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The Presuppositions of Religious Pluralism and the Need for Natural Theology

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Abstract In 'The Presuppositions of Religious Pluralism and the Need for Natural Theology' I argue that there are four important presuppositions behind John Hick's form of religious pluralism that successfully support it against what I call fideistic exclusivism. These are i) the ought/can principle, ii) the universality of religious experience, iii) the universality of redemptive change, and iv) a view of how God (the Eternal) would do things. I then argue that if these are more fully developed they support a different kind of exclusivism, what I call rational exclusivism, and become defeaters for pluralism. In order to explain rational exclusivism and its dependence on these presuppositions I consider philosophers J.P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, and Alvin Plantinga, who offer arguments for their forms of exclusivism but I maintain that they continue to rely on fideism at important points. I then give an example of how knowledge of the Eternal can be achieved.

Keywords Pluralism · Natural theology · General revelation · Fideism · Fideistic exclusivism · Rational exclusivism · John Hick · Vivekananda · Vasubandhu · Nagarjuna · Immanuel Kant · Post-Kantian theology · William Rowe · J.P. Moreland · William Lane Craig · Alvin Plantinga · Sensus divinitatis · Intuition · Inference · Reason · Law of non-contradiction · Ought/can principle · Religious experience · Redemption · Special revelation

Vivekananda and Theology After Kant

In his final address at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893, Swami Vivekananda presented a pluralistic account of religions which had a significant impact on those present and on the subsequent study of religion.[1] Although the idea

[1] Seager (1995), p. 111

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of pluralism that he presented was not new, it was significant that one of the great scholars of Hinduism was presenting a view of religious diversity that had become popular among post-Kantian theologians. The Wars of Religion in Europe had stimulated a search for the universal, or natural, religion. Because the Biblical scriptures were not universally available, this natural religion consisted of what could be known by reason without scripture. After the challenge to theistic arguments raised by David Hume and Immanuel Kant, the focus among philosophers shifted from what could be known about God to religious experience. Developed positively by Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard and negatively by Feuerbach, Nietzsche and Freud, this focus on experience became the center for the study of religion. Vivekananda, viewed as an outsider to this discussion, helped confirm its universality when he said: 'holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world,' and 'every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart.'[2]

In his opening remarks Vivekananda connected pluralism to his own tradition of Hinduism. 'The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: "Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me."'[3] The Bhagavad-Gita, after having become familiar to Western scholars, also influenced the development of pluralistic thinking about religion. For many, it dissolved the idea that Western religion, natural or revealed, was unique in its depth of thought and that all else was barbarous. The post-Kantian theologians had found the universal in religious experience, and this appeared to be confirmed by the great tradition represented by Vivekananda.

Defining Pluralism

In the following the term 'pluralism' refers to the form developed by John Hick, but which shares similarities with Vivekananda and others. This is the view that multiple religions can be legitimate means of salvation. It does not claim that every religion is correct in the details, indeed it might claim that all religions are incorrect in similar ways (in making exclusivist claims). Hick defines religious pluralism 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. That reality is in itself beyond the scope of our human conceptual systems.'[4] Pluralism is a hypothesis about the reality of religious diversity, and a meta-theory about the relationship between religions and their historical development.[5] It is opposed both to exclusivist and

[2] Seager, p. 82.
[3] Vivekananda (1983).
[4] Hick (1999), p. 77.
[5] Hick (1997), p. 163.

naturalist accounts of religion.[6] It does make modifications to specific religions in that most religions view themselves in an exclusivist fashion; however, it is not itself a first-order religious creed but is instead a hypothesis about the existence of religious diversity and the relationship between religions.[7] In this paper I will contrast pluralism with two kinds of exclusivism, fideistic exclusivism and rational exclusivism. Fideistic exclusivism asserts as its starting point something which is in need of proof (for instance, the singular truth of a specific scripture as against all others), and accepts this starting point without proof (for instance, trusting intuitions that themselves need proof) as authoritative. Rational exclusivism maintains that ultimate principles must not be in need of further proof because they make proof possible—for instance, the law of non-contradiction. Reason (say, the use of the law of non-contradiction to critically analyze the meaning of a claim) is available to all, whereas an individual's intuition, or a specific scripture or tradition, are not available to all.

The Presuppositions of Pluralism

This paper addresses two interrelated questions. The first is: what are the presuppositions used to support religious pluralism? Focus on Hick is especially important because of the influence of Kant on theology and the turn to a focus on religious experience—as a Kantian, Hick develops these themes in his form of pluralism. The second is: do these presuppositions rule out all forms of exclusivism? With respect to the first I will argue that there are at least four important presuppositions behind religious pluralism (hereafter simply 'pluralism') which are used to support it as a conclusion. These are 1) the ought/can principle, 2) the universality of religious experience, 3) the universality of redemptive change, and 4) a view of how God would do things. With regard to the second question I will argue that these presuppositions are successful in showing what I will call fideistic exclusivism to be false. However, I will also argue that if their good and necessary consequences are developed they support another form of exclusivism that I will call rational exclusivism. The implication is that these presuppositions do not lead naturally to pluralism as is commonly thought, indeed when developed, they lead to rational exclusivism. The purpose here is not to develop a natural theology relying on rational exclusivism. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that when the presuppositions used to support pluralism are developed, they actually serve as defeaters for pluralism and as a basis for working on the project of rational exclusivism.

The Ought/Can Principle

The strength of pluralism is in its reliance on these four presuppositions. The first is the ought/can principle. This states that if persons cannot do something then they

[6] 'We call this attitude "exclusivism" in the sense that it assumes that one's own tradition is the exclusive beneficiary of a vital gift or discovery -salvation, blessing, truth, - so that humankind beyond its borders lacks that all-important good. (Hick 1985). 'Naturalism, then, is the belief that reality consists exclusively in the multiple forms of discharging energy that constitute the physical universe' (Hick 1999, p. 14).
[7] Hick (1997), p. 163

cannot be required to do it; or, if they ought to do it they must be able to do it. Adherents of religious pluralism believe that the conditions for the good life set out by exclusivistic religions are often such that they cannot be met by the greater majority of humanity. For instance, if God can only be known by reading and understanding the Bible, and most humans are unable to do so (either due to when or where they lived, illiteracy, or all of these), then most humans are unable to know God.[8] Pluralism points out that if knowing God (or ultimate reality, the Eternal) is necessary for the good life, then humans ought to know God. The obligation to know God implies that they must be able to know God through means at their disposal anywhere, anytime. Therefore, the knowledge of God cannot be restricted to the sacred writings, temporally and geographically isolated, of one religion.

