THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PLURALITY AND RELATIVITY:
WHITEHEAD, JAINISM, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

VOLUME ONE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
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BY
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This dissertation is dedicated to my father,
Jeffery David Long, Sr. (1948-1981).

"Behind every beautiful thing,
there's been some kind of pain."
(Bob Dylan, 1997)

ṇiyayavayaṇijjasaccā savvanayā paraviyālaṇe mohā |
te uṇa ṇa diṭṭhasamao vibhayai sacce va alie vā ||

All perspectives are true, in their respective spheres, and to the extent that they are mutually exclusive, they are false. One who comprehends the many-sided nature of reality never characterizes a particular view as simply 'true' or 'false.'

Siddhasena Divākara
(*Sanmatitarka*)

The task of reason is to fathom the deeper depths of the many-sidedness of things.

Alfred North Whitehead
(*Process and Reality*)

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Jeffery D. Long
The University of Chicago
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to construct a pluralistic approach to religion in the tradition of such theologians and philosophers of religion as Raimon Panikkar and John Hick, but with a significant difference. Unlike the pluralistic theories of these scholars, my approach is based on a synthesis of Alfred North Whitehead's process metaphysics and the Jain 'philosophy of relativity.'

The point of this project is to address the many valid logical objections that have been raised against pluralistic interpretations of religion while preserving the basic insight underlying these interpretations: that the claim that many religions are expressive of salvific truth can be given a logically valid philosophical justification. Such interpretations, at least as they are currently formulated, typically degenerate under analysis into self-refuting relativisms. My claim, however, is that a form of religious pluralism can be developed on the basis of a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics which expresses the understanding of the relativity of truth which lies at the heart of current versions of this position, but which does not reject altogether the notion of an absolute truth as the logical foundation for the relativity of religious claims.

The relativity of truth in terms of some absolute conception of reality, the mutual implication of the relative and the absolute, I claim, is an insight shared by both Jain and process metaphysics. These two philosophies of relativity, I claim to demonstrate, are logically compatible, despite their many interesting differences, and can together form components of a single, internally coherent philosophical approach to religion (and to conceptual plurality in general) which avoids the problems that plague more conventional pluralisms.

The traditional Jain approach to religious and philosophical plurality is the model I use for developing a pluralistic system for the interpretation and evaluation of particular

religious claims as relatively true, but I do so on basis of Whitehead's metaphysical theism. I claim that this approach improves upon previous pluralistic theories of religion while yet advancing the same basic position that many religions can be conceived as 'true.'

Part I

THESIS

Chapter 1

PLURALITY AND RELATIVITY

Whitehead, Jainism, and the Reconstruction of Religious Pluralism

1.1 The Problem: Reformulating Religious Pluralism

My main objective in this dissertation is to reconstruct a position which has been effectively *de*constructed in the minds of many in the contemporary academy of religion. Over the course of an intense and emotionally charged scholarly debate which has now lasted for nearly three decades, this controversial position, known in Christian theological circles as *religious pluralism*, has become the target of widespread–and some would say devastating–criticism. Despite what I take to be the validity of much of this criticism, I intend to argue, on the basis of a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics, for the logical viability–indeed, the possible metaphysical *necessity*–of a reconceived religious pluralism.

Why am I doing this? What is the point of going to the effort–not to mention taking the risk–of reconstructing an unpopular and, in the minds of many, discredited position? I am pursuing this project because I find that despite the various faults which, admittedly, plague its current formulations, religious pluralism nevertheless expresses an important insight into the character of reality–one which I take to be entailed by my own universalist, Neo-Vedāntic faith commitments–namely, the insight that all perspectives, all views, have some measure of legitimacy, that all are elements in the ongoing creative expansion of the universe, the beginningless and endless process of the divine creative activity. My attempt in this dissertation will therefore be to reconceive religious pluralism in such a way that it will constitute a system of thought capable of addressing the legitimate criticisms to which

its current formulations are subject, while yet preserving the basic insight, or *pluralistic intuition*, which even these current formulations can be seen to articulate.

1.2 Defining (and Redefining) Religious Pluralism

What, then, is religious pluralism? The very issue of defining this position is clouded by the fact that this term is used in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts. Religious *pluralism* must first be distinguished from religious *plurality*–that is, from the observed fact that there are many religions, a fact which is also frequently termed, in both scholarly writing and the popular media, 'religious pluralism.' When I use the term 'religious pluralism' in this dissertation it is to refer not to the phenomenon of religious plurality, but rather to a normative and evaluative stance *toward* this phenomenon.

But what, in substantive terms, is this stance? Broadly speaking, religious pluralism refers to an *attitude*, which frequently is itself religiously informed, which sees religious plurality as basically a good thing–as a positive contribution to the enrichment of human experience. Religious pluralism, in this broad sense, is also relatively–though not altogether–uncontroversial. In this broad sense, in terms of their appreciation of religious diversity, a wide range of religious scholars (and scholars of religion) could happily be labeled 'religious pluralists,' their pluralistic attitudes being motivated and informed by a variety of (sometimes conflicting) religious and theoretical perspectives.

This broad conception of religious pluralism–as fundamentally an attitude of appreciation for religious diversity–also encompasses, but is by no means limited to, the fairly wide assortment of scholars who actively seek to promote, or even to participate in, constructive and mutually respectful interreligious dialogue. These scholars typically see such dialogue, for a variety of reasons, as the preferred form of interaction for the representatives of religious communities (as opposed to more traditional polemicizing or proselytizing). Indeed, many of these scholars see their religious pluralism as practically coextensive with their advocacy of such dialogue. Again, however, views about what,

precisely, constitutes constructive interreligious dialogue vary widely, and participation in such dialogue can be motivated by many possible agendas–scholarly, political, pragmatic, and religious–agendas which sometimes conflict and sometimes overlap.

At first glance, then, 'religious pluralism' would seem to be a fairly vague term, and not particularly useful in designating a substantive position about religious plurality; for this term is capable of designating a wide range of positions. In this dissertation, however, when I use this term, just as I do not intend for it to refer to the phenomenon of religious plurality (to which it is a response), I also do not intend for it to refer to the entire spectrum of views which could broadly be labeled 'pluralistic.' Fortunately, a more precise and therefore more useful definition of this term is available.

More precisely, then, and more relevantly to my project, the term 'religious pluralism' has come to be appropriated primarily by those scholars who hold the view that *there are, in fact, many* true *religions, many authentic and effective ways for human beings to respond to ultimate reality and attain salvation* (however 'ultimate reality' and 'salvation' may be conceived by the scholar in question). Unless otherwise specified, when I use the term 'religious pluralism' in this dissertation I am referring to some form or other of this view–a view which self-consciously opposes the traditionalist view that there is, or that there can be, only one true religion, as well as the more typically modern view that there is *no* true religion. A religious pluralist, on this understanding, is typically a religious *liberal*, one who tries to establish a middle ground or synthesis between tradition and modernity, who affirms the fundamental truth of religion, while at the same time accepting many modern criticisms of perceived inadequacies in traditional formulations of religious truth.

In defining the term 'religious pluralism' in this way, I believe I am following what has become something of a standard usage among scholars of religion. Again, this term has come to be appropriated primarily by those scholars who hold the view that there are many true religions, and not only one (or none). Those scholars, however, who share a

broadly pluralistic *attitude* toward the world's religions–who are 'religious pluralists' in the weaker sense described above–but who do not subscribe to the view that there are many true religions, tend to distance themselves from the application of this term to their own positions.

The stronger understanding of religious pluralism which I have adopted, though, does not do away altogether with internal diversity; for this position, as I have defined it, still includes two main subvarieties. The first of these–articulated pre-eminently by the 'Catholic/Hindu/Buddhist' theologian, Raimon Panikkar–maintains that the *plurality* of the world's true religions is irreducible, despite their shared character as 'true.' This form of religious pluralism emphasizes difference and dialogue. It celebrates diversity–though, some may argue, at the expense of logical coherence. The critical question which could be asked of this position is: Is it religious pluralism, or is it an incoherent relativism?

The other, more prominent, but also more controversial subvariety of this position–articulated pre-eminently by the philosopher of religion, John Hick–maintains that the plurality of the world's true religions forms an ultimate *unity*–that, despite their evident plurality, the many true religions all finally point to the same transcendent Reality and participate in the same essential process of salvation. This version of religious pluralism emphasizes similarities and celebrates harmony–though, again, some may argue, at the expense of the recognition and valuation of genuine difference. The critical question which could be asked of this position is: Is it religious pluralism, or is it an extreme form of monism?

The type of religious pluralism for which I shall argue in this dissertation–my 'reconstructed' version of this position–is an attempt to create a 'middle path' between these two prominent pluralistic views. My goal, in other words, is in some way to logically integrate these two positions, to blend their respective insights of plurality and unity into an internally coherent, yet open-ended, synthesis. This, essentially, is how I

would express my own stance in terms of its logical relations to the two main approaches which currently constitute religious pluralism as a point of view. Between absolute unity and absolute plurality–or rather, encompassing both as their synthesis–is unity-in-plurality (or plurality-in-unity), the metaphysical worldview pioneered by both Whitehead and the Jains. This, essentially, is the view for which I argue in this dissertation.

More specifically, taking *religion* to be, in the words of the process theologian, Schubert Ogden, "the primary form of culture in terms of which we human beings explicitly ask and answer the existential question of the meaning of ultimate reality for us" (Ogden 1992a:5), and *culture* to consist of "the concepts and symbols in terms of which we understand our existence and act to maintain and transform ourselves together with others" (Ibid:7), the view for which I argue in this dissertation is that *there are, in fact, many true religions–all religions necessarily being true in at least an implicit sense–and many of these religions express substantially different truths (though with some degree of overlap) on an explicit level as well, but it is nevertheless possible to coordinate these various truths within a more encompassing worldview in terms of which they can be seen to be both logically compatible and complementary*.

The implicit sense in which I take all religions necessarily to be true is the sense in which they constitute affirmations of what Ogden calls a "basic faith (or confidence) in the meaning of life" (Ibid). On Ogden's understanding, with which I concur, a necessary condition of the truth of this basic faith–which itself "is a necessary condition of the possibility of all our self-understanding and praxis" (Ibid)–is the existence of an ultimate locus of value and meaning which this faith takes as its object–in Ogden's terminology, the existence of *God* (Ogden 1992b:37-38). All religions, therefore–indeed, all forms of human activity–express an implicit truth in the sense that, by their very occurrence, they point to the reality of God (the affirmation that God, on this understanding of the term, is *not* real being at variance with the very condition of the possibility of its being made).

On an explicit level, it is empirically evident that religions make a great many prima facie incompatible claims. It is, however, possible, using a form of logic developed by the Jains in the form of their doctrine of conditional predication, or *syādvāda*, to coordinate these claims, both with one another and with the theistic worldview of process metaphysics whose truth they imply, thus demonstrating the logical compatibility and complementarity of at least their fundamental metaphysical assumptions within this more encompassing worldview. If the Buddhist doctrines of impermanence and no-self, for example, can be shown to articulate the temporal character of actual entities as described in process metaphysics, and the Platonic Christian doctrine of the eternal soul can be shown to articulate the continuity of characteristics over time in a personally ordered society of such entities, then these prima facie incompatible doctrines will have been shown to express, explicitly, different *aspects* of the deeper truth that all worldviews imply–the necessary character of reality as disclosed, essentially, in Whitehead's metaphysical theism.

I believe that this approach, which I call a *universalist inclusivism*, avoids the problems which plague current versions of religious pluralism while preserving what I take to be this position's fundamental insight–namely, the necessary value of all perspectives, the character of all perspectives as necessarily participating, in some sense, in the truth. It affirms plurality by not *reducing* the many perspectives expressed in the world's religions to one. Their insights remain distinct. But it also affirms unity by insisting upon the logical *coordination* of multiple truths. It affirms unity-in-plurality.

1.3 Reading Whitehead 'Pluralistically' Rather Than 'Christianly'

In affirming the logical complementarity of the world's religions, rather than giving preferential emphasis either to plurality (in the manner of Panikkar) or to unity (in the manner of Hick), the approach to religious plurality that I propose can be seen to resemble that of the process theologian, John Cobb. Although he has distanced himself from strong forms of religious pluralism, Cobb is a 'religious pluralist' in the broad sense, inasmuch as

he has been among the foremost proponents, in recent years, of interreligious dialogue between Christians and Buddhists (Cobb 1982). The main difference between my position and his is that Cobb sees, from the perspective of Alfred North Whitehead's process metaphysics, strong reasons for affirming the *possibility* of a complementarity among religions much like what I also affirm (Cobb 1996:46-57). I argue, however, also from the perspective of process metaphysics, that there are even stronger reasons for holding that many religions–indeed, *all* religions–are *necessarily*, in at least an implicit sense, true.

The other process theologian whose position and approach mine can be seen to resemble, and of whose intellectual project mine can be seen as a kind of continuation, is, of course, Ogden. When Ogden speaks of a basic faith in the meaning of life and when I speak of the implicit sense in which all religions necessarily are true, I find that we are affirming substantially the same thing. We differ, however, inasmuch as Ogden seems to use the word 'true' with reference only to explicit claims, rather than applying it, as I do, to the implicit assumptions underlying those claims as well. Like Cobb, then, Ogden stops short of the claim that many religions are *actually*, in some sense, true–the sense in which they imply the basic faith which he describes. In his writings on the issue of truth and religious plurality, he is willing to affirm a priori only that the truth of a plurality of religions–their *explicit* truth–is a *possibility* (Ogden 1992a).

My view, then, clearly goes further than either Cobb's or Ogden's in the direction of a strong religious pluralism of the kind advocated by Panikkar and Hick. But why, given our shared commitment to process metaphysics, might this be the case? Why don't Cobb and Ogden 'bite the bullet' and join the cause of religious pluralism, as I have done? Have I (or have they) perhaps misconstrued process thought and its implications for the issue of truth and religious plurality? Or are we simply reading Whitehead *differently*?

I believe the answer to this question may be related to the fact that both Cobb and Ogden are process *theologians*–that is, they are Christian theologians who take process

thought to provide a more adequate conceptual language for expressing an authentic Christian self-understanding than more traditional Western ('classical' or substantialist) philosophical terminology–and I do not disagree with their assessment in this matter.

I do find, however, that process thought is better understood as providing a conceptual matrix for discerning the general truths expressed in *all* religions than as a philosophical lexicon for expressing the truths of only one–as process theologians seem to do when, for example, they identify Whitehead's metaphysical conception of God, the God of Ogden's 'basic faith,' with the God of traditional Christianity.

It is not that I find this identification to be false or inappropriate.[1] But I do find it to be incomplete. It fails, I think, if it goes no further, to do justice to the expansiveness of Whitehead's philosophical vision. Whitehead's own writings suggest that he understood his metaphysical conception of God to be of far more general relevance than an exclusively Christian reading might allow. I would, in fact, go so far as to claim that Whitehead was a religious pluralist in the strong sense–that he believed in the truth of many religions, or at least in the unity of their transcendent object of faith. This may be a controversial statement to make about a thinker whose philosophical system has become, since his death, the catalyst for the foundation of a prominent school of Christian theology; but he makes it quite explicitly himself in *Science and the Modern World*, where he writes of God, in terms strongly reminiscent of John Hick, that:

> He has been named respectively, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, Order of Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being, Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the experiences of those who have used it (Whitehead 1925:179).

I find, therefore, that a religiously pluralistic reading of process thought is actually a more 'Whiteheadian' reading of this philosophy than those which appropriate it as a form

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[1] I, in fact, find it to be neither; for the claim of religious pluralism, as I understand it, is that all 'Gods' point to the reality of God–including, perhaps pre-eminently, but certainly not exclusively, the God of explicitly Christian faith.

of Christian theology. Like both Cobb and Ogden, then, I take my basic philosophical orientation from Whitehead. But due in part, I suspect, to our differing faith commitments (theirs to Christianity–traditionally wary of other religious paths–mine to a Neo-Vedāntic universalism which *entails* the truth of many religions as paths to realization), as well as to our differing understandings and uses of Whitehead's philosophy (theirs as, in Cobb's words, "a Christian natural theology" (Cobb 1965), mine as, in Whitehead's words, an attempt "to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted" (Whitehead 1978:3)), our conclusions on the issue of religious pluralism differ as well.

1.4 Whitehead's Philosophy and Jainism as Elements in a Synthesis

It is also very likely, however, that Cobb and Ogden–along with most of the Western world–are unfamiliar with the implications of Jain logic and metaphysics. Here, too, a source of the differences between us may be seen to arise. Again, I do not claim, like Cobb and Ogden, that *many* religions are *possibly* true. My claim, rather, is that *all* religions are *necessarily* true, in at least an implicit sense. Beyond this implicit sense, I claim that it is possible to interpret many religions, on an explicit level, as *relatively* true–explicitly true in different senses and to different degrees, and knowable as such due to their being capable of coordination within the larger, more encompassing worldview of process metaphysics.

As these two phrasings indicate–that all religions are *necessarily*, in an implicit sense, true, and that they can be *interpreted* as relatively true on an explicit level–my claim has both metaphysical and empirical dimensions. My affirmation that all religions are necessarily true, is ultimately based upon the conception of the universally salvific divine will which I find a consistent theistic metaphysics, such as Whitehead's, to entail. My affirmation, however, that many religions can be interpreted as *explicitly* true in different

senses and to different degrees is an empirical claim, arising from the tentative application of the interpretive methods of Jain philosophy.

The respective roles which Whitehead and Jainism each play in my reconstruction of religious pluralism thus begin to become evident. Whitehead's theism, I hope to show, provides the metaphysical basis upon which the fundamental claim of religious pluralism can coherently be made. Concepts and methods drawn from the Jain tradition, I also hope to show, can then be used to address an issue which is faced by anyone who seeks to advance a pluralistic interpretation of religion: the issue of the prima facie incompatible truth-claims made by many religious communities, the ultimate compatibility of which such a position affirms. My intention is to argue that the traditional Jain approach to all forms of conceptual plurality–a "horizontally coordinating inclusivism" (Halbfass 1988:414)–is the approach implied by a Whiteheadian interpretation of reality. The employment of process philosophy as a conceptual matrix for the discernment of the general truths expressed in particular religions, in much the same manner in which Jain intellectuals have traditionally employed the claims of their own philosophy to the evaluation of the claims of other traditions, is essentially the interpretive method that I have in mind. If it is the case that a consistent theism, such as Whitehead's, implies that all religions are, in some sense, true, then, if one is to avoid relativism, one must be able to determine in *what* senses particular religions are true in terms of the broader conception of reality which such a theism entails–otherwise, the claim that all religions are, in some sense, true, becomes an empty claim. My claim is that a conception of reality as complex–or in Jain terms, 'non-one-sided' (*anekānta*)–along with the understanding of the *relativity* of truth-claims (which is *not* the same as a relativ*ism*) which such a conception of reality entails, is the logical basis upon which a coherent religious pluralism can be constructed–and this is a conception of reality which I find shared by Jain and process metaphysics. The areas of compatibility shared by these two philosophies of relativity, the compatibilities of their fundamental ontologies

which are evident despite the very different historical and cultural contexts from which they have emerged, thus form the logical basis for my reconception of religious pluralism.

To explain further, the inner logic of religious pluralism, on my understanding, is ultimately theistic in character. In its critique of soteriologies which make the attainment of salvation dependent upon such contingent factors as birth or membership in *one* particular historical community, to the exclusion of all others, religious pluralism can be seen to attribute a just, and indeed loving, moral character to ultimate reality–and thereby to imply the truth of some form of theism. At the same time, I find process metaphysics to be the most compelling and consistent philosophical statement of theism of which I am aware–and, probably not coincidentally, a statement of theism that is particularly compatible with religious pluralism. It is therefore on the basis of process metaphysics that I argue for the claim that all religions are, in some sense, true.

The Jain tradition, however, similarly constitutes the most compelling and consistent expression of which I am aware of the *pluralistic intuition*, along with the principle of *propositional relativity* which it entails–the views, respectively, that *all propositions can be shown to express, even if only implicitly, some truth, some insight into the ultimate nature of reality,* and that *these propositions can all, in principle, be coordinated within a larger, more encompassing, yet internally coherent worldview*, that the universe is ultimately consistent, and not chaotic, or, in principle, incomprehensible. Process metaphysics is able to ground this intuition in a theistic ontology, to explain *why* it is necessarily the case, in terms of the universally salvific will of God, that the universe is such as to be capable of a variety of substantially different, yet logically compatible and authentic, interpretations. But I find that the Jain tradition has most effectively transformed this intuition, over the course of roughly two and a half millenia of reflection, into a clear, systematic and logically rigorous method for demonstrating the ultimate compatibility of the

prima facie incompatible truth-claims which the plurality of possible interpretations of reality involves.

In this dissertation, then, I will argue, on the basis of process metaphysics, for the claim that all religions are, in some sense, true. But on the basis of Jain philosophy I will also argue for the further claim that it is possible to determine, at least tentatively, the relative *degree* of truth potentially expressed by any given religious claim, to determine in *what* sense(s) particular religious claims can be interpreted as true. This, in part, is the process of distinguishing, in Cobb's terminology, between the "discernment" evident in a particular religion–the fundamental insight which constitutes its universal relevance–and the "construction" of that discernment–its subsequent expression in terms of some specific cultural matrix (Cobb 1996:49). It is the translation of the insights of the world's religions into the language of process metaphysics for the sake of demonstrating their harmonies and organic interconnections–not despite, but precisely on the basis of, their differences–and the subsequent deepening and enrichment of process metaphysics by this act of translation.

1.5 Why Religion? A Gandhian Critique of Modernity

Because its claims about the relative truth-value of all propositions are universal in scope, this project clearly has implications which go beyond the study of religion and religious plurality; for the interpretive system it seeks to develop could be applied to *any* kind of conceptual plurality–philosophical, political, cultural, artistic, etc. This, indeed, is in keeping with the Jain tradition, which–conceiving of itself, in traditional Indian terms, as a *darśana*, or total worldview–has never, at least until recently, recognized the artificial division of knowledge into discrete categories, with few or no organic interrelations, called 'religion,' 'philosophy,' or 'science'–a division which seems, in its extreme forms at least, to be idiosyncratic to modernity.

