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John Hick's Hypothesis of Religious Pluralism: postulates, criticism and modification

Abstract: This article provides the main theorems of John Hick's hypothesis of religious pluralism. In the article, there are arguments against recognizing this hypothesis as justified. In the final part, the author comments on the radical religious pluralism of David Rogacz. Radical pluralism, in contrast to Hick's proposal, postulates assent as the transcendent reality of all deities or supernatural beings. The author presents criticism of this concept. The key to criticizing Rogacz's hypothesis is the lack of clear criteria that distinguish divinity, *sacrum* from *profane*.

Key words: Hick, Rogacz, hypothesis of religious pluralism, radical religious pluralism, transcendental agnosticism, inexpressibility, radical exclusivism, perfect being, God, gods, devil.

Introduction

The central topic of the article is the concept of religious pluralism proposed by John Hick (1922–2012). Another key aspect is the discussion about this hypothesis and its modifications.

In the first part, we present the philosophical background of the hypothesis of religious pluralism (HRP), which should be useful for understanding both the hypothesis itself and its critics.

The second part outlines the main postulates of the hypothesis of religious pluralism, and the premises and reasons underlying the HPR.

The third section provides a review of objections raised against the HPR. The defence of Hick is included in the introduction to the second edition of “An

Interpretation of Religion”¹. This topic, however, is beyond the scope of the present paper, and it is worth exploring in a separate study.

In the fourth part, we discuss the proposition of radical hypothesis of religious pluralism proposed by David Rogacz, and the objections it has attracted.

Philosophical background of the HPR

The general characteristic of Hick’s philosophy of religion can be summarized as a religious interpretation of religion. Hick assumes that religions point towards something that really exists. In *Faith and Knowledge* (1957), Hick argues that religious faith has the same epistemological nature as scientific knowledge. All kinds of knowledge are experiencing-as. From that perspective, religious faith is not less rational than scientific knowledge. Propositions of religious faith are meaningful in Hick’s view. In opposition to Flew’s *Theology and Falsification* Hick assumes that religious statements can be verified in “eschatological verification” (*Theology and Verification* (1960)). Although there are no conclusive arguments for God’s existence, religious faith (theistic or non-theistic) is, Hick claims, a rational belief without proof (*Arguments for the Existence of God* (1970)). Hick initially limited his studies to the philosophy of theistic beliefs. Over the years, however, the scope of exploration expanded, and his philosophy of religion encompassed not only the theistic, but also the non-theistic view of faith. Ultimately Hick claims that all so-called “postaxial” religions are true and salutary. By “postaxial” Hick understands the time after the turn of the content and form of religion that was made between 800 and 200 BC. It involved a departure from the tribal and cosmic understanding of religion and its functions, accompanied by the spread of a new look at religion as a way of salvation. Among postaxial religions are Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Also, it needs to be noted that, in effect, Hick makes a kind of “Copernican revolution” in theology and philosophy of religion, culminating in the formulation of the so-called hypothesis of religious pluralism. The hypothesis proclaims that all postaxial religions are equivalent both in terms of accuracy and the possibility of salvation of their believers. All religions lead to the transcendent Reality. Hick discussed the HPR in a number of books including: “*God Has Many Names. Britain’s New Religious Pluralism* (1980), *Problems of Religious Pluralis* (1985), *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989, 1991, 2004), *Rainbow of Faiths* (1995) and *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion* (2001)².

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¹ J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New York 2004, pp. xvii-xlii.

² J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, ed. I, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York 1957; J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, ed. II, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York 1966;

Hick's philosophy of religion, and after time, of religions, provides a number of interesting answers to the contemporary problems of philosophy of religion. This aspect was also broadly discussed, as pointed out below. Hick gave Girfford lectures like William James, P. Tillich, H. Bergson, A. Flew and many others. References to Hick's philosophy can now be found, for example, in the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* or *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*³.

Postulates and premises of John Hick's hypothesis of religious pluralism

HPR postulates

a. All world religions embrace, express and worship the same "Transcendence", referred to by Hick as the *Real an sich*, in various ways, depending on the context of language, culture, history, economic conditions etc. Hick writes: "I want to explore the pluralistic hypothesis that the great world faiths embody different perception and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to the *Real* from within the major variant ways of being human"⁴.

b. All world religions are equal in terms of the truth of the above picture – as well as ethical-saving. As Hick writes: "each of the great world religions, theistic and non-theistic, also has good epistemological foundations, supported by religious experience, assumed revelation, sacred writings, inspiring role models and generally good effects visible in human life"⁵.

c. No world religion can claim the primacy of truth or greater "saving efficacy" and "within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place"⁶. Salvation/liberation represents transformation from self-centredness.

d. The hypothesis of pluralism does not entail that there must be a syncretistic, unified form of religion: "This hypothesis is not, however, part of the first-order

A. Flew, "Theology and falsification" in retrospect, in: *The Logic of God. Theology and Verification*, M. L. Diamond, Th. V. Litzenburg (eds.), Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis 1975; J. Hick, *Theology and Verification*, "Theology Today", 1960, vol. 27/2; J. Hick, *The Arguments for Existence of God*, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1970; J. Hick, *God Has Many Names. Britain's New Religious Pluralism*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, London 1980; J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1985; J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, Macmillan, New York 1989, 1991, 2004; J. Hick, *The Rainbow of Faith. Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism*, SCM Press, London 1995.

