he grasped the animal’s tail. “You’re all mistaken,” insisted the sixth. “An elephant is a long snake,” and he held up the tail. Then they all began to shout at each other about their convictions of the nature of an elephant.

After telling the story the Buddha commented, “How can you be so sure of what you cannot see. We are all like blind people in this world. We cannot see God. Each of you may be partly right, yet none completely so.”

The religious pluralist calls on us to give up our claims to exclusivity and accept the thesis that many paths lead to God and to salvation or liberation. As Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, “In whatever way men approach me, I am gracious to them; men everywhere follow my path.”

On the other side of the debate are exclusivists. They believe that only one way leads to God or salvation. Whereas Hinduism, reflected in the words of Lord Krishna (above), has tended to be pluralistic, Christianity and Islam have tended toward exclusivity. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.” And Peter says in the Book of Acts, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” The inspiration of the missionary movement within Christianity and Islam has been to bring salvation to those who would otherwise be lost.

Christians and Muslims have historically rejected pluralism. If Christ or Mohammed is the unique way to God, the other creeds must be erroneous because they deny these claims. Since Muslims and Christians believe that they have good reasons for their beliefs, why should they give them up? Why should they give up their claims to exclusivity?

One consideration given by the pluralist is that it is an empirical fact that people generally adhere to the religion of their geographical location, of their native culture. Thus, Indians are likely to be Hindus, Tibetans Buddhists, Israelis Jews, Arabs Muslims, and Europeans and Americans Christians. If we recognize the accidentality of our religious preference, shouldn’t we give up the claim to exclusivity?

The exclusivist responds that one might give up a claim to religious certainty as he or she recognizes that other traditions have different beliefs. But if reconsideration of relevant evidence leaves one still believing that one’s original religious views are more likely than the alternatives to be correct, then one might well be perfectly reasonable in continuing to hold those beliefs and in continuing to think that one’s own religious tradition offers the only path to salvation. The fact that one’s religious beliefs are partly a result of where one lives does not by itself show that exclusive claims are false. At best, the exclusivist will say, it shows that sociological factors have some role to play in determining how easy it is for one to happen upon the truth.

In our readings, John Hick defends the pluralist position and Alvin Plantinga defends religious exclusivism. Plantinga argues that religious exclusivism is not (or need not be) morally or epistemically improper and that a certain exclusivism is present no matter what we believe. For example, suppose the pluralist believes that all the major religions are equally good paths to God. Many others disagree; but the pluralist persists in thinking that they are mistaken. Thus, the pluralist is an exclusivist with regard to her belief that all of the major religions are equally good paths to God. Believing anything implies that those who believe the contrary of what you believe are wrong. So virtually all of us fall into exclusivism with respect to some belief or other.

David Basinger, in the third reading, attempts to reconcile Hick’s religious pluralism with Plantinga’s exclusiveness. Basinger argues that, properly understood, the two positions are compatible, both offering valid insights on the diversity of religious phenomena.

In our fourth and final reading, the Dalai Lama reflects on the Buddhist perspective on world religions, indicating some areas of unity within diversity.

VI.1

Religious Pluralism and Ultimate Reality

JOHN HICK

Biographical remarks about John Hick provide selection III.C.2. In this essay he outlines a groundbreaking work on God and the Universe of Faiths, Hick sets forth the thesis that God historically revealed himself through various individuals in various situations where geographic isolation prevented a common revelation to all humanity. Each major religion has a different interpretation of the same ultimate reality, to the same salvation. Now the time has come to engage in interreligious dialogue so that we may discover our common bonds and realize that other people participate in ultimate reality as validly as we do within our religion, “for all these exist in truth, as ways through time to eternity.”

Let me begin by proposing a working definition of religion as an understanding of the universe, together with an appropriate way of living within it, which involves reference beyond the natural world to God or gods or to the Absolute or to a transcendent order or process. Such a definition includes such theistic beliefs as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism; the non-theistic Hebraism of the Bhagavad Gita; the semi-theistic faith of Mahayana Buddhism and the non-theistic faiths of Theravada Buddhism and non-theistic Hindusim. It does not however include purely naturalistic systems of belief, nor

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Notes

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[Image]
such as communion and humanism, immensely important though these are alternatives to religious life.

When we look back into the past we find that religion has been a virtually universal dimension of human life—so much so that man has been defined as the religious animal. For he has displayed an innate tendency to experience his environment as being religiously as well as naturally significant, and to feel required to live in it as such. To quote the anthropologist, Raymond Firth, "religion is universal in human societies." In every human community on earth today, says Walford Cantwell Smith, "there exists something that we, at sophisticated observers, may term religion, or a religion. And we are able to see in it each case as the latest development of a continuity which can now affirm, for at least one hundred thousand years."

In the life of primitive man this religious tendency is expressed in a belief in sacred objects endowed with mana, and in a multitude of natural and ancestral spirits needing to be carefully propitiated. The divine was here crudely apprehended as a plurality of quasidivine forces which could to some extent be controlled by ritualistic and magical procedures. This represents the simplest beginning of man's awareness of the transcendent in the infancy of the human race—an infancy which is also to some extent extant today for study in the life of primitive tribes today.

The development of religion and religions begins to emerge into the light of recorded history when the three millennium B.C. moves towards the period around 2000 B.C. There are two main regions of the earth in which civilization seems first to have arisen and in which religion first took a shape that is at least dimly discernible to us as we peer back through the mists of time—these being Mesopotamia in the Near East and the Indus valley of northern India. In Mesopotamia men lived in nomadic shepherd tribes, each worshipping its own god. Then the tribes gradually coalesced into nation states, the former tribal gods becoming ranked in hierarchies (some however being lost by amalgamation in the process) dominated by great national deities such as Marduk of Babylon, the Samarian Ishur, Ammon of Thebes, Jehu of Israel, and the Greek Zeus, and so on. Further east in the Indus valley there was likewise a wealth of gods and goddesses, though apparently not so much tribal or national in character as expressive of the basic forces of nature, above all fertility. The many deities of the Near East and of India expressed man's awareness of the divine at the dawn of documentary history, some four thousand years ago. It is perhaps worth stressing that the picture was by means a wholly pleasant one. The tribal and national gods were often marital and cruel, sometimes requiring human sacrifices. And although rather little is known about the very early, pre-Aryan Indian deities, it is certain that later Indian deities have vividly symbolized the cruel and destructive as well as the beneficent elements in the human heart.

These early developments in the two cradles of civilization, Mesopotamia and the Indus valley, can be described as the growth of natural religion, prior to any special instructions of divine revelation or illumination. Primitive spirit-worship expressed man's fears of unknown forces; his reverence for nature deities expressed his sense of dependence upon realities greater than himself; and his tribal gods expressed the unity and continuity of his group over against other groups. One can in fact discern all sorts of causal connections between the forms which early religion took and the material circumstances of man's life, indicating the large part played by the human element within the history of religion. For example, Trevor Long points out that life in ancient India (apart from the Punjab immediately prior to the Aryan invasion) was agricultural and organised in small village units; and suggests that "among agricultural peoples, aware of the fertile earth which brings forth from it the nourishment upon which the bodies of the human is based, they regard the fertility of the earth as the most important of all the powers and that nourishes its progeny upon its broad bosom, it is the mother-principle which seems important. Accordingly God the Mother, and a variety of more specialised female deities, have always held a prominent place in Indian religious thought and mythology. This contrasts with the charismatically male expression of deity in the Semitic religions, which had their origins among nomadic, pastoral, herd-keeping peoples in the Near East.

The divine was known to the desert-dwelling patriarchs of the Hebrew tradition as God the Father, and this conception has continued both in later Judaism and in Christianity, and was renewed out of the desert experience of Mohammed in the Islamic religion. Such regional variations in our human ways of conceiving the divine have persisted through time into the developed world faiths that we know today. The typical western conceptions of God is still predominantly in terms of the male principle of power and authority; and in the typical Indian conceptions of deity the female principle still plays a distinctly larger part than in the west.

Here then was the natural condition of man's religious life: religion without revelation. But sometime, and in an unknown manner, the great shot goes back, we have called the golden age of religious creativity. This consisted in a remarkable series of revelatory experiences occurring during the next five hundred or so years in different parts of the world, experiences which deepened and purified men's conception of the ultimate, and which religious faith can only attribute to the pressure of the divine Spirit upon the human spirit. First came the early Jewish prophets, Amos, Hosea and first Isaiah, declaring that they had heard the Word of the Lord claiming their obedience and demanding a new level of righteousness and justice in the life of Israel. Then in Persia the great prophet Zaroonzrast appeared; China produced Lao-tzu and then Confucius; in India the Upanishads were written, and Gotama the BudDha lived, and Mahavira, the founder of the Jain religion and, probably about the end of this period, the writing of the Bhagavad Gita, and Greece produced Pythagoras and then, ending this golden age, Socrates and Plato. Then after the gap of some three hundred years came Jesus of Nazareth and the emergence of Christianity; and after that another gap the prophet Muhammad and the rise of Islam.

The suggestion that we must consider is that there are all moments of divine revelation. But let us ask, in order to test this thought, whether we should not expect God to make his revelation in a single mighty act, rather than to produce a number of different, and therefore presumably partial, revelations at different times and places? I think that in seeing the answer to this question we receive an important clue to the place of the religions of the world in the divine purpose. For when we remember the facts of history and geography we realise that in the period we are speaking of, between two and three thousand years ago, it was not possible for God to reveal himself through any human mediation to all mankind. A world-wide revelation might be possible today, thanks to the inventions of printing, and even more of radio, TV and communications satellites. But in the technology of the ancient world this was not possible. Although on a time scale of centuries and millennia there has been a slow diffusion and interaction of cultures, we are unaccountably within the present time what has now the most striking fact for our present purpose is the fragmented character of the ancient world. Communications between the different groups of humanity was then so limited and slow that for all practical purposes men inhabited different worlds. For the most part people in Europe, in India, in Arabia, in Africa, China were unaware of the others' existence. And as the world became fragmented, so was its religious life. If there was to be a revelation of the divine reality to mankind it had to be a pleriform revelation, a series of revealing experiences early independently within the different streams of human history. And since religion and culture were one, the great creative moments of revelation and illumination have influenced the development of the various cultures, giving them the coherence and impetus to expand into larger units, thus creating the vast, many-sided historical entities which we call the world religions.

