RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE SOME-ARE-EQUALLY-RIGHT VIEW

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Abstract. In this essay I identify and develop an alternative to pluralism which is overlooked in contemporary debate in philosophy of religion and in theology. According to this view, some but not all of the great world religions are equally correct, that is to say, they are just as successful when it comes to tracking the truth and providing a path to salvation. This alternative is not haunted by the same difficulty as pluralism, namely the problem of emptiness. It is therefore more rational at least for many Muslims, but probably also for many Christians and Jews, to embrace it rather than to embrace pluralism. Whether it is also to be preferred over exclusivism and inclusivism is a topic which I will not address in this essay.

The classic attempt to deal with religious diversity within contemporary philosophy of religion is to defend exclusivism, inclusivism or pluralism. In this essay I shall try to show that there is an alternative which is overlooked.[1] It is an alternative which is not haunted by the same problem as pluralism (which I shall, due to limitation of space, take to include primarily John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis) and it is therefore more rational at least for many Muslims, but probably also for many Christians and Jews, to embrace it rather than to embrace pluralism. Whether it is to be preferred over exclusivism and inclusivism as well is beyond the scope of this essay to answer.

I shall start by suggesting a typology which lists the options that religious believers face in a situation of religious diversity. I shall then identify an objection against pluralism, the problem of emptiness, which undermines

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the view. It is the main objective of this essay to point out that there is an alternative which typically is not considered in the philosophical and theological debate—an alternative which can successfully handle this objection.

THE ALTERNATIVES

It is helpful to start by identifying the actual options we have in a situation of religious diversity. If we look at the previous research in the area, it looks as if religious believers have the following choices. We could as a result of an encounter with other religions choose:

(1) to abandon our religion and replace it with one of these other religions (*the conversion alternative*),

(2) to abandon our religion and decide not to have any religion at all (*the naturalistic alternative*),

(3) to continue to hold on to our religion and believe that only it is correct (*the-only-one-is-right alternative*),

(4) to continue to hold on to our religion and believe that it is more correct than these other religions (*the one-is-more-right alternative*),

(5) to continue to hold on to our religion and believe that the great world religions are equally correct (*the many-are-equally-right alternative*),

(6) to continue to hold on to our religion and believe that all religions of the world are equally correct (*the all-are-equally-right alternative*), or

(7) to decide not to take a stand on which of these alternatives 1 to 6 we should embrace (*the agnostic alternative*).

If I as a Christian encounter Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or any other great world religion, I could choose to convert to one of them, say Islam. I then consider Islam to be the religion that I actually should embrace and act accordingly. This is alternative 1. Or perhaps I am overwhelmed by the differences that seem to exist between the religions of the world and draw the conclusion that neither Christianity nor any other religion is correct, and therefore no religion is worth being a practitioner of. This is the

second option we can choose in a situation of religious diversity. A third alternative is that despite these encounters I continue to be a Christian and believe that my own religion is after all the only one which is correct and everyone should therefore strive to become a Christian. Alternative 3 is often called exclusivism. Yet there is a possibility, alternative 4, that I think that the best thing to do is to remain a Christian but believe that it is not completely wrong or incorrect to be a Muslim or a member of some of the other world religions.

Alternative 5 is that I reach the conclusion that it will do just as well— it is equally correct—to be either a Christian or a Muslim or a member of any of the other great world religions. This is religious pluralism or at least the view of which John Hick is perhaps the most well-known defender.[2] He defines it as "the name that has been given to the idea that the great world religions are different human responses to the same ultimate transcendent reality."[3] But sometimes pluralism is understood more in terms of alternative 6, which would mean that I continue to hold on to my religion but believe that not merely the great world religions but all religions of the world are equally correct. Gary Kessler writes that "according to pluralism, all religions are valid paths to salvation."[4] Paul Griffiths claims that "an upshot of all forms of pluralism with respect to salvation is that no benefit, so far as the attainment of salvation is concerned, is provided by belonging to one religious form of life rather than another."[5] Whether or not we call both of these views "pluralism," the distinction between the many-are-equally-right view and the all-are-equally-right view is important because the latter view seems quite difficult to defend and Hick's pluralism should not be confused with it. Anthony F.C. Wallace estimates that humans have produced 100 000 religions.[6] Perhaps he exaggerated a bit, but still, how could all of the

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[2] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism," Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

[3] John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension: an Exploration of the Spiritual Realm*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 77.

