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Islamic Eschatology and Religious Differences

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Abstract

The issue of religious diversity is explicitly addressed in a number of *āyāt* of the Qur'ān. One of the recurrent themes that is found in these passages is the resolution of religious differences. The theme of religious difference is treated with assertions that diversity arose out of an original unity. There may be partial resolutions to issues over which there is contention, but ultimate resolution of differences is only to be expected in the eschaton. The morale given in such passages is a counsel of patience. The implications of this message for an Islamic theology of religions areconsidered.

Keywords

Eschatology, Religious, Trilemma.

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1. The Philosophy of Religious Diversity

A number of theologians and philosophers have written about religious diversity as a problem in the theology of religions and in the philosophy of religion. Perhaps no one has done more to emphasize the importance of this issue than John Hick (1922-2012). Over the course of his career he advocated his own *pluralistic hypothesis* as an answer to the problem of religious diversity and as a Christian answer to this problem in the theology of religions. His writings on this topic have provoked a number of reactions, some favorable, but more highly critical. One of the results of the ensuing debate has been an increased awareness of the range of available positions on religious diversity available to theologians and to philosophers of religion. Although Hick's pluralistic hypothesis was introduced as *a Christian response* to religious diversity, the adherents of several non-Christian traditions have also taken up the cause, including Muslims.[1]

Hick begins a brief summary of his pluralistic hypothesis in the introduction to the second edition of his *An Interpretation of Religion* with the claim of *the religious ambiguity of the universe*, that is, "the fact that it can be understood and experienced both religiously and naturalistically" (Hick, 2004, xvii). The religious ambiguity of the universe posed a problem for the meaningfulness of religious propositions when verificationist theories of meaning were taken seriously. In the 1950's, Hick sought to respond to positivist charges of the meaninglessness of religious claims with his theory of *eschatological verification* (Hick, 1988, 176 ff.; Hick, 1975, 193 ff). He continues to defend this position in his later writings, and explains the basic idea in *An Interpretation of Religion*, as follows:

1. See the review of positions in (Dag, 2017).

However if we are considering the case of … the theistic picture of the universe as a creative process leading to a limitlessly good end-state in conscious communion with God, I suggest that to participate knowingly in that fulfillment would confirm the reality of God beyond the possibility of rational doubt…. The prediction that the universe is leading to a limitlessly good end-state in communion with God would have been fulfilled (Hick 2004, p. 179).

The possibility of eschatological verification also could be used to defend the meaningfulness of the differences among the various religious traditions, as Hick recognizes. The differences among the religions are parallel to the differences between the religious believer and the atheist. In both cases there is a kind of religious ambiguity, that is, as Hick sees it, none of the disputants has an epistemic advantage:

Persons living within other traditions, then, are equally justified in trusting their own distinctive religious experience and in forming their beliefs on the basis of it (Hick, 2004, p. 235).

Despite the equality of epistemic justification, there is a factual difference that will be verified, if any are true, in the eschaton.

I have sought to establish the basically cognitive and fact-asserting status of standard religious discourse, both western and eastern, by stressing its eschatological component. Because the religions of Semitic and Indian origin offer coherent world-views entailing verifiable expectations they constitute factually true or false systems of belief. But it is clear that these expectations are very different. Hindu and Buddhist expectations differ, and both differ even more markedly from Jewish, Christian and Islamic expectations, which also differ among themselves. Each separately constitutes a

genuinely factual system of beliefs (Hick, 2004, pp. 187-188).

So, according to Hick, the religious ambiguity of the world does not mean that there is no fact of the matter about whether a religious or atheistic view is correct. Likewise, the fact that the adherents of different religious traditions are equally justified is consistent with an eschatological verification of just one of them. Despite the parallels, Hick's pluralism excludes atheistic or naturalist worldviews; and the religious pluralism he advocates would appear to be consistent with an eschatological verification of just one of the religious traditions, or one such family of traditions. Hick's response to the reconciliation of pluralism with the factual differences among religions that may receive eschatological justification is that the differences are not important with respect to soteriology. But Hick's religious pluralism is not only soteriological. It is also defined in terms of adequacy of reflecting reality or truth and the validity religious experiences. If one of the traditions has eschatological verification at the expense of others, then even if they all lead their followers to nirvana, they cannot be said to be equal reflections of ultimate truth.

In early statements of religious pluralism, Hick defines it with regard both to truth and to salvation/liberation (Hick, 1985, p. 91). In later works, the emphasis is placed more heavily on soteriology (Hick, 2004, xvii); although he retains the view that the major religious traditions are epistemologically on a par. The factual differences between them require eschatological verification, while in present circumstances, according to Hick, there is an equality of justification. If equality of justification is a condition for recognition in the plurality of valid religions, the religious ambiguity of the world means that some naturalistic views fulfill this condition.

