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JOHN HICK'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM – A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

The philosophical challenge that religious diversity poses for religious belief has become in recent years the focal point of a very engaging theological and philosophical debate. The debate began in the Christian context and it would be fair to say that its main issue remains the relationship of Christianity to other major religions. Traditionally Christian thinkers faced with the fact of religious plurality have assumed that Christianity is the only way to salvation, and the truth-claims of other religions can be refuted by way of argument. This position is described today as 'exclusivist'. John Hick's name has become synonymous with a radically different approach to the whole issue. Hick argues that all religious traditions make contact with the same Ultimate Reality ('the Real'), each encountering it through a variety of culturally shaped forms of thought and experience, but all offering equally effective paths to 'salvation/liberation'. Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, although very popular in some quarters, appears to many Christian and non-Christian thinkers as highly controversial.

In the following paper consisting of two sections I would like to have a close look at Hick's fundamental assertions and assumptions (in section I), and to point out some weaknesses of his pluralistic hypothesis (in section II). I will attempt to show that Hick's efforts to prove that adherents of different religions do not contradict themselves as far as essentials are concerned lead him to a point where he must embrace the anti-realist understanding of religious language, otherwise his theory becomes inconsistent. I will also draw attention to the fact that Hick's concept of salvation/liberation which he thinks is common to all religions, as well as his views about the extent to which religious

language is mythological in nature, makes his position virtually indistinguishable from that of revisionist theologians like Don Cupitt or D. Z. Philipps.

I. An Examination of Hick's Arguments for Religious Pluralism

John Hick did not begin his Christian life as a pluralist but as an Evangelical fundamentalist firmly committed to the truth-claims of traditional Christian belief.¹ In *God Has Many Names* Hick, an ordained minister of the United Reformed Church, writes: *I have from almost as early as I can remember had a rather strong sense of the reality of God as the personal and loving Lord of the universe.*² Paradoxically it was this traditional Christian conviction which prompted subsequent change of his theological views. At a certain point Hick found Christian exclusivism (which he calls 'absolutism'), as expressed in the patristic phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, contradicting the most fundamental Christian beliefs about the infinite goodness of God and about God's plan of universal salvation. For Hick, the logical consequence of Christian absolutism was that most of the world is condemned, and that he found *morally* unacceptable. The weight of this moral contradiction has driven him to explore other ways of understanding the human religious situation and to develop his pluralistic hypothesis.

Hick's first step towards the formulation of his hypothesis was his acceptance of the principle of the cultural relativity of religious truth-claims which maintains that one's religious presuppositions are primarily set according to the cultural context of one's birth. Attending services in synagogues, mosques and Hindu temples Hick came to the conclusion that *essentially the same kind of thing is taking place in them as in a Christian church – namely, human beings opening their minds to a higher divine Reality, known as personal and good and as demanding righteousness and love between man and man.*³ Hick presumes that if one was brought up in a Christian environment one is likely to grow up with the conviction that any salvation is found in Jesus Christ. If one was born in South India one will probably understand salvation in terms of being released from *moksha*. Again if one was born in Buddhist Tibet one will grow up with the religious desire to obtain *bodhi*. For

¹ Hick describes his spiritual pilgrimage in some detail in the introduction to *God Has Many Names*, London: Macmillan, 1980.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Hick, to assume that one has the privilege of knowing the full religious truth only by virtue of being born into Christian family is both immoral and irrational.⁴ Instead he thinks that the only viable option for a rational individual is to accept that *the great post-axial faiths constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied visions of it.*⁵

At the heart of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis lies his assertion that the Ultimate Reality constitutes the ground for all religious experience and religious language. He rejects naturalism which asserts that nature is all that exists and therefore all religious beliefs are delusive. Moreover, he explicitly refutes a close cousin of naturalism, religious non-realism, i.e. a claim that although religious beliefs may be subjectively important, useful, and in certain sense 'true', they do not denote objects which exist independently of believer's perception.⁶ In *An Interpretation of Religion* Hick makes it clear that he believes that the objects of religious belief, with a number of qualifications, do exist independently of one's perception.⁷ It is important to bear this in mind because in the second section of this paper I will attempt to show that it is difficult for Hick to hold this realist position while maintaining his pluralistic hypothesis.