Significantly, Whitehead saw his metaphysical system partly as a way of overcoming this artificial division of knowledge by integrating religious and scientific insights, by means

of philosophy, into an internally coherent, yet open-ended, total worldview–a recovery of the organic worldview of premodernity which would retain the insights of modern philosophy and science (Lowe 1990:186-187). The point of such an 'integral' position is not that there is *no* valid distinction to be made between approaches to reality such as those designated by terms like 'religion,' 'philosophy,' and 'science'–or, for that matter, 'art' or 'politics.' The point, rather, is that the rigid compartmentalization of these approaches which seems to characterize modernity has been detrimental to all of them. It has also arguably contributed to the fragmentation and alienation of the modern 'self,' the sense of the 'self' as functioning in multiple, mutually incompatible worlds, such as the worlds of moral, religious and aesthetic values and the world of the mechanistic production of wealth as an end in itself. As Mahātma Gandhi writes, in criticism of this dominant, compartmentalizing ideology of modernity:

> I claim that human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another…One cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in any other department. Life is one indivisible whole (Gandhi 1982:75, 19).

But this, of course, raises the question, "Why focus on *religious* plurality?" Why take religion as a starting point? Why single out any one facet of life as being of special significance for interpretation? Being in complete agreement with the Gandhian and Whiteheadian critiques of the modern trend towards the compartmentalization of knowledge (which I would want to distinguish from the basic modern commitment to the autonomy of reason as such, which I affirm), I take 'religion' as my starting point due only to its relevance to the issue of *salvation*–to the fact that the competition among the claims of various religions to constitute the sole effective path to the ultimate fulfillment of human existence creates an urgent situation of epistemological crisis for one who takes all such claims seriously without finding any one of them, at least initially, to be overridingly

compelling. It is to this particular kind of crisis that this project is a response. It is therefore with religion that it begins.

1.6 Intellectual Imperialism?

The worry that a project such as this, which presumes to make claims about the senses in which ancient and widespread traditions of belief and practice can be seen as true or false, could appear overly ambitious–or, even worse, pretentious or imperialistic–is not, I think, altogether unwarranted. I would seek to avoid it by pointing out that my approach to determining the relative degree to which particular religions are true, if the worldview entailed and presupposed by my argument for the truth of all religions is also true, must *itself* necessarily be relative, and therefore, to some extent, incomplete–an ongoing process with no definite conclusion in sight. I therefore conceive of this approach as an open-ended interpretive *method* rather than a closed *system*–if system necessarily implies finality (though I believe it need not). I definitely do *not* conceive of my project as the final word on religious pluralism, but as merely prefatory to the larger project of interpreting religious claims–and eventually, all kinds of claims–in light of the pluralistic intuition that all views can yield some truth, some insight into the ultimate nature of reality. This project finally reflects the perspective of only one person–myself–though it admittedly does so in the hope that others will find resonances with this perspective within their own. I see it as simply expressing my own unique view on the world, as contributing and adding to those perspectives which already exist, and not as replacing or superseding any of them.

To again invoke Cobb, rather than being an oppressive, absolute system, claiming ultimate finality for itself, process philosophy contains considerable internal warrants for its own "self-relativization" (Cobb 1996:56-57), the recognition of its own character as one perspective among many. That this need not undermine, but only qualify, its claim to be *true* is what prevents this philosophy of relativity from degenerating into a relativ*ism*, as I will argue shortly. The pluralistic interpretation of religion using process metaphysics as

an interpretive matrix is, again, the determination of what is universally relevant *from the perspective of process metaphysics* in any given religion as this is expressed in the terms of the particular cultural context in which it has emerged, and its subsequent translation into the language of this metaphysical system. This, emphatically, is *not* to say that such an interpretation is warranted in presuming any kind of ultimate superiority over the particular understandings of the communities whose religions are so interpreted–though it may certainly disagree with them in some respects, particularly inasmuch as religious communities tend to *identify* their views with the absolute truth in its totality, rather than as perspectives on or aspects of or ways to that truth. Such an interpretation is not conceived as adding to or completing the claims of particular religious communities so much as their claims, rather, are conceived as adding to and completing *it*, as assisting it in its neverending asymptotic approach to truth.

What is proposed here, then, is not a truly universal system, if by 'universal system' one means an absolute view which claims to encompass all truth exhaustively. What is proposed, rather, is one view among many; though, as we shall see shortly, this view does imply the necessary *existence* of an absolute perspective–the absolutely relative integrating perspective of, in the language of process philosophy, God. But it does not identify *itself* as such, but rather as an ongoing attempt to discern this absolute truth.

1.7 Absolute Relativity vs. Relativ*ism*: The Shared Insight of Jain and Process Metaphysics

The Jain philosophy of relativity postulates a universe of complex, or multi-faceted (*anekānta*) entities, each capable of being characterized in an infinite variety of ways from a correspondingly infinite variety of perspectives (or *naya*s). The relational character of reality and knowledge posited, respectively, by the ontological doctrine of the complexity of reality, or *anekāntavāda*, and the epistemological doctrine of the *naya*s, or *nayavāda*, entails that the truth of any given claim about the nature of a particular entity is contingent upon–

that is, relative to–the perspective from which that claim is made. In other words, claims about reality are true or false not absolutely, but only conditionally: "in a certain sense" (*syāt*) or from a certain point of view (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 104).

The conception of truth underlying this philosophy of relativity is expressed most succinctly by the fifth-century Jain logician, Siddhasena Divākara, when he writes:

> *ṇiyayavayaṇijjasaccā savvanayā paraviyālaṇe moha* |
> *te uṇa ṇa diṭṭhasamao vibhayai sacce va alie vā* ||

> All perspectives are true, in their respective spheres, and to the extent that they are mutually exclusive, they are false. One who comprehends the many-sided nature of reality never characterizes a particular view as simply 'true' or 'false' (*Sanmatitarka* 1:28).

As I understand this verse, it is a traditional Jain expression of the same basic principle, the same intuition, that underlies religious pluralism: that all views can yield some truth, some insight into the ultimate nature of reality, and that an adequate account of reality would accommodate what is true in all views, to the exclusion of none. Current formulations of religious pluralism articulate this intuition with varying degrees of clarity; and in some versions of this position it is certainly more implicit than explicit. But I would argue that this basic intuition underlies the impulse behind *all* forms of this position–the impulse toward an openness to and an appreciation of the views of others, and toward the possible synthesis of their insights into one's own worldview, thereby transforming and enriching it–an impulse which implies this intuition as a fundamental assumption.

Truth-expression, according to this intuition, is always *relative*. In other words, the truth of any given perspective, on this understanding, is limited to the extent that the truth of other perspectives must also be affirmed, without exclusion. This entailment of the pluralistic intuition is fairly easily demonstrated; for if *all* views necessarily contain some truth, then the truth of any given claim, or expression of a view, must be limited by the extent to which other claims, even claims with which it might at first appear to be incompatible, must also be true.

To take an example frequently cited within the Jain tradition: If all claims are, in some sense, true, then the claim "All things are permanent" must, in some sense, be true; but the contradictory claim, "All things are impermanent," must also, in some other sense, be true as well. The more inclusive truth is that all things are characterized, in different respects and from different perspectives, by both permanence (*nityatā*) and impermanence (*anityatā*). Both prima facie incompatible claims are true, in specific senses, but neither is *exclusively* or *absolutely* true; thus, in the Jain view, all things are characterized, in different senses, by both permanence and impermanence (*nityānityatā*).

This conclusion, of course, presupposes a conception of reality–which *anekāntavāda* provides–in terms of which things may be said to be characterized, in different respects, by prima facie incompatible characteristics–a conception of reality as consisting of a plurality of facets, or spheres of existence, in relation to which particular claims can be said to be true or false–a conception of reality in terms of which things could, for example, be said to be both permanent and impermanent, from different perspectives or in different senses. Truth and falsity are thus functions of the appropriateness of a claim to the sphere of existence to which it is relevant; and the interrelatedness of the many spheres of existence, the many sides or aspects of reality that this understanding of truth presupposes as its ontological basis, gives rise to the corresponding interrelatedness–the relativity–of the truth of all claims. In other words, on this metaphysical account, the truth of the claim that the truth of any given claim is always conditioned by–always relative to–the truth of contradictory claims is rooted in the multi-faceted (*anekānta*) character of reality itself.

If this is the case, then the truth of any given claim is never determinable in isolation, but only in relation to that of all other claims. The most egregious logical fallacy, on this understanding of truth, is thus to affirm, in a one-sided fashion, the absolute validity of any single perspective (*naya*) to the exclusion of all contrary views–a fallacy

called, in the Jain philosophical tradition, *durnaya* (Folkert 1993:222). The correct way to assert the truth of a proposition, on this understanding, is thus not absolutely, but conditionally–to specify the particular sense and the perspective from which it can be said to be true. This is the doctrine of conditional predication, or *syādvāda*–according to which all claims are true '*syāt*'–in a certain sense or from a certain point of view.

In the passage cited earlier, then, Siddhasena can be seen to articulate, in summary form, the conception of truth that underlies and is expressed by what I call the 'Jain doctrines of relativity.' These doctrines–*anekāntavāda* (the 'doctrine of many-sidedness'), an ontological doctrine which affirms the complex nature of reality; *nayavāda* (the 'doctrine of perspectives'), an epistemological doctrine which affirms the validity of all perspectives; and *syādvāda* (literally the 'maybe doctrine,' or doctrine of conditional predication), a hermeneutical doctrine which affirms the relative truth of all claims–taken collectively, can be seen to entail one another in much the same fashion that Whitehead claims ideas must in order to form an internally coherent system:

> 'Coherence,' as here employed, means that the fundamental ideas, in terms of which the scheme is developed, presuppose each other so that in isolation they are meaningless. This requirement does not mean that they are definable in terms of each other; it means that what is indefinable in one such notion cannot be abstracted from its relevance to the other notions (Whitehead 1978:3).

The relevance of *anekāntavāda* to *nayavāda* and *syādvāda*–the sense in which they are meaningful in terms of it–is as their ontological basis. Similarly, *nayavāda* gives epistemological relevance to *anekāntavāda*–it *is*, in essence, *anekāntavāda* as applied to epistemology–and an epistemological justification for *syādvāda* as an interpretive method. *Syādvāda*, finally, gives interpretive relevance to both *anekāntavāda* and *nayavāda* in the elucidation of prima facie incompatible truth-claims.

Such coherence, however, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the validity of a system of ideas. The possibility of real internal contradictions must also be addressed. The immediate concern which comes to mind when one is confronted with a system of

ideas that affirms the relative truth of all claims is the concern that it may exhibit the fallacy of *relativism*–which manifests in the *nihilist* position, according to which there ultimately is no truth, and the *agnostic* or *fideist* position that the truth, whatever it may be, is utterly beyond the reach of human knowledge. These forms of relativism are, in some respects, quite different positions; but they amount to the same thing with respect to our ability to *know* if what we believe is true. According to these views, the 'truth' of all claims is *solely* a matter of perspective. An account of the historical causes of their being made thus exhausts their knowable truth-value.

The problem with relativist positions is that they are self-refuting. This is because, if they were true, either, on their own terms, they could *not* be true, or one could not *know* if they were true and thereby be in a position to assert their truth as more than a mere conjecture. Despite its affirmation of relativity, the conception of truth which the Jain doctrines of relativity express is not a self-refuting relativism. These doctrines, first of all, constitute a definite world view which is affirmed to be both *true* and *knowable* as such. Secondly, they logically presuppose an absolute perspective from which their truth can be affirmed and which justifies the assertion of their claim that 'all perspectives are true in their respective spheres.' They do not, therefore, negate themselves in the manner of relativism, which undermines itself precisely inasmuch as it denies the truth, or the knowability of the truth, of any definite world view, and–at least in the case of nihilism–the existence of even a hypothetical absolute perspective. I shall now elaborate upon both of these points.

That the Jain doctrines of relativity do not amount to relativism is made evident, first of all, by the fact that they are expressed as entailments of a definite metaphysic–an ontology which affirms the 'many-sided' (*anekānta*) nature of reality, not as a mere conjecture, but as an absolute and necessary truth, knowable as such, upon which the claim of universal relativity–which is itself conceived as an absolute truth–is based. Their affirmation of a particular metaphysic suggests that the Jains are not complete relativists; for

they do affirm that one world view, and not another, is ultimately true–namely, one which asserts the multi-faceted nature of things, rather than one which denies this.

In contrast with the Jains, relativists, on my understanding, typically deny the possibility of metaphysics–of inquiry into the necessary character of reality as such and the attempt to express that character in a system of philosophical concepts–for their position precludes the possibility that necessary truths, even should their possible existence be affirmed, could ever be known by human beings. The Jains, however, actually claim to know such truths, and furthermore, to base their affirmation of universal relativity upon them. The Jain affirmation of relativity is thus inextricably bound up with the Jain affirmation of an absolute.

It is also significant in this regard that the Jain doctrines of relativity are ultimately based not upon metaphysical reflection as such–though such reflection forms a substantial portion of the Jain intellectual tradition–but upon the religious claim, central, as we shall later see, to Jain soteriology, that an absolute perspective exists from which the relativity of all other perspectives is perceived. This is the perspective of the omniscient, fully enlightened being, the *kevalin* or Jina–in Siddhasena's words, the "one who comprehends the many-sided nature of reality." According to John E. Cort, a contemporary scholar of Jainism, "The Jains posit that there is an absolutely true perspective. This was realized by Mahāvīra and the other Jinas, and it is from this absolute perspective that the Jinas taught" (Cort [1997]: 5). Faith in the existence of this absolute perspective, from which the Jain salvific path is taught, is basic to Jainism, both as a religious praxis and as a worldview.

Relativism incoherently asserts the ultimate unknowability of all truth, thus calling into question its own truth. But clearly, universal *relativity*, on a Jain understanding, is taken to be both knowable and assertible from a fixed, non-relative perspective, conceived as a totalizing synthesis of all perspectives. The introduction of this absolute perspective is a logical necessity if the error of relativism, which negates itself by undermining its own

validity, is to be avoided. In other words, the assertion of relativity, in order to be valid, requires a corresponding assertion of an absolute–of that *to which* the truth of all claims is relative–so that the claim of relativity will not negate itself.

This, however, leads to another, perhaps even stronger, possible objection to the Jain position; for, prima facie, it would seem to contradict the claim that relativity is universal–that, "One who comprehends the many-sided nature of reality *never* characterizes a particular view as simply 'true' or 'false.'" On what grounds can one legitimately make an exception to a universally applicable principle? Why should relativity itself not be relative? How can an absolute be legitimately introduced into a relativistic system? Paradoxically, the solution to this difficulty rests, I believe, with the fulfillment of the logical requirement of *some* absolute perspective from which relativity can be asserted non-relatively precisely by the consistent application of the claim of universal relativity–that is, its application to all claims, *including itself*–as I shall now attempt to demonstrate.

What happens if we apply the claim of universal relativity to itself? If the truth of the claim that the truth of all claims is relative is, itself, relative (and it must be, in order to be a universal claim, for it must apply even to itself), then it must itself be limited by the truth of all other claims, including its contradictory–the claim that at least one claim, at least one perspective, is *not* relative. This is precisely what the relativity of perspectives means on a Jain understanding–that the truth of any given perspective is limited to the extent that the truth of all other perspectives must also be affirmed–even perspectives with which it is prima facie incompatible. The relativity of the claim that all claims are relative, then, rests with there being at least one claim that is *not* relative, that is absolutely and universally true.

The claim that the truth of all claims is relative, the claim of universal relativity, itself seems, at least prima facie, to be just such a non-relative claim; for it claims to be true of *all* claims, absolutely and without exception. It therefore fulfills its own criterion of truth. The claim that all perspectives are relative is itself relative precisely in the sense that

it expresses an absolute truth–namely, the relativity of all perspectives. The paradox, in other words, is that the claim of universal relativity is relative precisely in the sense in which it is *not* relative–the sense in which it expresses an absolute truth.

What this suggests is that relativity, applied consistently, yields an absolute perspective; for, by applying the claim of universal relativity to itself, one finds that there is at least one perspective–that from which the relativity of all perspectives can be affirmed–which is not relative, but which yet *is* relative in precisely this same sense. Universal relativity, then, amounts not to relativism, but to the mutual implication of the relative and the absolute–or rather, as I have tried to show, the derivation of the absolute from the relative by means of the absolute affirmation of relativity.

Just as, in Jainism, the need for an absolute–or absolutely relative–perspective to ground the universal relativity of perspectives is fulfilled by the doctrine of the *kevalin* or Jina–the fully enlightened, omniscient being–similarly, in process philosophy, the logical need for an absolutely relative perspective, one which integrates the plurality and relativity of all perspectives into itself, forms part of an argument for the existence of God–conceived as a concrete individual characterized by "complete relativity to all actuality and possibility" (Gamwell 1990:171)–the one metaphysically necessary being.

According to process philosophy, the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed–the 'final real things' or 'actual entities'–are events, or units of process, which have the character of *perspectives*–or subjective integrations of all preceding events into syntheses–which themselves become, successively, the objective data for future events, and so forth. According to this metaphysical system, the beginningless and endless procession of actual entities is what we experience as the universe–including our very own sense of 'self.' By themselves, however, these actual entities provide an insufficient basis for the orderly procession of events that a universe requires–a coherent unity in the plurality of events that makes any kind of experience possible. God, then, is that necessary actuality

the synthesis of whose predecessors, from moment to moment, into a unified experience constitutes the universe, and whose mutual implication with all other actualities constitutes the basis for cosmic order, without which the universe would be "steadily relapsing into lawless chaos" (Whitehead 1967:115). God is therefore the "supremely relative" being, by whose relatedness–that is, by whose relativity–to all other beings the very continuity and coherence of existence is made possible (Hartshorne 1948:76-77).

Not only, then, need a conception of universal relativity not entail relativism, but, applied consistently, it is, in fact, compatible with the truth-claims of (at least) two metaphysical traditions–that of process thought and that of the Jains–philosophical systems which can both be conceived as ways of integrating seemingly contrary intuitions into internally coherent syntheses which express the complex character of reality.

1.8 Absolute Relativity and the Plurality of Perspectives: Relativity as a Pluralistic Interpretive Method

According to Whitehead's conception of philosophy, "The task of reason is to fathom the deeper depths of the many-sidedness of things" (Whitehead, 1978:342). A similar agenda could clearly be attributed to Jain philosophy as well. With the ontology of *anekāntavāda*, the doctrine of the many-sided nature of existence, the Jains historically have been able to integrate the prima facie incompatible philosophical doctrines of contesting schools of thought–such as the metaphysics of impermanence affirmed by Buddhist philosophers and the metaphysics of substance defended by adherents of the Brahmanical Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition–into an internally coherent synthesis which incorporates the fundamental metaphysical intuitions–or to use Whitehead's terminology, the 'ultimate notions'–of both schools of thought into itself. The Buddhist intuition of impermanence and the Brahmanical intuition of permanence both find their place in the Jain ontology of substances (*dravya*s) constituted by (rather than acting as substrata for) ever-changing modes–or, alternatively phrased, of momentary states (*paryāya*s) causally linked

in such a way as to constitute enduring streams of existence knowable as substances due to the relative continuity, or inheritance from one moment to the next, of their attributes over time. This is not unlike Whitehead's conception of an enduring 'society' of perpetually arising and perishing 'actual entities.' Similarly, the idea of many *naya*s, or perspectives, from which it is possible to view a topic or entity according to *nayavāda*, the Jain doctrine of perspectives, resembles Whitehead's conception of each actual entity as constituting a unique synthetic perspective on the universe. Despite the many differences between these two systems of thought, which shall be explored in some depth later, there seems to be very little, apart from terminology, separating them on the level of their fundamental conceptions of reality. Both of these systems of thought are, broadly, speaking, *realist*. That is, on my understanding of this term, they resist, in the course of offering their respective interpretive accounts of existence, the reduction of the rich complexity of experience to any one metaphysical notion of permanence or impermanence, or the rejection of any dimension of experience as illusory (*māyāvāda*).

The similarities between Jain and process metaphysics have been noted by at least two scholars of Indian philosophy–Y.J. Padmarajiah and Bimal Krishna Matilal–though neither have chosen to explore the possibility of integrating these two metaphysical systems into a synthesis, much less doing so as part of an attempt to reconceive religious pluralism. Padmarajiah points out Whitehead's articulation of "the need for an 'integral' viewpoint in which the ultimate postulates of 'permanence and flux' are harmoniously blended" (Padmarajiah 1963:132)–a need which, on Padmarajiah's reading, Jain philosophy fulfills. Similarly, according to Matilal:

> [T]he Jaina conception of reality, in bringing together the opposing viewpoints of the Buddhists and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, comes very close to that of Whitehead, according to whom the chief aim of philosophy is the 'elucidation of our integral experience' of both the flux and permanence of things. Whitehead has said that philosophers who have started with 'being' have given us the metaphysics of 'substance' and those who have started with 'becoming' have developed the

metaphysics of flux. But Whitehead points out the inseparability of the two (Matilal 1990:283).

This inseparability of contrary 'ultimate notions' affirmed by Whitehead has strong resonances with the Jain affirmation of the relativity–the limitation, or conditioning, of the truth of a claim by that of its opposite–which characterizes all perspectives. Contrary notions, on both of these understandings of truth, imply, rather than contradict, one another. This makes possible the integration of prima facie incompatible intuitions into a single system without violating the principle of non-contradiction, so long as the different senses in which these intuitions are true are specified. Again, this specification of the perspectives from which a claim can be asserted in order to determine the sense and relative degree of its truth, is the central task of the Jain doctrine of conditional predication, or *syādvāda*, according to which claims are only true or false '*syāt*'–in a certain sense or from a certain perspective. This gives a greater precision to language, allowing it to come closer to an articulation of the true, complex nature of things. As Matilal puts it: "Add a *syāt* particle to your philosophic proposition and you have captured the truth" (Matilal 1981:61).

