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For some years now, Hans Kueng has been advocating use of the dialectical method to make peace among the world religions. In this paper I try first to locate his Hegelian understanding of this method within its long and complex historical development. I then inquire about its value as an ecumenical tool by investigating some of its underlying assumptions about the subjective/objective, literary/figurative, monistic/pluralistic nature of religious truth. Along the way, doubts are raised about the likelihood or desirability of its bringing the various religions any closer together than have earlier absolutist and syncretistic approaches to ecumenism.

Rumor around the University of Innsbruck back in the 1960's had it that Karl Rahner had been somewhat disappointed over Hans Kueng's decision to do his doctoral dissertation on Karl Barth's doctrine of justification rather than on Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, as Rahner supposedly had advised him to do. Whatever truth there may have been to such a rumor, Kueng has certainly long since vindicated his old mentor. For although he has openly rejected Hegel's excessive identification of the divine and human,[1] he has nonetheless enthusiastically embraced many other of Hegel's insights, including especially his famous three-step dialectical method. This was already apparent in Kueng's 1957 treatise on Barth's doctrine of justification, as he tried to reconcile traditional Evangelical Protestantism with the teaching of the Council of Trent by concluding that while differences between the Barthian and Roman Catholic views might warrant a differentiation of "schools of thought" within Christian theology, they were not so irreducible as to justify a division of the Christian community.[2] It also showed up in Kueng's subsequent works *On Being a Christian, Does God Exist?*, *Freud and the Problem of God*, and *Eternal Life*, wherein he tried to strike up a constructive dialogue with modern philosophical trends of skepticism, atheism, and nihilism, as well as the positivist proclivities of the behavioral and medical sciences in general.[3] But it has been especially in his efforts to bridge the gap between Christianity and the other world religions that Kueng has encouraged application of the dialectical method. Initiated already in his earlier work *On Being a Christian*, this ecumenical project has been pursued most recently by Kueng in his 1986 publication *Christianity and the World Religions*. If there is, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has claimed, "a historical continuum in which we can observe at all points a pattern

of crossovers and overlaps, interdependence and interaction, give-and-take between religions that are unquestionably different but by no means disparate," it is, Kueng argues, "a continuum in discontinuity" that "cannot be explained if we reject outright 'dialectics.'"[4] The goal of all ecumenical studies, therefore, he states, should be "a dialectical 'transcending' (*Aufheben*) of conflicts through inner mediation, which at once includes affirming, denying, and overcoming antagonistic positions."[5] It is within this ecumenical context especially that Kueng's use of the dialectical method will be discussed in this paper. As appealing as such a method might at first seem, it is not altogether unproblematic.

In the first place, there is a problem of definition. Juergen Habermas and other Marxist-oriented dialecticians have often been criticized for their inability to explain clearly and exactly what they mean by the dialectical method.[6] A similar concern might be raised in Kueng's regard. Time and again he will invite his readers to think dialectically, but apart from the stock Hegelian description of the process as involving affirmation, negation, and sublation, he will seldom if ever try to explain more fully what the method is all about.[7] According to Ernest Topitsch, such reluctance to explain one's form of thinking is all part of an "immunization strategy," whereby practitioners of the dialectical method try to escape all critical scrutiny of their views and avoid any possibility of refutation.[8] Criticism of this sort by Topitsch is to some extent indicative of an epistemological prejudice which makes it impossible for him to appreciate any approach to knowledge other than a strictly empirical one, and on that account probably ought not to be taken too seriously. Furthermore, it would seem obviously unfair to ascribe obscurantist motivation to a thinker like Kueng (or, for that matter, Habermas), who has done so much in modern times to encourage an unfettered and critical exchange of views among all parties interested in the pursuit of truth.[9] Still, however abusive or beyond enlightenment Topitsch and his kind might be, their criticism can serve to remind us, as Goethe reminded Hegel himself,[10] how dangerously close to sophistry dialectics can come, and how, of all forms of thought, it is probably the most obscure by nature[11] and the most complex historically.[12] Before evaluating its ecumenical applicability, therefore, it will be necessary, in lieu of Kueng's failure to provide one himself, to come up with some introductory explanation of what his dialectical method is all about.