One of the ideas which underlies Hick's theory is a shift from orthodoxy to *orthopraxis*. Denying the crucial importance of orthodoxy Hick challenges the very basis of Christian exclusivism that is the need for a response to a specific message in order to be saved. He is convinced that salvation is always achieved as far as one is in *proper soteriological alignment with the Real*, and every religion is a true religion insofar as it enables a person to establish such an alignment.⁸ Thus religions could be seen as culturally determined sets of values for soul-making and points of contact with the Real. There is no need to assume, Hick would say, that only one religion is an effective mean of salvation, and therefore no need to aim at converting those who do not share our religious conviction. This is not to say that there is no place or need for an interaction between different religious tradition. On the contrary, Hick thinks that having the same ultimate goal (i.e. salvation/liberation) adherents of different religious traditions can enrich

⁴ Cf. J. Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 77ff.

⁵ J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (later simply *Interpretation*), p. 235-6.

⁶ Cf. J. Hick, *Religious Realism and Non-Realism: Defining the Issue, Is God Real?*, p. 3-18.

⁷ Cf. *Interpretation*, p. 190-209.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

each other by sharing their experience which comes from their own *orthopraxis*.

Thus beginning with the assumptions which are undeniably Christian (the God of love wants none to perish but all to be saved) Hick arrives at a point where he refutes traditional understanding of Christianity revolving around Christ as the only Saviour. Instead he embraces a view that every religion, including Christianity, revolves around God, while the yardstick of authenticity and effectiveness of any religion is its soteriological alignment with the Real.

These basic ideas had constituted a foundation of Hick's religious pluralism for more than a quarter of a century. However, comparing God and the Universe of Faiths (1973) with *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989) one can observe an important development in the author's understanding of the essence of religion. While in the previous book Hick sees different religions as culturally determined means of establishing the right relationship with the Ultimate Reality, in the latter he speaks about different religions as culturally determined responses to the Real. In other words, the author explains somewhat differently the source and nature of religious diversity. This shift is very important as in the final analysis it appears to be a shift towards theological anti-realism, and makes Hick's hypothesis more vulnerable, as I will attempt to show in the second section of this paper.

In *An Interpretation of Religion* where the fullest development of Hick's views can be found, the author gives an epistemological foundation to his version of religious pluralism by borrowing and revising Kant's concepts of *noumenal* and *phenomenal*, as well as Wittgenstein's category of 'seeing-as'. In this book Hick presents a comprehensive theory that attempts to explain all religious phenomena in such a way as to give a convincing account of religious diversity. Accepting Kant's claim that one can have no pure experience of the *noumenal* (i.e. the world in itself), and therefore our experience of the world is always to some degree a creation of our mind, Hick draws a conclusion that all experience, including religious experience, is 'experiencing-as' (a category which Hick owes partly to Wittgenstein but employs in different context). This allows Hick to say that as each person's religious experience being an ultimate source of religion is specific to himself, then one's religion is specific to oneself as regards the truth-claims inherent within it.

Acceptance of Kantianism as the epistemological basis for his pluralistic hypothesis allows Hick to alleviate some dilemmas which its initial formulation was prompting. For example, now he can explain how one and the same Real can be experienced as a personal deity in a theistic context (e.g. Yahweh or Allah), and as a non-personal reality

in some other traditions (e.g. Brahman), and yet be the same Reality which a believer encounters in soteriological relationship. In the light of Kant's distinction Hick distinguishes between *the Real an sich* (i.e. in itself; as it actually exists) and *the Real as variously experienced-and-thought by different human communities*.⁹ Thus the Real-as-experienced becomes a neutral identifier which allows very different definitions depending on one's perception of the *Real an sich*. For Hick, the main reason why different religious traditions have different or even conflicting conceptions of the Real is that none has direct access to it. Rather, all perception of the Real is mediated through a religious tradition which acts as a conceptual lens. This conceptual lens shapes perception of the Real, and it can be said that *each concrete historical divine personality – Jahweh, the heavenly Father, the Qur'anic Allah – is a joint product of the universal divine presence and a particular historically formed mode of constructive religious imagination*.¹⁰ In short, Hick holds that religious beliefs are partially formed by experience of the Real and partially by the believer's imagination.

