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Copernican Upheaval in Philosophy of Religion or Updating of the Old Heritage? John Hick and Classical Deism

To begin with, I'd like to refer to a certain call for papers in 2017 from one very well conducted journal. It ran as: "Open Theology" invites submissions for the topical issue "Global Philosophies as a New Horizon for Christian Theology and Philosophy of Religion," edited by Russell Re Manning and Sarah Flavel (Bath Spa University, UK), prepared in collaboration with Bath Spa Colloquium for Global Philosophy and Religion. *DESCRIPTION*

Ever since John Hick famously called for a new "Copernican Revolution" Christian theologians and philosophers of religion have paid close attention to the demands of a religious situation characterised by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices. From religious pluralism to recent work on transreligious theology the turn beyond religious provincialism has had numerous constructive consequences for Christian theology. A similar narrative holds for the discipline of the philosophy of religion, which is increasingly characterized by global or pluralist approaches to religion. In addition, attention is increasingly being paid to an emerging situation of philosophical diversity. One instance is the development of the movement of "analytic theology," which has sought, in its own terms, to emancipate Christian theology from its alleged captivity to so-called "continental" styles of philosophy. More importantly, perhaps, is the increasing recognition of the diversity of philosophical traditions beyond the Western traditions. The growth of global, or intercultural, philosophy challenges the endemic Eurocentrism in philosophy raising awareness of non-Western forms of thinking as philosophies.¹

I believe, however, that the authors of this propagandist agenda slightly "overplayed," inasmuch as many today's Christian theologians and philosophers of religion are so intimidated by accusations of exclusivism, eurocentrism and xenophobia (these terms are usually used as synonyms these days) and feel

¹ See: <http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/opth>

themselves as representatives of a religion which is only one and nothing more (some of them stress it outright) among all others, in addition guilty to them and already being regarded as only a tolerable guest in its homelands. So such an admonition sounds superfluous. It is quite clear why it does not appeal to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and others. Had it addressed them, one could have suspected that the authors of the cited agenda mean that the latter also have not attained “the Copernican world” as yet, still linger in “the Ptolemean world” and not have overcome “provincialism” as yet, and what could be more tactless than such suspicions in the epoch when only one religion may be regarded “Ptolemean” and “provincial”? But what is more topical for this article is that the Hickean call for pluralism and “Copernican upheaval”² are regarded as synonyms, and the cited invitation of the journal only confirms what has been considered axiomatic for at least already three decades.

It is true that John Hick has moved the very term *pluralism* into philosophy of religion and, to say more, his establishing of the normative triad of religious attitudes to the religious other (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism) together with his Ultimate Reality as the ontological foundation of religious pluralism have “created jobs” occupied with writing innumerable publications on the topic. This is to such an extent that even some most honored and traditional topics of analytic philosophy of religion, like arguments for the existence of God, correlations between Divine power and human freedom, the problem of evil etc. have had to make room to active “newcomers.” These “newcomers” have already become traditional topics with regular pros and contras, and the next breed of terms was creeping into this field of discussion. It is not too easy to discern where we have authors of new labels and where observers of the literature in question who ascribe them such creativity. The most activity was about inventing some new pluralisms to compete with the standard Hickeanist model for securing new “isms.” Joseph Runzo’s “relativism;” “core” or “perennial” pluralism ascribed to Huston Smith (Dale Tuggy calls it a naïve pluralism, and Iranian philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr along with Martin Lings, an English convert to Islam, are included by him

² It seems that for the first time Hick referred to analogies between Copernican discovery in astronomy and his own “revolution” as early as in his book *God and the Universe of Faiths* where he called for “a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realization that it is God who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him” [Hick 1973, p. 131]. His former critic and later opponent Gavin D’Costa correctly identified it as a provisional shift from *Christocentrism* to *theocentrism* [Hawitt 1991, p. 4]. But this was not the final point of destination. Still more “progressive” critics accused him of too selective attitude to the world religions. How would Buddhists, Jains, Taoists and Confucians locate themselves in his “Copernican world” if they don’t regard the source of the world as a personal being and its creator? And Hick changed his mind (because *Paris vaut bien une messe*) very swiftly. One could find out some approaches to it already in a small collection of papers *Truth and Dialogue* edited by Hick. He uses here “the logic of the Absolute” by Shri Aurobindo and hoped that in the future such labels as “Christianity,” “Islam,” “Hinduism,” “Buddhism” will not designate something more than external forms of religion [Hick 1974, pp. 153-155, 151]. But the final statement of this shift from “*theocentrism*” to “*realocentrism*” was endorsed later, in his opus magnum [Hick 1989, pp. 233-251]. In this way “the second Copernican revolution” has been accomplished.

in this category of pluralists);³ Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen's "non-reductive pluralism," "deep," "differential," and "complementary" pluralism of the well-known process-philosopher David Griffin; Mark Haim's "true religious pluralism," such are only a few word inventions in the field.