³ See <https://www.rep.routledge.com/search?searchString=Hick+John&newSearch> [accessed on: 10.11.2017]; <https://plato.stanford.edu/search/search?query=Hick> [accessed on: 10.11.2017].

⁴ J. Hick, *An Interpretation...*, op.cit., p. 240.

⁵ J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion*, Palgrave 2001, p. 41.

⁶ J. Hick, *An Interpretation...*, op.cit., p. 240.

religious language of the particular traditions, but of the second-order philosophical attempt to understand the relation between those traditions"⁷. It can help in the mutual enrichment of religions and protect from exclusivism (only our religion is true), inclusivism (our religion is true, but others are true to some degree as well) and from religious wars.

Premises of HPR

a. Since Hick gives a religious interpretation of religions, he assumes that the statements of the religious language are not reducible to natural elements (in opposition to, for example, Freud, Feuerbach or Marx).

b. Experience, including religious experience, is the first method of cognition. As Hick notes: "I think (...) that the followers of other religions are equally well-mannered, basing their faith on their own religious experience"⁸. Hick's earlier works about knowledge, faith and experiencing-as support that claim.

c. All experience and, therefore, every cognition is "experiencing-as". Hick extends Wittgenstein's remarks on one way of seeing – "seeing-as" – onto all our experiences. What this means that every human cognition consists of interpretation. This, in turn, is not possible without notions and concepts which allow us to establish or discover a content. The concepts are assimilated according to the context of the culture⁹.

d. Depending on the idea of experiencing-as, Hick's claim that the world is open to different interpretations, is ambivalent, especially in the aspect of religious faith¹⁰.

e. Religious faith is, therefore, an interpretative element within the religious "experiencing-as". As Hick claims: "The correlative notions of experiencing-as, and of the forms of meaning which it half-discovers and half-creates, can, I believe, be applied to the analysis of religious experience. The religious mind experiences both objects (the bread and wine in the Eucharist, statues of saints, of the Virgin Mary, of Hindu gods, the sacred icons in an Orthodox church, Buddhist *stupas*, the tombs of Sufi saints, and so on) and situations (from life as a whole to particular occasions – the birth of new life, the closure of a life in death, the experience of worship (...) – as mediating the presence of God or the enlightenment of the dharma or the requirements of heaven or awareness of the Tao...). In experiencing in this way, the religious person is making a (usually unconscious) cognitive choice. For the situation itself is always objectively ambiguous, capable of being experienced

⁷ J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy...*, op.cit., p. 41.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 6.

⁹ J. Hick, *Wiara chrześcijańska w świetle koncepcji "doswiadczenia-jako"*, E. Wolicka (trans.), "Znak", 1994, XLVI, no. 464, (1), pp. 66-80.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 66-80.

either in purely naturalistic or in religious terms, presupposing but going beyond its purely natural character. (...) In such cases the religious and non-religious minds are experiencing the same situation, but experiencing it differently because at a preconscious level they are interpreting in fundamentally different ways"¹¹.

f. Hick divides the view of the *Real*, present in the world religions, into personal and non-personal. The personal view is found in Christianity, Islam, Judaism and some Hindu denominations. Non-personal views include primarily Buddhism and some Hindu systems. The difference in the concept of the *Real* has given rise to the introduction of quasi-kantian concepts of noumenal and phenomenal. Based on these, Hick distinguishes between the *Real* phenomenal and the *Real* noumenal (the *Real an sich*). Since religions are contradictory or opposite, in Hume's line of argument none of them can be true. Hick's argument for the truthfulness of religions is as follows: the transcendental *Real an sich* interacts with the human consciousness, which responds by developing a religion. Both this action and the form of the human response depend on the effect of culture, language, history, etc. Hence all religions refer to the same transcendence, but differently understand, express, and worship¹².

g. While developing the HPR, Hick introduces the notion of transcategoriality as an expression of the conceptual imprisonment of the *Real an sich*. Transcategoriality, i.e. being outside of the cognitive categories of man, results in the inability to express the qualities of the *Real an sich*. With the introduction of the transcategorial, there is a desire to demonstrate the reasonableness of the language of religions without distinguishing the more or less true of them. The differences between religions cannot affect the transcendent "deity" itself, but at least the ways in which it is understood. Hick finds examples of the notion of transcategoriality in many religious traditions. In Hinduism, this is the distinction between the *nirguna* Brahman, the ultimate, transcendental reality in itself, and the *saguna* Brahman, the same reality as humanly experienced as Ishwara, divinity exalted in countless divine works, in different aspects of life¹³. In Mahayana Buddhism, as quoted by Hick, "an essentially similar distinction is drawn between the ultimate Dharmakaya, beyond human conceptuality, and its manifestation as the heavenly realm of the compassionate Buddhas, some of whom appear on earth in different historical periods"¹⁴.

h. In Christianity, in Hick's opinion, Gregory of Nyssa wrote about God as inexpressible in His real nature, impossible to grasp by any term or idea, or beyond all name. Hick states that a similar idea can be found in Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Eriugen, Eckhart, Margaret Porete, Paul Tillich, etc.¹⁵

¹¹ J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy...*, op. cit., p. 4.

