Globethics Repository

Globethics

John Hick’ s Religious pluralism from the perspective of cultural heterogeneity

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Zhang, Qiu-Juan
Publisher	Nordic Forum of Sino-Western Studies
Rights	All rights reserved
Download date	2026-11-05 14:41:14
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/3984461

John Hick's Religious Pluralism from the Perspective of Cultural Heterogeneity[1]

Qiujuan ZHANG

(School of Applied Foreign Languages, Beijing Language and Culture University, China)

Author: Qiujuan ZHANG, Ph. D., Lecturer in School of Applied Foreign Languages, Beijing Language and Culture University, China. Email: zhangqiujuan@blcu. edu. cn.

Abstract: John Hick's religious Pluralistic Hypothesis runs counter to the traditional Christian education he received in his teens, so he has twice been judged a heretic in his life. Scholars in religious studies hold different ideas about Hick's theory. Most of the scholars have studied it from the perspective of homogeneity, claiming that his pluralism confused the differences between the great world religions, and even tried to homogenize them, and finally imposed on them a false unity. This article analyzes Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis from the perspective of cultural heterogeneity, aiming to prove the feasibility and progress of this theory. Today, religious conflict has become one of the main threats to world peace, and equal dialogue between religions provides a great opportunity for the resolution of the contradictions between them, and can even be an effective way to help maintain world peace. Therefore, the practical significance of Hick's theory of religious pluralism is far greater than its academic and religious significance.

Key Wordss: Religious Pluralism, homogeneity, heterogeneity, Ultimate Reality

1. Introduction

At the end of the twentiethcentury Christianity was in deep crisis. The theological structure developed by the Western church had come to seem hollow and irrelevant to the majority of Westerners, and seem foreign and alien, as an extension of Western cultural hegemony, to many Christians in Africa, India, China and the East generally.[2] At the same time, driven by the global economic and cultural integration, great world religions began to have inter-religions and intra-religions dialogues. This interaction and collision have increasingly become the focus of contemporary religious studies in recent decades. In the context of world globalization where cultures are

---

[1] Leonard Sidharta, "Looking into the Birth of Gods, A Philosophical Interpretation of the Origin of Idolatry", International Journal of Sino-Western Studies, vol. 18, 149-158. (https://www. sinowesternstudies. com/latest-volumes/vol-18-2020/)

[2] *本文受北京语言大学院级项目(中央高校基本科研业务专项基金)资助,项目编号为 17YJ020007。This paper is supported by project "Rethinking the Religious Pluralism", funded by Beijing Language and Cultural University (Special Funding for Basic Scientific Research in High Education Institutions), Project No. 17YJ020007. John Hick, A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), preface.

heterogeneous but coexisting, cultural encounters caused the relationship between religions to undergo multiple revolutions of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. The British philosopher of religion, John Hick, who is an advocate of an universal ethical religion, has proposed the hypothesis of religious pluralism in his book A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths[3], attempting to build a cooperative relationship between religions and to develop the faith groups in a harmonious way. John Hick was a leading figure in comparative religion study, and he took an introspective and critical attitude towards his research. With his unique experiences of three controversies in religious studies and his awareness of inner conflicts caused by the conservatives' absolutistic values on religious issues, he realized that a harmonious dialogue between religions is crucial to the peaceful development of mankind. With the aim of coordinating the interrelationship between religions, easing the conflicts among races and maintaining world peace, Hick proposed the religious pluralistic hypothesis. The hypothesis gives the concept of Ultimate Reality which is described as real, ultimate and transcendent, also it points out that Ultimate Reality can be a universal source of all salvific transformation, thus disintegrating the absolute center of each individual religion and promoting the equality among great world religions. The theory provides a theoretical platform and foundation for an equal and harmonious talk among religions, also it works as an inspiration to scholars of religious studies all around the world.

With the unity of knowledge and action, Hick devoted his whole life to the attempt of a theory or ahypothesis which can help to establish an equal dialogue between races and an ensured harmony between religions. In his autobiography which was published in 2002, eighty-year-old Hick still raised his doubts about the goal setting and curriculum of the subject, philosophy of religion, in British and American universities, "The first thing to say is that much the greater part of what is called philosophy of religion in the UK and USA is not this at all but is philosophical theology or, in the title of Oxford chair, the philosophy of the Christian religion. The philosophy of religion proper is the philosophy of religion globally, not just of one particular tradition" [4]. This proves that it is his lifelong dream to let all religions coexist harmoniously on an equal footing. Although Western scholars have mixed views on his theory, still the hypothesis has promoted the process of peaceful and rational dialogue between religions with great practical significance.

2. John Hick and his Pluralistic Hypothesis

Following the Renaissance, the Enlightenment started in Europe in the late 17th and early 18th century. The anti-feudal and anti-church bourgeois movement once again brought crisis to churches, at the same time provided soil for the seeds of new religious theories. Actually, both domestic and foreign scholars in religious study agree that the pluralism has come into being long ago in Christianity. ZHANG Hua, a leading scholar in religious studies in China, has pointed out, "the concept of Christian pluralism originated in the 1960s and 1970s, and became widely popular after the 1980s; however, Christianity has always faced the dilemma of 'diversity' since the beginning… the

〔3〕 John Hick, A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

〔4〕 John Hick, John Hick-An Autobiography, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 311.