Nevertheless, I don't see which of these and other "improvements" of the classical triad lead us to real enlargement of it. Runzo's "relativism," one of the first birds of this breed, is not something else than pluralism. Indeed, to say that Christianity contains the absolute truth, but only for Christians, Buddhism the same for Buddhists etc.,⁴ is not anything more than to say that one has to regard his (her) native tradition as *summum bonum* for him(her) self and other members of a community (just because it is native for them) without universalizing its veracity for all humans, and that is just what Hick insisted on.⁵ As to Heim's "true religious pluralism," it is in truth only a blending of tasteless pluralism and wily inclusivism, for to say that the Buddhist *nibbāna* is a lower store than Christian kingdom of heaven but a store of the same "ladder"⁶ is to misunderstand and make others misunderstand the core difference between anthropocentric and theocentric soteriologies. Other inventions seem more rhetorical than substantively bearing upon the matter. So the classical triad, introduced by Hick, stands good on its feet.

But it is a well-known fact that only rarest schemes emerge out of nothing, as Athena from Zeus' head, without the work of direct or indirect predecessors. In some cases Hick was perfectly acquainted with them, in others not too proficient to learn about their achievements, but in every case skillful to present himself as a discoverer of something absolutely new. Only Kant with his epistemological Copernican upheaval was promoted by him as his direct methodological forefather. Nevertheless, Hick had also very "near ancestors," one of them the well-known Buddhologist Alan Watts who in a book published thirty years before Hick's pioneering writings stated, having assured the reader that "Church religion is spiritually dead," that one had to seek how it should be substituted by "an interior, spiritual and mystical understanding of the old, traditional body of wisdom ... a conscious experience of being at one with *Reality itself*" [italics mine].⁷

³ See: [Tuggy 2014].

⁴ His concept of religious relativism as opposed not only to pluralism but also to naturalism, exclusivism, inclusivism and "subjectivism" is expressed in his book [Runzo 1986] and in a series of articles wherefrom [Runzo 1988] is to be marked.

⁵ What is really intriguing with Runzo's invention is that his relativism, regarded by him as the last word in interreligious theology, is enrooted in the deepest crevices of paganism. The father of contemporary religious studies, Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) was meditating in his day how can it be that in various Vedic hymns various leading divinities (such as Indra, Varuna, Vishnu, Brihaspati, Vāc etc.) may be called "the greatest ones," especially as the greatest one should by definition be only one. And he decided to present this model of religious consciousness as something middle between monotheism and polytheism to label it as henotheism. Therefore, I suggest that Runzo unconsciously reproduced such an archaic localization of divine majesty wherein each decent god is most important on his native territory.

⁶ Heim 1995, p. 163.

⁷ Watts 1947, p. 29, 15.

Similarity of Hick's (terminologically weird) Reality-an-sich to the latter term is too striking to be only a parallel. Another Hick's predecessor was undoubtedly Paul Tillich (1886–1965). Certainly, his principle of conditional exclusiveness, which determines the attitude of Christianity to the world religions as a dialectical union of rejection and acceptance, presupposes a critical reflexion of Christianity, but with Christocentrism behind it was far from theology of pluralism. But his Absolute, called Being-itself and Ground of being, which can be expressed in symbols alone (with Christ as only one symbol among others) was surely another predecessor of Hickean Reality-an-sich as manifested in the main symbols (personae and impersonae) of the world religions.⁸

