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An Evaluative Framework for the Improvement of Religious Practice in the Context of Pluralism

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An Evaluative Framework for the Improvement of Religious Practice in the Context of Pluralism

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Abstract

Pluralism presents a troubling epistemic problem in that the inability to determine whether or not significant portions of a given religion's cosmological and metaphysical belief set actually correspond to reality. Within this standstill there seems to be no way to prove yet alone maximize the epistemic rationality of continued religious practice, as each religion will claim to have a unique source of knowledge the others do not. However, if we set aside these unverifiable disputes, there remains an often underemphasized common thread: religions each have a conception of how *this* world ought to be. These conceptions involve how members of a community ought to relate to each other so as to maximize well-being and minimize suffering. This focus on well-being is a universal aim of living creatures and as such is not the reduction of distinct religions to a shared essence but is instead a common underlying goal. Well-being will of course look different in different contexts, and as such this paper will develop a suitably relativizable yet robust sense of well-being to serve as a manner by which to evaluate religious practice. Thus, practical rationality at least with respect to this-worldly salvation can be maximized. But in order to avoid a relativism about the specific beliefs that get one to the ethical output, an internal coherency constraint will also be applied, secondarily to the ethical metric. This will help to maintain elements of religiosity and felt experience in the face of the changes that will be required by a shift in focus to this-worldly salvation. I will examine Christianity of a Catholic bent in order to look at some of the ways in which a religion's self-conception will have to change significantly with respect to their relation to salvation if it begins to understand itself as but one possible path towards it and if it begins to recognize that other prima facie contradictory religions can be learned from to better accomplish this shared goal.

keywords: this-worldy salvation, liberation theology, well-being, pluralism, relativism

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I. Introduction

The existence of a plurality of religions presents a troubling problem for the full-throated belief that one's own religion is uniquely and absolutely true. From an epistemic standpoint, each religion appears to be on perfectly equal footing with respect to metaphysical and doctrinal claims about the nature of divine reality. But even if the broader cosmological disputes can't be adjudicated, that does not relegate religious practice to the realm of mere armchair philosophy. Indeed, John Hick (1988) makes the claim that the inability to settle doctrinal disputes about conceptions of the ultimate, the metaphysical, and the historical do not affect whether or not any or all of the religions can be salvifically effective (p. 365-369). If we set aside metaphysical claims, salvation must be understood as this-worldly salvation centered upon the alleviation of suffering and the promotion of well-being. This definition will be developed in the following chapter.

There is, in absolute minimum, a pragmatic rationale for viewing religious practice as an avenue by which ethical praxis can be positively informed. Specifically, for the purposes of this paper, religious praxis can be seen as a plausible means by which to aid the broader practical aim of increasing well-being and decreasing suffering. And this aim is a uniquely universal one. I am by no means claiming a universal essence to religions generally; this universality is prior to religion. But due in part to that fundamental level of universality, each religion does involve a rich view of how *this* world is not as it ought to be (Suchocki, 1987, p. 159). The actualization of how the world in fact ought to be is the realization of this-world salvation. This involves an increase in well-being based upon that particular religion's contextualized version of what well-being means. And, if that universal aim is accepted and religion is seen as a rational manner in which to achieve it, it at least can be practically rational to continue to practice one's religion in

the face of pluralism. Of course, in order to be maximally practically rational the religious praxes must be subject to some sort of evaluative metric and adjusted where necessary to maximize its salvific efficacy. Developing such an ethical metric will be the task of the next chapter.

But, if one focuses *merely* on the practical benefit to well-being, religion runs the risk of becoming meaninglessly relative in its specifics and thereby being reduced to a roundabout, inefficient way to achieve something that can be achieved secularly. So, a separate metric must be developed by which the parts of religious belief and practice that cannot be verified or do not directly relate to well-being can be evaluated and similarly adjusted for maximal rationality, secondarily to the ethical metric. This is in attempt to avoid that relativity with respect to the specific beliefs that get one to the practical output. It is also an attempt at conserving the less practical aspects of religious practice in the face of the shifts that will be demanded by the ethical metric. This portion of the project will make up the third chapter.

The need for two separate evaluative metrics comes out of the fact that religion generally is (at least) dual in nature. There is the part of the religion that deals with the divine and concomitant beliefs, but there is also the part of religion that "has to do with confronting, specifying, and then repairing what is wrong with the way human beings live their lives together in this world" (Knitter, 1995, p. 100). These two halves of religion have distinct evidential bases as well. The metaphysical beliefs are empirically unverifiable and are thus based in faith and revelation. The practical half of religion, conversely, is in fact verifiable in that the effects of the positive ethical output can be seen in increases in well-being and reductions in suffering. This of course will have to be a coarse-grained verification similar to the utilitarian calculus. But even

so, it is the only part of religious practice that can be verified. The metaphysical disputes cannot be adjudicated by appealing to the way things really are.

Such a method of adjudication involves an empirical approach to the world and truth claims about it that can be summed up by a definition offered by Hilary Putnam of what he calls metaphysical realism (henceforth MR). MR is comprised of three claims: "(1) that the world consists of a fixed totality of mind-independent objects, (2) that there is exactly one true and complete description of the way the world is, and (3) that truth involves some sort of correspondence" between these objects and descriptions of them (Putnam, 1992, p. 49). Now, MR is typically the context by which conflicting beliefs are adjudicated, and it is appropriate for empirical disputes. For example, if someone claims that water is made up of two hydrogen molecules and one oxygen molecule and someone else claims that water has two of each, there is a way to settle the dispute. The mind-independent nature of water can be examined and compared to the two potential descriptions. But there seems to be no similar avenue with regards to the metaphysical and cosmological beliefs that underpin religions.

Here it will be useful to formalize the epistemic standstill between different religions that opened this paper. It will help to show the inapplicability of MR as a model for understanding metaphysical and cosmological religious disputes. Moreover, it will also show that understanding one's own religion as true in the MR sense is in large part what motivates exclusivist stances. Take a hypothetical exchange between, say, a Christian and a Hindu, in the presence of an impartial observer who has no background in any religion. If the Christian makes claim *A*, where *A* is a description of the cosmos and our role within in according to Christian doctrine, and the Hindu makes claim *B*, where *B* is a description of the cosmos and our role that is wholly incompatible with *A*, there seems to be no way in which the observer could determine

which claim, if either, is true. Neither claim can be demonstrably said to have an epistemic advantage. Now, given the faith justificatory basis for cosmological beliefs, both disputants take their claims as justified. But they would not view the other's claim as equally justified. Faith as a justificatory base typically involves the further belief that one's own religion is in some sense the recipient of a *unique* source of knowledge. In the case of the pluralist standstill, this unique source of knowledge justifies one's own belief such that it appears to oneself to have an advantage over the other. But to the observer, neither would have an advantage, as each would claim such a unique source of knowledge at the expense of the other.

But, from the Christian's perspective, claim *A* does have a justificatory advantage over claim *B*, given that he nonetheless views himself as having access to a source of knowledge not available to the Hindu. Under MR, if claim *A* has additional justification and claim *B* contradicts it, claim *B* cannot be true. If the descriptions conflict, they cannot both correspond to the way reality actually is. Thus, the Christian takes claim *A* as exclusively true and denies claim *B*. The Hindu would take the same logical steps about claim *B*. But since appeals to unique justificatory bases are available to all, this application of MR does not succeed in actually delegitimizing any other religion to which the same moves are available. And there is clearly no empirical method by which to determine 'who is right' with respect to cosmological beliefs. As such, this paper will set aside these disputes and focus on the things that can in fact be evaluated. That being said, I do not believe that this sort of epistemic standstill necessitates withholding belief from any religion because none can be verified. It is not as if this context acts as a defeater for either the Christian or Hindu belief set as much as presenting a defeater for continued claims of exclusivism. The reverse of the inability to prove the metaphysical underpinnings of one's own religion is that is one is equally unable to disprove those of another.

This application of MR to beliefs with content that cannot be verified in accordance with its theses leads to exclusivist mentalities that stymie interfaith discussions. One cannot learn from or even truly take seriously the religious claims of a member of a different religion if they view those claims as inherently false. Moreover, it tends towards stagnancy internally as well, in that the beliefs and practices of one's own religion are more easily seen as uncriticizable. So, recognizing that MR does not apply to cosmological religious disputes opens to the door to possibility of learning from other religions. It also reinforces the possibility that some sort of reform could even be required, beyond allowing for additional sources of insight. The fourth chapter of this paper will examine what sorts of reforms ought to occur with respect both to beliefs and practices and to how a religion views itself and others. The test case for the application of the norms and standards I am developing will be Christianity of a Catholic bent, but only because this is the background which I have and the religion about which I can speak most confidently.

However, in order to get to the point of developing a pluralist Christology, I will first have to examine ways in which to set up interreligious norms by which a belief, practice, etc. can be said to be ethically valuable, as well as developing a suitable notion of religious truth claims. Again, this will not be a static evaluative process. Instead, the standard relation of doctrine and ethical practice will be inverted. Generally, praxis is thought of as flowing out of and dependent upon doctrine. But given the doctrinal standstill outlined above, there seems to be no good way in which to determine best practices if the only metric for goodness is unverifiable correspondence with unevaluable metaphysical positions. Rather, I will be following Paul F. Knitter and others in looking at how Christian doctrine can be changed or differently employed and understood in the context of better achieving our ethical aims, while still retaining as much

of the heart of the Christian religious experience felt by its practitioners as is possible. This allows for us to move forward from the pluralist standstill.

This strategy of actively responding and adapting to the problem of religious diversity runs counter to what Tom F. Driver (1987) calls "strategies of liberal complacency" (p. 208-209). As a partial response to pluralism, many in the Christian community have shifted from the historical perspective of exclusivism in which all other religions are viewed as largely if not wholly misguided and incorrect to some sort of more positive viewpoint under the assumption that by so doing, these other religions "can somehow be politely affirmed in their existence without the need for Christianity to undergo any significant change itself" (Driver, 1987, p. 208). This takes two general forms. The first is the shift from an exclusivist view to an inclusivist one, as took place in Vatican II, largely influenced by Karl Rahner. Inclusivism is the claim that there is, in some minimized sense, salvation outside the church, but that the salvific value of other religions is still less than that of Christianity. More significantly, whatever salvific value can be found in non-Christian religions exists as a direct result of the salvific efficacy of Christ. That is to say, there is a lesser sort of salvation to be found in, say, Buddhism, but it is still mediated by Christ. So, what appears to be affirmation of other religions is at root still an elevation of Christianity as uniquely and absolutely true. More perniciously, the intended polite "affirmation of otherness is gained by somehow rendering the other compatible with Christianity, which of course eliminates the very otherness it sought to affirm" (Suchocki, 2003, p. 19). And, for the same reason that exclusivism is not a justifiable position given the nature of the epistemic standstill, inclusivism is not tenable because it is the same claim of unique superiority disguised as affirmation. It is useful to explicitly point out that under this view Christians continue to claim a unique source of knowledge, or in minimum a unique level of understanding. Other

religions may be on the right path, but Christianity is the furthest along and the only one that correctly understands that path.

The second type of 'complacency' is more straightforward but much more damaging. This is the affirmation of radical relativism, or the claim that all religions are utterly equal. If all religions are reduced to some common essence and all claims made by each are equally true, then any variations between religions, and indeed any aspect of any religion, is nothing but an accident (Driver, 1987, p. 210). Not only is this a formalized acceptance of the standstill and the corresponding inability to do better or worse, it also deeply undermines the significance of any one tradition. Under such a view, it simply does not matter what one believes or does as long as it is based in an uncriticizable religious position. That is the danger here. Not only does this give up on finding the best way to believe, it allows for seemingly terrible ones.

The aim of this paper is to ride a fine line between relativism on the one hand and absolutism on the other. This paper will focus more on absolutism than on exclusivism proper, as taking the claims of one's religion as wholly absolute leads quickly to taking those claims as exclusively true. For if it is absolutely and inviolably the case that *A,* then any version of *~A* is automatically false. So, the two terms are not synonymous, but leaning too far towards absolutism leads to exclusivism. A large part of walking this tightrope between absolutism and relativism involves the development of a sort of meta-universalism[1]. That is to say, I will be attempting to both allow for meaningful contributions and ethically valuable praxis by differing and incompatible religious traditions and to establish a sort of overarching standard by which these religions may be ethically evaluated. These standards, norms, or directionalities thus must

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[1] I will restrict the use of universal(ism) to positive, pluralist norms and so forth and restrict the use of absolute(ism) to the sorts of stances that lead to negative, exclusivist norms and so forth. E.g. global reduction of suffering is a plausible universalist norm whereas global abstinence from alcohol is an exclusivist norm derived from the belief set of Islam taken as absolute.

be minimal enough so as to allow for varying methods and their underlying belief structures, but also robust enough so as to allow for meaningful guidance. In light of these practical standards, each religion can then reexamine their own doctrines so as to best accomplish their ethical goals. These goals are variously construed as justice, eco-human well-being, communal expectation, and ethical transformation by those covered in the second chapter of this paper. The third chapter will then examine a notion of religious truth that avoids the pitfalls of relativism and of the reduction of the specific belief content of a religious tradition to an arbitrary means to an ethical end. For although the way out of the epistemic standstill does seem to be a prioritization of praxis, completely discarding the importance of the specific content of various belief systems results in a different sort of relativism that is no less unpalatable than radical relativism under which the content is solely an arbitrary means to an ethical end. The fourth chapter will then examine Christian doctrine in particular as an example of how a religious belief set might adapt to accommodate those practical aims and notions of religious truth. In this case, I will examine the development of a pluralist Christology. If the epistemic rationality of religious beliefs cannot be judged, then we shall judge them by their fruits (Matt. 7:20 New American Bible). But more than that, we shall cultivate and nurture those fruits.