Atheistic and agnostic worldviews are excluded from those that are considered valid in the pluralistic hypothesis, despite the doctrine of the religious ambiguity of the world, which states that believers and unbelievers may be equally justified in their worldviews. When Hick considers which worldviews to be excluded from the pluralistic hypothesis, morality is no less important than epistemology. While naturalism per se may not have any particular moral outlook, there is certainly an abundance of non-religious ethical systems of thought that would seem to qualify for effectiveness at salvation/ liberation if this is defined by moral criteria.

In conclusion, if our epistemic situation is as ambiguous as Hick takes it to be, this should lead us, by his reasoning, to a different conclusion than he reaches. Instead of a religious pluralism in which apparent epistemological and moral equality requires recognition of the equal status of the major religious traditions, we should expect a secular pluralism in which naturalistic ethical views take their place alongside the religious traditions. On the other hand, if eschatological verification is capable of showing that there is truth in the religious view to the exclusion of secular naturalism, an appeal to this same eschatological verification could be made to deny that truth is equally distributed among the major religious denominations.

2. The Theology of Religions of the Qur'ān

In the Qur'ān, various kinds of religious differences are discussed. There are differences between the pagan Arabs and Christians and Muslims. Differences between Jews and Christians. There are three references to the Sabaeans, about whose identity there is still much unknown. In addition to differences between groups, there are several mentions of the internal differences among the Jewish and Christian

groups. On the Day of Judgment, all the issues over which there were differences will be cleared up. The first example of this theme refers to the Children of Israel.

> *This Quran recounts for the Children of Israel most of what they differ about, (76) and it is indeed a guidance and mercy for the faithful. (77) Your Lord will decide between them by His judgement, and He is the All-mighty, the All-knowing. (78) (27:76-78)*[48]

In Surah Yūnus, the theme is extended to all religious differences. After a condemnation of paganism as having no basis in knowledge, we find:

> *Mankind were but a single community; then they differed. And were it not for a prior word of your Lord, decision would have been made between them concerning that about which they differ*. (10:19)[51]

This is not saying that the differences are desirable; quite the contrary. The Lord issued a word to spare those who differ wrongly until the Day of Judgment, after which those who differed because of lies they fabricated will be punished accordingly. The word that prevents the immediate destruction of the wrongdoers and liars appears to have been given by God in order that people may be tested.

> *Certainly, We settled the Children of Israel in a worthy settlement and We provided them with all the good things, and they did not differ until [after] the knowledge had come to them. Your Lord will indeed judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ. (10:93)*[51]

Say, 'Shall I seek a Lord other than Allah, while He is the Lord of all things?' No soul does evil except against itself, and no bearer shall bear another's burden; then to your Lord will be your return, whereat He will inform you concerning that about which you used to differ. (6:164)[55]

Indeed, only exclusive faith is worthy of Allah, and those who take other as awliya besides Him [claiming,] 'We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah,' Allah will judge between them concerning that about which they differ. Indeed Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate. (39:3)[59]

Say, 'O Allah! Originator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the sensible and the Unseen, You will judge between Your servants concerning that about which they used to differ.' (39:46)[59]

The pagan Arabs protested about Jesus (p.b.u.h) asking whether their gods were better or him. We are informed in the Qur'ān that they raised the issue solely for the sake of contention. Following this is an extraordinary claim about Jesus (p.b.u.h), after his divinity is denied he is said to be an exemplar, and he resolves some of the things about which there were differences. The fact that the resolution of differences had been otherwise expressly attributed only to God at the end of the world confirms the exceptional status of Jesus (p.b.u.h) against the contentions of the pagans, while at the same time insisting that he was a mere servant of God. The humble nature of the servant is explained as allowing him to serve as an exemplar. Otherwise God could have sent angels.

He was just a servant whom We had blessed and made an exemplar for the Children of Israel. Had We wished We would

have set angels in your stead to be [your] successors on the earth. When Jesus brought those manifest proofs, he said, 'I have certainly brought you wisdom, and to make clear to you some of what you differ about. So be wary of Allah and obey me. Indeed Allah is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is a straight path.' But the factions differed among themselves. So, woe to the wrongdoers for the punishment of a painful day!(43:59-65)[63]

And We gave them [the Children of Israel] manifest precepts. But they did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves. Indeed your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ. (45:17)[65]

One of the issues about which there was contention was the Resurrection of the dead. Those who deny it will be proven wrong.