Each of these religious complexes has expanded until it touched the boundaries of another such complex spreading out from another centre. Thus each major occasion of divine revelation has slowly transformed the primitive and national religions within the sphere of its influence into what we now know as the world faiths. The early Daovism and Aryan polytheism of India were drawn through the religious experience and thought of the Brahmins into what the west calls...
Hinduism. The national and mystery cults of the Mediterranean world and then of southern Europe were drawn by influences stemming from the life and teaching of Christ into what has become Christianity. The early polytheism of the Arab peoples has been transformed under the influence of Mohammed and his message into Islam. Great areas of Southeast Asia, of China, Tibet and Japan were drawn into the spreading Buddhist movement. None of these expansions from different centres of revelation has of course been simple and unconnected, and a number of alternatives which proved less durable have perished or been absorbed in the process—e.g., Mithraism has disappeared altogether; and Zoroastranism, whilst it greatly influenced the development of the Jewish and Christian traditions, has to that extent been absorbed, only survives today on a small scale in Persia.

Seen in this historical context these movements of faith—the Judaeo-Christian, the Buddhist, the Hindu, the Moslem—are not essentially rival. They began at different times and in different places, and each expanded outwards into the surrounding world, and in this way their influence spread in all directions. But whilst the great revealed faiths were drawn up into one or other of the great revealed faiths. And once this global pattern had become established it has ever since remained fairly stable. It is true that the process of establishment involved conflict in the case of Islam’s entry into India and the virtual expulsion of Buddhism from India in the medieval period, and in the case of Islam’s advance into Europe and then in retreat at the end of the medieval period. But since the frontiers of the different world faiths became more or less fixed there has been little penetration of one faith into societies moulded by another. The most successful missionary efforts of the great faiths continue to this day to be “downwards” into the remaining world of relatively primitive religions rather than “sideways” into territories dominated by another world faith. For example, as between Christianity and Islam there has been little more than rather rare individual conversions; but both faiths have successful missions in Africa. Again, the Christian population of the Indian subcontinent, after more than two centuries of missionary effort, is only about 2.7 percent; but on the other hand the Christian missions in the South Pacific are fairly successful. Thus the general picture, so far as the great world religions are concerned, is that each has gone through an early period of geographical expansion, converting a region of the world from its more primitive religious state, and has thereafter continued its comparatively settled conditions within more or less stable boundaries.

Now it is of course possible to see this entire development from the primitive forms of religion up to and including the great world faiths as the history of man’s most persistent illusion, growing from crude fantasies into sophisticated metaphysical speculations. But from the standpoint of religious faith the only reasonable way in which this historical picture represents a movement of divine self-revelation to mankind. This hypothesis offers a general answer to the question of the relation between the different world religions and of the myths which they embody. It suggests to us that the same divine reality has always been self-revealingly active towards mankind, and that the differences of human response are related to different human circumstances. These circumstances—ethnic, geographical, climatic, economic, sociological, historical—have produced the different existentiations of human culture, and within each cultural region the response to the divine has taken on its own characteristic forms. In each case the post-primary response has been initiated by some spiritually outwelling individual or succession of individuals, developing in the course of time into one of the great religious-cultural phenomena which we call the world religions. Thus Islam embodies the main response of the Arabic peoples to the divine reality; Hinduism, the main (though not the only) response of the peoples of India; Buddhism, the main response of the peoples of South-east Asia and parts of southern Asia; Christianity, the main response of the European peoples, both within Europe itself and in their emigrations to the Americas and Australasia.

This it is, I think, intelligible historically why the revelation of the divine reality to man, and the disclosure of the divine will for human life, had to occur separately within the different streams of human life. We can see how these revelations took different forms related to the different mentalities of the peoples to whom they came and developed within these different cultures into the vast and many-sided historical phenomena of the world religions.

But let us now ask whether this is intelligible theologically. What about the conflicting truth claims of the different faiths? Is the divine nature personal or non-personal; does deity become incarnate in the world; are human beings born again and again on earth; is the Bible, or the Koran, or the Bhagavad Gita the Word of God? If what Christianity says in answer to these questions is true, must not what Hinduism says be to a large extent false? If what Buddhism says is true, must not what Islam says be largely false?

Let us begin with the recognition, which is made in all the main religious traditions, that the ultimate divine reality is infinite and as such transcends the grasp of the human mind. God, to use our Christian term, is infinite. He is not a thing, a part of the universe, existing alongside other things; nor is he a being falling under a certain kind. And therefore he cannot be defined or encompassed by human thought. We cannot draw boundaries around his nature and say that he is this and no more. If we could fully define God, describing his inner being and his outer limits, this would not be God. The God whom our minds can penetrate and whom our thoughts can circumvolve is merely a finite and partial image of God.

From this it follows that the different encounters with the transcendent within the different religious traditions may all be encounters with the one infinite reality; though with partially different and overlapping aspects of that reality. This is a very familiar thought in Indian religious literature. We read, for example, in the ancient Rig-Veda, dating back to perhaps as much as a thousand years before Christ.

They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna, and Agni; And also heavenly, beautiful Varatman; The real is one, though sages name it variously.

We might translate this thought into the terms of the faiths represented today in Britain:

They call it Jahweh, Allah, Krishna, Param Atma, And also holy, blessed Trinity; The real is one, though sages name it differently.

And in the Bhagavad Gita the Lord Krishna, the personal God of love, says, "However men approach me, even so do I accept them: for, on all sides, whatever path they may choose is mine." Again, there is the parable of the blind men and the elephant, said to have been told by the Buddha. An elephant is visited by a great many blind men who had never encountered such an animal before. One felt a trunk and reported that an elephant is a great living pillar. Another felt the trunk and reported that an elephant is a great snake. Another felt the task and reported that an elephant is like a sharp ploughshare. And so on. And then they all asked one another, claiming that his own account was the truth and therefore all the others false. In fact of course they were all true, and each referring only to one aspect of the reality and all expressed in very imperfect analogies.

Now the possibility, indeed the probability, that we have seriously to consider is that many different accounts of the divine reality may be true, though all expressed in imperfect human analogies, but that none is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." May it not be that the different concepts of God, as Jahweh, Allah, Krishna, Param Atma, Holy Trinity, and so on; and likewise the different concepts of the hidden structure of reality, as the eternal expression of Brahman or as an immense cosmic process culminating in Nirvana, are all images of the divine, each expressing some aspect or range of aspects and yet none by itself fully and exhaustively corresponding to the infinite nature of the ultimate reality?

Two important qualifications however to this hypothesis: First, the idea that we are considering is not that any and every conception of God or of the transcendent is valid, still less all equally valid; but that every conception of the divine which has
come out of a great revelatory religious experience and has been tested through a long tradition of worship, and has sustained human faith over centuries of time and in millions of lives, is likely to represent a genuine encounter with the divine reality. And secondly, the paraledge of the blind men and the elephant is of course only a parable and like most parables it is designed to make one point and must not be pressed as an analogy at other points. The suggestion is not that the different experiences with the divine which lie at the base of the great religious traditions are responses to different parts of the divine. They are rather encounters from different historical and cultural standpoints with the same infinite divine reality and as such they lead to different focused awareness of the reality. The indication of this is most evident in worship and prayer. What is said about God in the theological treatises of the different faiths is indeed often widely different. But it is in prayer that a belief in God conquers alive and does its main work. And when we turn from abstract theology to the living stuff of worship we meet again and again the overlap and confluence of faiths.

Here, for example, is a Muslim prayer at the feast of Ramadan:

Praise be to God, Lord of creation, Source of all livelihood, Who orders the morning. Lord of majesty and honour, of grace and beneficence. He who is so far that he may not be seen and so near that he witnesses the secret things. Blessed be he and for ever exalted.

And here is a Sikh creed used at the morning prayer:

There is but one God. He is all that is. He is the Creator of all things and He is all pervasive. He is without fear and without enmity. He is timeless, unborn and self-existant. He is the Enlightener who can be reached by grace of Himself alone. He was in the beginning; He was in all ages.

The True One is, was, O Nanak, and shall for ever be:
And here again is a verse from the Koran:
To God belong the praise, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, the Lord of all being. His is the dominion in the heavens and in the earths: he is the Almighty, the All-wise.

Turning now to the Hindu idea of the many incarnations of God, here is a verse from the Ramayana:

And finally another Hindu (Vaisnavaite) devotional hymn:

O save me, save me, Omkirtnt. Save me and set me free:
O let the love that fills my breast cling to thee lovingly.
Grant me to taste how sweet thou art;
Great me but this, I pray.
And never shall my love depart Or turn from thee away.
Then I thy name shall magnify And tell thy praise abroad,
For very love and gladness I shall dance before thy God.

Such prayers and hymns as these must express, surely, diverse encounters with the same divine reality. These encounters have taken place within different human cultures by people of different ways of thought and feeling, with different histories and different frameworks of philosophical thought, and have developed into different systems of theology, embodied in different religious structures and organisations. These resulting large-scale religious-cultural phenomena are what we call the religions of the world. But must there not lie behind them the same infinite divine reality, and may not our divisions into Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jew, and so on, and all that goes with them, accordingly represent secondary, human, historical developments?

There is a further problem, however, which now arises. I have been speaking so far of the ultimate reality in a variety of terms—the Father, Son and Spirit of Christianity, the Jehovah of Judaism, the Allah of Islam, and so on—but always thus far in theistic terms, as a personal God under one name or another. But what of the non-theistic religions? What of the non-theistic Hindutva according to which the ultimate reality, Brahman, is not Ḫe but It; and what about Buddhism, which in one form is agnostic concerning the existence of God even though in another form it has come to worship the Buddha himself? Can these non-theistic faiths be seen as encounters with the same divine reality that is encountered in theistic religions?