As was implied by Plato's reference to it as the "power of conversing" or the "art of discussing,"[13] the dialectical method is before all else conversational. The word 'dialectic' in fact derives etymologically from the Greek term for dialogue.[14] At the root of all varieties of dialectics, therefore, including Kueng's, is the kind of 'give and take' exemplified in the ongoing discussions between Socrates and his followers. He wants to make peace between Christianity and other religions by getting them to start talking to each other.[15] But not just any kind of talk will do. As Bernard Lonergan has pointed out, the ancient Athenians did not really

need Socrates to get them talking.[16] Like any other primitive or civilized people of old, they were already full of opinions and stories about everything under the sun. Prior to their encounter with Socrates, however, much of their talk had been idle. They had not really known what they were talking about. The real importance of the Socratic enterprise, therefore, Lonergan notes, was to have "put an end to idle talk."[17] From a "primary, spontaneous level" of everyday language, Socrates moved them onto the "secondary, reflexive level, on which we not merely employ but also say what we mean by everyday language."[18] Kueng has a similar goal in mind. He wants to move the conversation between Christianity and the various religions to a higher level. Not unlike Juergen Habermas' attempt to develop a critical self-consciousness within the Marxist tradition,[19] Kueng is trying to move Christianity beyond an ideological mind-set, onto the level of a "critical-dialogical encounter" with religious views of reality other than its own.[20] What this means generally is that Christianity will criticize the other world religions in the light of its own teaching, while at the same time subjecting itself to the challenge of self-criticism in the light of the truth that is found elsewhere.[21] To see whether and how that might work dialectically, however, it will be necessary to take a closer look at the critical dimension of the dialectical method itself.

As is well known, Socrates operated on the assumption that the "unexamined life is not worth living."[22] His every conversation, therefore, involved an "incessant querying" by which to stir up doubts among those with whom he was talking.[23] Like a gadfly pricking a sluggish horse, he would sting his contemporaries with questions, trying to shake them out of their dogmatic complacency. Upon learning from the oracle at Delphi that he was the most learned man in all of Athens, he set out to prove the same by showing that unlike other supposedly learned men about town, he at least knew what he did not know, and that they did not know as much as they thought they did.[24] Professing ignorance all the while, he would try to draw those with whom he was conversing to the opposite of what their first impression had pronounced correct.[25] That is what is generally meant by Socratic irony and elenchus. It was an art of "finding premises believed by the answerer and yet entailing the contrary of his thesis."[26] Its whole essence lay "in making visible to the answerer the link between certain of his actual beliefs and the contradictory of his present thesis."[27]

This Socratic version of dialectics, J. S. Mill once observed, was "essentially a negative discussion of the great questions of philosophy and life, directed with consummate skill to the purpose of convincing anyone who has merely adopted the commonplaces of received opinion that he did not understand the subject."[28] Aristotle called it simply "the ability to raise searching difficulties on both sides of a subject," and like Plato before him,[29] thought of it as being helpful in developing skill in making and criticizing definitions.[30] In its broadest Socratic

sense, therefore, the term dialectic can be and has been applied to any form of thought, such as Abelard's *Sic et Non*,[31] Nicholas of Cusa's *De Docta Ignorantia*,[32] Kierkegaard's "existentialism,"[33] Barth's early "theology of crisis,"[34] Ricoeur's "philosophical anthropology,"[35] or even David Tracy's "analogical imagination,"[36] in which the *esprit de contradiction* is used to bring into focus the inadequacy of one or another definition. It is operative in a similar way in Kueng's ecumenical theology. A good part of his strategy is to convince people that, like himself, they do not know anything so long as they think that they know everything in knowing only their own traditions.[37] To do this, he will confront them with the "contradiction"[38] of their religious views from another religious perspective. Alongside a traditional triune conception of God's personhood, for example, he will juxtapose an example of Islamic monotheism,[39] or over against the Christian insistence upon the reality of selfhood, he will introduce a discussion of the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta*.[40] Like Socrates and every other dialectician, he is in search of definitions that are adequate. But no sooner does he introduce a definition of one or another religious phenomenon like "mysticism," for example, than Kueng will immediately call its adequacy into question by contrasting it with a variety of definitions from other religious and non-religious perspectives.[41]

At this stage, the dialectic as pursued by Kueng would still be within the purely negative realm of what Hegel calls "understanding," or the process of abstraction whereby identifiable phenomena are sharply and rigidly distinguished and separated from each other.[42] Such understanding, both Hegel and Kueng would insist, is important for any study, including the study of religion.[43] It can also prove to be rather irritating to those "whose ignorance is exposed" or "whose cocksureness is broken down."[44] And if it goes no further, it can even degenerate, as Augustine warned,[45] into an exercise in sophistry,[46] or a surrender to skepticism.[47] Kueng himself is aware of this danger, but, of course, like Hegel, has no intention of stopping with mere "understanding" or "negative reason." A mere juxtaposition of conflicting views, or a mere compounding of various features from various religions, he says, will not do.[48] Through all the contradictions will have to be sought that which is complementary.[49] Their opposition will have to be "overcome" by moving on from mere understanding to what Hegel calls "Speculative or Positive Reason."[50] But is such a move possible, and if so, how?

