

Religious similarities and differences



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Introduction

When looking at the various differences and similarities among the different religions, a question arises whether there is a possibility that all of them could be true. I follow one of the many religions that exist in our world and I always wonder how we are supposed to view all of the other traditions that exists?

Western religions namely, Christianity and Judaism have something in common, which is the fact that they both believe in a supreme being who has personal attributes whereas Islam which is Middle Eastern believe in a supreme being who created the world in accordance with his Godly purpose. (Rowe 2007, 179) After analysing the differences among the many religions which exist today one arrives at a crucial question which is what has gone wrong with the human life and how can one fix it. How does one approach and handle religious belief systems which conflict our own?

John Hicks proposed a pluralistic hypothesis, now when taking that into account another questions arises which is whether all belief systems can exist and still be valid alongside one another. This essay attempts to explore a way one can deal with the conflicting truth-claims of different religions as well as examine John Hick's hypothesis and whether his approach of pluralism would lead to polytheism.

Differences among Religions

Each faith is basically a reflection of the worldview of the area where it developed. The various religions cosmologies are different which is how they tend to explain the origins of the universe. What each religion emphasizes

and their teachers are different such as Buddhism emphasizes letting go of suffering whereas in Christianity they emphasize social action. Judaism is a total life religion, every aspect of life is impacted for example the keeping of food utensils separate.

Hinduism is very individualistic, and the expression of faith, practice and beliefs vary from one person to another. Each Religion has a different form of worship. Although Christianity, Judaism and Islamism share the belief in a Perfect being that exists these religions have different notions as to whether ultimate reality is the divine personal God or whether it's an impersonal absolute as in Hinduism. Different conceptions exist concerning one's destiny and the overall cycle of life and death and whether rebirth does happen.

The concept of Jesus differs among religions such as in the Islam faith Jesus is spoken of as a prophet and he himself wasn't God but in Christianity God is our heavenly father and Jesus Christ. Revelation differs among religions, revelation is contained within the Torah for Jews, The Bible for Christians, The Vedas for Hindus and The Quran for Muslims. The various religions have different beliefs regarding Sin. Christianity is more conventional in that it believes that all humans are surrounded by sin due to the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Jesus Christ, representing God then died for the sins of Christians on the cross so that all Christians could achieve salvation. With regards to achieving salvation one needs to establish a relationship with God and worship him as well as remain obedient toward him, and then once one dies they are delivered from sin and receive eternal life. (Rowe 2007, 180) Salvation in

terms of Hinduism doesn't include following a personal God into another life after death has occurred but instead holds that salvation is obtained through the unity with the complete Brahman and freeing oneself from all singular entities in order to become one universal notion in Brahman's light.

When looking at a religion, it can either be exclusivist in that it believes only in the beliefs it holds and that the system of belief of other religions are false or a religion can be inclusive in that we should all be accepting of the other belief systems. In terms of a pluralistic method towards religions as John Hicks proposed, all religions are valid and true.

Exclusivity

When referring to exclusivity when talking about religion, it represents the notion that an individual which follows a particular religion would only believe that which is supported by their religion and the ideas that encourage it. That individual would therefore believe that the truth is within their own religion and that what other religions support and believe cannot also be seen as true as it would then go against what they believe in. (Rowe 2007, 181)

For example, me being a Christian believes that when I die I will go to heaven and reach redemption in living how God wanted me too then I cannot also believe that attaining redemption is being one with Brahman as the Hindu's believe. An exclusivist religion rejects all other religions beliefs that aren't shared with their own.

Therefore what the Muslims might believe as true isn't supported by other religions such as Judaism. Monotheism which is the belief in only one

supreme God which created the heavens and the earth results in an exclusivist religion. Christianity is orthodox as to the fact that it has exclusivity, like the Roman Catholics believe that if an individual is not a member of the church then they will go to hell unless they join before they die.