Speaking very tentatively, I think it is possible that the sense of the divine as non-personal may indeed reflect an aspect of the same infinite reality that is encountered as personal in theistic religious experience. The question can be pursued both as a matter of pure theology and in relation to religious experience. Theologically, the Hindu distinction between Niyungu Brahman and Saguna Brahman is important and should be adopted into western religious thought. Detaching the distinction, then from its Hindu context we may say that Niyungu God is the eternal self-existent divine reality, beyond the scope of all human categories, including personality; and Saguna God is God in relation to his creation and with the attributes which express this relationship, such as personality, omnipotence, goodness, love and omniscience. Thus the one ultimate reality is both Niyungu and non-personal, and Saguna and personal, in a duality which is in principle acceptable to human understanding. When we turn to men's religious awareness of God we are speaking of Saguna God, God in relation to man. And here the larger traditions of both east and west report a dual experience of the divine as personal and as non-personal. It will be a sufficient reminder of the strand of personal relationship with the divine in Hinduism to mention Inayau, the personal God who represents the Absolute as known and worshipped by finite persons. It should also be remembered that the charactrerisation of Brahman as satyamadbhavamadbhuvah, the absolute being, consciousness and bliss, is not far from the conception of infinitely transcendent personal life. Thus there is both the thought and the experience of the personal divine within Hinduism. But there is likewise the thought and the experience of God as other than personal within Christianity. Rudolph Otto describes this strand in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart. He says:

The divine, which on the one hand is conceived in symbols taken from the social sphere, as Lord, King, Father, judge and so on in relation to person—is on the other hand denoted in dynamic symbols as the power of life, as light and life, as spirit abiding
and flourishing, as truth, knowledge, essential justice and holiness, a glowing fire that penetrates and pervades. It is characterized as the principle of a renewed, supernatural Life, mediating and giving itself, breaking forth as the living man as his novo vita, as the content of his life and being. What is here insisted upon is not so much an inanimate God, as an "experienced" God, known as an inward principle of the power of new being and life. Eckhart knows this divinity then besides the personal God ...

Let me now try to draw the threads together and to project them into the future. I have been suggesting that Christianity is a way of salvation which, beginning as a movement of religious communities and forming the principal way of salvation in three continents. The other great faiths are likewise of salvation, providing the principal path to the divine reality for other large sections of humanity. I have also suggested that the idea that Jesus proclaimed himself as God incarnate, and as the sole point of saving contact between God and man, is without adequate historical foundation and represents a doctrine developed by the church. We should therefore not infer, from the Christian experience of redemption through Christ, that salvation cannot be experienced in any other way. The alternative possibility is that the ultimate divine reality—in our Christian terms, God—has always been pressing in upon the human spirit, but in ways which leave men free to open or close themselves to the divine presence. Human life has developed along characteristically different lines in the main areas of civilization, and these differences have naturally entered into the ways in which men have apprehended and responded to God. For the great religious figures through whose experience divine revelation has come have each been conditioned by a particular history and culture. One can hardly imagine Gotama the Buddha except in the setting of the India of his time, or Jesus the Christ except against the background of Old Testament Judaism, or Mohammed except in the setting of Arabia. And human history and culture have likewise shaped the development of the webs of religious creed, practices and organisations which we know as the great world faiths.

It is thus possible to consider the hypothesis that they are all, at their experiential roots, in contact with the same ultimate reality, but that their differing experiences of that reality, interacting over the centuries with the different thought-frames of different cultures, have led to increasing differentiation and contrasting elaborations—so that Hinduism, for example, is a very different phenomenon from Christianity, and very different ways of conceiving and experiencing the divine occur within them. However, now that the religious traditions are consciously interacting with each other in the "one world" of today, in mutual observation and dialogue, it is possible that their future developments may be on gradually converging courses. For during the next few centuries they will no doubt continue to change, and it may be that they will grow closer together, and even that one day such names as "Christianity," "Buddhism," "Islam," "Hinduism," will no longer describe the then current configurations of men's religious experience and belief.

I am not here thinking of the extinction of human religions in a universal wave of secularisation. This is of course a possible future; and indeed many think it the most likely future to come about. But if man is an indwelling religious animal he will always, even in his secular cultures, experience a sense of the transcendent by which he will be both troubled and uplifted. The future I am thinking of is accordingly one in which what we now call the different religions will constitute the past history of different emphases and variations within a global religious life. I do not mean that all men everywhere will be overtly religious, any more than they are today. I mean rather that the discoveries now taking place by men of different faiths of central common ground, hitherto largely concealed by the variety of cultural forms in which it was expressed, may eventually render obsolete the sense of belonging to rival ideological communities. Not that all religious men will think alike, or worship in the same way or experience the divine identically. On the contrary, so long as there is a rich variety of human cultures—and let us hope there will always be this—we should expect there to be correspondingly different forms of religious cult, and organisation, conceptualised in different theological doctrines. And as long as there is a wide spectrum of human psychological types—and again let us hope that there will always be this—we should expect there to be correspondingly different emphases between, for example, the sense of the divine as just and as merciful, between homo and hybris; or between worship as formal and communal and worship as free and personal. Thus we may expect the different world faiths to continue as religious phenomena, though phenomena which are increasingly influencing one another's development. The relation between them will then perhaps be somewhat like that now existing between the different denominations of Christianity in Europe or the United States. That is to say, there will in most countries be a dominant religious tradition, with other traditions present in varying strengths, but with considerable awareness on all hands of what they have in common; with some degree of commonality of membership through their institutional walls; with a large degree of practical cooperation; and even conceivably with some interchange of ministry.

Beyond this the ultimate unity of faiths will be an eschatological unity in which each is both fulfilled and transcended—fulfilled in so far as it is true, transcended in so far as it is less than the whole truth. And indeed even such fulfilling must be a transcending for the function of a religion is to bring us to a right relationship with the ultimate divine reality, to awareness of our true nature and our place in the Whole, in the presence of God. In the eternal life there is no longer any place for religions; the pilgrim has no need of a way after he has finally arrived. In St. John's vision of the heavenly city at the end of our Christian scriptures it is said that there is no temple—no Christian church or chapel, no Jewish synagogue, no Hindu temple, no Muslim mosque, no Sikh gurdwara. . . . For all these exist in time, as ways through time to eternity.

VI.2

A Defense of Religious Exclusivism

ALVIN PLANTINGA

Biographical remarks about Alvin Plantinga appear before selection 1.B.B. In this selection, Plantinga argues for three theses: (1) The religious exclusivist is not necessarily guilty of any moral wrongdoing; (2) the religious exclusivist is not necessarily guilty of any epistemic fault; and (3) some exclusivism in our beliefs is inevitable. If a person truly believes her creed, it may be wrong to expect her to treat all religions as equally good ways to God, or even as ways to God at all. Nevertheless, Plantinga agrees that the knowledge of other religions is something to be sought, and that this may sensibly lead us to assure our assurance in our own belief.

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When I was a graduate student at Yale, the philosophy department prided itself on diversity, and it was indeed diverse. There were idealists, pragmatists, phenomenologists, existentialists, Whiteheadians, humanists of philosophy, a token positivist, and what could only be described as observers of the pasting intellectual scene. In some ways, this was indeed something to take pride in; a student could behold and encounter real, live representatives of many of the main traditions in philosophy. However, it also had an unintended and unhappy side effect. If anyone raised a philosophical question inside, but particularly outside, of class, the typical response would be to catalog some of the various different answers the world has seen: There is the Aristotelian answer, the existentialist answer, the Cartesian answer, the Buddhist answer and so on. But the question, "What is the truth about this matter?" was often greeted with disdain as unduly naive. There are all these different answers, all endorsed by people of great intellectual power and great dedication to philosophy; for every argument for one of these positions, there is another against it; would it not be excessively naive, or perhaps arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, would it be merely arbitrary to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false?

A similar attitude is sometimes urged with respect to the impressive variety of religions the world displays. There are theistic religions but also at least some nontheistic religions (or perhaps nontheistic strands) among the enormous variety of religions going under the names Hinduism and Buddhism; among the theistic religions, there are strands of Hinduism and Buddhism and American Indian religion as well as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity; and all differ significantly from each other. Isn't it somehow arbitrary, or irrational, or unjustified, or unwarranted, or even oppressive and imperialistic to endorse one of these as opposed to all the others? According to Jean Bodin, "such is the variety created by all the religions and the division of the world into nations and states that I must not agree. It is in the neighborhood that the so-called problem of pluralism arises. Of course, many problems and concerns can come under this rubric; the specific problem I mean to discuss can be thought of as follows. To put it in an internal and personal way, I find myself with religious beliefs, and religious beliefs that I realize aren't shared by nearly everyone else. For example, I believe both

1. The world was created by God, an all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect being (one that holds beliefs; his aims, plans, and intentions; and can act to accomplish these aims).

2. Human beings require salvation, and God has provided it through Christ's sacrifice through the incarnation, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of his divine son.

Now there are many who do not believe these things. First, there are those who agree with me on (1) but not (2): They are non-Christian theistic religions. Second, there are those who don't accept either (1) or (2) but nonetheless do believe that there is something beyond the natural world, a something such that human well-being and salvation depend upon standing in a right relation to it. Third, in the West and since the Enlightenment, anyway, there are people—naturalists, we may call them—who don't believe any of these three things. And my problem is this: When I become really aware of these other ways of looking at the world, these other ways of responding religiously to the world, what must or should I do? What is the right sort of attitude to take? What sort of impact should this awareness have on the beliefs I hold and the strength with which I hold them? My question is this: How should I think about the great religious diversity the world in fact displays? Can I sensibly remain an adherent of just one of these religions, rejecting the others? And here I am thinking specifically of beliefs. Of course, there is a great deal more to any religion or religious practice than just belief, and I don't for a moment mean to deny it. But belief is a crucially important part of most religions, perhaps, is a more widespread sympathy to other religions, a tendency to see them as more valuable, as containing more by way of truth, and a new feeling of solidarity with their practitioners.

Now there are several possible reactions to awareness of religious diversity. One is to continue to believe—what you have all along believed; you learn about this diversity but continue to believe that is, to be true—such propositions as (1) and (2) above, consequently taking to be false any beliefs, religious or otherwise, that are incompatible with (1) and (2). Following current practice, I will call this exclusionism; the exclusivist holds that the texts or some of the texts of one religion—Christianity, let's say—are in fact true; he holds, naturally enough, that any propositions, including other religious beliefs, that are incompatible with the texts are false. And there is a fairly widespread apprehension that there is something seriously wrong with exclusionism. It is irrational, or unscientific, or unjustified, or intellectually arrogant, or elitist, or a manifestation of harmful pride, or even oppressive and imperalistic. The claim is that exclusionism as such is or involves a vice of some sort: It is this claim I want to examine. I propose to argue that exclusivism need not involve either epistemic or moral failure and that, furthermore, something like it is wholly unavoidable, given our human condition.