[4] Gary E. Kessler, ed. *Philosophy of Religion*, Belmont, CA. Wadsworth, 1999, p. 529.

[5] Paul J. Griffith, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p. 142.

[6] Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View*, New York: Random House, 1966, p. 3.

religions which have existed on earth possibly be equally right? What a convincing argument for that conclusion would look like is hard even to imagine. Hick's claim is anyhow more restricted. It is that the great world religions are ways of salvation. They are equally successful in transforming human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.[7] He is therefore an advocate of the many-are-equally-right view.

A last possibility, alternative 7, is that we postpone our decision about which of the six alternatives we should choose, and think that this is the most rational thing for us to do in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. This is the agnostic view.

There are, however, some reasons that show fairly conclusively why some of these options can be rejected more or less immediately.

Suppose that I as a Christian, according to alternative 1, choose to convert to Islam and become a Muslim. After my conversion I still have to make up my mind whether my new religion is the only correct one or whether it is merely more correct than Christianity. But this means that the conversion alternative becomes, in the next stage, either alternative 3 or alternative 4. Alternative 2 is immediately ruled out. Alternative 6 is also ruled out because I could not at the same time convert to Islam and reject taking a stand on whether Islam rather than Christianity is to be preferred. Alternative 6 could become a possibility if I came into contact with yet another religion. Moreover, there is no point after the conversion in accepting alternative 5 or 6. Because why should I as a Christian convert to Islam if both should be considered to be equally correct?

What should we say about alternative 2? I call it the naturalistic alternative since it means that I, when encountering other religions such as Islam, should stop being a religious believer and start to believe that both Christianity and Islam and all other religions are incorrect and therefore not worthy of my commitment. How should we evaluate this alternative? Is it a reasonable position to take as a result of an encounter with other religions? The answer is no if we merely focus on the fact that there is a diversity of religions. I think it is fairly easy to see why if we raise the same kind of question in another context. Suppose I believe that a particular political party is the best one. It turns out however that

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[7] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, Yale: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 240.

there are a lot of people who think that parties other than my party are best. Should this give me a good reason not merely to abandon my own party but actually to start believing that no party whatsoever is worthy of my commitment? If I give an affirmative answer, I am immediately in a situation similar to the one I was in before, because when it comes to this new standpoint (that one should not be a member of any political party at all) there are also a lot of people who disagree with me. Therefore I should also abandon this view. In other words, we end up in a vicious circle that we cannot get out of. Therefore there must exist a reason other than merely the fact that people adhere to different religions or different political parties, for it to be rational for me as a religious believer or a member of a political party to draw the conclusion that no religion or political party at all is worthy of my commitment. Religious diversity *per se* does not constitute a good reason to abandon one's religion and start to believe that all religions are incorrect.[8]

What about alternative 7? The agnostic alternative can be understood in at least two different ways. Either I am agnostic about the whole spectrum of views or I am agonistic about alternative 3, 4, 5 and 6. In either case it is a rational position to take, I think, at least sometimes. Not surprisingly, except perhaps for alternative 7, the discussion in philosophy of religion has focused on exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, that is alternative 3, 4 and 5. I shall claim, however, that there is at least one important alternative missing from this debate, which for many Muslims in particular, but also for practitioners of other religions, constitutes a better alternative than pluralism.

