

# Pluralism

All Religions Lead to Salvation

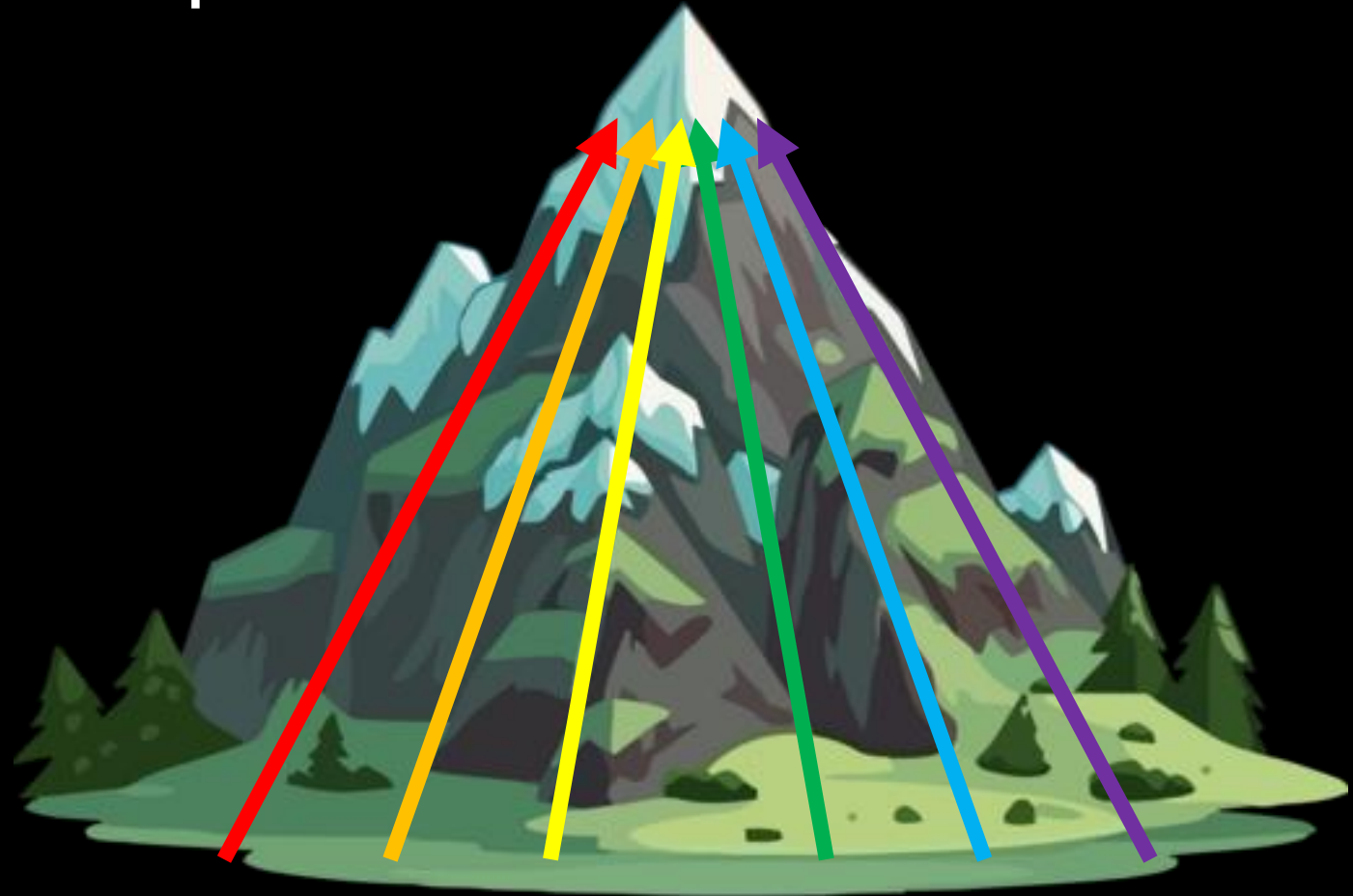
Session 2

# Outline

- I. What is Pluralism?
- II. Perennialism
- III. Unitive Pluralism
  - i. Philosophical Assessment
  - ii. Biblical Assessment
- IV. Conclusion