Taking these theoretical innovations into account one can sum up Hick's pluralistic hypothesis as claiming the following: (1) There is one divine reality, the Real, which is the ultimate source of all religious experience. (2) The Real transcends all descriptions – both negative and positive. (3) No religious tradition has direct perception of the Real. Each religious tradition represents an authentic way in which the Real is conceived and experienced. Different religions *constitute different conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the Real from within the different cultural ways of being human*.¹¹ More importantly, within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness can take place. This 'transformation' is synonymous with 'salvation/liberation' which for Hick constitutes the ultimate goal of every religion (an assumption which is highly disputable, as I will show in the second section of this paper).

In the light of this new formulation of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis it is still the cultural context which is the ultimate source of religious diversity, as the different ways of experiencing the Real (e.g. as personal or non-personal) depend on 'variant ways of being human'. Hick thinks that Muslims, Christians or Jews experience the Real as a personal One because they were brought up in the 'mode of I-Thou encounter', while Buddhists experience the Real as non-personal because of their 'non-

⁹ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁰ J. Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 159.

¹¹ *Interpretation*, p. 375-6.

personal awareness'. What ultimately Hick wants to assert here is that different expressions of religious awareness do not contradict each other. This is Hick's bottom line and he seems to be prepared to change some of his earlier views only to show that any such contradictions are apparent or superficial. Also acceptance of Kantianism as an epistemological basis of the pluralistic hypothesis appears to be useful in this respect. It allows Hick to assert that ultimately there can be no conflict between religions as far as their truth-claims about the nature of the Real *an sich* are concerned, because there is no possibility for an absolute truth-claim, as the Real is ineffable and unable to be understood or expressed.¹² Hick does not deny that there is some correspondence between the Real *an sich* and the Real-as-experienced but it is hard to see what sort of correspondence it is. Moreover, one could ask on what ground Hick asserts that there exists any correspondence between a believer's experience and the Real *an sich*.

In the final analysis what we are left with is the claim that religions are not there to teach us 'truths' about the Real but to evoke in us a proper soteriological response to the Real. They do it using mythical language. (Hick defines a myth as *a story or statement which is not literally true but which tends to evoke an appropriate dispositional attitude to its subject-matter. Thus the truth of a myth is a practical truthfulness: a true myth is one which rightly guides us to a reality about which we cannot speak in non-mythological terms.*¹³) The only 'truthfulness' of each religion is shown by its soteriological effectiveness, and there is no reason to suppose that many and very different religions can be 'true'.

One senses that there are at least two tacit assumptions here. Firstly, that there is a consensus about the meaning of 'salvation/liberation'. Secondly, that salvation, as conceived by Hick, is really what each world religion is all about. Hick thinks that the best way of finding out the concept of salvation assumed in each religion is an empirical one. He proposes to look at the spiritual fruits every major religion produces and arrives at a conclusion that different conceptions of salvation are specifications of what, in a generic formula, is the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to non-egocentrism. In other words, religion is effective (and 'true') if it is productive of love/compassion. As there is no empirical evidence showing that any of the world religions has shown itself to be more productive

¹² Cf. J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, p. 88-95.

¹³ *Interpretation*, p. 248.

in this respect, Hick concludes that each of the world religions is equally 'true'.¹⁴

II. A Critical Appraisal of Hick's Hypothesis of Religious Pluralism

There is no doubt that Hick's hypothesis has strong intuitive appeal. He presented his pluralistic hypothesis as something required if we are to hold in tension the idea of a God of love and the need for salvation. It can be said that Hick put into philosophical language what many people seem to believe, namely that all major religions lead to the same destination. However, the question we are facing in this paper is not whether this popular intuition is true or false, but whether Hick's *formulation* of religious pluralism is plausible. Possible weaknesses of alternative hypotheses which provide a framework by which one can claim that any religion which positively transforms lives of its adherents is valid, does not constitute an argument for holding Hick's position if it can be demonstrated that it is implausible.¹⁵ In addition, not everybody will be ready to accept as easily as Hick does that exclusivism is rationally unacceptable.¹⁶ There are a number of points of criticism I would like to make. I will begin with the more important ones.