The Universality of Religious Experience

The second premise is the universality of religious experience. Religious experience, or rather the report of some kind of experience of a 'higher' or 'transcendent' reality, is not limited to any one religion. While the particularities of response to this experience differ given the uniqueness of the person, culture, and time in which it occurs, what is the same is that there is this experience.[9] Pluralism asserts that, essentially, the same thing happens in each of the world's religions as happens in Christianity, namely, an opening of the human mind to a higher reality.[10] For the Christian, or the member of any other religion, to say that somehow his/her experience of ultimate reality is 'better' or 'more sincere' than the experience found in other religions is arbitrary and fails to understand the particularity of the development of each response. This is a hypothesis about the nature of religious experience. Whereas the member of an exclusivistic religion affirms his/her own experience as valid and explains all other experiences as counterfeits, pluralism asserts that ultimate reality (hereafter 'the Eternal') seeks to be known and responded to by humans, and so enters into human life through these experiences.[11]

There is a relationship between religious experience and fideistic exclusivism. Many times, the starting point affirmed by fideistic exclusivism is accepted due to a religious experience. A person may feel forgiven, or particularly close to God, or one with God/the Eternal, after reading a scripture or hearing a message based on a scripture. This experience is thought to justify the acceptance of the scripture as authoritative. However, this experience is universal to the world's religions and therefore use of it to justify an exclusivist position is fideistic exclusivism.[12] Pluralism recognizes the universality of these events and provides a hypothesis that

[8] Hick (1980), p. 31.

[9] ibid., p. 21.

[10] ibid., p. 18.

[11] ibid., p. 48.

[12] For an example of an attempt to use religious experience to justify belief in a specific scripture, see Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*, beginning on p. 258. He also considers the objection from religious experience beginning on p. 324. If we grant that there is initial warrant from religious experience that disappears once defeaters are raised Plantinga's considerations do not pose a problem for pluralism.

explains their universality but also avoids the reductionistic explanation of the naturalist. The universality of religious experience seems to require that genuine religious experience requires reciprocal recognition. What can be inferred from the reality of religious experience occurring under various particularities is that there is a transcendent being, the Eternal,[13] which is experienced in various ways given the conditions of the person. This is the hypothesis of pluralism.

The Universality of Redemptive Change

The third presupposition behind pluralism is the theme of redemption in the world's religions. Indeed, this is viewed by pluralism as what is common between the different religions: the response to religious experience of moving away from a self-centered view to a reality-centered view. That is, instead of viewing all things as related to the self, they are viewed in their relation to the Eternal. This is salvation, or renewal, or liberation.[14] Fideistic exclusivism perpetuates the very problem that needs salvation. It places some human experience at the center of all things as if it were ultimate, to the rejection of all other human experiences. Fideistic exclusivism often argues that its particular religion is the one true system because it has the ability to change people's lives. Pluralism reveals that this kind of salvation/transformation is not unique to any one religion but can be found in all of the world's religions, and is the standard for determining what is a genuine response to the Eternal and what is not.[15] Since the change from self-centeredness is not unique to a specific religion, any given instance of redemptive change cannot be described as the 'only way.'

The God of Love

The fourth presupposition is a certain view of how the Eternal would do things. In the autobiographical account of his spiritual journey John Hick explains that as he wrestled with the problem of evil he came to the conclusion that God would not allow any of his creatures to be lost.[16] This is because he believes God is loving, and the loss of some creatures is contrary to the love of God. I want to return to the question of whether or not the loving nature of God is inconsistent with some creatures being lost in a moment, but first I want to emphasize that what is behind this for Hick is a concern to be consistent with the nature of the Eternal. He specifically rejects a view of God which asserts that the only way for humans to know God is through reading the Bible because this is inconsistent with the claim that God is gracious and loving.[17] It would contradict the loving nature of God for God to ask humans to do

[13] A term used by Hick in (Hick 1980 p. 22).

[14] ibid., p. 34.

[15] Rowe (1999). and, Hick, *The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa*, p. 164.

[16] Hick, *God has Many Names*, p. 17. At this point in his account Hick is still using the term 'God', although he comes to use the term Eternal One to refer to ultimate reality.

[17] ibid., p. 31.

something they cannot do and then condemn them for not doing it. If God is perfect in love then he must behave in a way that is consistent with love, and fideistic exclusivism presents a view of God's actions that is not consistent with love.

As a conclusion resting on these presuppositions pluralism successfully shows the limitations and inconsistencies of fideistic exclusivism. Fideistic exclusivism restricts the knowledge of God to a specific tradition, book or experience, and yet requires persons to know God for the good life, thus violating the ought/can principle. Fideistic exclusivism implodes when its support structure, a given religious experience and a redemptive change, is also found in the religions fideistic exclusivism rejects. Fideistic exclusivism becomes the dogmatic assertion of one religious view, contradicting itself if it rests on religious experience or redemptive change (as it often does). As a witness to the truth of its religion, fideistic exclusivism nullifies its own testimony. On this basis pluralism can be said to be a much stronger hypothesis.

Pluralism's Presuppositions as Defeaters for Pluralism

However, do these presuppositions rule out all other forms of exclusivism? Is there an alternative hypothesis to pluralism which affirms the exclusive truth of one religious viewpoint and also affirms these presuppositions? I will argue that there is, and that this alternative is more consistent with these presuppositions than is pluralism itself because when these presuppositions are developed to their full extent, they cease to support pluralism. Indeed, I think that the very presuppositions used to support pluralism become defeaters for pluralism when their implications are developed. These presuppositions have also shown that fideistic exclusivism is false. The alternative is rational exclusivism: The ultimate starting point must be something which is authoritative (not in need of further proof because it makes proof possible), and universal. Reason can be used to know what is Eternal, as opposed to the claim that all religions are correct in their view of the Eternal, or one view of the Eternal must be accepted based on intuition, scripture, or tradition. Fideism starts with something that requires further proof, such as an intuition, scripture, or tradition, or gives insufficient proof (good enough for some, but not conclusive for all—what is conclusive is what proves the impossibility—and therefore incoherence—of the contradiction).

The Need for a Clear General Revelation as a Basis for Natural Theology

I am taking the ought/can principle as accepted in this discussion and so am not offering support for it. It is an important presupposition behind pluralism. However, in its formulation of this principle pluralism assumes that knowledge of the Eternal is through religious experience, perhaps mediated through a scripture or tradition. As noted above, it would then be arbitrary to hold that one such experience is valid and all others are not. In assuming this, pluralism rejects (either implicitly or explicitly) the possibility of a general revelation that reveals the Eternal as understood by a specific tradition.[18] If there is a clear general revelation of God (as understood by

[18] ibid., p. 23.

