

Hick's Religious Pluralism and Plantinga's Exclusivism in a Comparative Encounter

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Abstract:

The issue of religious diversity is one of the significant issues in philosophy of religion. The existence of different religions in the world is an inevitable fact. Nowadays, due to the unprecedented development of information technology and public awareness of different beliefs across the nations have made the acknowledgement of religious diversity more widespread than the past. Being this the case, the questions as to religious diversity have been taken to the fore and contemporary man finds himself exposed to the question that how should a believer approach the other beliefs? Could all religions despite the differences they have in their dogmas, beliefs and doctrines be legitimate? Will the followers of all beliefs touch salvation?

Accordingly, among the key issues of philosophy of religion are the issue of legitimacy of different religions and the issue of salvation of followers of different creeds. This essay is an epistemological assessment of Hick and Plantinga on the legitimacy of religions in a comparative context. The following questions represent the guidelines of the present essay:

- 1- How much is pluralism rationally and epistemologically feasible in its claim as to the legitimacy of all beliefs and the equal access of followers of all creeds to salvation?
- 2- Does Plantinga's exclusivist taking as to religious truth and salvation and narrowing them down to Christianity and Christians have rational and epistemological justification?

Hick has propounded his pluralism as a cure to difficulties caused by Christian religious exclusivism and inclusivism. Having insisted on the salvation promoting evolution from egotism to theism as the basic substance of religion, Hick traces the differences of religions back to the inattention to the symbolic language of religion. On the other hand, Plantinga takes the existing differences between religions as an evidence indicating the contradictoriness of pluralism and legitimacy of religious exclusivism. In explaining and defending his exclusivistic position, he rejects both moral and epistemological criticisms. Finally through his "proper function theory" and borrowing from the "Aquinas- Calvin Model" Plantinga tried to justify the validity of their religious exclusivism. By comparing

these two ideas and their principles and arguments, it seems that both takings on major issues, particularly in terms of epistemological justification, are confronted with some problems. Although, one can use the theistic universal compassion to support the aspect of salvation which Hick claimed, but his view concerning the aspect of truth is not strong enough. That is to say that Hick's major evidences for religious pluralism are confronted with some outstanding problems. By examining Plantinga's view, it will be shown that his efforts in rejecting the moral criticisms that the pluralists contended were successful. However, his attempts to justify the idea of exclusivism were not epistemologically good enough. The final conclusion in this research is that Plantinga's exclusivism according to which truth and salvation are embedded only in Christianity does not have good epistemological justification. Close examination of Hick's pluralism shows that his view is confronted with some epistemic problems too. However, it seems that Hick's theory, for the emphasis on the aspect of the tolerance between faiths, is more attractive than Plantinga's religious exclusivism.

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