Both of these systems of thought–Jain and process metaphysics–affirm the fundamental pluralistic intuition that all perspectives have validity, yet avoid the pitfalls of relativism by grounding this intuition in a metaphysics of absolute relativity. Jain philosophy does this with its doctrines of relativity, which it grounds in a scriptural revelation of an absolute perspective experienced by those who have successfully completed the Jain path of purification–the Jinas ('victors' or 'conquerors')–of whom the most recent was Mahāvīra, the 'Great Hero,' the historical founder of the Jain religion, at least as it is known today.[2] Process philosophy performs the same task with its doctrine of

[2] According to Jain tradition, Mahāvīra (who is traditionally claimed to have lived from 599 to 527 B.C.E.) was not the founder of Jainism, but a reformer and re-establisher of an already ancient, pre-existing religious practice and philosophy. He is traditionally numbered twenty-fourth among the *TīrthaŚkaras*, or "Fordmakers"–twenty-four fully enlightened beings who appear throughout the course of a *kalpa*, or cosmic epoch, to teach the Jain path to *mokṣa*, or liberation, to other beings, leading them to the "further shore" of enlightenment. From a modern historical perspective, there is, in fact, some

God, at which it arrives not through a divine revelation, but through unaided human reason reflecting on the necessary character of human experience.

Despite the significant differences between these two systems of thought–one a revealed though non-theistic system of religiously grounded metaphysics, the other a theistic humanism–they can nevertheless be shown to contain mutually compatible and complementary insights which I believe can together form the basis for a defense of the pluralistic intuition and a logical vindication of the claims of religious pluralism. Whitehead's theism, I hope to demonstrate, can ground the pluralistic intuition by giving an account of *why* it must be the case, as this intuition affirms, that all views can yield some truth, some insight into the ultimate nature of reality, and that an adequate account of reality would accommodate that which is true in all views, to the exclusion of none. Jainism, in turn, transforms this intuition into a systematic interpretive method which expresses the principle of relativity that this intuition implies and which can integrate the various insights of the world's religions and philosophies into a coherent, yet open-ended, synthesis.

1.9 The Limits of Language, Falsity, and the Problem of Evil

The open-endedness of the synthesis of insights pursued by a reconceived religious pluralism which takes a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics as its basis is necessitated by the limits of language–limits of which both of these traditions are keenly aware. As I mentioned earlier, process philosophy contains considerable internal warrants for its own self-relativization. Among these warrants are Whitehead's own profound awareness of the limitations of human linguistically-based conceptual thought–limitations which prevent the formulation of metaphysical first principles "in any form other than that of an asymptotic approach to a scheme of principles, only definable in terms of the ideal which they should satisfy" (Whitehead 1978:4).

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evidence that the Jain tradition, in some form, does pre-date Mahāvīra. This shall be discussed in greater depth later. See Jaini 1979:1-41 and Dundas 1992:11-39.

That this need not undermine, but only qualify, the claim of process philosophy, to be true–that a realization of the limits of language need not compel one to ring the death-knell of metaphysical speculation–is what prevents this philosophy of relativity from becoming a relativ*ism*; for Whitehead does not deny the possibility of *any* metaphysical knowledge. “There is no first principle,” he writes, “which is in itself unknowable, not to be captured by a flash of insight” (Ibid). What he denies is that any particular verbal or conceptual expression can ever *finally* or *definitively* exhaust such knowledge. “In philosophical discussion,” he writes, “the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly” (Ibid:xiv). The best way to understand our attainment of metaphysical knowledge , then, is as, to use Whitehead’s term, “asymptotic” (Ibid:4) We forever approach it, refining our concepts and broadening and deepening our initial intuitive awareness, but there ever remains scope for further creative speculation, further penetration of philosophic insight. Just as we must always be dubious of claims about the ‘end of history,’ similarly, we can expect no conclusive ‘end of philosophy.’ This asymptotic, qualified metaphysical approach to truth, with the understanding of human linguistic and conceptual capacities that it expresses, constitutes, I believe, a ‘middle path’ between a positivistic overconfidence and a postmodern despair.

The Jain tradition, too, expresses a sophisticated awareness of the limits of language, combined with a method for overcoming these limits–at least provisionally–in order to make *some* claims about the true nature of reality–the proper understanding of which is seen as central to the soteriological concerns at the heart of this tradition. The whole point of *syādvāda*, as we have already seen, is to give greater specificity to language, greater capacity to express the complex nature of reality than it ordinarily possesses–such as when, in ordinary speech, we tend to characterize particular claims as

simply 'true' or 'false,' rather than specifying the ontological conditions for their truth or falsity.

In ordinary speech, for example, we typically make claims such as "It's raining," or "It's hot," on the assumption that our interlocutors understand that what we really mean is "It's raining here right now," or "It's hot here right now." But the specification of ontological conditions can have a considerable effect on the truth of our claims. It may or may not be true that "It's raining in Chicago right now." But if I say, "It's raining on the Sun," or "It's hot on the planet Pluto," the specification of these ontological conditions will very likely falsify my claim. Or one can specify further. 'Hot' is a relative term. It may, indeed, be 'hot' on Pluto compared to some place where the temperature is absolute zero. Or some parts of Pluto may be 'hotter' than others. The point is that the specification of ontological conditions which characterizes *syādvāda* as a method has the effect–again, never completely, but rather, 'asymptotically'–of disambiguating language–a great advantage when one seeks to express, however imperfectly, metaphysical first principles.

According to Samantabhadra, a fifth-century Digambara Jain philosopher whose *Āptamīmāṃsā* marks a watershed in the historical development of this doctrine, the specificity of expression–and thus of knowledge–that *syādvāda* enables one to achieve is not too far removed from that of the *kevalin*–the omniscient being whose teaching, like the divine knowledge in process metaphysics, forms the absolute perspective from which the Jain conception of universal relativity draws its logical justification. In his words:

> *syādvādakevalajñāne sarvatattvaprakāśane* |
> *bhedā sākṣādasākṣācca hyavastvanyatamaṃ bhavet* ||
>
> [Both] *syādvāda* and *kevalajñāna* [absolute knowledge, or omniscience] illuminate the nature of all entities. The difference between these two is due to immediacy and non-immediacy [that is, *syādvāda* operates through the medium of linguistically-based concepts, whereas *kevalajñāna* is conceived as an immediate form of awareness]; but this difference should be [regarded as] immaterial (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 105).

In this matter, however, the Jain tradition is not monolithic. According to the teachings of a mystical school of Digambara Jainism attributed to the *ācārya*, or teacher, Kundakunda, the totality of the knowledge attainable through *syādvāda*, through the mediation of linguistically-based concepts, collectively constitutes the *vyavahāranaya*, or mundane perspective, which the aspirant on the Jain path hopes eventually to overcome in order to attain the *niścayanaya*, or ultimate perspective of the enlightened Jina, which is *beyond* the capacity of mundane, linguistically-based concepts to comprehend.

The sense that this understanding of the absolute perspective of Jainism conveys–of this perspective as existing beyond the limits of language and ordinary human comprehension–is more compatible with a Whiteheadian understanding of philosophy as asymptotically approaching, rather than actually apprehending, its speculative ideal, than is Samantabhadra's almost positivistic reading of *syādvāda*, and perhaps informs the Digambara conception of the teaching of Mahāvīra as having occurred not through the medium of language, but in the form of a *divyadhvani*, or divine sound, spontaneously emitted from his body upon his attainment of absolute knowledge and subsequently interpreted by his discerning disciples as the teachings of Jainism (Jaini 1979:42). Historically, however, Kundakunda's 'two truths' approach to *nayavāda* never became predominant within the mainstream Jain intellectual tradition–Digambara or Śvetāmbara. Like similar Mādhyamika and Vedāntic views, rejected by the Jains, which relegate all conceptual constructs to the realm of the provisional, it was feared that an approach which reduced all doctrine to the level of the merely mundane might undermine religious praxis.

The importance of emphasizing an open-ended approach to the act of philosophically interpreting and synthesizing a plurality of perspectives is not only connected with a sense of the limits of language and the fallibility of ordinary human cognitive capacities–a recognition of which, of course, need not rule out claims, such as those of the Jains, that it is possible for human beings to develop *extraordinary* cognitive

capacities. The importance of developing a pluralistic interpretive method that is open-ended is also connected with the capacity for any totalizing system of thought to become oppressive, or to rule out options a priori which, upon further experience and reflection, could be seen to express valuable insights. On my understanding, therefore, the absolute or divine perspective upon which the principle of the universal relativity of truth-claims is based is a necessary postulate of the logic of this principle, rather than a specific, rigidly defined worldview. Yet, like Whitehead and the mainstream Jain tradition, I resist absolute skepticism no less than absolute positivism. I thus conceive of this absolute perspective–in its mode as a conceptual basis for an interpretive method, rather than in and of itself–not as a wholly empty set with regard to definite metaphysical propositions, but rather, as an *open* set of such claims, capable of modification in light of further speculative and interpretive activity, and always characterized, like Kundakunda's *vyavahāranaya*, by a degree of tentativeness, a quality of provisionality–though the 'two truths' are ultimately identical.

At this point, however, it might be objected that some claims *ought* to be excluded from such an 'open' interpretive system, that some kind of absolute exclusionary standard is demanded by morality. To assert, for example, that the racist beliefs of Hitler or the Ku Klux Klan are 'in some sense true' seems, at least prima facie, monstrous. It could thus be charged–as it has also been charged of other formulations of religious pluralism–that such an interpretive system ends up unwittingly justifying despicable evils in a misguided attempt to avoid making imperialistic negative judgments on the beliefs of others. "Take a stand!" this objection seems to say. If one does not resist evil, then one risks becoming complicit with it–even in the abstract realm of metaphysics.

In reply to this objection, I would first of all highlight the fact that, according to *syādvāda*, all claims, as I have been emphasizing, are, in some sense, true; but they are also all, in some sense, false. Indeed, contrary to popular conceptions of this doctrine as articulating a form of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*,' or tolerance, its primary function in the Jain

intellectual tradition has historically been to demonstrate the *incompleteness*, the *partiality*, of the truths expressed in non-Jain philosophies, in contrast with the more comprehensive perspective of Jainism. The disambiguating capacity of *syādvāda*, mentioned earlier, has enabled traditional Jain philosophers to employ it as "a fiercesome [sic] weapon of philosophical polemic with which the doctrines of Hinduism and Buddhism could be pared down to their ideological basics of simple permanence and impermanence respectively and thus be shown to be one-pointed and inadequate as the overall interpretations of reality which they purported to be" (Dundas 1992:199).

Bearing in mind, therefore, the negative capacities of this doctrine–negative in the strictly logical sense of 'negation'–and its historical uses by representatives of the tradition that developed it, one can see that, although a pluralistic interpretive system employing *syādvāda could* take as its primary mandate–as I have taken mine–to be to show the senses in which various philosophical and religious perspectives are true, *syādvāda* is nevertheless a double-edged (logical) sword. Like gentle Pārvatī, the wife of Śiva, transforming herself into the fierce Kālī to slay demons, such a pluralistic system has the capacity, I believe, to become a powerful intellectual tool for the *critical* analysis of religious and philosophical propositions as much as for their charitable reading as expressions of a multi-faceted truth.

In order to address this question–the question of the ability of *syādvāda* to act as a philosophy of resistance to evil–one must have recourse to the larger metaphysical and ethical context from which this doctrine emerges–the context of Jainism. The central ethical principle of Jainism, entailed by its overall worldview, is *ahiṃsā*, which is often translated as 'nonviolence,' but which in fact literally means 'the absence of even the desire to do harm.' Ethically, I believe, this is the principle which can give *syādvāda* its critical edge.

The point, again, of *syādvāda* is to disambiguate linguistically expressed claims, to "pare them down"–just as, to paraphrase Dundas, the Jains have traditionally "pared down" the claims of their philosophical opponents–"to their ideological basics," and then to

specify the senses in which these claims express (partial) truth in terms of the more encompassing or comprehensive perspective provided by the Jain *darśana*, or worldview, conceived as an internally coherent system. Assuming a relation of logical entailment between the ethical principle of *ahiṃsā* and the method of *syādvāda* as components of such an internally coherent system (which is *not* the same as claiming that *syādvāda* is a form of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*'), if one follows the traditional Jain approach, taking the cardinal sin of philosophical interpretation to be *durnaya*–the one-sided (*ekānta*) taking of a particular *naya*, or relative perspective, to be exclusively true–then, if one analyzes claims which issue in the advocacy of violence, one will presumably find, at their basis, a *durnaya*–an illicitly absolute affirmation of a relative truth. This is best illustrated by way of example.

Let us take what is considered, by widespread consensus, to be the classic case of evil in the twentieth century–arguably the most violent century in human history–namely, Nazism. Nazism is, of course, a highly complex network of ideas, attitudes, symbols (such as the *svāstika*), and practices, each of which, presumably, could be individually analyzed in terms of *syādvāda* in order to determine the relative degree of truth or falsity it could be seen to express. But taking Nazism as a whole, let us presume that its fundamental affirmation is that certain groups of people–Jews, Gypsies, Homosexuals, and anyone who rejects this fundamental affirmation–are inferior to members of the 'pure Aryan nation' and ought to be exterminated. The objector to *syādvāda* asks (presumably with some exasperation), "In what sense could this demonic affirmation possibly be true?" The reply is the following: The 'truth' which the Nazi, or 'member of the pure Aryan nation,' perceives–and expresses in his fundamental affirmation–is the rather banal truth that there exist groups of people called 'Jews, Gypsies, etc.' who are, in some unspecified ways, different from himself; and this is certainly the case.

This truth, however, as it is expressed in the Nazi's affirmation, is one-sided because it fails to take into account the extent to which it is conditioned by its contrary: that

there is another sense–the sense in which they share a common humanity–in which these people who are different from him are also *like* him. In affirming that these people are inferior to himself and merit extermination the Nazi fails to recognize the truth of his commonalities with his would-be victims because he is blinded by his one-sided insistence on the differences which separate them from himself. A recognition of the contrary of the differences emphasized by the Nazi–that is, of the common humanity shared by all of these groups of people with himself–would complete his one-sided perspective, thereby logically negating the violence inherent in it (and also thereby, one could hope, converting him).

In this sense, then, *syādvāda can* function as a philosophy of nonviolence. If one can presume, a priori, that all claims which could entail injury to others must necessarily contain a one-sided affirmation–which will, in all likelihood, typically be an affirmation of some seemingly unbridgeable distance between the speaker and the object of his intended violence–and then correct this one-sidedness with an affirmation of its contrary–namely, the common humanity, or 'beingness,' of the speaker and the object of his intended violence–then one should be able to avoid the problem of one's pluralistic interpretive method inadvertently justifying truth-claims which advocate or approve of violent acts.

Such an approach, in fact, could be seen to lead to the deduction, from the logic of *syādvāda*, of the 'Golden Rule' as an ethical principle–the principle that one ought to treat others as one wishes for oneself to be treated; for we are all, in a sense, one, inasmuch as we share a wide range of similarities based upon our common humanity.[3] Indeed, South Asian traditions, such as Jainism, do not stop at our common humanity in finding a basis for affirming such an ethical principle. In Hindu traditions, for example, one is enjoined to follow something like the Golden Rule because *all* beings–and not only humans–ultimately constitute one Being, one Oversoul–or *Brahman*; or, in more conventionally theistic forms of Hinduism, much as in the theistic traditions of the West, all beings are affirmed to be

[3] I shall return to this topic in chapter nine.

children of God. Similarly, in Buddhism, universal compassion (*karuṇā*) is enjoined because all beings are dependently co-originated and ultimately no different from one'self'– a separate 'self' finally distinct from the rest of the universal process being a mere conceptual construct. Finally, in Jainism, *ahiṃsā* toward all beings is enjoined, in part, because all beings, even microscopic beings, possess a soul (*jīva*) and are capable of feeling pain.

Such an ethical principle of reciprocity is 'non-one-sided' (*anekānta*) inasmuch as it is based upon both the similarities uniting and the differences separating all beings; for, just as a one-sided, exclusive affirmation of the differences separating one from others can issue in fear, hatred, and violence, similarly, an exclusive affirmation of resemblances and unities can blind one to the very real distinctions between oneself and others–distinctions which make one's experiences of others so richly diverse and rewarding. Such an emphasis could also lead to the violence of an instrumental attitude toward others–a selfish, infantile perspective which would see others as mere extensions of oneself, rather than as distinct beings–as 'ends in themselves'–with their own wills and destinies. It could also blind one– as has been charged against forms of religious pluralism which emphasize unity at the expense of diversity–to other kinds of difference between oneself and others, such as economic and social inequalities perpetuated, in part, by being ideologically concealed.

The a priori application of the ethical principle of *ahiṃsā* in a reconceived pluralistic interpretation of religion which takes a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics as its logical basis cannot, of course, be a mere arbitrary imposition. It must find a warrant in both of these worldviews; and process philosophers are currently not of one mind on the issue of nonviolence (Hartshorne 1948:154). I believe, however, that an affirmation of *ahiṃsā* is quite logically deducible from one of the central affirmations of process thought–that God, as the supremely relative being, feels and experiences everything that is felt and experienced in the cosmos (without, however, being thereby diminished in any way). If this

is the case, then whenever we inflict injury of any kind on our fellow beings, we, in a very real sense, do injury to God, who experiences all injury as 'His' own.

Indeed, the ethical principle implied by such an understanding of God as its metaphysical basis must, it seems, go beyond *ahiṃsā*, conceived as the avoidance of injury to–including even injurious thoughts toward–others, though it would certainly include *ahiṃsā* as a central element. Besides enjoining one to avoid evil, it would also logically include a positive injunction to do good, to be universally compassionate, to work for peace and social justice and the welfare of all beings. The Golden Rule–to treat others as one wishes for oneself to be treated–which this conception of God and *syādvāda* together entail does not *only* mean to avoid evil thoughts, words, or deeds toward others. It *also* means, positively, to do good for others. Indeed, the metaphysical understanding of God as supremely relative gives a very literal twist to the interpretation of Biblical passages, such as Matthew 25:31-45, a classic Christian injunction to works of justice and mercy:

> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat upon his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the upright will say to him in reply: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer: *"In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."* Then he will say to those on his left hand: "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food, I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink, I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, lacking clothes and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then he will answer, *"In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me.*"[4]

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[4] From *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Emphasis mine.

A pluralistic interpretation of religion which includes such an understanding of the nature of God in its logical basis therefore not only avoids being complicit with evil by inadvertently justifying claims which enjoin violence, but also entails a positive injunction to work for the good of all beings–a concern which has long been a central one for religious pluralists.

An approach to conceptual plurality which takes a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics–with their shared principle of universal relativity–as its logical basis would seek to be both internally coherent and open; to be, where appropriate, both charitable and critical–aware of the limits of language, the possibility of falsity, and the problem of evil, yet in terms of a consistent worldview, rather than through ad hoc exclusionary criteria. It would seek, in short, to overcome the problems which currently plague religious pluralism.

These issues–the limits of language, falsity, and the problem of evil–are logically intertwined in complex ways. Addressing this nexus of issues is also vitally important to the development of a coherent pluralistic interpretation of religion; for it is in their treatment of these very issues that contemporary versions of religious pluralism tend to be most vulnerable to criticism. As we shall explore in greater depth later, any position, like religious pluralism, which is based upon the notion of tolerance–or better, of openness to and potential acceptance of the views of others–and which holds such openness as a central value runs the risk of becoming indistinguishable from a nihilistic relativism. In resisting intolerant absolutisms, religious pluralists must also resist affirming such a relativism; for their commitment to openness is itself based on certain absolute ethical values and moral imperatives which would be undermined by such an affirmation. At the same time, a candid recognition of both the limits of language and of the capacity of human beings to pervert even very good ideas into oppressive ideologies requires one to be watchful of the possibility of one's own absolute commitments becoming intolerant absolutisms of the kind these very commitments require one to oppose. Commitment to religious pluralism requires one to walk the proverbial razor's edge between, on the one hand, a nihilistic relativism

which would ultimately negate one's very pluralistic commitment, and on the other, an intolerant absolutism arising as a consequence of overzealous commitment to a position which consists precisely of a rejection of such absolutist attitudes. Contemporary versions of this position achieve this balance with mixed success. Whether the version I propose will fare any better remains to be seen.

1.10 Contemporary Religious Pluralism: Insights and Oversights

In contemporary religious and philosophical discourse in the West, the expression of the pluralistic intuition as it applies specifically to the phenomenon of religious–as opposed to other kinds of conceptual–plurality has chiefly been the province of those Christian theologians and philosophers of religion who refer to themselves as *religious pluralists*.

According to the dominant thread of religious pluralism, the world's major religions are all valid and effective paths leading to the realization of a common salvific goal, varied human responses to a shared transcendent Reality, known variously, according to religious context, as the Great Spirit, Yahweh, Christ, Allah, Brahman, Buddha, and the Dao–to cite just a few well-known examples from the world's religious traditions of names for this putative transcendent Reality. Arising from a context of reflection and debate within the Christian tradition on what constitutes a properly Christian response to the fact of religious plurality–though analogous views have been developed from within a variety of religious settings throughout history[5]–its advocates conceive of this position as a 'Copernican revolution' in Christian theology, replacing traditional concepts of the absoluteness of

[5] Religious pluralism has, of course, been claimed to be ancient in India, such claims typically being supported by the now famous quotation from the *¿g Veda*, "Reality is one, though wise men speak of it variously." The caveat must be entered, though, that what are often taken to be traditional South Asian forms of religious or philosophical pluralism usually, in fact, constitute forms of *inclusivism*, which view one religion (*darŚana*, *dharma, mata, mārga, siddhānta*) or another as the most true, or as in some way definitive of the ultimate truth toward which all other paths point (though, as we shall see, this can also be said of pluralism itself). For an excellent discussion of this question see Halbfass 1988:402-418.

Christianity as the standard by which religious truth is to be judged with a posited religiously neutral conception of the ultimately Real. In the words of the philosopher of religion, John Hick, one of the most prominent voices in favor of this position:

> May it not be that there are several *different* forms of human awareness of and response to the Eternal One, which are each valid and effective in spite of being different? Should we not perhaps reject the assumption of one and only one true religion in favor of the alternative possibility of a genuine religious pluralism? (Hick 1982:56)

According to religious pluralists generally, the traditional belief of most religious persons–but particularly of Christians–in the superiority of their own religion over all others has led to untold violence and bloodshed throughout the course of human history. Such religious absolutism, it is charged, has typically gone hand-in-hand with religious imperialism. In light of the horrors of colonialism and an increasing Christian awareness and appreciation of other religions once labeled 'heathen,' the time has come, it is claimed, to replace missionary activity with interreligious dialogue, and religious absolutism with a more 'Christian,' respectful, open-minded, and open-hearted religious pluralism.