Roman Catholics ultimately believe that one cannot achieve salvation if they separate from the church. (Rowe 2007, 182) With exclusivity there come certain problems such as the fact that people need to be aware of and take into account that many people who have lived and died haven't followed Christianity. A problem that comes with being an exclusivist is that they hold a narrow mind, which then leads to them have a bad relationship with those who believe in another God, this then causes a social disadvantage. They also need to bear in mind those individuals who lived before Christ and who have followed other dogma's.

Does one then have to conclude that God almighty only intended for a small group of people to achieve redemption? Another issue of exclusivity is that if one had to come across an individual who we as imperfect individuals would consider a saint but that person isn't part of our religion, do we then say that such a person will go to hell because he wasn't of Christian faith? An advantage of this approach would ultimately be for one's own satisfaction, due to the fact that by not worrying about all the other variety of possible religions being true and that an individual could just be content with one religion. Any person who attempts to make a truth claim, due to the nature of truth, is an exclusivist.

Inclusivity

As mentioned above, Judaism and Christianity are both exclusive religions, however Islam is not exclusivist but more inclusive as they accept all prophets starting from Adam right up until Muhammad and believe that the Bible's original scriptures being the Torah in its unaltered form is still correct. Inclusivity maintains that everyone should be accepting of other religions and what they stand for. With regards to the problems raised by exclusivity as mentioned above, inclusivity addresses them. In terms of Inclusivity, an exclusivist religion will adjust in order to cope with problems as abovementioned.

The Roman Catholics for example, have readjusted their belief that people who don't belong to the church will not achieve salvation. (Rowe 2007, 183)

The readdressed it as then stated that individuals who were unaware of Christianity and its beliefs and the church but live in terms of and search for the supreme God are able to achieve salvation. In terms of the Islam belief, Allah may forgive whoever including those who have no access to the message of God or follow a different religion but still live a virtuous life.

Therefore in terms of inclusivity, one may achieve and get salvation even though you are unaware of Christ or Christianity, as a person who follows only one religion, inclusivism allows us to accept those who have no control over the fact that they have had no opportunity to be educated and made aware of Christianity and allows such individuals to also achieve redemption. One cannot discredit other religions' beliefs because we don't believe in them due to being born somewhere else in a different area and time.

Those who follow a different religion should be allowed to achieve redemption by the way in which they believe they will because that is what they know and have been raised to follow just as we were raised to follow Christianity. We should respect their religions just like they should be respectful of ours.

However, inclusivity becomes impossible, which is a consequence of the nature of truth claim. This is that whenever one makes a claim, that person is claiming that it is true which ultimately implies that all that which contradicts it is false. One can try to be one hundred percent inclusive but they will never be fully inclusive as it will exclude any person who holds and believes a view contrary to one's own.

John Hicks Pluralism

The hypothesis on Pluralism held by John Hick states that an ultimate reality that all religious systems provide means to achieve doesn't exist due to the fact that no religion holds direct knowledge of what is meant to be the "real". Religions should be seen differently in a way that one can view what is considered the "real". (Johnson 1997)

When bearing in mind all the religions that exist in the world and everything that each religion holds one starts to doubt each of them. One begins to take a sceptical approach towards religion. When doing so one can view the various religious traditions as illusions which each being created for themselves in their minds. In order to take a more narrow approach, one will then need to regard all religions, except one's own as an illusion.

Due to this it makes more sense to believe that one regards their own religion as the truth or more true than others because it is their own religion in which they have placed all their faith in. (Rowe 2007, 184) One of the reasons why all the different religions have truths that are conflicting with regards to what's considered the ultimate real is due to the fact that each of them have no direct contact or access to the ultimate reality because it is merely perceived through their religious traditions. (Johnson 1997)

Us as individuals and followers of our religions cannot therefore say that our religion of choice is above anyone else's because we all regard our own religion as what's the truth before our own God. An individual will naturally favour one's own perspective and belief as it is the one you chose and put all your faith into. (Heim 1990, 67) The Pluralistic approach held by John Hick is to view each religion equally as each system holds a promise of salvation and promises saving from all wrong in life.