These predecessors were well known to Hick and used by him. Whether he heard anything about religious studies of one of the greatest Indologists of the 20th century Paul Hacker (1913–1979) is not clear, but it is absolutely certain that both Hick and his followers (including Orientalists, like Harold Coward) ignored his discoveries. Meanwhile, it was Hacker who invented the very term *inclusivism* (crucial for the triad of religious attitudes), and implemented it not for the documents of Vatican II, but to a much earlier epoch and in quite another region. He convincingly demonstrated that what had been acknowledged as famous Indian open-mindedness and tolerance (set against intolerance of the monotheistic religions) in reality is a very thorough missionary practice. According to this practice a convert is being indoctrinated with the idea that what he regarded as his authentic native tradition turns to be only a very limited and damaged version of that veridical and primordial tradition wherein he is being converted.⁹ He used the *Tevijja-sutta* from the Pāli canon as an example, where the Buddha very skillfully prepares the mind of the young Brāhmana Vasettha to realize that the Three Vedas are in their true essence nothing else as the Buddha's own teaching. Hacker referred willingly also to the *Bhagavadgītā* where Krishna declares that he supplies believers in other gods (without any profit for himself) with their very faith in order that they could get its fruits, and that whomever anyone sacrifices, he sacrifices in reality to him.¹⁰ He also referred in detail to Tulsidas' medieval poem the *Rāmacaritamānasa* intended to lighten conversion for the Shaivites to Vishnuism by means of the presentation even of the most honorable Śhiva as a devout worshipper of Rāma, i.e, Vishnu. Hacker also mentioned writings of such leaders of Neo-Hinduism of the 20th century as Svami Vivekananda and Sarvepali Radhakrishnan who tried to persuade the Western audience that while all religions were salvific Vedānta

⁸ For details of Tillich's theology of symbols see early but very enlightening paper [McDonald 1964].

⁹ According to Hacker, "inclusivism means that someone interprets a central belief of a foreign religious or world-outlook group as identical to these or those central beliefs of that group to which he belongs himself. What is specific for inclusivism foremost is an articulated or unarticulated statement that what belongs to an outsider is proclaimed to be among an insider's belongings, is somehow subdued or lower than the latter" [Hacker 1983, p. 12].

¹⁰ Bhagavadgita VII. 21-22; IX. 23.

contained their truth in the most veridical shape. I myself specified some of his elaboration of the subject as exemplified in the Pāli Buddhist texts.¹¹

But, turning to religious pluralism, as it were discovered in the 20th century, there was also an earlier epoch in the Western history of ideas when many features of the whole pluralistic theology can be discovered (without use of the term under discussion) and “the Ptolemean universe of faith” was already revised. And, to say more, this is of primary importance, I believe, for understanding the very essence of pluralism.

There are different approaches to Deism, one of them being its tacit identification as religious philosophy of most prominent persons usually known as *deists*, and another which selects some essential features that can be regarded as criteria whereby one can judge whether this or that thinker can be ranked in such a community. The first way may seem less speculative, the second more “hazardous,” but in reality the case is just the opposite. Many notorious figures were called deists by their opponents, without further justifications, and this tradition survives up today¹². Among the most notable of the second type was the scheme offered by German theologian Christoph Gestrich who selected the following attributes of deistic religiosity: (1) denial of claims on absoluteness of any religion, confession or denomination; (2) insistence on religious tolerance and freedom of worship; (3) emphasis on equivalency of piety in Christianity, Judaism and Islam; (4) elaboration of the principles of comparison and even combining of these and other religions; (5) acknowledgement of the existence of some cryptic community of reasonable religious worshippers in all the ages and countries; (6) admission of the existence of the overall Original Religion of the mankind, natural and monotheistic, later distorted by myths, prejudices and greed of priests; (7) admission that the content of this Original Religion is quite sufficient to meet religious requirements also of contemporary human beings; (8) rejection of supernatural Revelation or its acknowledgement only as an educative recourse