Advocated by such scholars of religion as Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul F. Knitter, and Raimon Panikkar,[6] religious pluralism, despite the obvious good intentions motivating it, has been subjected to severe criticism, particularly over the course of the past decade or so of its existence. The charges against it have included both logical inconsistency and a lack of sufficient philosophical justification for its claims. One of its most outspoken critics, the philosopher of religion and Buddhologist, Paul J. Griffiths, has characterized this position as "massively implausible," claiming that "the collateral arguments offered for its truth do not go far enough toward remedying this implausibility" (Griffiths 1991:50-51). To the religious pluralists' claim that the religions ought, in the name of harmonious dialogue, to renounce their claims to absolute truth, Griffiths responds

[6] See especially Hick 1989, Smith 1981, Knitter 1985 and 1995, and Panikkar 1993.

that, "…[T]o assert this is precisely to claim that some of the doctrine-expressing sentences of some religious communities [those expressing religious absolutism] are false…and such an interesting and potentially religiously divisive assertion cries out for justification through argument, justification that perspectivalists of a universalist stamp [that is, religious pluralists] seem not to want to provide" (Ibid:50).

The basic conceptual problem of contemporary religious pluralism, as I understand it, is that religious pluralists–despite their repeated protests that they are not relativists–have finally failed to distinguish their position in any coherent or convincing way from a nihilistic relativism of the kind I mentioned earlier. The reasons for this situation are complex, and I shall explore them in greater depth later; but the incoherence of religious pluralism as it currently stands seems largely due to the reluctance of contemporary religious pluralists to embrace a philosophical perspective–such as that of Whitehead or the Jains–which could make sense of their affirmation of the relativity of religions. They are typically loath to do this; for they shun absolutism as a position inimical to peaceful and constructive dialogue among religions–which is their primary agenda. They embrace religious pluralism for this very reason–as the stance which they take to be the most conducive to harmonious interreligious dialogue. If, however, the argument I have outlined above is valid, relativity, as a philosophical position, cannot be coherently affirmed *without* an absolute; for these two concepts–the relative and the absolute–on a consistent understanding, imply one another. Religious pluralists, then, like relativists, end up undermining the validity of their own claims, such as their ethical claim that *religious* absolutism, with its attendant violence and imperialism, is morally objectionable.

The two thinkers who, in my view, have articulated religious pluralism most compellingly are Raimon Panikkar and John Hick. Each of these thinkers articulates an aspect of what I take to be the larger truth of religious pluralism, but each also denies aspects of this truth which I wish to affirm. Panikkar emphasizes the plurality of the true

religions, but therefore eschews the systematization of this plurality into a single, coherent worldview (Panikkar 1987b:89-116). Hick does systematize religious pluralism, but, despite its various merits, his project finally fails, I think, because of his denial of the possibility of metaphysics and consequent introduction of a Kantian distinction between the divine noumenon and its phenomena–a distinction which, I hope to show, undermines his attempt to demonstrate his 'pluralistic hypothesis' of a transcendent unity of religious experience (Hick 1989:236-249). My attempt in this dissertation will be to construct a 'middle path' between the views of these two thinkers which, hopefully, will incorporate their respective insights while yet avoiding what I take to be their difficulties.

1.11 Presuppositions and Motivations

John Hick's positing of his pluralistic hypothesis–according to which the world's many religions constitute many valid and effective paths to a common salvific goal, varied human responses to a common transcendent Reality–and of other, similar hypotheses by like-minded thinkers since the late 1960's and early 1970's, has provoked a heated debate among Christian theologians and philosophers of religion over what I call the *question of truth and religious plurality*–a question articulated by Schubert Ogden in the form, "Is there only one true religion or are there many?" (Ogden 1992a) Over the course of this debate, which will be explored more fully later, exclusivists and inclusivists have upheld the view that Christianity is either the only true or the only *wholly* true religion. Religious pluralists have argued, on the contrary, that many roughly equally true religions exist. Finally, and most recently, some 'attitudinal' pluralists, postliberal traditionalists, and such process theologians as Ogden and Cobb have raised concerns about the validity of both pluralist and non-pluralist a priori responses to this question, responses proposed in the absence of any actual empirical or hermeneutical engagement with the world's religious traditions about which they make their claims.

In terms of this ongoing scholarly debate, my claim is that a pluralistic interpretation of religion can be a valid option for belief rather than the 'massively implausible' option depicted by its many critics. But I, too, am critical of current forms of religious pluralism. As the only space in the contemporary Western academy in which the question of truth and religious plurality is being taken with anything at all like the seriousness which I think it merits, I have chosen to take this debate as the starting point for my own reflections on this question. Yet I also find this debate, and all of the various positions which have been proposed within it thus far, to be, in significant ways, inadequate to my own purpose; for they fail to penetrate to what I take to be the real question at hand–a more fundamental question of truth and religious plurality than the one to which this debate is explicitly addressed. This more fundamental question of truth and religious plurality is not, "Is there only one true religion or are there many?" but rather, "Which, *if any*, religion is true?"–a question only answerable in conjunction with a response to the epistemological question, "How would one know if a particular religious account of reality were true?" and to the even more fundamental question, "What would it *mean* for such an account of reality to be true?" I would argue, in the manner of Pascal (Pascal 1966:149-153), that the importance of formulating a valid response to this question arises from the fact that one's answer to it may be determinative–depending on which religion, if any, really is true and salvific–of one's attainment of the possible ultimate end of one's existence–of one's personal salvation, however this may finally be construed.[7] The fundamental question of truth and religious plurality is therefore not only an intellectual question, but also a question of

[7] The term 'personal salvation' should not be taken to preclude the possibility that salvation is a corporate phenomenon–which is actually the view that I take, the characteristically Vedāntic (and Mahāyāna Buddhist) view that one's own destiny is bound up with that of all other beings. In the words of Gandhi, "…I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and if one man falls the whole world falls to that extent" (Gandhi 1982:23).

potentially profound existential import, another possible formulation of which could be, "What, if anything, must we do or believe in order to be saved?" which also, of course, involves addressing the questions, "What, if anything, is salvation?" and "Is it humanly attainable?"

On my understanding, the more radical formulation of the question of truth and religious plurality which I propose to address only arises as a legitimate question in a situation of *epistemological crisis*, which is Alasdair MacIntyre's term for the situation that a person or an entire community can face when that person's or community's system of belief encounters or generates a problem with which it lacks the internal resources to cope (MacIntyre 1988:361-369). Adopting a pluralistic approach to religion is one possible response to one such crisis–a response the rationality of which I propose to defend.[8]

The particular kind of epistemological crisis which leads one to formulate the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality, and then to posit a pluralistic response to this question, arises from the perception that one faces a variety of religious options which are all, prima facie, equally plausible. This is the 'rough parity' of the world's religious and naturalistic belief systems of which Hick frequently speaks, a perception of which gives rise to what he terms the "religious ambiguity of the universe" (Hick 1989:73). Such a perception leads one to ask, "In which religion, if any, should I believe? Which, if any, is true?" and possibly to respond, "Perhaps all are true in different ways."

Such a perception of rough equivalence can, of course, be a result of ignorance, or mere surface-level knowledge, about the various religious or philosophical options that actually exist. It can reflect a kind of intellectual paralysis in the face of the massive and overwhelming diversity of the available belief systems that exist in the world–hence the

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[8] Though it is not a response of which MacIntyre would likely approve–the search for a transcendental, non-tradition-specific foundation for one's beliefs about the truth of particular religious claims. MacIntyre rejects such a characteristically modern approach to ultimate questions.

attacks on religious pluralism as a position which defers the difficult work of actually engaging with and interpreting the diverse religious claims with which it is faced in favor of an easy a priori postulation of their common truth. "Such a pluralism masks a genial confusion in which one tries to enjoy the pleasures of difference without ever committing oneself to any particular vision of resistance and hope" (Tracy 1987:90).

To end the discussion at this point, however, is, I think, to write off the pluralistic impulse too easily; for a perception of parity, or even of complementarity, among various religious options can also arise as a result of one's response to perceived inadequacies–to an epistemological crisis–within one's native belief system. If these inadequacies are not sufficient to lead one to reject this system in its *entirety*, they may, nevertheless, prompt one to undertake a serious exploration of other belief systems for possible answers to one's questions. If, in the course of these investigations, one finds that these other belief systems are both adequate and inadequate in ways that one's own is not, then the perception of a parity, and perhaps even a complementarity, of the systems with which one is confronted becomes highly likely, and perhaps even inevitable (especially if this perception happens to be a correct one–that is, if the religions really *are* on a par with one another).

One possible rational response to such a situation is to pick and choose from the variety of available traditions and to creatively synthesize those elements which one finds most adequate to one's own experiences and reflections, and to reject–or better, to mentally store away for possible future use–the rest: a conceivably neverending process. If one's belief system is further informed by a conception of deity which implies a universal divine salvific will, and an anthropology which allows for the possibility of a widespread, or even universal, dispersion of salvific knowledge, then the groundwork is laid for the adoption or the development of a universalist system for the interpretation of all religious claims.

This is something like the train of reasoning which has led me to support a pluralistic interpretation of religion, and to defend its plausibility, despite the numerous valid criticisms

which such interpretations, at least in their current forms, have provoked, particularly over the course of the last decade. I conceive of such a project as an exercise in *faith seeking understanding*, an effort to render explicit, in the form of an *intellectual* position, the assumptions underlying the universalist *religious* faith which I have come to adopt over the course of my own reflections and experiences. My religious situation is shared, I believe, by a number of my contemporaries as well–other 'seekers' and 'New Agers'–who are trying to develop an authentic religious identity and worldview in the midst of conflicting and fragmented traditions. The epistemological crisis which led me to this position, and which eventually led me to adopt the faith I have–a universalism in the tradition of Neo-Vedāntic Hinduism[9]–arose as a consequence of two occurrences–my perception of contradictions between the nature of God as universal love proclaimed in the Christian tradition in which I was raised and the insistence of many Christians on the absoluteness of their own revelation,

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[9] Neo-Vedānta, in contrast with traditional Vedānta, is that philosophical interpretation of Hinduism which, in keeping with the modern commitment to the primacy of experience and reason, takes the foundation of Hindu religious belief to be the direct experiences (*anubhāva*) of the Vedic 'seers,' or *ṛṣis*–experiences in principle available to any human being who undertakes their cultivation through the discipline of *yoga*–rather than the Vedic texts, which are taken by this tradition to be a *record* of those experiences. Hinduism, on this understanding, is the eternal or 'universal religion' (*sanātana dharma*), its truths being available to all human beings from within the practice of all religions. Such modern or 'neo' Hinduism regards the great spiritual figures of a plurality of traditions–Jesus Christ, Mahāvīra, the Buddha, etc.–as advanced *yogis*, and proclaims the truth of a plurality of religions. Neo-Vedāntic thought is represented pre-eminently in the works of such modern Indian philosophers as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Swāmi Vivekānanda. See Halbfass 1988:217-246.

If this dissertation can be taken as a contribution to the tradition of Neo-Vedānta, that contribution consists of a realist critique of the *māyāvādin* (illusionist) advaitic philosophical perspective in terms of which Neo-Vedāntic thought has traditionally been framed and the claim that a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics actually yields a more coherent philosophical expression of the basic worldview of Vedānta than advaitic categories. In a forthcoming article, I shall argue that this realist, Jain philosophy is that adopted by another great, but unorthodox, Neo-Vedāntin, Mahātma Gandhi. I would characterize my own philosophy as a Gandhian Neo-Vedānta. My adoption of a Vedāntic philosophy and religious faith is based on my conviction that such a philosophy and religious worldview is the proper issue of the search for the foundations of knowledge, the attempt to answer the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality on the basis of the modern commitment to the autonomy of reason reflecting on experience.

and my conclusion, for a variety of reasons, that the doctrine of reincarnation, rejected by orthodox Christianity, expresses an important and, for me, undeniable truth. I conceive of religious pluralism, therefore, as an entailment of the universalist faith that I have adopted, and my approach to this position is to see it as most coherent as a form of universalist theology–a universalist inclusivism. This, I think, is what finally distinguishes my view from the pluralistic theories of Christian theologians.

My methodological approach has been to see my project as an act of philosophical disclosure of the metaphysical premises underlying my religious praxis and worldview. I currently find these premises to be most clearly and coherently articulated in both Jain and process metaphysics, and to be expressible as a synthesis of elements derived from these two systems of thought. It is my own, idiosyncratic view (for which I will not seek to present a defense in this dissertation) that these two philosophies represent coherent syntheses–in a sense, culminations–of the respective intellectual streams from which they emerge–that of South Asia and that of the West. I therefore base my reflections upon them.

1.12 The Reconstruction of Religious Pluralism: The Basic Structure of the Argument

I have divided my dissertation into three parts and nine chapters. Part One–entitled "Thesis"– consists solely of this chapter (chapter one), Part Two–"Contemporary Approaches to Religious Plurality"–of chapters two through four, and Part Three–"Two Philosophies of Relativity and their Synthesis: The Reconstruction of Religious Pluralism"–of chapters five through nine.

With this first chapter constituting Part One, Part Two explores contemporary approaches to religious plurality and the various conceptual problems with which they are associated–problems which I think necessitate the reconstruction of religious pluralism on the basis of a consistent philosophy of relativity of the kind I have outlined in summary form in this chapter.

In chapter two I take up the question, "Why religious pluralism?" Why, in light of the many conceptual difficulties involved with articulating this position in a coherent, or even plausible, fashion, ought one to adopt it? The main point of this chapter is to outline some of the possible objections that a pluralistic interpretation of religion would have to overcome in order to be considered valid–including a number of actual objections that have, in fact, been raised by critics of contemporary versions of this position. My claim in this chapter is that the objections to contemporary religious pluralism, though valid, are not decisive. A form of religious pluralism could conceivably be constructed which would avoid or address these objections. And, of course, it is my intention, in this dissertation, to attempt the construction of just such a religious pluralism.

In chapter three I 'go on the offensive.' Continuing the line of questioning begun in chapter two–"Why religious pluralism?"–I take up the question "Why no other response (to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality)?" Even if it is possible, as I argue in chapter two, to construct a religious pluralism which avoids or even addresses the various objections that currently apply to this position, why go through the mental gymnastics? Are there not other approaches to this issue which, as they stand, are far less problematic than religious pluralism? The point of this chapter is to answer this last question in the negative. The current alternatives to religious pluralism are finally *not*, in my view, compelling. They all share, to varying degrees, the quality of denying some important aspect or other of human existence–of being forms of *durnaya*, or *ekāntavāda*, the one-sided affirmation of some particular perspective, some particular truth, to the exclusion of others. These views range from positions with which I agree very little–such as relativistic agnosticism of the kind we have already encountered, as well as religious exclusivism–to positions so similar to my own that my differences with them could be perceived by some as philosophical hair-splitting–such as the views of Schubert Ogden, John Cobb, and Mark Heim.

In chapter four I move on to contemporary religious pluralism–or rather, to the pre-eminent spokespersons for the two current subvarieties of this position–Raimon Panikkar, speaking on behalf of the irreducible plurality of the true religions, and John Hick, speaking on behalf of their transcendent unity. I argue here that these two positions, respectively, are analogous to two schools of traditional Indian philosophy regarded by the Jains as articulating two extreme, opposed ontological views–Mādhyamika Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta. Panikkar, analogously to Nāgārjuna, the founder of Mādhyamika Buddhism, argues for the irreducible plurality of perspectives and against any attempt to articulate a unified, comprehensive system or substratum underlying this plurality. He opts, instead, for the 'silence of the Buddha' where ultimate metaphysical questions are concerned (Panikkar 1989). Hick, not unlike Śaṅkarācārya, the pre-eminent expounder of Advaita philosophy, argues for the existence of 'the Real'–the utterly indescribable and inconceivable ground of all religious experience into which, rather like Śaṅkara's *nirguṇa brahman*, all particularity is finally dissolved (Hick 1989). My argument in this chapter is that both of these formulations of religious pluralism express important insights, but each needs to be completed by the other in order to avoid the incoherences arising from both of their one-sided affirmations, respectively, of irreducible plurality and ultimate unity. Such completion of the current pluralistic project is one goal of my reformulation of this position.

Finally, Part Three returns to the philosophy of relativity outlined here, in Part One (and alluded to throughout the course of Part Two), and attempts, on its basis, the reconstruction of religious pluralism. In chapter five I try to provide a fairly in-depth historical and conceptual analysis of the Jain philosophy of relativity. As I have already outlined it briefly in this chapter, the traditional Jain approach to conceptual plurality provides the logical structure which I find an internally consistent religious pluralism based on process metaphysics to entail. It still remains, of course, to demonstrate that Jain and

process metaphysics are compatible. The point of chapter five is to provide an account of Jain philosophy of sufficient depth to serve as a background for such a demonstration.

In chapter six I begin with the question–answered, I think, most compellingly, by Whitehead's theism–"On what basis can one believe the fundamental claim of religious pluralism?" Why should the pluralistic intuition be true? The answer to this question takes the form of a deductive argument from process metaphysics, in combination with insights from contemporary cultural anthropology, for the claim that *all* religions–indeed all human cultural constructs *as such–necessarily* express some degree of truth, and contain, even if only implicitly, the potential to act as vehicles for the salvific transformation of human beings. In this chapter, as well as attempting to provide a fairly in-depth account of Whitehead's thought, I argue that the metaphysical position which religious pluralism implies and from which it can most effectively be argued is that of a consistent theism located within the modern commitment–which is process metaphysics. The understanding of religion which my argument finally entails involves an integration of three approaches to religious doctrine–the *propositionalist*, the *experiential-expressive*, and the *intrasystematic* or *cultural-linguistic* approaches–disagreement over which, I claim, lies at the heart of the contemporary debate over religious pluralism. Religious doctrines, on this understanding, particularize general, abstract truths in terms of a specific, concrete worldview, thereby enabling the process of salvation, of life lived in harmony with the *telos* of the universe.

This, however, is itself a rather abstract claim. Turning it into the basis for an interpretive method with relevance to the actual beliefs and practices of the world's religions is the task of chapter seven, the thesis of which is that the approach to religious plurality most appropriate to Whitehead's understanding of the universe–an approach never fully or explicitly developed by Whitehead himself–is essentially that of the Jains. Though evidence exists, in the form of statements scattered throughout his published works, that his basic orientation toward religious plurality–and conceptual plurality in general–could well be

considered a "pluralistic attitude," the systematic resolution of the issue of truth and religious plurality was not a task to which Whitehead ever turned his full attention. But his approach to other forms of conceptual plurality, such as the historical conflict between religion and science, provides strong indications that, when faced with a plurality of conceptual options, his instinct was to integrate and synthesize, rather than reduce and eliminate, possibilities. I argue in this chapter that the integration of interpretive principles of *charity* and *coherence* which such an approach involves yields an interpretive principle of *relativity* which, in turn, finds logical expression in the Jain doctrine of *syādvāda*.

In chapter eight I argue that the synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics proposed in chapter seven is logically viable–that these two philosophies of relativity are compatible on a fundamental metaphysical level which allows their synthesis as a logical possibility.

I conclude in chapter nine that this synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics can constitute the basis for a reconceived religious pluralism which addresses the criticisms to which current versions of this position are subject while yet preserving their basic intuition–with the theistic insight of process thought forming the ontological basis for this intuition and the Jain philosophy of relativity forming its systematic expression. I also discuss the worldview which such a pluralism–reconceived as a *universalist inclusivism*– entails, exploring its implications for the nature of ultimate reality and the afterlife and its ethical and political implications, as well as the question of community–of *where* one fits, as a religious person, if one holds such a view. I then conclude with an outline of what I call a 'cosmological vision' of salvation and the role played by the world's religions in this vision as constituting creative possibilities for the ongoing process of the expansion of the universe, the perpetual enrichment of the divine experience of the life of the cosmos–called in the Hindu tradition God's 'play' (*līlā*).

Part II

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

Chapter 2

WHY RELIGIOUS PLURALISM?

The Question of Validity

2.1 Religious Pluralism: An Implausible Position?

Contemporary religious pluralism did not, of course, appear from nowhere. It has emerged from a specific context–the context of a heated debate. Over the course of the last twenty to thirty years a controversy has raged, and continues to rage, among Christian theologians and other scholars of religion over the question, "Is there only one true religion or are there many?" In other words, is Christianity, as Christians have long believed–and as Christian *religious exclusivists* continue to affirm–the only true religion, and Christ the one, unique way to salvation, or might there be other true religions as well? Might the other religious traditions of the world represent–as Christian *religious inclusivists* maintain–authentic paths to the same ultimate goal, the same salvation in Christ, to which Christians aspire? Or, as *religious pluralists* have suggested, is 'Christ' simply one more symbol, one culturally particular metaphor among others, for the saving grace of God–or, more appropriately on such a view, for the salvific efficacy of the ultimately Real, conceived in a religiously neutral fashion rather than in the terms of any particular religious tradition? In other words, might the other religions constitute, as John Hick suggests, "several *different* forms of human awareness of and response to the Eternal One, which are each valid and effective in spite of being different?" (Hick 1982:56) This is Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, according to which religion "constitutes our varied human response to transcendent Reality" (Hick 1989:172), and no one religion, no single response to that shared Reality to which all ultimately point, is finally normative for the rest.

The controversy which Hick's pluralistic hypothesis has sparked within the Christian scholarly community has arisen, in part, over the issue of its compatibility with traditional Christian doctrine. Pluralistic interpretations of religion, such as Hick's, have been rejected by many Christian theologians precisely on the basis of their perceived incompatibility with traditionally central Christian claims about the uniqueness, finality, and absolute normativity of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The relativization of Christ as constitutive of but one authentic divine revelation among many that such a hypothesis entails is seen by these theologians as a radical departure from distinctively Christian faith; for it presumes to replace Christ as the central norm of faith with an ostensibly religiously neutral conception of the ultimately Real, of which Christ is but one manifestation among many (Ibid:233-296). This is a departure from tradition and a reorientation, in the ultimate scheme of things, of the object of their faith that these theologians find too radical to recognize as Christian. They therefore judge such a pluralistic shift to be an illegitimate move for Christian theologians, and a conceptual system which exhibits it unacceptable as Christian theology, having greater affinities with modern Hinduism than with Christianity.