The Pluralistic approach is one in which each individual regards all other religious systems as equally valid as one's own. What each individual believes about their God tend to be mere perceptions of Him. (Hick 1922, 93). In Pluralism's aim to be as inclusive as possible by accepting every religion and their beliefs as long as it benefits their followers it ultimately becomes what it is trying to avoid which is exclusive.

Pluralism's exclusivity and inclusivity relies upon what an individual does or doesn't do whereas in Christianity for example, it relies upon what Christ has done for you as a follower. The inclusiveness of Pluralism originates from the idea that all individuals can be good enough but its exclusivity then

originates from the reality of the fact that not every individual will be good enough, pluralism ultimately doesn't even provide a standard in order for us to measure what good enough entails so how can one even begin to understand it.

Religious diversity and Polytheism

Polytheism is the belief in or the worship of more than one God, it holds that every divine being present in each different religion are all divine beings and that the belief systems of these religions are considered and seen as true. Polytheism however comes with a problem, it can be rendered void. The reason why it can be rendered void is because within each religion, their divine being that they believe in is regarded, to them, as the only divine being.

Therefore, it raises the issue that if that's the case then they cannot exist alongside each other and be considered as valid. (Rowe 2007, 185) Pluralism established in order to develop a more satisfying and acceptable explanation to one's belief and perception of what the ultimate reality really is. Due to this establishment of pluralism, one can now say that an individual can undergo some form of transformation and still obtain salvation in any one of the existing religious systems in our world. (Rowe 2007, 187)

One tends to doubt this idea of pluralism as to the fact that it is difficult to accept something that one cannot describe and that holds no fundamental properties. Polytheism allows individuals to say and believe that in reality there exists only one God who holds different names according to the different religions.

Conclusion

If one had to follow an inclusivist approach then you would believe and accept that all religious systems that exist can be accepted as true due to one's own personal experience whereas in contrast, a strict exclusivist approach holds that only one God exists and all other Gods that exist due to various different religions are false. The Pluralistic approach in terms of John Hick then goes further to conclude that there exists only one God who holds various names which relates to different religions.

How can we as individuals know which is correct as all of the above mentioned approaches cannot be correct and true at the same time. It is then crucial to understand that any belief that is claimed to be true should also then be subjected and open to contradiction. The Muslim religion believe that the one and only true God is Allah whereas the Hindu religion believe that there exists more than one God so therefore, it is clear that both these truth-claims claimed by these various religions contradict one another and therefore they both cannot be true at the same time.

This also acts as evidential proof the John Hicks pluralism hypothesis also cannot be valid as he ultimately assumes exactly what he's trying to prove. It is therefore then rational to conclude that our ideas of God are merely a creation which we invented in our imagination in order to make sense of the world and why things happen the way they do as well as to create a form of a " security blanket" for ourselves to rely on and put all our belief into. The fact that so many religious systems exist in our world shouldn't be discredited but should be seen as different responses to one ultimate reality.

When looking at the different beliefs individuals follow it is crucial to take into consideration ones accidental circumstances that one is born into or lives in. The hypothesis created by John Hick ultimately leads to polytheism as to the fact that all religious systems are able to function alongside one another and still be considered valid and acceptable regardless of the conflicting beliefs they each face. (Hick 1990, 119) One needs to accept all religious systems as valid as each one makes a positive impact on their followers lives, one needs to understand that just as we put our faith into one belief, so do many others even though it might not be the same belief as yours.

Just because another individual doesn't follow the belief you yourself does, it doesn't make their religion or beliefs false. Just like others accept you and your belief so should you be accepting of theirs as it all comes down to respect. What I believe as true as a Christian doesn't leave what Muslims believe to be false, and out of respect one needs to accept that not everyone will believe in the same religion and that's okay, as long as everyone is shown the same respect regarding their beliefs.