¹¹ I mentioned, among other things, that in a number of the Pāli texts we come across the treatment of Brāhmanic divinities as true followers, enthusiastic admirers and even zealous missionaries of the Buddha's dharma. E.g., Indra, the king of the Vedic gods, decided at the very beginning of the *Sakkapanha-sutta* to place himself under the patronage of the semigod Pañcasikha because the possessor of frightful (for the Brāhmanists) *vajra* (Sanskrit *vajra*, viz. lightning, the main attribute of Indra in the Brāhmanic texts beginning with the *Rigveda*) did not dare to appeal to the Buddha directly with for solvation of his problems, since it was not very safe to disturb the Tathāgatas absorbed in meditation [Dīgha-Nikāya, 1903. Vol II, p. 265]. But, according to the *Janavasabha-sutta*, the Buddha himself instructed thirty three Vedic gods in how to achieve superpowers, three ways to bliss and seven stages of meditation, while Sanañkumāra embarks on missionary work on behalf of the Buddha on the earth. When he learned, for example, that Joṭipala, a son of a royal Brāhmana-purohita, had attained the reputation of one who saw Brahmā face to face, he instructed him in how to attain unity with Brahmā “in reality” and to become a “veridical Brāhmana.” As a result, Joṭipala abandons a brilliant worldly career, becomes a Buddhist monk and diligently practices four great Buddhist virtues, viz. charity, compassion, co-rejoicing and equanimity, and teaches his followers to do the same [Dīgha-Nikāya 1903, Vol. II, pp. 221-222, 211-218, 239-252]. For more detail see: [Shokhin 2005, pp. 148-150].

¹² The best examples are such nicknames as “Hobbes-deist” and “Locke-deist.” They are not more realistic than “Fichte-atheist” during the famous Atheismstreit in Jena (1798–1799).

for those who cannot cerebrate on their own; (9) insistence on the necessity of such God-knowledge quite independent from any dogmatic traditions and religious institutions; (10) claim that the veridical content of all religions coincides with their ethical component; (11) elaboration of such Biblical exegesis whereby the meanings of Biblical texts can be “cleaned” by means of historical, scientific or moralistic criticism; (12) conviction that God is a subject of philosophy or, more exactly, metaphysics; (13) denial of the traditional Triadology and Christology and sympathy for unitarianism and Arianism.¹³

- The aforesaid is a classical case of enumerative definitions, and, perhaps, that is the best way to catch the essence of such a complicated reality. It is very comprehensive and at the same time covers quite typical features of what everyone has in mind when he (she) speaks of a phenomenon designated in use as Deism. Indeed, some correctections may be offered, i.e. point (10) is only a specification of (4), and (12) is the same as (9). Gestrich’s point (3) also needs an enlargement: many deists acknowledged an “equivalence of piety” outside the three monotheistic traditions, in the first place in Confucianism, which was regarded as the model of reason and morality in the age of Enlightenment.
- But I’d offer also an additional point. I mean the creation of new creeds (of purely rationalistic fashion) for replacement of traditional ones. According to “the father of Deism” Herbert of Churbery (1583–1648), the author of *De Religione Gentilium Errorumque apud Eos Causis* (published posthumously), there are only five axioms of the veridical religion, revealed by reason alone, present in all actual religions and quite sufficient for the acquisition of salvation. They are well-known and run as:

(1) There is one Supreme God; (2) He ought to be worshipped; (3) Virtue and piety are the chief parts of divine worship; (4) We ought to be sorry for our sins and repent of them; (5) Divine goodness doth dispense rewards and punishments both in this life and thereafter.¹⁴

Herbert’s friend Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) offered still more economical “symbol of faith:” (1) God exists; (2) He is a spiritual being; (3) He directs the history of the world; (4) He created everything.¹⁵ Some later deists abridged their credo to three articles, such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the existence of rewards and punishments in afterlife. One of the best German experts on the controversies around Deism managed to put

¹³ Gestrich 1981, p. 394.

¹⁴ Cited from [Orr 1934, p. 62].

¹⁵ *De Jure Bellis ac Pacis* II.20.45.

down axioms of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) in this way: (1) the conventional forms of all “instituted religions” depend on the states and are, therefore, of contingent character; (2) their “internal truths” are derived from reason, and its “proportion” is the same with them; (3) therefore all “instituted” (revealed) religions are equally true and equally false; (4) the best revealed or positive religion is one where we have a minimum of conventional additions to natural religion.¹⁶

- But the very order of Gestrich’s points is much more systematic, logical and persuasive in comparison with former identifications of Deism. In early times its denial of Providence was highlighted, in contradiction to facts, because only some of those called deists insisted that God has only set the clock going of the world without interfering into its rate later. More essential was later identification of Deism as rejection of any Revelation and adherence to natural God-knowledge alone, but the very modes of this rejection with those thinkers who are regarded as deists widely differ.¹⁷ What is of most importance in our context, Gestrich managed to hit the target when he placed denial of claims to absoluteness of any religion under the very first point, because just this denial of these claims makes one understand quite clearly why deists were sure that no revelation of any world religion may claim to absoluteness, and, therefore, all these religions are to be regarded as only local augmentations to Original Revelation. And these points are very systematically ordered inasmuch as the last one again echoes the first one. I mean that the denial of Incarnation is a necessary condition of the denial of Christianity’s claim to absoluteness, and vice versa. Indeed, this claim is based in the final analysis on the belief that God himself in flesh was the founder of this religion.