The central claim Hick is making is that beliefs of adherents of religions as different as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism are not contradictory, and therefore all religions can be considered as authentic manifestations of the same Ultimate Reality. Yet, it seems obvious for most believers and non-believers that different religious traditions hold irreconcilable beliefs on many important points. Does Hick adequately address the problem of conflicting truth-claims?

Hick does not deny that various religious traditions disagree about fundamental issues. Moreover, he is aware that this situation *pose an*

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 172.

¹⁵ Karl Rahner's inclusivism could be considered as the middle of the road position. He maintains that Christianity is the true religion. At the same time he is confident that other religions, too, can be lawful because God, desiring that all be saved, gives people his grace through these religions. Adherents of these religions must be regarded as 'anonymous Christians' until the Gospel brings them to an explicit knowledge of God's self-revelation in Jesus. (Cf. K. Rahner, *Religious Inclusivism, Philosophy of Religion*, p. 503-513).

¹⁶ Exclusivism has such prominent adherents as Alvin Plantinga. (Cf. Plantinga A., *A Defence of Religious Exclusivism, The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*, p. 201-5.)

*obvious problem for the pluralistic hypothesis.*¹⁷ Yet he thinks he is able to show that conflicting truth-claims do not falsify his theory because as far as essential religious beliefs are concerned he can not see contradiction between them. Among such essential beliefs Hick finds first of all 'trans-historical truth claims', and 'differing conceptions of the Real'.¹⁸ Trans-historical truth claims have to do with questions to which there is in principle a true answer, but (according to Hick) one which cannot be established by historical or other empirical evidence. Conflicting truth-claims about the nature of the universe (eternal or temporal?, created or not?) and the fate of humans at death (one life or many?) belong to this category. In the second category there is the even more fundamental religious question of the nature of the Real (a personal God or a non-personal Reality?).

As far as the nature of the universe is concerned, Hick reasons that as current scientific cosmologies are compatible with either perspective, therefore belief that the universe is eternal (associated more often with non-theistic religions) and traditionally theistic belief that it is created by God (and therefore temporal) are not contradictory. When faced with the fact that Eastern traditions emphasize numerous reincarnations or rebirths following death while adherents of Western theistic religions tend to believe that each person lives one life followed by a judgement to determine an eternal fate, Hick gives two answers which are supposed to show that this does not falsify his pluralistic hypothesis. On the one hand, he proposes that both these beliefs may better be understood mythologically (i.e. not literally true but evoking the proper soteriological response to the Real), and then both claims may be 'true' at the same time. On the other hand, Hick notices that it is conceivable that some people are reincarnated while others are not. That would mean that both religions are partly right and partly wrong but there is no contradiction between them which would endanger Hick's position. On top of these arguments Hick makes the more important and highly problematic statement that the resolution of the dispute about such issues as the nature of the universe and the fate of humans at death is unimportant in the final analysis as it *cannot significantly help or hinder the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness*.¹⁹ One is tempted to think that Hick tries to suggest that because the differing trans-historical truth-claims are not soteriologically vital therefore even if there were contradictions between

¹⁷ *Interpretation*, p. 362.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26-7.

them it would not be a serious blow for his hypothesis as it operates, as it were, on the deeper level. In addition he seems to be ready to resort to a mythological interpretation of all trans-historical truth-claims which will challenge his pluralistic hypothesis.

He applies a similar procedure when it comes to explaining how it is possible that adherents of Eastern and Western traditions have such different views about the nature of the Real (a personal God *versus* a non-personal Reality) and yet, as Hick's hypothesis says, they all refer to *authentic manifestations of the Real*.²⁰ Answering the critical question about the relationship between the Real in itself and the varying conceptions of the Real held by the followers of various traditions Hick writes: *This relationship between the ultimate noumenon and its multiple phenomenal appearances, or between the limitless transcendent reality and our many partial human images of it, makes possible mythological speech about the Real. [...] a true myth is one which rightly guides us to a reality about which we cannot speak in non-mythological terms.*²¹ It appears then that for Hick speech about the Real is always mythological in nature. If so then again he will be inclined to argue that even if beliefs about the Real vary to such extent that sometimes they appear to be contradictory, they may well all be true because they evoke the appropriate soteriological response to the Real.