Christian basic theological appeal is anti-pluralism, yet it constantly produces seeds of pluralism from some part within itself, thus shaping the historical face of all Western civilization".[5]

John Hick was a pioneer in religious pluralism, and three controversies[6] in his academic career witnessed his changes from the conservative Christian to the radical one. The occurrence of the three controversies gave a potential to the constructing of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, provided a mass basis for the spread of the theory, and guaranteed the acceptance of this theory under a new interpretation of a central Christian doctrine.

The first controversy happened in 1959 when Hick moved from Cornell University to Princeton Theological Seminary and hoped he could transfer his ministerial membership from the Presbytery of Berwick in England to the local presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church, the Presbytery of New Brunswick. In the examination of qualification check, he needed to answer a few questions on basic doctrines. When hewas confronted with the question related to the doctrine of virgin birth of Jesus, he exhibited his hesitation and could not positively affirm it. So unfortunately, some fundamentalists voted to refuse to accept Hick as a new member. To Hick, being excluded from the Presbytery meant he was no longer a Presbytery minister, and presumably no longer eligible to hold the office of Stuart Professor of Christian Philosophy at the seminary, which was run by the Church. To debate, he stated, "I distinguish between the central Christian faith in the Incarnation, and the theologically peripheral story of the Virgin Birth, and following St Paul, St John and most of the other New Testament writers, I do not found my belief in the Incarnation upon the Virgin Birth tradition. I would therefore not exclude from the Presbyterian ministry…"[7]. The whole incident lasted over a year, and finally General Assembly declared that a failure to affirm the doctrine of the virgin birth did not constitute a ground for barring him from Presbyterian membership. The result taught Hick that the principle of toleration on subsidiary theological issues were reaffirmed by the Church[8]. Through the first controversy, Hick keenly felt that the dominance of conservatives in the church has been gradually weakened, and a relatively loose environment in Church is the general trend. Also, the incident paved the way for the publication of Hick's work The Myth of God Incarnate, which challenges the central Christian doctrine incarnation.

The second controversy happened in 1967, when he was teaching in Birmingham University. Hick described Birmingham as a radical, culturally and religiously pluralistic city, where a tenth of its inhabitants are black or brown. During centuries of imperialism, the racismwas planted deeply into British people's mind; On the other hand, different races and cultures merged and collided one another, therefore some political issues were raised up. After that, white and black liberals and radicals sought to fight against discrimination and to promote a just and equal society by taking violent measures. In order to meet this situation of increasing conflicts, Hick with a humanitarian heart, chose to takeover a voluntary group, named All Faith for One Race(AFFOR for short with an

〔5〕 张华,[ZHANG,Hua],"当代神学的人类学视角及基督宗教多元主义",Dangdai shenxue de renleixue shijiao ji jidu zongjiao duoyuanzhuyi,[Anthropological Perspective of Contemporary Theology and the Pluralism of Christianity],《国学与西学:国际学刊》,Guoxue yu xixue guoji Xuekan,[International Journal of Sino-Western Studies],No. 17,Dec. 2019),148.

〔6〕 John Hick,Problems of Religious Pluralism,(Hampshire and London:Macmillan,1985),1-15.

〔7〕 Hick,John,Problems of Religious Pluralism,(Hampshire and London:Macmillan,1985),3.

〔8〕 Hick,John,Problems of Religious Pluralism,(Hampshire and London:Macmillan,1985),4.

attempt of exposing the truth of racism),and to be the first chairman. In 1976,he undertook a task to produce a pamphlet,then The New Nazism of the Nation Front and National Party:A Warning to Christians had been produced and circulated widely in British churches. After this event,the minority of the church people became aware of,even concerned about Britain's new religious pluralism. They were holding an open and positive attitude to the pluralism,and showing a real desire to see justice. In practice,it was gradually accepted that there is a plurality of divine revelations and contexts of salvations,and that the traditional policy of seeking to convert all mankind to the Christians should be abandoned. Under this circumstances,the doctrine of Incarnation which is one of the central Christian doctrines,was challenged. Hick's experience of debating had paved way for the proposition of Pluralistic Hypothesis in the future.

The third one came from the publication of theMyth of God Incarnate,and it centered on the doctrine of the Incarnation,which was greatly valued by the Anglican mind. Because of this event, Hick and other authors of Myth had been considered heresy. In this volume,Hick considered the incarnation doctrine as the source of religious exclusivism,so if the metaphorical or mythic features of the language used in describing divine incarnation were admitted,it would be possible for Christians to come to a genuine acceptance of religious pluralism,even the equality of all great world religions.

The occurrence of the three controversies directly contributed to Hick's transforming from conservative Christian to the radical one. At themean time,it also reflected the embarrassing situation of the traditional churches in British society where the unified and exclusive pattern of the Christian church will inevitably be broken,then a more practical world religious theory will come into being.