Although his aim may always have been to pursue the truth, Socrates hardly ever succeeded in reaching any positive results. One may doubt, in fact, whether Socrates ever had any thought of getting beyond the negative dimension of his dialectic in a speculative way. For in the specifically Socratic dialogues, as Kierkegaard pointed out, "questions were asked not in the interest of obtaining an answer, but to suck out the apparent content with a question, and leave only

an emptiness remaining."[51] The definitions of love, courage, and so forth, to which the Socratic dialectic would lead were "utterly void of content."[52] They were pure abstractions—"indeterminate determination[s] of pure being."[53] They may have left Socrates conscious of eternal truth, but they told him nothing about what it was.[54] They were actually "limits" beyond which he could hope to get only by way of turning inward to seek a knowledge of self in terms of the relationship with the divine toward which his state of ignorance inclined him.[55]

Plato, on the other hand, was more affirmative in his pursuit of the dialectic. Questions were raised in order to receive an answer that would deepen and broaden the knowledge of the object.[56] His method seemed more conducive to positive results.[57] Thus, in the same dialogue (Symposium) wherein love was defined from the Socratic standpoint in totally negative terms, Plato tried, in the discourse of Diotima, "to permit the negative to be seen."[58] The "unknown" object of pure desire in the Socratic definition now was presented as the "beautiful."[59] What is most significant, however, is that by this stage in the Platonic ascent to knowledge, we are, according to Kierkegaard, already beyond the dialectic, and in the realm of imagination and the mythical.[60] The dialectical process has not been consummated,[61] but simply stopped,[62] and an "entirely new beginning" has been made.[63] The dialectician has fallen into a state of contemplation.[64] The "idea" is present, but "in a condition of estrangement," its splendor shining in the form of the image.[65] In the final analysis, therefore, it is doubtful whether even the Platonic dialectic ever became truly speculative in the sense of transcending the negative in a rational way.[66]

For his part, Aristotle distinguished dialectic from "scientific demonstration," and doubted that the former could ever lead to a certain reconciliation of conflicting opinions, not to mention logically contradictory propositions.[67] Medieval thinkers also expressed doubts about the ability of the dialectical method to produce positive results, some by insisting that Tradition alone (or the *analogia fidei*) can serve as a final arbiter between the "contradictory" views Abelard and others were bringing to light on a variety of theological issues,[68] others like Bonaventure and Nicholas of Cusa, by adhering strictly to a contemplative *theologica negativa*.[69] Later, from a different perspective, Immanuel Kant would also question the power of reason ever to move beyond "understanding" toward a purely speculative resolution of the contradictions or "antinomies" of human thought.[70] But Hegel himself rejected such anti-rationalistic tendencies,[71] and was confident that by paying closer attention to the positive significance of negation, a higher synthesis of truth could be found.[72] By the "positive significance" of negation, Hegel understood the "internality" of the relationship established between the conflicting poles of thought.[73] The negation, Hegel claimed, is not just something that surfaces alongside a definition of one or another term, and then sits there merely in an extrinsic and independent relationship to it.

Rather, in any genuinely dialectical act of interpretation,[74] it arises from within the definition itself. The essence of the thing being defined involves as much what it is not, as what it is. Every determination is by its very nature also a negation.[75] The very qualities that define Socrates as a Greek, for example, exclude him from being an American.[76] Conversely, every negation is also a determination.[77] That Socrates is not an American is essential to and constitutive of his being a Greek. Like the parts of a living organism, therefore, every phase of a dialectical argument (affirmation, negation, etc.) implies another, and the whole of which it is a part.[78] Furthermore, as a result of their dynamic interplay, the various phases of the argument give rise to a still higher synthesis or "unity of opposition," in the context of which the opposites, though still held in mutual distinction and contrast,[79] are now, by way of the perception of their relatedness, sublated or elevated above their originally inadequate, finite formulations.[80] This "result" is more than the mere quantitative sum of thesis and antithesis imagined by Fichte.[81] According to Hegel, it is a higher, "more concrete," conception of reality, a "new definition of the Absolute . . . presenting more fully what in its predecessors was only partially and inadequately expressed."[82]

