, "[U]nfortunately, Hick mistakes one goal of true religion for a *criterion of truth* in religion."⁴⁴ In an epistemology such as Hick's, both views are permissible. In theology, these two areas can be distinguished by saying that ethics involves human behavior while soteriology involves human

⁴⁴ Douglas Geivett and Gary Phillips, "Response to John Hick", in *More Than One Way?*, p. 78.

salvation. To many theologians, this is the correct view of the two areas. Again, this view of ethics and salvation is as permissible as Hick's position given an agnostic epistemology such as his. Individuals of different religions should be morally transformed to a degree. However, moral equality ceases to be a strong factor regarding the truth of religion.

Furthermore, according to Hick himself, the measuring rod he uses cannot be verified. Hick says we "have no way of accurately recording the individual actions of hundreds of millions of people within the great world religions over the centuries or today." He adds, "[W]e can only go on personal observation and the reports of others, both contemporary and historical, and on this basis form a global impression, though one that we cannot claim to prove."⁴⁵ Hick assesses that morally, Christians seem no better or worse than people in other religions. Yet, he says that coming to this conclusion is hard to quantify. Anyone can point to good and bad behavior in people of other religions. So, if the instrument may be faulty, one should not use it.

⁴⁵ Hick, "A Pluralist View", p. 40.

Furthermore, Rebecca Pentz takes to task Hick's moral equivalence theory.⁴⁶ She recognizes that Hick's position is not strictly empirical.⁴⁷ Hick seems to recognize this point when he notices that the equality of morals is hard to quantify; and that many people can point out good and bad behavior by people living according to their respective religions. How does one then empirically establish Hick's assertion? Furthermore, as D'Costa notices, the criteria for moral fruit becomes exclusivistic because any other doctrine or practice of morals simply will not do.⁴⁸ In other words, when looking at the moral behavior of people, the criteria established by Hick is the only way to compare Christianity and the great world religions.

Pentz also notes that the "fairness of Hick's test depends on the relation between saint-production and Reality centeredness." She maintains that Hick's test "will be fair only if being transformed to Reality-centeredness and exhibiting the fruits of spiritual insight and compassion

⁴⁶ Pentz, "Hick and Saints: Is Saint-production a Valid Test?", Faith and Philosophy, Vol. 8, No. 1, (Jan. 1991) 100.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p, 98.

⁴⁸ Gavin D'Costa, **The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions**, Religious Studies, Vol. 32, No. 2 (June 1996) 229.

are positively correlated to the same degree in each religion." She says that Hick cannot meet this condition.⁴⁹

The Neglect of Natural Law

Hick does not seem to notice the correct moral piece that finishes his pluralist jigsaw puzzle. The correct piece to the pluralist puzzle is natural law. The reason that Hick notices that people of other religions apparently act morally equal is because God created the natural man with the law of God written upon his heart.⁵⁰ Therefore, since all humans as humans are the same, God has placed in all humans what we call natural law: God's law written upon the heart of mankind.

Epistemologically, Hick should find this position appealing for two reasons. First, Hick apparently does not argue a case for polytheism, but for theism (he uses the term "Real"). In this case, it is certainly possible that God or the Real has given mankind this natural law on the heart. Second, given Hick's epistemological conditions for religious knowledge, Hick should see the possibility of natural law being calculated into the moral equation of religious individuals. In other words, one could perceive

⁴⁹ Pentz, "Hick and Saints", 100.

⁵⁰ Romans 2:14, 15.

that natural law is written on the hearts of all mankind. Plus, we would see similar behavior among people of other great religions because of such a law. Furthermore, this could lead to the perceived conclusion that we are all created from the same Creator. These beliefs should be acceptable to Hick because religious beliefs are perceived. Plus, we can be unsure of our religious beliefs as long as no claims are made that one has the only way of salvation. This view is not making any claim to salvific superiority, only differing from Hick on the behavioral similarity of religious people.