These objections, of course, are not to the truth of (1) or (2) or any other proposition someone might accept in this exclusionist way (although objections of that sort are also put forward); they are instead directed to the propriety or rightness of exclusionism. There are initially two different kinds of indictments of exclusionism: broadly moral, or ethical, indictments and other broadly intellectual, or epistemic, indictments. These overlap in interesting ways as we will see below. But initially, any way, we can take some of the complaints about exclusionism as intellectual criticisms: It is irrational or unjustified to think in an exclusionist way. The other large body of complaint is moral: There is something morally suspect about exclusionism—it is arbitrary, or intellectually arrogant, or imperalistic. As Joseph Runcie suggests, exclusionism is "neither
MORAL OBJECTIONS TO EXCLUSISM

I turn to the moral complaints: that the exclusivist is intellectually arrogant, or egotistical or self-servingly arbitrary, or dishonest, or imperialistic, or oppressive. But first, I provide three qualifications. All moral complaints, I suggest, will probably be guilty of some or all of these things to at least some degree, perhaps particularly the first two. The question, however, is whether they are guilty of these things just by virtue of being an exclusivist. Second, I will use the term exclusivist in such a way that you don't count as an exclusivist unless you are, rather fully aware of other faiths, have had their existence and their claims called to your attention with some force and perhaps fairly frequently, and have some degree reflected on the problem of pluralism, asking yourself such questions as whether it is or could be really true that the Lord has revealed Himself and His program to us Christians, say, in a way in which He hasn't revealed Himself to those of other faiths. Thus, my grandmother, for example, would not have counted as an exclusivist. She had, of course, heard of the heathen, as she called them, but the idea that perhaps Christians could learn from them, and learn from them with non-Christian guidance, had not so much as entered her head; and the fact that it hadn't entered her head, I take it, was not a matter of moral derecognition on her part. This same would go for a Buddhist or Hindu peasant. These people are not, I think, properly charged with arrogance or other moral flaws in believing as they do.

Third, suppose I am an exclusivist with respect to (1), for example, but nonculpably believe, like Aquinas, say, that I have a knock-down, drag-out argument, a demonstration or conclusive proof of the proposition that there is such a person of God, and suppose I think further (and nonculpably) that if those who don't believe (1) were to be apprised of this argument (and had the ability and training necessary to grasp it and were to think about the argument fairly and reflectively), they too would come to believe (1)? Then I could hardly be charged with these moral flaws. My condition would be like that of Gödel, let's say, upon having recognized that he had a proof for the incompleteness of arithmetic. True, many of his colleagues and peers didn't believe that arithmetic was incomplete, and some believed that it was complete; but presumably Gödel wasn't arbitrary or egotistical in believing that arithmetic is in fact incomplete. Further, therefore, he was guilty of an egotistical sin for himself? Well, it must be conceded immediately that if he believes (1) or (2), then he must also believe that those who believe something incompatible with them are mistaken and believe what is false. That's no more than simple logic. Furthermore, he must also believe that those who do not believe as he does—who believe neither (1) nor (2)—must be guiltless of the same or similar moral faults. As a result, the same would certainly apply if they had also not fully shown themselves to be in the same logical position as themselves. It is the case that every reasoner, after all, is in a state of ignorance about many things; and ignorance is a measure of the strength of our knowledge. It is therefore not true that I have a self-evident or self-apparent proof. The only reason the exclusivist can feel himself justified in his belief is that he is much more sure of its correctness. I believe this proof is, however, that there are some among whom you reject some of the things I believe; I do not believe that you are thereby oppressing me, even if you do not believe you have an argument that would convince me. It is conceivable that exclusivism might in some way continue to oppress, but it isn't in itself oppressive.

The more important moral charge is that there is a sort of self-serving arbitrariness, an arrogance or egotism, in accepting such propositions as (1) or (2) under condition C. Exclusivism is guilty of some serious moral fault or flaw. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "... except at the cost of insensibi1ity or delinquency, it is morally not possible actually to go out into the world and say to devout, intelligent, fellow human beings: '... we believe that we know God and we are right; you believe that you know God, and you are totally wrong.'"

Well then, we might say, how can we possibly argue for ourselves? We must not, of course, claim that the exclusivist, qua exclusivist is guilty of something like arrogance or egotism. But the exclusivist is guilty of taking something like a position to which he has not been led by one of the above charges, and that he cannot help himself. For I believe that there is a serious flaw in my belief, and I believe that this is, in fact, the case.
propositional attitudes with respect to a given proposition. In the simplest and most familiar case, I disagree with you if there is some proposition p such that I believe p and you believe ~p. But that's just the simplest case; there are also others. The one that is presently of interest is this: I believe p and you withhold it, fail to believe it. Call the first kind of disagreement "contradicting"; call the second "dismissing.

My claim is that if contradicting others (under the condition C spelled out above) is arrogant and egotistical, so is dismissing (under that same condition). Suppose you believe some proposition p but I don't; perhaps you believe that it is wrong to discriminate against people simply on the grounds of race, but I, recognizing that there are many people who disagree with you, do not believe this proposition. Can I really be behaving incorrectly, of course, but in the circumstances I think the right thing to do is to abstain from belief. Then am I not implicitly condemning your attitude, your believing the proposition, as somehow improper—perhaps, or unjustified, or in some other way less than optimal? I am implicitly saying that your attitude is the superior one; I think my course of action here is the right one and yours somehow wrong, inadequate, improper, in the circumstances at best second-rate. Of course, I realize that there is no question, here, of showing you that your attitude is wrong or improper or naive; so am I not guilty of intellectual arrogance? A sort of egotism, thinking I know better than you, arrogating to myself a privileged status with respect to you? The problem for the exclusivist was that she was obliged to think she possessed a truth missed by many others; the problem for the abstruse pluralist is that he is obliged to think that he possesses a virtue others don't or acts rightly where others don't. If, in condition C, one is arrogant by way of believing a proposition others don't, isn't one equally, under those reflective conditions, arrogant by way of withholding a proposition others don't?

Perhaps you will respond by saying that the abstruse pluralist goes into trouble, falls into arrogance, by way of implicitly saying or believing that his way of proceeding is better or wiser than other ways pursued by other people; and perhaps he can escape by abstaining from that view as well. Can't he escape the problem by reaffirming by insisting that racial bigotry is wrong and also refraining from holding the view that it is, under the conditions that oblige, to withhold that proposition that is to assert and believe it? Well, yes, he can; then he has no reason for his abstention; he doesn't believe that abstention is better or more appropriate; he simply does abstain. Does this get him off the egotistical hook? Perhaps. But then he can, in constancy, also hold that there is something wrong with not abstaining, with coming right out and believing that bigotry is wrong; he loses his objections to the exclusivist. Accordingly, this way out is not available for the abstruse pluralist who accedes the exclusivity of arrogance and egotism.

Indeed, I think we can show that the abstruse pluralist who brings charges of intellectual arrogance against exclusivism is hoist with his own petard, holds a position in a certain way is self-referentially inconsistent in the circumstances. For he believes

(3) If S knows that others don't believe p and that he is in condition C with respect to p, then S should not believe p.

This or something like it is the ground of the charges he brings against the exclusivist. But the abstruse pluralist realizes that many do not accept (3); and I suppose he also realizes that it is unlikely that he can find arguments for (3) that will convince them; hence, he knows that condition obtains. Given his acceptance of (3), therefore, the right course for him is to abstain from believing (3). Under the conditions that do in fact obtain—namely, his knowledge that others don't accept it and that condition C obtains—he can't properly accept it.

I am therefore inclined to think that one can't, in the circumstances, properly hold (3) or any other proposition that will do the job. One can't find here some principle on the basis of which to hold that the exclusivist is doing the wrong thing, suffers from some moral fault—that is, one can't find such a principle that doesn't, as we might put it, fall victim to itself.

So the abstruse pluralist is hoist with his own petard; but even apart from this dialectical argument (which in any event some will think unlikely), aren't the charges uncompelling and implausible? I must concede that there are a variety of ways in which I can be and have been intellectually arrogant and egotistic; I have certainly fallen into this vice in the past and no doubt am not free of it now. But am I really arrogant and egotistic—just by virtue of believing what I know others don't believe, where I can't show them that I am right? Suppose I think the matter over, consider the objections as carefully as I can, realize that I am finite and furthermore a sinner, certainly no better than those with whom I disagree; but suppose it still seems clear to me that the proposition in question is true. Can I really be behaving incorrectly in continuing to believe it? I am dead sure that it is wrong to try to advance my career by telling lies about my colleagues. I realize there are those who disagree; I also realize that in all likelihood there is no way I can find to show them that they are wrong; nonetheless I think they are wrong. If I think, this after careful reflection, if I consider the claims of those who disagree as sympathetically as I can, if I try my level best to ascertain the truth here, and it still seems to me sleazy, wrong, and desppicable to lie about my colleagues, to advance my career, could I really be doing what is immoral by continuing to believe as before? I can't see how. If, after careful reflection and thought, you find yourself convinced that the right propositional attitude to take to (1) and (2) in the face of the facts of religious pluralism is abstention from belief, how could you properly be taxed with egotism, either for so believing or for so abstaining? Even if you knew others did not agree with you?

**EPISTEMIC OBJECTIONS TO EXCLUSIVISM**

I turn now to epistemic objections to exclusivism. There are many different specifically epistemic virtues and a corresponding plethora of epistemic vices. The core with which the exclusivist is most frequently charged, however, are imminence and lack of justification in holding his exclusivist beliefs. The claim is that an exclusivist holds unjustified beliefs and/or irrational beliefs. Better, he is unjustified or irrational in holding these beliefs. I will therefore consider those two claims, and I will argue that the exclusivism views need not be either unjustified or irrational. I will then turn to the question whether his beliefs could have warrant—what property, whatever precisely it is, that distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief whether they could have enough warrant for knowledge.

**Justification**

The pluralist objector sometimes claims that to hold exclusivist views, in condition C, is unjustified—epistemically unjustified. Is this true? And what does he mean when he makes this claim? As even a brief glance at the contemporary epistemological literature will show, justification is a protean and multifarious notion. There are, I think, substantially two possibilities as to what he means. The central core of the notion, its beating heart, the paradigmatic center to which most of the myriad contemporary variations are related by way of analogy and family resemblance, is the notion of being within one's intellectual rights, having violated no intellectual or cognitive duties or obligations in the formation and sustenance of the belief in question. This is the pithiness, going back to Rene Descartes and especially John Locke, that underlies the multidimensional battery of contemporary inscriptions. There is no space to argue that the pluralist objector to exclusivism claims that the latter is unjustified, it is some notion lining this neighborhood that he has in mind. (Here we should note the very close connection between the moral objections to exclusivism and the objection that exclusivism is epistemically unjustified.)