Examples of how this Hegelian dialectic might work ecumenically abound in Kueng's works, perhaps the best being his attempt to resolve conflicting views about the personal or impersonal nature of the ultimate reality. Starting with the traditional Christian conception of God as being personal, Kueng will affirm the truth of the propositions that God is our Father, or our Mother, or, in a more general sense, a "person."[83] The truth of such propositions is then called into question and relativized, however, by being brought into contact with the typically Buddhist (and sometimes Hindu) impersonal conception of the ultimate reality.[84] It is not that the truth of the Buddhist view cancels out the truth of the Christian view, as the truth of −A might, in terms of strict logical contradiction, imply the falsehood of A. What the truth of the Buddhist view does is to bring into focus the "conceptual inadequacy" of the Christian view of God as a person.[85] It strips the Christian truth of its "absoluteness":[86] That God is "personal" may be so—"yet, not just so!"[87] This "negation" is, of course, mutual, and just as the truth of the Christian view is relativized, so the truth of the Buddhist view, regarded as absolute, is discarded. Having been relativized, however, the truth of both views is preserved, being taken up into the unity of the whole, and once again "absolutized."[88] Both affirmation and denial are transcended. Out of the dynamic, dialectical encounter of the Christian and Buddhist views arises the higher truth that the ultimate reality is "transpersonal" and "transsexual,"[89] or, in other words, neither personal nor impersonal exclusively, but both, and yet more: the truth is "so, and yet not just so, but so!"[90]

Such then, in rough outline, is Kueng's ecumenical dialectic. It remains to inquire about its value by way of investigating some of its underlying assumptions

and the extent to which it does or does not bring the various world religions closer to the truth.

In the first place, as in any Hegelian rendition of the dialectic, there is in Kueng's approach an assumption that one can actually identify and understand views of reality contrary to one's own. But this may not be as easy or unproblematic as it might at first seem. So far as the identification of conflicting religious views is concerned, there is certainly a danger of contriving the opposition and, in the process, distorting the truth of the religion with which one is trying to establish critical dialogue. Heinz Bechert has criticized Kueng for having done just that in his response to Buddhism.[91] Even more difficult than identifying accurately conflicting religious views, however, is the problem of understanding them. For although some objects of knowledge, being themselves objective, can be known objectively,[92] the object of religious knowledge, as Kierkegaard argued so emphatically,[93] would seem to be ultimately subjective, and to that extent capable of being understood only in a primarily subjective manner.[94] Religion, it should be noted in this connection, does not seem nearly so exclusively or even primarily an intellectual affair as Comte and Freud claimed. Many modern scholars of religion, like Rudolph Otto or Mircea Ediade, have followed the suggestions of Friedrich Schleiermacher and located its essence rather in the realm of feeling and experience, albeit never to the total exclusion of the rational element. Not only Christianity, therefore, but every religion has at its heart a "God-relationship," and defines or shapes itself accordingly. In order to understand this relationship as it is perceived by members of one or another religion, therefore, it may very well be necessary, as Kierkegaard noted in regard to Christianity,[95] to put oneself in the shoes of these same individuals in a genuinely existential manner. In other words, without the free commitment, made in the context of love (as in Christianity), obedience (as in Judaism), devotion (as in Shinto), etc., it may be nigh impossible to understand (much less feel certain about) what one or another religion is talking about. Kueng, it should be noted, recognizes this point to some extent by readily admitting that Hegel's "dialectic of cognition" must be supplemented by a "dialectic of love" if the Christian understanding of God's freedom and transcendence is ever to be properly appreciated.[96] But must not something similar apply to all the world religions? Just as the Christian "dialectic of love" can only be understood and appropriated "from within," so too, perhaps, the different dialectics of "obedience," "self-denial," "surrender," "submission," or "devotion," such as one might find operating, each with its own logical structure, in the religions of Judaism, Hinduism, Taoism, Islam, or Shinto respectively, can only be understood "subjectively." But can one, even with as tolerant and open a mind and will as Kueng's, ever really get "inside" another religious experience so as to appreciate the uniqueness and difference of its point of view? Kueng seems to think one can, and has spent