They swear by Allah with solemn oaths that Allah will not resurrect those who die. Yes indeed [He will], it is a promise binding upon Him, but most people do not know, (38) so that He may clarify for them what they differ about, and that the faithless may know that they were liars. (16:39)[70]

Do not be like her who would undo her yarn, breaking it up after [spinning it to] strength, by making your oaths a means of [mutual] deceit among yourselves, so that one community may become more affluent than another community. Indeed Allah tests you thereby, and He will surely clarify for you on the Day of Resurrection what you used to differ about. (16:92)[70]

> *The Sabbath was only prescribed for those who differed about it. Your Lord will indeed judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they differ. (16:124)*[70]

> *Indeed your Lord will judge between them [the Children of Israel] on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ. (32:25)*[75]

The theme continues to be taken up in the following Medinan *āyāt*. In the first of these we find a condemnation of a kind of exclusivism explicitly stated in the Qur'ān:

> *And they say, 'No one will enter paradise except one who is a Jew or Christian.' Those are their [false] hopes! Say, 'Produce your evidence, should you be truthful.' Certainly, whoever submits his will to Allah and is virtuous, he shall have his reward from his Lord, and they will have no fear, nor shall they grieve. The Jews say, 'The Christians stand on nothing,' and the Christians say, 'The Jews stand on nothing,' though they follow the [same] Book. So said those who had no knowledge, [words] similar to what they say. Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ. (2:111-3)*[87]

In his *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī observes that what is stated here indicates that denomination is not a criterion for spiritual success or felicity. The criteria are submission to God and *iḥsān*, which Sachiko Murata and William Chittick translate as "doing the beautiful" (See Murata & Chittick, 1994, p. 269). 'Allāmah asserts that this is this point also is made in two previous *āyāt* of this *sūrah* of the

Qur'ān (See Tabataba'i 1984, pp. 55-56).[1] The theme comes up again in a later *āyah* of this surah.

> *That is so because Allah has sent down the Book with the truth, and those who differ about the Book are surely in extreme doubt. Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, piety is [personified by] those who have faith in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and who give their wealth, for the love of Him, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler and the beggar, and for [the freeing of] the slaves, and maintain the prayer and give the zakat, and those who fulfill their covenants, when they pledge themselves, and those who are patient in stress and distress, and in the heat of battle. They are the ones who are true [to their covenant], and it is they who are the Godwary. (2:176-177)*[87]

Among the major religious scriptures, the Glorious Qur'ān is unique in promising rewards in the afterlife for those among whom religious disagreement persists. (2:113), however, pertains to both the question of divine rewards and to religious truth, what one "stands on". So, the rejection of exclusivism pertains to both alethic and soteriological pluralisms. Furthermore, the reference to the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāmah*) indicates that we can expect

1. The other *āyāt* are:
   Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Christians and the Sabaeans—those of them who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously—they shall have their reward from their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve. (5:69)
   Certainly whoever commits misdeeds and is besieged by his iniquity—such shall be the inmates of the Fire, and they will remain in it forever. And those who have faith and do righteous deeds—they shall be the inhabitants of paradise; they will remain in it forever. (2:81-82)

religious disagreement to remain with us until the end of the world, for only after thatwill God judge about the matters of contention.

> *When Allah said, 'O Jesus, I shall take you, and I shall raise you up toward Myself, and I shall clear you of the faithless, and I shall set those who follow you above the faithless until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me will be your return, whereat I will judge between you concerning that about which you used to differ. (3:55)*[89]

> *For every nation, We have appointed rites [of worship] which they observe; so let them not dispute with you concerning your religion, and invite to your Lord. Indeed, you are on a straight guidance. But if they dispute with you, say, 'Allah knows best what you are doing. Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which you used to differ. (22:67-69)*[103]

The final statement of the theme sounds the same points. God appointed different rites for different peoples. Those differences are not going to bar anyone from achieving felicity. As long as people get the basics right, and act accordingly, there will be a reward. As for points of contention, we will have to wait until Judgment Day for all these matters to be cleared up.

> *We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it of the Book and as a guardian over it. So judge between them by what Allah has sent down, and do not follow their desires against the truth that has come to you. For each [community] among you We had appointed a code [of law] and a path, and had Allah wished He would have made*

you one community, but [His purposes required] that He should test you in respect to what He has given you. So take the lead in all good works. To Allah shall be the return of you all, whereat He will inform you concerning that about which you used to differ. (5:48)[112]

3. The Eschaton

While most theological discussions, whether among Christians or Muslims, about the Day of Judgment, the Resurrection of the Dead, the Return, and the End of the World take up issues such as the sequence of events, signs that hearken the end, whether beliefs about such matters can be epistemologically justified, and metaphysical theories about the nature of the body and identity conditions, far less theological attention has been given to the functional role of the eschaton in scripture. By reviewing the passages cited in the previous section, we find that one of the functions of the eschaton is to be a venue for the resolution of religious differences, an eschatological verification of the sort that John Hick has discussed in several of his works.