¹² Ibidem, p. 91.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 77.

¹⁴ Ibidem, note 4, p. 87.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 87-81.

i. The acceptance of truthfulness of each postaxial religion is possible, if any of founders of religions claim for the divine attributes. If one of them assigns such a divine title, in the literal sense of the word, it puts on a privileged position in relation to other religions. In this context, a question arises about Jesus Christ. Hick presents a series of analyses. Hick also points out similarities in views of the transcendence and conception of salvation in religions. According to Hick "the function of religion is to be an enabling context of salvation/liberation, which consists in the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to a new orientation centred in the *Real* as variously manifested through the different religious traditions. And because the great world faiths seem to have proved over the centuries to be more or less equally salvific (and also more or less equally infected by human greed, cruelty, pride and selfishness), it seems to me proper to hold that they constitute, so far as we humans can tell, equally valid even though there are very different responses to the *Real*"¹⁶. This transformation depends on the commitment to faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour; complete submission to God in Islam; full trust and obedience to the Torah; transcendence of the ego, which is at the self-conceived desire and desire to attain the moksha or Nirvana¹⁷.

Objections to the hypothesis of religious pluralism

Problem of transcendental agnosticism

One of the most important objections was formulated by Gavin D'Costa¹⁸. While working on the hypothesis, Hick was forced to revise his earlier views including "eschatological verification". The purpose of the principle was to defend the factual nature of the language of religion. In brief, it claims that the Bible descriptions of the figure of God and his plans for the people are statements of facts, because one can think of a situation where they could be verified. This situation is the eschatological state after death. The transition to religious pluralism is, therefore, to ask about the role of this principle and the factuality of the language of religion, taking into account different descriptions of the *Real*, and thus the claims to be verified. In "Eschatological Verification Reconsidered" Hick concludes that it may be that the final state will be beyond the horizon of the power of our present imagination, may be over the anticipation of any earthly religion¹⁹. According to D'Costa, being

¹⁶ J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy...*, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

¹⁷ J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New York 2004, pp. 36-50.

¹⁸ G. D'Costa, *John Hick's Theology of Religions. A Critical Evaluation*, Lanham 1987, pp. 70-185.

¹⁹ J. Hick, *Eschatological Verification Reconsidered*, in: *A John Hick Reader*, P. Badham (ed.), New York 1990, pp. 126-144.

beyond the horizon of imagination also concerns the *Real*. It means that the description of the eschaton loses its factual character. So, this aspect of indeterminacy of the eschaton precludes D'Costa from using the term transcendental agnosticism in favour of pluralism. The allegation is serious, as the notion of agnosticism as a suspension of judgment by virtue of the inability to know, excludes any belief. Hick's agnosticism is discussed in greater detail by Chrzanowski²⁰.

Differences between religions

Chrzanowski also draws attention to the reductive nature of the interpretation of similarities between religions. Meanwhile, Hick looks for these similarities at an excessively general level, making comparisons which appear too straightforward. An example given by Chrzanowski is the notion of love in Christianity and Buddhism. According to Hick, Buddhism and Christianity share not only the concept of salvation but also the notion of love²¹. According to Chrzanowski, not only the concepts of salvation are different, but also the concepts of love. One is *caritas* – merciful love, and the other one *karuna* – boundless compassion²². The quoted author refers here to the analyses of de Lubac and Waldenfels²³. The latter states: "where the being is deprived of this ontological density [of Buddhism – Grzegorz Chrzanowski] given to him by God-creator, where we encounter only complex, fluid structures, there is nothing that would demand and allow ultimate love. Any altruism, whatever its degree of fervour and possible colouration, will be reduced to the technique of desecration"²⁴. Besides, in Chrzanowski's view, although Hick prefers to address the principles of phenomenology in the description of religion, it does not apply to its basic postulate of a return to things. Hick, meanwhile, does not accept the faith of Christians as it was originally presented, but makes a significant change by rejecting the divinity of Christ. In the same way, it describes the Christian religion not as it perceives itself, but rather in a manner which accommodates it within the HPR²⁵.