Christianity), then Christianity does not violate the ought/can principle because knowledge of God is universally available. In the following, 'natural theology' refers to the body of knowledge about the Eternal whose subject is 'general revelation,' defined as what can be known of the Eternal by all persons at all times. In natural theology, knowledge is inferential. Conclusions about the Eternal are inferred from sources that are available to all humans (general revelation). The act of inference is the act of distinguishing between 'a' and 'non-a,' and critically analyzing claims to test them for meaning (for instance, do they affirm both 'a' and 'non-a,' the Eternal is both 'personal' and 'non-personal'?), and then drawing conclusions about what remains after self-contradictions are identified and ruled out.

Redemptive Change and the Need for a Clear General Revelation

The pluralist's presupposition of the need for redemption requires that there is a clear general revelation to hold persons responsible. The need for a redemptive change assumes that a person needs to change. Pluralism formulates this as a change from being self-centered to reality-centered. This formulation assumes that it is wrong to be self-centered and a person in this condition needs to be saved, or redeemed. But if we apply the ought/can principle consistently, then we must conclude that if persons should not be self-centered then they can know this and can do what it takes to not be self-centered. If this knowledge were only available in a specific scripture then most humans could not know this. Therefore, this knowledge (that it is wrong to be self-centered, that there is an Eternal being) must be available to all apart from a specific scripture or a unique experience had only by some. There must be a clear general revelation to make sense of the claim that humans ought not to be self-centered (clear because if it is hard to know then this violates the ought/can principle). This means that the initial fault for which humans need to be redeemed is the failure to know what they should know about the Eternal. Any redemptive revelation that professes to explain how salvation is achieved is based on, or assumes, a general revelation available to all humans.

The Ought/Can Principle and the Need for a Clear General Revelation

Further development of the ought/can principle shows that it is inconsistent with the pluralism's claim that the available evidence used to support belief in a religious tradition can be interpreted in different ways (the world is ambiguous),[19] and that

[19] 'we can see that the universe, so far as we are able to observe it, is ambiguous. As humanly conceived and experienced, it can have either a naturalistic or a religious character. It is possible to describe it, in principle, completely in naturalistic terms within which religious experience is included as imaginative projection and religious life as a response to that projection. But it is equally possible to describe it, again in principle, completely in ways that accept most of the naturalistic account but which set this in the context of a more encompassing spiritual reality, variously conceived and experienced as God, or Brahman, or the Dharma, or (in Chinese religion) Heaven, or the Tao, or in yet other forms.' Hick 1999, p. 15.

there will be eschatological verification[20] of which path leads to the Eternal.[21] This view violates the ought/can principle because while it affirms that we ought to know which path to take, we ought to be reality-centered, we cannot now know which path in fact is reality-centered. If the world is ambiguous, then humans cannot be held responsible for knowing the Eternal. This ambiguity, consistently applied, includes an ambiguity about whether it is better to be self-centered or reality-centered. If this is ambiguous then, again, humans cannot be held responsible for their choices about being self or reality centered. The implication is that we must be able to know the Eternal, and know that we should be reality-centered, and that we are not currently reality centered.

Does this imply that the reality of change from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness can be found in many religions and therefore pluralism is correct? On the contrary, the requirement that the Eternal be knowable rules out the possibility that there are true but contradictory facts about the Eternal. This means that many claims about redemptive change are in fact mistaken—they are reports of change from self-centeredness to a reality-centeredness that involve a false view of reality. This problem will be explored in more detail at a further point in this paper.

Religious Experience and Interpretation

This has important implications for religious experience. Pluralism rests on the claim that one person's religious experience cannot be used to invalidate another person's religious experience. However, it is the interpretation of religious experience, and not the experience alone, that is important for religious belief. The interpretive act is often overlooked or not seen by the individual. A person reports having experienced God, not recognizing that he/she experienced given sensations which he/she is interpreting as God, and which others might interpret differently. Acknowledging the universality of religious experience requires also acknowledging the variety of interpretations for any given religious experience. At the minimum, pluralism asserts that a religious (as opposed to naturalistic) interpretation of religious experience is necessary for the good life (reality-centeredness). But this requires that it can be known that the Eternal exists, as opposed to only the material world. A proof for the existence of the Eternal cannot be based on religious experience without being circular.[22] This means that to support the claim that religious experience should be interpreted as the pressing in of the Eternal on human affairs, there must be a proof for the existence of the Eternal not based on experience. So again, a developed view of the presuppositions behind pluralism requires that there be a clear general

[20] John Hick proposes that while evidence in this life is ambiguous, religious belief can still pass the test of empirical verification in the next life where it will be evident which view was correct. In his book *Faith and Knowledge* Hick accepts an empirical verification model for truth, and sets out to show that religious beliefs can satisfy the requirement of, at least in principle, empirical verification. (Hick 1957).
[21] Gill (1971), p. 141.
[22] Silver (2001), p. 15.

revelation of the Eternal available to all humans apart from religious experience or scriptures, ignorance of which requires the personal transformation found in redemption. This clear general revelation provides inferential knowledge through the use of reason, not immediate knowledge from intuition/senses.

Consistency with the Nature of the Eternal

It is not necessarily true that consistency with the nature of the Eternal requires affirming that all humans will find redemption. What is required is that all humans have the same access to knowing the Eternal. It is not required that all humans come to actually know the Eternal. A libertarian view of freedom would assert that a situation where all persons are led by the Eternal to the good life violates freedom. In response, pluralism might take a compatibilist view which allows both freedom and predestination. Here it could be said that the Eternal wills that all persons come to redemption (out of love for them) and they do so freely. What the 4th presupposition is claiming is simply that if God has a nature, then God must act consistently with this nature. Hick thinks that the Christian view of God is that God is love. He also thinks that if God is love, then God would not condemn anyone to eternal suffering. But what if God's nature also includes justice? How can the theist reconcile the demands of love and justice? Hick cannot rely on only one part of God's nature to justify his religious pluralism. The question is: does love necessitate that all persons who are guilty be forgiven? To put it another way, does love require only mercy, or can love involve both mercy and justice?