In 1985,Macmillan Press published the bookProblems of Religious Pluralism[9],in which John Hick expresses his ideas on some of the religious issues and explained the theoretical basis of religious pluralism. In this book, he borrows the seeing-as[10] proposed by the philosopher Wittgenstein in his Philosophical Investigations,and expands it to the experiencing-as which later plays an important role in constructing his theory of religious pluralism. Wittgenstein believes that seeing is just a transient visual experience,while seeing-as is integrated with thought activities and has interpretive significance,"we see it as we interpret it"[11]. Hick expands the concept of seeing-as, based only on sight,into the comprehensive conception of experiencing-as which is taken as our ordinary multi-dimensional awareness of the world.[12] Hick believes,apart from certain marginal cases,all human experiencing is experiencing as,then he introduces it into religious studies. As far as Hick learns,what Wittgenstein wants to stress is that the way in which we experience our environment depends upon the system of concepts that we use and that this is carried from generation to generation in the language in terms of which we think and behave. There is thus a relativity of forms of experience to what Wittgenstein sometimes called language-games,but Hick

〔9〕 John Hick,Problems of Religious Pluralism,(Hampshire and London:the Macmillan Press Ltd,1985).

〔10〕 Ludwig Wittgenstein,Philosophical Investigations,translated by G. E. M. Anscombe,(Oxford:Basil Blackwell Ltd,1958, second edition),197.

〔11〕 Ibid.

〔12〕 John Hick,Problems of Religious Pluralism,(Hampshire and London:the Macmillan Press Ltd,1985),19.

prefers to name it, cultures. Then it further helps to explain how is that there is not just one form of religious experiencing-as, with its own superstructure of theological theories, but a plurality, which we call the different religions.[13] In summary, Hick expands Wittgenstein's seeing as theory into an experiencing as and applies it to human beings' all conscious activities in different cultures, which surely include religious experiences. This conversion of seeing as to experiencing as provides an important basis for the subsequent construction of the Pluralistic Hypothesis.

Anothertheory which contributes a lot to Hick's theory of religious pluralism is the one proposed by the comparative religious philosopher Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Smith put forward the question of what is religion and what is religious faith in his monograph The Meaning and End of Religion-a New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind[14]; furthermore, in the following chapters, religious concepts, names and terms which have appeared so far in mankind history and their relation with one another between religions are examined from the perspective of the history of revolution happened to these concepts. Finally, Smith proposes that the concept of "religion", which originated in the West, with a sense of Christianity involvement should be abandoned for the purpose of having a true understanding of human beings' religious life and conventions, so "cumulative tradition" or "faith" can be the substitutes. Hick inherited the method of interpreting human faith from the historical perspective and different cultures, excluded two most common attitudes of inter-religious dialogue in Christian theology, inclusivism and exclusivism, and proposed that the theory of religious pluralism would be the most feasible one to solve the religious conflicts and political issues. "Each of the great religious traditions affirms that in addition to the social and natural world of our ordinary human experience there is limitlessly greater and higher Reality beyond or within us, in relation to which or to whom is our highest good. The ultimately real and the ultimately valuable are one, and to give oneself freely and totally to this One is our final salvation/liberation/enlightenment/fulfilment. Further, each tradition is conscious that the divine Reality exceeds the reach of our earthly speech and thought. It can not be encompassed in human concepts. It is infinite, eternal, limitlessly rich beyond the scope of our finite conceiving or experiencing. Let us then both avoid the particular names used within the particular traditions and yet use a term which is consonant with the faith of each of them- Ultimate Reality, or the Real."[15]

This is the first time Hick has explicitly given the concept of Ultimate Reality or the Real, which aims to clarify the central issue of the theory of religious pluralism: What is theOne which is holy and ineffable in each religion? Hick used the fable of the blind men grasping the different parts of the elephant to map the relationship between different religions, and thus led to the initial assumption of the religious pluralism hypothesis, the existence of Ultimate Reality[16]. The putting forward of this concept paved way for his Pluralism Hypothesis in the future.

3. The Rainbow of Faiths——John Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis

In the 1994 Auburn Lectures at Union Theological Seminary, New York, Hick was invited to

[13] John Hick, Problems of Religious Pluralism, (Hampshire and London: the Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985), 26.

[14] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion-a New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind, (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1962).

[15] John Hick, Problems of Religious Pluralism, (Hampshire and London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985), 39.

[16] Ibid, 97.

respond to criticisms of the religious pluralism he advocated. In the lecture, for the first time he officially used the Pluralistic Hypothesis to name his theory and to construct the related contents. He took simple language, clear examples to fully explain his theory of religious pluralism: from the cultural and theoretical basis to the responses to different concerns. In 1995, based on Hick's lecture and responses to criticisms, A Christian Theology of Religion- The Rainbow of Faiths[17] was published. Although Hick had been working on the research and statement on the theory of religious pluralism for decades, this was the first time he elaborated on his theoretical assumption on religious pluralism in the name of Pluralistic Hypothesis.