D'Costa notes an inconsistency in Hick's argument for a necessary change in the evaluation of the figure of Jesus. On the one hand, Hick describes Jesus as a person possessing the constant and intense consciousness of God and, at the same time,

²⁰ G. Chrzanowski, *Zbawienie poza Kościołem*, Poznań 2005, pp. 316-318. The topic of HPR in the Polish literature is also discussed by P. Strzyżyński in, *Koncepcja wiary teistycznej w filozofii religii Johna Hicka*, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań 2009.

²¹ J. Hick, *An Interpretation...*, op. cit., pp. 316-337.

²² G. Chrzanowski, *Zbawienie poza...*, op. cit., pp. 295-296.

²³ H. de Lubac, *Aspekty buddyzmu*, translated by I. Kania, Cracow 1995, pp. 35-88; H. Waldenfels, *Buddyzm a chrześcijaństwo. Francuz-chrześcijanin spogląda na buddyzm, wstęp*, in: H. de Lubac, *Aspekty buddyzmu*, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁴ H. de Lubac, *Aspekty buddyzmu*, op. cit., p. 72.

²⁵ G. Chrzanowski, *Zbawienie poza...*, op. cit., p. 299-315.

notes the uncertainty and insecurity of the New Testament descriptions of Jesus²⁶. What determines which descriptions are authentic, and which should be described as mythological?²⁷

According to Kenneth Rose, the HPR is reductive because it denies the doctrinal and descriptive difference between religions to such an extent that it suggests deliberately cutting their message to the requirements of the HPR. Hick does not refer, for example, to the difference between the Hindu incarnation (where there are no limits) and the Christian concept of one incarnation; likewise, he omits the difference in the Jewish and Indian-Greek perceptions of creation: in the former it is the creation *ex nihilo*, and in the latter – emanation²⁸. Unlike in his early writings, in the later works Hick declares that the differences are merely a package, but it is important that religions are soteriologically effective²⁹. According to Rose, here lies the subordination of the individual religions to the general HPR. Such an interpretation protects the cognitive nature of the language of religion and religious beliefs at the expense of the specificity and substance of particular religions. On this basis, Rose states that it is difficult to expect that followers of religion accept the *Real an sich* as about what their religions say. Differences undermine the earlier premise of parallels, and thus do not permit the claim that the world religions describe the same *Real*. In the initial focus on the similarities between religions Hick had to compete with an explanation of differences. Some crucial differences include the following attributes of the *Real*: being a person and a non-person, being a substance and a non-substantial process; being a factor that intervenes in human history and not being such a factor; incarnation in a human being and not incarnation; being triune and being strictly unitary, and so on³⁰.

In order to overcome the difficulty of contradictory descriptions of the ultimate, Hick introduces the previously mentioned notion of transcategoriality: “the term ‘ineffable’, meaning inexpressible, transcending description, beyond the scope of our human concepts, is good semantic currency with a respectable Latin lineage. (...) I suggest ‘transcategorial’, that is, outside or beyond the range of our categories of thought, and I shall use both terms in what follows. We are concerned with transcategoriality as applied to God – using ‘God’ as our customary western term for the ultimate reality to which the religions point. Each of the great traditions says, in its own way, that God in God’s ultimate nature is beyond characterization by the range of concepts available to human thought and embodied in our languages. But they balance this by also speaking of God in relation to ourselves as having, in

²⁶ J. Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London 1977, p. 172.

²⁷ G. D’Costa, *John Hick’s Theology of...*, op. cit., p. 126,

²⁸ K. Rose, *Knowing the Real. John Hick on the Cognitivity of Religions and Religious Pluralism*, New York 1996, note 6, pp. 120-121.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 99-106, see note. 2 and 3, p. 120.

³⁰ J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy...*, op. cit., p. 91.

the case of the monotheisms, humanly describable attributes such a personality, goodness, love, compassion"³¹.

It seems that by adopting the quasi-kantian distinction, the conception of faith as 'experiencing' as well as the specific 'inexplicability' of the *Real*, one can accept the hypothesis of religious pluralism. All the more so because the analysis of the religious beliefs which Hick conducts is coherent with that ineffability. Hick disagrees with the notion of religious belief as a primarily cognitive, propositional attitude expressed in the theories on what the *Real* is and what it is not. Faith for Hick is a non-propositional attitude. It is related to such approaches to religious belief as *emuna* (faith in), and opposes the unilateral conception of faith as *pistis* (faith that). With this faith in mind, the question of conceptualizing the *Real* goes down³².

Problem of inexpressibility of the noumenal *Real*

Kenneth Rose notes that the inexpressibility attributed to the *Real an sich*, resulting from transcategoriality, is stronger than that of Aquinas and Dionysius Areopagus. In fact, there is nothing that can be said about the noumenal *Real*. Rose also claims that such an apophatic way weakens Hick's conception, since in classic apophaticism, *via negativa* has its complementarity in *via affirmativa*, and in the HPR *via negativa* is not balanced³³. The lack of balance leads to an inconsistency, since the understanding of something inexpressible is out of cognition. In this way, the concept of religious cognitiveness declines. As a result, Hick fails in the views he was trying to counter³⁴.