The duties involved, naturally enough, would be specifically epistemic duties: perhaps a duty to proportion degree of belief to (propositional) evidence from what is certain, that is, self-evident or
incorrigible, as with Locke, or perhaps to try one's best to get into and stay in the right relation to the truth, as with Chisholm, the leading contemporary champion of the justificationist tradition with respect to knowledge. But at present there is widespread—and as I see it, correct—agreement that there is no duty of the Lockean kind. Perhaps there is one of the Chisholmian kind; but isn't the exclusivist answer conforming to that duty if, after the sort of careful, indeed prayerful consideration I mentioned in the response to the moral objection, it still seems to him strongly that (1), say, is true and he accordingly still believes it? It is therefore very hard to see that the exclusivist is necessarily unjustified in this way.

The second possibility for understanding the charge—the charge that exclusivism is epistemically unjustifiable—is to accept the oft-repeated claim that exclusivism is intellectually arbitrary. Perhaps the idea is that there is an intellectual duty to treat similar cases similarly; the exclusivist violates this duty by arbitrarily choosing to believe (for the moment going along with the fiction that we choose beliefs of this sort (1) and (2) in the face of the plurality of conflicting religious beliefs the world presents. But suppose there is such a duty. Clearly you do not violate it if you nonculpably think the beliefs in question are not on a par. And as an exclusivist, I do think (nonculpably, I hope) that they are not on a par. I think (1) and (2) are true and those incompatible with either of them false.

The rejoinder, of course, will be that it is not alethic parity (these having the same truth value) that is at issue: it is epistemic parity that counts. What kind of epistemic parity? What would be relevant, here, I should think, would be internal or internalist epistemic parity with respect to what is internally available to the believer. What is internally available to the believer includes, for example, detectable relationships between the belief in question and other beliefs you hold, so internal parity would include parity of propositional evidence. What is internally available to the believer also includes the phenomenology that goes with the belief in question; the smooth phenomenology but also the nonsmooth phenomenology involved, for example, in the belief's just having the feeling of being right. But once more, then, (1) and (2) are not on an internal par, for the exclusivist, with beliefs that are incompatible with them. (1) and (2), after all, seem to me to be true; they have for me the phenomenology that accompanies that seeming. The same cannot be said for propositional incompatibility with them. If, furthermore, John Calvin is right in thinking that there is such a thing as the Sensus Divinitatis and the Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit, then perhaps (1) and (2) are produced in me by those belief-producing processes and have for me the phenomenology that goes with them; the same is not true for propositions incompatible with them.

But then the next rejoinder: Isn't it probably true that those who reject (1) and (2) in favor of other beliefs have propositional evidence for their beliefs that is as strong with me as for my beliefs? And isn't it also probably true that the same or similar phenomenology accompanies their beliefs as accompanies mine? So that those beliefs really are epistemically and internally on a par with (1) and (2), and the exclusivist is still treating like cases differently? I don't think so; I think there really are arguments available for (1), at least, that are not available for its competitors. And as for similarities in phenomenology, this is not easy to say: it is not easy to look into the breast of another; the secrets of the human heart are hard to fathom; it is hard indeed to discover if there is anything even with respect to someone you know really well. I am prepared, however, to stipulate/both sorts of parity. Let's agree for purposes of argument that those beliefs are on an epistemic par in the sense that those of a different religious tradition have the same sort of internally available markers—evidence, phenomenology and the like—for their beliefs as I have for (1) and (2). What follows?

Return to the case of moral belief. King David took Bathsheba, made her pregnant, and then, after the failure of various stratagems to get her husband Uriah to think the baby was his, arranged for him to be killed. The prophet Nathan came to David and told him a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many flocks and herds; the poor man had only a single ewe lamb, which grew up with his children, "at his table, drunk from his cup, lay in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him." The rich man had unexpected guests. Rather than slaughter one of his own sheep, he took the poor man's single ewe lamb, slaughtered it, and served it to his guests. David exploded in anger: "The man who did this deserves to die!" Then, in one of the most riveting passages in all the Bible, Nathan turns to David and declares, "You are that man!" And then David sees what he has done.

My interest here is in David's reaction to the story. I agree with David: Such injustice is utterly and despicably wrong; there are really no words for it. I believe that such an action is wrong, and I believe that the proposition that it isn't wrong—either because really nothing is wrong, or because even if some things are wrong, it isn't— is false. As a result, I believe that a lot I believe more strongly. I recognize, however, that there are those who disagree with me; and once more, I doubt that I could find an argument to show them that I am right and they are wrong. Further, for all I know, their conflicting beliefs have for them the same internally available epistemic markers, the same phenomenology, as mine have for me. Am I then being arbitrariness in treating similar cases differently in continuing to hold, as I do, that in fact that kind of behavior is despicably wrong I don't think so. And I am not in thinking racial bigotry despicable, even though I know that there are others who disagree, and even if they think they have the same internal markers for their beliefs as I have for mine! I don't think so. I believe in serious activism, the view that no objects have properties in worlds in which they do not exist, not even 'nonexistence'. Others do not believe this, and perhaps the internal markers of their dissenting views have for them the same quality as my views have for me. Am I being arbitrary in continuing to think as I do? I can't see how.

And the reason here is this: in each of these cases, the believer in question doesn't really think the beliefs 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. But she must still think that there is an important epistemic difference, she thinks that somehow the other person has made a mistake, or has a blind spot, or hasn't been wholly attentive, or hasn't received some grace she has, or is in some way epistemically less fortunate. And, of course, the pluralist critic is in no better case. He thinks the thing to do there is to take what belief is to be withheld judgment; he knows that there are others who don't think so, and for all he knows that belief has internal parity with his; if he continues in that belief, therefore, he will be in the same condition as the exclusivist; and if he doesn't continue in that belief, he no longer has an objection to the exclusivist.

But couldn't I be wrong? Of course I could! Just I don't avoid that by believing that all oport (philosophical or moral) belief; I can go wrong that way as well as any other, treating all beliefs, or all philosophical notions, or all moral views as on a par. Again, there is no safe haven here, no way to avoid risk. In particular, you won't reach a safe haven by trying to take the same attitude toward all the historically available patterns of belief and withholding; for in so doing, you adopt a particular pattern of belief and withholding, one incompatible with some adopted by others. You pay your money and you take your choice; realising that you, like anyone else, can be desperately wrong. But what else can you do? You don't really have an alternative. And how can you do better than believe and withhold according to what, after serious and responsible consideration, seems to you to be the right pattern of belief and withholding?

Irrationality

I therefore can't see how it can be sensibly maintained that the exclusivist is unjustified in his exclusive views, but perhaps, as is sometimes claimed, he or his view is irrational. Irrationality, however, is many things to many people; so there is a prior question: What is it to be irrational? More exactly, precisely what quality is it that the objector is attributing to the exclusivist (in condition Q) when the former says the latter's exclusive beliefs are irrational? Since the charge is never developed at all
fully, it isn’t easy to say. So suppose we simply consider the main varieties of irrationality (or, if you prefer, the main senses of “irrational”) and ask whether any of them attach to the exclusivist just by virtue of being an exclusivist. I believe there are substantially five varieties of rationality, fifth distinct but analogically connected senses of the term rational; fortunately not all of them require detailed consideration.

Aristotelian Rationality This is the sense in which man is a rational animal, one that has ratio, one that can look before and after, can hold beliefs, make inferences and is capable of knowledge. This is perhaps the basic sense, the one of which the others are analogical extensions. It is also, presumably, the present context at any rate. I hope the objector does not mean to hold that an exclusivist will by that token no longer be a rational animal.

The Deliverances of Reason To be rational in the Aristotelian sense is to possess reason: the power of thinking, believing, forming, reasoning, knowing. Aristotlean rationality is that sense. But there is an important more specific sense lurking in the neighborhood; this is the sense that goes with reason taken more narrowly, as the source of a person’s knowledge and belief. An important use of minimal analogically connected with the first has to do with reason taken in this more narrow way. It is by reason thus construed that we know self-evident beliefs—beliefs so obvious that you can’t so much as grasp them without seeing that they couldn’t be false. These will be among the deliverances of reason. Of course there are other beliefs—38 X 99 = 1482, for example—that are not self-evident but are a consequence of self-evident beliefs by way of arguments that are self-evidently valid; these too are among the deliverances of reason. So say that the deliverances of reason is the set of those propositions that are self-evident for us human beings, closed under self-evident consequence. This yields another sense of rationality: a belief is rational if it is among the deliverances of reason and intuitional if it is contrary to the deliverances of reason. (A belief can therefore be neither rational nor irrational in this sense.) This sense of rational is an analogical extension of the fundamental sense, but it is itself extended by analogy to still other senses. Thus, we can broaden the category of reason to include memory, experience, induction, probability—and whatever else goes into science; this is the sense of the term when reason is sometimes contrasted with faith. And we can also soften the requirement for self-evidence, recognizing both that self-evidence or a priori warrant is a matter of degree and that there are many propositions that have a priori warrant, but are not such that no one who understands them can fail to believe them. Is the exclusivist irrational in this sense? I think not; at any rate, the question whether he is what’s the question you ask. He is irrational in these senses only if there is a good argument from the deliverances of reason (taken broadly) to the denial of what he believes. I do not believe that there are any such arguments. Presumably, the same goes for the pluralist objector: at any rate, his objection is not that (1) and (2) are demonstrably false or even that there are good arguments against them from the deliverances of reason; his objection is instead that there is something wrong or subpar with believing them in context C. This sense too, then, is irrelevant to our present concerns.

The Deontological Sense This sense of the term has to do with intellectual equivalent, or as he is often called, obligation: a person’s belief is irrational in this sense if in forming or holding it she violates such a duty. This is the sense of irrational in which according to many contemporary evidentialist objections to theistic belief, those who believe in God without propositional evidence are irrational. Irrationality in this sense is a matter of failing to conform to intellectual or epistemic duties; the analogical connection with the first, Aristotelian sense is that these duties are thought to be among the deliverances of reason (and hence among the deliverances of the power by virtue of which human beings are rational in the Aristotelian sense). But we have already considered whether the exclusivist is flouting duties: we need say no more about the matter here. As we say, the exclusivist is not necessarily irrational in this sense either.

