

Proposal for Graduate Research Symposium

Name of Student: Olaoluwa Apata

Topic: Many Religions, One God: Considering the Logical Contradictions of Religious Pluralism

Department: Philosophy

Name of Mentor/Professor: Dr. Ed Martin.

In a world of many religious persuasions and traditions, cultural diversities and historical backgrounds, with their complex systems that have developed to meet the mental, emotional and physical needs of a wide range of people, there can never be a single world religion but there could be approaches to how they can better interact with one another without hindering the development of one another.¹ In an attempt to infer solutions to these complexities, John Hick argues that religions should be treated as a reality, and that their unique differences should be developed, corrected, and enlarged for human benefits as they continue to interact. His convictions and experience perhaps contributed to his desire to propound a hypothesis where he suggested not a final solution but an approach that could resolve the religious tension and intolerance of our contemporary world.

In his pluralistic hypothesis, he explains that religious pluralism is an approach or a religious tradition, whereby all religious experience and belief having the same intentional objects, is put into perspectives with the aim of providing an epistemology of religion where all the religious worldviews can rest.² Religious pluralism could be a means of viewing all religions as being plausible. It is a doctrine that holds that all world religions with respect to their various belief systems, tenets, traditions, and histories are all plausible indicative of what the ultimate reality (God) stands for.³ This implies that although all the world religions have different persuasions and different conceptions of God as either personal or non-personal ultimates, yet, they are all the same and the organic whole of their various perceptions of the Transcendent Being is the same.⁴ Consequently, they also literally serve the same God from different ways.⁵ Hick intends to solve the problem of religious differences or diversities. His critique of absolutism and exclusivism may be a good platform for religious tolerance and dialogue but it is most probable that conservatives of any religion may not accept his pluralism, that notwithstanding, his work of universalizing world religions is commendable; if to say the least, as a philosophical response.

The purpose of this work is to explore the logical contradiction of such hypothesis like religious pluralism and not necessarily doing a direct critique of the work of Hick. Two propositions are said to be contradictory if they “necessarily have opposite truth value.”⁶ For

¹ John, Hick, *God has many names*, (London: Macmillan, 1980), 18-21

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ John, Hick, *An interpretation of Religion*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 233

⁵ Ibid., 234

⁶ Patrick Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, 12th Edition, (CT: Cengage Learning, 2008), 215

instance, if P is true then $\neg P$ has to be false. But for P and $\neg P$ to be true at the same time and in the same sense is contradictory. The denial of a statement and the statement itself cannot be both true and not true at the same time and in the same sense. Applying this to religious pluralism, it could be deduced that different religions with different religious beliefs, religious systems, and conceptions of God cannot be the same at the same time and in the same sense. For instance, the Christian Religion teaches the doctrine of trinity while the Islamic religion teaches that God is one and that the teaching of trinity is both blasphemy and it is also the greatest sin that will ultimately attract the wrath of God. How can this contradictory positions be unified according to religious pluralism?

This work will be limited to various possible contradictions within the confines of practicable beliefs systems among the world religions with special attention given to their conception of ultimate reality, salvation, human condition, claim of truth and exclusivism. It will not pay special attention to or be a critique of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. However, there will be an overview of what religious pluralism is from his standpoint.

Bibliography

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