Furthermore, Hick cites the literature used by the great world traditions and they make mention of what Christians call the golden rule: "And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way."⁵¹ The statement above is a quotation from Jesus Christ. In

⁵¹ The quote is taken from Luke 6:31. See also Hick's "A Pluralist View" for his citations from other religious traditions, pp. 39, 40. Hick even says "[T]he basic ideal of love and concern for others and of treating them as you would wish them to treat you is, in fact, taught by all the great religious traditions." On a slightly different note, those familiar with the first principle of natural law being "seek good and avoid evil", I am not here equating the golden rule with the above first principle. I only seek to show that the golden rule is a natural law. See Ralph McInerny's article "St. Thomas and the Golden Rule," **The Modern Schoolman**, LXIX, (March/May 1992) 421-430.

addition, Hick does quote sources that do seem to follow the golden rule. Other religious sources seem to agree. The University of Notre Dame Law School years ago dedicated an entire journal issue to the subject of natural law in world religions other than Christianity.⁵² Authors from Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese traditions report about natural law.

Rabbi Solomon Freehof writes,

[W]ith regard to the intention of the Divine Law-Giver an interesting doctrine arose, that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai not one law but two, the written law which we have before us, and an unwritten or an oral law, which He taught him.⁵³

The unwritten, oral law Freehof refers to is natural law. About this law he says never before "in human history was an entire people in its religious and secular and business life governed so completely by a system of Divine and natural law."⁵⁴

Muslim Khalifa Abdul Hakim says that natural law comes from God and is in the heart of everyman. He says,

Nature's Laws are God's thoughts thinking themselves in orbits and tides. As there are signs of God's power and wisdom and beauty in all Nature outside man, so are

⁵² Edward F. Barrett, ed., Natural Law Institute Proceedings, Vol. V, (1953).

⁵³ Ibid, p. 18.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 19.

these signs inscribed in the hearts of all men.⁵⁵

Regarding ethics and behavior he says,

Let men have different codes of manners and different modes of worship, but the essentials of ethics must be the same for all because they are inherent in the common nature of all men.⁵⁶

Finally, Hakim says that all mankind can discover these laws of mankind,

The teaching of Islam is that the fundamental principles are rooted in the nature of man, and men of knowledge, not misled by personal or collective egoism, can discover them.⁵⁷

Hindu M. S. Sundaram notes, "[T]here are millions of Hindus today, and there have been many more millions before them, whose only knowledge of law concerned Natural Law."⁵⁸

Furthermore he writes of the eternal and unalterable nature of natural law. He contrasts natural law with common law, canon law, constitutional law, and international law saying that those four kinds of laws can change.⁵⁹

Speaking of natural law common to all religions, Sundaram writes,

The immortality of the soul is applicable to the followers of all religions and the law of Nature pertaining to the soul of man is of universal

55 Ibid, p. 35.

56 Ibid, p. 42.

57 Ibid, p. 43.

58 Ibid, p. 70.

59 Ibid, p. 71.

acceptance. Natural Law, according to the Hindu, is identical in all faiths and is common to all mankind.⁶⁰

Buddhist Daisetz T. Suzuki quotes the *Dhammapada* as follows:

All shrink from violence,
 All fear death.
 Putting oneself in another's position,
 One should neither kill nor cause to kill.
 All shrink from violence,
 To all life is dear.
 Putting oneself in another's position,
 One should neither kill nor cause to kill.⁶¹

This, he says, "is an appeal to the fellow-feeling natural to all humanity."⁶² Furthermore, the basis for moral values is found in the human consciousness of all.⁶³

Hu Shih comments on the Chinese tradition. Regarding natural law he says that the Chinese tradition has made appeal to a higher authority in different forms. One of these forms makes an appeal "to Reason or Law or Universal Reason or Natural Law...as it is intuitively evident in the moral conscience of men...." He believes this is similar to "the words of Coke 'the common right and reason' of man."⁶⁴

Given that much, should we expect anything less, given that we are all human beings and created from the same

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 78.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 93.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 94.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 123.

being. (Hick might conceive this last point of creation but not others.) Given that we are all human beings with human natures, shouldn't we have the same built in basics of ethical behavior? The Bible makes this point in that while the Greeks did not have the Law like the Jews, God still holds Greeks accountable because they have the Law written on their hearts. This is natural law. The above authors testify to this law written on the hearts of mankind. The same behavior does not mean we all have the same Savior. What should be granted is that we all have the same Creator.

