

WORLD RELIGIONS: SESSION TEN
PLURALISM: "ALL RELIGIONS LEAD TO SALVATION"

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DEFINING PLURALISM

Multiple definitions of the word "Pluralism":

_____ **Pluralism:** The fact that there are lots of different religions in our country.

_____ **Pluralism:**

a) as an indicator of _____. A society that truly protects freedom of religion will be one in which many religions flourish and truth can be pursued in the "free marketplace of ideas".

and/or

b) as _____. Religious diversity is a good thing and should be encouraged. Choosing "your own truth" (without anyone telling you it is not truth) is the highest priority. Negative view of proselytizing, because it spoils diversity.

_____ **Pluralism:** "All religions are the same".

_____ **or** _____ **Pluralism:** All faiths, to a certain extent, are independently valid. This form of pluralism rejects as arrogant and unacceptable any religious claim to exclusive truth. All religions are not necessarily "the same", but they are all equally valid paths to "salvation".

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT ALL RELIGIONS ARE BASICALLY DIFFERENT PATHS TO SALVATION?

I. The Problem for Pluralists

A. All religions make truth claims. All religions understand these truth claims to be universal in nature.

But what about the tolerant and pluralistic claims of eastern religions?

1. Hinduism

2. Buddhism

B. Many of these truth claims conflict with one another in absolute ways at fundamental levels.

C. To validate all religions the pluralist must find a way to reconcile conflicting truth claims.

2. The Pluralist Solutions

A. Some pluralists think no one religion has the corner on truth (elephant illustration). The problem: _____

B. Some pluralists rely on the inability of language to accurately express truth. The problem: _____

C. Some pluralists put "religious truth" in a different category than other kinds of truth.

Religious truth is _____ truth not _____ truth. The

problem: _____

D. Some pluralists say ultimate religious truth is “ineffable”, and all religions are just different kinds of _____ human responses to this ineffable reality. (John Hick)

- a. No religion is rationally superior to another. None can claim “special revelation”.
- b. *The Real* = the ultimate reality in the universe; it is ineffable.
- c. The religions have different ways of conceiving of, experiencing, and responding to *The Real*, based on conditioning and culture. No one knows or experiences *The Real* as it is in itself, but only a lower manifestation (such as Jesus, Allah, Buddha, etc.)
- d. “Salvation or liberation” is defined as transformation from self-centeredness to “The Real”-centeredness.
- e. All religions that move people toward “the Real”-centeredness are “true” religions. “True” does not mean *factually* or *literally* true, but *mythologically* true.
- f. Only “naive fundamentalists” in the religious traditions insist that their religious beliefs are literally true.

3. The Problem with Philosophical Pluralism

- A. Pluralism doesn’t *unite* all religions in one coherent scheme as it claims. It replaces them.
- B. Pluralism makes the exclusive, dogmatic, literal truth claim that all the other religions’ exclusive, dogmatic claims are not literally true.
- C. Pluralism claims rational superiority over any traditional religion’s self-understanding.
- D. Pluralism provides no moral grounding, since ultimate reality is unknowable or unexpressible.
- E. Pluralism insists that religious views are based on culture and conditioning, but claims special immunity for its own views.

IS IT “INTOLERANT” TO CLAIM THAT JESUS IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE?

“If you say, ‘There are many paths to the truth,’ or, ‘There is no truth,’ or ‘I believe in the truth of diversity,’ you’re still asserting, ‘I’m right, everybody else is wrong.’ If you insist that there are many paths to the truth, you assert that I am wrong to believe there is only one way.” It’s hard to have good conversation unless everyone admits to holding beliefs that are incompatible with others’ beliefs. The pose of complete open-mindedness may be held sincerely, but it’s often used as a stick to beat down the narrow-minded people we disagree with.”

“It is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim that one way to think about all religions is right.” (Timothy Keller)