If we cannot evaluate the epistemic rationality of religions participation under MR, our only avenue for maximizing the rationality of religious practice in light of pluralism is in terms of practical rationality. My basic claim will be that continued religious participation is practically rational to the degree to which it coheres with a non-relativistic understanding of the pluralist context. That 'non-relativistic understanding' will be based in the normative discussion in the following chapter as well as the model of religious truth claims in chapter III. Increasing practical rationality will involve some basic tweaking of applications, altogether discarding

certain practices, and affirming others, but will also involve significant changes in the understanding of things like Christ's role in relation to salvation. But this will not happen without reference to the existent belief systems, and there will still be an emphasis on internal rationality as well. The belief systems will be called to change in significant ways, but it is crucial that we do not throw the baby out with the bath water. As such, a large part of the function of chapter III is a broadly conservatist one, in that it tries to maintain the internal coherency of the religion secondarily to the primary ethical aims.

Despite this paper's focus on interfaith relations, I confess that I am not enough a scholar of comparative religion to try to look too closely at what the logistics of interreligious dialogue and thus more literal cooperation might look like. That being said, the epistemic standards of interreligious dialogue carried out in good faith will be useful in determining how various religions ought to best understand the claims of different religious beliefs sets. I do intend to also look at intrareligious dialogue in light of pluralist ethical standards and objectives that would be reasonable for any religion to adopt. As such, the following chapter has characteristics reminiscent of social contract theory in the establishment of the proposed norms.

Another way of describing this project as a whole is as the construction of a framework by which a plurality of religions can interact fruitfully in the pursuit of the universal goal of reducing suffering and increasing well-being. The framework provides a way by which the truth claims of another religion can be understood and potentially learned from without taking them as at best largely contradictory to one's own. If the goal is to achieve those shared ethical aims, albeit in varying and relativized modes, then there is a way in which those goals can be achieved with maximal effectiveness. This is the sense of practical rationality I mean, and this maximization can be achieved through the construction of a relativizable system of richer and

richer ethical norms constructed atop the foundation of the universal aim of well-being, and of a

system by which to understand the various ways in which that goal is approached and achieved.

II. Pluralism and Universalist Ethical Norms

This chapter will be divided into four primary sections. The first three will be presenting the views of Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, Paul F. Knitter, and Tom F. Driver, with some assistance from John Hick throughout. This chapter will be examining the establishment of cross-religious norms for ethical religious praxis and, by extension under the liberation theology inversion, doctrine. The ordering of the three is informed by this focus. Suchocki's 1987 essay "In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective" most explicitly deals with second-order norms, of the three. That is to say, she is most directly concerned with how best to construct norms for the evaluation of different religious traditions that neither exclude nor diminish certain forms of religious expression nor fail to provide any actual normative force. I will briefly appeal to John Hick's paper "On the Grading of Religions" as well, as it operates in much the same area. The second author is Paul F. Knitter, who both explicitly offers potential norms as well as operating in the second order. The third will be Tom F. Driver. He most certainly has second-order norms relevant to this discussion, but norms which have to be extracted somewhat. His primary purpose is the development of a trinitarian ethic based in a Christology appropriate for pluralism and religious dynamism generally. He will appear more in the fourth chapter. The fourth section of this chapter will step back, evaluate the three authors presented and the insights gleaned from them and explicitly establish how the nature of their justification is analogous to a social contract theory.

II.i Suchocki and Justice

Before getting into Suchocki, Hick's provocatively titled "On the Grading of Religions" is useful in framing the nature of this entire normative discussion. Hick (1981) does claim that

"religious phenomena…can in principle be classified or graded" and that "the basic criterion is the extent to which they promote or hinder the great religious aim of salvation/liberation," but denies that religions taken as totalities can be ranked in this way (p. 406-407). This is similar to the issue had by the utilitarian calculus when applied at a fine-grained level; it is relatively easy to tell if something has good or bad consequences, or broadly does more good or more harm, but it is impossible to quantify such that option A is, say, 7% better than option B. In the case of religious phenomena, the best that can really be determined is a sort of positive or negative (or neutral) directionality. The key to this whole project is a satisfactory definition of salvation/liberation. Salvation and liberation are used more or less interchangeably in the liberation theology literature broadly, though in my work I will stick to 'salvation' and 'salvific,' while I will refer to the movement as a whole as 'liberation theology'. Due to the practical nature of the discussion, salvation ought to be understood as this-worldly salvation, hence the synonymity with liberation. Salvation of the metaphysical kind such as personal immortality falls into the disagreements that this paper has set aside due to the impossibility of MR adjudication.

Suchocki (1987) begins her paper with what she believes is the central aim of liberation theology generally: "the normative justice that creates well-being in the world community" (p. 149). She is extremely conscious of the dangers of imposing a new sort of meta-absolute norm that would play much the same role as exclusivism or inclusivism in the hinderance of an authentic pluralism. She rejects the idea that one can truly step outside of their own traditions or "religious and cultural histories" and take a post-modernist 'view from nowhere' and is careful to avoid attempting to do so (Suchocki, 2003, p. 15). The impartial observer in the introduction to this paper occupied a hypothetical 'view from nowhere' in his lack of affiliation or knowledge of

any religion, but that example was ultimately constructed so as to show the inapplicability of the MR standards of mind-independent, verifiable truth in the religious realm. In practice, no one in religious dialogue is able to fully extricate themselves from the context. It is unlikely that one could even do so culturally, let alone from the impact religion has upon culture even if one is not themselves a practitioner. Such a standard is relegated to questions of science and empirical verification, which does not serve us in this context. This rejection of a god's eye view is in line with Langdon Gilkey's (1987) claim that there is a "requirement of a center for praxis" and that one "must stand somewhere and act from some basis" (p. 46). The same line of thought will also be echoed by Victoria Harrison in the third chapter. This is one of the reasons that liberation theology generally is dialogical in form, because of the inescapability of one's own standpoint[2]. Thereby, the problem of who defines well-being is particularly sticky, due to the variance of cultural values and the non-option of 'the view from nowhere.' This is also why Suchocki (1987), echoing Knitter, calls for "a shift of judgment from ideological ground to ethical ground (p. 150). A fundamental sense of well-being should be better able to escape cultural differences than the ideological baggage behind it in various particularized forms. However, the richer the sense of well-being becomes, the more relativized it necessarily will have to be.

Following her basic statement of the goals of liberation theology, the relationship between 'justice' and 'well-being' needs to be clearly defined, as it is the driving concept for her position. Suchocki (1987) offers that justice ought to be thought of "as a concrete reality manifested in concrete communities" and that "laws are to be abstracted from situations that

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[2] In my case, given that I am neither deeply versed in comparative religion nor literally engaged in dialogue, I will have to emulate social contract theory. That is to say, I will have to be satisfied with the process adhering to the standard that if all hypothetical parties could agree to a given proposed norm in the absence of coercion, power differentials, and so forth it could be reasonably said that the norm is good for all involved. Although this seems like a god's eye view, as will be rejected, it is simply the movement from a universal concrete reality to more nuanced and relativized sense of justice abstracted from that concrete reality. I believe it avoids this issue.

exhibit well-being" (p. 154). Moreover, well-being also feeds back into justice in the sense that well-being serves as the norm by which laws are judged as just or unjust. So, a just law is based in the promotion of well-being and an unjust law is identified as such when it hinders or reduces well-being. Identifying justice as a concrete reality in this way helps its plausibility as a universal norm and hinders the potential for a culturally imperialist or absolutist abstract ideal, which is a clever move. So, since justice is dependent upon well-being, Suchocki (1987) gives a tri-level conceptualization of well-being in which the levels are "successive, building upon the other, and each moving toward a multiplicity of forms," resulting in richer and more relativized conceptions of justice within various contexts (p. 155). The higher and more complex the level, the more relativity between groups as to what constitutes well-being.

The first level is fundamental physical well-being such as food and shelter and the base existence of a community and its members, unnormed in its structure. The second level has to do with a more nebulous sense of human dignity and recognition within a community. The third level is "openness to self-development and self-determination within the context of community," with the community now fully self-normed in its structure (Suchocki, 1987, p. 154). It is important to point out that the goals of dignity, recognition, self-development and self-determination can mean very different things depending on variables such as the level of individualism valued by each community, but that this is accommodated by relativizing the details of those broad goals to the communities. Fundamental physical well-being thought of as minimally the reduction of suffering and unwilling privation in the domains of food, shelter, and the like is relatively straightforward. Human dignity and recognition within a community would mean at least basic human rights and certain social rights. Some social rights would likely be restricted in societies with royalty or even aristocracy, but as long as one is not prohibited from

'baseline' social rights and services, the second level ought to obtain. The third level is the most nebulous, but I offer that it would be along the lines of maximal ethical self-determination within a given cultural and religious context. The more complex and underdetermined the level, the more room for relativization between contexts.

These three levels clearly show the treacherous position between absolutism and relativism. The fundamental idea is that people ought not to suffer, but the more positive and social senses of well-being in the second and third levels require room for and affirmation of differences between religious communities. It is much easier to try to generate negative norms which prohibit base suffering[3] than it is to construct positive ones that account for rich, social well-being. A benefit of Suchocki (1987) attempting to work in this positive dimension is that her sense of "justice implicitly and explicitly pushes toward an affirmation of pluralism" as well as acting as "a criterion for judging the forms of pluralism it engenders" (p. 155). Not only is the relativizability built into Suchocki's program, it is also constructed such that it resists unethical relativization through the interrelation of justice and well-being. A key point with regards to this entire project is the divergence of this ethical criterion from both doctrinal and historical criteria. It is essential to recognize that a religious phenomenon could be historically and doctrinally authentically Christian without meeting the ethical criteria. In her words, "failure of the criterion becomes to that extent a judgment against the [ethical][4] value of the form, although it would not necessarily speak to the Christianness of the form" (Suchocki, 1987, p. 155). And this divergence is really the key shift that must be made in order to develop a truly salvific, non-radically relative pluralism: the prioritization of ethical fruits over purely orthodox adherence to

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[3] cf. Knitter in section II.ii

[4] My specification, as I will make the distinction between the ethical and religious dimensions more explicitly in chapter III. This is not to say that the ethical criterion will not have priority, but it is important to note that it is not all that is at play, as that would engender a sort of relativism about specific beliefs.

Christianity as it has been. Driver in particular will focus on this, and both his and Knitter's perspectives will make up much of the fourth chapter.

This is not to say that the historical and cultural undergirding ought to be discarded; they are what underly the concrete forms of well-being within her method. The first and fundamental level more or less escapes cultural variation, but the second and third levels most certainly do not. There will be obvious differences between what different religions and cultures consider to be the more nuanced senses of well-being, and much of that will come from their ideological background. But some must be discarded, as in cases in which a religion ends up "justify[ing]…poverty as a necessary condition for the attainment of a good not presently seen or experienced" (Suchocki, 1987, p. 157-158). At least some strains of Christianity have in the past done this. However, more generally speaking, a common aspect of religion, specifically in the realm of this-worldy salvation, is an idea of how the world ought to be. With this comes the implication that it is not yet that way; this almost always involves at least the base sense of suffering. This can be taken advantage of within the process of norm construction in that a not overly, but adequately, relativized sense of justice could be found in each religion if justice is characterized "as that which renders life meaningful in light of a vision of what existence should be" (Suchocki, 1987, p. 159). Moreover, justice couched as such can be used intrareligiously to examine whether or not its existent societal form corresponds with its idealized vision of justice. There can also be intradoctrinal examination of which ultimate and penultimate values are being pursued and upheld in light of this idealized vision. And this is not wholly foreign to the, for example, American Christianity; take the shift in which parts of the Bible were reflected in doctrine before and after the abolition of slavery in the United States. The values that were presented in doctrine that justified the disproportionate suffering of a segment of society began to

no longer match society's understanding of justice and were slowly discarded. This sort of dynamism with respect to ideals of justice over time will be central to Driver's account. Such a partially internal basing also works to help mitigate the charge of pluralism as being merely an absolutism of the second order. That is to say, it is not the pluralists forcing the change from on high, but the Christian community reaching that conclusion on the basis of their own beliefs and values no longer being reflected in those aspects of doctrine. And it is indeed in this order, and historically has been. It is in practice a less foreign idea to shift doctrine on the basis of communal values than it seems, despite the common view that values are derived from and dependent upon doctrine.