So, then, the apparent equality of morals really can be solved by an examination of natural law, not concluding that all religions are equal valid routes of salvation/liberation because of behavioral equality. Hick's logic does not follow when he argues from moral equality. What he forgets is that we do not all **worship** the same God, but that we are the **workmanship** of God. Furthermore, God created all mankind with a sense of moral behavior.

Natural law theory accounts for the commonality of morals that Hick observes in other religious traditions. If the premise that God has instilled within the heart of all men some common moral principles, then it holds that one will witness these common moral acts among different people

of different religions. By no means do common moral acts mean universal salvation.

Hick may deny just such a position, but what would be the point? According to his own philosophy I would certainly be within my epistemic rights to at least hold to natural law theory to account for the similarity of moral behavior. Furthermore, my perceptions of Christianity viewed against other religions tells me that common behavioral acts do not equal a common salvation. Sure, my religious beliefs turn out to be different than Hick's; however, given his agnostic stance about religious beliefs I am within his own epistemic boundaries that he has set up. If my religious beliefs are perceptions of the Real, can I not argue that God has placed in the hearts of all mankind a natural law. Furthermore, this law leads me to the conclusion that we are all created by the same God. My account of moral equivalence differs from Hick's, yet can be accounted for by using the epistemological framework used by Hick. Hick's religious pluralistic epistemology can serve to strengthen the case for Christianity, especially when discussing natural law.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*Normal knowledge may well not be complete knowledge . . .
but normal knowledge is true from the very fact that it is
knowledge.*

-Etienne Gilson

Up to this point a critique of the moral considerations of Hick's religious pluralism has been given. We noticed in many places the weakness in Hick's argument for pluralism based upon the equality of moral behavior. Now, discussion will focus on the epistemological considerations of Hick's religious pluralism.

Kant's epistemological background analyzed

As influential as Kant has been since the Enlightenment, his noumenal/phenomenal distinction fails miserably. Specifically, Kant's distinction is self-refuting. When Kant expresses the notion that the real world is unintelligible, he makes an intelligible statement about the world. If the world were not intelligible, then how could one know anything about the world, much less communicate that truth? For one to say we cannot know anything beyond a given point, that person would have to know that they cannot know anything beyond that point. If

anything, to be consistent, Kant should have said that he may possibly not know what is beyond a given point. Instead, Kant uses a universal negative qualifier stating no such knowledge can be known. By using the negative qualifier, Kant immediately destroys his position because he would have to know in order to claim no knowledge.

Someone may say that Kant was not necessarily giving statements about reality, but about the limits of our knowledge of reality. Geisler responds clearly to this kind of rebuttal.

Now if someone should press the argument that the agnostic need not be making any statement at all about reality but simply defining the necessary limits of what we can know, it can be shown that even this is a self-defeating attempt; for to say that one cannot know any more than the limits of the phenomena or appearance is to draw an unsurpassable line for those limits. But one cannot draw such firm limits without surpassing them.⁶⁵

Hick's reinterpretation of Kant analyzed

Hick holds, in Kantian terms, that we as human beings know the "Real" not as it is in itself, but as it is conceived and perceived by us humans. To Hick, our geographical and cultural conditions shape our conceptions of the divine. We do not, therefore, really know the Real

⁶⁵ Norman L. Geisler, **Christian Apologetics** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 21.

in itself but only how it is known **by us**. Four problems result from this kind of reasoning: it is epistemologically and linguistically self-refuting, religiously intolerant, religiously inconsistent, and logically invalid.

First, Hick's religious pluralism is self-refuting in its epistemology. Regarding his epistemology, for instance, Hick says "[T]he world is indeed there, and is as it is; but we do not have access to it as it is in itself, unperceived by us."⁶⁶ This remark is absurd, for Hick would have to know what the world is really like, that is, to have access to it, in order for him to say that we do not have access to it. Even A.J. Ayer put his finger on the problem when he said, "How Can he [Kant] tell what are the boundaries beyond which the human understanding may venture, unless he succeeds in passing them himself?" Furthermore, Wittgenstein observes, "In order to draw a limit to thinking, we should have to think both sides of this limit."⁶⁷ The Kantian distinction fails because one cannot know the noumenal unless one knows that we cannot know the noumenal. Kant and Hick must know the noumenal as it is in

⁶⁶ Hick, *Disputed Questions*, p. 17.