# Pluralism

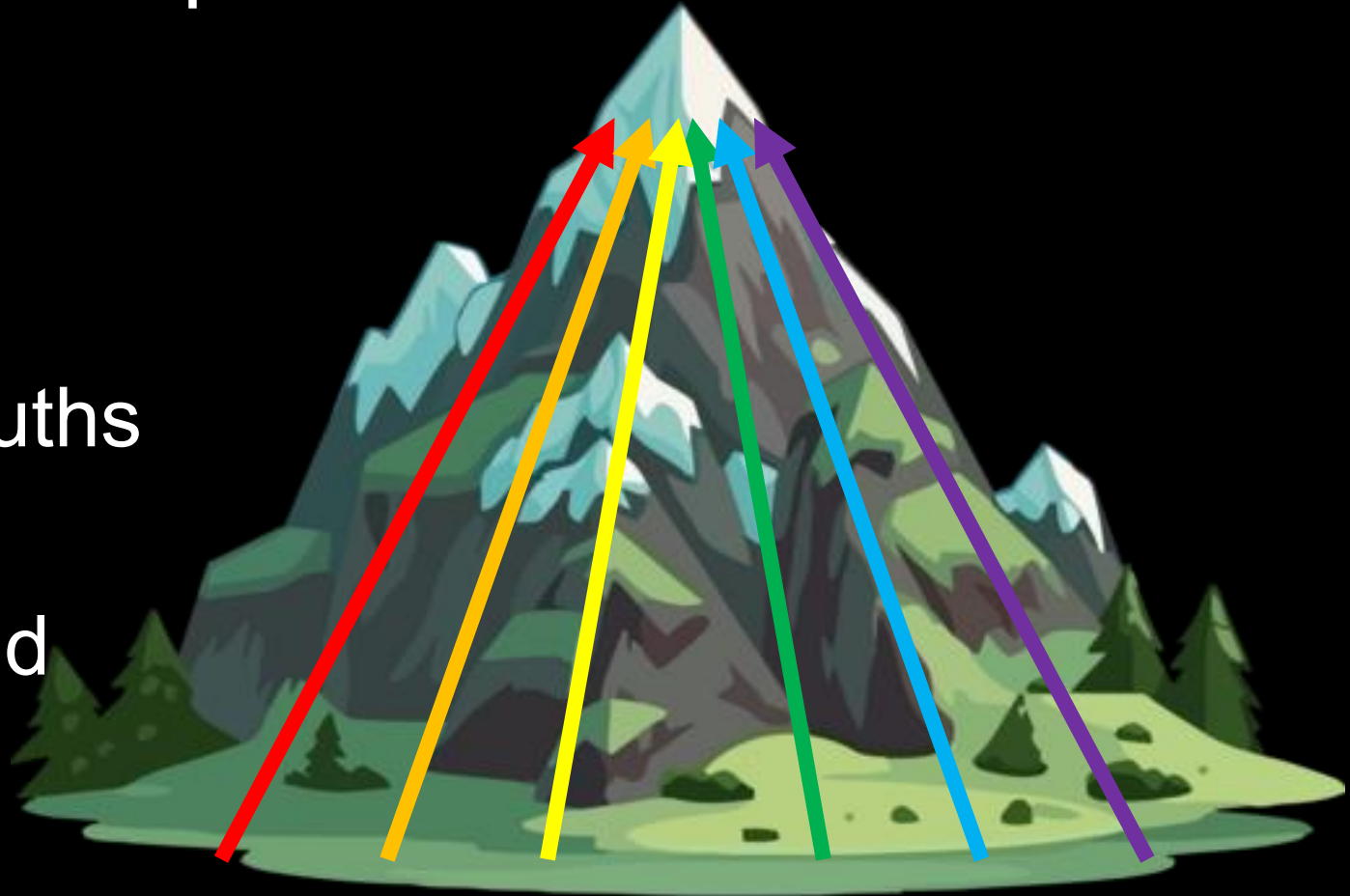
“All Religions are different paths that lead to salvation.”



# Pluralism

“All Religions are different paths that lead to salvation.”