II.ii Knitter and Eco-Human Well-Being

Knitter (1995), similarly to Suchocki, makes the claim that "justice or eco-human well-being can serve as a universal criterion for truth without becoming a new foundational or absolute norm for truth" (p. 118). There are two central differences in approach that should be pointed out first that I find to be essential contributions to the picture laid out by Suchocki. The first is evident in the above quotation: the expansion of well-being to include both human and ecological aspects. Knitter makes this expansion in his 1995 *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility*; it does not contradict his earlier work but merely expands its focus. One of the main benefits of this expansion is that it broadens the common ground between religions. Not only is there a sort of "shared locus of religious experience" as well as some sort of minimal "moral commons" with respect to well-being, but also a shared *context* for those divine experiences, mundane experiences, and moral concerns and responsibilities (Knitter, 1995, p. 103, 125; Knitter, 1987, p. 186). This also reinforces a

"common cosmological lineage" in the sense that we all share as our roots the Earth (Knitter, 1995, p. 120). And this is all an added bonus to the more basic fact that ecological degradation is clearly correlated with human suffering, or at the very least inversely correlated with the degree of positive well-being. This more concrete point of common intersection also avoids some of the problems that come with merely boiling down all religious experience to the same thing to serve as a common ground, as this often mischaracterizes and reduces the value of and the variation between those traditions. Instead, Knitter (1987) proposes that "perhaps there is a common approach or a common context with which we can begin dialogue" that is not reducing religion down to some purported shared essence. Rather, he suggests "the preferential option for the poor and the nonperson – that is, the option to work with and for the victims of this world" (Knitter, 1987, p. 185). This benefits further from his later expansion to include ecological suffering, but starting from this point helps to ensure that new norms are not set up that increase the well-being of some but not of those whose voices are not heard. This approach is why I find that Knitter in particular echoes the justificatory mode of social contract theory.

The second central divergence is Knitter's explicit statement that his soteriological project involves both a positive and a negative assertion. The positive assertion is the active promotion of eco-human well-being, and the negative assertion is "a resolute 'no' to the sufferings, human and ecological, that torment our world" (Knitter, 1995, p. 99). I find this second divergence to be of particular use in the pluralist dance between absolutism and relativism. To take Suchocki's layered structure of well-being, it becomes increasingly hard to specify what constitutes well-being the more nuanced the levels get. This is the room that is left for relativism between communities, and it is essential. But, the denial of suffering is a clearer common ground throughout. We agree far more on what constitutes suffering that we do on

what constitutes its inverse. There are of course still disagreements, but the absence of suffering seems to me a firmer common ground. This is not to say that Suchocki does not account for this, only that Knitter's explicit bifurcation is quite useful. In minimum, as we work through the sticky process of establishing positive and progressively relativized norms, we can work to reduce suffering in the meantime.

One more commentary on the Knitter quotation that opened this section. He uses the phrase 'a criterion for *truth*[5],' which prima facie seems absolutist or at least confusing. Knitter (1995) is expanding on a claim made by Langdon Gilkey about the paradoxical, dialectical nature of truth in the context of pluralism.

> When I make a claim that something is true not primarily because it makes logical or coherent sense, and not mainly because it corresponds to my tradition, but because it is necessary for promoting human justice and ecological stability, then I am experiencing two things: a) I feel that insofar as this truth is essential for the well-being or salvation of the planet or other beings, I must stand up for it, defend it, maybe be ready to die for it; my truth is absolute for me. b) But I also feel that I can and must be open to any other version or edition of truth that will enable us to attain these same goals of well-being, or to understand them even more adequately; I realize and am challenged by the relativity of the truth I am proposing and living (p. 130).

So, in other words, the absoluteness is felt in the doing, in the praxis and one's total dedication to it, and the relativity is felt in reflection in the form of an openness to the possibility of better ways of carrying out those actions and aims. Gilkey (1987) himself says that a center at which one stands and basis from which one acts is necessary for praxis and that this, paradoxically, requires acting from an absolute standpoint not admitting of relativity (p. 45-47). However, the relativity of the pluralist liberative context is felt in reflection, in the understanding of the relativity within that context and its myriad positions (Knitter, 1995, p. 130). Gilkey (1987) describes this as "relative absoluteness," in which one stays centered in the Christian mode in

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[5] My emphasis.

first-order participatory praxis but relativizes that mode in second-order reflection (p. 47). Knitter does not apply the concept quite as broadly as Gilkey does, but it is useful as an expression of the absolute/relative tightrope liberation theology walks. Part of the pull of ethical obligation involves the felt need to assert and assume absolute positions, but in the pluralist context we are also drawn to recognize that these positions are relative, correctable, limited, and so forth. The importance of Gilkey's point has to do with the motivational structure of religious beliefs. When one is acting on the basis of a religious belief, in acting they take that belief as absolute, despite the fact that the belief is relativized in reflection when couched within the pluralist context. This point will be developed further with Knitter's claims about discipleship and dedication in section IV.i. The idea there will be that not only is a religious belief taken as non-relative in the moment so as to motivate action, in reflection such absoluteness can be recast as something that is worth one's complete allegiance, even if it is ultimately understood as being only one possible route. Moreover, even if one cannot step fully outside of their beliefs in reflection, simply relativizing or recasting those beliefs as such can serve as the avenue by which one's own doctrines are reexamined.

A way in which this concept can be applied directly to the generation of practical norms is the idea that various religions can have very divergent experiences of truth or divinity but can agree that these experiences must ultimately help to promote eco-human well-being or at least help to reduce suffering. This variation in praxis, experience, and more nuanced value sets can persist with eco-human well-being and suffering acting as shared reference points by which the claims of other religions can be criticized or affirmed. Human and ecological suffering are both universal and immediate and can thus be the basis of a common context underlying the relativity (Knitter, 1995, p. 127).

Knitter (1995) also appeals to Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx in a manner which echoes Suchocki's claims about idealized visions. Schillebeeckx makes the claim that global responsibility in this sense of eco-human well-being can be a sort of "communion with the divine." He takes the exclusivist mantra *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*[6] and alters it to *extra mundum nulla salus*[7]. The experience of a world of suffering and injustice leads to a "negative experience of contrast" in which there is a "spontaneous and forceful" rejection of the way that things are and then a "resolute yes" to how the situation might be transformed into how it ought to be. Put another way, salvation in this sense involves a "fundamental no disclosing an unfulfilled yes" (p. 113-114). The 'unfulfilled yes' will be in line with Driver's position of christic expectation in the following section.

What comes out of all this is a prioritization of ethical criteria with respect to the personal and social consequences of our beliefs over mystical, rational, historical, doctrinal, and so forth criteria (Knitter, 1995, p. 125-126). No matter how orthodox a belief, practice, doctrine, etc. is, if it bears "unethical fruits" it ought to be regarded with suspicion at the very least (Knitter, 1987, p. 182). Moreover, in Knitter's (1987) view, orthopraxis takes explicit priority over orthodoxy, such that "if orthodox clarity is not required" for the promotion of liberation theology's salvific aims, "it can wait." For Knitter, "praxis is both the origin and the confirmation of theory or doctrine" (p. 191-192). That is to say, a religion's practical aims, thought of as a vision of how the world ought to be based upon that community's aims and values, is what drives the generation of a version of doctrine that accomplishes those ends. The practical aims determine the structure of doctrine, which is confirmed by making progress

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[6] 'no salvation outside the church'
[7] 'no salvation outside the world'

towards those aims. Such an inversion is absolutely crucial to avoid the standstill of unresolvable doctrinal conflict that pluralism can so easily engender.

II.iii Driver: Christic Expectation and Communitas

In Driver's 1981 book *Christ in a Changing World: Toward an Ethical Christology*, one of his central arguments is a trinitarian ethic that comes out of a desire to detach the meaning and significance of Christ from a static, fixed event in the past and reconceptualize the trinity with respect to this dislocation. Knitter also spends much time examining how to reconceptualize Christ and his salvific role in a pluralist Christology, but that aspect of his project runs more parallel to the normative dimension than does Driver's more direct treatment. As such his contribution to that area will appear in the fourth chapter along with a more in depth look at Driver's, but Driver's position needs to be addressed at least in passing in order to extricate his normative claims. Some of the finer elements of Driver's (1981) nuanced conception of the trinity are not necessary for the purposes of the immediate discussion, but the central feature is a dynamic sense of the expectation of emergent good (p. 136). Importantly, what he means by this is an "expectancy [that] is a function of present action" (Driver, 1981, p. 148). That is to say, there is a vital difference between what it is like to hope for something versus expecting it to occur. Driver is not content to merely hope or to make do, and hence builds a program around christic expectation. Christic in this context should be understood as salvific, if generalized away from Christianity in particular.

Briefly, the structure of his trinitarian conceptualization is "two divine figures related in a contextual field that is itself divine," which involves "two figures of a definite character and a third component that is ineffable" (Driver, 1981, p. 105). The idea is to emphasize that there is

no priority between 'members' of the trinity, that no 'member' is unchanging, and that Spirit is

the context in which the two figures of Father and Son interact. He then broadens this relation as

a model for relations generally, in the sense that any relation exists in a field of divine potential.

And for Driver (1981), where these expectations are based is in the "experience of community in

awareness of the field of divine potential" (p. 148). The idea is that a "Christian community [is

a] community of christic expectation" (Driver, 1981, p. 134). Specifically, Driver (1981) appeals

to Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*, which Turner defined as "communal life freed from

duty and devoted to existence in mutual love" (p. 119). Importantly, the expectations shared by

such a community come out of their shared communal values. Their expectancy is about

actualizing those values out of the divine potential of the Spirit. Driver (1981) himself restated

the concept in religious terms as the idea "that people desire not only to live in community but to

experience therein a sacred communion of life with life" (p. 161). Notice that this concept of

community above and beyond simply living within a group mirrors Suchocki's higher levels of

well-being. Part of what his focus on fundamental relationality achieves is gleaning the insight

that "ethical decisions and values do not focus on *whether* people should be related but on the

mode and quality of their interactions (Driver, 1981, p. 146). The assumption of relations is

prior to any ethical discussion and is thus fundamental.

These dynamic communal expectations and divine communion manifest, according to

Driver (1981), as focusing on "the just integration of society" (p. 138). The thought is similar to

Knitter and Suchocki's ideas of a vision of how life ought to be. And for Driver, the idea is that

the burden of righting the wrongs found in the contrast of how life currently is versus how it

ought to be falls upon the community rather than the individual, and that it is the duty of the

community to deal with opposing interests or values by rectifying disagreements through

dialogue and growth. It is, however, interesting that Driver (1981) uses the phrase 'just integration' as the focus earlier, because he makes the claim that it is really the pain felt from the "violations" of the "experience of *communitas* in worship" rather than "an abstract ideal of justice…[that] motivates a Christian social ethic" (p. 169). It seems to me that *communitas* generates christic expectations which are then contrasted with their failure to obtain. One example that he mentions is the conflict between such a christic expectation and "social structures which guarantee privilege at the expense of communal justice" (Driver, 1981, p. 148). A modern example of such a situation might be the Dalits, or Untouchables, a Hindu social group that is heavily ostracized on the basis of the Hindu caste system. Driver's proposal that it is the pain of contrast rather than an abstract sense of justice that truly motivates ethical action is similar to Suchocki's basing of justice as well-being thought of as a concrete reality. The pain is similarly concrete, and similarly advantageous.

II.iv Justice, community, and the preferential option

So, the task is now to synthesize these various approaches to set up an appropriate meta-normative system for the establishment of justified and relativized norms within various communities. The fundamental starting point, in my view, ought to be the negative prong of Knitter's bifurcation. Before well-being can be effectively maximized, suffering must be reduced. This can be accounted for in Suchocki's position because the establishment of the first level of physical well-being necessitates a reduction in suffering, but Knitter's approach is helpfully explicit. I have been making analogies to social contract theory, and Knitter's preferential option for the poor is the starting point for that. An essential element of achieving communal justice is to look to those who experience the highest degree of injustice, or lack of

well-being. There cannot be a truly legitimate, higher-tier sense of communal justice if a segment of society is not participating in it. In a hypothetical agreement in which all members of society were behind something analogous to Rawls's veil, the basic, concrete sense of well-being for all would be inarguable as an aim. The brilliance of Rawls's veil is how radically undesirable well-being or prosperity for some that comes at the expense of the well-being of others appears if one does not or cannot assume an advantaged position in the group. And in terms of justification, the grounding of justice in concrete well-being by Suchocki and the ethical motivation of Driver's communal expectation as a concrete pain at the violation of *communitas* give a foundational starting point from which the higher levels of justice can be abstracted. This puts this project in a better position than merely starting from an abstract ideal.