Zweckrationalität A common and very important notion of rationality is means-ends rationality—what our continental cousins, following Max Weber, sometimes call Zweckrationalität, the sort of rationality displayed by your actions if they are well calculated to achieve your goals. (Again, the analogical connection with the first sense is clear: The calculation in question requires the power by virtue of which we are rational in Aristotle’s sense.) Clearly, there is a whole constellation of notions lurking in the nearby bodies. What would it far contribute to your goals? What you take it would contribute? Perhaps you would say that if your self-evidence, acute, or knew enough, or weren’t distracted by lust, greed, pride, ambition, and the like? What you would take it would contribute to your goals if you weren’t thus distracted and were also to reflect sufficiently? and so on. This notion of rationality has assumed considerable importance in the last 50 years or so. (Among its lairs, for example, is the complete domination of the development of the discipline of economics.) Rationality thus construed is a matter of knowing how to get what you want; it is the cunning of reason. Is the exclusivist properly charged with irrationality in this sense? Does his believing in the way he does interfere with his attaining some of his goals, or is it a markedly inferior way of attaining those goals?

An initial caveat: it isn’t clear that this notion of rationality applies to beliefs at all. It isn’t clear that in believing something, I am acting to achieve some goal. If believing is an action at all, it is very far from being the paradigmatic kind of action taken to achieve some end; we don’t have a choice as to whether to have beliefs, and we don’t have a lot of a choice with respect to which beliefs we have. But suppose we set this caveat aside and stipulate for purposes of argument that we have sufficient control over our beliefs for them to qualify as actions. Would the exclusivist’s belief then be irrational in this sense? Well, that depends upon what his goals are; if among his goals for religious belief is, for example, not believing anything not believed by someone else, then indeed it would be. But, of course, he needn’t have that goal. If I do have an end or goal in holding such beliefs as (1) and (2), it would presumably be that of believing the truth on this exceedingly important matter or perhaps that of trying to get in touch as adequately as possible with God, or more broadly with the deepest reality. And if (1) and (2) are, believing them will be a way of doing exactly that. It is only if they are not true, then, that believing them could sensibly be thought to be irrational in this means-ends sense. Because the objector does not propose to take as a premise the proposition that (1) and (2) are false—he holds only that they are not involved in defining them—this also is presumably not what he means.

Rationality as Sanity and Proper Function One in the grip of pathological confusion, or flight of ideas, or certain kinds of amnesia, or the manic phase of manic-depressive psychosis will often be said to be irrational; the episode may pass, after which he has regained rationality. Here rationality means absence of dysfunction, disorder, impairment, or pathology with respect to rational faculty. So this variety of rationality is again analogically related to Aristotelian rationality; a person is rational in this sense when no malfunction obstructs her use of the faculty by virtue of the possession of which she is rational in the Aristotelian sense. Rationality as sanity does not require possession of particularly exalted rational faculties; it requires only normality (in the nonscientific or, health, or proper function. This use of the term, naturally enough, is prominent in psychiatric discussions—Oliver Sacks’s male patient who mis-took his wife for a hat, for example, was thus irrational. This fifth and final sense of rationality is itself a family of analogically related senses. The fundamental sense here is that of sanity and proper function, but there are other closely related senses. Thus, we may say that a belief (in certain circumstances) is irrational, not because no sane person would hold it, but because no person who was sane
and had also undergone a certain course of education would hold it or because no person who was wise and furthermore was as intelligent as we and our friends would hold it; alternatively and more briefly, the idea is not merely that no one who was functioning properly in those circumstances would hold it, but rather no one who was functioning optimally, as well or nearly as well as human beings, ordi- narily do (leaving aside the occasional great genius) would hold it. And this sense of rationality leads directly to the notion of warrant; I turn now to that notion; in treating it, we will also treat antecedents—and this fifth kind of irrationality—

Warrant

So we come to the third version of the epistemic objections: that at any rate the exclusivist doesn't have warrant, or anyway such warrant (enough warrant for knowledge) for his exclusivist views. Many pluralists—for example, Hick, Runzo, and Cantwell Smith—deny in declaring that, at any rate, the exclusivist certainly doesn't know that his exclusivist views are true. But is this really true? I will argue briefly that it is not. At any rate, from the perspective of each of the major contemporary accounts of knowledge, it may very well be that the exclusivist knows (1) or (2) or both. First, consider the two main internalist accounts of knowledge: the justified true belief accounts and the coherentist accounts. As I have already argued, it seems clear that a thesis, a believer in (1) could certainly be justifi- ed (in the primary sense) in believing as she does: she could be finding no intellectual or cognitive data or obligations. But then on the most straightforward justified true belief account of knowledge, she can also know that it is true—if, that is, it can be. More exactly, what must be possible is that both the exclusivist is justified in believing (1) and/or (2) and they be true. Presumably, the pluralist does not mean to dispute this possibility.

For concreteness, consider the account of justification given by the classical foundationalist Chris- holm. On this view, a belief has warrant for me to the extent that accepting it is apt for the fulfillment of my epistemic duty, which (roughly speaking) is that of trying to get and remain in the right relation to the truth. But if after the most careful thorough, open, and prayerful consideration, it still seems to me—perhaps more strongly than ever—that (1) and (2) are true, then clearly accepting them has great agnosic force for the fulfillment of that duty. A similarly brief argument can be given with respect to coherenceism, the view that what constitutes warrant is coherence with some body of belief. We must distinguish two varieties of coherentism. On the one hand, it might be held that what is required is coherence with some or all of the other beliefs I actually hold; on the other, that what is required is a coherence with my own specific structure (Keith Lehrer’s term): the set of beliefs that remains when all the false ones are deleted or replaced by their contradictions. But surely a coherent set of beliefs could include both (1) and (2) together with the beliefs involved in being in condition C, what would be required, perhaps, would be that the set of beliefs contain some explanation of why it is that others do not believe as I do. And if (1) and (2) are true, then surely (and a fortiori) there can be coherent verificistic social structures that include them. Hence, neither of these versions of coherentism rule out the possibility that the exclusivist in condition C could know (1) or (2).

And now consider the main externalist accounts. The most popular externalist account at present would be one or another version of reliabilism. And there is an oft-repeated pluralistic argu- ment that seems to be designed to appeal to reliabilists. The conclusion of this argu- ment is not always clear, but here is its premise, in Hick’s words:

For it is evident that in some ninety-nine percent of cases the religion which an individual professes to, and to which he or she adheres depends upon the accidents of birth. Someone born to Buddhist parents in Thailand is very likely to be a Buddhist, someone born to Muslim parents in Saudi Arabia is a Muslim, someone born to Christian parents in Mexico to be a Christian, and so on.

As a matter of sociological fact, this may be right. Furthermore, it can certainly produce a sense of in- dictmental vertigo. But what is one to do with this fact, if it is, and what follows from it? Does it follow, for example, that I ought not to accept the religious views that I have been brought up to accept, or the ones that I find myself inclined to accept, or the ones that seem to me to be true? Or that the belief-producing processes that have produced those beliefs in me are unreliable? Surely not. Furthermore, self-referential problems once more burn; this argument is another philo- sophical tar baby.

For suppose that it can be conceived that I have been born of Muslim parents in Morocco rather than Christian parents in Michigan, my effects would have been quite different. (On one hand, I prob- ably wouldn’t believe that I was born in Michigan.) The same goes for the pluralist. Pluralism isn’t and hasn’t been widely popular in the world at large; if the pluralist had been born in Madagascar, or medi- cal France, he probably wouldn’t have been a plu- rally. Does it follow that he shouldn’t be a pluralist or that his pluralist beliefs are produced in him by an unreliable belief-producing process? I doubt it. Suppose I hold the following, or something similar:

(1) If X’s religious or philosophical beliefs are such that if X had been born elsewhere and was brought up under different circumstances, she would have had them, then those beliefs are produced by unreliable belief-producing mechanism and hence have no warrant.

Once more I will be with my own petard. For in all probability, someone born in Mexico to Christian parents wouldn’t believe (4) itself. No matter what philosophical and religious beliefs we hold and uphold (so it seems), there are places and times such that if we have been born there and then, we would not persist with the pattern of holding and upholding of religious and philo- sophical beliefs we do display. As I said, this can indeed be verisimilar; but what can we make of it? What can we infer from it about what has warrant and how we should conduct our intellectual lives?

That’s not easy to say. Can we infer anything at all about what has warrant or how we should conduct our intellectual lives? Not obviously.

To return to reliabilism: then, for simplicity, let’s take the version of reliabilism according to which S knows p if the belief that p is produced in S by a reliable belief-producing mechanism or process. I don’t have the space here to go into this matter in sufficient detail, but it seems pretty clear that if (1) and (2) are true, then it could be that the beliefs that (1) and (2) be produced in me by a reli- able belief-producing process. For either we are thinking of any belief-producing processes, like our memory or John’s power of a priori reasoning (tokens as opposed to types), or else we are thinking of types of belief-producing processes (type reliabilism). The problem with the latter is that there are an enormous number of different types of belief-producing processes for any given belief, some of which are reliable and some of which are not; the problem (and a horrifying problem it is) is to say which of these is the type the reliability of which determines whether the belief in question has warrant. So the first (token reliabilism) is a bet- ter way of stating reliabilism. But then clearly enough if (1) or (2) are true, they could be pro- duced in me by a reliable belief-producing process, Calvini’s Sense Dominant, for example, could be working in the exclusive in such a way as to reli- ably produce the belief that (1) is true; Calvini’s Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit could do the same for (2). If (1) and (2) are true, therefore, then from a reliabilist perspective there is no reason whatever to think that the exclusivist might not know that they are true.

There is another brand of externalism which seems to me to be closer to the truth than reliabili- sm; call it (fancily mine) “proper functionality.” This view can be stated to a first approximation as follows: S knows that (1) the belief that p is pro- duced in S by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly (as working as they ought to work, suffering from no malfunctions), (2) the cognitive environment in which p is produced is appropriate for those faculties, (3) the purpose of the module of
the epistemic faculties producing the belief in ques-
tion is to produce true beliefs (alternatively, the
module of the design plan governing the produc-
tion of p aimed at the production of true beliefs),
and the objective probability of a belief's being
given that it is produced under those condi-
tions, is high. All of this needs explanation,
and for present purposes, perhaps, we can col-
lapse the account into the first condition. But then
clearly it could be, if (1) and (2) are true, that they
are produced in me by cognitive faculties function-
ing properly under condition C. For suppose (1)
is true. Then it is surely possible that God has cre-
ated us human beings with something like Calvini's
Sens Diviniain, a belief-producing process that in a
wide variety of circumstances functions properly
to produce (1) or some very similar belief. Further-
more it is also possible that in response to the
human condition of sin and misery, God has pro-
vided for us human beings a means of salvation,
which he has revealed in the Bible. Still further,
perhaps he has arranged for us to come to believe
what he means to teach us by way of the opera-
tion of something like the Internal Testimony of
the Holy Spirit of which Calvin speaks. So in this
view, too, if (1) and (2) are true, it is certainly pos-
sible that the exclusive know that they are. We
can be sure that the exclusive's views are truthtul
in this sense, then, only if they are true; but the
pluralist objector does not mean to claim that they
are true; this version of the objection, therefore,
also fails. The exclusive isn't necessarily irrational,
and indeed might know that (1) and (2) are true,
if indeed they are true.