One of the most clear-cut examples for (1) and (3) gives Jean Jacques Rousseau. Savoyard Vicar in his *Émile* (1762) insists upon that there is no religion which could be considered more favored with God than others, and especially that Christianity is not one true religion. With much irony he depicts how in interreligious controversies Christians become winners in Paris, Jews in Amsterdam and Muslims in Constantinople (using in the first and third cases also power besides persuasion).¹⁸ But Abrahamic religions, and Christianity in the first place deserve more criticisms than others inasmuch as God of the Bible is especially biased, for He benefited only one (Jewish) people with his favor and disregarded

¹⁶ Feiereis 1965, p. 106.

¹⁷ From radical antagonism with Reimarus (see below) to much more “tolerance” towards it with Henry Dodwell (died in 1704).

¹⁸ Rousseau 1762, pp. 539-540.

all others (insists Rousseau in sheer contradiction to Christian universalism). God who condemns all those ignorant of his Scripture and propagation of his teachings (in the American continents, the heart of Africa or in the Asian heaths) cannot be that merciful Lord of the universe which is suggested by reason of all reasonable beings.¹⁹ But even when a Christian missionary approaches peoples inhabiting lands in thousands miles distant from Jerusalem, why these peoples should believe him that a man crucified there about two millennia ago was also God if the very inhabitants of this city don't believe in it? Or do these barbarous people have to study historical sources to make sure what is veridical and what is false there and compare arguments of different religious teachers?!²⁰ That means that a human by no means has to change his native religion. Otherwise he will be condemned at the judgement-seat of the Supreme Judge for having voluntarily accepted delusions. Rousseau's book proved very influential not only in France but everywhere, in Germany in the first place. Here we have two important points of pluralistic theology, i.e. that revelations of "instituted religions" are limited, relative and, therefore, may have no claims on something more and that everyone should hold to his native religion (just because no one of them is better than another in the final analysis).

Expressed antichristian ("antiptolemeic" in Hickean idiom) reflexions on religious diversity emerged from the writings of Rousseau's contemporary and like-minded person, the most famous German deist Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768). One of his point was an apology of ancient and contemporary Gentiles who did not and don't want to be converted into Christianity. Reimarus stressed that they are quite justified in loyalty to their native religion and had no interest in "foreign scriptures," just as his contemporary Christians are loyal to their own without any interest for Talmud, Mishna and Gemara, Al-Koran or Zendavesta.²¹ Everyone is justified in abiding by his tradition as one has no wish, ability and time for comparing religions with each other, and everyone has right to consider his tradition as the only veridical and salutary, especially as Jesus was not something more than a Jewish apocalyptic prophet (Gestrich's point [13]) and the Bible cannot be regarded as Revelation inasmuch as the authors of the Old Testament did not hold to the doctrine of personal immortality and those of the New Testament held not on historical data. Reimarus did not however deny the very possibility of Revelation but laid down his own conditions to any text which deserved the title of "revealed." It should correspond to both historical plausibility and logical coherence, otherwise it is not "revealed."²² Reimarus was in a sense a spiritual teacher of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (see above) who published his

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 540.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 542.

²¹ Feiereis 1965, p. 80.

²² See: [Lessing 1835, pp. 291-294]. I'm indebted for this reference to Russian historian of German philosophy and theology Ludmila Kryshchok.

writings posthumously and also considered “instituted religions” as almost equal (Gestrich’s points [1] and [3] again), though in his famous drama *Nathan the Wise* (1779), which is just a literary image of pluralistic approach to the Abrahamic religions, Christianity is presented as “less equal.”²³

There is no doubt among historians of ideas that Lessing via Reimarus was strongly influenced by ideas of Matthew Tindal’s *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730), called also “the Bible of Deism.”²⁴ No wonder, bearing in mind that England, the homeland of Herbert of Churbery was the same also of classical Deism and was at highest esteem in the eyes of both French and German deists. By the way, Tindal’s book, translated into German in 1741 by Johann Lorenz Schmidt, later along with Anthony Collins’ writings became favorite reading for Friedrich II’s environment “infected by deism.”²⁵

“The Bible of Deism” deserved its nickname because, according to one authority, it became the focus of the whole deist controversy thereafter. But one of its most significant contribution to deist theology is connected, in my view, with Gestrich’s points (6) and (7), i.e. admission of Original Revelation besides “empirical revelations” of empirical religions.