If the only objections against religious pluralism were of this kind, then arguing in its defense would not be as challenging as it actually is. One could claim, from within the Christian tradition, that the understanding of Christ held by the opponents of religious pluralism fails utterly to do justice to the depth of the Mystery which this term historically expresses–that there is no Christian basis for holding that the divine Word made flesh in Jesus *could not* have also revealed Itself in other religious traditions, just as It is held to have done in the Jewish tradition. Or one could part company with Christianity, perhaps taking Hinduism to express a more adequate understanding of God's saving presence in the world's religions than a tradition closed to this possibility. But Christian chauvinism has not been the only basis upon which religious pluralism has been rejected. Many have also

criticized it on logical grounds, due to the perceived failure of its advocates to make a convincing case for it, to show that it is not a self-refuting form of nihilistic relativism.

Seeing the force of these logical objections as they pertain to current versions of this position, yet maintaining, on the basis of my own universalist *darśana*, or worldview, the ultimate truth and validity of the fundamental claim that this position makes–that there are, in fact, many true religions, many authentic and effective ways of reaching salvation–I have set out to reconstruct this claim, to reconceive and re-articulate it in such a way that it will be able to avoid the incoherences which have rightly been pointed out in its current formulations while yet preserving and defending its logical validity.

Due, however, to the, for many, counterintuitive nature of what this claim entails–namely, that the many prima facie incompatible accounts of the ultimate nature of reality that the world's religions offer are all, in some sense, true, despite their differences–giving even a plausible pluralistic account of religion is no small task. As Griffiths explains just one of the implications of such an account:

> It means, to take an example from Buddhism and Christianity, that ultimate reality must be such that it can be characterized both as a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes but without any substantial independent existence, and as an eternal changeless divine personal substance. While it may not be impossible to construct some picture of ultimate reality that meets these demands, it is far from easy to see how it might be done (Griffiths 1991:47).

These are not the only demands that such an account must meet. Further reflection on the many issues that its construction must involve reveals that in order for a pluralistic account of religion to be valid it must fulfill a number of fairly difficult and demanding criteria.

My goal in this chapter is to argue, first of all, that there is no reason, in principle, that a pluralistic interpretation of religion could not be formulated which could fulfill these criteria, and secondly, that the valid logical objections which have been raised against contemporary versions of this position could conceivably be circumvented. In order to do this, I will first outline the criteria that a valid religious pluralism must meet. I will then

explore the historical evolution of contemporary versions of this position and the objections that have been raised against them. Then I will conclude with a discussion of these objections in which I will argue for their ultimate non-decisiveness for religious pluralism.

2.2 Conditions for the Validity of Religious Pluralism

A valid religious pluralism must, first of all, include a coherent account of what, exactly, it *means* for a religion to be true and conducive to salvation. This means that it must include particular understandings of truth and salvation, as well as religion, and of how religions express truth and facilitate the salvific transformation of human beings. All of these concepts–truth, salvation, and religion–must also be so related as to exhibit an organic interconnectedness, an interdependence that will give coherence to the account as a whole; and they must all be articulated in a logically valid, non-self-contradictory fashion.

Such an account can then address a set of questions raised by the pairing of truth and salvation which it involves. What is the relationship between these two? Why are *both* truth-expression and salvific efficacy to be affirmed of many religions? Are these two somehow inextricably linked? Does a pluralistic interpretation of religion perhaps require what could broadly be called a *gnostic* account of salvation? In other words, does salvation necessarily involve, or perhaps presuppose, the possession of a certain kind of knowledge? Must a religion therefore be, in some sense, true, in order to be salvific? Must it convey knowledge of a certain kind? Is soteriology dependent upon epistemology?

Closely related to the issue of a theory of truth, a pluralistic account of religion must also be able to explain the *senses* in which many different religions, giving expression to a variety of prima facie incompatible claims, can all validly be said to be true–senses presumably determined, at least in part, by the theory of truth which the account employs. Are many religions true because reality itself is ultimately amenable to a variety of true, though seemingly incompatible, descriptions? Or is it the nature not so much of reality, but of language, which creates the possibility of a plurality of apparently disparate, but

nevertheless true, religious expressions of its ultimate nature? Similarly with salvation–are many religions salvific because, as Hick claims, salvation can be achieved in many ways? Or is there, in fact, as Mark Heim suggests, a plurality of salvations, for which the world's various religions provide correspondingly effective vehicles (Heim 1995:129-157)?

Also related to both truth and salvation is the question of *which* religions are true and salvific. If many religions are both true and salvific, which ones, and in what senses? And if only some, but not all, religions are true, by what criteria are some to be judged true and others not? If *all* are true, again, given the apparent incompatibilities of their many aims and contents, in what senses can this be validly affirmed?

Any adequate attempt to answer these questions must also involve an interrogation of the validity of the very standards of truth employed by the pluralistic account itself. How are the standards that this account applies to the world's religions themselves to be justified? On what logical and moral grounds can they be applied?

Related to this set of questions is yet another issue. Some account must also be given of *why* it is the case that one can validly affirm that there are many (in some sense) true and salvific religions. What justifies one in making this assertion? From what point of view is it made? What kind of a universe is presupposed by such a claim? Addressing this issue adequately, of course, involves either the development or the deployment of an itself valid metaphysical system with which the claim can be shown to cohere–or, better yet, from which it can be shown to follow as a logical entailment.

Finally, the question remains of what one can *do* with such a pluralistic account of religion once it has been constructed. What purposes can it serve? This question is raised with two possible kinds of purpose in mind–a scholarly purpose and a political one (though these are not, of course, separable in any ultimate way). On the scholarly side, can this account be usefully applied as an instrument for the interpretation of religious claims? Does it contribute anything substantive to our understanding of the world's religions? Or does it

prejudge all issues of interpretation prior to any such application? On the political side, *whose* interests does such an account serve? Given its relativization of traditional sources of religious legitimation of authority, is it, as many contemporary religious pluralists would claim, an account that is liberatory for human beings? Or is it itself potentially complicit in concealing the application of oppressive power, in ideological domination?

In order to determine legitimately whether a pluralistic interpretation of religion can be developed which would be able to fulfill all of these criteria and satisfactorily answer all of these questions, one would, first of all, have to develop such a system and then apply these criteria and pose these questions to it–which is precisely what I intend to do. After reconceiving religious pluralism on the basis of a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics, I will return, in my final chapter, to these questions and criteria in order to see how well the pluralistic account of religion I have developed addresses and fulfills them.

For now, however, I believe it is sufficient simply to affirm that there is no a priori basis for claiming that it would *not* be possible, in principle, to develop a pluralistic account of religion which would be capable of meeting these criteria and answering these questions–that the burden of proof rests with whomever would deny this possibility. It may be difficult. It may be, as Griffiths writes, "far from easy to see how it might be done" (Griffiths 1991:47). But it is not necessarily impossible–which even Griffiths, one of the foremost critics of religious pluralism–is willing to concede (Ibid).

In fact, even the perceived difficulty of a project such as this, I believe, is more of a function of the fact that contemporary scholars in the West–including many of the religious pluralists themselves–tend to think in terms of the mutually exclusive truth of prima facie incompatible claims (when taken in a propositional sense) rather than in terms of a system of thought, such as that of Jain or process metaphysics, which affirms the relativity, the mutual implication, of contrary notions on the basis of a conception of reality as complex–a complexity which, in Whitehead's words, "is one of the reasons why the logicians' rigid

alternative, 'true or false,' is so largely irrelevant for the pursuit of knowledge" (Whitehead 1978:11). Both Jain and process metaphysics are relatively marginal systems of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts, but they both articulate just such an understanding of reality as complex–a view which I find can give conceptual grounding to a reconceived religious pluralism which can fulfill the criteria and answer the questions I have outlined in a way which avoids the problems of current versions of this position.

2.3 "Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?" Contemporary Religious Pluralism in its Context of Intra-Christian Debate

In order to understand contemporary formulations of religious pluralism, their various problems, and the ways in which the version I intend to propose seeks to improve upon them, it is necessary first to understand the historical and conceptual context from which these formulations emerge–including the views against which they constitute a reaction and the views which, in turn, have emerged in reaction to them.

The conceptual context of the emergence of contemporary religious pluralism is primarily a *theological* one. Though it is foreshadowed in the work of such early modern and modern writers as Gotthold Lessing, G.W.F. Hegel, Ernst Troeltsch, W.E. Hocking, and Arnold Toynbee (Race 1982:71), and in the writings of such premodern thinkers as St. Justin Martyr, St. Augustine, Pico della Mirandola, Giordano Bruno, and Nicholas of Cusa (Ogden 1992a:1-4), and paralleled in the teachings of a number of other traditions, most notably Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Sufi Islam, the Baha'i Faith, and Theosophy, contemporary religious pluralism has emerged largely in the context of Christian theological reflection and debate, since the end of the second world war and the withdrawal of the European imperial powers from their colonies, on the question of the truth and salvific efficacy of the other world religions. This debate has seen considerably heightened activity in the period from the late 1980's to the present, and it is from materials

written during this latter period that my characterization of religious pluralism as it currently stands and the theological conversation from which it has emerged is largely derived.

This debate has gone through at least two distinct phases. The first phase, lasting from roughly the early 1970's to the late 1980's, is marked by the emergence of three standard views on the truth and salvific efficacy of Christianity in relation to that of other religions: (1) *exclusivism*, according to which Christianity is the only true religion and explicit assent to Christian beliefs and practices–explicitly Christian faith–is a necessary condition for the attainment of salvation; (2) *inclusivism*, according to which Christianity is the only *wholly* true religion and the norm by which religious truth is to be determined, but many religions may express *partial* truth, and salvation in Christ is available to all human beings who adhere in good faith even to such partially true religions; and (3) *pluralism* (or *religious pluralism*), according to which there are many true religions, all of which are potential vehicles for human salvation, and none of which can validly be asserted to be more true than or the norm of truth for the rest.[1]

The second phase of this debate, a phase which began in the late 1980's and has continued to the present, is marked by a strong discomfort among many of its participants with the a priori nature of all three of these standard positions, and by consequent attempts to formulate views that go "beyond the usual options" (Ibid:79). Whatever stand they may take on the issue of truth and religious plurality, the discomfort that the three 'usual options' hold for all of these scholars seems to arise primarily from the fact that one can hold any of these standard views without ever engaging with–without, in fact, ever really knowing anything at all about–the actual religions about which all three positions make very strong claims–claims about truth, falsity, and salvific efficacy. In the eyes of these scholars, this seriously undermines the plausibility of all of these standard options.

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[1] This now standard threefold typology of views was formulated by Alan Race in Race 1982.

Looking briefly at all of these options in greater detail, exclusivism and inclusivism can both be seen to represent ancient Christian attitudes toward non-Christian religions. Both claim warrant in scripture and other authoritative sources in the Christian tradition. Exclusivism, for example, can be derived from such scriptural passages as John 14:6, in which Jesus proclaims, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me." The most concise formulation of this position is probably the Latin church father Cyprian's now famous (or infamous) claim, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*–"Outside of the church there is no salvation" (Ibid:28-29).

On the other hand, inclusivism, which represents the current official stance of the Roman Catholic Church toward non-Christian religions as found in such documents as the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate*, or "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," expresses a far more open attitude toward other religions, and greater optimism regarding the possibility of the articulation of truth within them, than does exclusivism, while yet affirming the centrality of Christ to the Christian view of salvation:

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims and must ever proclaim Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19) (Abbott 1966:662).

The most rigorously systematic formulation of Christian religious inclusivism is probably to be found in the work of the modern Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner on 'Anonymous Christianity.' This is Rahner's term for the implicit faith in Christ which he posits as a necessary condition for the salvation of non-Christians–a salvation the possibility of which he claims Christians, precisely *as Christians*, must affirm as an entailment of their belief in the universality of the divine salvific will.[2] Because God is

[2] See Rahner 1966:115-134; 1974a:390-398; 1974b:161-178; 1976:280-294; and 1983:288-295.

love, and thus wills the salvation of all, and because salvation also requires faith in Christ, then this faith must, at least in implicit form, be available to all.

As mentioned above, both exclusivism and inclusivism could be categorized as ‘traditional’ Christian responses to the fact of religious plurality; for both claim warrant in the Bible and other writings of the early Christian community. Both are defined by Ogden as forms of ‘religious monism,’ the view that there *can be* only one true (or at least wholly true) religion, only one formal norm in terms of which all religious truth-claims are to be evaluated. A religion, according to Ogden, “may be said to be *formally* true provided that its representation of the meaning of human existence is that with which all others must agree in order themselves to be true religions” (Ogden 1992a:12). A formally true religion is thus the standard for the determination of religious truth.

Exclusivism and inclusivism concur in claiming that only Christianity satisfies this definition of a formally true religion. They differ, however, in their evaluations of the degrees to which other religions concur with Christianity’s ‘representation of the meaning of human existence.’ Exclusivists see the failure of non-Christian religions to explicitly acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, no matter how similar their beliefs and practices may otherwise be to those of Christians, as a defect sufficiently grave to bar these religions from being considered ‘true.’[3] According to some exclusivists, this even places

[3] See, for example Karl Barth's evaluation of Pure Land Buddhism in Barth 1963:343. Barth, in fact, is an interesting case–an exclusivist with regard to truth, but an inclusivist with regard to salvation–of a thinker whose position does not fit neatly into any of the three standard categories, but ‘slips through the cracks’ of this typology. Barth holds that only Christianity proclaims the unique divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ–and is thus exclusively true–but that because Jesus died for the sins of all, all are thereby saved. A good Lutheran, Barth maintains that nothing human beings can do by their own power can make them worthy of salvation. Christianity, therefore, *as a religion*, as a cultural and historical set of practices by which people hope to find favor with God, is as false as any other religion. According to Barth, *any* attempt on the part of human beings to find favor with God, and therefore religion as such, is false and sinful. The Christian is therefore in no better a situation before God than the Buddhist. Both are under the divine judgment. The only difference between the two is that the Christian is privy to the ‘good news’ of the saving act of Jesus Christ by which both are redeemed.

their adherents beyond the pale of the possibility of salvation. Inclusivists, however, though affirming the formal truth of only one religion–Christianity–and the uniqueness of Christ, are willing to acknowledge the extensive agreement that may exist between particular religions and the only formally true one and to take such agreement to be a token of the possibility that salvation may–and according to some, must[4]–be available to the adherents of those religions from within their respective religious contexts.

Christian religious monism can be understood, according to Ogden, in light of the fact that it presupposes a *constitutive* christology, according to which salvation for human beings is *constituted*–rather than *represented* or *manifested*–by God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ (Ibid:79-104). Salvation without Jesus Christ is inconceivable on such a constitutive account because the very *definition* of salvation is precisely the fact that God so loved human beings as to save them in the life, death, and resurrection–in the person–of Jesus Christ. Exclusivists maintain that personal salvation can result only if one explicitly acknowledges the unique salvific efficacy of Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior, while inclusivists claim that an implicit faith 'according to one's lights' in the cosmic reality revealed explicitly in the person of Christ is sufficient. An explicit post-mortem encounter between non-Christians and Christ in which the final choice between faith and unbelief is made has also been postulated (DiNoia 1990:267-269). But in any event, the uniqueness, finality and normativity of Christ as understood by traditional, orthodox Christianity are affirmed by both of these theological positions. According, therefore, to the exclusivist and inclusivist paradigms, Christianity is the only (fully) true religion and is either the only or the best[5] way to salvation for human beings.

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[4] Such as Rahner. See Rahner 1983:288-295.

[5] This being the distinction between exclusivism and inclusivism, respectively.

Then there is religious pluralism, which has emerged since the early 1970's both as an attempt to replace missionary activity and apologetics with open and mutually respectful dialogue as the primary mode of interaction between the representatives of Christian and non-Christian religious communities, and as a critique of more traditional Christian attitudes toward non-Christian religions–thereby sparking the very controversy of which it forms a central part. The most prominent advocates of this position in the Western academy have included the philosopher of religion, John Hick, and the historian of religions, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, as well as the Roman Catholic theologian and former Divine Word missionary, Paul F. Knitter, and the 'Catholic/Hindu/Buddhist' theologian and philosopher Raimon Panikkar.

Contemporary religious pluralism, as a Christian theological position, is probably best understood as a product of the heightened historical consciousness which has emerged among Western intellectuals generally since the nineteenth century, but especially in the latter half of the twentieth century. One factor, for example, which has impelled Christian intellectuals like Hick, Smith, Knitter, and Panikkar to adopt a pluralistic stance toward non-Christian religions has been a heightened awareness of the very real beauty and depth of these religions as revealed in contemporary Western scholarship. As Hick writes:

> Between the two world wars, and even more so since the second, ill-informed and hostile Western stereotypes of the other faith communities have increasingly been replaced by more accurate knowledge and more sympathetic understanding. The immense spiritual riches of Judaism and Islam, of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, of Confucianism and Taoism and African primal religion, have become better known in the West and have tended to erode the plausibility of the old Christian exclusivism (Hick 1987:17).

But the pluralistic turn in Christian theology is not solely the product of a newfound positive appreciation for the intrinsic values of other religions. This turn also contains an historical self-critical element for Christians, as Hick goes on to point out:

> Another factor has been the realization that Christian absolutism, in collaboration with acquisitive and violent human nature, has done much to poison the relationships

> between the Christian minority and the non-Christian majority of the world's population by sanctifying exploitation and oppression on a gigantic scale (Ibid).

According to its advocates, a pluralistic stance toward other religions is both a necessary condition for authentic interreligious dialogue and a necessary corrective to the historically destructive influence of both exclusivism and inclusivism. The belief in the unique superiority of Christianity over all other religions that both of these traditional positions exhibit has, according to religious pluralists, historically served as an ideological justification for religiously motivated Christian violence and imperialism on a massive scale. The litany of crimes against humanity committed by Christians against non-Christians (as well as by Christians against each other), often–ironically–in the name of Christ, is, indeed, lengthy: the Crusades, the Inquisitions, the Holocaust, as well as the European colonization of most of the planet over the course of the last five centuries, "For the moral validation of the imperial enterprise rested upon the conviction that it was a great civilizing and uplifting mission, one of whose tasks was to draw the unfortunate heathen up into the higher, indeed highest, religion of Christianity. Accordingly the gospel played a vital role in the self-justification of Western imperialism" (Ibid:19).

Religious pluralism, on the other hand, is proposed as an alternative ideology of mutual respect and dialogue among the world's diverse religious communities, a "liberation theology of religions" (Knitter 1987:178), according to which, "universalizing one religion such that it is taken as the norm whereby all other religions are judged and valued leads to oppression, and hence falls short of the norm that liberationists consider ultimate–the normative justice that creates well-being in the world community" (Suchocki 1987:149). Such 'creation of well-being in the world community' is arguably the unifying political agenda of all religious pluralists, who conceive of their promotion of interreligious dialogue through the construction of pluralistic models of truth as a way of working for peace and social (as well as ecological) justice on a global scale, expressing an ethic, in Knitter's words, of "global responsibility" (Knitter 1995).

But despite this common political agenda of promoting peace and justice through mutually respectful interreligious dialogue–a dialogue itself presumably promoted by the pluralistic claim that all parties to such dialogue already have some purchase on the truth–religious pluralism is itself a highly internally diversified position–or rather, a family of positions–so much so that it may be more adequate, descriptively, to speak of 'religious pluralism*s*,' in the plural, rather than of a singular 'religious pluralis*m*.' This is due, in part, to the fact that those who have come to hold some version or other of this position have done so from a variety of backgrounds and commitments, including a range of academic disciplines, such as the philosophy of religion, the history of religions, and theology–both Roman Catholic and Protestant. Broadly, though, one may speak of two main subvarieties or streams of pluralistic thought. I call these two subvarieties–one of which affirms the ultimate unity of the world's many true religions, the other of which affirms their irreducible plurality–*common core* religious pluralism and *dialogical* or *attitudinal* religious pluralism.[6]

Common core religious pluralism, advocated most prominently by John Hick, conceives of the world's many religions as valid alternate paths to a common ultimate salvific goal–a radical transformation of the human person from a state of 'ego-centeredness' to centeredness on the ultimately Real. On this view, the religions are conceived as historically and culturally determined 'cognitive filters' which mediate experiences of a common ultimate Reality to those who believe in and practice them. This ultimate Reality is, in and of itself, unknowable and inexperienceable. It is only known and experienced through the various cognitive filters–the conceptions of the ultimately Real, either as personal Deity or as impersonal Absolute–that the religions provide. Christian conceptions of salvation in Christ, therefore, and Buddhist conceptions of

[6] For the use of the term 'common core' to describe the form of religious pluralism which affirms the transcendent unity of religions, see Wells 1993:20-33.

nirvāṇa, are simply alternative modes of conceiving of a radical personal transformation effected by a common ultimate Reality to which both point beyond themselves (Hick 1989:233-251). According to common core religious pluralism, Christianity is therefore only one among many true paths to salvation, only one of many 'planets' in the 'universe of faiths' orbiting the 'Sun' of the ultimately Real (Hick 1974).

The astronomical imagery does not end there. Common core religious pluralism is characterized by its advocates as a 'Copernican revolution' in theology, a shift from a traditional constitutively 'christocentric' model of salvation to a 'theocentric' model centered upon a religiously neutral and historically independent salvific principle of absolute good, a shift conceived as analogous to that in medieval astronomy from a Ptolemaic, geocentric paradigm for understanding the structure of the universe to the Copernican, heliocentric model (Hick 1982:18-19). The analogy is a powerful one, expressing, as it does, the intended shift of religious pluralism away from the ethnocentric absolutization and universalization of the relative, historically conditioned, and localized claims of a particular religious tradition–characteristic of the traditional paradigms–to an egalitarian model of salvation centered around a postulated universally accessible fountainhead of salvation–the 'Real' (Hick 1989:233-296).