All this seems right. But don't the realities of
religious pluralism count for anything at all Is there
nothing at all to the claims of the pluralists? Could
that really be right? Of course not. For many or
many more exclusivists, I think, an awareness of the
erosion variety of human religious response functions
as a defeater for such beliefs as (1) and (2)—an under-
cutting defeater, as opposed to a rebutting defeater. It
calls into question, to some degree or other, the
sources of one's belief in (1) or (2). It won't or
needn't do so by way of an argument; and indeed

there isn't a very powerful argument from the
proposition that many apparently devout people
around the world dissent from (1) and (2) to the
conclusion that (1) and (2) are false. Despite, it
works more directly; it directly reduces the level of
confidence or degree of belief in the proposition's
question. From a Christian perspective, this situa-
tion of religious pluralism and our awareness of it
itself a manifestation of our miserable human con-
dition; and it may deprive us of some of the con-
fort and peace the Lord has promised his followers.
It can also deprive the exclusive of the knowledge
that (1) and (2) are true, if they are true and he
believes that they are. Because degree of warrant
depends in part on degree of belief, it is possible,
though not necessary, that knowledge of the
truth of religious—pluralism should reduce an exclud-
vist's degree of belief and hence of warrant for
(1) and (2) in such a way as to deprive him of
knowledge of (1) and (2). He might be such that if
he hadn't known the facts of pluralism, then
he would have known (1) and (2), but now that
he does know those facts, he doesn't know (1)
and (2); in this way, he may come to know less
knowing more.

Things could go this way with the exclusion.
On the other hand, they won't go this way. Con-
consider once more the moral parallel. Perhaps
you have always believed it deeply wrong for a
counselor to use his position of trust to seduce a
client. Perhaps you discover that others disagree;
they think it more like a minor peccadillo, like running
a red light when there's no traffic; and you realize
that possibly these people have the same internal
markers for their belief that you have for yours. You
think the matter over more fully, imaginat-
ively reconstruct and reexamine such situations,
become more aware of just what is involved in such a
situation (the breach of trust, the breaking of implied
promises, the injustice and unfairness, the
moral irony of a situation in which someone comes to a
counselor seeking help but receives only hurt), and
come to believe even more fully that such an
action is wrong—and indeed to have more warrant
for such belief. But something similar can happen in
the case of religious beliefs. A fresh or heightened
awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could
bring about a reappraisal of one's religious life, a
reawakening, a new or renewed and deeper
grasp and apprehension of (1) and (2). From Calv-
in's perspective, it could serve as an occasion for a
more and more powerful working of the belief-
producing processes by which we come to appre-
hend (1) and (2). In that way, knowledge of the
facts of pluralism could initially serve as a defeater,
but in the long run have precisely the opposite
effect.

NOTES

1. Calviniis Hypugrapheヽi de Rerum Narrationi erotic Anon.,
dublished by 1593 but first published in 1587.
English translation by Marien Kone (Princeton,
2. Joseph Runzer: "Today, the impressive piety and
evident rationality of the belief systems of other
religious traditions, unmistakably conflicts Christians
with a crisis and a potential revolution." "God,
Commitment, and Other Fails: Pluralism vs.
Relativism," Faith and Philosophy 5, no. 4 (October
3. Gary Gutting: "Applying this considerations to
religious belief, we seem led to the conclusion that
because believers have many epistemic reasons
who do not share their belief in God... they have no
right to maintain their belief without a justification.
If they do so, they are guilty of epistemological
epistemology." "Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism
(Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press,
1982), p. 90 (foot see the following pages for an
important qualification).
4. Wilfred Cantwell Smith: "Here my submission is
that this front the traditional fundamental position of
the Church has in fact mitigated against its
traditional moral position, and has in fact
encouraged Christianity to approach other men
unhesitatingly. Christ has taught us humility, but we
have approached them with arrogance... This
charge of arrogance is a serious one." Religion
5. Rauschen: "Ethically, Religious Exclusivism has
the morally reguative result of making those who
have privileged knowledge, or who are intellectually

alvin plantinga a defense of religious exclusivism

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This does not mean, let me again emphasize in closing, that the consideration of Q1—the consideration of the conditions under which a religious hypothesis can be rationally affirmed—is unimportant or even less important than the consideration of Q2. It is crucial that we recognize who must actually shoulder the "burden of proof" in this context. And we need to thank Reformed exclusives for helping us think more clearly about this matter. But I fear that a preoccupation with Q1 can keep us from seeing the importance of Q2—the consideration based upon which we choose the hypothesis to be defended—and the comparative assessment of hypotheses to which such consideration leads us. And we need to think pluralities such as Hick for drawing our attention to this fact.

VI.4

Buddhism, Christianity, and the Prospects for World Religion

DALAI LAMA

Dai Lama, originally Tenzin Gyatso (1935-), the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet, was born in China. In 1957 he was designated the fourteenth Dalai Lama, but his right to rule was delayed until 1950. An ardent advocate of communal relations, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. In this volume he responds to questions from José Ignacio Cabreza on the possibility of a religious integration of Buddhism and Christianity. The Dalai Lama (referred to as "His Holiness") doesn't think such an integration is possible, for there are unique features in these religions that cannot be shared without loss of identity. But he argues that all major religions have much in common. They aim at the same goal of permanent happiness, and all promote moral integrity. These common concerns should enable people of all faiths to find common ground in building a better world of peace and justice.

Question: Do you see any possibility of an integration of Christianity and Buddhism in the West? An overall religion for Western society?

His Holiness: It depends upon what you mean by integration. If you mean by this the possibility of the integration of Buddhism and Christianity within a society, where they co-exist side by side, then I would answer affirmatively. If, however, your view of integration envisioned all of society following some form of composite religion which is neither pure Buddhism nor pure Christianity, then I would have to consider this form of integration implausible.

It is, of course, quite possible for a country to be predominantly Christian, and yet that some of the people of that country choose to follow

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Buddhism, I think it is quite possible that a person who is basically a Christian, who accepts the idea of a God, who believes in God, could at the same time incorporate certain Buddhist ideas and techniques into his/her practice. The teachings of love, compassion, and kindness are present in Christianity and also in Buddhism. Particularly in the Buddhist vehicle there are many techniques which focus on developing compassion, kindness, etc. These are things which can be practiced at the same time by Christians and by Buddhists. While remaining committed to Christianity it is quite conceivable that a person may choose to undergo training in meditation, concentration, and one-pointedness of mind, that, while remaining a Christian, one may choose to practice Buddhist ideas. This is another possible and very viable kind of integration.

Question: Is there any conflict between the Buddhist teachings and the idea of a creator God who exists independently from us?

His Holiness: If we view the world’s religions from the widest possible viewpoint, and examine their ultimate goal, we find that all of the major world religions, whether Christianity or Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, are directed to the achievement of permanent human happiness. They are all directed toward that goal. All religions emphasize the fact that the true follower must be honest and gentle, in other words, that a truly religious person must always strive to be a better human being. To this end, the different world’s religions teach different doctrines which will help transform the person. In this regard, all religions are the same, there is no conflict, their own faith. This is something we must emphasize. We must consider the question of religious diversity from this viewpoint. And when we do, we find no conflict.

Now from the philosophical point of view, the theory that God is the creator, is altogether and permanent, is in contradiction to the Buddhist teachings. From this point of view there is disagreement. For Buddhism, the universe has no first cause and hence no creator, nor can there be such a thing as a permanent, propositionally being. So, of course, doctrinally, there is conflict. The views are opposite to one another. But if we consider the purpose of these different philosophies, then we see that they are the same. This is my belief.

Different kinds of food have different tastes. One may be very hot, one may be very sour, and one may be very sweet. They are opposite tastes, they conflict. But whether a dish is concocted to taste sweet, sour or hot, it is nonetheless made in this way so as to taste good. Some people prefer very spicy hot foods with a lot of chili peppers. Many Indians and Tibetans have a liking for such dishes. Others are very fond of bland tasting foods. It is a wonderful thing to have variety. It is an expression of individuality; it is a personal thing.

Likewise, the variety of the different world religious philosophies is a very useful and beautiful thing. For certain people, the idea of God as creator and of everything depending on his will is beneficial and soothing, and so for that person such a doctrine is worthwhile. For someone else, the idea that there is no creator, that ultimately, one is one’s own creator—in that everything depends upon oneself—is uniquely appropriate. For certain people, it may be a more effective method of spiritual growth, it may be more beneficial. For such people, this idea is better and for the other type of person, the other idea is more suitable. You see, there is no conflict, no problem. This is my belief.

Now conflicting doctrines are something which is not unknown even within Buddhist itself. The Mahayana and Cittamatra, two Buddhist philosophical schools, accept the theory of emptiness. The Vaibhavika and Sautrantika, two others, accept another theory, the theory of selfexistences, which, succinctly speaking, is not the same as the doctrine of emptiness as posited by the two higher schools. So there exists this difference, some schools accepting the emptiness of phenomena and others not. There also exists a difference as regards the way in which the two upper schools explain the doctrine of emptiness. For the Cittamatra, emptiness is set forth in terms of the non-luxury of subject and object. The Mahayana, however, repudiate the notion that emptiness is tantamount to ideality, the claim that everything is of the nature of mind. So you see, even within Buddhism, the Mahayana and Cittamatra schools are in conflict. The Mahayana are again divided into Prasangika and Sautrantika, and between these two sub-schools there is also conflict. The latter accept that things exist by virtue of an inherent characteristic, while the former do not.

So you see, conflict in the philosophical field is nothing to be surprised at. It exists within Buddhism itself.

Question: I would like to know the role that consciousness plays in the process of reincarnation.