So far I have not said anything explicitly about a very important question, namely, concerning what, exactly, it is that religions are supposed to be correct. What do I mean by the term "correct" in the list of alternatives? There are certain obvious candidates and I shall also pick two of these but I think it is often wise to leave it open to people, depending on which religion they endorse and how they understand their religion to fill out for themselves what "correct" actually means. For certain religious

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[8] This parallel also shows that the naturalistic alternative, in a similar way to the conversion alternative, actually is a version of either alternative 3 or 4, it is just that "the court of the game" has, so to speak, been expanded. You can see this if in the scheme you replace the word "religion" with "worldview."

believers it might be the rituals, for others it might be ethical norms or moral behaviour or it might be salvation, and for others still it might be truth, and so on. There are religious people who hold non-cognitive or non-propositional views of religion and there are those who hold cognitive or propositional views of religion. The list of alternatives is meant to be neutral in regard to this choice. However, in contemporary philosophy of religion the focus has been on two of these, namely *truth* or *cognitive success* and *salvation* or *soteriological success* so for instance alternative 3 could be stated in two different ways:[9]

> (3´) After an encounter with religions other than our own, we still continue to hold on to our religion and believe that only it contains true religious beliefs.

> (3´´) After an encounter with other religions, we still continue to hold on to our religion and believe that only this religion's path to salvation is efficient and actually leads to salvation.

The other alternatives could be explicated in these two different ways as well, either in terms of cognitive or soteriological success. For my purpose in this essay it is not of great importance, but it follows of course that these answers could be combined in different ways. So although (3´) and

> (4´) After an encounter with other religions, we still continue to hold on to our religion and believe that these other religions contain true religious beliefs but that our religion contains a larger number of them.

are incompatible options, one could embrace (3´´) and (4´), and so on.

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[9] An analogy might explain the difference between the two: one might have found a medicine that works, that cures people from a disease without one actually knowing much at all about the disease (that would be the equivalence of soteriological success), or one might know many true things about the disease but still lack a medicine that cures people (cognitive success), or one might of course have been successful in both of these regards.

My claims will be that whether we explicate the alternatives in terms of truth or salvation, there (a) is a missing alternative and it (b) is more reasonable, at least for many Muslims, but probably also for many Christians and Jews, to embrace it rather than to embrace pluralism.

THE PROBLEM WITH
THE MANY-ARE-EQUALLY-RIGHT VIEW

A problem many, if not all, versions of pluralism seem to have is that of locating a common referential success that all religions covered by the view are supposed to achieve. So something like what I shall call the "problem of emptiness" might obtain for all of them. I do not have the space here to develop such a case but will, as I stated at the beginning of the essay, limit my critical remarks to Hick's pluralism.

Hick maintains that the most rational thing for religious believers to do in a situation of religious diversity is to continue to believe that the infinite Real exists (which is the source of our religious experiences) but to start to believe that "the infinite Real, in itself beyond the scope of other than purely formal concepts, is differently conceived, experienced and responded to by people in at least the great religious traditions of the world."[10] These traditions include for instance Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. We should believe that they are all equally soteriologically and epistemically successful. Any of them tracks the truth and offers a valid path to salvation/liberation as well as any other.

A number of problems connected to Hick's interesting proposal have been discussed in recent years. However, the most severe difficulty, in my view, is the problem of emptiness.[11] The great world religions seem to make conflicting claims about God, the Real or ultimate reality. For some believers the infinite Real is personal, loving, powerful and the

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[10] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 14.

[11] It has been developed in slightly different ways by, for instance, Keith Yandell, *Philosophy of Religion*, London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 65-79, Philip L. Quinn, "Towards Thinner Theologies", Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker, eds., *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 226-242, and Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 43-63.

creator of the world. For others the infinite Real is non-dual, impersonal, transcending the illusory world in which we live and think, and so on. How could all of the great world religions be equally true and offer equally valid paths to salvation if this is the case? Hick's well-know solution to this problem is to appeal to Kant's distinction between reality in itself or *un sich* (noumenal reality) and reality for us or *für uns* (phenomenal reality). Just as my belief that the car over there appears to me to be blue and your belief that it seems to you to be black do not contradict each other since both can be true (because that is the way the car appears to us) so, similarly, the beliefs of the great world traditions do not contradict each other. The different religious understandings of the Real in terms of Jahve, the Trinity, Allah, Brahman, Shiva or Tao contradict each other only if the believers claim that the way the Real appears and is experienced by them corresponds to the Real as it is in itself, but Hick suggest that believers should not make such claims.