⁶⁷ Ayer and Wittgenstein remarks quoted from Norman L. Geisler's, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 96.

itself in order to state that we cannot know the noumenal in itself. Sometimes things are not what they appear to be, for example, a stick in the road that from a distance looks like a snake. However, the "snake" in the road later is corrected by the senses as just a plain old stick. Furthermore, just because *sometimes* things are not what they appear, does not mean that we *cannot* know things as they are. What good basis is there to deny accessible knowledge to the world as it is?

Hick's view on religious truth claims is self-refuting. Hick's pluralism is problematic when it says truth claims are permissible within differing religious belief systems.⁶⁸ Using Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit picture, one religious culture may see a rabbit while another sees a duck. Given the notion that one religion only knew what a "duck" was like, while the other knew only what a "rabbit" was like; these different religions would both be expressing a truth because religion A sees a duck because that's all they know, while religion B sees a rabbit because that's all they know.

Attractive as this point is, I believe that it falls prey to being circular. It would seem to assume that what we

⁶⁸ Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, pp. 23-27.

can know is that which my perceptions tell me; especially in regards to religious belief systems whether discussion centers on salvation or truth. Here, in Hick's argument, the duck-rabbit illustration does not justify his view of truth but only illustrates the point. Hick already assumes in this illustration that we cannot know the noumenal, but only the phenomenal in religious beliefs. This perspective of reality claims or truth claims is still what is questioned. I do not believe in the noumenal/phenomenal distinction epistemologically, and I believe it to be absurd. However, the point is not what I believe but whether the duck-rabbit illustration is an adequate illustration or justification of the truth of religious beliefs in Hick's pluralism.

Linguistically, Hick's position amounts to self-refutation and it begs the question. Hick writes, "[A] qualification has to be made to the idea of the Real *an sich* as the ultimate reality that is ineffable in that it transcends our human thought forms." Furthermore, "[T]his is that purely formal statements can be made even about the ineffable - such as, for example, that it is ineffable!"

Hick believes that this amounts to "logical triviality."⁶⁹ He says that "[W]e cannot attribute to the Real a *se* any intrinsic attributes, such as being personal or nonpersonal, good or evil, ... though the limitations of our language compel us to speak of it in the singular rather than the plural." Furthermore, "we are not affirming that the Real is impersonal by denying that it is in itself personal. This polarity of concepts simply does not apply to it, and likewise with other polarities." Concluding that "[O]ur systems of human concepts cannot encompass the ultimately Real. It is only as humanly thought and experienced that the Real fits into our human categories."⁷⁰

One problem Hick's position has is he says that while denying the Real as personal, he is not affirming the Real as impersonal. Yet, logically one must be affirming the Real as impersonal if one is denying the Real as personal. Hick might be right if he were saying that the Real may be personal or may be impersonal. However, Hick cannot mean this because he says that polarity of concepts do not ("does not") apply to it (Real). If these concepts *do not* apply to

⁶⁹ Hick, "A Pluralist View", p. 50.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

the Real, then one can neither say the Real is personal or impersonal, effable or ineffable. But, Hick does say that the Real is "ineffable in that it transcends our human thought forms."⁷¹ However, to even say that much, Hick has to use human thought forms as relating the Real to deny human thought forms relate to the Real (or relate in any adequate way).

Furthermore, this begs the question because this "logical triviality" amounts to the assumption that we cannot know the Real as it is in itself, only as the Real is known to us. To hold to a position like this has been shown above to be self-refuting and absurd.

Furthermore, characteristics of the Real become contradictory. For instance, whatever the thing is in itself (assuming Kantian distinction) it is ridiculous to think the Real as personal, yet impersonal. Hick already knows that the Real has existence. And if the Real does exist, no matter what we perceive the Real to be like, the Real has to be personal or impersonal. The Real cannot be both. The same applies to the Real as relating to being infinite or finite; is the Real all powerful or limited in power? In itself the Real has to be one or the other. Hick

⁷¹ Ibid.

only says we supposedly cannot know what the Real is like; however, this is different from saying this existing being is personal and not personal. The question then is, in what way does religious language apply to God?⁷²

Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine argue that Hick states "a splitting paradox." On the one hand we come to God using "mythological and liturgical language". On the other hand, the language we use about God is "literally false". How can mythical or liturgical language be literally false? As Smart and Konstantine suggest, we know what is not the case regarding God, to be the case about God. They write, "If Christ and the Holy Spirit are not divine identities, then it is surely wrong for us...to worship them." Additionally, "[I]t is not that mythologically they are divine but literally they aren't...."⁷³

⁷² See Norman L. Geisler's excellent treatment in his **Philosophy of Religion**, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973). There are three alternatives: univocal language, equivocal language, or analogical language. Geisler presents a solid case for religious language being analogical.

⁷³ Ninian Smart and Steve Konstantine, **Christian Sytematic Theology: In a World Context**, Gen. Ed. Frank Whaling (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 182.

Second, Hick's pluralism regarding tolerance of all religious groups is inconsistent. While Hick seeks tolerance among religious groups concerning salvation, he is not tolerant of Christianity. Hick wants religious people to be tolerant about agnostic perceptions about God. Therefore, Hick wants any exclusive salvific doctrines to be discarded. Yet, this certainly does not follow from his position. Why should Hick ask Christians to rethink their view of God on theological matters when it really shouldn't matter to the pluralist? If the pluralist is really tolerant, and if religion is created from our human concepts, then he should just let the Christian accept the whole Christian package. He should be the first to understand the Christian position. If our perceptions and concepts frame our religious perspective, then the Christian is certainly within his or her epistemic rights to believe the way he or she believes. Why? Because the exclusive claim to salvation is how Christians have perceived and conceived God/Christianity.⁷⁴ McGrath is right when he says

⁷⁴ Geivett similarly says "Even if it (a theistic argument for God's existence) is merely a feature of our cognitive situation that we seek for further explanation of the beginning of the universe in terms of some cause, that is still a constraint on what it is rational for us to believe." **Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hicks Theodicy**, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,

"[T]he identity of Christianity is inextricably linked with the uniqueness of Christ."⁷⁵ By his attack on Christian doctrine Hick shows the lack of tolerance he has for Christianity, therefore nullifying the pluralist contention of being tolerant of others.⁷⁶

Furthermore, pluralists maintain that an attitude of tolerance should exist among individuals of different religions. If there is supposedly no one way to the Real, then tolerance should reign supreme in the attitudes of people. Yet, as D'Costa correctly asserts, "[T]he irony about tolerant pluralism is that it is eventually intolerant towards most forms of orthodox religious belief, Christian

1993), p. 144.

⁷⁵ Alister McGrath, "The Christian Church's Response to Pluralism", Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, Vol. 35, No. 2, (Dec. 1992) 489.

⁷⁶ Hick, **God Has Many Names**, p. 67. Here Hick says, "If this is so, the older Christian view of other faiths as areas of spiritual darkness within which there is no salvation, no knowledge of God, and no acceptable worship must be mistaken." First, why can't Christians hold this view if Christianity is what one perceives it? Second, Hick is not tolerant because Christians are mistaken. He should at least let Christians hold this position based upon our epistemology. Third, how does Hick know we are mistaken? If we cannot know the Real in itself and/or know the truth regarding salvation, Hick now makes a dogmatic, certain statement that Christians are mistaken. But how does he know we are mistaken according to his own account of religious epistemology? These types of certainties are the kind that Hick is trying to avoid.

or otherwise."⁷⁷

Third, Hick's pluralism is religiously inconsistent. One way of seeing this point is expressed by D'Costa. D'Costa argues that pluralism really is not pluralistic at all, but an exclusive claim.⁷⁸ I fully agree with D'Costa. D'Costa argues that the three camps in the debate over religious pluralism (Pluralism, Inclusivism, and Particularism) are merely labels. Regarding Pluralism, D'Costa notices that Pluralism really amounts to a claim of being exclusive. In other words, the Pluralist is really saying that one should accept his or her pluralistic position because it is the only way to view religion. Believe in religious pluralism because anything else will not do if one wants to truly have a correct view of religion. As McGrath notes regarding one of Hick's work,

The assumption that underlies the thinking of most of the contributors to *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* is that a liberal pluralism does, in effect, have a monopoly on religious truth by allowing religions to be seen in their proper context. It alone provides the

⁷⁷ D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religion", 229.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 225. D'Costa says "that pluralism must always logically be a form of exclusivism and that nothing called pluralism really exists."

vantage point from which the true relation of the religions can be seen.⁷⁹

Returning to D'Costa about labels, the term "pluralism" remains a mere term without correlation to the doctrine espoused.