According to its advocates, after this 'Copernican revolution' in Christian theology (Hick 1982:36-39), this shift from a 'christocentric' to a 'theocentric' or 'Reality-centered' model of salvation, Christianity ceases to hold a privileged position with regard to salvific truth, and many religions–at least the world's major traditions, or the 'post-axial' religions (Hick 1989:56-69)–come to be conceived as being on a par regarding their ability to mediate salvifically transformative truth and experience to human beings, to serve as vehicles for ultimate fulfillment, as loci for radical human reorientation from "ego-centeredness" to "Reality-centeredness" (Ibid:36-55). Again, the world's religions become, on such a pluralistic reading, just so many 'planets' orbiting the 'Sun' of a

religiously neutral concept of ultimate Reality, rather than any particular religious conception of the ultimate. The intended contrast is with traditional exclusivist and inclusivist readings of religious plurality, according to which Christ (for Christians, or Buddha for Buddhists, or Brahman for Hindus, etc.–taking exclusivism and inclusivism to be possibilities from within these other traditions as well) is the normative 'Sun' around which all other religious traditions revolve, the standard in terms of which they all must be judged–either harshly, as in exclusivism, or charitably, as in inclusivism, but judged nevertheless. Common core religious pluralism, in contrast with these traditional models, could be seen as an eirenic attempt to defer such judgment in the name of harmonious relations among the frequently strife-torn religious communities of the world; for the advocates of this view, like religious pluralists generally, read the history of interreligious violence, of religiously motivated war, persecution, and imperialism, as the inevitable outcome of ethnocentric exclusivist and inclusivist interpretations of religious plurality. The adoption of this position could thus be seen as an act of repentance on the part of liberal Christian theologians for centuries of highly un-Christian interreligious violence. In the words of one religious pluralist: "Over the whole discussion of pluralism there hangs the specter of colonialism, neocolonialism, exploitation of the weak, and warfare. It is this history that makes the topic urgent" (Driver 1987:217).

In addition to these overtly ethical and political concerns, however, common core religious pluralism also seems to be a liberal Christian reaction–or rather, the latest version of a much older and ongoing liberal Christian reaction–to the epistemological problem of faith and modernity–and more recently, of postmodernity: the problem of either defending Christianity against (the traditionalist response) or reconciling it with (the liberal response), on the one hand, the findings of modern science and the conclusions of modern philosophers and social theorists–whose methods presuppose the final authority not of a traditional body of knowledge, but of unaided human reason applied to empirical

observation of the phenomenal world–and on the other, of critical and postmodern theories of culture, which call into question *all* epistemically privileged positions, both traditional and modern.

What, precisely, is the meaning of "modernity" in this context? As Franklin I. Gamwell writes, "The distinctive characteristics of modernity are a subject of extensive and complicated debate. Still, it is widely agreed that the modern age is marked in some sense by the increasing affirmation of *autonomy*" (Gamwell 1990:3).[7] According to Gamwell, autonomy, the distinctive affirmation of modernity, is the affirmation:

> that our understandings of reality and ourselves in relation to it cannot be validated or redeemed by appeals to some authoritative expression or tradition or institution. In other words, our understandings can be validated or redeemed only by appeal in some sense to human experience and reason as such. Because it is identified with this latter appeal, the modern affirmation may also be called the *humanistic commitment*. (Ibid:3-4).[8]

Gamwell, of course, recognizes that modernity does not necessarily spell the end of tradition. The "increasing affirmation of autonomy" which characterizes the onset of modernity is a far from uniform historical process; and institutions antedating this onset–like Christianity–continue to thrive, though arguably in a different form necessitated by their new, modern context. But even apart from these 'survivals' from premodernity, the increasing specialization of distinctively modern fields of knowledge, combined with the natural limitations of the human mind, create a situation in which, even in modernity, one, in fact, holds the great majority of one's understandings on the basis of the authority of traditions and institutions–such as those of modern science or academia–rather than on the basis of one's own reason reflecting on experience. This is why Gamwell specifies that, in modernity, "our understandings can be validated or redeemed only by appeal *in some sense* to human experience and reason as such" (Ibid)–more often than not an indirect, rather than

[7] Emphasis mine.

[8] Emphasis mine.

a direct, sense.[9] The distinction between the modern 'faith' in the traditions and institutions of modernity and more traditional 'faith' in such premodern institutions as religion is that the authority which modern faith bestows upon its institutions rests on the trust that the authoritative representatives of these institutions have arrived at their particular understandings through the process of reason reflecting on common human experience–a process in which anyone could, in principle if not in fact, participate (that is, given the right kind of training and socialization into the methods and presuppositions of the field in question). From a modern perspective, knowledge that is not based on such, in principle, universally available standards of rationality–such as an alleged divine revelation or vision–is viewed as arbitrary, and therefore, suspect (unless it is humanistically redeemed).

It is this last characteristic of modernity which is most pertinent to the issue of religious pluralism. As the modern commitment came to predominate among Western intellectuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the claims of religion–primarily of Christianity, the dominant Western religion at the time–came to be viewed with increasing skepticism. The gradual erosion of premodern cosmologies effected by the rise of modern science–cosmologies long supported by the authority of the church–in combination with devastating criticisms by such modern philosophers as Voltaire and David Hume of traditional Christian beliefs, led to a situation in which Christian intellectuals were put increasingly on the defensive to justify their religious commitments on humanistic grounds.

The reaction of liberal Christian theologians, beginning in the early nineteenth century with Friedrich Schleiermacher, to the claims of modernity was to accept them fairly–from a contemporary postmodern and postliberal perspective–uncritically, and to accommodate them with an "experiential-expressive" (Lindbeck 1984:31-32) model for understanding religious doctrine. According to this model, the chief function of doctrine is not so much to describe ontological realities (as in more traditional and straightforwardly

[9] Emphasis mine.

propositionalist accounts of doctrine), as to evoke an ineffable experience of the sacred, the transcendent, the numinous "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*." (Otto 1923). This move arguably contributed to the development of the discipline of the history of religions, and the transformation of theology, for many scholars, from explicit reflection on the claims of the Christian tradition into a 'science' of the religious consciousness, of religious 'feeling' as such, unconfined to any particular cultural expression.[10] This move is a concession to modernity, an accommodation of modern claims; for it removes religion from 'objective' spheres in which its claims can be contested into a purely subjective realm of emotion–a move which both facilitates and is encouraged by the *privatization* of religion in modernity, its removal from the sphere of public discourse into a private realm of personal preference.

Current formulations of common core religious pluralism, such as those of Hick and W.C. Smith, can be seen as continuations of this concessive liberal strategy for the accommodation of faith to modernity, and as extensions of this strategy beyond the realm of distinctively Christian faith to become a defense of faith as such–of all the world's religions–a move made logical by the liberal withdrawal from the defense of the cognitive content of distinctively Christian claims to an emphasis on a more generalizable "religious feeling" (Heim 1995:101-117). The latest modern challenge, as it were, in the wake of the Holocaust and colonialism, to distinctively Christian faith, and to the traditional sense of the superiority and the moral ascendancy of Christianity over other religions, is the new appreciation of religious plurality enabled by the modern study of religion, accompanied by the new historical awareness that Christians are no less (and, in some cases, have arguably been more) inclined to commit atrocities in the name of their faith than the followers of other religious paths. According to religious pluralists, the superiority of Christianity over other religions can, for these reasons, no longer be claimed. Exclusivism and inclusivism

[10] Hegel foresaw this result of Schleiermacher's emphasis on 'feeling' over the cognitive content of doctrine and was, for this very reason, quite strongly opposed to it (Hegel 1988:80-99).

are thus no longer appropriate or credible models (if they ever were) for conceptualizing the nature of truth and salvation in relation to religious plurality. Therefore, just as Christian faith, in order to maintain intellectual credibility, has had to accommodate the Copernican revolution in astronomy and the Darwinian revolution in biology, similarly, common core religious pluralists claim, Christian faith–and religious belief generally–must accommodate the pluralistic revolution, a revolution that arises out of the modern awareness that a variety of more or less equally justifiable religious interpretations of reality are possible–that, with regard to the historical causes of their being believed, there is a relativity, a rough parity, of religions across cultures, and that no privileged perspective exists for the apprehension of the sacred, the ultimately Real. As the early modern philosopher Michel de Montaigne observes, one's religious adherence, like one's nationality or mother tongue, is largely an accident of birth:

> …[W]e receive our religion…not otherwise than as other religions are received. We happen to have been born in a country where it was in practice; or we regard its antiquity or the authority of the men who have maintained it; or we fear the threats it fastens upon unbelievers, or pursue its promises…Another region, other witnesses, similar promises and threats, might imprint upon us in the same way a contrary belief.…We are Christians by the same title that we are Perigordians or Germans.[11]

This observation is echoed by Hick, who similarly writes, in response to the claims of Christian religious exclusivists, that:

> …[A] "hermeneutic of suspicion" is provoked by the evident fact that in perhaps 99 percent of cases the religion to which one adheres (or against which one reacts) is selected by the accident of birth. Someone born to devout Muslim parents in Iran or Indonesia is very likely to be a Muslim; someone born to devout Buddhist parents in Thailand or Sri Lanka is very likely to be a Buddhist; someone born to devout Christian parents in Italy or Mexico is very likely to be a Catholic Christian; and so

[11] *"…[N]ous ne recevons nostre religion…non autrement que comme les autres religions se recoyvent. Nous nous sommes recontrez au pais ou elle estoit en usage; ou nous regardons son ancienneté ou l'authorité des hommes qui l'ont maintenue; ou creignons les menaces qu'ell'attache aux mescreans; ou suyvons ses promesses.…Une autre region, d'autres tesmoings, pareilles promesses et menasses nous pourroyent imprimer par mesme voye une croyance contraire…Nous sommes Chrestiens a mesme titre que nous sommes ou Perigordins ou Alemans"* (Montaigne 1931:161; Frame trans. 1957:324-325).

> on. Thus there is a certain non-rational arbitrariness in the claim that the particular tradition within which one happens to have been born is the one and only true religion. And if the conviction is added that salvation and eternal life depend upon accepting the truth's of one's own religion, it may well seem unfair that this saving truth is known only to one group, into which only a minority of the human race have had the good fortune to be born (Hick 1997:610).

The question which arises as a consequence of this realization in modernity of the characteristic arbitrariness of religious commitment, the relativity of religious belief with respect to its causes–the same question that divides religious pluralism into its two distinct camps–is whether any incontestably neutral, non-arbitrary ground exists in human reason for adjudicating religious differences–for determining (as the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality asks) which, if any, of the religions that exist in the world is (or are) true. Pluralists of a liberal or modernist persuasion, such as Hick and Smith, who tend to be common core religious pluralists, claim that religious faith, in order to survive as a viable option in modernity, must accommodate the realization of the relativity of religious belief by grounding itself not in some arbitrarily chosen, culturally particular symbol or set of symbols, such as Christ–though such symbols can, and should, continue to exist as concrete expressions of the faith of historical persons–but in a *religiously* neutral[12] abstract ground of all religious experience and salvific transformation: "the Real" (Hick 1989:10-11) or "faith" (Smith 1981:172).[13] This is the 'Copernican revolution,' described above, which these religious pluralists propose.

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[12] Though not, of course, neutral on the question of the validity of religious faith in general, as opposed to unbelief, or 'naturalistic' world views (Hick 1989:210-230).

[13] Initially, religious pluralists took 'God' to be the ultimate reality toward which all religions pointed; but it was soon realized that, given the existence of non-theistic traditions such as Buddhism and Daoism, even this was too culturally particular a symbol of ultimate reality to accomodate all of the world's major traditions. Arguably, this modern pluralistic insight underlay the early development of the discipline of the history of religions as well–long before it emerged at the heart of an explicitly theological stance. The idea of an objective 'science of religion' that would take as its object of study all human interactions with a non-religiously particular abstract 'sacred,' as embodied in the works of such scholars as Max Müller, Joachim Wach, and, arguably, Mircea Eliade, has strong affinities with the kind of interpretation of religion John Hick proposes, or the approach to the history of religions advocated by Wilfred Cantwell Smith. "Faith," according to Smith, is "that which saves, universally," regardless of religious affiliation.

Religious pluralists of an arguably more 'postmodern' persuasion, on the other hand, such as Paul F. Knitter and Raimon Panikkar, who are suspicious of universalizing theories of religion, tend to be *dialogical* or *attitudinal* religious pluralists. These religious pluralists insist on a pluralistic model rooted not in a postulated religiously neutral absolute, but in the lived experience of interreligious dialogue, with all of its attendant risks and uncertainties, claiming that "a pluralistic *system* would be a contradiction in terms" (Panikkar 1987b:110).[14] This is the form of religious pluralism which affirms the irreducible plurality of the world's religions.

Dialogical or attitudinal religious pluralists are uncomfortable with the speculative philosophical formulations of common core religious pluralists. Rather than articulate a systematic perspective like that of Hick, or the in many ways very similar historical perspective of Smith, dialogue-based or attitudinal religious pluralists, such as Raimon Panikkar, Gordon Kaufman, John S. Dunne, and David Tracy, advocate a "pluralistic *attitude*" toward non-Christian religions (Tracy 1987:90).[15] Rather than develop a pluralistic *system* which theorizes a common core of experience at the heart of the world's religions–and thereby risks competing with them as a distinctive set of claims in its own right, or dominating them in the manner of a modernistic 'objective' theory–these pluralists emphasize the lived experience of encounter between the members of different religious communities, the experience of actual interreligious dialogue. The attitude which they advocate consists of an *openness* to the *possibility* of truth in other religions–for which their

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According to Smith, the boundaries between traditions being artificial and, historically, quite porous, it is more proper to think in terms of "a history of religion in the singular" rather than in terms of many religious traditions, with faith being a quality shared by all religious people. This is his historically-based variety of common core religious pluralism, the historian's analogue of Hick's philosophical version.

[14] Emphasis mine.

[15] Emphasis mine.

faith gives them reason to hope–rather than an a priori assertion, before any actual dialogue has occurred, of the actual *presence* of such truth. As Tracy writes:

> The discourses and ways of the religions can sometimes complement or even, at the limit, complete some undeveloped aspect of one another. The religions can also interrupt and, at the other limit, obliterate one another's claims. There is no way to tell before the conversation which option is the right one. To want more is to try to be freed from the demands of interpretation (Ibid).

Interreligious dialogue, according to this group of religious pluralists, *is* demanding–and radically so. It demands that one face honestly the radical *otherness* of the religious Other, with no preconceptions about what results encounter with that Other might yield. This precludes the kind of a priori systematizing of religious plurality that a position like that of John Hick entails. As Raimon Panikkar writes: "Pluralism does not allow for a universal system. A pluralistic system would be a contradiction in terms. The incommensurability of ultimate systems is unbridgeable" (Panikkar 1987b:110).

In their general discomfort with strong a priori judgments, either positive or negative, on the truth of the explicit claims of non-Christian religious communities, dialogical or attitudinal religious pluralists anticipate another, subsequent group of contributors to this debate whose criticisms of all three of the standard positions described thus far have shaped the character its second, more recent phase. In this second phase of the pluralism debate, a consensus has emerged among a number of its participants which rejects not only religious pluralism of the common core variety, but also exclusivism and inclusivism–or, for that matter, any position which would seek to prejudge the issue of the truth-claims of diverse religious communities prior to actual engagement with those claims.

Prominent among these more critical participants are those who share with such thinkers as George Lindbeck and Alasdair MacIntyre a postliberal, tradition-constituted epistemology–that is, who reject the characteristically modern liberal belief in universally available standards of rationality in terms of which all disagreements can, in principle, be resolved, in favor of the view that the standards by which one makes evaluative judgments

of any kind are always inevitably informed by and historically locatable within some tradition or other–including that of liberalism itself (MacIntyre 1988:326-348). This leads these neotraditionalist thinkers to reject religious pluralism of the common core variety precisely because such pluralistic theories tend to portray themselves as religiously neutral and tradition-independent. This tendency is illustrated, for example, by John Hick's reference to his own philosophical project as an attempt to develop "a religious but not confessional interpretation of religion in its plurality of forms" (Hick 1989:1). Despite the various interesting differences among them, these critics of religious pluralism could collectively be called 'postliberals.'[16] They include, among the prominent contributors to this debate, Paul J. Griffiths and Francis X. Clooney.

Griffiths, a Roman Catholic philosopher of religion and scholar of Buddhism, has been among the most outspoken and incisive critics of common core religious pluralism (Griffiths 1991:45-59). He advocates a return to traditional interreligious apologetics, and the investigation of religious claims on a case-by-case basis, rather than a general theory of religion, as the proper means for determining the truth of the conflicting claims of different religious communities. He claims that pluralist conceptions of interreligious dialogue omit the substantive issues that make such dialogue at all interesting or intellectually engaging. According to Griffiths, such a conception of dialogue "produces a discourse that is pallid, platitudinous, and degutted" (Ibid:xii).

Clooney is a Roman Catholic theologian and scholar of the Advaita Vedānta tradition of Hindu scriptural interpretation. Adopting Lindbeck's conception of a religious tradition as being structured like a language, he advocates not so much a return to traditional

[16] Lindbeck sets the agenda for postliberal Christian theology in Lindbeck 1984. MacIntyre's views on the epistemological necessity of tradition are expressed in MacIntyre 1988 and his Gifford Lectures, published as MacIntyre 1990.

apologetics as the learning of the texts of another tradition after the manner of a 'second mother tongue,' then returning to one's own tradition and 'reading' into it the new insights that one has learned from the alien tradition, 'inscribing' them into the 'margins' of one's own 'text' and thereby transforming it. By engaging in such a comparative exercise with Advaitic texts, Clooney claims that he is continuing a long tradition within Roman Catholic Christianity of reading across traditions and inscribing the texts of others into one's own–a tradition that includes, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas's 'inscription' of Aristotle into the 'meta-text' of Christianity (Clooney 1993). Interestingly, despite his postliberal conception of religion, Clooney ultimately supports an inclusivist understanding of the possibility of salvation for non-Christians (Clooney 1990a:63-80).

In addition to these postliberal critics of religious pluralism, there are, from the tradition of process theology, Schubert Ogden and John Cobb, both of whom share the postliberal aversion to strong a priori claims about the *actual* truth of religions other than Christianity. The normative commitment of these two theologians to process thought, however, renders them more open than postliberals both to the concept of, in principle, universally available norms (in the form of the necessary truths of process metaphysics) and to the possibility that the claims of religious pluralists might turn out to be true–that there may, in fact, be many true and salvifically efficacious religions.

Indeed, this is precisely Ogden's thesis. On process metaphysics-informed Christian theological grounds, Ogden argues that exclusivism and inclusivism are both mistaken positions; for both are based upon a constitutive christology which he rejects (Ogden 1992a:79-104). According to Ogden, however, the rejection of exclusivism and inclusivism need not imply, as religious pluralists claim, the truth of their position. A 'fourth option' is possible. The logical contrary, according to Ogden, to the exclusivist claim that there *cannot be* more than one true religion (and of the inclusivist claim that there *cannot be* more than one *wholly* true religion) is not the claim that there *are* many true

religions (the pluralist claim), but the claim that there *can be*. Prior, however, to actual engagement with the claims made by historical religious communities, no assertion about the truth or falsity of their claims is warranted. Ogden, then, does not claim that religious pluralists are necessarily wrong. They have simply jumped too quickly to their conclusion. Ogden, indeed, says of his position that:

> [I]t gives one every reason to look for signs of the actuality of the pluralism whose possibility is securely grounded in the completely universal reality of God's love, which is savingly present throughout all human existence and, therefore, is also at work in all religions (Ibid 103).

Similarly Cobb, also working out of the tradition of process thought, advocates interreligious dialogue on the basis not of a prior belief in the truth of other religions, but of a faith in the *possibility* of such truth, and a consequent faith that such dialogue can lead to a positive "mutual transformation" of its participants.[17] Cobb has suggested, on the basis of his ongoing dialogue with Buddhists, that, contrary to the common core pluralist claim that the many religions all point to one common ultimate Reality, "it seems more realistic to recognize a plurality of ultimates, including at least the personal God affirmed by monotheistic religion and the ever-changing interdependent process of the universe (*pratītya-samutpāda*) affirmed by Buddhism" (Hick 1997:613). Cobb's conception of a plurality of ultimates is given coherence by his commitment to Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, which affirms just such a plurality of ultimates.

A similar view to that of Cobb is proposed by S. Mark Heim in the form of his 'more pluralistic hypothesis,' or 'orientational pluralism,' according to which the salvific goals of the various religions really are different from each other, rather than ultimately unitary (Heim 1995:144-152). On Heim's view, both exclusivists and pluralists are, in a sense, correct. When Christian religious exclusivists claim that Christianity is the sole path to salvation as Christians conceive of it, they are right–for the term 'salvation,' as used by

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[17] See Cobb 1982, 1994 and 1996.

Christians, is only meaningful within a Christian syntactic context.[18] As a term which takes its meaning from Christianity, it is only from within a Christian context that salvation can be meaningfully conceptualized and sought as an ultimate goal. In other words, salvation, for Christians, *means* salvation in Christ. The very meaning of this term is lost, on this understanding, if it is abstracted from its Christian context.

This does, not, however, mean that Christianity is the only true, or even the only salvifically effective, religion; for the same postliberal intrasystematic conception of meaning that Heim applies to salvation as conceived within Christianity is no less applicable to the ultimate goals of other religions as conceived within *their* respective syntactic contexts. *Nirvāṇa*, then, as conceived within Buddhism, is, analogously with Christian salvation, only available by means of the specific path to its attainment prescribed within a Buddhist context. Just as Christianity is the only path to salvation (as Christians conceive of it), similarly, Buddhism is the only path to *nirvāṇa*; for it is only within a Buddhist syntactic context that the term *nirvāṇa* has any meaning.[19] The same principle also applies to the ultimate goals of all the other religions, as well as to the concept of truth: the religions say different things because they are answers to different questions. It is in this sense that Heim is a religious pluralist–or, as he claims, *more* of a pluralist than those who

[18] This view is clearly dependent upon postliberalism's conception of religion as being structured like language.