- Perennialism
  - All teach the same truths
- Unitive Pluralism
  - All have the same end



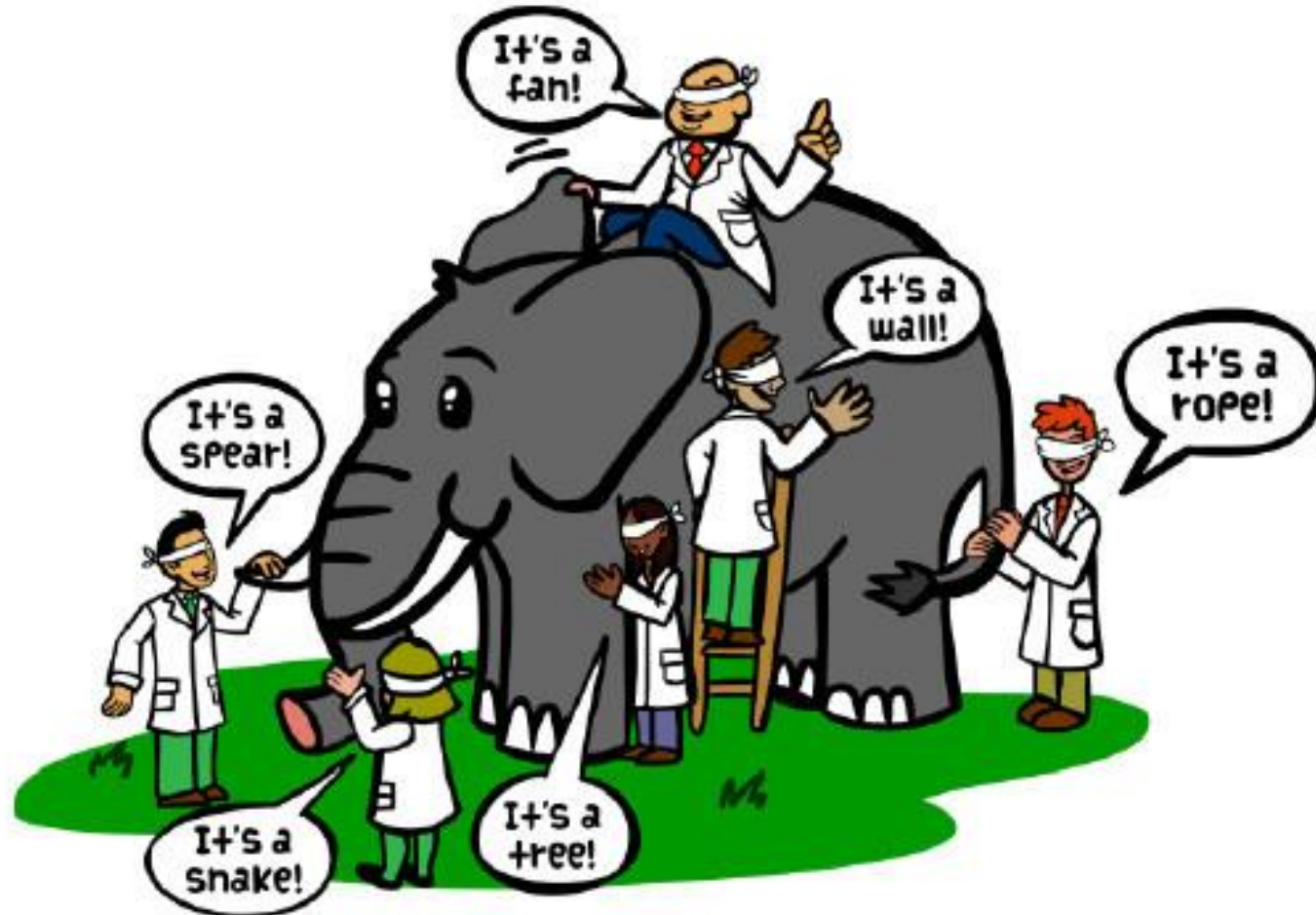
# Outline

- I. What is Pluralism?
- II. Perennialism

# Perennialism

“All religions teach the same core truths.”

# Perennialism



# Perennialism

“All religions teach the same core truths.”