Moreover, getting at it in this way makes communal well-being necessarily the goal. If one assumes their position to be the worst in society, which functions analogously to Knitter's preferential option for the poor, then the only option is to better all of the community. And this is in line with Suchocki and Driver in particular. Community is central in what is ethically valuable in this system, both in that it is an aim and that it helps determines what the ethical expectant vision is, which is then reflected in the higher levels of justice. In basing the more nuanced elements of well-being in the communities, my project in this chapter has thus been a meta-normative or meta-social contract theory. That is to say, it is a generalized normative system about how best to set up particular normative systems in particular communities. That is not to say that they are isolated or relative systems. They meet at base human suffering and the existence of a community generally, let alone existing within a set of global communities. If a norm in one community gives a small benefit to well-being internal to that community but causes

obviously more base suffering to another, then it ought to be discarded, as physical well-being is prior to the later social senses of well-being.

Additionally, one ought to be concerned about ecological well-being, if only for the fact that we live here[8]. One way to look at this is to analogize Suchocki's notion of levels of well-being. There are least two ecological levels: the base existence of an ecological system at all, with higher, richer value in ecosystemic stability. This mirrors Suchocki's level in that higher levels of well-being are constituted in part by relations within a community. It does seem clear that ecological well-being ought not to have priority over human well-being, but it should not be discarded or overly diminished. In fact, in a later book Suchocki (2003) distinguishes the dual level "responsibility to care for the earth in its particulars and also in its wholeness," which is amenable to my proposition (p. 60).

The basic idea is the setting up of a normative system which is reasonable for any individual adopt by way of a meta-system which would be reasonable for any community to adopt. These normative systems will then be the primary basis for the religious self-examination of the fourth chapter by way of serving as the ethical metric. The expectations of religious communities differ, but they should be as one voice rather than highly stratified in their influence, as that influence ought to be for the benefit of the entire community. Hopefully even if I am not literally engaging in dialogue in this paper, the end result would be much the same if different traditions were in dialogue with the preferential option for the poor and a sense of justice as well-being as their basic guiding principles.

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[8] I am of the mind that ecological stability is of some intrinsic value, but that discussion would put this paper far into the weeds.

III. A Pluralist Conception of Religious Truth

I will now turn to the difficult problem of developing a suitable and principled conception of truth within a pluralist context. The basic problem of the incompatibility of the claims of different religions is perhaps the greatest thorn in the side of any pluralist position and merely setting them aside, even with the addition of a separate, ethical criterion, is still a relativism about specific beliefs that I wish to avoid. To begin with, take Joseph Runzo's dual-level conception of the types of beliefs involved in religions. He claims that religious belief is constituted at both the first and second orders. The first order includes "specific beliefs…about the nature of the ultimate reality and the way in which it gives meaning to life" (Runzo, 1988, p. 346). These beliefs make up the various religious doctrines that are ostensibly in conflict. But much more crucially, religions also involve "the meta-belief that the religion in question does indeed refer to a transcendent reality which gives meaning to life" (Runzo, 1988, p. 346). This second claim is of course the basis for claims of exclusivity, given that if religious beliefs correspond to a transcendent reality, they cannot all do so without contradiction. Despite having only claims of unique sources of knowledge and the principle of non-contradiction, very few practitioners withhold belief on the literal truth of their metaphysical beliefs about ultimate reality. Furthermore, this belief in correspondent, literal truth is usually what acts as the justifying basis for action, *not* merely the ethical fruits. This is again a place where the pluralist project broadly runs up against the felt experience of the average religious practitioner, even if pluralists generally only avoid making positive claims about correspondence. That is to say, we take the pluralist context as negating the ability to claim exclusivity without taking it as negating the legitimacy of religious practice wholesale. Although I cannot do anything to maintain felt experience in this particular regard, this chapter as a whole provides a sort of conservatist

impulse to try and counterbalance the rather radical reconceptualizations of chapters II and IV

with the maximal maintenance of the existing religious belief sets, given pluralism, of course.

Now, Runzo's bifurcation is relevant to Hick's claim discussed in the introduction that

distinguishes between doctrinal disputes and salvific efficacy, echoed by Knitter. This move is

motivated by the fact that it cannot be adjudicated which, if any, religion does in fact truly refer,

or more or less truly refers as compared to other religions. The idea being that if it's impossible

to tell if any religion is 'right,' then we ought to more or less simply set aside the question and

focus on this-worldy salvation. But the question emerges of whether, in "leav[ing]

disagreements aside in the interest of cooperative work," we are thereby failing to truly address

"the depth of the other," left instead with a relativism about specific beliefs (Suchocki, 2003, p.

20). This is not the same degree of relativism as radical relativism, in that there is still an ethical

metric, but as long as that metric is met, there would be no *religious* standard for the content that

caused the satisfaction of the metric. As it stands, each religious community can accept that the

ethical output from another can be equally valuable but typically doesn't view the basing

religious content as equally legitimate. Moreover, specific belief relativism would deeply favor

humanism, in that it would simply be more efficient to just get to the ethical output and avoid the

religious baggage, if that is all there is to it. Thus, we do need to at least develop some sort of

principled way to account for religious truth claims, even if the question of its correspondence to

a transcendent reality is insoluble.

Hick, for slightly more complicated reasons than simple inability to adjudicate, as will be

outlined in the following section, "invites us to apply a principle of charity" as a result of this

"veil of ignorance," such that each "of the world's religions are equally worthy of belief" and

that each "offers an authentic way of achieving the religious goal" of this-worldly salvation

(Harrison, 2006, p. 288). A similar end result is accomplished by Knitter's definition of truth laid out in the block quote in section II.ii[9]. However, this definition of truth as that which is "necessary for promoting human justice and ecological stability" is admittedly very far removed from any recognizable or intuitive notion of truth and in many ways seems to diminish the religious value of the truths as merely means to an end (Knitter, 1995, p. 130). I do think that a principle of charity is warranted by the veil of ignorance. Indeed, "charity is forced on us" in the attempt to understand other viewpoints. To try to actually understand involves "count[ing] them right in most matters" (Davidson, 1973, p. 19). But we must be very careful to avoid veering off into relativism regarding the beliefs underlying the praxis. As such, the aim of this section is to develop a reasonable conception of religious truths as distinguished from Knitter's sense of truth, which I will call 'salvific efficacy.' The difficulty is in developing a form of religious truth that avoids both the problem of incommensurability and is still a meaningful, non-relative form despite the lack of verifiable correspondence or reference by which MR operates. This still will likely fall short of satisfying the felt experience of Runzo's meta-belief, but it will nonetheless advance the conversation. It is primarily Victoria Harrison's application of Hilary Putnam's internal realism to pluralism that will achieve this goal. Terrence Merrigan (1997) claims that "the pluralists' understanding of religious knowledge cannot be ultimately integrated into any recognizable form of orthodox Christianity" (p. 706). That very likely will remain true. But the goal is to at least be able retain *more* of the felt religious experience of what it is to be a Christian than may prima facie appear possible within a pluralist context.

In the subsequent sections I will begin by discussing the views of John Hick before turning to Victoria Harrison and then bringing the discussion back to bear on Knitter's practical

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[9] Although, Knitter will ultimately offer that in interreligious dialogue we must only hold that it is *possible* that there is value to be found in other religions rather than assuming from the start that there in fact is, cf. section III.iii.

salvific efficacy. The reason for so doing is that Hick's view of religious truth is famously

unpalatable to many, despite his more general structural insights about the problem of religious

diversity. Harrison is directly engaged with these issues and her view is in large part an attempt

to avoid some of the pitfalls of Hick's. I find that she succeeds in developing a sense of religious

truth that has a depth not found in Knitter's pragmatic focus.

III.i Hick's Divine Noumenon

To put the earlier point a different way, Hick follows Wilfred Cantwell Smith in the idea

that religions are not fundamentally sets of beliefs, instead proposing that their central concern is

"'the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness,'" which

is Hick's definition of this-worldly salvation (Runzo, 1988, p. 352). This distinction between

religious belief and the ethical dimension will be crucial to this chapter as a whole.

 will be focusing solely on the belief set dimension, but this is importantly not at the expense of

compatibility with a separate ethical dimension. Hick (1988) seems to overcorrect in his

decentralization of religious belief sets in that he finds conflicting truth claims to be largely

irrelevant, as well as reducing distinct methods of transformation to a single essence (p. 365).

Both of these moves are often taken to be a reduction of the dignity of the various faith

communities. If the particulars of the beliefs aren't important, then it seems unclear how they

are also supposed to be taken as valuably as they are in the felt experience of practitioners

(Runzo, 1988, p. 354). Moreover, simply reducing the importance of differences of history,

doctrine, metaphysics, and so forth "does not provide an intellectually satisfying solution to the

persistence of those differences" (Merrigan, 1997, p. 702).

It is important, however, to understand the background and motivations for Hick's arrival at that position, as he is of enormous influence in pluralist philosophy. It will also be helpful in setting up Harrison's internal pluralism in the following section, as she is in large part responding to that influence. Hick "proposed what he considered 'a Copernican revolution' within the discipline" of religious pluralism and exclusivism (Harrison, 2006, p. 288). The degree to which the metaphor is appropriate will become more apparent as I outline the background of his views. His revolution was based in the application of Kantian metaphysics to religion[10]. Christian exclusivism, like Ptolemaic astronomy, placed Christianity at the center of the universe, and all other religions were of secondary importance. And in inclusivism, the metaphor gains further traction in that the other religions were dependent upon Christianity for any inferior salvific value they did have. Hick shifted the picture such that Christianity also began to orbit, this time around a nebulous Real or Ultimate. No religion was truly correct in that they are not true representations of the Real but gain value by receiving mediated contact. In the terms of the metaphor, they are shined upon by the Real and held in their orbit by its gravity.

It is important to see how Hick got to this position. He saw religious diversity as presenting what he considered to be an exhaustive trilemma. Either a) no religion is at all true and is mere illusion, b) only one religion is true, or c) the underlying basis for religion is noumenal (Harrison, 2006, p. 291). In the postulation of a noumenon, there are two fundamental Kantian theses operating in the background. The first is the claim that all experience is structured by the mind such that 'raw experience' or direct, unstructured contact with base reality is impossible. The second is the distinction between this structured experience, phenomena, and the underlying, unknowable noumenon that is mediately experienced (Runzo, 1988, p. 353).

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[10] I will limit the degree to which Kant is explained to only what is necessary for the purposes of this paper, as he is notoriously quagmirical.

Applied to religion, religious experience is merely a phenomenal, mediated, and structured experience of the Eternal noumenon.

Let us return to the trilemma. Hick rejects a) because he does not believe that religion is mere illusion, that there is something true happening, even if imperfect or distorted. He rejects b) because it cannot be the case that one's arbitrary place of birth and cultural context determines that they and they alone have the true religious position. Thus, he postulates a noumenon. Although this constitutes a way to retain religious value in the face of religious diversity, it has severe effects on the meaning of religion, which is found to be objectionable by many, for obvious reasons. The idea is that all religions "embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real of the Ultimate." The experience of the Real is accessible to all, but the role of the "concrete religious traditions" is reduced to "the forum within which religious experience becomes possible" (Merrigan, 1997, p. 695). Not only that, but no religion is actually describing the Real with any accuracy with the mediating context of their respective forum (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 8). Thus, religions are all literally false, or the unsatisfying "mythologically true;" they are something radically different than what their adherents take them to be (Harrison, 2006, p. 295-7). To put it in Runzo's terms, in Hick's view the MR reference meta-belief is not only false but wholly unachievable.

Beyond even the by definition unverifiable metaphysics[11], it seems wrong to equate "core religious concepts such as 'salvation,' 'nirvana,' and 'moksha' [as] roughly equivalent" (Harrison, 2006, p. 297). I am quite amenable to a sort of overarching ethical directionality such as Hick's transformative process or the other norms discussed in the previous chapter, but am unsatisfied with the pure reduction to that and that alone. The difficulty of doing so is

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[11] It is reached through reasoning backwards from religious experience.

particularly evident in Hick's response to the objection of morally motivated atheists who appear to undergo the same ethical transformation he lays out as the center of religion. Harrison summarizes his response as basically a characterization of them as 'anonymous theists' to demonstrate its similarity to Rahnerian inclusivism's 'anonymous Christian,' part of the very doctrine Hick was attempting to refute! If that transformation is type-identified with religion, there are deep problems. But if the ethical directionality is separated from the religious beliefs such that religious beliefs are a sufficient but not necessary motivation for participating in that ethical transformation, non-religious humanists can be made sense of.