[19] Traditions other than Buddhism, of course–specifically Jainism and some forms of Hinduism–employ the term '*nirvāṇa*,' but I suspect that, on Heim's postliberal understanding of the meanings of religious terminologies, the term '*nirvāṇa,*' when employed in non-Buddhists contexts, is, for this very reason, a *different* term, though denoted by the same lexical item. Similarly, the terms '*salvation*' or '*God*', if employed by non-Christian theists, would mean something different than when they are employed within a Christian context. But then these terms must also, on the same understanding, take on different shades of meaning when employed within *different* Christian contexts, in which they are conceived differently. This also suggests, of course, that these terms could even be pushed to mean different things to different people, or to the same person in different contexts. But where, then, does their constitutively *Christian* meaning finally lie? The fact that this question is finally unanswerable in any adequate way points to a weakness of postliberal intrasystematic conceptions of truth that has already been discerned by postmodern critics of this position. See Tanner 1997:138-143.

call themselves pluralists, those common core pluralists who conceive of the religions as many ways to a single, unitary, common salvation, rather than a genuine plurality of 'salvations,' or ultimate religious ends. Because he is also a postliberal, however, Heim, like Griffiths and Clooney, denies that a tradition-independent stance exists from which one could ask how one knows *which* ultimate goal to seek, which salvation *really is* ultimate (Heim 1995:152-157). The question will always come back, "Ultimate in terms of what? In terms of which syntactic system?" The plurality of salvations, like the plurality of religions, is finally, according to Heim, irreducible.

2.4 Butting into the Conversation: The View from the Periphery

If one embraces what could broadly be called a pluralistic religious worldview, if one's spirituality and overall religious response to reality has been informed by a variety of religious and philosophical traditions, and if one sees all of these traditions as being relatively–in different senses and to different degrees–true, each being in its own way valuable and important as a guide to some aspect of the truth, then what is one to make of the complex of contending views that I have outlined here, which constitutes the conceptual context of the emergence of contemporary religious pluralism? This is the perspective from which I now seek to join this debate, and perhaps even to interrupt it–a debate which, despite its shortcomings from my point of view, is the only context within the Western academy of which I am aware in which the issues of truth and religious plurality are being taken with the seriousness which I believe they merit.

I call my perspective a 'view from the periphery' because, with the highly noteworthy exception of Raimon Panikkar, the voices of religious persons such as myself–who are not committed *exclusively* to any one religious tradition, but who are, nonetheless, religious people, committed to a spiritual practice and a specific, religiously informed worldview–have not, by and large, been heard. Even Panikkar's pluralistic religiosity seems to be seen by most primarily as an idiosyncratic effect of his mixed Hindu-Catholic

parentage–and therefore ‘forgivable’–rather than as a free rational choice not to be limited by the categories of one religious tradition, but to creatively synthesize and experiment with the concepts of a variety of traditions, to allow himself to be taught and transformed by his “interior dialogue” with a plurality of views (Redington 1983:587). I see the contemporary theological conversation about truth and religious plurality, in other words, as primarily a conversation among and for the benefit of Christian intellectuals–and God help one, such as Hick, who dares to challenge the supremacy of Christian categories and Christian self-understandings as normative for the understanding of religion generally. With this project I hope to contribute, in a modest way, to a change in this situation.

But despite my sympathies being largely with the pluralist side of this debate, it would be intellectually dishonest for me to deny that the various criticisms of religious pluralism have some validity. Some of these criticisms, in fact, come from within its own ranks, such as dialogical religious pluralists’ criticisms of common core varieties of this position. I would, in fact, go so far as to say that this position, as it stands, in both its common core and dialogical varieties, is finally untenable.

The point of this chapter, however (and ultimately of this dissertation as a whole), is to argue that this need not be the case. Religious pluralism can, I think, be reconceived in such a way that it can answer the legitimate objections currently raised against it by its opponents while yet preserving its fundamental affirmation of a plurality of true religions.

It is not my claim that this reconceived religious pluralism will be universally compelling. Like all philosophical positions, its acceptance will depend not only upon its own internal logic, but also upon an acceptance of its basic premises and assumptions–and, on my understanding, the acceptance or rejection of fundamental philosophical premises and assumptions is a function of one’s unique perspective on and response to reality on a basic, primordial level. Therefore it cannot ultimately be determined by argument. It is a matter of what could be called ‘faith,’ or intuitive experience. My hope in this dissertation is

therefore to make a case for the *validity* of a reconceived religious pluralism–its internal coherence, its ability to be shown to follow logically from its premises, and its ability to fulfill the criteria and answer the questions raised earlier in this chapter. This is why my hope in this chapter is to show that the valid objections which are applicable to current versions of religious pluralism need not be decisive for this position–that a version of this position could be constructed to which these objections would not apply. I see establishing the truth of this claim as a precondition for actually constructing such a view.

The question that arises next, then, is what *are* the valid objections which apply to current versions of religious pluralism? I see these objecions as being of two main types, which I call *traditionalist* and *logical*.

2.5 Traditionalist Objections: Autonomy and Heteronomy, Reason and Revelation

By *traditionalist* objections to religious pluralism I am referring to specifically Christian theological objections to this position–objections to the effect that this position does not articulate an authentically Christian understanding of reality, that its relativization of Christ as one authentic way to salvation among many, rather than as "*the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life" (John 14:6)[20] places it beyond the pale of acceptable Christian theology or philosophy–though such objections could conceivably come from other traditions as well.

I take the force of these traditionalist objections to be the following: As a position which seeks to affirm the truth of many traditions and to show that they can all be seen as true and harmonious, the fact that any one tradition can strongly disagree with religious pluralism, I think, seriously undermines its prima facie plausibility. Put simplistically, if religious pluralists are supposed to agree, after a fashion, with everyone, the fact that anyone could disagree with them at all calls into question their claim to agree with everyone. This actually points to one of the logical objections to religious pluralism that we shall be

[20] Emphasis mine.

addressing shortly–that religious pluralism itself actually constitutes a particular position, a particular interpretive stance toward religion, rather than the truly neutral "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986) that it typically presents itself as being.[21]

Traditionalist objections of the kind that Christians have typically raised against religious pluralism–objections of its incompatibility with the central claims of their tradition–could conceivably be made from the perspective of any religion which claims absolute truth for its teachings. Their experience with Christianity should be insructive to religious pluralists that this is more likely to happen than not. This is part of the logic of what a religion is. It is the very nature of a religion to take its particular expression of truth as *the* truth. This is how religions typically function to communicate abstract truths to their believers–by *identifying* those truths with particular concrete expressions.

My view is that the question of the compatibility of a pluralistic account of religion with the claims of any particular religious tradition is unanswerable in any final way, but is a matter of interpretation–that is, of what one takes the substantive claims of a particular religious tradition actually to be. Taking Christianity as an example–as a religious pluralist, I believe that my religious perspective is perfectly compatible with Christianity, correctly understood. I believe, for example, that when Jesus makes the claim in scripture, as in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," the singular "I" in this statement refers not exclusively to the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, who was born and lived in a particular place and at a particular time, but to the divine Christ or Cosmic Consciousness which was alive in Him and with which He identified Himself completely–a divine reality, different *aspects* of which are similarly named in other religious traditions with such terms as Brahman, Buddha Nature, etc. (Prabhavānanda 1963; Yagi 1987).[22] My qualifier,

[21] This applies more to common core views than to dialogical or attitudinal religious pluralisms.

[22] My interpretation of the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation is not unlike that of Paramahāṃsa Yogānanda: "These Biblical words refer to the threefold

'correctly understood,' when asserting that my view is perfectly compatible with Christianity highlights the apologetic character of my pluralistic assertions, the fact that my view is one perspective, one interpretation, among many, rather than a truly neutral ground for the understanding of religion. It can therefore involve disagreement with other views.

For there are Christians who would hold that my view is not an authentically Christian reading of their tradition, that such an interpretation is not, in fact, compatible with authentically Christian faith as this is defined by mainstream Christianity. The responses which I have received over the years to my interpretation of Christianity, from equally devout Christians representing a wide spectrum of Christian belief and practice,

have ranged from enthusiastic agreement that it is, in fact, 'the true Christianity,' to the view that it's 'the work of the devil.'

I find, ultimately, that the real difference between pluralistic interpretations of religion and more traditional understandings rests with their evaluation of reason and the humanistic commitment; for religious pluralism, at least in its contemporary form, is very much a product of modernity–a faith-informed response to modernity which accepts its fundamental humanistic commitment at a very deep level.

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nature of God as Father, Son, Holy Ghost (*Sat*, *Tat*, *Aum* in the Hindu scriptures). God the Father is the Absolute, Unmanifested, existing *beyond* vibratory creation. God the Son is the Christ Consciousness (Brahma or *Kutastha Chaitanya*) existing *within* vibratory creation; this Christ Consciousness is the 'only begotten' or sole reflection of the Uncreated Infinite. The outward manifestation of the omnipresent Christ Consciousness, its 'witness' (Revelation 3:14), is *Aum*, the Word or Holy Ghost: invisible divine power, the only doer, the sole causative and activating force that upholds all creation through vibration. *Aum* the blissful Comforter is heard in meditation and reveals to the devotee the ultimate Truth, bringing 'all things to…remembrance'" (Yogānanda 1999:169). In the language of process metaphysics, I take the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to correspond, respectively, to Creativity (the Absolute); the primordial, abstract nature of God; and the consequent, temporal nature of God.

To traditionalist objections to my own pluralistic understanding of religion, for example, my response is typically to assert that this is the understanding that I find to be most in harmony with my reason reflecting on my own life experiences–including religious experiences. My traditionalist interlocutors, however, typically support their claims by recourse to Scripture. I would point out, of course, that my interlocutors' route also involves their use of *their* reason–for the use of Scripture always involves an interpretive element. But the point is *where* we each choose to locate authority. My commitment is finally to *autonomy*–to my own reason reflecting on my experiences, which, as Gamwell explains, is the characteristically modern commitment. My interlocutors' commitment, in contrast, is to *heteronomy*–"that is, the affirmation that our understandings can be redeemed by appeal to some authoritative expression, tradition, or institution" (Gamwell 1990:4). Again, although these two are never wholly separable in practice, the point is where these two commitments *explicitly* locate authority–and this, I believe, is not an issue that can be resolved non-circularly through argument (though this recognition, as Gamwell points out, itself presupposes a characteristically modern understanding of the distinction between tradition-based and reason-based reflection (Ibid:13)). Whether one locates the authority on the basis of which one holds one's beliefs outside oneself–in a tradition, a teacher, or an institution, deploying what Griffiths calls an "externalist epistemology" (Griffiths 1999:72-76)–or within oneself–in one's (ultimately, I think, God-given, and therefore, 'theonomous') reason reflecting on one's own experiences (deploying an "internalist epistemology" (Ibid.))–is finally a matter of faith (though, I would hold, again in the manner of Gamwell, that even the choice of a heteronomous basis for one's beliefs, if it is recognized *as a choice*, is finally a matter of autonomous reason reflecting on experience, an *internally* warranted decision). I find, therefore, that traditionalist objections against religious pluralism are finally not decisive, but neither are they finally answerable unless the traditionalist and the pluralist can agree upon the terms in which their differences could

finally be resolved–and this, I think, is ultimately the very issue which divides them. As long as the religious pluralist argues on the basis of reason reflecting on experience, and the traditionalist on the basis of tradition, they are talking past each other. To put the matter in ordinary language, the traditionalist and the pluralist must, in the end, agree to disagree.

None of this, of course, should be taken to mean that the religious pluralist, in accepting the modern commitment to autonomous reason and to the humanistic redemption of claims in its *formal* sense, necessarily accepts all of the *substantive* views which have been associated with the modern commitment over the centuries, such as a denial of the possibility of metaphysics, a tendency to reject a priori all claims based on religious or paranormal experience, a tendency to embrace a materialistic–allegedly 'scientific'–and atheistic worldview, or a tendency, already mentioned in the previous chapter, to conceive of knowledge as divided into–to again cite Gandhi–unrelated 'watertight compartments,' thereby relegating religious issues to a private, 'subjective' realm and allowing into the field of public discourse only topics which cohere with a (too) narrowly defined 'objective' and 'scientific' worldview. Indeed, I would contend that it is the uncritical acceptance by many religious pluralists–particularly such common core pluralists as Hick and Smith, on the basis of their 'Schleiermacherian' liberal Protestant commitments–of some (though not all) of these 'modern' views which has led to many of the problems which plague their pluralistic interpretations of religion. Their acceptance of the dominant modern consensus which denies the possibility of metaphysics, in particular, is a topic to which I shall be returning; for this denial has facilitated the relegation of many religious claims to the experiential-expressive realm in order to enable them to pass modern tests of credibility not necessarily entailed by the formal modern commitment to autonomous reason. The acceptance by religious pluralists of these dominant modern views and attitudes has led to their development of pluralistic models of truth which, in effect, perpetuate the global hegemony of these same views and attitudes, thereby transforming religious pluralism into

yet another form–albeit an unwitting one–of Western ideological imperialism, arguably more insidious than the traditional Christian absolutism which it seeks to replace (Heim 1995:110-117). The point, again, is that the acceptance of these and other substantive views and attitudes typically associated with modernity need not follow from the acceptance of the formal modern commitment to autonomous reason. They therefore need not be associated with religious pluralism.

Just as the acceptance by the religious pluralist of the humanistic commitment, in its formal sense, need not entail an acceptance of *all* of the substantive claims and prejudices typically associated with modernity, similarly, it also need not entail an a priori rejection of *all* of the substantive views upheld by traditionalists on a heteronomous basis. It is only the commitment to heteronomy itself that is rejected; for the religious pluralist may, indeed, believe that God exists, that there is an afterlife (or afterlives), and that the Bible (or the Qur'an, or the Veda), is an inspired scripture, containing a divine revelation. Indeed, it is characteristic of religious pluralists generally that they *do* wish to uphold such views, but that they wish to do so on the basis of the humanistic commitment, rather than on the basis of 'blind faith' in a heteronomous tradition. In the absence, however, of a coherent and humanistically redeemable conception of the relativity of all truth-expression, such as that provided by the Jain tradition, their desire to affirm the truth of a *plurality* of religious worldviews which are prima facie incompatible leads them, again, to conceive of this truth as being of a 'symbolic' or 'mythological,' experiential-expressive character, removing it from the realm of propositional truth dominated in modernity by the empirical sciences.

What I am arguing, essentially, is that it is possible for a religious pluralist–or, for that matter, for any religious person–to be committed both to the autonomy of reason reflecting on experience *and* to many of the substantive claims of a belief system–such as a religious belief system–which, historically, have typically been held on the basis of faith in the authority of a tradition. Most contemporary religious persons, I suspect, actually hold

something like a dual commitment in this matter, accepting the autonomy of reason in secular matters, but deferring to the authority of tradition in matters of faith (though, as pointed out earlier, even in secular matters, most persons typically defer to the wisdom of such authorities as scientists and technicians, though on the implicit understanding that the authority invested in these figures is ultimately based upon the humanistic redeemability of their claims. The modern commitment, in other words, in its formal sense, does not rule out a priori, but leaves as an open question, the substantive truth of many traditional claims.

The distinction I am invoking here between the modern, humanistic commitment in its formal sense and particular substantive claims which have emerged in and are typically associated with and dominant of modernity is also emphasized by Gamwell:

> To affirm that understandings of reality and ourselves in relation to it can be redeemed only by humanistic appeal leaves open to further deliberation and argument the material understandings that can be so redeemed. Without further argument, for instance, the humanistic commitment does not preclude substantive religious or social understandings that were dominant in medieval culture. More generally, the modern commitment as I have defined it is *explicitly* neutral to all material differences among understandings. To be sure, the formal affirmation of autonomy is *implicitly* an affirmation of whatever substantive understandings can be validated by humanistic appeal, but this does not gainsay that explicit decisions about which understandings are so implied wait upon humanistic argument. In sum, we might contrast with the modern commitment in its formal sense a material or substantive meaning of modernity or humanism, where the latter, whatever it may be, is normative for human belief and action. That distinction is especially important in the contemporary context of moral and political discussion, because some voices have been led to say that an adequate understanding of ourselves and
>
> our common life must now be in some sense "post-modern." While this term is used with many meanings, I judge that at least most of them involve a contrast with some material or substantive meaning of modernity, rather than with the humanistic commitment in its formal sense (Ibid:7-8).

It is in this sense that I would characterize my own project of reconstructing religious pluralism as "post-modern" as well–in order to contrast it with a dominant meaning of modernity which involves the substantive views I have already cited, such as the denial of the possibility of metaphysics, and which I take many religious pluralists to have accepted uncritically–while yet remaining firmly within "the humanistic commitment in its formal

sense," within the fundamental modern commitment to autonomous reason reflecting on experience as the authoritative foundation upon which I base my beliefs.

As I have already said, religious pluralism is a faith-informed response to modernity which accepts its fundamental humanistic commitment at a very deep level. The religious pluralist is someone willing to question the authority of a tradition and to develop alternative models when those provided by that tradition seem to have failed–particularly when the tradition seems to contradict itself and the experiences upon which it is ostensibly based, such as when the Christian tradition proclaims that God is love and then claims that God has condemned most human beings to eternal damnation because they have not given explicit assent to this proclamation. At the same time, the religious pluralist is also a person of faith who affirms the essential truth of his or her own tradition, but who seeks to do so without denying that of others. Religious pluralism, as it stands, is a position characterized by an attempt to find a 'middle path' between the skepticism toward traditional authority which has tended to characterize the modern condition–skepticism which, in its extreme forms, has led to the wholesale rejection of tradition–and the faith in the *substantive claims* of tradition, if not its intrinsic authority, which characterizes heteronomous commitments. In this sense, in trying to walk this 'middle path' between faith and modernity, it is, as I have said, a continuation of the liberal theological tradition which attempts to accommodate the claims of faith to those of modernity, particularly to the perception of the arbitrariness of traditional religious adherence. To the extent that 'modernity' can here be identified with the modern commitment in its formal sense, rather than with dominant modern views and attitudes, I would say that this is a fair characterization of my own version of religious pluralism as well. The difference, on the issue of modernity, between my version of religious pluralism and those of my predecessors is the extent to which their positions arise from an attempt to accommodate not only the basic modern commitment–which I, too, affirm–but also a number of other highly questionable and, I think, invalid modern views.

Like Gamwell, and other thinkers from the tradition of process thought–such as Ogden, Cobb, and Hartshorne, and beginning, of course, with Whitehead–I maintain that there are traditional religious and philosophical beliefs, such as belief in the existence of God, which are literally true, in a straightforward, propositional sense, and humanistically redeemable as such, rather than true in *only* a metaphorical or an experiential-expressive sense, or maintainable as literally true only on the basis of the authority of tradition. On this view, the two extremes to which the dominant understanding of modernity pushes religious belief–into either a purely private realm of subjective meaning, or to the militant affirmation of blind faith in a tradition which characterizes fundamentalisms–are both to be rejected.

Religious pluralism–being constitutively a rejection of the second alternative (fundamentalist absolutism)–has tended to embrace the first (experiential-expressivist subjectivism). I, however, would suggest that, with regard to the claims of traditions, a third alternative is both possible and desirable. This is the option opened up by the application of the claims of process metaphysics to the issue of truth and religious plurality. The issue of truth and religious plurality, in terms of the question of faith and modernity, is the issue of deciding–once one recognizes, on the basis of the humanistic commitment, the arbitrariness of adhering *exclusivistically* to a religious belief solely on the basis of one's accidental birth and/or acculturation into a particular religious community–which religion, if any, is really true. If the system of process metaphysics really does represent, as its adherents claim it does–and as I would argue as well–a humanistically redeemable theism, then it follows that its substantive claims constitute a good, relatively non-arbitrary starting point for reflecting on the validity of religious truth-claims. If this metaphysical system also gives one good reasons for believing that all religions are, in some sense, true, and if a system for the interpretation of religious claims is deducible from it–both being claims for which I argue in this dissertation–then one is in a position to assess a plurality of traditional religious views *positively*, yet still on the basis of the modern humanistic commitment. One

is, of course, thereby prevented from accepting traditional claims which explicitly *preclude* the humanistic commitment, but not all traditional claims are of this meta-variety.[23]

The particular interpretation of these views which will result from such a project, like my interpretation of Christianity discussed earlier, will probably not be met with unanimous agreement by those who adhere to their views on the basis of the authority of tradition alone. Such an interpretation will probably be taken to be no less of a distortion of tradition than those offered by contemporary religious pluralists. The point, however, is that such an interpretation, even though it takes as its basis autonomous reason reflecting on experience rather than traditional authority–its differences with traditional interpretations

[23] And even some traditional claims which *are* of such a kind as to be prima facie incompatible with the humanistic commitment could conceivably be interpreted in such a way as to negate this prima facie incompatibility. Take, for example, the traditional Vedāntic position on the Veda–that the Vedic text (that is, the oral text, the *Śruti*) is eternal and constitutes the ultimate authority in all religious matters, including the definition of what is and what is not a legitimate religious experience (*anubhāva*). (This is in contrast with the Neo-Vedāntic and modern insistence on the primacy of experience over text.) If, by 'Veda' (which, in Sanskrit, means 'wisdom'), one refers not to an actual text, but to the sum total of the necessary truths of the universe, the metaphysical first principles–something like the *dharmakāya* of Mahāyāna Buddhism, or the *logos* of the Gospel of John–then a modern interpreter would have no problem accepting the traditional affirmation of the eternality and ultimate authority of the Veda–the 'transcendental Veda,' co-extensive with the sum total of ultimate truths, the mind of God. The texts called 'Veda' would then bear a relationship to the transcendental Veda–their Platonic form, so to speak–not unlike those of the deities or *devatās* of Hinduism to *Brahman*, their one divine source. It would also then be possible to postulate that other sacred texts, the sacred texts of the world's various text-based religions–the Qur'an, the Bible, etc.–as well as sacred oral traditions, are also manifestations of or participations in the same transcendental wisdom. This might be a textual analogue to Hick's pluralistic hypothesis of numerous divine *personae* and *impersonae* of a common divine *noumenon* (Hick 1989:242). Divine revelation would thus be seen as a matter of intuitive discernment of transcendental wisdom and its subsequent translation into the cultural idiom and context of the 'seer.' Though I shall only mention it here, the development of such a pluralistic theory of divine revelation is a desideratum–and one that, to my knowledge, has yet to be fulfilled by any current religious pluralist. Keith Ward's views about divine revelation come close, in some respects, to what I have in mind (Ward 1994).

most likely arising on this very basis–it need not involve the *rejection* of traditional claims, such as the claims of a tradition to constitute a divine revelation. But it seeks to coordinate and understand such claims in the light of reason reflecting on the *totality* of experience.

