

Outline on Religious Diversity

I. The Fact of Religious Diversity

- A. Religious traditions, while sharing many features, have many different views and practices.
- B. Many of the different claims of religious traditions are *incompatible* with each other and so they cannot all be correct with respect to these issues.

II. Significance of Religious Diversity

- A. The facts of religious diversity may be adduced as a reason for supposing that the claims of any particular religion are either false or at least unwarranted. Hence, religious diversity makes the beliefs of religious people unreasonable.
- B. Religious diversity may be a reason for non-religious persons to (reasonably) withhold assent to religious statements if, as many claim, there is no way to adjudicate the fundamental irreconcilable differences between the traditions.
- C. The facts of religious plurality may need an explanation from within religion to the extent that religious practitioners are acknowledge a privileged position or relationship to the Divine for themselves.

III. Three Positions

- A. Exclusivism: Person *S* is *exclusivist* with reference to religion *A* just if *S* thinks that religion *A* alone is right and other religions that differ from *A* are excluded from being right.
- B. Inclusivism: Person *S* is *inclusivist* with reference to religion *A* just if *S* thinks that religion *A* is right but other religions may participate in *A*'s rightness.
- C. Pluralism: Person *S* is a *pluralist* with reference to religion just if *S* thinks that for any religion *A*, *A* is no more right than other religions *B*, *C*, *D*, etc.

IV. Two Types of Rightness

- A. Truth Claim Rightness: Religion *A* is right just if its (essential) claims are true.
- B. Spiritual Attainment Rightness: Religion *A* is right just if participants in *A* are capable of a particular kind of religious attainment while adhering to *A*.

Note: These forms of rightness are independent. For example, a person may maintain that a particular religion is exclusively right in terms of its truth-claims but adopt an inclusivist view with respect to spiritual attainment.

V. Some Potential Problems for Each Position

- A. Problems with Exclusivism: (i) Religious preferences are constrained or determined by factors of luck (e.g., where we were born, what our parents taught us), so we're not entitled to claim that our religious claims are epistemically privileged. If a person were born at a different time and place, her religion of preference would likely be very different than it

actually is. (ii) It's *prima facie* odd (to many) that there would be one Absolute being who created the entire universe and cares for all human beings yet only a privileged minority would be the recipient of the true revelation from God and stand in a positive relationship with the creator of all. (iii) Exclusivist claims require extraordinary evidence, but there is no such evidence for exclusivist religious claims.

B. Problems with Inclusivism: (i) Inclusivism grants practitioners of other traditions at least the possibility of spiritual attainment but only of a second-class and derivative sort. (ii) Inclusivism requires that practitioners of other traditions achieve spiritual attainment *in spite of* their own tradition since, on the inclusivist view, spiritual attainment is based on the alleged truth of her religious claims. For example, in Christian inclusivism, if non-Christians are saved, it's because Christ redeemed them, not because their own spiritual practices are efficacious.

C. Problems with Pluralism: (i) all religions cannot be right in their essential claims since their essential claims are often incompatible, (ii) to fix (i) would require adopting a view of the essential claims of religion as false, but this would run contrary to what religious people actually believe about their own religion. (iii) Pluralism rejects religious exclusivism, but pluralism is just another form of exclusivism since it claims that its account of religion is correct and all others incorrect.