In the first chapter, Hick explains the Pluralistic Hypothesis in detail. He begins with the introduction to the three-fold classificationwithin Christian theologies as exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, then rejects the exclusivism based on God's compassionate doctrine, and rejects the theory of inclusivism on the basis that it is not accepted by religions other than Christianity. The salvation claim is extended to the truth claim, and the relationship between faith and objects of faith is described in aid of the Polish-American psychologist Jastrow's rabbit-duck figure. That is, different judgments about this picture are made by people from different cultural backgrounds, living environments, thinking modes as well as their respective religions, and it is like the way people are seeing their faith. In the end, he leads the solution of a harmonious dialogue between religions to the third one: religious pluralism (Pluralistic Hypothesis).

The core word of Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis is Ultimate Reality or the Real. In Christian theology, God, Ultimate Reality, the Transcendent, the Real all refer to God, and they are the core and foundation of the faith; and Ultimate Reality and the Real also constitute the foundation of the theory. Hick said, "the hypothesis to which these analogies point is that of an ultimate ineffable Reality which is the source and ground of everything, and which is such that in so far as the religious traditions are in soteriological alignment with it they are contexts of salvation/liberation. These traditions involve different human conceptions of the Real, with correspondingly different forms of experience of the Real, and correspondingly different forms of life in response to the Real[18]". Ultimate Reality can not be personalized or depersonalized, and it exceeds human being's conceptual system, so it is ineffable and indescribable. Hick believes that each tradition will continue in its concrete particularity as its own unique response to the Real, in form of different religious experiences[19]. Therefore, Hick gives the definition of religious pluralism in his book The Fifth Dimension: An exploration of the Spiritual Realm, "We now encounter what is known as religious pluralism, this being the name that has been given to the idea that the great world religions are different human responses to the same ultimate transcendent reality. That reality is in itself beyond the scope of our human conceptual system. But nevertheless it is universally present as the very ground of our being.[20]"

Based on Hick's introduction to the Pluralistic Hypothesis, the attributes of Ultimate Reality become clear to readers: the first one is being real, that is, the original being is the ultimate foundation of all beings; the second one is being ultimate, namely, there is nothing more fundamental than it; the third one is being transcendent, which is to say, in the view of human beings' conceptual

[17] John Hick, A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

[18] Ibid, 27.

[19] Ibid, 30.

[20] John Hick, The Fifth Dimension: An exploration of the Spiritual Realm, (Boston: One world, 1999), 77.

systems,Ultimate Reality is indescribable. The purpose of Hick's endowing the Real with the first two attributes is to include the existence of various ultimate reality in different religions,so as to establish the theoretical superiority of the religious pluralism. Based on the superiority,all religions are responses to Ultimate Reality,"When we have come to see the other great religious traditions as different but (so far as we can tell) equally valid human responses to the ultimate reality that is the ground and sources of everything and the condition of our highest good,we have no reason to restrict ourselves to the spiritual resources of our own tradition"[21].

When talking about world religious issues in his autobiography, Hick once mentioned his favorite words of SufiJalaluldin Rumi,"The lamp are different,but the Light is same:it comes from Beyond" [22]. The divine light was reflected into different colors in different clouds,and it is just like the different responses and religious experiences to their faith in the context of cultural diversities. As the title,A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths shows,Hick hopes to use the image of rainbow to describe the feature and ideological connotation of his Pluralistic Hypothesis: "This sees the great world faiths as very different but (so far as we can tell) equally valid ways of conceiving,experiencing,and responding in life to the ultimate reality that we call God. The rainbow, as the sun's light refracted by the earth's atmosphere into a glorious spectrum of colors,is a metaphor for the refraction of the divine Light by our human religious cultures[23]".

Rainbow is an apt term to describe the coexistence and the differences of various religions. According to the analogy of rainbow,Ultimate Reality is the sources of divine light and the common goal pursued by various religious believers;different religions are just like the colors in a rainbow, which are formed through the refraction of sunlight by the earth's atmosphere, so there is no distinction of superiority between colors,and it represents all religions are completely equal. The customs,cultures and history of different religions are like the earth's atmosphere which refracts sunlight and helps to form different colors of the rainbow, that is, the human being's mental construction is also an essential condition for the formation of religions. Various colors of the rainbow coexist at the same time, and the ideal goal of religious pluralism is to achieve the harmonious coexistence of various religions. In Hick's theory,he uses rainbow to metaphorize the religious pluralism,aiming to promote equality between religions. However,the traditional theology promotes Incarnation unconditionally,and the promotion has achieved the supremacy of Christianity. Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis runs counter to it,so his theory meets challenges from all parties.

4. Challenges from the homogeneity perspective

The three controversies in his academic career,his questioning the Incarnation doctrine,and the

[21] John Hick,A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths,(Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press,1995),139.

[22] John Hick,John Hick-An Autobiography,(Oxford:Oneworld Publications,2002),p161. The line is from Rumi:Poet and Mystic (1207-1273):Selections from his Writings Translated from the Persian with Introduction and Notes,translated by Reynold A. Nicholson,(George Allan& Unwin Ltd,1950),160.

[23] John Hick,A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths,(Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press,1995),preface.

official proposal of the Pluralistic Hypothesis, put him in the spotlight, and made him under the criticism and doubts from all sides. Hick's academic pathshall be filled with hardships and challenges.