It seems that every step of Hick's argumentation is open to criticism and that ultimately he fails to resolve the problem of conflicting truth-claims which he himself recognizes as a serious challenge to his pluralistic hypothesis. First of all, Hick seems to assume that because such disputes as that about the nature of the universe, or the fate of humans at death, or the nature of the Real can not be settled historically or empirically, therefore conflicting beliefs about those issues do not pose a problem for his pluralistic hypothesis.²² This approach is totally unconvincing, as the fact that one can not fully determine which belief is correct does not soften the contradiction.²³ How can religious beliefs of a polytheist be reconciled with beliefs of a theist? It is theoretically possible that they both are wrong (if there aren't any gods or God), but how can they both be correct? It may be true (though it is not obvious) that the opposing truth-claims in question cannot be adjudicated, but this does not allow one to conclude that all those claims are true.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

²¹ Ibid., p. 16.

²² Ibid., p. 365.

²³ Cf. M. J. Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth*, p. 19-20.

However, it has to be noted that the problem of conflicting truth-claims becomes less of a challenge for a religious pluralist if he understands religious beliefs in the anti-realist way. There can be no doubt that the overwhelming majority of adherents of the world religions making religious truth-claims think in terms of a correspondence theory of truth, i.e. in terms of the agreement of thought with reality. In saying that God is a loving Creator or denying that the Real is a person, or claiming that there are many gods, believers intend to make propositions, factual statements which describe reality independent of their thoughts and as such are subject to contradiction. In addition, they implicitly assume that the truth or falsity of entertained propositions is absolute and immutable, and is totally independent of their being right or wrong in entertaining these propositions. One who believes in reincarnation will not normally say that this belief may be true for him but false for someone else. He will rather assume that he can be right or wrong but the belief itself either is or is not true. This epistemological position is often described as realism, and is opposed to anti-realism. Anti-realists like Don Cupitt or D.Z. Philips assume that when Muslims or Christians pray to God, they are not praying to a supernatural being who exists independently of their perception because God is for them a mere psychological projection. For an anti-realist a religious proposition is always true *for* somebody, and they are true when they are 'useful', e.g. when they provide the ground or framework for someone's ethical convictions. For Don Cupitt religious beliefs about Jesus Christ are true in that sense, but he does not *really* believe, as most ordinary Christians do when they pray to Jesus, that he is alive, he is omnipresent and omnipotent God, and therefore he listens to their prayers. Cupitt does not think religious language refers to independently existing objective reality.²⁴ For an anti-realist there can be no real conflict between religious truth-claims which appear to be conflicting when interpreted in a realist way. Perhaps Hick is an anti-realist? This question is crucial for the appraisal of Hick's hypothesis, and yet the answer to it is not obvious.

Hick's recent critique of the non-realist approach clearly shows that he would like to be seen as a realist.²⁵ In the 1970s he even more firmly argued that it is vitally important to maintain the genuinely factual character of the central affirmations of the Christian faith, because Christianity could not retain its identity in any meaningful way unless the factual character of its basic assertions was insisted upon. He

²⁴ Cf. D. Cupitt, *Anti-Realist Faith, Is God Real?*, p. 48ff.

²⁵ Cf. *Interpretation*, p. 190-209.

rejected the utilitarian view that what really mattered was a religion's usefulness, and therefore religious truth-claims were irrelevant.²⁶ In *An Interpretation of Religion* Hick distinguishes between what he calls 'literal' and 'mythological' truth. The first involves correspondence to reality, while the latter evokes 'proper dispositional response to X'. One could expect that by making such distinction Hick intends to assert that among religious propositions one can find also factual assertions. However, it appears that it is impossible to point out any such assertions which Hick would recognize as such. After all he proposes to understand mythologically all particular beliefs about the nature of the Real, and not as literally true descriptions of the Real. In the final analysis Hick is inclined to hold that any religious belief that would conflict with another religious belief (and thus challenge his pluralistic hypothesis) must be understood mythologically.²⁷

This brings us to the main critical point of this paper. It seems that Hick has only two choices. Either he is a realist or a non-realist. If the first is true, then his arguments which aim at resolving the problem of the conflicting truth-claims of different religions do not work, thus making his hypothesis implausible. If Hick is in fact a non-realist (though he suggests he is not) and assumes that religions don't make any truth-claims whatsoever, then his position becomes indistinguishable from that of anti-realist thinkers and will be unacceptable for the vast majority of the adherents of the world religions which Hick wants to reconcile.