Suppose I accept Hick's pluralistic hypothesis and start to maintain that my belief in God as personal, just and compassion is true only in the sense that this is the way that the Real appears to and is experienced by me, but it does not say anything at all about how the Real or God is in itself. But how could I then know or be rationally entitled to believe that I and all the other believers of the great world religions experience and talk about the same thing or try to establish a relationship to or insights about the same greatness?

Let us again go back to the analogy to identify the problem. How do you and I know that we are talking about the same thing when I say that the car appears to me to be blue and you say that it appears to you to be black? The answer is of course that we also see that it has a certain shape; it has tires, doors, windows and so on (and it is against this background we can understand our disagreement). Now Hick's idea is that even these impressions should be understood phenomenologically, that is, they do not really say anything about how the car is in itself but only something about how it appears to us. What we should actually say is not merely that the car appears to me to be blue and to you to be black, but that it appears to have a certain shape, tires, doors, windows and so forth. We do not know anything about how the car is in itself—what it should be like if we were not there to observe it. It is a complete mystery.

Maybe we could live with this since we agree on what many of these properties are, which also make it possible for us to describe and treat the object as a car. But our problem is in fact greater than this. It is not just the case (if we stick to the analogy) that you and I do not agree on the colour of the car but where I see window, you see mirrors, where you see tires, I see stones. We even have different beliefs about the very structure of the object.

Hick's suggestion is that we should understand our claims about the object not as expressing contradictory but contrary properties. What characterizes the object is that it does not have any of the substantive properties you and I believe it to have, but some other properties that none of us know anything about. Our claims are therefore not mutually exclusive and they do not contradict each other in this sense. His second proposal is that we should not talk about a car anymore (or in the actual case, we should not talk about God, Brahman, or Tao anymore) but about the "Real." It is real because you and I agree that it is the object that causes our experiences.

But how, then, could we know or be rationally entitled to believe that what we originally called a car (and now call the Real) is a car or even has anything at all to do with cars, since it could just as well have to do with a tree, a mountain, a poster or a house. How could we even know that it has to do with one object? It could be many objects. The Real itself could be any thing (or at least have any property other than those you and I claim characterizes it or on an alternative interpretation have no substantive properties at all). It is an unknowable and unidentifiable *X*.

Let us now go back to religion again. If, as Hick admits, the acceptance of the many-are-equally-right view (or pluralism) entails that the Real "cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, conscious or unconscious, purposive or nonpurposive, substance or process, good or evil, loving or hating" since these are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive properties, why should I as a Christian or say you as a Muslim believe that this *X*, what Hick calls the Real, has anything at all to do with our religions?[12] How could Christians and Muslims be rationally entitled

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[12] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 350.

to believe that their experiences of God as personal, just and compassion have anything in particular to do with this X rather than say their experiences of art, food, football, vacationing or car driving? This is the *problem of emptiness*.

Perhaps someone might object and say that what is important is after all the transformation that the great world religions cause in peoples' lives and not their experiences and beliefs. These religions start a process of transformation in which people go from selfishness and self-centeredness to a life that is characterized by love and compassion. For this reason we should also expect them to offer equally successful paths to salvation. Here the same problem comes back to haunt us again but in a different shape. Why should we believe that the paths to the Real have anything to do with unselfishness, love and compassion? If the Real cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, conscious or unconscious, purposive or nonpurposive, substance or process, good or evil, loving or hating, why should we then believe it to be connected to what is good rather than what is evil? The answer is that it is not any more connected to the good than the evil because it is not in any special way connected to anything of which we have a conception. So the conclusion would still be the same, namely that an acceptance of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis entails that the religious ultimate is emptied of content and that its relation to the good life erodes. This gives us a good reason not to embrace the many-are-equally-right view, at least in its Hickian version, or, which is more to the point, gives philosophers of religion, theologians or religious believers who have accepted or advocated Hick's pluralism a good reason to look for an alternative. Is it then possible to formulate a fall back position for the pluralist? I believe it is and I shall also claim that it can avoid the problem of emptiness.

THE SOME-ARE-EQUALLY-RIGHT VIEW

In a sense it is obvious that religious believers can respond to the content of other religions in different ways, but it is something which seems to have been forgotten in the discussion about exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism in philosophy of religion or in theology for that matter.