The religious pluralismhas been suspected since it was proposed. Even today, it has still been a hot topic in the field of religious study. Paulo Huang put forward, "In this global village, pluralism is a disguised inclusivism, but actually the essence of inclusivism is exclusivism"[24], to some degree it also denies the rationality of religious pluralism.

The criticisms of Hick's theory from the perspective of homogeneity can be divided into two categories: the first category is the criticism from the conservatives in Christianity of Hick's denial of the central doctrines (the Incarnation and the Trinity) based on the homogeneity of all western cultures; the second category is the criticism of the theoretical construction of the Pluralistic Hypothesis, and scholars believe that the theory is homogeneous in nature, thus blindly eliminating the differences between cultures and religions.

In 1977, Hick put forward more than once in hisMyth of God Incarnate, "Christ did not claim to be God", but the Incarnation doctrine is the foundation of Christianity's long-standing one-religion in the western history. The identity of Christ, half man and half god, gives supreme power to the Christian doctrine and Christianity therefore becomes the most advantageous one in great world religions. Inevitably, to question the incarnation must challenge the bottom line of the Christian theological system and touch the nerves of many people. In 1944, Hick gave a lecture at at Union Theological Seminary on the Pluralistic Hypothesis, and in 1995, A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths, an expanded version of the Auburn Lectures, was published. These events caused huge waves first in the field of Christian theology in the West.

In 1997, William J. Wainwright questioned Hick's theory in the book review ofA Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths and pointed out that there are logical flaws in the theory[25], "Hick believes that his religious experiences and those of his fellow Christians are prima facie veridical. But he also thinks that the experiences of Buddhists, Hindus, and so on are epistemically similar to Christian experience. Hence, they too are prima facie veridical. These experiences, however, conflict. If (for example) God exists, Nirvana does not, and vice versa. Now either (1) all are delusive, (2) some are delusive and some are not, or (3) non are delusive. Hick rejects the first alternative, for he thinks that religion is not a 'purely human projection'. He also rejects the second. The traditions must be judged by their moral and spiritual fruits, and these are 'more or less on a par' …. So Hick proposed the concept of the Real to support his hypothesis, but it has flaws (1) that the concept of the Real is empty, (2) that the criterion of religious authenticity isn't adequately grounded , and (3) that by rejecting a tradition's self understanding, pluralism denies its 'otherness'"[26]. Besides these comments, Wainwright also pointed out that the Pluralistic

---

〔24〕 黄保罗 Huang Baoluo [Paulos Huang], "儒基会大战吗?" Ruji hui dazhan ma? [Is there going to be a War between Confucianism and Christianity?],《国学与西学:国际学刊》Guoxue yu xixue guoji Xuekan, [International Journal of Sino-Western Studies], No. 5, June, 2013), 3.

〔25〕 William J Wainwright, Bookreview: A Christian Theology of Religion: The Rainbow of Faith by John Hick, International Journal of Philosophy of Religion, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1997, 124-128.

〔26〕 Ibid, 124-125.

Hypothesis has two implications for Christian theology. The doctrine of the Incarnation implies the unique superiority of Christianity and is therefore unacceptable. Pluralism also entails the rejection of traditional concept of salvation. For if salvation consists in union with the Trinity, or redemption through the atoning death of Christ, the religions aren't equally salvific.[27] Wainwright's criticism reflects the attitudes of most traditional theological critics: in the historical background of long-lasting one-religious monarchy in the West, Hick's Hypothesis denies the core, the Incarnation doctrine, and suggests that all religions are equal and are the reflections of the same Ultimate Reality in different cultural and traditional contexts. Obviously this theory can not be agreed by the scholars who adhere to the traditional theology.

Itmust be mentioned here that Hick himself is also cautious on this issue, and it is related to his family's religious background. In 1977, as an editor, he participated in the publication of the collective volume, The Myth of God Incarnate[28]. In 1993, he rewrote and expanded the paper into a monograph, The Metaphor of God Incarnate[29]. Gavin D' Costa made his comments on it in his book review to The Metaphor of God Incarnate, "The title reflects the controversial collection edited by Hick, The Myth of God Incarnate 1977, and advances the same argument. What is new is Hick's critical assessment of Christological works previously not attended to by him… In this reviewer's reading, the shift from 'myth' to 'metaphor' signifies no 'literal' advance in the conceptual terms of the earlier debate. This is a shame[30]". However, it just shows that after more than ten years, Hick's attitude on this issue has become more cautious.

From the perspective of its theoretical construction, some scholars believe that Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis has homogenous feature; some even believe that it is monistic rather than pluralistic. It is evident that these criticisms fundamentally negate the logical validity of Hick's theory. Critics of religious pluralism believe that pluralism ignores or eliminates the differences between traditions, even makes them homogenous, become a false unity. In addition, postmodernist writers are apt to attack the integrative way of thinking, because it forcefully changes the complex and colorful world into a single conceptual icon. And the process of globalizationhas also enhanced this thinking, weakened the the "difference" and "alterity" and eliminated "the otherness of the Other". Along with these changes, critics apply this idea to criticizing the religious pluralism, and they say that religious pluralism "totalizes", then "homogenized" all religions, suppressing the mutual "otherness" of each religion. In their view, the religious pluralism is a comprehensive and homogenizing historical scheme, which assimilates to itself, thereby tames and domesticates the practices and beliefs of the different religious traditions. Again, he says, religious pluralism serves effectively to decompose or obscure the radical historical particularity which is constitutive of the true "other". Where a certain Christian barbarism presumes its "superiority" in order to justify the elimination or the conquest of the non-Christian "other", this monological "pluralism" sedately but ruthlessly domesticates and

[27] Ibid, 124.