Jesus and Confucius taught approximately the same truths, but where is the criterion of their truthfulness? And Tindal gave a very resolute answer, right from the very beginning of his “Bible:”

... by Natural Religion, I understand the Belief of the Existence of a God, and the Sense and Practice of those Duties, which result from the Knowledge, we, by our Reason, have of him, and his Perfections, and of ourselves, and our Imperfections; and the Relation we stand in to him, and to our Fellow Creatures; so that the Religion of Nature takes in every Thing that is founded on the Reason and Nature of Things.²⁶

This Original Revelation is to be served as the gauge for “written revelations.” Says he outright about it:

I desire no more than to be allowed. That there’s a Religion of Nature and Reason written in the Hearts of every One of us from the first Creation; by which all Mankind must judge of the Truth of any instituted Religion whatever; and if it varies from the Religion of Nature and Reason in any one Particular, nay, in the minutest Circumstance, That alone is an Argument, which makes all Things else that can be said for its Support totally ineffectual.²⁷

There are no doubts that we have here the source of Reimarus’ stipulations to any text deserving the title of “revealed” (see above). It is true that “empirical revelations” contain some things not included in “religion of nature and reason,”

²³ One of the characters of the drama, which represent different religions, Patriarch of Jerusalem, is depicted as the most repellent person.

²⁴ See, e.g. [Lalor 2006, p. 151].

²⁵ Ibid., p. 150.

²⁶ Tindal 1730, p. 3.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

but it is indifferent for our good as to whether we believe in them or not. And there are also some things which cannot stand examination on the touchstone of this Religion, as, e.g., the doctrines of the Trinity and transubstantiation, because it is impossible to ask anyone to believe what cannot be understood, and therefore they cannot be made part of revelation.²⁸

There is an obvious contradiction in Tindal's judgement of correlation between "Natural and Revealed Religions." On the one hand, they are in whole agreement as they have the same end and precepts. On the other, natural religion being available to mankind from the beginning, that is, the creation of the world and is immutable, revelation can neither add anything to it nor detract from it.²⁹ Given such mutual relation between these religions, in the first case we have two of them, wholly coinciding with each other, in the second one only the first one remains the only veridical religion, while the second may be at most only its adaptation for "feeble minds." Rousseau, who should have learned about Tindal's ideas very well,³⁰ made a further step: Savoyard Vicar insisted that if one can trust to one's senses and reason there is no use for him of what so called revelations had said. But Tindal was not so reckless and preferred to undermine the Church carefully without entering into an open conflict with it, and even to seem its philosophical apologist. The very title of his book, where he disguised his real intention by pretended limitless exaltation of his native religion, is a good evidence for that.

Hick was also a politician, and much more successful than Tindal. He proved exceedingly skillful in having caught proper time when there was already not any need to conceal his goal, i.e. replacement of Christianity by a new philosophical religion. Up to his time what was to be replaced had been sufficiently enfeebled by both starting ideology of political correctness and its own sense of guilt to both secular society and other religions for its "imperialistic heritage." He, his closest associates (with Cantwell Smith, Peter Hebblethwaite and Paul Knitter at their head), rivals (like Hans Küng) and numerous followers (like K. Cragg, L. Richard and K. Stendahl not to mention others³¹) began to promote their "Copernican [i.e. nonincarnational] Christology" when Christianity was already ready to begin feel itself only as "a tolerated religion" in its homelands.

Besides "political capabilities" the pluralists definitely share those features of deistic world outlook which correspond to Gestrinch's points (1-4), (8-10) and (12-13). Most crucial, doubtlessly, is the coincidence of classical Deism and pluralism in points (1) and (13): both Hick and the classical deists recognized quite perfectly that had not one changed orthodox Christology, one would not cope

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁰ Voltaire, another eminent champion of natural religion, admired Tindal and, no doubt, tried to do his utmost to meet him during his circulation throughout English high society in 1726-1729.