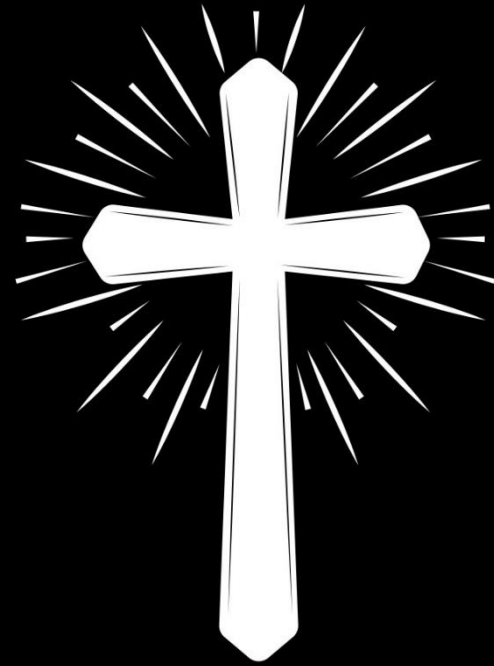


# Perennialism



# Perennialism

Compare Islam and Christianity

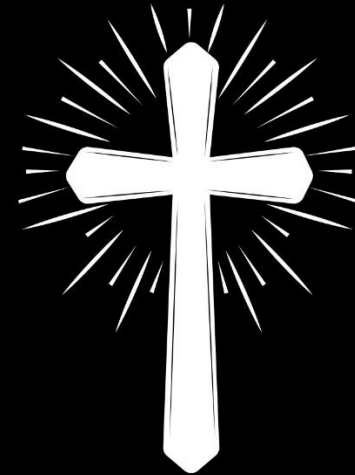


# Perennialism

Regarding God...



Only one person  
(most central claim)



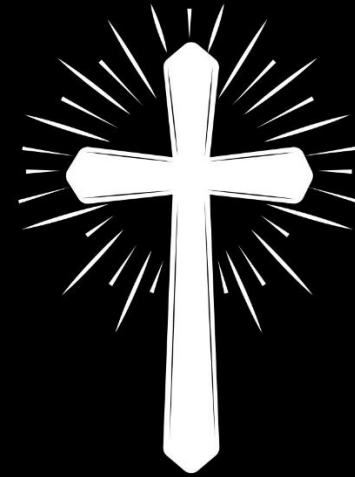
God is 3 persons

# Perennialism

Regarding Jesus' person...



Merely a man



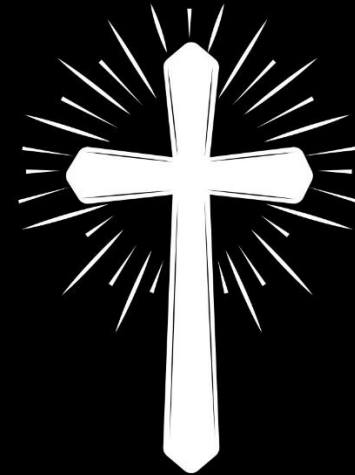
Fully man and fully God

# Perennialism

Regarding Jesus' death...



Did not die on the cross  
or rise again



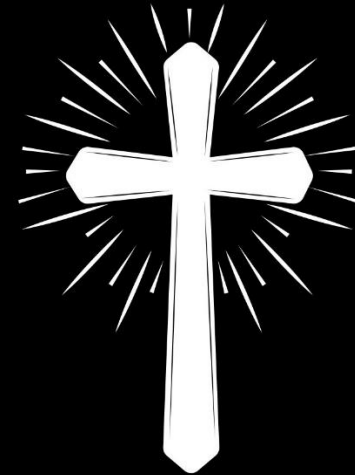
Died and was  
resurrected

# Perennialism

Regarding the Bible...



Corrupted



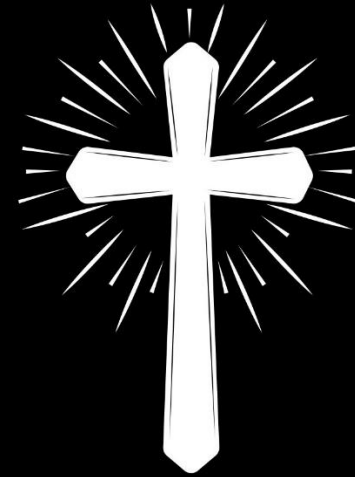
Inspired

# Perennialism

Regarding Salvation...



By faith plus works when good deeds outweigh bad deeds, but Allah can ignore all this and decide either way.



By faith, not works, through the free gift of grace, and God judges fairly.