Pluralism hypothesizes that religious diversity can be explained as responses to the Eternal which, desiring to be known by humans, imposes on human life.[23] Taking this 'desires to be known' as central to the Eternal, and developing further the fourth presupposition that the actions of the Eternal must be consistent with the nature of the Eternal, it follows that the Eternal will act in a way to reveal its nature to humans. If the Eternal is loving, then it will act consistently with this and fideistic exclusivism can be ruled out. But if the Eternal is also just then it must act in a way that is consistent with this. Part of revealing the just nature of the Eternal might be revealing the result of being self-centered, and what it would be like if a person chose to be self-centered forever (either on a libertarian or compatibilist model of free choice). To emphasize mercy and redeeming all persons instead of justice would be inconsistent with affirming that the Eternal wishes to reveal itself to humans.[24]

Pluralism presupposes that the Eternal is loving. How can we know this? How can we know if the Eternal is just? Defenders of exclusivism often argue that the Eternal cannot be both personal and non-personal at the same time and in the same respect. Hick argues that this is to confuse the Eternal itself and ways of speaking about the Eternal. He maintains that the Eternal in itself transcends such categories,

[23] Hick, *God has Many Names*, p. 23.

[24] A further question can be raised about whether or not mercy can be required or if it is by its nature a gift that can be given to some without being given to all.

but it is understood by finite humans in such categories.[25] The question is: can it transcend all categories, and if it does, can anything meaningful be said about it?

It appears to be inescapable that the Eternal will have some properties corresponding to it that are not merely due to human limitations and language. Take the example given above where the Eternal is said to transcend certain categories. This means that the Eternal has the property of transcending certain categories, and does not have the property of not transcending those categories. William Rowe says:

> Since Hick clearly states that the Real lacks the property of being good, and lacks the property of being personal, by my lights his view implies that the Real in itself has the property of being non-good, and has the property of being non-personal. Of course, if Hick were to agree that the Real is non-personal, this would create a serious difficulty for the assessment of religions favouring personal deities as opposed to religions favouring non-personal absolutes... Hick is driven to postulate the Real in itself, declaring that it cannot have either one of the pairs of contradictory properties that get exhibited among personal gods and non-personal absolutes... I take it to be a necessary truth, if not a truth of logic, that whatever is real is either personal or non-personal. So, by my lights there can be no such thing as Hick's Real in itself.[26]

I would take this a step further to say that whatever is Real, or Eternal, must, like everything else, obey the law of non-contradiction. The law of non-contradiction still applies to the Eternal; it is not merely a convention of human language but is a necessary law—it is not a product of language because it is necessary for language. Similarly, it is not in need of proof because it makes proof possible. It is necessary in that, if it is denied, nothing meaningful can be affirmed of the Eternal (or anything else). Rational exclusivism maintains that the Eternal can be known through the use of reason, the use of the law of non-contradiction, to draw inferences.

Taking the claim of pluralism that the Eternal wants to be revealed to humans, one can infer that this revelation includes a revelation of what happens when a person chooses to be self-centered forever. Hick came to pluralism through the problem of evil, but his assumption that the Eternal wants to reveal itself to humans can be used as a solution to that problem which includes some humans always choosing to be self-centered, and this is permitted by the Eternal as a revelation of the justice of the Eternal. Or, perhaps all persons choose to be self-centered, and both mercy and justice are revealed in how some are redeemed from being self-centered and some are allowed to pursue self-centeredness.

Pluralism's Presuppositions Lead to Rational Exclusivism

The implication of the above discussion is that the very presuppositions that are used to support pluralism, when developed, require a position contrary to pluralism. The way that the Eternal would do things is, according to pluralism, a way which is

[25] ibid., p. 24.

[26] Rowe, *Religious Pluralism*, p. 149.

consistent with its nature and which will reveal that nature to humans. While religious experiences are universal, interpretations of a given experience that contradict the nature of the Eternal are not valid interpretations. Both the failure to draw the correct interpretation and the failure to be reality-centered are faults that require redemption. This requirement of redemption to be consistent with the ought/can principle requires that the Eternal could be known through studying general revelation (apart from religious experience or scripture). This is to say that natural theology, as the product of the study of general revelation, is produced through inferences (arguments, syllogisms), rather than immediate knowledge (intuition, experience). Because the world's religions maintain contradictory beliefs about the Eternal, pluralism is ruled out on the basis that being reality-centered requires rejecting false beliefs about the Eternal.

This leads to rational exclusivism. Rational exclusivism, like pluralism, is a meta-theory, or hypothesis, explaining the reality of human religion. It is a meta-theory because it offers an explanation of the variety of first-order religions. Many first-order religions, perhaps all to some degree, are false interpretations due to the self-centeredness of humans. This self-centeredness is culpable (and requires redemption) because it occurs in the context of a clear general revelation about the Eternal. 'Rational' because it says that humans, through their cognitive abilities of forming concepts and drawing inferences, can know the Eternal (apart from experiences or scriptures). It is 'exclusivist' because it denies that all views of the Eternal are meaningful, or even that all views which appear to be reality-centered actually are reality-centered. It might be tautological to say that a view is acceptable if it is reality-centered, but it could be that upon examination many views which claim to be reality-centered, and which are accepted by pluralism, make claims about the Eternal which are inconsistent with what can be known of the Eternal from general revelation. I am not only suggesting the possibility of rational exclusivism, I am also arguing for the impossibility of pluralism due to inconsistency with its own presuppositions.

Rational Exclusivism and Limited Redemption

Further, this is a form of exclusivism because it affirms that redemptive revelation need not be made universally available, and that redemption need not be universal. What must be universal is the standard for which humans are held accountable (according to the ought/can principle). But redemptive revelation is the explanation for how to be redeemed. It assumes that humans are already guilty and accountable. Therefore, humans are not guilty because they did not believe the contents of redemptive revelation—they are guilty for rejecting general revelation. A limited availability of redemptive revelation does not violate the ought/can principle.

It is also exclusivist because it denies that all humans will find redemption. This follows from the claim that the Eternal acts in a way to reveal its nature, and part of its nature is justice. This means that a revelation of the justice of the Eternal involves leaving some persons to the consequences of their choice to be self-centered. This would be an unending revelation of Eternal justice, in the same way that some persons being redeemed would be an unending revelation of Eternal mercy. The only

way to avoid this (and keep the fourth presupposition) is to deny that the Eternal is just. I am taking it for granted that the pluralist, such as Hick, would not want to deny that the Eternal is just because this would undermine his claim that all humans must be saved.[27] Presumably, if God is not just, then God can act unfairly and condemn the innocent. Limited redemption is also consistent with how God would do things in that it is part of God revealing his nature as both just and merciful.