III.ii Harrison's Internal Pluralism

Victoria Harrison is attempting to provide an answer to the same problem that Hick saw to be posed by religious diversity, but is looking to avoid swinging so far towards relativism. Any de-absolutizing of the truth of religious belief will unavoidably diminish it in some sense, but the aim is to not wholly erase it. Her move is the application of Hilary Putnam's internal realism to religious truth. As such, some exposition of Putnam's position is required, to a much larger extent than exposition of Kant was required for Hick. It is interesting, though, that I find that Putnam's internal realism can better handle some classic objections when restricted to the realm of religious knowledge.

Putnam distinguishes between MR and internal realism. Recall MR's three central theses: "(1) that the world consists of a fixed totality of mind-independent objects; (2) that there is exactly one true and complete description of the way the world is; and (3) that truth involves some sort of correspondence." Putnam's internal realism denies all three claims. This is in large part an attempt to break away from the dichotomy of objective and subjective conceptions of

rationality and truth (Harrison, 2006, p. 289-290). This is part of the brilliance of Harrison's move, in that that mirrors the dichotomy between absolutism and relativism that pluralism attempts to avoid.

The central claim here is that "the notion of truth does not make sense outside of a conceptual scheme as it would be developed under conditions of ideal inquiry" (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 10). Donald Davidson offers several definitions of conceptual schemes. I will be tackling his objections to the idea of conceptual schemes generally further below. The definition best suited to Putnam's view is "systems of categories that give form to the data of sensation" (Davidson, 1973, p. 5). This system stands in an organizing relation to experience or reality (Davidson, 1973, p. 13). Specific to Putnam, though, is the inclusion of conditions of *ideal* inquiry and *idealized* rational acceptability. This distinguishes him from mere conceptual relativism, which can also fit that particular definition of Davidson's. For Putnam, truth and rational acceptability are interdependent notions, but are not synonymous. Being justified in believing a claim is not the same as it being true, which is why it is a form of realism[12]. Instead, truth is a form of idealized rational acceptability that involves "some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system" (Putnam, 1992, p. 49). And it is the inclusion of multiple divergent belief systems that drives the innovative aspect with respect to pluralism. Putnam rejects the idea "that truth is somehow independent of all conceptual schemes or that it is tied to one, and only one," as MR claims (Harrison, 2006, p. 291). The claim is that ideal inquiry within each conceptual scheme could lead to multiple theories that are all ideal but nonetheless in conflict. And, if truth does not make sense outside of a conceptual scheme due to there not

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[12] This is in response to Dummett's anti-realism, which "reduces truth to what one is warranted in asserting" (Harrison, 2006, p. 290, fn.14).

being truth from a god's eye view, then it makes no sense to ask what is *really* true in the way that MR would. This also rejects Hick's view, as part and parcel of Putnam's view is the rejection of "the coherence of the idea of truths which outrun our ability to know them" (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 11). Even if, for Hick, no one could know the Real from a god's eye view, his theory still heavily relies on how things 'really' are outside of any conceptual scheme (or, outside of any phenomenal conditioning, in his terms).

An example of Putnam's concerning divergent ideal theories regarding objects and existence will be helpful. He asks us to consider a world comprised of three colored atoms. For a 'Carnapian logician,' those three objects are all that exist. But for 'the Polish logician' whose conceptual scheme also considers aggregates to be objects, there are seven objects: each atom, three different pairs, and a trio. The two incommensurate answers to the question of how many objects exist are both objectively true within their respective conceptual schemes (Harrison, 2006, p. 292). Neither fails to be a 'genuine truth.' 'Three' is $true_{CL}$ and 'seven' is $true_{PL}$.

I will now cover Harrison's application of internal realism to pluralism before treating objections to Putnam and Harrison at the same time, as the plausibility of her theory in large part depends upon the plausibility of his. Though, given Harrison's narrowing of application to the religious domain in specific, I find that there is not a perfect correspondence in vulnerability to objections between the two.

As with internal realism, internal pluralism does not admit of talk of a Real that exists outside of and independent of any particular religious conceptual scheme (henceforth RCS[13]). And given the plenitude of different RCSs, there is a possibility of different religious realities with their respectively different religious truths. I would, in its application to religion, define an

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[13] Harrision uses 'faith-stance,' but I do not want to run away from Davidson's upcoming objection to conceptual schemes and want that to be explicit.

RCS as a system of concepts that stand in an organizing relation to both religious experience and the purported cosmological or divine aspects of reality. As with the conceptual schemes of the logicians, variance in beliefs contained within different RCSs does not entail that either fails to contain genuine truths. Moreover, these truths remain as such independent of correspondence (Harrison, 2006, p. 292). This works to counter the incompatibility problem if the idea is that conflicting beliefs cannot all be true because they cannot both conflict and all correctly refer. That being said, some, none, or all[14] RCSs could have truths in the MR sense within them, but that is insoluble. So instead, we can speak of degrees of success between RCSs in the internal pluralist sense. This is not to say that different RCSs are successful or not in the attainment of a single ethical goal, ala Hick, but rather successful in terms of intra-RCS truth. There of course is room for comparison of the ethical fruits of different RCSs, but that is a different evaluative dimension than religious truth. Internal pluralism is not subjectivism because the truths are dependent upon the RCS. But nor is it relativism in the sense that what is true is simply whatever the RCS says, unexamined (Harrison, 2006, p. 293-295). Ideal inquiry could conceivably reach a conclusion such as the Christian god not existing due to the problem of evil's intractability (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 12). Beliefs that are stable and convergent within the RCS tend towards intra-RCS truth, but the possibility of revision is demanded by ideal inquiry (Harrison, 2006, p. 291).

Between different RCSs, there is no legitimate dispute if the claims in question do not genuinely enter into each other's RCSs (Harrison, 2006, p. 293). For instance, if a Muslim says to a Hindu 'Mohammed is the prophet,' there is no genuine conflict because such beliefs do not fit within the Hindu RCS. However, a Shiite and a Sunni could have a more legitimate

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[14] cf. Raimon Panikkar's ontological pluralism

disagreement. Simply put, internal pluralism accepts intra-RCS bivalence but not inter-RCS bivalence (Harrison, 2006, p. 296). There is of course the question of where to draw the line with respect to what constitutes a distinct RCS in cases of sects such as the Shiites and the Sunnis, but the broader point remains.

I will now to turn to some objections to internal realism and internal pluralism. The first will be an objection from Donald Davidson against the very idea of conceptual schemes at all[15], which is of course central to internal pluralism. He claims that there is an underlying paradox in conceptual schemes, though it ought to be noted that the context for his objection is against a more general form of conceptual relativism. I am not sure Putnam's internal realism survives the objection with its addition of ideal inquiry, but Harrision's restriction to the religious dimension does. Davidson (1973) says that the paradox is that on the one hand, different conceptual systems are comprehensible given a "common coordinate system" but on the other, if there is such a system, the different conceptual systems no longer seem to be the purported self-contained realities (p. 6). The idea here is that if you can translate between languages, for example, then then languages are not 'different worlds.' "The interdependence of belief and meaning" is such that no meaningful interaction can occur without some comprehension of belief (Davidson, 1973, p. 17). He suggests that the claim being made in favor of conceptual schemes as different worlds suggests "a dualism of total scheme and uninterpreted content" (Davidson, 1973, p. 9). This does apply to Hick, but Putnam's denial of the necessity for correspondence is such that this is not precisely true of him. Davidson (1973), however, works under that dualism and offers that attempting to evaluate conceptual schemes in terms of organizing an entity such as the world comes down to the claim "that something is an acceptable [conceptual scheme]…if

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[15] My thanks to David Cajias Calvet for pointing out this objection.

it is true…or largely true" (p. 16). Again, the lack of correspondence avoids this, though perhaps unsatisfyingly in the empirical realm. Mere internal coherence and internal idealized rational acceptability are not particularly satisfying either, as that just seems like coherentist conceptual relativity.

And that is Davidson's other main complaint. Even if one were to accept the idea that one could have isolated truth-realities, one could not compare them. A "fixed-stock of meanings" would not suffice because that would indicate 'common coordinates' that would undermine the claim of separateness. Nor could a "theory-neutral reality," as there is no such god's eye view under a conceptual scheme view, as Putnam would agree (Davidson, 1973, 17). But here is where Harrison's restriction to the religious domain works so well. Davidson is highly focused on communication and translatability, and as such focuses on languages in entirety. But with religious concepts, we can use secular, translatable language to express metaphysical concepts that are not comprehensible to the other, or at least not fully. Take for example the idea of the Trinity. One can say to a non-Christian 'three in one' without them being able to comprehend its true meaning, perhaps just noting a contradiction. Even Christians cannot truly grasp the concept, and it is in the terms of their own RCS! So, it seems that different RCSs can interact without total translation. We can hear the words used to describe metaphysical concepts without understanding them fully.

Moreover, when combined with the ethical norms of the previous chapter, there is not a 'theory-neutral reality' per se, but there is a metric by which RCSs can be evaluated that is not purely internal nor an infinite regress of meta-RCSs. This lead us nicely into the next objection against internal pluralism. This objection is proposed by William Alston. He makes the claim that internal realism is internally incoherent due to the fact that "its account of conceptual

schemes generates a vicious, infinite regress" (Alston, 2002, p. 321). Since objects are conceptual scheme-dependent (cf. the logicians example), then conceptual schemes are meta-conceptual scheme dependent, since they are no less objects. Harrison's response is that it is true that one cannot conceive of an object that exists outside of a conceptual scheme, and that one would in fact need a meta-conceptual scheme to conceive of the conceptual scheme as a whole, one can nevertheless identify objects in the world without viewing the conceptual scheme by which one does so as itself an object. She draws an analogy to language. In order to examine a language as a totality, one needs a meta-language of grammar and morphology and such, but one does not need that to merely employ the language itself (Harrison, 2006, p. 298-299).

She offers a variation which is the question of switching between conceptual schemes with respect to infinite regress generation. But people seem to be able to convert between religions without a broader meta-conceptual scheme such as internal pluralism. It seems to me that conversion is rarely motivated by notions such as pluralism. If one wants to understand how different RCSs "fit together into a wider theoretical picture," then a meta-RCS is needed. The idea is that a meta-RCS helps to explain how RCSs work, but is not required for the RCS to work, or even to switch between them. The same applies for switching meta-RCSs such as internal pluralism and a Hickean view. Internal pluralism as a meta-RCS is not required for a RCS to work, but does provide the benefit of taking different RCSs equally seriously and as equally valuable (Harrison, 2006, p. 299-300).

This is relevant to an objection raised by Ruhmkorff. He questions if internal pluralism as a meta-RCS "can characterize atheism, pluralism, and exclusivism as opposed views without appeal to the god's eye view" it denies (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 12). However, he frames it as the question of who is *really* correct because of a different purported infinite regress. If the atheism

meta-RCS is true$_A$, pluralism is true$_P$, and exclusivism is true$_E$, then there is the meta-meta-RCS that the pluralist meta-RCS is the true meta-RCS, etc. And this is in some sense true, if it is only internalism. But my inclusion of the separate, ethical metric allows the debate to focus on tangible results. As stated before, a simple humanism seems to do pretty well in that regard, but so does pluralism. Exclusivism to me seems to have a disadvantage. But even then, it's not a settleable question if the atheist meta-RCS is true in the MR sense as compared to the pluralist meta-RCS. The truth is internal and the ethical evaluation is impossible at a fine-grained level. And, the ethical metric does nothing to solve the MR sense of truth. I'm okay with this. The debate about truth can be relegated to internal ideal inquiry as long as it also follows a positive ethical directionality that is prior to it.

This is still likely unsatisfying in some regard and is still rather removed from the traditional felt experience of religious practitioners, but it has a large advantage over mere conceptual relativism or reduction to only ethical output. And that was the aim of these two chapters: to get the debate moving again and set up ways in which different RCSs can self-evaluate, at the cost of compromising the traditional standpoint. But compromises are trades. We give up the reference meta-belief and focus on religion's effect in the world, but not at the wholesale expense of the traditions and beliefs that underly those effects. The ethical dimension must be what informs the intra-RCS examination and revision of the following chapter, but the adoption of internal pluralism as the way to characterize those RCSs preserves much more of the dignity of the RCS than the traditional pluralist options. And this bifurcation of belief and practice is quite amenable to internal pluralism. Harrison (2006) says that internal pluralism "is not committed to regarding RCSs and religions as synonymous" (p. 293, fn.26). Part of a religion is the praxis, not just the belief set. It also helps to makes sense of my response to

Davidson's objection on behalf of internal pluralism. Not only is it possible to achieve a "sympathetic understanding" of another RCS without full translation (Harrison, 2006, p. 293, fn.28), that understanding and taking of a religion to be true internally is distinct from adherence to it (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 21). Even if different RCSs adopt similar general ethical aims, the particular praxes will be quite different.