a good deal of time and energy traveling around the world trying to do just that. But others, like Harvey Cox, have tried the same, "turning east," for example, with no less good will and openness of mind than Kueng, only to have returned home considerably humbled by the impossibility of the project.[97] Was this due merely to the practical, logistical problems involved, such as the sheer immensity of religious phenomena about which Toynbee had warned, or was it not epistemologically impossible from the start, doomed by the social-historical contingencies which keep human beings from ever committing themselves radically in more than any one way at a time or even successively? For it is not just a problem of understanding one or another isolated concept or proposition that is different from one's own. Such concepts and propositions can themselves be understood only in the context of an appreciation of the whole religious "universe of discourse" from which they spring. But how, short of a "leap of faith," can one ever adequately penetrate such a world? And if, because such a cross-cultural "leap of faith" seems so impossible, there can be no adequate understanding of religious viewpoints other than one's own, how could any attempt to reconcile them along dialectical lines not eventually break down or go awry? Would not any synthesis resulting therefrom be similar to the kind of easy agreement people are sometimes so quick to find between dissenting views simply because they fail to see the points of difference involved?

Secondly, even assuming that one could identify and understand the differing viewpoints represented by the various world religions, there is room to doubt whether one could or would even want to reconcile them in some supposedly higher, dialectical synthesis of thought. Is not the plurality of religious viewpoints essential to the revelation of eternal truth? Even granting the unity of the latter, does not the finiteness of the human perspective warrant or even require a multiplicity of religious views? And does not this multiplicity itself enrich revelation, and contribute in an essential way to the very survival of religion in a sometimes hostile environment?

Kueng, of course, is not oblivious to the value of religious pluralism. Like Hegel, the synthesis he has in mind is not a "night in which all cows are black," or an Aesopian lion's den from which no trace of variety ever emerges. Kueng consistently rejects both the "absolutist standpoint of exclusivity or superiority," according to which the truth of all other religions would have to be measured by their degree of conformity to the supposedly one true Christian view of things,[98] and the standpoint of "relativism and indifferentism" which would result either in an "arbitrary pluralism,"[99] or in the kind of "syncretism" advanced by Toynbee, Radhakrishnan, and others, according to which the varieties of religious doctrine and practice make no difference in the final analysis, and the truth of all religions can ultimately be reduced to some common core of religious experience, like "mysticism" or "faith."[100] When stating as he does, then, that "the

truth cannot be different in the different religions, but only one,"[101] Kueng is not trying to say that the differences between the religions can be overlooked or dismissed. Consistent with his taste for the Hegelian dialectic, he appreciates the importance of diversity to the development of truth. What he means by the "unity of religious truth," therefore, is that in and through their "opposition" the truths of all religions are "complementary" and "inclusive,"[102] not in the sense of providing ground for a "weak ecclecticism,"[103] but in the sense that through their critical encounter they constitute an ongoing, although not necessarily "continuous," evolution of an increasingly more adequate theology.[104] The unity he has in mind is similar to that of a jigsaw puzzle, or to the more dynamic, organic unity of a living body, whose parts are adapted to each other to fit together as a whole, but all the while remain distinct.

But does even such a sophisticated notion of the unity of religious truth do justice to the plurality of religions? Is there not still a danger that in the process of having their truths sublated, the various religions as we now know them will become mere shadows of some abstract ideal *ecumene*, less real in the concrete than in the mind of the theologian? The whole aim of the Hegelian dialectic is, of course, to render opposites more concrete by bringing them "holistically" into relation with each other. But does not the attempt to bring them together result simply in confusion? William James once complained that the Hegelian dialectic was like a pantomime in which "all common things are represented to happen in impossible ways, people jump down each other's throats, houses turn inside out, old women become young men, everything 'passes into its opposite' with inconceivable celerity and skill."[105] James marveled incredulously at how simple distinctions between say, the one and the many, could so easily be translated into "contradictions," and then just as "miraculously" be transcended.[106] And why, it may be asked in the same skeptical vein about Kueng's ecumenical dialectic, need we assume that all the various religious viewpoints do in fact cohere, or complement each other? Would not the existence of, or at least the discovery of, such internal relatedness or coherence require something approximate to what Alfred North Whitehead, from a more specifically metaphysical perspective, has referred to as "an all-inclusive act of experience,"[107] or what Bernard Lonergan has called the "universal viewpoint"?[108] But whether finite human reason ever enjoys such a view of things is certainly debatable.[109] Hegel himself, with his conception of human reason as Absolute Spirit in the process of developing itself towards complete self-awareness,[110] was able to afford to man "a God's-eye view" of reality, or an "absolute" knowledge in the context of which the Kantian duality of numina and phenomena could be overcome, the whole of reality, in all its diversity and complexity, could be viewed "systematically" in terms of the internal coherence of all its parts, and a genuine coincidence of opposites could occur.[111] But was this not, as Kierkegaard claimed, the