His Holiness: In general, there are different levels of consciousness. The more refined or gross levels of consciousness are fixedly dependent upon the physical or material sphere. Since one’s own physical aggregate (the body) changes from birth to birth, so too do these gross levels of consciousness. The more subtle the level of consciousness, however, the more independent of the physical sphere and hence the more likely it will remain from one life to the next. But in general, whether more subtle or gross, all levels of consciousness are of the same nature.

Question: It is generally said that teachers of other religions, no matter how great, cannot attain liberation without turning to the Buddhist path. Now suppose there is a great teacher, say he is a Sivaji, and suppose he upholds very strict discipline and is totally dedicated to other people all of the time, always giving of himself. Is this person, simply because he follows Sivaji, incapable of attaining liberation, and if so, what can be done to help him?

His Holiness: During the Buddha’s own time, there were many non-Buddhist teachers whom the Buddha could not help, for whom he could do nothing. So he just let them be.

The Buddha Sakyamuni was an extraordinary being, he was the manifestation (nimidhakalyana), the physical appearance, of an already enlightened being. While some people recognized him as a Buddha, others regarded him as a black magician with strange and evil powers. So, you see, even the Buddha Sakyamuni himself was not accepted as an enlightened being by all of his contemporaries. Different human beings have different mental predispositions, and there are cases when even the Buddha himself could not do much to overcome these—there was a limit.

Now today, the followers of Siva have their own religious practices and they reap some benefit from engaging in their own forms of worship. Though this, their life will gradually change. Now, my position on this question is that Sivaji’s followers should practice according to their own beliefs and traditions. Christians must genuinely and sincerely follow what they believe, and so forth. That is sufficient.

Question: But they will not attain liberation!

His Holiness: We Buddhists ourselves will not be liberated at once. In our own case, it will take time. Gradually we will be able to reach the omniscience, but the majority of Buddhists will not achieve this within their own lifetimes. So there’s no hurry. If Buddhists themselves have to wait, perhaps many lifetimes, for their goal, why should we expect that it be different for non-Buddhists? So, you see, nothing much can be done.

Suppose, for example, you try to convert someone from another religion to the Buddhist religion, and you argue with them trying to convince them of the inferiority of their position. And suppose you do not succeed, suppose they do not become Buddhist. On the one hand, you have failed in your task, and on the other hand, you may have weakened the trust they have in their own religion, so that they may come to doubt their own faith. What have you accomplished by all this? It is of no use. When we come into contact with the followers of different religions, we should not argue. Instead, we should advise them to follow the beliefs that they have accepted—sincerely and as truthfully as possible. For if they do so, they will no doubt reap certain benefits. Of this there is no doubt. Even in the immediate future
they will be able to achieve more happiness and more perfection. Do you agree? This is the way I usually act in such matters, it is my belief. When I meet the followers of different religions, I always praise them, for in it enough, it is sufficient, that they are following the moral teachings that are emphasized in every religion. It is enough, as I mentioned earlier, that they are trying to become better human beings. This in itself is very good and worthy of praise.

Question: But is it only the Buddha who can be the ultimate source of refuge?

His Holiness: Here, you see, it is necessary to examine what is meant by liberation or salvation. Liberation in which "a mind that understands the sphere of reality amasses all different elements in the sphere of reality" is a state that only Buddhas can accomplish. This kind of satori or svarupa is only explained in the Buddhist scriptures, and is achieved only through Buddhist practice. According to certain religious traditions, however, salvation is a place, a beautiful paradise, like a peaceful valley. To attain such a state, this, to achieve such a state of satori, does not require the practice of emptiness, the understanding of reality. In Buddhism itself, we believe that there is a continuous improvement of merit one can obtain rebirth in heavenly paradies like Tushita.

Question: Could you please give us some brief advice which we can take with us into our daily lives?

His Holiness: I don't know, I don't really have that much to say—I'll simply say this. We are all human beings, and from this point of view we are the same. We all want happiness, and we do not want suffering. If we consider this point, we will find that there are no differences between people of different faiths, races, color or cultures. We all have this common wish for happiness.

Actually, we Buddhists are supposed to save all sentient beings, but practically speaking, this may be too broad a notion for most people. In any case, we must at least think in terms of helping all human beings. This is very important. Even if we cannot think in terms of sentient beings inhabiting different worlds, we should nonetheless think in terms of the human beings on our own planet. To do this is to take a practical approach to the problems. It is necessary to help others, not only in saggy prayers, but in our daily lives. If we find we cannot help another, the least we can do is to do not harm them. We must not cheat others or lie to them. We must be honest human beings, sincere human beings.

On a very practical level, such attitudes are things which we need. Whether one is a believer, a religious person, or not, is another matter. Simply as an inhabitant of the world, as a member of the human family, we need this kind of attitude. It is through such an attitude that real and lasting world peace and harmony can be achieved. Through harmony, friendship, and respecting one another, we can solve many problems. Through such means, it is possible to overcome problems in the right way, without difficulties.

This is what I believe, and wherever I go, whether it be to a communist country like the Soviet Union or Mongolia, or to a capitalist and democratic country like the United States and the countries of Western Europe, I express this same message. This is my advice, my suggestion. It is what I feel. I myself practice this as much as I can. If you find you agree with me, and you find some value in what I have said, then it has been worthwhile.

You see, sometimes religious persons, people who are genuinely engaged in the practice of religion, withdraw from the sphere of human activity. In my opinion, this is not good. It is not right. But I should clarify this. In certain cases, when a person genuinely wishes to engage in intensive meditation, for example when someone wishes to attain samatha, then it is alright to seek isolation for certain limited periods of time. But such cases are for the exception, and the vast majority of us must work out a genuine religious practice within the context of human society.

In Buddhism, both learning and practice are extremely important and they must go hand in hand. Without knowledge, just to rely on faith, faith and more faith is good but not sufficient. So the intellectual part must definitely be present. At the same time, strictly intellectual development without faith and practice, is also of no use. It is necessary to combine knowledge born from study with sincere practice in our daily lives. These two must go together.

Question: The Christian notion of God is that He is omnipotent, all-compassionate, all-powerful, and the creator. The Buddhist notion of Buddha is the same, except that He is not the Creator. To what extent does the Buddha exist apart from our minds, as the Christians believe their God to be?

His Holiness: There are two ways of interpreting this question. The general question is whether the Buddha is a separate thing from mind. Now in one sense, this could be asking whether or not the Buddha is a phenomenon imputed or labeled by mind, and of course all phenomena in this sense must be said to be labeled by name and conceptual thought. The Buddha is not a separate phenomenon from mind because our minds impute or label Him by means of words and conceptual thought. In another sense, the question could be asking about the relationship of buddhahood to our own minds, and in this sense we must say that buddhahood, or the state of a buddha, is the object to be attained by us. Buddhahood is the resultant object of refuge. Our minds are related to buddhahood (they are not separate from buddhahood) in the sense that this is something that we will gradually attain by the systematic purification of our minds. Hence, by purifying our minds step by step, we will eventually attain the state of buddhahood. And that buddha which we will eventually become is of the same continuum as ourselves. But that buddha which we will become is different, for example, from Sakyamuni Buddha. They are two distinct persons. We cannot attain Sakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment because that is His own individual thing.

If instead the question is referring to whether or not our minds are separate from the state of buddhahood, and if we take buddhahood to refer to the essential purity of the mind, then of course this is something which we possess even now. Even today, our minds have the nature of essential purity. This is something called the "buddha nature." The very nature of the mind, the mere quality of knowledge and clarity without being affected by conceptual thoughts, that too we may call "buddha nature." To be exact, it is the innately clear light mind which is called the "buddha nature."

Question: When creating merit, one must acknowledge that Christians create merit as well as Buddhists, so that the whole source of merit cannot reside solely in the object, i.e., Buddha or God, to which one is making offerings. This leads me to think that the source of merit is in our own minds. Could you please comment on this?

His Holiness: The main thing is motivation, but probably there is some difference in regard to the object to which one makes offering and so forth. The pure motivation must, however, be based on reasoning, that it is, it must be verified by valid cognition; it must be unmistakable. But no doubt that the main point is the motivation. For example, when we generate great compassion we take as our object sentient beings. But it is not due to anything on the side of sentient beings, on the part of sentient beings, that great compassion is special. It is not due to any benefit of benefit that results from this. This is not, however, due to anything from the side of sentient beings, from the object of the great compassion. It is simply by thinking of the kindness of sentient beings and so forth that we generate great compassion and that benefit comes, but not due to the blessing of (or anything inherent in) sentient beings themselves. So strictly from the point of view of motivation, from one's own motivation, a great amount of benefit can result, isn't it so?

Likewise, when we take the Buddha as our object, if our motivation is that of great faith, of
very strong faith, and we make offerings and so forth, then again, great benefit can result from this. Although a suitable object is necessary, that is, an object which, for example, has limitless good qualities, nonetheless the principal thing is our motivation, i.e., the strong faith. Still there is probably some difference as regards the kind of object to which one is making these offerings.

From one point of view, were sentient beings not to exist, then we could not take them as our object, and great compassion could not arise. So from this perspective, the object is, once again, very important. If suffering sentient beings did not exist, compassion could never arise. So from that point of view, the object, sentient beings, is a special one.

**Question:** To what do you attribute the growing fascination in the West, especially in America, with Eastern religions? I include many, many cults and practices which are becoming extremely strong in America. To what do you attribute, in this particular age, the reasons for this fascination, and would you encourage people who are dissatisfied with their own Western way of life, having been brought up in the Mosaic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam), dissatisfied with their lack of spiritual refreshment, would you encourage them to search further in their own religions or to look into Buddhism as an alternative?

**His Holiness:** That’s a trick question. Of course, from the Buddhist viewpoint, we are all human beings and we all have every right to investigate either one’s own religion or another religion. This is our right. I think that on the whole a comparative study of different religious traditions is useful.

I generally believe that every major religion has the potential for giving any human being a good message; there is no question that this is so. But we must always keep in mind that different individuals have different mental predispositions. This means that for some individuals one religious system or philosophy will be more suitable than another. The only way one can come to a proper conclusion is as to what is most suitable for one’s own mental predispositions. This means that for some individuals one religious system or philosophy will be more suitable than another. The only way one can come to a proper conclusion is what is most suitable for one’s mental predispositions. This means that for some individuals one religious system or philosophy will be more suitable than another. The only way one can come to a proper conclusion is as to what is most suitable for one’s own mental predispositions.

**Question:** That I cannot do. Certainly, for some people the Buddhist religion or ideology is most suitable, most effective. But that does not mean it is suitable for all.