But is this consistent with presuppositions 2 (universality of religious experience) and 3 (universality of redemptive change)? It is true that rational exclusivism will need to nuance these, but this provides an important correction to fideism. The fideist often relies upon appeals to religious experience or redemptive change to argue in favor of the exclusivity of one religion. However, the general universality of religious experience and redemptive change is a defeater of these appeals. But that universality need not ignore important differences within religious experience and redemptive change. Specifically, experiences must be interpreted (and no experience is self-interpreting) so that any given religious experience can be interpreted in many different ways. Furthermore, understanding a given redemptive change requires understanding the change as from one state to another state. Thus, the rational exclusivist can agree that religious experiences are universal, but also maintain that not all interpretations of these experiences are rationally coherent. Similarly, the rational exclusivist can maintain that all religions help individuals overcome certain kinds of vices or harmful behavior, but also maintain that change from self-centered to reality-centered requires a true view of reality—there is the possibility of changing from self-centered to false-view-of-reality-centered. Nevertheless, while all religions exhibit instances of change, not all religions exhibit instances of redemption from self-centered to reality-centered.

Rational Exclusivism and Diverse Views of the Eternal

I have been using the phraseology ‘the Eternal’ to be consistent with that used by pluralism (sometimes it is ‘the Real’). I have also argued that there must be a proof that there is something eternal (not from experience or scripture) if persons need to be redeemed from a self-centered view. This has important implications that rational exclusivism can develop to argue in favor of a particular view of the Eternal and therefore the need of natural theology to make known the Eternal. Namely, if there is an argument to show that there is something Eternal and that a naturalistic account of reality is not sufficient, then the implication is that the material world is not the Eternal. This rules out any interpretation of reality that says either there is only the material world or the material world is eternal along with something else (Greek dualism). But what about other views, such as Vivekananda’s which says that the soul is divine, and the soul is eternal? Or Vasnubadhu’s form of Buddhism and his metaphysics of impermanence? Or the theists who say that only God is eternal, and all else is created by God (and therefore not ‘all is one’)?[28]

[27] Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 17.
[28] Cobb (2005), p. 367.

The Eternal cannot be all of these (where they contradict), nor can a meta-theory of religion claim that all of these are correct descriptions of the Eternal without becoming meaningless. And yet, as pluralism maintains, the good life involves knowing the Eternal. Therefore, which of these is an accurate description of the Eternal must be knowable by all persons (a clear general revelation) on pain of violating the ought/can principle.[29] This further implies that the redemptive revelation held by the correct view of the Eternal is the only accurate explanation of how to achieve redemption, to the exclusion of the others. Each reported 'redemptive change' must be understood by that religion's view of what is Eternal. It is not enough to change from being self-centered to reality-centered if one is centered on a false view of reality. What is necessary is a change from self-centered to reality-centered with a true view of reality.

The deciding factor between pluralism and rational exclusivism is the impossibility of pluralism's account of reality. This is the point made both by the 'friendly atheist' William Rowe, and by the Christian Alvin Plantinga. If a belief involves a self-contradiction, then it cannot possibly be the case. The choice is between pluralism and the law of non-contradiction. This isn't much of a choice because the law of non-contradiction is inescapable. When Hick presents his view, he asserts that it is true, and that its opposite is not true. If he were to abandon the law of non-contradiction then he would have to accept the possibility that both his view and its opposite are true at the same time. Nor does it help to argue that the law of non-contradiction is merely a human construct that does not apply to the Real. If this is true, then it must be consistently applied to all theories about reality, one of which is pluralism. If both 'a' and 'non-a' could be true about reality, then nothing can be affirmed or denied. But pluralism does make affirmations about the Real, for instance, that it is 'beyond the scope of our human conceptual systems.'[30] This is a claim both about the human mind, and also about the nature of reality. Rowe's method is to use the law of non-contradiction as a standard for knowing about reality. Rowe is inclined toward what he calls friendly atheism, others might incline toward theism, but the work of avoiding contradiction in our knowledge of reality cannot be circumvented. This is the work of natural theology (or in Rowe's case, atheology).

This also addresses the question of whether or not more than one religion could be supported by rational exclusivism and general revelation, or if multiple religions could be supported by general revelation, thus leading to rational inclusivism. For

[29] If there is no such knowledge available then it cannot be said that humans ought to be redeemed from the self-centered view. I'm assuming this implication is rejected by pluralism.

[30] Hick 1999, 77. This paper has studied pluralism as the conclusion of four important presuppositions. However, it is sometimes the outcome of skepticism about knowledge. If it is held that humans cannot know, then all views of the Eternal are epistemically equal. This is importantly different than the kind of pluralism considered in this paper which does make claims about the Eternal, although sometimes retreats into skepticism when challenged by the law of non-contradiction. A complete rebuttal of pluralism would need to include an argument showing that skepticism about the human ability to know the Eternal is misguided, and that some things can be known about the Eternal. For the purposes of this paper it can be affirmed that if humans cannot know at least some things about the Eternal then they cannot be responsible for their beliefs about the Eternal.

instance, consider the position of the Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna (who is noted for his use of rational argumentation to support his view). He said: 'Nothing exists anywhere, whether we conceive of it as born of itself or of others, or of both or of no cause whatsoever.' It means that the notion of causation is an illusion; and, since the doctrine of Buddha admits nothing that is uncaused, the whole universe must be illusory. The teaching is thus entirely negative. All experience is a delusion; and the world, a tissue of false things falsely related.'[31] Compare this view to theism, which maintains that both God and the world are real, although only God is eternal and everything else is created. Philosophers in both views maintain that reason leads to their view. Nagarjuna says that while objects may appear real to the senses, they vanish into nothing when subjected to rational scrutiny. Anselm says that only the fool maintains that there is no God. This rules out the possibility of a rational inclusivism since these views are mutually exclusive and are not simply paths to the same end.

But it raises an important question about reason. Could it be that reason leads both to the claim that nothing exists, and to the claim that only God is eternal such that the failure to know God is foolish? If so, then reason is supremely unhelpful, and many have maintained exactly this view of reason. Instead persons suggest turning to tradition, intuition, or experience. This does not solve the problem because it leaves unanswered the question 'whose tradition, intuition, or experience?' But there is a more serious issue at stake. If reason can lead to both 'there is only non-being' and 'there is some being,' then nothing else can be clear to reason. If the distinction between 'being' and 'non-being' is unclear, then, *a fortiori*, distinctions that presuppose *being* are unclear: tradition, intuition, and experience all presuppose *being* or are activities of *beings*. If reason can support both claims, then no distinctions can be drawn, and if no distinctions can be drawn then nothing can be said. Now, this is the position of Nagarjuna and Madhyamika.[32] But this is not religious pluralism, nor is it exclusivism; it is the affirmation that nothing exists and that reason only leads to contradictions ending in silence. This seems to be the consistent outcome of the claim that nothing is clear to reason. If there is a rational exclusivist position, it would need to argue that some things are clear to reason—for that matter, if there is religious pluralism or inclusivism they also would have to maintain this or end in silence.