Charge of preferring religion with the non-personal approach of the *Real an sich*

William Rowe suggests that talking about something that is personal contains more content (it is more specific) than a statement about something impersonal. The HPR, supported by Hick's notion of 'transcategoriality', tends to prefer anon-specific view. Consequently, the HPR supports a rather non-personal view of the *Real*, which excludes personal concepts. Therefore, it is no longer the hypothesis of religious pluralism³⁵.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 76.

³² J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New York 2004, p. 158-160; also in: J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, II ed., New York 1966, pp. 11-148.

³³ K. Rose, *Knowing the Real...*, op. cit., pp. 110-111, see note 37, p. 124.

³⁴ G. Chrzanowski, *Pluralizm religijny i teologia negatywna*, "Logos Ethos", 2004, n. 1(16), pp. 63-78; P. Strzyżyński, *Teologia apofatyczna Pseudo-Dionizego Areopagity i apofatyzm hipotezy pluralizmu religijnego Johna Hicka*, in: *Filozofia chrześcijańska*, K. Stachewicz (ed.), Poznań 2008, pp. 165-186.

³⁵ W. Rowe, *Religious Pluralism*, "Religious Studies", Cambridge 1999, vol. 35, n. 2, p. 146.

Problem of ontological status of the *Real*

Rowe also raises the question of ontological status of both the divine personal beings (God of Israel, Holy Trinity, Shiva, Allah, Vishnu, etc.) and non-personal absolutes (Brahman, Nirvana, Sunyata). It is hard to think that they exist as specifically as trees and stones. According to Row, although Hick does not express this, he thinks of them as analogous to "true hallucinations" – no such beings exist in reality, but their "emergence" is an opportunity for the process of salvation/liberation³⁶.

Primacy of experience

In a polemic with Hick, William Alston shows that relying on religious experience does not necessarily lead to the HPR. According to Alston, differences in religions could not be the effect of different experiences. Dissimilarities could be explained by errors contained in superior systems of cultural context. Thus, in order to clarify the diversity of religion while relying on experience, it is not necessary to construct the HPR³⁷.

Accusation of quasi-statements

Chrzanowski believes that the convictions expressed in the statements assuming the truth of the pluralism hypothesis, would not be as much statements as quasi-statements. Likewise, statements about unicorns in literature. The way of existence of a unicorn does not allow for the same recognition as the way of existence of a table. Statements about the existence of these objects will be, respectively, quasi-statements and statements. Chrzanowski notes that in the HPR all the statements referring to the religious sphere do not concern the *Real an sich*. As a consequence, statements of religious language are quasi-statements³⁸. So the possibility of building moral claims on the basis of quasi-statements is questioned. Every religion entails some ethical requirements, and they should be treated as serious requirements rather than quasi-requirements. The serious requirements cannot be built on the foundations of quasi-statements.

³⁶ W. Rowe, *J. Hick's Contribution to the Philosophy of Religion*, in: *God, Truth and Reality. Essays in Honour of J. Hick*, A. Sharma (ed.), New York 1993, p. 22.

³⁷ W. Alston, *Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God*, "Faith and Reason", 1988, n. 10, p. 433-445; J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy...*, op. cit., pp. 25-75.

³⁸ G. Chrzanowski, *Zbawienie poza Kościołem*, op. cit., p. 326. Chrzanowski recalls here Ingarden's distinction on statements and quasi-statements, in: R. Ingarden, *Szkice z filozofii literatury*, Cracow 2000, pp. 119-174.

Difference between the categories of Hick and Kant

Rose notes that Hick treats the *Real an sich* at the same time as transcendent and causal. He states that Hick defines the *Real an sich* in transcendental terms as a necessary postulate. Only by treating the *Real an sich* as transcategorical and transcendental, in Hick's view, is it possible to defend the religious interpretation of religion against the non-religious, and defend the meaningfulness of the language of religion. On the other hand, this transcendental element affects the people who construct the phenomenal *Real*. This is a philosophical error in Rose's opinion. Transcendental cannot be causal, and cannot affect empiric. Rose specifies: "it is inconsistent to claim transcendentalism, such as Realism, that it exhibits the schematization of self in harmony with the human cognitive and cultural process, in the aspect of the reality of the religious experience. There is no point in arguing that an inexperienced transcendental postulate influences human consciousness"³⁹. Assuming the influence of the *Real an sich* on the subject means that it can be experienced. That means, in turn, that the postulate of the noumenal *Real* falls, if it is to be empirically grasped. Noumen, however, if it is to be a noumen, cannot be seen in the phenomena. As a result, in Rose's opinion, the HPR fails as an attempt to defend a religious cognitive function. Indeed, the effects become another version of religious non-cognitivism, and also non-religious, functionalistic interpretation of religion⁴⁰.