[28] Edited by John Hick, The Myth of God Incarnate, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1977).

[29] John Hick, The Metaphor of God Incarnate, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993).

[30] Gavin D'Costa, "Book review: The Metaphor of God Incarnate by John Hick", Religious Studies, Vol. 31, No. 1, Mar. 1995, 136.

assimilates the "other" -any "other" - in the name of a "world ecumenism".[31]

Raimon Panikkar, the father of inter-religious dialogue, also believes that "to recognize that all creeds are reflections of one transcendent unity or that all religions have relative validity, although this step is important, it does not solve the problem of splitting between human beings.[32]" He criticizes the essence of Hick's theory as monism or reductionism, and he thinks it is unreasonable to attempt to summarize "many" with "one" and assimilate diversity and differences. Mandatory assimilation and suppression will eliminate the possibility of plurality, that is, the religious pluralism would become a tool to promote the laws of identity. Inevitably, this will lead to the emergence of "colonized" regulatory discourse context and the resurgence of universalism over differences.

The critics analyze the theory of religious pluralism from a homogeneous perspective, because they believe that when great world religious traditionswere regarded as the different responses to the same ultimate reality, the factors of people who are under different cultures would have been eliminated. This elimination ignores the specific characteristics of different religions and reduces it into a groundless theory. That is, the problems which various religions try to solve are different, but the answer provided by Hick's theory are the same. For example, the core issue of Judaism is how to bring holiness into everything they do, but the issue faced by Buddhist is how to attain the end of suffering.

In fact, although different great world religions have different ways to express worship, they are same in nature. All religions are constructed on the basis that this world is imperfect and unsatisfactory to most of the people, and at the sametime they could promise their believers a better future; they are all about the answers to one question, which is about how to move from an unsatisfactory state to a better one. When Hick tries to solve this problem, he puts different beliefs in one mode, which does not belong to each religion respectively but is given by Hick's Hypothesis. Because Hick believes that the only way to eliminate the religious egoism and to achieve the goal of equality between religions is to put them on the same dimension of reality, surely the Ultimate Reality can contribute to this possibility greatly. When trying to reduce the "reality" in each religion to its essence, Hick applied a phenomenological method, "experiencing as", to define the relationship between Ultimate Reality and the "realities" as the relationship between the essence and phenomena. But still his theory has been criticized badly by different parties. Therefore, if Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis is studied from the perspective of homogeneity, it will be in a dilemma; while being analyzed from the perspective of heterogeneity, it will give people a lot of inspirations.

5. From the Perspective of Cultural Heterogeneity

ZHANG Hua once proposed, "the rapid development of modern anthropology and the anthropological turn in theology are closely connected with the transformation of anthropology and theology, also with the shifting of Western ideological focus to human beings, and it is important for

[31] John Hick, A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 40.

[32] Raimundo Panikkar, Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility, (Fortress Press, 1955), 61.

people to learn this point in order to further develop anthropology and theology. Therefore it becomes extremely critical to think deeply about many issues of contemporary theology, including religious pluralism, from the perspective of anthropology"[33].

Cultural anthropology, as an important part in anthropology, is closely related to theological studies, and scholars have attempted to introduce methods of cultural studies into theological studies. In fact, some modern theologians have already shown us this possibility. For example, Schleiermacher's idea about theological work can be seen as an inquiry into the the culture of the Christian community. Lai Pin-chiu in his paper said that the doctrine of justification by faith is the core belief in Protestantism, but it has been derived into various interpretation in different cultures. Lai believes that if this doctrine can be properly interpreted, it will be a stepping stone rather than a stumbling-block to the future development of Protestant Christianity in China.[34] Culture heterogeneity exists generally. In the process of globalization, the direction of cultural development which can be homogeneous or heterogeneous, has also become a hot topic among scholars. Religions, as a carrier of culture, have also demonstrated trend of monism or pluralism. From this perspective, it should be feasible to use heterogeneity theory to explain the religious pluralism.

Many scholars in religious study see religious pluralism as a product of post-Enlightenment rationalism, and some who are influenced by Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Levinas, and Adorno (although these writers themselves don't discuss this issue) link religious pluralism with a capitalist world hegemony which is concealed behind the current "one world" idea.[35] From a cultural perspective to explore the Pluralistic Hypothesis, the discussion of "difference" and "heterogeneity" in philosophical system becomes unavoidable. The differences between beings and between cultures determine that to take the heterogeneous perspective to explore this religious theory can be more feasible and of practical significance.