Other pluralists themselves find Hick's position problematic. Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine believe Hick's Christological position incoherent saying, "we do argue that he (Hick) cannot coherently account for the beliefs and behavior of Jesus' followers, nor can he make real sense of the uniqueness of Christ."⁸⁰ Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine, although not taking a particularist view, disagree with Hick on Christological matters. First, they disagree with Hick in how his pluralism denies the importance of Trinitarian thought. Smart and Konstantine refer to Hick's position as "Unitarian Universalism" which they see as adoptionism. Smart and Konstantine ask of Hick's adoptionism, "is it Christian? It seems to us to sacrifice the heart of the faith." Furthermore, Hick's pluralism is "quite unsatisfactory" because it does "not

⁷⁹ McGrath, "The Christian Church's Response to Pluralism", 494.

⁸⁰ Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine, **Christian Systematic Theology**, p. 183.

account for the key experiential data in the life of Jesus and the early church community. It was these data that the classical Trinity doctrine tried to explicate and on which it rested." Again, they say, "Hick's view, for instance, undermines the soteriological basis upon which the distinctively Christian experience of God and the new way of life on earth rest."⁸¹

Plus, Smart and Konstantine say Hick's Christological views are "phenomenologically false."⁸² Regarding Hick's adoptionism, Smart and Konstantine believe that Hick's view can amount to idolatry.⁸³ They take an example from the Eucharist in Christian liturgy. If Christ is not present within the Eucharist, then people worship a piece of bread "for the concept of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament does not add up to anything if Christ is not himself divine."⁸⁴

The authors maintain that Hick tries to "parry the charge" of idolatry by saying that Christians worship **through** Christ and that mediation is essential to worship of the divine noumenon. This point of Hick's leads to the

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 181.

⁸² Ibid, p. 182.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 181.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Smart and Konstantine problem of Hick's view as being phenomenologically false. Smart and Konstantine note that, "Christ is phenomenologically somewhat different from the Bodhisattvas, *avatāras*, etc., of the Indian tradition, since he was from earliest times worshipped as himself constituting a divine identity and on a par with the heavenly Father: it was not a question of worshipping the Father through him...."⁸⁵ In other words, Christ was not thought of as a mere mediator to God. He was, however, worshipped as Jesus himself; and, considered as being equal (on par) with the Father. This certainly is not worship of the divine noumenon **through** any person or object. Christ is worshiped Himself.

Another inconsistency is the jumping from skepticism to certainty. If our religious beliefs are human conceptions and perceptions about the Real and salvation/liberation, then Hick says we must be agnostic about our knowledge of God. If so, then how does Hick **know** that all roads lead to God? How does he **know** that Christian perceptions are not accurate? He makes very certain conclusions about Christian beliefs when none, according to him, can be made. Hick

⁸⁵ Ibid.

could be wrong, especially if God is perceived by us. Other religions could be wrong as well. Therefore, Hick should be quite timid in his pluralism.

Fourth, Hick's pluralism is logically invalid. Hick's Christology does not follow from his pluralism. If religions are humanly perceived and religious truth is uncertain, then freedom should be given by Hick to those who do believe that Christ is the only way of salvation. Because, according to Hick's pluralism, this is what people (Christians) perceive. If Christ is or is not God, what should it matter to Hick's argument? If all great world religions lead to God, then what great harm is done when a Christian believes Christ to be God? Could Hick have to argue against the orthodox view of Christ because he views it as damaging to his pluralism? This should not bother him at all since Hick holds to an agnostic position regarding religious beliefs. It appears as though Hick has to rid Christian theology of Christ's deity to make his case when it really should not matter to him. After all, we do not know the Real in Himself but only as He is perceived by us (our perceptions of Him).