Rose also notes further difficulties associated with the concept of the *Real an sich*. They are attributable to the fact that Kant's categories are universal and necessary, while Hick's are culturally dependent. What is more, Hick claims that man has the freedom of choosing which category (God-personal, Absolute-non-personal) he will use to refer to himself as the *Real an sich*. The Kantian categories, however, are a constant structure of cognition and not a possible outcome of choice⁴¹.

Problem of pragmatic criterion

The criterion of getting to know the *Real an sich* is, according to Hick, the transformation of life, the transition from self-concentration to concentration on the *Real*. The transition to a pragmatic criterion for the truthfulness of a religion has its consequences for its cognitivism. In Rose's view, Hick reduces the cognitive nature of religion to more or less general, pragmatic, soteriological effects. The defence of cognitivism in a theoretical way fails as soon as the *Real an sich* becomes superfluous and irrelevant – if it is inexpressible, then what is its purpose? On the other hand,

³⁹ K. Rose, *Knowing the Real. John Hick on the Cognitivity...*, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 112.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 113. See G. Chrzanowski, *Zbawienie poza Kościołem*, op. cit., pp. 319-322.

the defence of cognitivism in a pragmatic way fails at the moment when, by introducing the soteriological criterion, Hick makes religion only a system of ethics or a psychological therapy leading to the avoidance of self-centeredness. Hence, Hick's attempt fails. According to Rose, the stubbornness of ordinary people with their religious convictions better defends her cognitive ability than the pluralist hypothesis⁴².

Proposition of Radical Pluralism of Religions (RPR)

In the book *W stronę radykalnego pluralizmu religijnego* David Rogacz radicalised the HPR, based on the above critics, among others⁴³. In Rogacz's opinion Hick proposed "religious monism – vision of one Reality, one salvation, one mystic, one religious ethic"⁴⁴. The main idea underpinning the RPR is that there is not one *Real*. There is a pluralism and possibly an infinite quantity of the *Reals*. Each of them has connections with an appropriate version of salvation, ethics and mysticism. There is no meta-definition of salvation or mysticism⁴⁵. *Reals* do not have to be good in the traditional meaning. Satan can also be the *Real* worshiped by believers⁴⁶. Religions, like Christianity, Hinduism etc., are not unchangeable in their dogmas "because their followers living in time and space, they (dogmas) are changing"⁴⁷. In the logical order the *Reals* construct forms of salvation, mystical experiences, and ethics. But which of the *Reals* will be confessed depends on the human choice, which in turn depends on widely understood cultural factors⁴⁸. The RPR is not any kind of a new syncretic religion. Instead, it is a theoretical interpretation of religions. The RPR is only a meta-theoretical position which tries to include all religions with their own view of themselves⁴⁹. The RPR gives place for radical exclusivism – a believer of a particular religion can still believe that only his religion is true⁵⁰. But on the level of the RPR, this statement is suspended because the RPR is meta-theory which in "horizon of polytheism recognised even monotheism"⁵¹. Rogacz believes that only the RPR theory is a real pluralism which avoids the reduction of religions

⁴² Ibidem, p. 116-117.

⁴³ D. Rogacz, *W stronę radykalnego pluralizmu religijnego*, Cracow 2016.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 137, translation by P. Strzyżyński. D. Rogacz proposed the RPR with references also to the pluralistic hypothesis of Heim and Legenhausen, p. 93-125. These references and the hypothesis itself, however, are beyond the scope of this article.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 139.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 143.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 141.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 144-145.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 145.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 145.

to view one transcendent Reality⁵². He avoids focusing on the similarities or differences between religions, and states that despite Judaism, Christianity and Islam claiming that they worship the same God, in the light of the RPR these gods are different Realities⁵³. This is why the RPR entails possible exclusivism, as the RPR does not see common points in religions. Believers can believe that only their religion is true. For the RPR, each *Real* is real to the same extent, and there is no way to state which religion is more or less true. It is out of the range of human possibilities⁵⁴.

These features, in Rogacz's opinion, defend the RPR from the critique levelled against Hick's HPR for reductionism and selective approach to religions. Hick, as mentioned, reduced the vision of Christ as the true Son of God in Christianity, probably to fit it to the HPR⁵⁵. *Ipsa facto*, the RPR is resistant to objections for bypassing differences between religions like the HPR.

In Rogacz's opinion, the RPR defends itself also from the accusation of reducing religion to ethics by applying the pragmatic criterion of truthfulness of religion. In the RPR, this problem vanishes, as the RPR does not ask questions about the truthfulness of religion. The RPR accepts the pragmatic criterion, but inside each religion, without constructing any kind of generalisation of that criterion⁵⁶.

Since the RPR does not explain differences of religions, it does not need the distinction between the *Real an sich* and the *Real*. This is why there is no need to use concepts of inexpressibility or transcategoriality as in the HPR. As a consequence, the RPR defends itself from the charge of transcendental agnosticism⁵⁷.