The idea of Hick and other pluralists' is that we should believe that all the great religions of the world are equally successful when it comes to tracking the truth and providing a path to salvation.[13] But why not believe that *some* but not all of these great world religions are epistemically and soteriologically equally successful?

Suppose that you are a Muslim, in that case, it is part of your tradition to believe that Jews and Christians are also "People of the Book." They possess their own revealed scriptures and worship the true God. They are in this sense privileged in a way that for instance Buddhists and Hindus seem not to be. In the Qur'an we can read that "Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right—shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or to regret" (Surah 2:62). In the comment to this Surah in the Swedish translation of the Qur'an, Muhammad Asad writes that here only three conditions for salvation are listed: to believe truly in God, to believe in the Last Day and to live a righteous life.[14] Mahmut Aydin agrees and claims that the conditions of acceptability to God, are "believing in God and the Hereafter, and performing righteousness."[15] His conclusion is that "the Qur'an calls all people to follow the 'Abrahamic Religion' whose essence is to reject all forms of idolatry and to obey the will of the Lord of the worlds by submitting to Him."[16] According to Sane M. Yagi and A. R. Rasheed there are "numerous verses [like Surah 2:62] in the Qur'an which unequivocally define salvation in non-exclusivist terms and extend it to Jews and Christians."[17] The same kind of understanding cannot be found in the Qur'an when it comes to polytheists, for instance, because it is a serious sin (*shirk*) to associate partners with God (Surah 4:116).

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[13] See for instance Peter Byrne, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism*, London: MacMillan Press, 1995.

[14] *Koranens budskap*, Stockholm: Proprius förlag, 1998, p. 13 n. 50.

[15] Mahmut Aydin, "Is There Only One Way to God? A Muslim View," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 10 (2000), p. 152.

[16] Aydin, "Is There Only One Way to God? A Muslim View," p. 153

[17] Yagi, Sane M. and A.R. Rasheed, "Exclusivism in the Gospels and the Qur'an," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 7 (1997), p. 10

So it seems to be quite possible for Muslims to believe that Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are equally right at least in the sense that they all provide an equally valid path to salvation, while deny that this is the case with respect to the other great world religions. It is not just possible, but even much more in line with their Holy Scripture than Hick's pluralism.

This position, the *some-are-equally-right view,* could also be extended to truth claims. One would then maintain that Christianity and Judaism contain on the whole as many true beliefs as Islam does. None of these three world religions does any better epistemically speaking than the others; although they all do better in this regard than the rest of the great religions of the world.

A possible objection is of course that I have wrongly interpreted my Islamic sources, at least when it comes to the second point about equal cognitive success. It seems quite clear from the quotations given that Aydin, Yagi and Rasheed maintain that not only Islam but also the Religions of the Book, Judaism and Christianity, provide a valid path to salvation. However, salvific effectiveness and cognitive success are two different things, and it is doubtful that they would accept also the latter. This may be true, but it is hard to determine given the texts I have referred to. Nevertheless it is beside the point, because all I am saying here is that it is possible to extend the some-are-equally-right view in such a way that it also includes cognitive success and that it is more likely that Muslims would accept that view than pluralism.

The some-are-equally-right view should then be distinguished from Hick's pluralism. It could of course also be defended by advocates of any other religion, but the way in which the view would be expressed and justified would probably be different. We have identified a missing alternative, which means that we could as a result of an encounter with other religions also choose:

(8) to continue to hold on to our religion and believe that some of the great world religions are equally correct (*the some-are-equally-right alternative*).

Could the some-are-equally-right view deal with the problem of emptiness better than the all-are-equally-right view? I think the answer is "yes"

and this is the reason why. What according to Hick characterizes the Real in itself is that it does not have any of the different properties which advocates of the great religions of the world believe it has. It is neither one nor many, person nor thing, conscious nor unconscious, purposive nor nonpurposive, substance nor process, good nor evil, loving nor hating, just nor unjust, but is characterized by some other properties—properties which for human beings are completely unknown and impossible to conceptualize. In other words, what creates the problem of emptiness is that the Real is experienced by religious people in such radically different ways. This together with the idea that the object does not have any of these properties but is characterized by some other unknown properties creates the problem of emptiness. The Real becomes without content and it is not possible to sustain its logical connection to the good life.