Examples of Rational Exclusivism(?)

In order to better understand this criticism of Hick's pluralism, I am going to present three thinkers who attempt to give a rational defense of their exclusivist religious belief, but which end in fideism, and then an example of what rational exclusivism might look like. Like Hick, J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig consider the problem of religious pluralism to be part of the problem of evil.[33] It is what they call

[31] Hiriyanna (2005), p. 220
[32] ibid., p. 222.
[33] Moreland and Craig (2003), p. 662

the 'soteriological problem of evil.' If God is all loving and all powerful, why wouldn't He make salvation available to all? This is a problem for Christians like Moreland and Craig because of the belief that salvation is only found in the knowledge of Christ's atoning death, and one can only know about this by access to special revelation.[34] However, they do admit that there is a general revelation of God that is available to all.[35] The pluralist will point out that they have violated the ought/can principle in their view of Christianity: humans are lost and need to be saved because they have not known God as they should have from general revelation.[36] But for Moreland and Craig, general revelation does not give knowledge in the sense that the alternative is false, but only probability, or what Moreland and Craig call a 'good argument.'[37] A good argument is 'an argument that is formally and informally valid and consists of true premises that are more plausible than their negations.'[38] They add that there are many contemporary analytic philosophers of religion that believe there are good arguments for God's existence.

The key term is 'plausible.' This is a subject relative term. What is plausible for Moreland and Craig may not be plausible for Vivekananda. Indeed, 'plausible' implies 'not certain,' as opposed to 'true,' or 'necessary.' It is taken this way by one of the contemporary philosophers that Moreland and Craig mention, and rely heavily upon, Alvin Plantinga. In reformulating St. Anselm's arguments, Plantinga says: 'They cannot, perhaps, be said to *prove* or *establish* their conclusion. But since it is rational to accept their central premiss, they do show that it is rational to *accept* that conclusion. And perhaps that is all that can be expected of any such argument.'[39] Here is where fideism appears. Plantinga accepts the conclusion as rational, but allows that others might deny it and yet still be rational. He may accept it for personal reasons or considerations, but apparently these are not strong enough to count as proof; therefore, he must decide to allow these to inform his decision to believe (why not discount such personal considerations, or intuitions, and reject belief?). Similarly, Moreland and Craig find the premises plausible, but allow that others might not. This plausibility might be informed from a number of considerations, but does not amount to proof and therefore could be rejected and rationality still maintained. Why not reject intuitions or the beliefs they are used to support since intuitions are often mistaken? If it just 'seems right,' why not reject this feeling/intuition? This is where mere assertion emerges, which is a return to fideistic exclusivism. To assert that the feeling is actually the *sensus divinitatis* begs the question because it must be proven that there is a God to give such an intuition. No doubt it is an intuition, but is it really the *sensus divinitatis* or a mistake?

To be fair, it is important to note that Moreland and Craig would both reject the title 'fideist,' and argue against blind belief as being acceptable in religious matters. They argue that 'in Scripture, faith involves placing trust in what you have reason to

[34] ibid., p. 615.

[35] ibid., p. 615.

[36] ibid., p. 615.

[37] ibid., p. 464.

[38] ibid., p. 464.

[39] Plantinga (2002), p. 188.

believe is true.'[40] They quote Anselm's motto: 'faith seeking understanding.' But, given their view of what counts as a reason to think something is true, or a 'good argument,' they are ultimately relying on deciding factors that are not self-evident and are therefore in need of further confirmation/proof. This is not a problem in many areas, but it is a problem for ultimate standards—what is ultimate cannot rely on something else for its confirmation (if it does, it is not, by definition, ultimate). Moreland and Craig feel they have 'good arguments,' but Vivekananda might not feel this way. How is this disagreement to be cleared up? That Moreland and Craig rest with their feeling that they have a good argument is, at that level, fideism (even though they try to avoid fideism at other levels).

Plantinga also rejects the claim that he is a fideist, or that faith amounts to a blind leap. He does so by arguing that the analogy between faith and making a leap in the dark while not knowing if you can make it across the crevasse is a false analogy.[41] Persons in a position to leap do not know if they can or cannot make the leap, but they hope they can. Persons with religious faith are certain of the objects of their faith. He thinks a better analogy is to memory beliefs or elementary truths of arithmetic. I think his assessment is true phenomenologically. The problem with these examples is that one has the immediate memory of breakfast, understanding of numbers, or sense of God, but this does not give an explanation of the ontology of these. What is the nature of the past? Is Vasubandhu correct about impermanence, or is Vivekananda correct that the soul is divine? Plantinga does not deal with these options. Here is where his fideism emerges—he simply asserts the ontology of theism, relying on his intuition called the *sensus divinitatis*. But why accept this? My concern is not simply to defend my current beliefs as being just as warranted or justified as another person's beliefs—my concern is to know what is true about the Eternal.

In considering the reality of the world's religions as a defeater to exclusivist forms of Christianity, Plantinga argues that it is not a defeater and that a believer is not being arbitrary in holding to Christianity as the sole source of salvation:

> The believer in question doesn't really think the believers [of other religions] in question *are* on a relevant epistemic par. She may agree that she and those who dissent are equally convinced of the truth of their belief, and even that they are internally on a par, that the internally available markers are similar, or relevantly similar. Still, she must think that there is an important epistemic difference: she thinks that somehow the other person has or hasn't received some grace she has, or is blinded by ambition or access to a source of warranted belief the other lacks. If the believer concedes that she *doesn't* have any special source of knowledge or true belief with respect to Christian belief—no *sensus divinitatis*, no internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, no teaching by a church inspired and protected from error by the Holy Spirit, nothing not available to those who disagree with her—*then*, perhaps, she can properly be charged with an arbitrary egoism, and *then*, perhaps, she will have a defeater for her Christian belief.[42]

[40] Moreland and Craig, 18.

[41] Plantinga (2000), p. 263.

[42] Plantinga, p. 453.