III.iii Knitter and More General Objections

Knitter, with his emphasis on practical salvific efficacy, exhibits something that is difficult to accommodate within this internal pluralist picture: the phenomenon of multiple belonging. This is the practice of claimed "membership in multiple faiths by a single individual" (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 19). He pronounces the Bodhisattva vows but is primarily of a Catholic background. There are two primary responses to this, neither of which I am particularly satisfied with. The first is the idea that "each individually negotiated self-consistent set of practices and doctrine can be considered a religion unto itself," its own RCS (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 19). The line of what constitutes a disctinct RCS may in fact emerge at the level of sects or smaller, but I resist the idea that that each person has their own RCS. Part of my hesitancy has to do with the fact that the values of an RCS are intrinsically communal in nature and in origin, and such hyperindividualization runs counter to this central feature of this account. The other potential response is that multiple belonging is compatible on the practical level but incoherent as an RCS. As stated above, an RCS is not necessarily synonymous with a religion as a whole, but it does seem that for Knitter to truly be a practicing (partial?) Buddhist, Buddhism would have to enter into his RCS. And maybe it could do so and be ideally rationally acceptable. But this does prove a challenge for my approach, as a large part of the appeal of internal pluralism for me is

the maximal maintenance of the integrity of RCSs thought of as historical mythos and associated beliefs and concepts as can be achieved under an ethical examination. Part of this motivation comes from a general worry about radically revisionary projects unchecked by any sort of conservatist impulse. The idea here is that this conservatism will still be secondary, but will be a reactionary counterbalance. Explicitly, internal realism in my project serves as an attempt try to maintain the foundations of a religion so as to resist the erosion of felt experience by the elevation of praxis and the universalist ethical norms in chapter II.

Perhaps this will be clearer if contextualized within a more explicit discussion of Knitter's conception of religious truth. He does not spend much time at all giving an explicit characterization himself, but it can be extracted from his characterization of the way in which dialoguers from different religions ought to interact. He does make the claim that "religious language is inherently symbolic or metaphoric," but not in such a way that "den[ies] that such statements are making real truth claims" (Knitter, 1995, p. 149). I take these two claims as a way of addressing the inability to apply MR to religious disputes. He maintains they are truth claims but calls them symbolic and metaphoric to indicate how they cannot be verified in the same way as a typical empirical description of reality. Within the domain of interpreting the claims of another faith, he distinguishes between two ways of judging a religious truth claim: as an "act of faith" or by interpreting the "content of faith" itself (Knitter, 1997b, p. 152). That is, he distinguishes between absolutist claims interpreted as demonstrations of total commitment or interpreted as descriptive claims about reality in the MR sense. This is in line with the earlier discussion of Gilkey's 'relativized absoluteness.' Praxis is felt as flowing from an absolutist basis when taken as the justification or grounds for that action, but in second-order reflection the contentful truth claim is taken as relative.

And I think that the inclusion of internal pluralism along with the metric of salvific efficacy brings to the forefront a consistent, implicit thread in Knitter. Take for instance his hesitance to fully agree with Hick's call to "recognize not just the possibility but the *actuality* of genuine truth in our partners' religions" (Knitter, 1997b, p. 154, fn.12). Knitter agrees in the sense that there are ethical fruits in each, which should be understood as within the domain of practical salvific efficacy. But he hesitates in the methodological realm, pointing both to relativism as a concern and to the stance felt when engaging in dialogue, which is that in order to achieve genuine engagement, one has only to affirm the *possibility* of something valuable in the other's position. Moreover, Knitter (1997b) thinks that for ideal dialogue, all that is required is that "all religions are viewed from the beginning of the conversation, *not* as necessarily being *equal* or the *same* in their truth claims but as having *equal rights*" (p. 154). And although this is not explicitly a result of worries about the relativism of truth claims, nor does he seem to ultimately carry out much less salvific reduction of religious beliefs than Hick, his hesitancy points out a phenomena that internal pluralism can help to make sense of in such a way that avoids relativism of belief. Not only is it not necessary for dialogue to believe that the religious truth claims of another RCS are true in the same way that truths internal to one's own RCS are, it does not make sense to say that within internal pluralism. Within internal pluralism, the truth claims of RCS_2 are true internal to RCS_2, and someone with RCS_1 can recognize this level of truth without taking the claims to be true in the same way that they take claims from RCS_1 to be true. Perhaps an ethical insight could be gleaned from RCS_2 such that it is incorporated into the ethical metric by which RCS_1 is evaluated and accomplished through different means amenable to RCS_1. But, it is still difficult for me to understand how claims from RCS_2 could enter directly into RCS_1 such that they are considered to be the same kind of claim.

And this makes sense with respect to my response to Davidson's objection from translatability. Leonard Swidler (1997), speaking about Knitter's revisionary project, says that "the mistake we must be cautious to avoid in this situation is that when we speak about the transcendent we are using empirical language" and that we are intrinsically unable to do so (p. 188). In strictly literal terms, I would say we are in fact using the same language we use to describe empirical concepts, but would agree in a less literal sense that we are not speaking empirically. There is, as Davidson said, an 'interdependence of belief and meaning' in the empirical realm, but this does not fully translate to the religious realm. And when Knitter says that religious language is metaphoric, without denying that it involves real truth claims, he indicates a sort of tension that I believe can be well accommodated within internal pluralism. It is a way to systematically account for the paradoxical 'relative absoluteness' that undergirds much of Knitter's praxis-centric view. For despite this emphasis, Knitter seems more hesitant than Hick to reduce religious belief to salvific efficacy completely, and this can account for that anxiety. That is not to say that he ultimately does any less reduction that Hick, but he seems to hesitate in a way that Hick does not.

It is also prima facie unclear how internal pluralism, even with the parallel ethical metric, makes sense of the particularity problem. That is, how it can still be meaningful and rational to adopt a particular religion over any other. This is above and beyond the rationality of adopting any religion at all or the rationality of continuing to practice one's religion in the face of religious diversity. Internal pluralism has the rather counterintuitive feature of taking all religions as at least minimally true intra-RCS but not inter-RCS, on which it is agnostic due to the lack of a correspondence requirement. Granted, adherence requires more than belief, so an RCS can be taken as correct in some sense without necessitating adherence. But nonetheless, the

question remains of what motivates taking one religion over another. My answer is that it is often cultural convenience with respect to the 'birth lottery,' although "'cultural convenience' does not accurately reflect the felt urgency of the choice and the resulting depth of commitment" (Ruhmkorff, 2013, p. 21). I find that one is disposed to remain in their initial RCS, but not necessitated. In minimum, one has a greater depth of understanding and subsequent greater depth of religiosity in the religion one knows best. Even if two religions are intra-RCS equally true, one will generally get more, so to speak, out of something they have practiced for ten years than something they are just starting out with. Again, this is not necessitation; conversion and abandonment are both perfectly compatible with this claim.

  I accept that taking religious truth claims in this way has significant ramifications for religious epistemology generally. And although religious epistemology is a significant and important field, I find that as it stands it tends to primarily function properly only within a particular RCS. Traditional modes of religious epistemology tend to include the same sorts of faith justification bases and subsequent standstills as mentioned in the introduction and as such do not do much to advance the interfaith conversation. Take for instance reports of mystical experiences. It is much for likely for, say, a Muslim scholar to see a report of a Christian mystic's experience and situate it as an imperfect recognition of a revelation from Allah rather than taking it as the reported vision from God, and vice versa. Internal realism can account for this, but typical faith and revelation models cannot. In the broader context of pluralism I can offer the unsatisfying claim that all we can really know is the as-if qualities of things like mystic experience given my agnosticism on correspondence. So, within particular RCSs religious epistemology can carry on as usual, but I do not think the traditional approach will gain much

traction in the context of pluralism. Therefore, the radical shift in the understanding of religious truth claims.

       A final commentary on the relationship between idealized internal coherence and the primary ethical metric. There are many cases in which there are beliefs and practices within a religion that are ostensibly neutral with respect to well-being. I am perfectly okay with this and find that in many cases those beliefs are very positive with respect to internal coherence under ideal inquiry and help to resist the radical changes proposed by this paper. However, if there are ostensibly harmful beliefs with respect to well-being, either internally to the that religion or externally to another group, that have the same highly positive internal coherency profile, they must nonetheless be discarded. The internal realist norms of this chapter must be secondary to the ethical aims of chapter II.

IV. Intradoctrinal Examination

In this chapter, I will be examining what a pluralist Christianity might look like after intradoctrinal examination and revision in light of the salvific efficacy metric and the internal pluralist conception of truth. I will be following Knitter, Driver, and Suchocki again, this time looking at Christianity in particular. As such, this chapter will involve more Christian metaphysical baggage than the previous chapters. I will first look at Knitter's work on understanding the salvific role of Jesus in a pluralist context as 'one among many.' I will then turn to discussions of the deprioritization of the Holy Spirit in Western trinitarianism and its effect on Christian thought. This will lead to a discussion of relationality and the cultural context of value-basing communities in Driver and Suchocki. Driver places Spirit more centrally than does Suchocki's process-relational theology, but it is compatible with her work and there is significant overlap in their discussions of community. I will end with Suchocki's Christian argument for pluralism generally as a direct result of God's role in her process-relational picture. It is an interesting point to end on, as it attacks the problem of religious diversity from within the standpoint of the Christian RCS, rather than working from a minimal, universal sense of concrete well-being to a culturally relativizable set of ethical standards as I did in the second chapter.

IV.i Knitter's Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus

One of Paul F. Knitter's most important works is a book in which he lays out his proposal for how best to understand Jesus in a pluralist context, and then has twenty philosophers respond. I will introduce his theses and look at some of the more pertinent responses and objections. Knitter's (1997a) five theses are as follows:

1. Given the nature and history of Christology, previous understandings of the uniqueness of Jesus *can* be reinterpreted.

2. Given the ethical imperative of dialogue, previous understandings of the uniqueness of Jesus *must* be reinterpreted.
3. The uniqueness of Jesus's salvific role can be reinterpreted in terms of *truly* but not *only*.
4. The content of Jesus's uniqueness must be made clear in Christian life and witness. This content, however, will be understood and proclaimed differently in different contexts and periods of history. Today, the uniqueness of Jesus can be found in his insistence that salvation or the Reign of God must be realized in *this world* through *human actions* of love and justice.
5. The orthodoxy of this pluralistic reinterpretation of the uniqueness of Jesus must be grounded primarily in the ability of such a reinterpretation to nurture a holistic Christian spirituality, that is, a devotion to and following of Jesus. The proposed understanding of Jesus as God's truly but not only saving word does meet this criterion (p. 3-16).

A central idea to hold in mind to understand Knitter's proposal is the claim that Knitter (1997a) is "not questioning *whether* Jesus is unique, only *how*" (p. 5). By extension, he is asking the same question about the salvific role of Christianity, and that is what objectors seem to actually be concerned about in these discussions. For one of the major worries is that to make Jesus one among many is to reduce his role in salvation from a constitutive, ontological reality to mere revelation of ethical ideas. That is to say, Jesus inspires salvation but does not effect salvation himself. Though, Knitter can and does appeal here to the historical Roman theological concept of 'symbolizando causant.' The concept is that "by symbolizing (teaching, showing), sacraments cause or effect what they symbolize" (Knitter, 1997b, p. 156-7). So, to propose a sacramental Christology is to make *both* a functional and an ontological claim about Jesus's nature, not a functional one at the expense of an ontological one.

But, before I deal with the fallout from Knitter's reinterpretative project, let me give a little more background and qualification for the theses themselves. In the first thesis, Knitter is simply pointing to the shifts in Christology that have already occurred throughout the church's history as demonstration of the dynamic rather than static nature of the religion. He does however, appeal to the value of "an ancient theological ground rule of the early communities" that undertook these changes. That is that the "*lex credendi* (norms for belief) must resonate

with and foster the *lex orandi* (norms for spirituality), but that such norms are dangerously inadequate if they are not linked with the *lex sequendi* (norms for discipleship)" (Knitter, 1997a, p. 5). So, despite Knitter's susceptibility to the objection of reduction to the merely ethical and his stressing of the necessity of discipleship, he nonetheless understands the importance of its connections with belief and spirituality, albeit as a secondary concern. The latent existence of this concern is part of the motivation for my inclusion of internal pluralism as a separate, secondary coherency constraint, and part of why I find the dual metrics compatible. Though, it is somewhat unclear why Knitter on one hand makes these distinctions, and on the other more or less equates spirituality with discipleship in the fifth thesis.