The repeated statements in the Glorious Qur'ān that religious differences will only be cleared up on the Day of Judgment together with other verses already mentioned imply the following points:

- religious differences will persist until the end
- patience is thus required
- there should be no expectation that argument will resolve all the differences, although allowance is made that some differences may be resolved before this

- specifics of religious rites do not determine that some will and others will not have heavenly rewards
- punishment awaits those who willfully differ because of rebellion against the divine message or unauthorized claims to superiority
- Jesus (p.b.u.h) is not only to come at the end along with the Mahdi (p.b.u.h), according to narrations, but the differences about the status of Jesus (p.b.u.h) are to be resolved in the eschaton.

4. The Trilemma

The tripartite division of views about the diversity of religions—exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism—is usually attributed to Alan Race (b. 1951), who introduced the division in a Christian theological work of 1983 (Race, 1983). In the same year, John Hick (1922-2012) made the same division (Hick, 1983);[1] and prior to this he essentially recognized the division without using the terms.[2] Furthermore, Race, who was a student of Hick, refers to Hick's work in his publication, while Hick's first uses of it do not mention Race. Although Race may have used the word "inclusivism" prior to Hick, Hick was already comparing the concept of what would become known as *inclusivism* to epicycles in a Ptolemaic system to be replaced by his own Copernican, divinity centered, theology of religions in 1972 (Hick, 1993, pp. 124-127).

1. reprinted in (Hick, 1985).
2. The division without the names is clearly present in (Hick, 1980, pp. 49-51); and the basic idea is even stated on the last page of (Hick, 1973, p. 129). J. J. Lipner contrasts his own inclusivist view (without calling it by that name) with exclusivism and Hick's pluralism in (Lipner, 1977).

So, with some caution, it may be appropriate to attribute the tripartite distinction to Hick.[1]

Hick's division grows out of the need for tolerance in the religiously plural society of Britain in the late sixties and the seventies.[2] Theology is carried forward on a wave of social changes. The meaning of "pluralism" shifts from a social-political framework in which there is an advocacy for the recognition of racial and religious diversity in the author's society to a theological position in which the acceptance of a variety of religious traditions is advocated; the demand for social equality is reflected in the claim that the religions are equal.

The theology of religious pluralism that Hick defends is multidimensional: It includes positions in epistemology, ethics, and several areas of Christian theology, including Christology, soteriology, and eschatology. It is also bold in its outlook and has been the cause of religious condemnations as well as academic criticisms. While most of those who have engaged with Hick's work ultimately reject some key features of his position, Hick's theology continues to attract defenders, and the controversy about his views continues (See Sugirtharajah, 2012).

In his earliest discussions of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, they are presented as the three *main* options for responding to the question of religious diversity with particular emphasis on the

1. I will willingly retract the claim if evidence to the contrary is found; but I have found no references prior to 1983 for Race's thinking on the trichotomy, while it is clearly present in the earlier cited writings of Hick. Nevertheless, the division is nearly universally attributed to Race by contemporary writers on this topic. See (Harris, 2016).
2. See Hick's autobiographical remarks in the first chapter of (Hick, 1985).

question of salvation/liberation. So, strictly speaking, no claim is made that these are the only possible options. Nevertheless, they have been treated as such and have given rise to a tendency to pigeonhole anyone who expresses a view on religious diversity with the expectation that their views must fall into one of these three categories.

Hick defines the trichotomy in 1983 in terms of truth or validity, although the soteriological element is also presented.

By 'exclusivism' I mean the view that one particular mode of religious thought and experience (namely, one's own) is alone valid, all others being false. By 'inclusivism' I mean the view … that one's own tradition alone has the whole truth but that this truth is nevertheless partially reflected in other traditions; and, as an additional clause special to Christianity, that whilst salvation is made possible only by the death of Christ, the benefits of this are available to all mankind…. And by 'pluralism' I mean the view - which I advocate - that the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real or the Ultimate from within the different cultural ways of being human; and that within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is manifestly taking place (Hick, 1985, p. 91).

In a piece published the following year, each part of the trichotomy is defined in some detail in relation to salvation or liberation.

'Exclusivism', relates salvation/liberation exclusively to one particular tradition, so that it is an article of faith that salvation is

restricted to this one group, the rest of mankind being either left out of account or explicitly excluded from the sphere of salvation (Hick, 1985, p. 31).