But how can this believer, from both the internal and external perspective, avoid simply asserting what must be proven and thus falling into fideism? From the internal perspective, she believes on the basis of an intuition, but she can also notice that her intuitions are sometimes wrong. How does she know that they are correct in this case? If she appeals to the Holy Spirit or confirmation by the church or tradition, she still must answer how she knows that she is the one being upheld (or her church/tradition) and not her theological opponents. This kind of assertion based on an intuition (a feeling, or *sensus divinitatis*), and asserted to be given and upheld by the Holy Spirit or tradition is the essence of fideism. She might say 'I believe in my tradition,' but that does not answer the 'why' question, nor do follow up assertions about the Holy Spirit or the *sensus divinitatis*.

From the external perspective, why should Vivekananda believe this account? He encounters a Christian who is subjectively sure of her view, and tells Vivekananda he is lost, but why should he accept this? Does this account of the need for atonement through Christ make sense? Humans are condemned by God for not knowing God, and the only way to be saved from this condemnation is through the atoning work of Christ,[43] but God is not revealed to all persons; at best humans have 'plausible' arguments, or premises that are intuitively acceptable to some (say, Plantinga). Is this the basis for God's condemnation? This violates the ought/can principle. If humans ought to know God, then they must be able to know, and something much stronger than plausibility and intuition must be available. It seems that maximal consequences, like God's condemnation, require maximal clarity about what must be known. From this external perspective the view of Christianity given by Moreland, Craig, and Plantinga is not plausible (due to violating the ought/can principle); therefore, the believer loses her warrant (using Plantinga's terminology).

If these thinkers end in fideism, what would rational exclusivism look like? There are two initial steps that can be identified; however, the goal here is simply to maintain that natural theology is necessary, and cannot be avoided by appeals to pluralism, rather than actually proving some specific content of natural theology. The first step can be called presuppositionalism: identifying the most basic claims of a religion. The second step is the use of reason in critical analysis to test these basic claims for meaning. So, for instance, Vivekananda maintained that the whole of religion is in the belief that the soul is divine, and the soul is eternal.[44] Or, for Anselm, the concern is to show that God is the highest being, that only God is eternal.[45] Or, for Vasubandhu that there is an eternal continuum of aggregates that constitutes reality and the self.[46] We have in these three thinkers the expressions of three basic and logically contradictory beliefs: all is the self and the self is eternal, only God is eternal and the self is created, the self is an aggregate and all is impermanent.

The method used by rational exclusivism would not be intuition, experience, a 'voice from "God",' tradition, etc. Each of these can be interpreted in many different

[43] Moreland and Craig, p. 615.

[44] Vivekananda, p. 673.

[45] Anselm (1968)

[46] Vasubandhu (2003), p. 94.

ways. Thus, the method must be to use reason to test the meaning of interpretations of experience or reality. So, for instance, earlier it was pointed out that Nagarjuna denied the possibility of origination, and thus nothing can be caused whatsoever because nothing can originate, either of itself or from another being.[47] But he also held to the Buddhist view that there is nothing that is uncaused. He concluded, rightly given his premises, that nothing exists. Given the assumptions that nothing can originate, and there is nothing that is uncaused, Nagarjuna must rationally take the step to his conclusion. But reason also requires us to examine our premises. We can agree with the Buddhist view that there are no uncaused events. But why believe that there is no origination? Indeed, this seems to require the denial that there is a clear distinction between *being* and *non-being*. To affirm that nothing exists is itself problematic, it is a statement about what *is*, that there *is* only *non-being*. This is the primary source of Hindu criticism of Nagarjuna's view (although Shankara's position is not dissimilar).[48] When this interpretation is examined by reason, it leads to the denial of the possibility of knowledge (interestingly, it is because of this same process that Nagarjuna rejects belief in the world, yet he does not take this next step to use the method of rejecting contradictions on this premise). Thus, the methodology of rational exclusivism is to maintain that there are some clear distinctions, the denial of which leads to nihilism and silence. Can this method be used to show that only God is eternal, or that all is matter and matter is eternal? I think so, and by very similar means as just demonstrated, but this is beyond the scope of the present article.

Rational Exclusivism and the Universality of Religious Experience and Redemption

In each of these cases what counts as 'redemption' is relative to the basic belief about the Eternal and what is required to know the Eternal. If redemption is a change from being self-centered to reality-centered, this requires that one's beliefs about reality are true. And yet in each of these cases a view of the Eternal is held that is incompatible with descriptions from the other religions. For instance, Vivekananda speaks of being free, liberated, which is achieved when one comes to know that the self is divine.[49] Anselm speaks of the atonement, and the payment for sin that required the death of Christ.[50] This atonement is necessary for salvation which is a return to knowing and enjoying God.[51] Vasubandhu asserts that there can be no liberation from suffering, as spoken of by the Buddha, without a correct view of the self.[52] Therefore, it is impossible to argue for pluralism by arguing that all religions

[47] Hiriyanna, p. 220.

[48] ibid., p. 222.

[49] Vivekananda, p. 672.

[50] Anselm, p. 244.

[51] ibid., p. 239.

[52] Vasubandhu, p. 71.

contain examples of redemption because in each case just what this redemption consists of involves contradictory claims about reality.

Rational exclusivism does not deny that every religion contains cases of redemption in the sense of turning away from generally agreed upon harmful acts (drunkenness) to generally agreed upon healthy lifestyles (moderation in food and drink). Nor does it deny that every religion contains examples of persons who change from being self-centered to being centered on the view of reality given in that specific religion. But each religion speaks of a much deeper level of redemption that involves coming to know the Eternal, and each gives contradictory views of the Eternal, so that each is making exclusivist claims (even Vivekananda!). The alternatives are to remain silent about the Eternal, or to give a rational demonstration of one view over and against the other views.

Nor does rational exclusivism deny that all religions contain examples of religious experiences. But rational exclusivism reverses the common order of these experiences: Instead of arguing to the truth of a religion from an experience, the experience must be understood in reference to the religious system in which it occurs. So, for instance, it is not surprising, and hardly to be denied, that Vivekananda, Emerson, and Walt Whitman all experienced a oneness with the universe and all were influenced by the Bhagavad-Gita. Similarly, Anselm's deep experience of God's love, or Vasubandhu's experience of liberation from suffering upon apprehending the impermanence of the world. The universality of religious experiences is not an argument in favor of pluralism, but instead should point to the importance of basic beliefs and the need for critical analysis of how they operate in the act of interpretation. The reality of the diversity of religions in the world can be understood as an indication of the need for redemption: Humans are given to not using reason to seek and understand the Eternal and therefore invent numerous and contradictory beliefs about the Eternal. Redemption, or salvation, in this deeper sense of coming to know the Eternal, cannot be a property shared by all religions because (at least in the examples considered here) these religions make mutually exclusive claims about the Eternal.