archexample of *hubris*—for a mere human like Hegel to have presumed, namely, to the divine vantage point of eternity?[112] Kueng as much as admits that it was when he states that "it is impossible simply to adopt [Hegel's] system of mind-monism and its ontic-noetic constraints which cover up the difference between God and Man,"[113] or when he accuses Hegel of having fallen into a "disguised dualism" to compensate for reason's lack of "cunning" in explaining individual human existence (as Kierkegaard noted), the alienation of the worker (as Marx complained), or the tragic dimension of history in general.[114] It is on that account also that Kueng, as noted earlier, admits the need to supplement Hegel's "dialectic of cognition" by a "dialectic of love." Not only does he mean thereby to make more room for the "otherness" and "freedom" of the Christian God, but also to allow for the possibility of a religious experience in whose sense of mystery,[115] a view of the "whole" might be found to provide the framework of unity necessary for any coincidence of opposites but unavailable through reason alone.[116] Kueng insists that this does not mean "going back behind Hegel," as if a God of reason could ever again be altogether displaced by a God of faith.[117] He sees his ecumenical dialectic as being true to the best of Hegel's intentions.[118] Its actual resemblance to Hegel's dialectic, however, might seem rather superficial in the final analysis.

Notwithstanding his extensive use of Hegelian terminology, the "synthesis" Kueng eventually arrives at is not nearly as "positive" in content as Hegel's. It is not really a "speculative" synthesis. To be sure, Kueng goes beyond the Socratic standpoint of irony, and he does not go as far as Kierkegaard in rejecting an objective basis for religious knowledge. The last step in his dialectic is not just a "leap of faith." But neither is it simply the consummation of an act of thinking. In many ways it seems closest to the Platonic dialectic, which, as we have seen, leads up to the "idea," but then falls back, via the imagination, into a "contemplative stare." More often than not, as he pushes his dialectic on toward a reconciliation of conflicting views, Kueng not surprisingly has to turn to a mystical line of thought to express the synthesis he has in mind. In his aforementioned attempt to bring together Christian and Buddhist views of ultimate reality, for example, he must appeal to the "negative theology" of Nicholas of Cusa to say what he means by a "transpersonal" or "transsexual" Absolute.[119] His language, in other words, inevitably becomes intuitive and paradoxical. Even the "limit concepts" (like "transpersonal"), which supposedly "burst through" and "sublate" more mundane definitions, have a metaphorical, poetic ring to them. Like Karl Rahner's *Urwoerte*, they may reflect "the mystery of the unity in multiplicity, of the essential in the phenomenal, the wholeness in the part, and the partiality in the whole," but they do not "define" it.[120] The "knowledge" they reveal, therefore, is not nearly so much the "positive result" of "speculative reflection" as it is simply a "*scientia visionis*."[121]

It could be argued, of course, that such an approach is at least preferable to one based exclusively upon an uncritical embrace of the Hegelian "dialectic of cognition." If we must talk about the "one" truth that supposedly is present in the many different religions, it is best, perhaps, that we leave the first and last word to the mystics and poets. For as a host of thinkers, from Vico to Bergson, Jung, and Tillich have argued, poetry may very well enjoy a priority over the literal meaning of human language, not because it is altogether "prelogical," but in the sense that "the human spirit will express itself in symbols before it knows, if ever it knows, what its symbols literally mean."[122] But even in its more Platonic, "contemplative" dress, Kueng's ecumenical dialectic is not without difficulties. Not to mention the specific problems accompanying the increased emphasis upon religious symbolism,[123] or the usual problems of verification that plague any ontological approach to theology, there is above all a practical problem of lucidity. The "talk" to which Kueng's ecumenical dialectic gives rise is all too often so paradoxical that only a select few will ever have a chance of grasping whatever its meaning might be. Who but an Erich Przywara or a Nāgārjuna, for example, could ever comprehend Nicholas of Cusa's statement about God as the "maximum in the minimum"? Is there not a touch of *hubris* and, therefore, inevitable confusion, even in such contemplative language? Granted, nothing should ever stop the various religions from talking to and trying to understand each other. But does it really bring them any closer to the eternal truth to be groping for some kind of ecumenical *esperanto* along dialectical lines? Is there not a better way of conversing—one that involves as much listening as talking—that will allow more time and room for various lines of religious thought to run their course without constantly being subjected to alteration on the basis of cross-cultural, negative references? It may be true—to borrow Kueng's own analogy—that "if we know only England, we don't know England." But is it not also true that if we ever want to get to know and be at peace with the English, at some point we have to bracket whatever else we know about ourselves, the French, the Germans, or any other people, and give the English a chance to reveal themselves, literally, poetically, or however, in terms of the same relatively independent "universe of discourse" in which their culture developed in the first place. For all its good intentions, Kueng's ecumenical dialectic does not seem to do that. It claims to respect differences between the various religions, and disclaims any interest in assimilating all the world religions into one.[124] Yet, in its passion for synthesis, it seems unable to afford the different religions an uninterrupted expression of their own unique messages.