In the second thesis, Knitter is appealing to two different ways in which the sufferings of the world necessitate interreligious cooperation and reinterpretation: external and internal. Externally, the existent eco-human suffering serves as a call to action. And internally, in order to accomplish this, there must be a reprioritization of loving the neighbor over merely proclaiming the gospel (Knitter, 1997a, p. 6). This thought will be later echoed by Suchocki's (2003) insistence that the Reign of God, understood as the enactment of this-worldly salvation, is "a principle of unrest" that calls for the abandonment of existent values if such abandonment achieves greater well-being. Specifically, the value reversal must culminate in the "exten[sion] of well-being to those whom we neither require nor expect to become like ourselves" (p. 81-82). This is in line with the historically Christian idea of truly judging the ethics of a community based upon the way that 'strangers in the gates' are treated, rather than merely the way in which members treat other members. It is only when one is concerned with the well-being of someone that is not like them and likely never will be that one can see if that person is truly concerned

with well-being as a primary aim rather than as, say, a means by which he could achieve recognition and favor within his own community.

The third thesis introduces what is perhaps the most pernicious source of objection: his carefully worded deflationary characterization of Jesus as one among many salvific avenues. He is *truly* salvific but is not the *only* route to or source of salvation. Specifically, Knitter tries to recharacterize God's revelation in Jesus. The idea is that this revelation is *universal*, but not *full*. The revelation can be used by all and can improve the lives of all, but is not exhaustive of God's truth. In this same vein, it cannot thus be said that Jesus's revelation is *definitive*, in the sense that no divine norms can exist outside of Jesus, or *unsurpassable*, in the sense that "God could not reveal more of God's fullness in other ways at other times" (Knitter, 1997a, p. 7-8). Rather, Knitter offers *decisive* and *indispensable* to go along with *universal*. The revelation given in Jesus is decisive in that it has normative power, but it does not restrict further norms. For, the idea being, if God was to reveal further truth, it would not contradict these norms, only expand them. Finally, that revelation is indispensable in that while it not per se required for others to know or believe it, it would improve their lives if they did (Knitter, 1997a, p. 9-10). And the sense of this improvement is borne out by Knitter's response to a wonderful objection by Hick. Hick warns that in claiming indispensability with respect to salvation, Knitter has merely arrived at the old exclusivism by a highly roundabout path. He asks if Knitter means indispensable as in the indispensability of penicillin or as in that of multivitamin tablets. In the latter sense, if different brands of multivitamin tablets work more or less equally well, it cannot reasonably be said that one of them is 'indispensable' (Hick, 1997, p. 82). Knitter (1997b) boils this objection down to a dilemma: "if Christ is like penicillin, I'm an exclusivist missionary; if like vitamins, I'm a missionary presenting a product that can be found elsewhere." But the sense that Knitter

has in mind is closer to a "skill or insight" such as reading and writing (p. 175-177). It is not as if literacy is a necessary condition for living a contented life, but once one is literate they will be forever changed and enriched by it. The idea here is that lessons learned from Christ are universally additive and enriching but are not required to achieve the universal aims of this project.

The fourth thesis makes clear liberation theology's emphasis on the Reign of God as this-worldly salvation, defined as justice and love. This is in line with the second chapter's normative exercise and its prioritization over internal RCS standards. Knitter (1997a) actually goes further and claims that this engagement with this-worldly concerns being so explicit and central to Christianity "is the *unique* ingredient in [Jesus's] saving message" (p. 13). Hick again raises an objection to this point, denying even the possibility of organizing and understanding all the pieces of a religion such that a distinct identity is made clear. And moreover, Christianity isn't even the only religion that does this (Knitter, 1997b, 162-163). Take for example this text found in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*: "Those who are devoted to the cause of the Personality of Godhead live only for the welfare, development, and happiness of others" (Canto 1, Ch. 3, text 12). But Knitter (1997b) does not mean 'unique' as in 'the only one,' which is the first definition offered in Webster's dictionary, but as 'distinctively characteristic,' which is also offered by Webster's (p. 163). Moreover, he is not looking for an essence. Rather, he is only making the claim that "an active commitment to this-worldly well-being is something without which one wouldn't have authentic Christian faith," not that other religions are not so focused in varying ways. And something similar is offered in a response by Kenneth Cragg in which he offers that 'distinctive' implies a difference that is intrinsically connected with the rest of a unity (Knitter, 1997b, p. 161). Knitter (1997b) also makes the claim that the preferential option for the victim is

something distinctively characteristic of Christian historical engagement, although one must understand this claim in something like Cragg's sense (p. 170-171). It is unlikely that Christianity is unique in this sort of engagement if 'distinctive' is understood as something true of only Christianity.

In the last thesis, Knitter is claiming that his reinterpretation can be understood as orthodox if the primacy of discipleship is granted for evaluation. That is to say, if orthodoxy is grounded in praxis rather than in coherence with historical RCSs, then his reinterpretation is orthodox. And Knitter defends this view against the objection that the focus on this-worldly salvation comes at the cost of the more spiritual elements, notably mystic religious experience. To this, Knitter concedes the ontological priority of the mystical, but denies that it is "always or necessarily chronological." Jon Sobrino suggests that mystical experience might actually be found *in* the action, 'contemplatio in actione' (Knitter, 1997b, p. 167). And this is another way to make sense of Gilkey's 'relativized absoluteness.' In acting, one feels the basis for that acting as absolute, but only as reflective in reflection. Perhaps the absoluteness is part of or correlated with a praxis-centric sense of mystical experience. The idea would be that in acting on the basis of a religious belief, in being motivated by a claim that in reflection cannot be claimed with certainty, one feels the absoluteness and totality of the mystery underlying that belief and becomes subsumed by it and completely and utterly devoted to it. This sounds like a mystical sort of experience to me. This general view of devotion is in line with a Knitter discussion elsewhere with respect to interpreting ostensibly absolutist biblical passages. In interpreting 'one and only' claims, he suggests a "hermeneutic of discipleship." Such claims' truth is centrally in calling one to discipleship rather than in religious definitions of Jesus situated within a wider theoretical framework. Thus, these claims of 'one and only' are to be understood as full

allegiance, "extolling [Jesus] as someone whose vision was entirely worthy of all one's trust and energies" (Knitter, 1997b, p. 149). This certainly seems rather far removed from the historical understanding of Jesus. But, "historical knowledge by itself has no *moral* weight," let alone more than the primary ethical metric (Driver, 1981, p. 85). And if one accepts Knitter's grounding of orthodoxy in discipleship, with a secondary concern for normative concurrence with spiritual norms when possible, then this is a justified interpretation. However, it is still a radical interpretation. There will of course be controversy over what constitutes discipleship, but broadly well-being oriented, religiously informed action is a widely compatible definition. I believe that situating his claims within the relational and communal views of Driver and Suchocki in section IV.iii will help to mitigate some of these concerns or at least provide further grounding for their plausibility. Moreover, he seems to indicate being amenable to their ideas of cultural and historical contexts being central to determining a religion's identity in the fourth thesis. But before I get to that, there remains some discussion to be had about reinterpreting the role of the Holy Spirit and, to a lesser extent, of God.

IV.ii The Filioque Controversy and Trinitarianism

Driver and, to a smaller degree, Suchocki both base their community-centric relational views in trinitarian thought, and Knitter also discusses the issue of a deprioritized Spirit. I find that these discussions and proposed revisions in trinitarianism move the discussion more historically orthodox rather than less, so it is my hope that this section will temper concerns about the rather radical shift in the interpretations of Jesus's salvific role. Moreover, it will be useful to look at an internal kind of Christocentrism and its ill effects, as opposed to the external Christocentrism of Christian exclusivism. The filioque clause is the source of the shift in

trinitarian thinking in the West that I find to be detrimental in many cases. The controversy has to do with the insertion of 'filioque' into the Nicene Creed. In the original text, the section that lists beliefs about the Holy Spirit contained the line 'Spiritum Sanctum…qui ex Patre procedit.' A later council inserted 'filioque' after 'Patre' such that the text now said that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and from the Son* rather than merely from the Father. This was eventually accepted by the Western church in the 11th century, which was a contributing factor to the schism between Eastern and Western Christianity.

The main worry that comes out of this is that a filioque trinitarianism "run[s] the risk of a form of 'subordinationism,' but this time not of the Word (or Son) to the Father (or Parent), but of the Spirit to Word" (Knitter 1997b 180). This was further compounded by a linear representation of the First, Second, and Third members of the Trinity, which at least runs against the idea that no member has priority. Beyond the risk of subordinationism, these hierarchical mischaracterizations led to God the Father alone being taken out of time. Rather than dynamic, creative interaction with the world, as Driver and Suchocki will develop, God was removed (Driver 1981 105-107). This is of course not to say that the insertion of the filioque clause was the sole contributing factor to the removal of God from time or that it occurred overnight. However, it most definitely helped to cement a growing interpretation of God as such. And such an interpretation assists and is assisted by notions of historical biblicism, of God's word as 'once and for all.' Conversely, Driver's (1981) "radical trinitarianism begins with God in relation to creatures, not before" (p. 109).

At this point it will be useful to look at Driver's conception of the Spirit within his radical trinitarianism. For Driver (1981), "a doctrine of the Trinity requires two divine figures related in a contextual field that is itself divine," with the two figures having a "definite character" and an

"ineffable" third component, the field itself (p. 105). This conception of the trinity is not of three gods, nor of a static and removed God, but of a "changeful and complex" one. Instead, "Spirit is that meaningful power of God's life which is infinite and which resists figuration because its function is to provide meaning and power *to* the figures we encounter" (Driver, 1981, p. 108-109). The idea here is that Spirit is a sort of divine potential, the sense of possibilities not yet actualized that are interpreted as Spirit. Because of the ineffable, indeterminate nature of Spirit, it cannot determine ethical judgment, but informs it on the basis of the expectations generated by the values of the community" (Driver, 1981, p. 113-115). And, as covered in II.iii, 'expectancy' is distinguished from mere hope via its relationship to present action. The central claim of Driver's (1981) radical trinitarianism with respect to the Spirit is that "Spirit is concomitant with passionate interest in *present* reality in the context of infinite Spirit," which is directly in line with liberation theology's this-worldly focus (p. 111). It is worth pointing out that such a conception of Spirit appears to be an impersonal one. It is in minimum indeterminate in isolation, in that Spirit itself does not provide the contentful specifics of the reality that it helps to manifest. Instead, it is mere potential. The specifics of what becomes actualized are based in the expectant values of a given community rather than in, say, the aims and goals of Spirit itself. I think it is reasonable to say that Spirit is broadly positive in its directionality, but since it and the expectant value set with which it interacts is based in part upon the past history of that community, this contextualized nature could make it so that what is actualized is bent slightly towards the past mistakes and persistent ills of that community.

Knitter also presents a conception of the Trinity in light of the worry of subordinationism, and many of his claims echo Driver. Here as well, there is concern that the independent, though related, "dynamism and historicity" of the Spirit is conflated with that of the Word. He follows

George Khodr's proposal that the two economies cannot be understood in isolation but exist in "hypostatic independence." A benefit of this is that the truths revealed by one economy by be more revealing in some form or fashion but will not contradict those revealed by the other because of the reciprocity and mutual service of their relations (Knitter, 1997b, p. 181).

However, where Driver, though never explicitly, seems to reject the filioque clause entirely, Knitter proposes what he considers a non-subordinating conception of a filioque trinitarianism. He claims that "the economy of the Spirit is a consequence of the incarnation, originating from it (filioque), but living out its own identity (its own hypostasis)" (Knitter, 1997b, p. 181). I am not entirely convinced, however. This seems to be just reinforcement of a deep ontological priority of the Word over Spirit. The filioque clause, among other reasons, opens the door to the deleterious effects of removing God from time and subordinating Spirit. And this internal sense of christocentrism will only impede liberation theology generally, as "Christian community is only a social hierarchy rather than a communitas "to the extent that [it] focuses on a central figure" (Driver, 1981, p. 168).

It can of course by argued that Spirit is subordinate to Word with or without the filioque clause. However, understanding Spirit in Driver's sense is such that the particular way in which the Word was revealed to us in the particular instantiation of the Son is in part constituted by the Spirit. That is to say, the Son is actualized within the field of divine potential that is Spirit and which is informed by the communal expectations of the Christian community at that time. The way that the significance of the Son is understood is in part based upon its meaning and power being based in the figurating power of Spirit. So, I resist the claim that Spirit is inherently subordinate because it is a constitutive component of the Word thought of as an actualization of God's will from divine potential to reality. This sort of conception is far closer to the traditional

relationality of 'one in three,' though God still seems primary if any member is. Regardless, such a conception is better suited to develop a dynamic, expectant Christianity and better reflects the initial framing by the Nicene Creed.