Furthermore, as Rogacz states, the RPR defends itself against the accusation of exclusivism which was raised against the HPR in view of the fact that Hick's theory concerns only a few forms of religion. The RPR is a framework for every form of religion, including religions that will exist in the future⁵⁸.

It appears that Rogacz's proposition has successfully addressed the problems associated with the HPR, however, there are few difficulties associated with the RPR, too.

According to Hick's HPR, believers can theoretically believe that their religion is in the same way true and salvific as others religions, for all of them refer to the same *Real an sich*. Hick's proposition focuses on the similarities shared by religions, which is why he assumes that religions say something true about one transcendent object. For believers, in Hick's opinion, the HPR can offer an explanation for differences between religions. In the case of the RPR, believers should assume that

⁵² Ibidem, p. 145.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 144.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 147.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 147-148.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 148.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 146.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 145.

there is an infinity of realities in which they will live after death in the presence of the corresponding *Real*. Each – even subtle – difference between religions or denominations should be understood as a reason for believing that it corresponds to a different reality. The above also applies to joke religions⁵⁹. Rogacz does not consider similarities to be more important than differences, because he does not seek to adopt any presumption, even that similarities are more important than differences. For Hick, similarities apply to more important features of the transcendent being than differences. This is why he argues that if one can say anything about the *Real an sich*, it should be a statement about the goodness of it. Differences between religions are merely misunderstandings resulting from diverse cultural contexts. For Rogacz, these statements are the effects of unjustified presumptions. But claiming that, he must posit that there is no reason to treat any statements about the ultimate reality as truer than another. Any statements about the *Real* can be true, or are true. In the name of objectivity, Rogacz refuses the problem of the criterion of truthfulness of religions.

As Rogacz says, believers may change the understanding or interpretation of their own religions. Catholics can change their understanding of any dogma in a subtle element (for example, by shifting the understanding of the story of creation from a literal description of a historical event to a heuristic myth). Is he or she (the believer) changing the *Real* in which he or she believes? Is he or she also changing the eschatological reality? Is it possible to affirm that the subjective cognition or knowledge changes the ultimate reality and the *Real*? And what about the incorrect interpretation of dogmas or moral requirements? On the one hand, Rogacz argues that the “criteria of truthfulness of religious experiences are established by particular Churches”⁶⁰. On the other hand, however, in the RPR all beliefs concerning the transcendent are true. Rogacz tries to be very objective and refuses all presumptions, even that the *Real* must be good or even that there must be something true about gods. Looking for true statements without any borders, he loses all borders, even between the good and bad.

The RPR is open to criticism for radical subjectivism because it does not give any constant ontological background for statements about the transcendent. The *Real* can be almost everything. It becomes more obvious below, based on Rogacz’s argumentation against the traditional view of perfection of God’s being.

These are arguments for arguing that the RPR, by subjectivity, loses its explanatory power. This is in opposition to Rogacz’s statement that the RPR has a heuristic power⁶¹.

Another problem arises if one compares the statement that the RPR does not settle the question of falseness or truthfulness of religions with the statement that

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 148.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 147.

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 148.

religions talk about something real. There is a question of how Rogacz agrees with the above. Saying that something is real is the same as saying that something is true.

Another question is as follows: is the conviction of believers a sufficient reason for the truthfulness of the vision of the *Real*? If so, why is a conviction saying that the *Real* of another religion is not true, not a sufficient reason to deny the realness of that *Real*? The RPR is open to radical constructivism – what someone believes in could be the *Real*.

Indeed, the RPR is similar to the methodological principles of sciences of religions. Despite the presumption that religions speak about something real, the sciences of religion also treat religions as they understand themselves, despite claims for truthfulness; also without building any generalisation about salvation as something real.

What Rogacz claims is that, the RPR, like other forms of religious pluralism, has a few assumptions: about the real existence of objects of religions; that each religion is on the same epistemological level; and agnosticism⁶². But the refutation of statements about the features of a transcendent object makes the agnosticism of the RPR much more destructive for his heuristic power than agnosticism in Hick's conception.

Rogacz believes that the RPR is useful for interreligious dialogue, but Hick's proposition, not the RPR, was constructed as the platform for such dialogue. In Rogacz's opinion, however, there is still room within the RPR for inclusivism and exclusivism as an attitude of believers⁶³. In contrast, Hick's proposition looks for common points in the vision of transcendence, salvation and ethics. On these grounds, pluralism is in opposition both to inclusivism and exclusivism. It is a new proposition which attempts to maintain both: believing in the truthfulness of one's own religion and believing that other religions also lead to the same transcendent. The identification of common aspects in different religions by their followers provides a platform for dialogue and peaceful coexistence of faiths. In Rogacz's concept, there is no place for recognizing points that are shared by different religions, as the RPR does not determine what is true or false in them. Therefore, the RPR is not a good platform for dialogue between faiths, as it does not give any foundations for the discourse and peaceful coexistence of religions. Moreover, the RPR is not only indifferent towards the claim of exclusivism/inclusivism, but also, in opposition to the HPR, avoiding similarities in religions allows believers for that positions.