What Would Rational Exclusivism Look Like: Knowing the Eternal

In order to establish rational exclusivism as more than a mere possibility it is necessary to give an example of something that is sufficiently clear to reason such that humans can know the Eternal. The ought/can principle requires that if humans ought to know the Eternal, then they must be able to know the Eternal. This means that such knowledge cannot be too technical so as to place it beyond the reach of most humans. The simplest standard of thought that is available to all humans as thinkers is that one should not contradict oneself. In thinking about the Eternal, one's view must be free from self-contradictions. All persons able to form a thought have implicitly agreed to this, and insofar as they wish to continue to maintain their belief as true in contrast to its contradiction, they explicitly agree to this.

The first step to claiming knowledge about the Eternal is to ask if thinking about the Eternal actually arrives at knowing the being of the Eternal, or only tells about our own thoughts. What I'm claiming is that reason can be applied to the Eternal at least in this basic way: The Eternal cannot be a self-contradiction, or, contradictory

claims about the Eternal cannot both be true (in the same way and at the same time). This rules out the possibility that general revelation shows all the actual religions to be equally valid as a means to salvation, where salvation is the change from being self-centered to reality-centered. If, among the world's religions, there are contradictory claims about the Eternal, then some of the world's religions encourage a change from being self-centered to being false-view-of-reality-centered. This is not salvation, but merely a change from error to error. Therefore, the possibility of this form of pluralism is ruled out.

However, this does not require that there be a general revelation that is co-extensive with some actual religion. To put it another way, this need not rule out the necessity of special revelation, or require that all that can be known about the Eternal is knowable from general revelation. What the ought/can principle requires is that any universal standards humans ought to keep must be knowable (and doable) from general revelation, and thus their violation is culpable. However, it does not require that the means to salvation be revealed to all persons. That is, the means to the good life must be generally revealed, but the means to being restored to the good life once a person has culpably rejected the good need not be universally revealed. It would be unfair if the good life could only be known through special revelation, and then a person without access to special revelation was condemned for not knowing the good. But it is not necessarily unfair if a person has access to the good life, culpably ignores this, and then is not told how to be forgiven/restored. Such a scenario does not violate the ought/can principle. It does not follow from the ought/can principle that all knowledge must be available through general revelation, or that redemptive knowledge be available through general revelation, but only that what is required to avoid guilt and live the good life be available through general revelation.

But what would count in order to be clear enough such that the failure to know the Eternal is culpable and requires salvation? In order to explain this further, I will use Kant as the source of an objection in his claim that our concepts do not apply to being in itself (God, the Eternal).[53] Hick's form of pluralism relies on the Kantian distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal. In order to alleviate the tension between competing claims about the Eternal, Hick claims that the Eternal is ineffable. This is one problem that will be considered here, but is not the only reason that rational exclusivism is superior to pluralism. It is also superior because it preserves the ought/can principle is explaining how knowledge of the Eternal is possible by rejecting the possibility that contradictions are true. Although Plantinga was criticized earlier for relying upon fideism, he gives a helpful response to Kant's claim that being in itself cannot be known by pure reason and in this gives an example of doing natural theology. Kant arrives at this conclusion after arguing that reason leads to antinomies. Plantinga's response is to show that none of the supposed antinomies of Kant are actually sound arguments, and that Kant has not shown that reason proves the conclusion of these antinomies.[54] If we cannot speak about the

[53] See Plantinga, *Warranted*, p. 30.

[54] Plantinga, *Warranted*, p. 25.

Eternal, or being in itself, then we cannot even say whether there is an Eternal or being in itself. 'The incoherence is patent.'[55]

In this process Plantinga has done a bit of natural theology, showing that something about the Eternal is clear from general revelation. He has critically analyzed a claim about the Eternal to show that it is incoherent, where 'incoherent' means involving a self-contradiction and therefore is meaningless. The self-contradiction here is between 1) nothing can be said about being in itself; and 2) #1 is saying something about being in itself. This is a defeater for pluralism: If adherents of pluralism keep pluralism's presuppositions, then they can no longer maintain that the views of the Eternal held by the world's religion are all meaningful, and, if they affirm the importance of redemption, they must become rational exclusivists and show which view of the Eternal can be known by reason in order to show that humans are in a condition that needs redemption. They must either become rational exclusivists, or give up the very presuppositions that lead to pluralism.

Plantinga critically analyzes Hick's pluralism in his 'Warranted Christian Belief.' His analysis is that Hick's pluralism is due to a desire to avoid self-aggrandizement. Indeed, this is how Vivekananda characterizes the claim that one religion is true while others are not (quoted earlier). But if this is so, Plantinga argues: 'shouldn't the same desire lead him to hold that his views *about* religion—his view, for example, that they are all equally right and equally wrong—really have no more claim to truth than any other view here (for example, the view that Christianity alone, say, is correct)?'[56] Indeed, Plantinga rejects the motivation behind Vivekananda and Hick mentioned earlier, that their version of pluralism can lead to unity and peace. 'The basic problem is that, given our actual intellectual and spiritual situation, it simply isn't possible to avoid serious disagreement with others.'[57] Rather than providing a basis for unity, Vivekananda and Hick have added one more view to the list of views *about* religion for people to disagree and argue about. The question is: how can we come to agreement and unity in the midst of so many views? This article does not flesh out an entire system of general revelation, but it provides the basis for doing so and answers the objection which states that such work cannot be done.

Conclusion

In this paper I have presented four important presuppositions behind pluralism that I believe are generally accepted and that are successful in demonstrating that fideistic exclusivism is false. However, I have also argued that if the good and necessary consequences of these presuppositions are developed consistently, they no longer support pluralism but instead a position which I call rational exclusivism. The meaning of this for the study of religion is that natural theology emerges as having

[55] ibid., p. 29.

[56] ibid., p. 63.

[57] ibid., p. 62.

an important role for any view that affirms the need for redemption. Pluralism affirms that redemption is needed, and therefore must also affirm that humans can know the Eternal and not all claims about the Eternal are true. Many have noted a Kantian influence in pluralism (especially in John Hick), and it has been true that after Kant natural theology has not received much attention. It is my hope that the argument presented here will show the central role natural theology plays for understanding how humans respond to the Eternal, and encourage a return to the work of natural theology.

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