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the religious pluralism of John Hick. Religious pluralism was defined as a world view that states that all major world religions can lead one to God, or as Hick says, the Real. Hick justifies his position with his religious epistemology influenced by the thought of Immanuel Kant. According to Hick, religious experiences are human conceptions and perceptions of the Real. Individuals can only experience the Real according to one's perceptions. This is so because we do not know the Real in itself, but only as we perceive it to be like. Furthermore, true salvation/liberation moves a person from being self-centered towards a recentering in the divine or the Real. Hick presented two parts to his defense: a moral part and an epistemological part.

Hick first presents a moral argument for religious pluralism. He believes that people in general are no better or no worse than others. People of the major religions seem to be on an ethical par with each other, even exclusivistic ones. By this apparent moral equivalence, Hick believes that no religion should lay claim to being the only religion because of the equality of moral behavior of mankind.

This view of moral behavior is untenable for the following reasons. First, observation was made that this theory is weak. Hick's religious epistemology amounts to agnosticism. If that is so, then any other theory that deals with moral behavior in major world religions is acceptable. In this kind of epistemological environment, Hick's position is no better or worse than any other epistemological theory regarding religious morals.

Furthermore, Hick said himself that the measuring stick for gauging morals is defective. He knows there is really no way to prove his moral point. If so, why make it a point at all? Plus, Pentz notices that Hick's test is not "strictly empirical." How can Hick substantiate adequately his point?

Second, observation was made that Hick was missing an important piece to his moral puzzle. That piece is natural law. Given the fact that the Real exists, we stated that God or the Real could have given mankind the common principles that govern moral action. Therefore, the option should be available to us that religions are not the same because of similar moral behavior, but that behavior is similar because we have the same Creator.

There are several problems with Hick's epistemology of religious pluralism. First, Hick's view is epistemologically and linguistically self-refuting. Epistemologically, to say we cannot know the Real in itself, one would have to have a certain knowledge of the Real in itself to say we cannot know the Real in itself. This statement is contradictory and there is no solid, rational basis for believing in the contradictory.

Linguistically, he uses the conventions of human language to deny their adequacy in describing the Real. Yet, Hick employs human language to convey the supposedly correct way to view our relationship with the Real. He believes that his way for describing the Real is correct, while other ways like the Christian model is incorrect. Yet, if human language is inadequate in describing the Real, how then can Hick adequately describe his brand of religious pluralism?

Second, Hick's pluralism is religiously intolerant. Hick's epistemology expects a subjective role in religious knowledge. He later concludes that this subjective knowledge should cause a person to abandon any exclusive claims to salvation/liberation. However, this is inconsistent because exclusive claims should not be

abandoned because of Hick's presentation of human knowledge. If our conceptions shape our reality, why does Hick want Christians to abandon exclusive claims? After all, a Christian could justify his or her position on Hickian grounds.

Third, Hick's pluralism is religiously inconsistent. D'Costa says well that religious pluralism really is an exclusive claim to religious truth and really is not open-minded. Hick's view amounts to the conclusion that one should accept his view of religious truth and experience against other views. One might object that he allows for the Buddhist or Muslim to hold to their views. However, he really does not. For example, in the case of the Muslim, Hick wants the Muslim to abandon their exclusive claim to religious truth. The Muslim should be skeptical about their Islamic faith and accept Hick's views on religion. This really amounts to the conclusion that Hick's view is the only view to maintain in the busy world of religious experience.

A crucial problem for Hick's religious pluralism in its epistemological dimensions is that it is non-sequitur. Hick maintains that religious experience and religious doctrine is created by our perceptions of the Real.

Therefore, a person should abandon exclusive religious claims regarding salvation. For example, the Christian, Muslim, and Jew should abandon any exclusive claims within their respective religion. However, in Hick's own epistemology, exclusive claims could be true because we do not know much about God anyway. Hick does not hold to such a position, but by his own guidelines an exclusive position should at least be permissible to maintain. The only thing we know about the real is what our perceptions tell us about the Real. And our exclusive perceptions could actually be right. Why then does one have to abandon exclusive claims since the logic of his own epistemology does allow for an exclusive position. In other words, if religious beliefs are created perceptions which in turn lead us to an agnostic view of the Real, then any claim (exclusive or not) is permissible. Exclusive views should be **included** not **excluded** from the realm of religious beliefs.

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