More importantly, Hick's apparent shift towards anti-realism makes his position totally inconsistent. On the one hand he wants to assert that the Real exists independently of the perception of believers. In other words, he wants to be a realist about the Real. On the other hand, in order to resolve the problem of conflicting-truth claims (and thus to save his hypothesis) Hick allows virtually all religious beliefs to be interpreted mythologically. At the same time he would like to maintain that various conceptions of the Real are 'authentic faces' of the Real, and not mere hallucinations. But how can he know that this is the case? If all particular beliefs about the Real are only mythologically 'true', how can Hick know what is their actual relationship to the Real? How can he be sure that believers who think about the Real in realist terms are not completely wrong because in fact the Real does not exist independently of their perception? And what are his arguments to support his view that *all* conceptions of the Real are 'authentic'? Why

²⁶ Cf. P. Badham (ed.), *A John Hick Reader*, p. 17-21.

²⁷ Cf. *Interpretation*, p. 371.

not to assume that some of them may be authentic (e.g. monotheism) while some other may be wrong (e.g. polytheism)? Or perhaps some of them are much closer to the truth about the nature of the Real than others? Why think that all of them are equally good?

Hick faced with such challenging questions is likely to respond by stating that in the final analysis all those rather theoretical problems are not soteriologically vital, because the only thing which really matters in religion is salvation/liberation, which Hick defines as *the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness*. He makes it clear in the following passage: *But if we ask: Is belief, or disbelief, in reincarnation essential for salvation / liberation? the answer must surely be No.*²⁸ Here we arrive at a point where the weakness of Hick's formulation of religious pluralism becomes again apparent. One can ask on what ground Hick assumes that his definition of salvation is identical with the one which hundreds of millions of Muslims, Christians or Buddhists implicitly assume? What justifies Hick's strong conviction that transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness is what religion is all about? And why does Hick take for granted that all religions have the same concept of salvation or aim at the same ultimate goal? Is the Buddhist concept of liberation by achieving Nirvana not utterly different from the Christian concept of salvation involving our existence in heaven in the presence of a Triune God? It is hard to find in Hick's works any satisfactory answers to these questions which clearly challenge his pluralist hypothesis.

He argues that because all religions are bringing salvation despite their conflicting truth-claims, therefore conflicting truth-claims are not a problem for his pluralistic hypothesis. Here we have yet another example of question-begging. On what ground does Hick assume that salvation/liberation is happening in all religious traditions? Hick points to empirical evidence. But such an argument can work only if salvation is limited to some degree of moral transformation *in this life*. However, such very temporal understanding of salvation will be wholly unacceptable for the vast majority of believers of any major religion. Both the Christian and Muslim concept of salvation clearly refers to a life beyond the grave.

There is yet another proposition which Hick takes for granted, namely that what one believes about the nature of the Real and the after-life does not affect in any way one's experience of salvation. How does he know that? Adherents of almost every religion seem to believe

²⁸ *Interpretation*, p. 368.

something contrary to Hick's conviction.²⁹ Many New Testament authors seem to maintain that belief in the messianic identity of Jesus is a necessary condition for salvation (cf. e.g. John 1:12-14; 3:16-18; Romans 3:23-38; 10:9). Contrary to Hick, Luther and many Protestant Christians would hold that belief in the divinity of Christ is much more important for salvation, than is moral transformation.