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NOTES

1. See Hans Kueng, *Does God Exist?* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), pp. 163-64, 169; Hans Kueng, *Christianity and the World Religions* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), p. 206.

2. Kueng, *Justification* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), pp. xii-xiii, 275ff.

3. Kueng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 83, 264, 309; Kueng, *Does God Exist?*, pp. 146-49, 594, 600; Kueng, *Freud and the Problem of God* (New Haven: Yale, 1979), p. ix, 91-122; Kueng, *Eternal Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), p. 174.

4. See Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. 24-25; Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981); E. T. Long, "Cantwell Smith's Proposal for a World Theology," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (Jan., 1987), pp. 3-12.

5. Kueng, *World Religions*, p. 180.

6. See E. Topitsch, "How Enlightened is 'Dialectical Reason'?" in Tibor R. Machan, *The Main Debate: Communism versus Capitalism* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 21.

7. See *Supra*, n. 3, and Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. 174, 180, 209, 385-88, 396, 416.

8. Topitsch, "How Enlightened is Dialectical Reason?," 23-28.

9. See Kueng, *Freud and the Problem of God*, pp. 93-96.

10. See Machan, *The Main Debate*, p. 24.

11. On Plato's own difficulty in appreciating the finer nuances of the Socratic dialectic, see Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), pp. 69-70.

12. On early influences on dialectical thinking, see G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 15-171.

13. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, p. 69.

14. See *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, VII, p. 385.

15. Kueng, *World Religions*, p. 441.

16. Bernard Lonergan, *Collection* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 256.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 256.

19. See Kueng, *Does God Exist*, pp. 579f.

20. See, for example, Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. xviii-xix.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Plato, "Apology," 38, *The Dialogues of Plato, Great Books of the Western World* (Henceforth *GB*), ed. R. M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), vol. 7, p. 210.

23. See Machan, *The Main Debate*, p. 3.

24. Plato, "Apology," 21, 29, *GB* 7, pp. 202, 206.

25. This is Hegel's summary of the Socratic dialectic (Hegel, *Hegel's Logic* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975], p. 117).

26. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, p. 15.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

28. J. S. Mill, "On Liberty," *GB* 43, p. 288.

29. On the development of Plato's conception of dialectic, see: Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, p. 70; Taylor, *Plato, The Man and His Work* (New York: Dial, 1936), pp. 291-95, 313, 387, 412;

Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy*, pp. 432-33.

30. See Mortimer J. Adler, *The Great Ideas*, I, *GB* 2, p. 348.

31. See David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1962), pp. 95, 125, 126.

32. V. Martin, "The Dialectic Process in the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa," *Laval Theol.et Phil.* 5 (1949), pp. 213-68.

33. See Hermann Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), esp. pp. 10-15.

34. P. Harrison, "Karl Barth and the NonChristian Religions," *Ecumenical Studies* XXIII (Spring, 1986), pp. 207-20.

35. P. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man* (Chicago: Regnery, n.d.), p. 26f.

36. See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 409.

37. Kueng notes that "if you only know England, you don't know England" (*Christianity and the World Religions*, p. 441).

38. Like Hegel himself, Kueng will sometimes use this term in the sense of a 'conflicting view' rather than strict logical contradiction (See *World Religions*, pp. xvi-xix).