³¹ Even a special collection of papers on the correlation between acknowledgement of Christ's Godhead and perspectives of interreligious dialogue was prepared after the work of Hick's school [Anderson and Stansky 1981].

with the Christian claim to absoluteness.³² Pluralism was also developing its creed, and Hick has not put it down mostly because of his unwillingness to acknowledge that he was creating a new, secondary-rated though it is, religion (especially as he was hotly criticized for that).³³ But had he not concealed this intention under the disguised of philosophy (theology) of religion, he could have put down such a creed as: (1) there is Ultimate Reality, quite transcendent for human awareness; (2) it has been manifested in personae and impersonae as crucial symbols of the great religions; (3) therefore all of them are partially truthful but none can claim to something more; (4) all religions have in spite of all difference of their doctrines and rites one and the same goal, i.e. transformation of human mind from ego-centrism to reality-centrism; (5) pluralism is *summum bonum* and exclusivism *summum malum* for followers of all religions. Among all deistic creeds mentioned above this quite rationalistic symbol of faith (as all deistic symbols were) seems to be closer to Lessing's, I believe, more than to others.

There are also some differences. Point (11) is lacking with pluralism because the Bible is not such an authoritative text for contemporary society which would demand serious exegetical work with it, and (5) is partially lacking because it appeals not to elected circles but is much more peanut, applied for conversion of not only very educated persons but also common people in the street. And, it is true, deists were not developing the conception of Ultimate Reality behind crucial symbols of the chief religions and were satisfied with "God of philosophers" as the foundation of religious diversity.

One reason for this difference is, certainly, that Kantian philosophy, which provided Hick with an epistemological instrument for developing it, had not come into being at the age of classical Deism as yet. Another one is, surely, the widening of the horizon of contemporary Western knowledge because of such mutual approach of civilizations which had no comparable antecedents in the age of Modernity and Enlightenment³⁴. In this way the classical deists had no instruments for, e.g., reinterpretation of the Holy Trinity doctrine in terms of the Buddhist conception of *trikāya*, i.e. "the three bodies" of the Buddha (for unmasking "the

³² Hick expressed this point very clearly already in one of his earliest works, wherein a "cumulative refutation" of the Incarnation doctrine was presented. His arguments against it could be put down as a syllogism: (1) the teaching of Jesus' divinity appears only in the epoch of the ecumenical councils and not earlier; (2) he himself, judging by the earliest sources (i.e. those of the New Testament) did not claim to the divine status; (3) the teaching of his divinity is in the way of interreligious dialogue; (4) therefore, this teaching is false [Hick 1977, p. 3, 6.]. First two premises, unhistorical as they are, come to a sheer contradiction with logics in combination with the third premise. In the same manner one could infer that a writer *A* was not awarded with Nobel because (1) he started in fiction only lately; (2) his parents would not believe in his awarding; (3) had his awarding really taken place, it would damage the health of his rival *B*, and that would be unpleasant for many friends of the latter.

³³ See already an early response to Hickean "Copernican Upheaval" [D'Costa 1987].

³⁴ Hick confessed proudly that from the first acquaintances with Theravāda in Sri Lanka and with Zen in Claremont he had begun to feel spiritual affinity with Buddhism and the latter's influence only developed along with his growth [Hick, 1989, p. 283]. It was in accordance with the truth inasmuch as his "second Copernican upheaval" (see above) meant a resolute passage to impersonalistic understanding of the world: in spite of the Real's manifestations personae and impersonae it itself is much closer to the latter than to the former.

myth of Christian uniqueness”) while Hick realized this way to show that an Eastern approach to the Trinitarian theology was preferable to the Christian doctrine.³⁵