People's research on heterogeneity stems from the exploration of philosophical theory, but in the era of modernization, globalization, networking and diversification, heterogeneity theory has been borrowed by scholars into various research areas. In the context of globalization, people have begun to pay attention to having a dialogue on the basis of equality and rationality, and henceforth the coexistence of multiple religions has become the norm. Therefore, it is innovative and enlightening to discuss the equality of religions from the perspective of heterogeneity.

Throughout the development of Christianity, conservatives in the field of Christian theology and in church have adhered to the absolute position and universalism of Christianity, and these featureshave been mainly manifested in religious exclusivism and religious inclusivism. Before the mid-20th century, "there is no salvation out of the church" had been an essential principle hold by the religious exclusivists; after that, the idea of Christian absolutism was weakened by the influence of

---

〔33〕 张华,[ZHANG,Hua],"当代神学的人类学视角及基督宗教多元主义",Dangdai shenxue de renleixue shijiao ji jidu zongjiao duoyuanzhuyi,[Anthropological Perspective of Contemporary Theology and the Pluralism of Christianity],《国学与西学:国际学刊》,Guoxue yu xixue guoji Xuekan,[International Journal of Sino-Western Studies],No. 17,Dec. 2019),149.

〔34〕 赖品超,Lai Pinchao (Lai Pan-chiu),"因信称义与基督新教在中国:兼论芬兰学派对路德的诠释",Yinxinchenyi yu jiduxinjiao zai zhongguo :jianlun fenlan xuepai dui lude de quanshi,[Justification by Faith and Protestant Christianity in China:With Special Reference to the Finnish Interpretation of Luther],《国学与西学:国际学刊》Guoxue yu xixue:guoji Xuekan[Journal of Sino-Western Studies],No. 16,2019),21-35.

〔35〕 John Hick,A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths,(Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press,1995),31.

people's awareness of religious diversity and the occurrence of inter-religious dialogue, then the inclusivism came into being. The religious inclusivism admits that salvation can occur at any time, any place and in any religious practice, but insists that the fact of salvation is the merit of Christ no matter where it occurs. In the end, people of all faiths will be included in the salvation by Christ. Under this circumstance, both the religious inclusivism or exclusivism are the typical form of religious absolutism and egoism essentially, because both of them are in accordance with the Christian centralism. What is more, they contradict with people's awareness of the religious diversity, hence become an obstacle to the establishment of an equal talk between religions. In this situation, a new religious theory, namely religious pluralism, came into being.

Hick once made it clear in A Christian Theology of Religions-The Rainbow of Faiths, "Indeed everything of real interest in theology today is controversial, and if the church as a whole is not to descend into bitter argument and mutual anathematizing we have to become accustomed to the rich internal diversity of Christian thought.[36]" It can be seen that he noticed the diversities within Christianity, and therefore concluded that if there are differences within a religion, the differences between religions will be more prominent and sharper, so he hoped to find a theory which could help to harmonize the religious differences, so as to achieve the purpose of coexistence. Therefore, as an attempt to build a peaceful relationship between religions and to develop the various faith group in a harmonious way, he proposed the Pluralistic Hypothesis. But at the same time, his awareness to the diversities within a religion or between religions can be seen from the statement at the beginning of this paragraph. And he realized that it could be something pretty normal in church in the future, so the differences or heterogeneity of religions should be accepted and be taken as a perspective to solve the problems within or between religions. From the perspective of heterogeneity, Hick's Plural Hypothesis is full of vitality and development potential.

InProblems of Religious Pluralism, Hick showed his appreciation to Dr. Philip Almond, for Almond made the cost-benefit analysis of the the pluralistic approach to the theology of religions in his paper "John Hick's Copernican Theology" which was publish in Theology in 1983[37]. Almond used the ancient parable of the blind men and the elephant to suggest that the different religious traditions have mistakenly developed dogmatic definitions of the divine on the assumption that their own partial experience of it is complete and adequate. Because each of the men touches different part of the elephant, the one who feels a leg mistakenly identifying the elephant as a tree, the one who feels the trunk identifying it as a snake. The whole thing is like the people's religious experiences, and they develop different conception of divine on their assumption rather than the truth itself. When analyzing and defending his theory of religious pluralism, Hick clarifies that the differences are originated from the formation of various religions. These differences are further reflected in corresponding religious ideologies and practices, therefore different religions have different religious ideas, religious experiences, and ways of responding to the divine reality. In this context, Hick believes that there needs a theory which can make people interested in a large number of differences between these religious senses rather than being bound by them, at the same time to see those

〔36〕 Ibid,11.

〔37〕 John Hick,Problems of Religious Pluralism,(Hampshire and London:the Macmillan Press Ltd,1985),96.

differences as humans' responses to the transcendent divine reality. Then we can conclude that Hick's religious pluralism has the following propositions. First, the reality of belief (personal gods or non-personal gods) in the world great religions are not Ultimate Reality, but merely stays as the secondary ultimate reality which are the reflection of the ultimate one, and they are the diversified cultural expressions of Ultimate Reality, the transcendent ontological universe. Second, the redemptions of various religions all include the transformation from self-centralism to reality-centralism. In different cultural, historical and religious backgrounds, people take different paths to seek the unity with Ultimate Reality, thus showing a variety of paths to redemption. Third, the diversity of the secondary ultimate reality will produce different religious forms, religious activities, ethical concepts and religious practices, that is, the pluralism of religions. Fourth, each religion contains multiple good points, also countless evils. The fifth one is the practical significance of religious pluralism: to promote dialogues on the basis of equality between religions, to explore sound ethical resources in religion, to promote religious peace and religious concern to the issues related to human beings' survival.