# Perennialism





# Perennialism

## John 14:6

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

## Acts 4:12

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

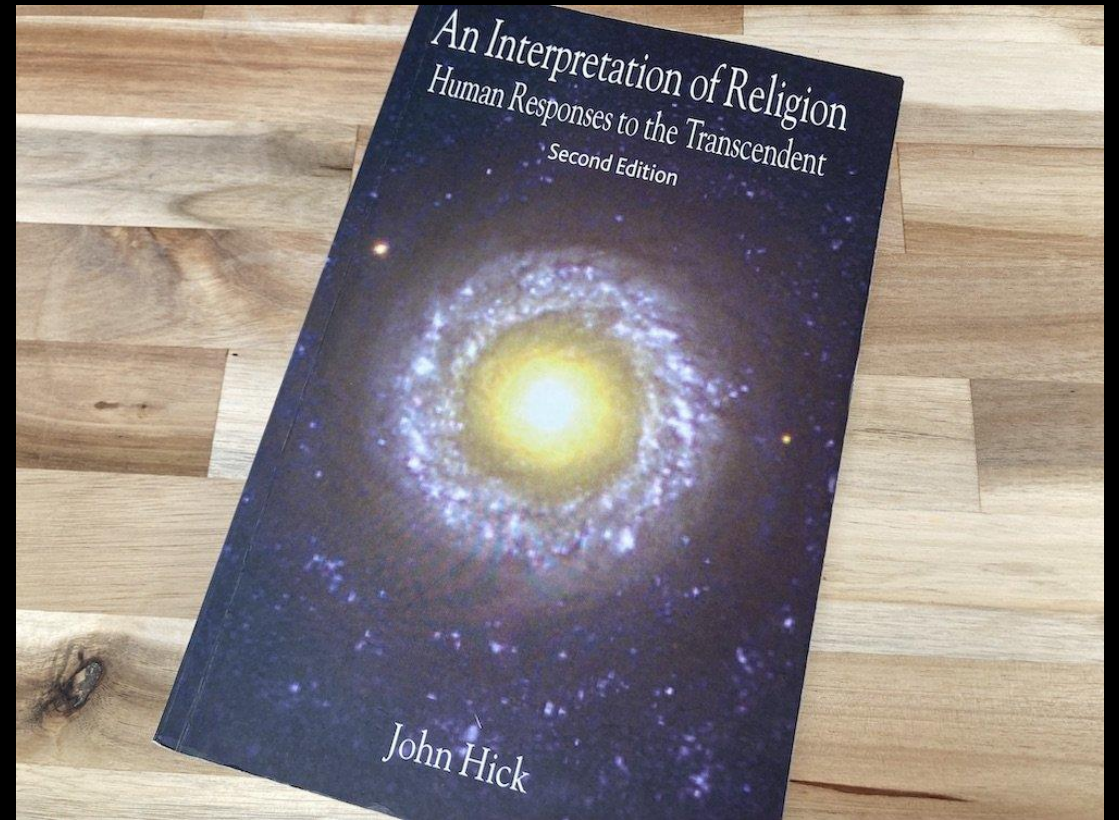
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- III. Unitive Pluralism

# Unitive Pluralism – Typical Traits

1. Most, but not all, religions are “true.”
2. Generalized and watered-down “salvation” to fit all religions.
3. Religious truths are relative.
4. Christ is not unique. They deny his deity and resurrection.
5. Strong aversion to hell doctrines.

# Example: John Hick's Pluralism



# John Hick's Pluralism

1. The universe is religiously ambiguous.

# John Hick's Pluralism

1. The universe is religiously ambiguous.
2. God does not reveal himself directly.

# John Hick's Pluralism

“I thus see theology as a human creation. I do not believe that God reveals propositions to us, whether in Hebrew, Greek, English, or any other language. I hold that the formulation of theology is a human activity that always, and necessarily, employs the concepts and reflects the cultural assumptions and biases of the theologians in question.”



John Hick

# John Hick's Pluralism

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2. God does not reveal himself directly.
3. Christianity is not unique



# John Hick's Pluralism

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  - a. Jesus never taught he was God.
  - b. The Incarnation is incoherent.
  - c. The resurrection is a developed myth.

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4. Religious experiences are widespread.

# John Hick's Pluralism

- All religions claim to save people
- This is marker for truth
- Salvation is “transformation from being self-focused to being focused on the transcendent reality behind people’s religious experiences.”
- “The Real”
- This “salvation” is manifest in moral improvement.

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5. The moral improvement of people reveal which religions are true.
6. Most religions exhibit the same degree of moral improvement.