Indeed, both Theo-centrism of classical Deism and Ultimate-centrism of contemporary pluralism have the same rationale in fighting Christo-centrism in spite of just mentioned difference in cultural evolution of the Western world. Another difference-cum-identity lies in approaching to a model of interrelations between the Absolute and empirical religions which are approximately equivalent avenues for its “translation” in the world. Hick was more skillful than classical deists in identification them as “lenses,” whereby the cultures perceive and fold beams of the Absolute. Tindal, in turn, was much more coherent in inventing Original Revelation whereby it provided the world with the gauge for measuring and, consequently, estimation of “written revelations.” Hick claimed that the world religions are more or less equal mediators between the Real and human cultures, or, as he put it, “as far as we are able to judge, to about the same extent”³⁶ (some being, however, “more equal” than others³⁷) without real explaining why is that (his statement that they lead their followers more or less similarly from ego-centrism to reality-centrism was too misty for being “warrant”), while Tindal indicated quite concrete marks of “natural religion” by which “revealed religion” are to be judged (see above). But who may be a measurer himself, in one case using a slack gauge and much more steady in another? Certainly, such authorities who tower themselves above all “written revelations” and rate their own considerations real revelations. That is why I specified that Gestrich’s point (5) of identification of Deism (“acknowledgement of the existence of some cryptic community of reasonable religious worshippers in all the ages and countries”) is only partially inapplicable to Hickeanism (see above).

Charles Perrault, the eminent author of *Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals*. *Tales of Mother Goose* (1697) provided his fairy tales with very short didactic upshots. His book was a success, and I therefore will imitate him. My first “moral” is that what is regarded *the* Copernican Upheaval in theology of religion is only *a* new version of it having a powerful predecessor and that pluralism itself

³⁵ See: [Hick 1989, pp. 272-273]. In reality there is no similarity between two models inasmuch as “the Buddhist trinity” is non-personal and hierarchial: Dharmakāya is the impersonal Absolute, Sombhogakāya the realm of blissful Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (as the second level of manifestation of the former) and Nirmānakāya the historical Gautama Śakyamuni (as the lower, quasi-physical manifestation) reminding one strongly of doctetic Gnosticism. But it was not by chance that Hick approached to the Buddhist model after having embraced another one, that of Sabellius’ modalism, essentially antitrinitarian inasmuch as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were regarded as not Persons here but only models (shapes) of Impersonal Godhead (in some sense just similar to Hick’s the Real-an-sich).

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 373, 375.

³⁷ He stated in the epilogue to his opus magnum that Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism “are already considerably more advanced than the faiths of Semitic origin in the development of a pluralistic outlook, and may be expected to continue to contribute to its spread” [Hick 1989, p. 378]. Nevertheless, “most educated Christians” can also attain such a level of religious consciousness (on condition, certainly, that they reject the exclusivistic foundations of their faith) which is already available for Hindus, Jains and others mentioned above – *ibid.*, p. 377.

is not anything but a today's version of Deism. The second "moral" results from the first one: an idea shared by numerous Christians today (under the impressure of *Zeitgeist* in the first place) that one can be a Christian and pluralist at the same time is an illusion inasmuch as Deism is just negation of Christianity and their correlation is that of A and $\neg A$. To wish to combine them is analogical to wish be naked and clothed, to sit and to run, or to be a married man and a bachelor simultaneously. The reason is that Christianity is a religion of Revelation, and according to it *there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved* (Acts 4: 12). This statement was not uttered in rhetorical style for its meaning was profoundly connected with what constitutes the foundations of Christianity as a religion, i.e. the revealed doctrines of the Trinity (Jesus as the Godhead itself) and Incarnation (Jesus as the Divine Head of the Church), and it was by no means of chance that Hickeanists have fought very persistently against these doctrines from the very beginning (as classical deists did in their age) as the main obstacle on the way to their new and brave "universe of faiths."

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Copernican Upheaval in Philosophy of Religion or Updating of the Old Heritage? John Hick and Classical Deism

Abstract

It is a common view that theology of pluralism emerged as Athena from Zeus’ head in the last third of the twentieth century to have created a genuine revolution in philosophy of religion which opened a new era in the field after centuries of the outdated confessional approach to religious diversity. The author of the article undertakes, in opposition, its reconstruction in the context of history of thought. It turns out that similar “pluralistic revolutions” aiming at supplanting the traditional religion of the West took place in the epoch of Enlightenment the main common feature being erection of “rationalistic Revelation” as a gauge for the “instituted revelations.” The article is concluded by identification of the contemporary pluralistic ideology as a modern shape of Deism and estimation of compatibility of the authentic Christianity with these “pluralistic revolutions” then and now.

Keywords: philosophy of religion, theology, exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, Revelation, Deism, Christianity, the Christian doctrines, non-Christian religions.