The second answer to the question of the relation between salvation/liberation and the cumulative traditions is inclusivism, of which Hick presents two varieties:

A juridical or of a transformation-of-human-existence conception of salvation. In the former terms it is the view that God's forgiveness and acceptance of humanity have been made possible by Christ's death, but that the benefits of this sacrifice are not confined to those who respond to it with an explicit act of faith. The juridical transaction of Christ's atonement covered all human sin, so that all human beings are now open to God's mercy, even though they may never have heard of Jesus Christ and why he died on the cross of Calvary…. [T]he other form of Christian inclusivism, which accepts the understanding of salvation as the gradual transformation of human life… regards this however, wherever it happens, as the work of Christ—the universal divine Logos, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Thus we can speak of 'the unknown Christ of Hinduism' and of the other traditions, and indeed the unknown Christ within all creative transformations of individuals and societies. And, if we ask how this differs from simply saying that within all these different streams of human life there is a creative and re-creative response to the divine Reality, the answer of this kind of Christian inclusivism is that Christians are those, uniquely, who are able to identify the source of salvation because they have encountered that source as personally incarnate in Jesus Christ (Hick, 1985, pp. 32-33).

Pluralism is then introduced as the recognition that salvation/ liberation takes place within all the major traditions:

Pluralism, then, is the view that the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions (Hick, 1985, p. 34).

Later in the same essay, Hick presents the trichotomy as answers to the question of the validity of religious experience:

At this point the three answers that we discussed above become available again: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. The exclusivist answer is that only one's own form of religious experience is an authentic contact with the Transcendent, other forms being delusory….

Moving to the inclusivist answer, this would suggest that religious experience in general does indeed constitute a contact with the Transcendent, but that this contact occurs in its purest and most salvifically effective form within one's own tradition, other forms having value to the varying extents to which they approximate to ours (Hick, 1985, p. 38).

Hick criticizes the exclusivist and inclusivist positions and offers pluralism as the preferable alternative, giving credit for the contribution of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) to this standpoint. There is much that can be questioned here: whether the positions he attributes to those to whom he describes as exclusivists and inclusivists would agree with his characterizations of their views; whether salvation/liberation are to be understood in the various traditions as Hick describes it; whether revelation can be understood as a form of religious experience; and much more. These are topics

about which much has been written and debated. Here, however, I am interested in the structure of Hick's trichotomy, not the merits of the concepts used to define its parts or the attributions of views to particular groups or authors.

In the introduction to the second revised edition of his *An Interpretation of Religion,* published in 2004, Hick explains the first two divisions of the trichotomy in quick parenthetical remarks, as to aid those new to the discussion:

An exclusivist (Christianity alone is true/salvific) or inclusivist (Christianity alone is fully true/salvific, but non-Christians can be included within the sphere of Christian salvation) theology of religions…(Hick, 2004, xvii).

The alternative *theology of religions* proposed by Hick, which he now calls *the pluralistic hypothesis* is developed at length through a series of points, somewhat in the style of a creed or manifesto. Pluralism is still presented as the major alternative to exclusivism and inclusivism, but it is admitted that there are several versions of religious pluralism; and *the pluralistic hypothesis* is the name he gives to his own version, which he refined over the course of the twenty years since he introduced the trichotomy in his examinations of Christian responses to religious diversity. The pluralistic hypothesis of *An Interpretation of Religion* is so rich in content that the idea of a comprehensive trilemma becomes preposterous. It does not require much reflection to realize that dissatisfaction with exclusivism and inclusivism does not force one to accept Hick's Kantian thesis of an ineffable ultimate conceptualized with equal accuracy in the religions of the world.

Hick's trilemma is rejected by authors who offer versions of

pluralism that differ from Hick's on several points. However, in fairness, although Hick welcomes non-Christian analogues to his view, he presents the pluralistic hypothesis as *a Christian response* to religious diversity. The adherents of several non-Christian traditions have also taken up the cause, including Muslims.[1] Second, distinctions have been made between moral, soteriological, alethic, and other forms of pluralism.[2] In general, with regard to any given value, *V*, that is ascribed by adherents to a preferred religious tradition, *r**, the trichotomy can be formulated as follows:

1. *V*-exclusivism: *V* is exclusive to *r**.

2. *V*-inclusivism: *V* is maximally in *r**, (MAX*r*V*), but inferior degrees of *v* are in traditions other than *r**.

3. *V*-pluralism: *V* is equally in *r** and in a plurality of other religious traditions.