But a Christian and a Muslim understanding of God are not that different. Many Christians and Muslims agree that there is a God and that this God is mighty but also just and compassionate. There seems therefore to be no need to make a distinction between a phenomenal and a noumenal reality to be able to handle contradicting religious beliefs. Instead the advocates of the some-are-equally-right view could claim that on those issues where Christianity and Islam contradict each other, it is reasonable to believe that sometimes neither of the religions is right, sometimes it is one of them and sometimes it is the other one, but generally speaking they are equally successful in tracking the truth. They would then also maintain that to the extent that Buddhism, Hinduism or any other great world religion claims that God is not one but many, not a person but a thing, not conscious but unconscious, not purposive but nonpurposive, not good but evil, not loving but hating, not just but unjust, they are or probably are wrong.

Defenders of the some-are-equally-right view could, just like Hick, refer to the negative theology which is part of their religious traditions but give it a less radical interpretation. Hick claims that negative theology offers support for the idea that the Real is such that we cannot say anything about it. Its nature cannot be grasped in human thought and language.[18] But they can on this point hold the more moderate position

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[18] John Hick, "Ineffability," *Religious Studies*, 36 (2000), pp. 35-46.

that God goes beyond our conceptions in the sense that our thoughts about God do not fully capture who God is. God is above reason and therefore there are things about God that we do not know or even cannot know. It also means that some of the things we believe that we know or at least are rationally entitled to believe about God could very well be wrong or just partly true. But God is not thought to be a complete mystery. God has through revelations (such as the Bible or the Qur'an) revealed some things about Godself. We have received moral guidelines and some knowledge about who God is so that we can obey, serve, and worship God in a correct way. The Qur'an states that God in his omnipotence is also omnipresent and "close" to every creature (Surah 34:50, 50:16). God is compassionate, eternal, just, holy and forgiving without any equals (Surah 5:98, 59:23). God is self-subsistent, unchanging, the sustainer of the world, the Lord of all and his work is prefect. Many Christians would also claim that all of these attributes characterizes God.

At the same time many Christians would probably express doubts about some of ideas found in the Qur'an, namely that God "leaves in error whom He will" (Surah 13:27) and is the one who deceives both the good and the bad (Surah 14:4); the one who is responsible for peoples' ignorance (Surah 6:35), idolatry (Surah 16:35-36) and unbelief (Surah 10:99). One of the ninety-nine beautiful names of God is the "deceiver" or "misleader" (*al-mudill*). Muslims on the other hand might question the idea that humans are created in the image of God since there would then be something of God beside Himself and the idea that humans have a fallen nature—that they are supposed to be exposed to some kind of original sin which corrupts their nature.

Advocates of the some-are-equally-right view could take seriously these different views of God and human beings better than a pluralist like Hick. They do not have to deny these differences or try to explain them away (by for instance adding a distinction between a phenomenal and a noumenal reality). Advocates of the some-are-equally-right view could also maintain that some of their religious beliefs are closer to the truth than some of the beliefs which could be found in another religion. What they must claim, if they want to avoid their view becoming a version of the one-is-more-right view or inclusivism, is that although their religion on certain issues might be closer to the truth than the other religion, they

are both epistemically speaking equally successful, that is, on the whole they both deliver the same amount of true beliefs.

In this essay I have identified an alternative to pluralism which is overlooked in contemporary debate in philosophy of religion and in theology. According to the some-are-equally-right view, some but not all of the great world religions are equally correct, that is to say, they are just as successful when it comes to tracking the truth and providing a path to salvation. This alternative is not haunted by the same difficulty as pluralism or at least Hick's pluralism, namely the problem of emptiness. It is therefore more rational, at least for many Muslims, but probably also for many Christians and Jews, to embrace it rather than to embrace pluralism. Whether it is also to be preferred over exclusivism and inclusivism is a topic which I have not addressed in this essay.[19]

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[19] Some of my ideas about exclusivism can be found in "Exclusivism, Tolerance and Interreligious Dialogue," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 16 (2006), pp. 100-114.