To sum up, in Hick's theoretical system, clearly he emphasizes the existence of diversity and believes that in the process of developing a world community, human beings should to be tolerant to one another and coexist heterogeneously.

The agreement on the conception of differences help scholars to study Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis more objectively; from the perspective of heterogeneity, the process of constructing the theory is seeking common ground while reserving the differences, and it is innovative and of practical significance. On one hand, the religious pluralism keeps different doctrine systems intact in their respective religious tradition; but on the other hand, it uses Ultimate Reality as a meta-theory, that is, these complex and diversified religious traditions as a whole are different responses to one Ultimate Reality.

The affirmation of the existence of differencesis also reflected in the approvals to different interpretations derived from various cultural contexts to one doctrine. For example, when Huang Paulo and You Bin had a discussion about the Chinese localization of Christianity, they all agree on the "great theology" structure derived from the context of Chinese native culture: Christian science, Christian etiquette, Christian ethics and Christian psychology. These four parts are all built on the basis of Christian classics, thus constituting a complete system of Chinese Christian "great theology".[38]

6. Concluding Remarks

In 2012, Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick[39], the second volume of essays in honor of Hick, was published to mark the occasion of Hick's

[38] 游斌,黄保罗,[YOU Bin, Paulos HUANG]"基督教中国化视角下的路德新诠释", Jidujiao zhongguohua shijiao xiade ludexinquanshi,《国学与西学:国际学刊》Guoxue yu xixue: guoji Xuekan, [International Journal of Sino-Western Studies], No. 16, March, 2019), 1-16.

[39] Edited by Sharada Sugirtharajah, Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

ninetieth birthday. 19 essays were assembled in one volume to reflect the philosophical and theological concerns of John Hick, and there are four sections: 1) religious pluralism and global perspective, 2) religious pluralism and practical concerns, 3) theological and philosophical orientations, 4) John Hick's writings and their impact. "The essays are not recollections or mere praise of Hick's vision for religion in the 21st century, but are original insights inspired by his thought. Furthermore, not all the scholars are uncritical of Hick and his program. The conversation remains fresh."[40] It can be seen that as a leading figure in the field of comparative religious study, Hick's theory of religious pluralism has far-reaching influence. On one hand, he derived "experiencing as" from Wittgenstein's "seeing as", put forward the proposition that all experience is "experiencing as" and used this as the basis of his Pluralistic Hypothesis. Also based on Kant and Wittgenstein's philosophical views, he explained the philosophical system of Pluralistic Hypothesis with easy words which made his theory more readable and acceptable to readers. On the other hand, Hick's theory of religious pluralism challenged the traditional Christian doctrines, so it has drawn scholars' criticism or support. Those who agree with his view hope to supplement or modify the constituent element based on Hick's theoretical framework, attempting to make this theory more persuasive and complete. Inspired by his theory, some of them even propose a new interpretation to his theory by using different theoretical reference. There are also many opponents: some of them are Christian conservatives, criticizing Hick's infidelity and defamation to Christian doctrine; some of them are from other religions, directly pointing out that Hick's thinking is wishful and idealized, and the western Enlightenment thinking or ideology may be hidden behind his theory.

It is of great significance that Hick's theory of religious pluralism makes a dialogueon the basis of equality possible and lays the foundation for the peace and development of mankind. Because compared with the conflicts of interest which are heavily constrained by various factors, religious conflicts which lack these constraints are likely to break out. Therefore, religious conflicts have become one of the greatest threats to world peace. The equal dialogue between religions has provided a good opportunity for the coordination and resolution of contradictions among religions, and has also become an effective measure to maintain world peace. Therefore, the practical significance of Hick's theory of religious pluralism is far greater than its academic and religious significance.

〔40〕 Bede Benjamin Bedlack, Reviews on Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick by Sharada Sugirtharajah, Theological Studies, 2013, Vol. 74 Issue 1, 210-213.

中文题目:

文化异质性视角下的宗教多元主义

张秋娟,比较文学博士,北京语言大学应用外语学院讲师。通讯地址:北京市海淀区学院路 15 号,北京语言大学教五楼 237,e-mail:zhangqiujuan@blcu.edu.cn

摘要:约翰·希克与他童年时受到的传统基督教教育背道而驰,因倡导宗教多元论而被两次判为异端。宗教学界对他的宗教多元论也是褒贬不一,多数学者都是从同质化的宗教多元角度来批判宗教多元主义的谬误,认为多元主义消除了传统间差异性,使他们同质化,成为了一个虚假的统一体。本文拟从异质性角度来阐述宗教多元主义假说的可行性和进步性,进步一分析各个宗教的异质共存才是宗教多元主义的基础。

关键词:宗教多元主义;同质性;异质性;终极实在