IV.iii Communities and Relationality

Suchocki and Driver both place relations within and among communities as fundamental features of their theologies. In fact, Suchocki even bases this in trinitarianism. The idea is that if "the nature of God [is] a depth of unity that is established in and through irreducible diversity," as trinitarianism proclaims, then an individual alone cannot truly be in the image of God (Suchocki, 2003, p. 66). Rather, the community is required to reflect this diversity. And this is not to say that the individual does have a role or is not godly. It only means that the locus of the image of God is in the community, as is the generation of ethical values and so forth.

The central aim of this section is to look at what *kind* of community should be the ideal basis for the generation of the culturally relativized ethical values that determine their RCS-specific ethical metric. For both Suchocki and Driver, these communities are inherently and dynamically interrelated. Like religion itself through history, the values of the community shift and change with their context. In fact, these shifts in values determine the shifts in theology. And this is not a radical claim. People already regularly self-determine varying levels of authority for different parts of the Bible, "yet we rarely confess that we are doing so" (Driver, 1981, p. 94). But at the same time, these shifts can be monumental for the identity and felt experience of religious practitioners. And this is the point of including internal pluralist as a conservatist inclination, in an attempt to echo those theological ground rules of the early Christian community. Specifically, this provides a way to approach well-being neutral beliefs

and practices. I lean towards them being left alone for the sake of (non-harmful) historical coherence, when possible. A hypothetical religion that produced zero helpful or harmful outputs could and should probably do more, but a religion that is focused on this-worldly salvation could probably keep some harmless beliefs and practices. There are also cases of religious practices such as asceticism that ostensibly provide a reduction in well-being, but such self-inflicted base 'suffering' is typically done by people who have established well-being in the higher two senses of Suchocki's. Without even getting into the liberty of the individual versus inflicting suffering upon others, such practices often deepen religiosity and would also ultimately provide more benefit than harm in most cases. Not to say that it ought to be mandatory, of course.

Both Driver and Suchocki view relationality as a fundamental feature of existence itself. For Driver (1981), "things are and are known in relation to each other" such that knowledge is constituted by "our interpretations of changing relations among" both the related figures and the necessary context itself (p. 96, 104). For Suchocki's (2003) process-relational theology, these relationships are central to identity as well, in that "who we are depends upon our own individual creative responses to physical and psychical relationships" (p. 25). For both, God is directly involved in these same sorts of dynamic relationships. And such a feature is the bedrock of even ethics generally, as "ethical decisions and values do not focus on *whether* people should be related but on the mode and quality of their interactions" (Driver, 1981, p. 146). It already assumes the existence of those interactions as fundamental.

Here it is necessary to give an explication of the 'process' half of Suchocki's process-relational theology. Process theology operates under a call and response system. God sets the initial parameters and "as the world responds within those parameters, it increasingly participates in determining its own content." And these responses are actively evaluated and responded to by

God, building upon the past history and past responses of that community, whether they be good or bad (Suchocki, 2003, p. 29-30). The call that God makes is a call to greater care in and for the community and to "forms of community that mediate well-being" relativized to the cultural context (Suchocki, 2003, p. 34). The important thing to note here is that there is an inherent capacity for novelty in the responses of both God and the world such that the ideal form to which God calls community towards will vary based on the past responses of that community. The call is one that is suitable for that particular time and place (Suchocki, 2003, p. 47). And Driver (1981) echoes this in saying that "the relation of Christ to human society is dependent upon what transpires in the *koinonia* (communal life) of Christians" (p. 165). In such a system, the truth of each RCS is constituted in that RCS as well as its cultural context (Suchocki, 2003, p. 45-47). This grounding in cultural context is likely wholly through the history of the value judgments of that community, although place-bound religions are more directly theologically based in physical contexts.

IV.iv Process-Relational Theology and Pluralism Generally

Suchocki's system also provides an interesting argument for the validity of a plurality of religions from within a Christian RCS. It starts from the claim that to the degree to which a revelation is exclusive, it is weakened. This is the idea that the fewer people that are saved because of it, in a this-worldly sense or not, the less effective the revelation. Note the difference between this view and the typical view of a unique source of revelatory knowledge. Rather, in call and response, God adapts revelation to the contextualized community, and it is "*because* [of this adaptation] that each form of revelation is of inestimable importance" (Suchocki, 2003, p. 104). And given the capacity for novelty in the responses of both God and the world, the set of

responses and subsequent RCSs is necessarily diverse and, moreover, there are necessarily at least some revelational truths in other religions. And if there's no good way to determine what is and is not revelation, outside of merely ethical metrics, it is necessary that each RCS is given initial equal rights in dialogue. And interesting benefit of this Christian argument for pluralism is that it goes against the intuitive idea that pluralism intrinsically exists in opposition to one's RCS.

V. Conclusion

This project has attempted to show that despite the existence of a plurality of prima facie incompatible RCSs, there is nonetheless a universal thread underlying that plurality. This common thread is the shared belief that suffering is generally bad and increases in well-being are generally good. This universal thread exists at a level deeper than religions themselves and thus avoids becoming a distillation of religion to a shared essence. Rather, it is a shared feature of existence broadly. Of course, visions of what constitutes well-being vary widely based upon relativized visions of how the world ought to be, and there is subsequent variation in richer senses of well-being between different contexts. Nonetheless, it is this shared thread that is then relativized outwards. Keeping hold of this broad aim as the primary metric by which a religion is evaluated helps to mitigate wholesale religious relativism.

In sharing this common aim, we can take divergent attempts at realizing divergent versions of that aim seriously and as legitimate and potentially instructive. Moreover, we can view the aims and practices as potentially instructive without having to adopt the views of the RCS underlying them. The way in which this is achieved is by taking the claims of another RCS as legitimate truth claims. This is both necessary for dialogue broadly and a necessary result of the lack of MR verifiability. Granted, the lack of a correspondence constraint on truth claims is a radical shift, but such a shift is necessary if one is not content with the pluralist standstill. And constructing a framework that is based in idealized inquiry rather than mere coherency helps to mitigate specific belief relativism.

The framework constructed is one by which the ethical outputs of religiously motivated praxis can be evaluated independently of the truth of the metaphysical claims underlying and adjacent to that praxis, which cannot be evaluated satisfactorily. It is also one by which we can

take seriously the religious truth claims of our and other RCSs despite the lack of correspondence verifiability. Moreover, taking them seriously in this sense helps to maintain the felt experience of members of all of the RCSs. This includes one's own, as in discarding exclusivism and accepting pluralism broadly, one's own RCS runs the risk of seeming less legitimate in the same way that others appeared less legitimate to an exclusivist.

And situating one's own RCS within this context can be helpful in reconceptualizing it in light of the practical aims of this project. Take the example case of Christianity. Not only are we able to maintain more of the felt experience than seems initially possible, a surprising amount of that maintenance can be achieved by more orthodox means than one might anticipate. Take for example the concept of symbolizando causant. The extreme fear about what the salvific role of the Church becomes if Christ does not *constitute* salvation in the exclusivist or inclusivist sense is not only less of an issue than it appears, but it can also be rectified by the application of a historically Christian theological concept, rather than only be means of a roundabout and counterintuitive pluralist invention. Similarly, the hermeneutic of discipleship and Gilkey's relative absoluteness can make sense of prima facie absolute truth claims by understanding them as claims about deep discipleship and devotion, central features of New Testament Christianity. And the way in which these concepts make sense of the lack of verifiability is ultimately not very far removed from the typical Christian ideas of action motivated by faith, at least evidentially. Acting upon a belief held in faith as if it were absolutely true is not particularly different from acting as if a belief you cannot verify or adequately defend as exclusively true in reflection as absolute when acting on the basis of that belief. And even if the reader does not reject the filioque clause, the mere existence of the controversy shows that religions have been

self-examining at a foundational, metaphysical level for hundreds of years, above and beyond

shifts in emphasized doctrine based on communal value shifts.

That being said, it is clear to me that my project nevertheless demands a radical shift in

the self-understanding of a given practitioner. But I find this radical shift to be a necessary one if

the pluralist standstill that began this paper is accepted as a legitimate threat. The response to

that standstill offered has been a careful agnosticism with respect to the MR claims that make up

the cosmological background of a given religion. But within that agnosticism, which is more of

a recognition of unverifiability than it is a denial of the truth claims involved, this project offers a

way to nonetheless progress as a religion in its aims and the achievement thereof.

I concede that there are several aspects of pluralist religious practice that cannot wholly

adequately be taken into account by the framework offered by this project. It can account for

learning from the general aims of other RCSs and incorporating those aims into one's own and

achieving them via a different avenue that is more coherent with one's own RCS. But it has

trouble making sense of claimed dual belonging by pluralists such as Knitter. Nevertheless, truly

dual practitioners, as opposed to, say, a Buddhist-informed Christian, are more the exception

than they are the rule. As such, for the average religious practitioner, even finding a way in

which they can learn from and be bettered by the claims and beliefs of another religion without

feeling as if the simple recognition of value in another RCS is a threat to one's own is a

significant step in the right direction.

And there is of course the possibility that there is indeed only one true religion. This is

particularly troubling as it would be the case that it is merely the so-called 'birth lottery' that

determines whether or not one is a member of the 'correct' faith. But given that we have no way

by which to justifiably determine which of the various religions is in fact true if this were the

case, I do not find that this logical possibility undermines this project. It is still the case that we cannot know, it is still the case that we as existent beings share the common aims of reducing suffering and increasing well-being, and it is still the case that each religion, in its own way, seeks to achieve these aims as part and parcel of its vision for the world. Thereby, such a logical possibility does not mitigate the practical rationality of continued religions practice in the way that this paper has laid out.

There has also been in the background of this paper the base assumption that religiosity is in and of itself intrinsically valuable or at least potentially positive. And in most cases I would take this to be true. But there is the logical possibility, if not probability, that in at least some cases "a person's cultural or religions community is an inherent obstacle" to the achievement of a this-wordly salvation, an obstacle to the Reign of God understood as an establishment of a this-wordly salvific Kingdom. Such a situation has been termed by some in the pluralist community as "an instance of the 'anti-Kingdom'" and in such cases it would seem the appropriate dialogical stance would be to try and get a given practitioner to abandon their particular RCS (Knitter, 1997b, p. 179). This could be found in particularly repressive and fundamentalist sects of a given religion. I would hesitate to say that there is a religion that is wholesale an instance of the anti-Kingdom, but that remains logically possible. If it is indeed the case that a religion as a whole was found to be an obstacle to well-being, rather than a religion particularized in an unfortunate manner, then hard questions would emerge for this project as a whole. It would be difficult to draw a hard line by which to evaluate a religion as being wholly harmful, as mentioned earlier in the comparison of ranking religions as totalities to utilitarian calculus at the fine-grained level.

The background question of the value of religiosity has also been in the context of humanism. Humanism seems to be in good standing in terms of achieving the universal aims of reducing suffering and increasing well-being, even more so if pluralism is without an internal metric such as Harrison's internal pluralism to mitigate specific belief relativism. If either radical relativism or specific belief relativism is true, then religions can quite easily become a hinderance to those ethical aims rather than an aid. For the former, there need not even be a concern for ethical aims within religions. And for the latter, religions become a roundabout way of achieving something that can be more efficiently achieved secularly. It may well be the case that until more religious communities undergo something approaching the self-evaluation and interfaith dialogue proposed by this paper, humanism is a better way of achieving the ethical aims of the second chapter. That being said, I resist the idea that this is necessarily true, or will remain true after such self-evaluation and reprioritization. I hold the view that religion is a sufficient but not necessary motivation for achieving those ends, and welcome humanists' participation. But I do also believe that religiosity has its own separate value that is worth maintaining as best as possible. Simply because this paper set aside metaphysical and cosmological claims due to insolubility in MR terms does not mean that I do not find religion a beautiful and valuable way of communing with the divine and reveling in Mystery. If anything, the agnosticism of this paper, in the literal sense of being unable to know with certainty, is in my view a far more interesting stance than if it were in fact possible to adjudicate metaphysical disputes via MR.

If nothing else, this paper has sought to demonstrate the mere possibility of being able to both take the threat of pluralism seriously and not only be able to continue practicing one's religion with practical rationality and without dissonance, but also improve the manner in which

the religion is being practiced, given the context of pluralism. Rather than either ignoring

pluralism or reducing religion to merely salvific outputs, this paper seeks a third way in which

pluralism can not only be recognized without a total loss of felt experience but can also be a

possible source of growth. The secondary internal truth metric helps to keep the religion as close

as is possible to the way it has existed despite the changes required from the primacy of praxis

and provides a better way in which the claims of other religions can be understood and learned

from. The primary salvific efficacy metric helps to move religions forward towards achieving

the aims that we can work towards that can in fact be evaluated.

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