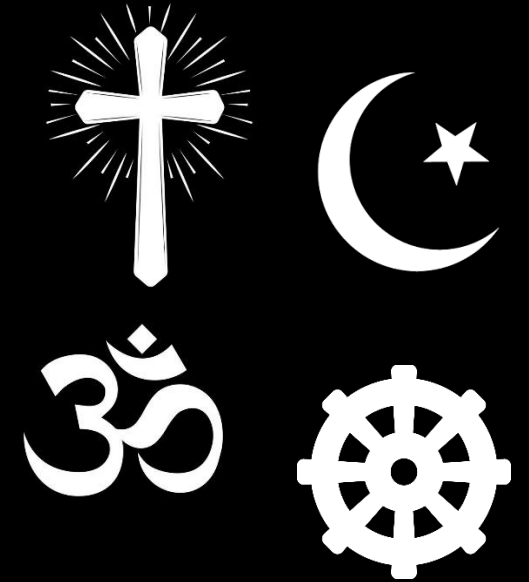
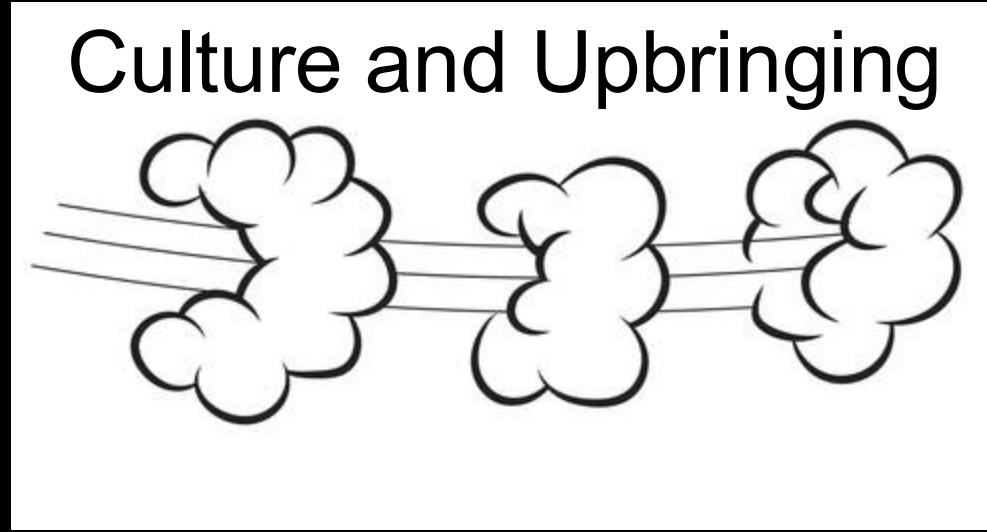
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7. Therefore, most religions are true.

# John Hick's Pluralism



“The Real”  
itself



“The Real” as it  
is experienced



# John Hick's Pluralism

“... [The Real] cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, substance or process, good or evil, purposive or non-purposive... We cannot even speak of this as a thing or an entity.”



John Hick



# John Hick's Pluralism

1. The universe is religiously ambiguous.
2. God does not reveal himself directly.
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4. Religious experiences are widespread.
5. The moral improvement of people reveal which religions are true.
6. Most religions exhibit the same degree of moral improvement.
7. Therefore, most religions are true.
8. All religions make claims about how they experience the Real, not the Real itself.

# Critique of Christian Moral Merit

“Should not the fruit of the Spirit, which according to Paul is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23), be more evident in Christian than in non-Christian lives? It would not, of course, be fair to expect that any randomly selected Christian be morally superior to any randomly selected non-Christian. But surely the average level of these virtues should be noticeably higher among Christians than among non-Christians. Yet it does not seem to me that in fact Christians are on average noticeably morally superior to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists.”



John Hick

# Questions

# Outline

- I. What is Pluralism?
- II. Perennialism
- III. Unitive Pluralism
  - i. Philosophical Assessment

# Philosophical Assessment

## Hick's Pluralism:

1. Arguments for God fail.
2. The major religions are equally effective at “saving” people (i.e., moral improvement).
3. The Real itself is different than how it is experienced, leading to different religions.

# Philosophical Assessment

- There are very strong arguments for the Christian God.

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  - True vs. Nominal Christians

# Philosophical Assessment

- There are very strong arguments for the Christian God.
- Salvation as moral improvement?
  - Moral improvement does not imply truth.
  - The effects of religions are not equal.
- **Christian moral merit?**
  - True vs. Nominal Christians
  - **Temporal Limitations**

# Philosophical Assessment

“We must, therefore, not be surprised if we find among the Christians some people who are still nasty. There is even, when you come to think it over, a reason why nasty people might be expected to turn to Christ in greater numbers than nice ones. ... If you have sound nerves and intelligence and health and popularity and a good upbringing, you are likely to be quite satisfied with your character as it is. "Why drag God into it?" you may ask... You are quite likely to believe that all this niceness is your own doing: and you may easily not feel the need for any better kind of goodness.”