This brings me to one fundamental conclusion concerning the way Hick 'interprets' religion in order to defend his formulation of religious pluralism. In the final analysis Hick appears to be a typical revisionist theologian who does not take religious beliefs as they are understood and held by millions of believers, but ends with telling people what and how they should believe, so that his theory can work. This approach is typical of anti-realist authors and supports a hypothesis I would like to conclude with, that the only way in which Hick can defend his position while avoiding inconsistencies is by embracing the anti-realist view of religious language. Then he will have to accept all the consequences of that choice, including agnosticism about the existence of the Real, and complete 'secularization' of the concept of salvation understood as the ultimate goal of religion. Acceptance of anti-realism will allow Hick to maintain on utilitarian grounds that all religions are equally 'true' because each of them can constitute an effective means of salvation understood as the moral transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. However, he will not be able to assert that each religious tradition is an authentic manifestation of the Real because anti-realism can not provide him with any arguments to support such a claim.

To summarise, in order to show that his pluralistic hypothesis in its latest formulation is plausible Hick has to resort to anti-realism. This may appear to him a heavy price to pay, as it would leave his position hardly distinguishable from that of Don Cupitt or D.Z. Philipps, and thus would rob him of his originality.

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²⁹ A. Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, p. 111-113.

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JOHNA HICKA FILOZOFIA PLURALIZMU RELIGIJNEGO –

OCENA KRYTYCZNA

Streszczenie

Powyższy artykuł jest próbą krytyki popularnej tezy Johna Hicka, że wszystkie religie są „autentyczną manifestacją” Absolutu („Rzeczywistości Ostatecznej”) i równie skuteczną drogą do zbawienia, dlatego

Badham P. (ed.), *A John Hick Reader*, Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990.

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JOHNA HICKA FILOZOFIA PLURALIZMU RELIGIJNEGO –

OCENA KRYTYCZNA

Streszczenie

Powyższy artykuł jest próbą krytyki popularnej tezy Johna Hicka, że wszystkie religie są „autentyczną manifestacją” Absolutu („Rzeczywistości Ostatecznej”) i równie skuteczną drogą do zbawienia, dlatego

wszystkie należy uznać za prawdziwe. W obliczu poważnego wyzwania jakim dla tak sformułowanej teorii pluralizmu religijnego jest fakt, że różne religie podają do wierzenia sprzeczne zbiory twierdzeń (np. monoteizm i politeizm), Hick dostarcza takich odpowiedzi, które albo są w zupełności nieprzekonujące, albo podają w wątpliwość spójność całej jego teorii.

Po pierwsze, w sposób bezpodstawny Hick zakłada, że z faktu, iż trudno racjonalnie rozstrzygnąć spór wokół fundamentalnych wierzeń poszczególnych religii (czy świat jest stworzony czy odwieczny; czy dusza podlega reinkarnacji, czy „żyje się tylko raz”; czy Rzeczywistością Ostateczną jest Osobowy Bóg, wielu bogów, a może bezosobowy Brahman, itd.) wynika, że można założyć, iż między tymi twierdzeniami nie ma konfliktu, a nawet, że można uznać, iż wszystkie one są prawdziwe.

Po drugie, Hick starając się obniżyć rangę powyższego wyzwania utrzymuje, że ostatecznie w religii ważna jest nie ortodoksja (akceptacja właściwych wierzeń), ale ortopraksja (właściwe postępowanie). Hick twierdzi, że najważniejsze w religii jest osiągnięcie zbawienia, a wszystkie religie zakładają taką samą koncepcję zbawienia (jest nim moralna przemiana od osobowości skoncentrowanej na sobie ku osobowości skoncentrowanej na Rzeczywistości Ostatecznej) niezależnie od wyznawanego credo. Jako że obserwacja uczy, iż w obrębie każdej tradycji religijnej można równie często spotkać się z przypadkami takiej moralnej transformacji, zatem Hick wnioskuje, że we wszystkich religiach wyznawcy dostępują zbawienia i ewentualne różnice doktrynalne są bez znaczenia. W tym rozumowaniu Hick popełnia kilka błędów *petitio principii*. Co pozwala mu założyć, że wszystkie religie przyjmują taką samą lub zbliżoną koncepcję zbawienia? Skąd przekonanie, że moralna przemiana jest tym, co w religii najważniejsze? Czyż takie podejście nie sprowadza całego przedsięwzięcia, jakim jest egzystencja człowieka religijnego, do wymiaru czysto doczesnego? Czyż miliardy muzułmanów i chrześcijan nie pojmują swego zbawienia w kategoriach pośmiertnego istnienia w obecności Boga? I czyż często nie żywią tej nadziei pomimo i niezależnie od świadomości, że ich moralna transformacja osiągnęła niezbyt zaawansowane stadium? Także twierdzenie Hicka, że żywienie lub nie pewnych przekonań religijnych nie ma wpływu na doświadczenie zbawienia, nie znajduje odbicia w tym, co wierzy szeregowy chrześcijanin (w Nowym Testamencie wiara w mesjańską tożsamość Jezusa jest stawiana co najmniej na równi z postawą miłości bliźniego) czy muzułmanin (akt wiary w Allaha i Jego Proroka jest tym, co stanowi o tożsamości wyznawcy islamu).