Third, some have presented pluralism in contrast to other alternatives than exclusivism and inclusivism. For example, David Basinger offers an alternative trichotomy, which I reformulate here to facilitate comparison with the above:

1. DB *V*-exclusivism: MAX*r*V*.

2. DB *V*-non-exclusivism: *r** is not superior to all other religious traditions with regard to *V*, that is, *not*-MAX*r*V*.

3. DB *V*-pluralism: DB *V*-non-exclusivism plus EITHER*V* is equally in *r** and in a plurality of other religious traditions or, if this is

1. See the review of positions in (Dag, 2017).
2. I list seven value dimensions in (Legenhausen, 2009). The notation used in what follows that given in this paper, but with some simplification.

not possible, there is equal justification for believing that some aspect of *V* is reflected in *r** and in a plurality of other religious traditions (See Basinger, 2018).

Although one could quibble with Basinger's characterization of pluralism—because mere recognition of equal justification for belief that *V* is reflected in some manner in various traditions allows the possibility of superior reflection of *V* in one tradition—what is more important, it seems to me, is the recognition that there can be a kind of *V*-pluralism that is not tied to the condition that *V* is actually present in the different religions. There can be an *epistemological V*-pluralism that depends not on the actual presence of *V* in *r**, but on epistemic justification.

Epistemological justification comes in several varieties (See Alston, 2005), which may be considered with regard to exclusivism and inclusivism, as well as pluralism. Given some version of justification, *J*, an epistemic exclusivist would hold that the distinctive claims of *r** have *J*, while for any *r* other than *r**, the distinctive doctrines of *r* lack *J*. Other epistemic values that might be considered are knowledge and certainty. We can designate any such epistemic value as V^e, and approach Basinger's epistemological pluralism by restricting the epistemic value to *J* and further restricting it to beliefs about the possession of other values, such as being the religion most favored by God. Suppose that Lessing's (See Lessing, 1912) merchant, knight, and sultan each believes that his own religion, r_1, r_2, and r_3, respectively, is most favored by God, call this value V^f. Since it is not logically possible for two different religions to possess V^f, Bassinger allows one could be a pluralist by allowing that beliefs about the possession of $V^f$are equally justified. So the merchant might be a V^e-pluralist with regard to the belief that $r_n$has V^f, but not a V^f-pluralist.

The policy that pluralists, like Hick, have proposed, however, is to abandon V^f. Once one has become convinced of the truth of the pluralistic hypothesis, one is supposed to realize that one's former beliefs about V^f were mistaken. Neither the merchant, the knight, nor the sultan has justification for their beliefs about V^f. This is what makes religious pluralism most controversial. It does not merely assign equal status to the denominations; rather, it requires reform through the elimination of beliefs about value superiority. The position taken by Lessing's merchant, Nathan, is not one of religious pluralism as Hick understands it, for Nathan holds that we just do not know which, if any, of the religions is most favored by God, although each is justified by the testimony of those deemed trustworthy. This would be sufficient, however, for Nathan to be a pluralist in Bassinger's sense.

Yet another way of understanding religious pluralism is presented in the zealous defense of the doctrine by Kenneth Rose. Rose suggests a linguistic interpretation of pluralism.

Exclusivism may be defined as taking one of the many available bodies of religious teachings as final to the exclusion and even negation of other bodies of religious teaching; *inclusivism* may be defined as a weaker or minimal expression of exclusivism that takes terminology in the home tradition as the "final vocabulary" to interpret all religious phenomena; and *pluralism* (as a theological and philosophical stance rather than just as the reality of religious diversity or diverse religious views) may be defined as the view that the limitations of language necessarily imply the ceaseless proliferation of religious languages, none of which can be universally plausible (Rose, 2013, p. 8).

Unfortunately, Rose defines *exclusivism* in terms of "bodies of religious teachings", while *inclusivism* and *pluralism* are defined with

respect to terminology and religious language. Nevertheless, the suggestion is clear enough that some linguistic value is considered for exclusivists to be the sole property of one tradition, while for inclusivists linguistic value is admitted for a plurality of religions, but with one vocabulary holding clear superiority over all rivals. One would expect that *pluralism* would then be defined as the recognition of various vocabularies without giving any privilege over the others; but Rose's pluralism is more radical, for it involves the rejection of all religious vocabularies as inadequate. He goes on to distinguish a strong and a weak version of pluralism. The strong version attempts the construction of a new universal religious "teaching or practice" (although it would be more consistent to use "language"); while the weak version considers all religious views to be deficient because of "the limitations of language". If this seems more like a rejection of religion than a defense of a pluralistic theology, Rose admits: "This version of pluralism may move beyond the spectrum of religious views altogether, since it resembles secular, historical, literary, and social-scientific approaches to the study of religion" (Rose, 2013, p. 9). Needless to say, there is a danger that the movement toward pluralism, which began with the intention to accept the plurality of religious traditions, will lead to either the formation of a new syncretic sect or to the rejection of religion altogether.