C.S. Lewis

# Philosophical Assessment

- There are very strong arguments for the Christian God.
- Salvation as moral improvement?
  - Moral improvement does not imply truth.
  - The effects of religions are not equal.
- **Christian moral merit?**
  - True vs. Nominal Christians
  - Temporal Limitations
  - **Christianity Attracts “Bad” People**

# Philosophical Assessment

- Hick's concept of the Real is contradictory.

# Philosophical Assessment

“...we cannot apply to the Real... the characteristics encountered in its [representations in different religions]. Thus it cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, substance or process, good or evil, purposive or non-purposive... a thing or an entity.”



John Hick



# Philosophical Assessment

- Hick's concept of the Real is contradictory.
- General weakness of Pluralism: Religious believers of every religion have misunderstood their own religions, but the pluralist has understood them correctly.

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# Biblical Assessment

- Jesus never taught he was God.
- Jesus' deity was a legendary development invented by the early church.
- The incarnation makes no sense.
- The resurrection has naturalistic explanations.



John Hick

# Biblical Assessment

- The pluralist must prove legendary development, not just assert it.

# Biblical Assessment

Implausibility of mythological development in the Gospels:

- Not enough time.
- Literary genre is “ancient biography”.
- Transmission culture was highly developed and reliable.
- Restraints on the embellishment of stories about Jesus.
- Proven track record of historical reliability.

# Biblical Assessment

- The pluralist must prove legendary development, not just assert it.
- Jesus could hardly have made his deity any clearer

# Biblical Assessment

- The Messiah (e.g., Mark 8:27-30; Matthew 11:2-6)
- The Son of Man (e.g., Mark 14:60-64)
- The Son of God (e.g., Matthew 11:27)

# Biblical Assessment

- His triumphal entry pointed to him being the prophesied Messiah. (Mark 11:1-11; John 12:12-19)
- He preached about the coming Kingdom of God and that he would have the authority to rule over it. (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30)



# Biblical Assessment

- He put his words on the level of God's words in the Holy Scriptures. (Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 10:2-12)
- He forgave sins as only God can (Mark 2:1-12).
- He performed miracles on his own authority (e.g., Matthew 9:27-28).
- He exorcised demons on his own authority (e.g., Mark 1:21-27).
- And he received worship (e.g., Matthew 28:17).

# Biblical Assessment

- The pluralist must prove legendary development, not just assert it.
- Jesus could hardly have made his deity any clearer.
- There are multiple possible ways to understand the incarnation.

# Biblical Assessment

- Seen only by a small Christian fellowship.
- Not included in any histories of the Roman Empire.
- Possible naturalistic explanations:
  - Legendary development.
  - Hallucinations induced by a strong belief in an unseen presence.
  - Hallucinations induced by grief.
  - A symbolic, non-physical resurrection in the hearts of the believers.



John Hick

# Biblical Assessment

- Witnessed by enemies that later converted.
- Roman historians were few and had a lot to write about.
- The resurrection best explains the historical facts:
  - Empty tomb.
  - Wide-spread resurrection experiences.
  - Rise of a counter-cultural movement.

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# Conclusion

“... pluralism involves a systematic abandonment of the *distinctives* of Christianity-such as the doctrine of the divinity and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity - so that the "Christianity" being compared with other religions is an artificial construction. This represents a failure to take the religions seriously *as they are*.”



Alister McGrath

# Conclusion

“The attraction of pluralism lies not in its claims to truth, which are remarkably elusive and shallow, but in its claim to foster tolerance among the religions... [But] Toleration is more likely to result from showing respect to other religions than from forcing them into an artificial framework that suppresses their distinctiveness in an attempt to make observation conform to theory.”



Alister McGrath

# Conclusion

- There are strong theistic arguments that disqualify large groups of religions.
- Pluralism leads to incoherent beliefs.
- Pluralism cannot account for the historical and biblical evidence regarding the resurrection and deity of Christ.
- Pluralism does not do justice to the significant differences among world religions.



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# Next Week

Universalism: All the Unevangelized are Saved

# Questions