Na powyższe pytania trudno u Hicka znaleźć zadowalającą odpowiedź. Jednakże jeszcze bardziej problematyczne są te stwierdzenia Hicka, które prowokują zarzut niespójności jego teorii pluralizmu

religijnego. Przyjmując za epistemologiczny fundament swojej teorii kantowskie rozróżnienie między fenomenem i rzeczą samą w sobie Hick sugeruje, że „Absolut sam w sobie” (taki jaki jest naprawdę) jest niepoznawalny i nie sposób zawrzeć Jego natury w jakiejkolwiek doktrynie. W związku z tym Hick proponuje, by wszystkie zdania języka religijnego mówiące o Absolutcie rozumieć mitologicznie (a mit religijny jest dla Hicka „prawdziwy”, gdy wywołuje u wierzącego pożądane nastawienie do Rzeczywistości Ostatecznej, a nie wówczas gdy opisuje rzeczywisty stan rzeczy). Takie rozumienie języka religijnego jest typowe dla grupy anglosaskich filozofów religii (takich jak D. Cupitt czy D.Z. Philipps) zwanych teologicznymi antyrealistami, którzy dostrzegają wartość religii w tym, że może ona dla pewnych ludzi stać się pomocą czyniącą spójnym ich system wartości czy ich światopogląd. Jednakże antyrealiści zajmują stanowisko, które z filozoficznego punktu widzenia wydaje się być dalece bardziej spójne, niż stanowisko Hicka, gdyż antyrealiści zakładają, że język religijny jest w całości mitologią i jego zdania nie odnoszą się do żadnej obiektywnej rzeczywistości. Tymczasem Hick w wielu miejscach podkreśla, że „Absolut sam w sobie” istnieje niezależnie od umysłu wyznawców poszczególnych religii. Bliższa analiza nowszych publikacji Hicka pokazuje jednak, że aby uporać się z problemem konfliktu między wierzeniami poszczególnych religii, jest on skłonny interpretować w kluczu mitologii wszystkie pozostałe przekonania religijne. A wtedy nasuwa się pytanie, na jakiej podstawie Hick może głosić swoje fundamentalne twierdzenie, że wszystkie religie są „autentyczną manifestacją” Rzeczywistości Ostatecznej? Skąd Hick może wiedzieć, jaka jest relacja między „Absolutem samym w sobie” a wierzeniami poszczególnych religii, które opisują ten Absolut przy użyciu nierzadko radykalnie odmiennych pojęć? Dlaczego wbrew Hickowi nie założyć, że być może jedne wierzenia na temat natury Absolutu są poprawne, a inne nie? Albo że wszystkie są niedoskonałe, ale niektóre są bliższe prawdy od innych?

Zatem główny wniosek niniejszego artykułu brzmi, że Hick może podtrzymać główną tezę swojej teorii pluralizmu religijnego bez popadania w niespójność i bez prowokowania ciągu kłopotliwych pytań tylko za cenę konsekwentnego opowiedzenia się po stronie teologicznego antyrealizmu, ku czemu jednak nie wydaje się zmierzać. Nic dziwnego, bo wówczas straciłby na oryginalności, gdyż musiałby stanąć w jednym szeregu z Cupitem, Philipensem i innymi „rewizjonistycznymi” filozofami religii, którzy podejmując godną pochwały próbę wyrażenia wierzeń religijnych w postaci zrozumiałej dla współczesnego człowieka kończą tę misję w roli cenzorów, którzy dyktują miliardom wyznawców wielkich religii, w co i jak mają wierzyć.