Certainly the kind of pluralism that seems to be indicated in the *āyāt* of the Qur'ān with which we began is neither Rose's strong nor weak pluralism. Since it involves the explicit recognition of truth in different traditions and spiritual reward regardless of denomination, the view is not exclusivist. One might consider it to indicate some sort of inclusivism; but, if so, it is not the inclusivism defined by Rose, for there is no claim in the cited passages of the Qur'ān and none in any other passages that requires a belief that all religious phenomena must

be interpreted in the language of Islam. The Qur'ān was revealed "in clear Arabic" (See Qur'ān: (12:2); (13:37); (16:103); (20:113); (26:195); (41:3); (42:7); (43:3); 46:12)) so that it could be understood, and confirm what came before, but only in a general manner without any attempt to "translate" all religious phenomena into the language of the final revelation.

The statement of the Qur'ān (5:3) that religion has become complete, (which, according to the Shī'ah, was revealed immediately after the Prophet's (p.b.u.h) announcement of the *wilāyah* (guardianship) of Imam 'Ali (p.b.u.h), while Sunni scholars place the revelation after the Prophet's (p.b.u.h) farewell pilgrimage) likewise makes no mention of and has no implication about the relation of the language of Islam and the various religious traditions of the world. What is stated is merely that the divine guidance that constitutes Islam became complete by the time of the revelation of (5:3).

If the Qur'ān does not provide sufficient evidence to endorse inclusivism as defined by Hick or Rose, there are still other versions of inclusivism that might be considered. The inclusivisms of Hick and Rose posit a single set of standards (salvation/liberation, reality orientation, linguistic superiority) associated with one religious tradition that is to be used to measure the worth of all others. What we find in Islamic sources, to the contrary, is clear condemnation of the polytheistic religions of ancient Arabia, affirmations of some aspects of other religions, and silence about most of the religious traditions of China and India, let alone the aboriginal religious beliefs in Australia and the Americas. Dale Tuggy explains that the difference between exclusivism and inclusivism is a matter of degree. Both privilege a particular religion, although the inclusivist recognizes greater value in other religions than the exclusivist does; while pluralists hold some

broadly defined group of religions to be equal.

Roughly, pluralistic approaches to religious diversity say that, within bounds, one religion is as good as any other. In contrast, exclusivist approaches say that only one religion is uniquely valuable. Finally, inclusivist theories try to steer a middle course by agreeing with exclusivism that one religion has the most value while also agreeing with pluralism that others still have significant religious value (Tuggy, n.d.).

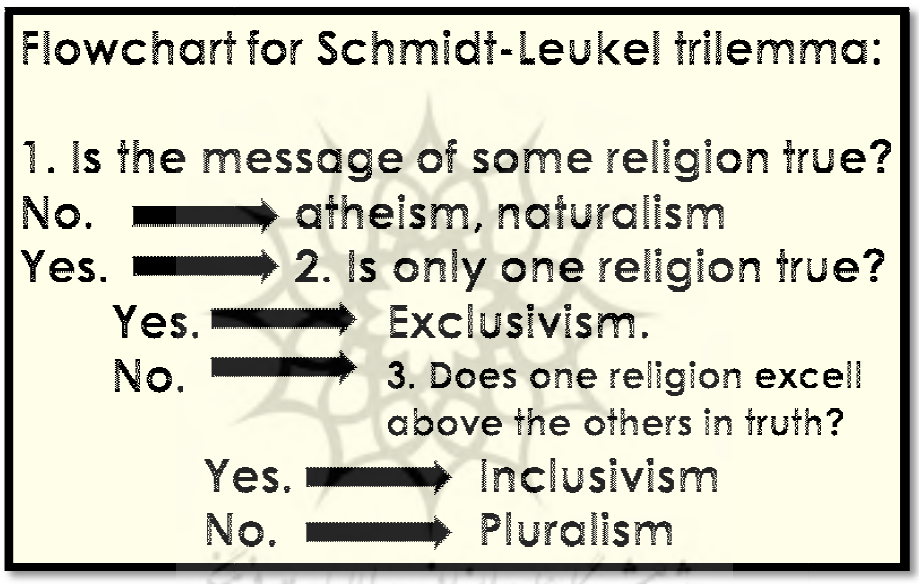
Although this initial statement of the trichotomy is rather vague, Tuggy distinguishes several varieties within each of the three main types. Thus, he describes the sort of "pluralism" indicated in the Qur'ān as a kind of "Abrahamic inclusivism". If the teachings found in the Qur'ān and some Islamic traditions may be considered to form a kind of Abrahamic inclusivism, it is only with respect to the relative merits of the religions mentioned in the sources. To extend this to other views, one would have to decide whether those views are sufficiently similar in relevant ways to those about which clear judgments are found on the basis of which to extend those judgments to others.