39. See *ibid.*, pp. 112-26.

40. See *ibid.*, pp. 381-86.

41. See *ibid.*, pp. 167-74.

42. See Errol Harris, *An Interpretation of the Logic of Hegel* (Lanhan: University Press of America, 1983), p. 37.

43. See *Hegel's Logic*, p. 115; Kueng, *World Religions*, p. xix.

44. See Copleston, *History of Philosophy* (Garden City: Image, 1964), I, 1, p. 128.

45. See M. Adler, *The Great Ideas*, pp. 346-47.

46. See *Hegel's Logic*, p. 117.

47. See *Hegel's Logic*, p. 119.

48. Kueng, *World Religions*, p. 180.

49. *Ibid.*, p. xix.

50. See *Hegel's Logic*, pp. 119ff.

51. S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 73; Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic*, p. 3ff.

52. S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 82.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 199.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 202.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

57. As quoted in *ibid.*, p. 244.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38; Taylor, *Plato*, p. 231.

59. Kierkegaard, *Concept of Irony*, p. 138.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-38.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 138.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 138.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 132, 133, 138.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 383, n. 18.

67. See J. Ferguson, *Aristotle* (Boston: Twayne, 1972), p. 45.

68. See *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, pp. 908ff.

69. G. Tavard, "The Coincidence of Opposites," *Theological Studies* 41 (September, 1980), pp. 576-84.

70. See Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, vol. 6, II, p. 26.

71. See *Hegel's Logic*, pp. 76-79, 117.

72. *Hegel's Logic*, pp. 116-19.

73. See *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* VII, pp. 125-26.

74. See *Hegel, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. MacIntyre (U. of Notre Dame, 1972), pp. 237-87.

75. See *Hegel's Logic*, pp. 116-17.

76. See W. K. Wright, *A History of Modern Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan, n.d.), p. 324.

77. See *Hegel's Logic*, pp. 116-17.

78. See *Hegel's Logic*, pp. 20, 117.

79. See *Hegel's Logic*, pp. 119-20.

80. See *ibid.*, p. 116, and J. N. Findlay, "The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel," in MacIntyre, *Hegel*, pp. 4-5.

81. See Harris, *An Interpretation*, pp. 30-31, 131.

82. *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 32, 42-44.

83. Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. 208-09.

84. See Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. 208-09, 386-98, 414-17.

85. See *Supra*, n. 80.

86. Kueng, *Does God Exist*, p. 146.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.* and Findlay, "Contemporary Relevance of Hegel," p. 6.

89. Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. 396, 416.

90. Kueng, *Does God Exist*, p. 146.

91. See Kueng, *World Religions*, p. 409.

92. Louis P. Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity* (University of Alabama Press, 1984), p. 52.

93. See *ibid.*; Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic*, pp. 47-50.

94. See Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity*, pp. 52-75.

95. See *ibid.*, p. 52.

96. See Kueng, *Does God Exist*, p. 164.

97. See Harvey Cox, *Turning East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), pp. 21, 155.

98. See Kueng, *World Religions*, p. xviii.

99. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

100. See: *ibid.*, pp. 169, 174.

101. Kueng, *World Religions*, p. xviii.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. xviii-xix.

103. Kueng, *On Being a Christian*, p. 112.

104. Kueng, *World Religions*, p. 180.

105. W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, GB 53, p. 238, n. 2.

106. *Ibid.*

107. See W. P. Alston, "Internal Relatedness in Whitehead," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. V, No. 4 (June, 1952), p. 541.

108. See B. Lonergan, *Insight* (London: Longmans, 1958), p. 738.

109. See Alston, "Internal Relatedness in Whitehead," pp. 542, 558; Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 738-39.

110. See Harris, *An Interpretation*, p. 21.

111. See *Hegel's Logic*, pp. 18-19; N. Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel* (Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 246.

112. Pojman, *Logic of Subjectivity*, p. 29.

113. Kueng, *Does God Exist*, p. 169.

114. *Ibid.*, pp. 163, 165.

115. See Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. 170, 207.

116. See *ibid.*, p. 170.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 207; Kueng, *Does God Exist?*, pp. 148-69.

118. Kueng, *Does God Exist?*, p. 164.

119. Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. 207, 395-96.

120. K. Rahner, "Priest and Poet," in *The Word, Readings in Theology*, ed. Carney Gavin *et al.* (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1964), p. 6.

121. See *Hegel's Logic*, p. 121.

122. See Lonergan, *Collection*, p. 263.

123. See W. P. Alston, "Tillich's Conception of a Religious Symbol," in K. Yandell, *God, Man, and Religion* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp. 252-61.

124. See D. Toolan, "Religions of the One God: Hans Kueng on World Theologies," *Commonweal* CXIV 5 (March 13, 1987), p. 147; Kueng, *World Religions*, pp. 440-43.