In addition to the considerations given above, a more interesting question remains. Why should one accept the infinity of the *Reals* than one *Real an sich* at all? Rogacz notes that the typical argumentation against the multiplicity of the *Reals* is similar to the traditional argument against the multiplicity of gods, claiming that it

⁶² Ibidem, p. 155.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 156.

is impossible to be more than one perfect being called god⁶⁴. As far back as Melissos from Samos says that "For if it is (infinite), it must be one; for if it were two, it could not be infinite; for then they would be bounded by one another"⁶⁵. Rogacz seeks to refute that argument by saying that perfection does not have to be understood as "having the maximum of features, but the possession of at least one feature at maximum intensity"⁶⁶. In effect, in Rogacz's opinion, there is no need for constructing a hierarchy from less good beings to perfect beings. The *Reals* are on the same level, they are almost incomparable⁶⁷. Rogacz's second argument is that the traditional one Absolut does not have all features at their maximum intensity. The Absolut is immaterial; it is good as opposed to bad; it is almighty and not weak, so it does not possess all possible features. Rogacz argues that it comes from the assumption that the Absolut must have good qualities, and hence not all⁶⁸. In his opinion, there is a theoretical possibility that beside the infinitely good Absolut there is also the infinitely bad Absolut, deified Satan. The traditional way to justify mentioning good and bad on the same level is a privative conception of evil. But for Rogacz this is just a way of avoiding the problem of good and evil, because it is possible to invoke the arguments of Gnosticism that the primary word is bad, and good is the absence of bad⁶⁹. The third argument states that "even if we insist that among the *Reals* there should be a perfect being in all features... this does not exclude the existence of other *Reals* which do not have the aspiration to perfection"⁷⁰. Rogacz concludes that these three arguments show a "theoretical possibility of coexistence of different *Reals*"⁷¹. He adds that for humans it is impossible to show the factuality or necessity of that coexistence⁷².

Of course, there is no possibility of demonstrating the factuality of that coexistence, or the existence of one perfect being. But if our logic has something to do with reality, the logic necessity could eliminate impossible solutions.

Rogacz proposes the understanding of perfection as "having the maximum of features" or "the possession of at least one feature at maximum intensity". Why did he omit the phrase "having all possible features in maximum"? Apart from the problem of linking perfection to good features, let us focus on some formal analyses. Does something perfect, in no relative or redundant sense, have any feature to a lesser degree than the maximum one? And if one puts together two relatively perfect objects X and Y, so that X has one feature A in the maximum degree, but Y

⁶⁴ Ibidem, pp. 141-142.

⁶⁵ Simplicius, *De caelo*, p. 557, 16 (R. P. 144).

⁶⁶ *W stronę radykalnego pluralizmu...*, op. cit., p. 142.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 142.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 143.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 143-144.

⁷² Ibidem, p. 144.

has two features A and B in the maximum degree, which of them should be called more perfect? Admittedly, however, the phrase "more perfect" looks odd, because something is either perfect or not.

Also, there is no clear distinction between connecting perfection with good only or with bad as well. At some point, Rogacz writes about good features ("all features valued as good") but a few lines further he mentions Satan as a perfect being⁷³. Decisions about connecting goodness and evil with perfection should be more justified, as traditionally, not only in theological or scholastic frameworks, perfection connected with gods involves only good features. The refutation of a privative conception of evil should also be more justified.

Naturally, after Kant, we have no common metaphysical or ontological tools to discuss the problem of perfection. We have no justified connection between the existence of being with the goodness of that existence. This is why we cannot justify the following reasoning: the existence of something is good; Evil wants ill; so Evil does not want existence; something which we can call God wants good; so Evil is not God. But religions are related to something which wants good (even if evil is understood as good). Therefore, for believers something worthy of worship must be something wanting good for them; therefore Satan – wanting evil – is not an object of worship and religion. In the case of religions a link between existence and good exists. By abstracting from metaphysics and ontology, in his efforts to achieve objectivity and formality, Rogacz not only loses the justification for understanding perfection, but also a connection with really existing religions.

Conclusions

Religious pluralism proposed by Hick attracted a lot of criticism which the philosopher sought to address. Few such refutations, however, are still convincing. The accusations of transcendental agnosticism and reduction of religions to fit them within the HPR are hard to refute.

There are concerns that the same also applies to Rogacz's proposal. If the above understanding of his radical pluralism is correct, it will be hard to argue against the accusation of radical agnosticism, the lack of ontological independence of the *Real* (his subjection to believe in them) or the outright rejection of traditional arguments for the perfection and goodness of God.

Hick's sin was the attempt to gather within the HPR all postaxial religions and defend their truthfulness. Rogacz's sin is the attempt to avoid the problem of truthfulness of religions and collecting religions without any axis.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 142-143.