The tri-polar typology has been defended most prominently in recent years by Perry Leukel-Schmidt. He claims that his refinement of the typology makes it: "logically comprehensive, coercive, and universally, that is, interreligiously applicable" (Leukel-Schmidt, 2017, p. 14). So, it may be instructive to consider why we should think it is none of these things. Leukel-Schmidt asks us to consider the following question:

The question of diversity: To what extent might the different religious messages of salvation be true?

(We have already mentioned that the focus on "salvation" is

not shared by other traditions, even if it is broadened enough to include Buddhist concepts of liberation.) He characterizes the atheist/naturalist as answering that none are true. Aside from atheism, Schmidt-Leukel claims that one must either hold that only one religion is true (exclusivism), or that although more than one are true, one is superior to all others (inclusivism), or that none is superior to all the rest and some are equally valid (pluralism). We can put Schmidt-Leukel's trilemma in the form of a flow chart:



At least one reason why the Schmidt-Leukel trilemma is not logically comprehensive is that it ignores the possibility of *relative truth*. The point here is not to defend any sort of relativism about religion, but, rather, to point out a logical possibility that undermines the trilemma. For the sake of argument, suppose the truths contained in religious traditions were all relative to those traditions. Then we could not even answer the first question in the flow chart. All of the questions in the flow chart would be incomplete. Relative to one set of religious standards, religions R_1 and R_2 might be equal in truth, while

relative to another set of standards, one could be superior to the other, and relative to a third set of standards they might be incomparable.

Incommensurability is another reason the trilemma fails. Maybe on the Day of Judgment the resolution of some religious differences will take the form of a divine ruling that some differences involve no contradiction because some of the truth claims made in two religious traditions are mutually incomprehensible. One religious point of view might be just different from another without there being any possible ranking of the amount of truth they convey. One is not superior to the other, but neither are they equal. The possibility of radically incommensurable worldviews is treated at length by Carol Rovane, and draws on the work of Nelson Goodman to allow for the possibility of *multimundialism*, the idea that incommensurable assertions might accurately describe the different worlds in which those who make the assertions live (Rovane, 2013; Goodman, 1978). Rovane's advocates a form of epistemic indifference that is not to be confused with what has been condemned in the Catholic Church as the *heresy of indifferentism*. The heretical view is that religious commitment is a matter of indifference: one religion is as good as another. Rovane's epistemic indifference *prohibits* the judgment that one is as good as another, and insists that different traditions are *incommensurable*. It is the refusal to pass judgment, either to condemn the other or to pronounce them equal, that enables Rovane's *multimundialism* (multiple world-ism) to resist both the heresy of indifferentism and the trilemma of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

Finally, a third reason the trilemma fails is because of suspended judgment, what the ancient skeptics called "*epoché*"

(ἐποχή). If, as the Glorious Qur'ān teaches, religious differences will remain until the Day of Judgment, and if these differences include questions of whether the amount of truth to be found in various traditions is or is not equal, then the theology of religions that would suggest itself would be neither exclusivist, inclusivist, nor pluralist, but what we might call a *skeptical theology of religions* or an *epochist theology of religions.*

An epochist Islamic theology of religions would hold that although we may have *revealed* reasons to affirm the unique superiority of Islam to other religions, there are no religiously neutral criteria by which conclusive judgments or purely rational reasons could be made about the relative merits of other religious traditions that would be found convincing by all rational agents. Thus we would have an inclusivist position internal to Islam together with a healthy skepticism about comparative judgments about the worth of other traditions. And God knows best.

5. Conclusion

The Noble Qur'ān contains numerous *āyāt* that state that at least some religious differences will not be resolved until the Day of Judgment. This is an aspect of Islamic eschatology that has been neglected by theologians and philosophers of religion. The significance of these Islamic teachings about the eschaton isprofoundly significant for the theology of religions and comparative religion. Muslims engaged in comparative theology should not expect that all religious differences will be resolved as a result of their comparative studies. Most significantly, however, is that the teachings of the Noble Qur'ān about the eschaton make it demonstrable that the trilemma among

exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism is incomplete. Here, I have suggested a skeptical or epochist theology of religions that allows that the amount of religious truth to be found in different traditions as well as particular differences about religious claims might be such that no resolution is to be expected before the end of the world.

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