2.6 Logical Objections

This brings me, then, to what I call logical objections to religious pluralism. These are objections raised against religious pluralism on its own terms–on the terms of the modern, humanistic commitment–objections which, therefore, if decisive, would logically lead to the invalidation of the pluralistic project. They are also objections which have actually been raised by opponents of this position over the course of the most recent phase of the ongoing debate on these issues. They are therefore expressed in a variety of ways, depending upon the author who is formulating them. On my understanding, however, they take the form of five basic criticisms of religious pluralism. These are:

1. The A Priorism or Lack of Engagement Critique,
2. The Lack of Argument or Meta-Theory Critique,
3. The Non-Necessity for Dialogue or Superfluity Critique,
4. The Intellectual Imperialism or Ideology Critique, and
5. The Lack of Exclusionary Criteria or Relativism Critique.

In the rest of this chapter, I intend to take up each of these critiques individually, discuss them, and then suggest reasons why they need not be decisive–why, although they do pertain to current formulations of religious pluralism (the formulations against which they have, in fact, been raised by a variety of authors) a version of this position could be conceived which could effectively address, avoid, or incorporate them.

Ultimately, I believe that all five of these logical criticisms can be traced back to a single problem. Religious pluralism, as I have tried to show here, is based on the modern humanistic commitment to the authority of reason reflecting on experience; and in this I concur with it. But, as I have pointed out, the authors of contemporary versions of this

position also accept a dominant modern view which rejects the possibility of metaphysics. This, I believe, is ultimately the source of their problems. This is an issue which I will take up in much greater detail later; but I maintain that it is only on the basis of a humanistically redeemed theistic metaphysics that religious pluralism can be logically justified.

2.7 The A Priorism or Lack of Engagement Critique

One of the criticisms of religious pluralism, as we have already seen, has been the criticism, to which exclusivism and inclusivism are also subject, of the a priori nature of this position, of the fact–despite the interest in dialogue which its advocates profess–that, by its inner logic, it makes no demands upon those who hold it actually to engage in interreligious dialogue, or even to learn anything at all about the world's religions about which it makes a number of strong claims–claims which, as we have also seen, can amount to a radical reinterpretation of the actual teachings of these religions.[24] For it is *not* the case that most religions, in fact, accept the central claim of religious pluralism–that there actually are many true religions. They certainly do not accept the claim that no single religion can be used as the norm for evaluating the truth of all the others. Rather, as Ogden points out, "it belongs to a religion to claim to be *the* true religion, and hence the formal norm by which all other true religion, if any, has to be determined" (Ogden 1992a:13). This is why Griffiths insists that to assert that there are many true religions "is precisely to claim that some of the doctrine-expressing sentences of some religious communities are false.…and such an interesting and potentially religiously divisive assertion cries out for justification through

[24] This criticism seems to apply most forcefully to Hick's position, which ultimately reduces all differences between the religions to the level of the merely phenomenal–which could be read to suggest that such differences, which constitute the main object of study for scholars of religion, as well as the distinguishing characteristics of these religions for the communities which hold them, are ultimately unimportant. Though I am sure that Hick would resist this reading of his position, it nevertheless appears to be part of the common core pluralist *rhetorical* strategy to downplay–rather than celebrate–differences in the name of harmony among religious communities.

argument" (Griffiths 1991:50)–which, of course, suggests that such a justification has yet to be provided by those who advocate such a view.

In its least charitable formulation, this critique amounts to the claim that religious pluralists do not *want* to make the effort to explore the rich diversity of actual religious traditions, that they wish "to be freed from the demands of interpretation" (Tracy 1987:90)–hence the reference, on the back cover of Griffiths' work, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Griffiths 1990), to "lazy pluralists."

How decisive is this a priorism critique for religious pluralism? *Must* this position be characterized by a lack of engagement with the world's actual religious traditions? In the words of David Tracy, who raises this objection, and is yet, himself, a religious pluralist:

> Pluralism–more accurately, perhaps, a pluralistic attitude–is one possible response to the fact of religious plurality. It is an attitude I fundamentally trust. But whenever any affirmation of pluralism, including my own, past and present, becomes simply a passive response to more and more possibilities, none of which shall ever be practiced, then pluralism demands suspicion (Tracy 1987:90).

On Tracy's understanding, it seems that religious pluralism need not be simply an a priori response to the fact of religious plurality, lacking any sense of genuine engagement with the possibilities that it seeks to assess; but it always runs the *danger* of becoming a "passive response" of this kind. In other words, it is always tempting–because it is easy to do so–to respond to the fact of a plurality of religions by simply saying, "They're all true, in some sense," without going through the difficult task of actually listening to what they have to say. This a priorism or lack of engagement critique carries force precisely to the extent that it actually describes any current version of religious pluralism. To what extent this criticism characterizes any particular pluralist author or authors, I would not want to venture to guess. It seems to me that every religious pluralist I have ever read has come to a pluralistic conclusion after years of careful study of multiple traditions–though the inner logic of common core religious pluralisms does seem to lend itself to just such a criticism.

Tracy articulates this criticism as a self-critique, as a cautionary appeal to all religious pluralists, including himself, to avoid allowing their views to take on this a priori character.

The version of religious pluralism that I intend to develop in this dissertation is itself an a priori position, inasmuch as my conclusion that many religions are true is derived as an entailment from my own Whiteheadian metaphysical presuppositions. But I also seek to develop, on the basis of Jain philosophy, an open-ended interpretive method compatible with these presuppositions for engaging with actual religious claims; and my view that the religions are complementary is the tentative result of my application of this method.

2.8 The Lack of Argument or Meta-Theory Critique

According to Paul Griffiths, as we have seen, religious pluralists have not provided an adequate rational justification for the claims that they make. Rather than simply presume its truth because they happen to find it, for ethical or political reasons, an attractive position to take–which is what he claims, with some justification, that they, in fact, do[25]–Griffiths claims that religious pluralists ought to engage in the same kind of logical defense on behalf of their position as the representative intellectuals of religious communities traditionally have in order to establish the preferability of their own view over that of others which they find to be at odds with it. What Griffiths claims religious pluralists must do in order to justify their view, in other words, is to take a firm position in an interreligious debate on its behalf: to engage in interreligious apologetics on behalf of religious pluralism.

Why, one might ask, is this any more necessary for religious pluralists than for any other group defined by belief in a particular point of view? Does it not apply to one who takes a position on any issue–that the taking of such a position places one, at least implicitly,

[25] Griffiths–somewhat sarcastically–characterizes the attitude of religious pluralists toward their position in the following way: "…[I]f everyone becomes convinced of the truth of this position, then missionaries will pack their bags, Jews, Muslims, and Christians will stop fighting one another in the Middle East, Buddhists and Hindus will stop fighting one another in Sri Lanka, and the world will become a much happier and more habitable place" (Griffiths 1991:48).

on a particular side of whatever that issue might happen to be? The problem, according to Griffiths, S. Mark Heim, and other critics of religious pluralism, is that supporters of this position, such as John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Paul F. Knitter, rather than engage in debate on an equal level with those who reject their claims, typically choose to assume a 'meta-position,' above the fray of interreligious debate, proposing religious pluralism as a religiously neutral theory or intellectual common ground on the sole basis of which open and mutually respectful interreligious dialogue can occur. They propose religious pluralism, in other words, as a precondition for such dialogue, rather than as another position within an already ongoing conversation.

Such a move, according to these critics, is illegitimate. As Griffiths points out in the passage that I have cited, the truth of religious pluralism is far from self-evident. Its claim that many religions are true is, in fact, incompatible with some of the claims made by many of these very same religions–namely, claims to the effect that one religion and one religion alone (the one making the claim) is, in fact, true. In other words, whereas religious pluralists are quite happy to claim that Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are all 'valid and effective forms of human awareness of and response to the Eternal One,' many Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists would reject this claim on grounds specific to their respective religious traditions, claiming instead that Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism alone is the one, true religion.

Religious pluralism sets itself in opposition to such claims and, according to its critics, thereby places itself in competition with them, as one more competing set of religious views *among*–rather than 'above' or 'beyond'–the many that exist. Rather than resolving the plurality of religious perspectives into a transcendent unity through its postulation of a common core of valid and salvifically effective religious experience of the 'Eternal One,' religious pluralists have simply added one more element–their own view of truth and salvation–to that already existing plurality.

According to the critics of religious pluralism, if the preferability of this position is to be asserted over that of the claims of religious exclusivists–of those who deny the truth of more than one religion–then it must be defended on the same logical grounds as such claims as these–claims with which it is, at least prima facie, incompatible. Religious pluralism, as Heim asserts, is not a religiously neutral theory or common ground for interreligious dialogue. It is a position with definite religious implications. As such, it is, in this sense, one more religious vision of reality–indeed, another 'religion'–among others, and it must defend its claims accordingly, rather than indulge in the arguably elitist and paternalistic, not to mention metaphysically incoherent, pretense that it is somehow above the fray, above the level of argument with other, competing views (Heim 1995:141-142).

Why, though, one might ask, should this present a problem for religious pluralists? Why could a religious pluralist not marshal proper philosophical arguments, as I intend to do, on behalf of this position–arguments which would seek to demonstrate, on logical grounds, that the claims of religious pluralism are more likely than not to be the case? Religious pluralists have refrained from taking this approach for a reason. They have generally tended to avoid such straightforward argumentation and intellectual exchange because they perceive it as fundamentally flawed–as a form of intellectual violence against which they see themselves as being in protest. It is, in fact, for this very reason that many have become religious pluralists. They perceive that traditional interreligious debate, in which the representative intellectuals of religious communities attack the views of other communities as false, has historically provided intellectual justification for interreligious violence on a massive scale (Hick 1987:16-36). Such debate is therefore perilous. It can *itself* constitute a form of violence if it is directed at a community that is in the process of being victimized as the target of genocide, colonization, or exploitation.[26] For many,

[26] That Griffiths, the most prominent supporter of this form of debate, is highly sensitive to its political dimensions and potential abuses is, I think, amply demonstrated

therefore, the choice to refrain from such argument out of a commitment to nonviolence is not only the motivation for choosing, but is itself *constitutive of*, religious pluralism.

But does this historical awareness of the ideological uses of interreligious apologetics necessarily lead to the conclusion that all such debate is inherently violent and immoral? This conclusion would seem to present insuperable logical difficulties; for to claim that it is wrong to claim that the claims of others are wrong is itself to claim that the claims of others are wrong–namely, the claims of those who claim that the claims of others are wrong, the claims of those who engage in interreligious debate of the kind that scholars like Griffiths advocate. Religious pluralism as a form of intellectual nonviolence–if public disagreement indeed *necessarily* constitutes a form of violence–inevitably fails; for, unless it wants to renounce its ethical imperative and become indistinguishable from a nihilistic relativism, it must end up engaging in the same kind of 'violence,' at least implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, as those forms of discourse against which it is claimed to be a form of protest. And this is necessarily the case, particularly when such religious pluralists as Knitter conceive of their ethical imperative as including the prophetic denunciation of the evils perpetuated by such historical institutions as patriarchy and global capitalism (Knitter 1987:178-200). Agreement, or even silence, in such a situation is tantamount to complicity with evil. Religious pluralists, then, by their own criteria–at least those, like Knitter, who see this position as a tool for political transformation–*must* engage in public debate with those with whom they disagree. Knitter, in fact, acknowledges this quite openly in *One Earth Many Religions* (Knitter 1995), in which he seeks to address the various criticisms to which religious pluralism has been subjected and to clarify his position accordingly. This simply underscores the point made earlier that religious pluralism is a definite point of view–one more view among many. It therefore logically precludes certain other points of

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in his chapter on the proper conditions for engaging in interreligious apologetics (Griffiths 1991:77-80).

view and thereby involves itself, willingly or not, in intellectual debate, as one option among others.

If religious pluralists are willing (as, for example, Knitter seems to be) to concede this point, to accept that their view is one more interpretation, one more option among many–that they are, themselves, *within* the plurality of views, just as, in Hick's Copernican revolution, Christianity becomes one more religious path among many–then this objection will not apply to them.

Again, this objection seems related to the deep connections between religious pluralism–at least its common core variety–and theological liberalism. Religious pluralism presents itself as 'objective' and 'neutral' because, like the modern commitment upon which it is based, it constitutes a rejection of what is perceived to be the arbitrariness of particularity. But if this commitment is combined with a recognition of the ultimate impossibility of a truly objective perspective (except for that of God, or a *kevalin*), then a particular metaphysical perspective must be adopted to serve as its conceptual basis.

2.9 The Non-Necessity for Dialogue or Superfluity Critique

Logically connected with the lack of argument or meta-theory critique is the charge that religious pluralism, despite its self-portrayal as a necessary condition for any authentic interreligious dialogue, and a nonviolent corrective to the religious imperialism implicit in exclusivism and inclusivism, does not, in fact, constitute such a condition or corrective at all. What it, in fact, constitutes, according to its critics, is not a necessary condition or 'neutral ground' for interreligious dialogue, a common core of agreement, but rather a distinctive new position, a new participant in, rather than a common ground for, an already ongoing interreligious conversation. Religious pluralism, particularly its common core variety, is, on this reading, a new form of inclusivism, an allegedly 'higher' perspective which claims to be the norm for determining the truth of the claims of other religions.

Many, indeed most, current pluralistic interpretations of religion are constructed with the explicit aim in mind of fostering constructive, open and mutually respectful interreligious dialogue by creating the proper conditions for such dialogue in the form of a pluralistic understanding of religion that respects all positions as having some possible validity, and all religions as having a common transcendent foundation and salvific end. As one prominent advocate of religious pluralism, Paul F. Knitter, writes, "Dialogue must be based on the recognition of the possible truth in all religions; the ability to recognize this truth must be grounded in the hypothesis of a common ground and goal for all religions" (Knitter 1985:208). The holding of a pluralistic interpretation of religion, on this view, is thus a necessary condition for the kind of mutually respectful interreligious dialogue that religious pluralists wish to promote, any other basis for such dialogue being, presumably, either ineffective (which is an empirical claim) or illegitimate (which is an evaluative claim), constituting interreligious intellectual imperialism, "a colonization of another, a subtle form of violence" (Wells [1997]).

As Heim points out, however, peaceful and productive interreligious dialogues were, historically, already occurring long before religious pluralists offered their critique of exclusivism and inclusivism, and such dialogue continues to occur with or without the input of religious pluralists:

> I would suggest that the pluralistic doctrines add nothing distinctive to these existing dialogues. There is no specific type or agenda of dialogue that is added to our repertoire by virtue of pluralistic views. Nor are those views a necessary condition or a uniquely effective motivation for engaging in such interactions. All of these dialogues were in fact pioneered and carried on by persons inclusivist if not exclusivist by pluralist reckoning.…Today those of pluralist conviction participate, but hardly predominate in these dialogues. And they seem subject to the same kinds of internal conflict over the most fruitful paths of encounter as Christians of other views (Heim 1995:101).

Religious pluralism, in fact, constitutes a radically new interpretation of religion which, if its acceptance is, indeed, to be a condition for interreligious dialogue, demands a reinterpretation of the claims of the world's religious communities by their represenatives no

less radical than those demanded by traditional Christian views of the world's religions–such as that they are but 'preparations for the gospel,' finding their ultimate fulfillment only in Christ. Griffiths, in particular, is quite insistent on this score:

> A prerequisite for proper interreligious dialogue, if the pluralists are right, is…the development of a radically new understanding of their own traditions by all participants in it. It is not difficult to see in this traditional Christian imperialism with a new twist: Because some Christian theologians feel called upon to reject or reinterpret the traditional exclusivism and condescension to nonmembers evident in their own community, they require of their dialogue partners an identical rejection and an identical reinterpretation. Christians are still, as they almost always have, setting both the agenda and the terms of interreligious dialogue. They are happy to talk but much less inclined to listen, even when their own pluralistic inclinations suggest that they might have something to learn. This suggests, to put it mildly, a significant lack of internal coherence in a strictly pluralistic position (Griffiths 1990:158).

If Griffiths is correct, then not only is religious pluralism not a necessary condition for interreligious dialogue, it, in fact, constitutes yet another form of Christian religious imperialism–only this time wearing the benign face of Western liberalism, rather than that of the more openly triumphalist Christendom of the 'church militant.'

The holding of a pluralistic understanding of religion seems, in fact, neither to be a necessary condition nor even a guarantee for a mutually respectful interreligious dialogue. Those who hold a pluralistic view are not prevented, by their holding of this view, from engaging in the 'violence' of excluding those who disagree with them from participation in dialogue as they conceive of it. Pluralistic charity does seem, in practice, to have limits. As Heim, again, recounts:

> At one conference a well-known pluralist theologian said, in good humor, to a decidedly non-pluralist Jewish theologian, the veteran of long years of interfaith discussions, "With your views, you shouldn't be involved in dialogue." "Nevertheless, I am," he replied, and suggested that it was perhaps the pluralist theory that ought to be adjusted and not the reality he represented. In any event, the Jewish theologian continued, when liberal Christians and liberals of other traditions get together to talk about their liberalism, he did not call that dialogue. This affable exchange was capped by another pluralist voice in the audience who allowed that though his Jewish compatriot might be able to dialogue "after a fashion," he would be unable to participate in *authentic* dialogue until he had adopted a thoroughly

> pluralistic outlook. Here it would seem that the old lamented triumphalist attitudes of Christians remain in vigorous health, if in different forms (Heim 1995:109).[27]

In keeping with this empirical observation, then, the evaluative issue of whether or not a dialogue that is based on non-pluralistic assumptions is–even if mutually respectful, and even productive–really an *authentic* dialogue, or just a disguised form of intellectual violence, can itself be turned back against the supporters of religious pluralism.

Again we encounter the realization that while religious pluralism purports to be a neutral 'meta-theory' of religion it, in fact, constitutes a new and distinct set of claims, another participant in, rather than the neutral ground for, the ongoing interreligious (and intrareligious) conversation. Accepting the validity of this claim, the version of religious pluralism that I propose will not deny its own status as a potential conversation partner with the world's religions. Although I am a wholehearted supporter of interreligious dialogue, and the goals of dialogue that other religious pluralists support, I believe that all is required for such a dialogue to occur is mutual respect and a willingness to learn from the Other–and even to incorporate the insights of the Other into one's own system of belief. Perhaps this could be called a 'pluralistic attitude.' In this sense I am aligned with such dialogical pluralists as Knitter, Panikkar and Tracy. But, as I have said before, my reason for defending and reformulating the constitutive claim of religious pluralism is not, primarily, to foster dialogue, but to articulate the entailments of my own pluralistic religious belief system and my own 'interior dialogue' with the world's religions. Unlike other religious pluralists, I do not come to these issues as an exclusive member of only one religious community, but as someone trying to take the best from the traditions that have been left to me in order to create a worldview which coheres with my own reason and experience, and hoping to encourage others in my situation to boldly and creatively do the same, in the faith that ours need not be derided as a 'smorgasbord' approach to religion, but can, itself,

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[27] Emphasis mine.

constitute a logically valid and compelling system of belief. Dialogue is certainly central to this process–but it is not the *end* of the process, which *has* no end.

The version of religious pluralism which I am trying to develop in this dissertation, then, will, I think, avoid both the lack of argument or meta-theory critique and the non-necessity for dialogue or superfluity critique. I *do* intend to develop a logical argument for my position which does *not* claim to be neutral on metaphysical issues, and I do *not* hold the view that holding a view such as mine is a necessary condition for engagement in interreligious (or interphilosophical or interdisciplinary) dialogue. Religious pluralists do, I think, make a valid point if their claims about the connections between a pluralistic view and interreligious dialogue can be read as the claim that religious pluralism, *by its inner logic*, is the position that is most conducive to such dialogue. But that this need not be the case in practice–that the opposite, in fact, *can* be the case–must, I think, be conceded, particularly in light of the observations made by Griffiths and Heim. I think that Tracy is correct in his assertion that the true precondition for such dialogue, in both theory and practice, is a pluralistic *attitude*–a willingness to listen to and learn from the Other. Whether one theorizes this attitude coherently or not is another matter.

Again, both of these critiques of religious pluralism–its lack of argument and its superfluity to dialogue–are connected, I think, with the renunciation by religious pluralists of constructive metaphysics. The best reason to argue with religious exclusivism is because it is wrong and can be shown to be wrong. There need be no shame in this.

2.10 The Intellectual Imperialism or Ideology Critique

We have already seen, in the last section, that the claims of religious pluralists that their opponents' positions constitute a form of theological imperialism, of intellectual violence, can be turned back against them–that claiming to set the terms upon which a legitimate conversation can occur is no less 'violent' when engaged in by a liberal Christian

pluralist than by the most ardent missionary. This leads us to another, I think, more serious criticism of religious pluralism, particularly of its common core variety.

In a powerful article (Surin 1990), Kenneth Surin points out the possible complicity such theories can be shown to share with the agenda of global capitalism–the attempted homogenization of world culture and its transformation into one, giant 'supersystem.' By emphasizing the equality–in Hick's terms, the 'rough parity'–of religious traditions and watering down their genuine diversity into a single, a prioristic view, Surin charges, pluralistic theories of religion conceal the very real *inequalities* that exist in actuality between the adherents of most of the world's diverse religious traditions and the dominant worldviews of the West–which religious pluralism, in fact, represents. Surin is not, I think, questioning the sincerity of common core religious pluralists such as Hick or Smith. His is an *ideology* critique, an analysis which seeks to penetrate to the economic and political forces unconsciously shaping religious pluralism and making it complicit with their agenda of world domination. What is required if one truly desires the goals which religious pluralists seek, Surin maintains, is a true *pluralism*, which would celebrate difference, thus empowering the religious Other to transform her belief system into a way of resisting the dominant paradigm, rather than being subsumed within it–in the manner that difference is subsumed in systems such as Hick's and Smith's.

I must say that I find Surin's argument–and his politics–compelling. As I intend to argue later, I believe a Jain approach to religious plurality, which affirms both similarity and difference, addresses these concerns on several levels–both in terms of its inner logic and its intrinsic 'otherness' to the dominant paradigms of the modern West.

2.11 The Lack of Exclusionary Criteria or Relativism Critique

The most serious logical problem facing religious pluralism, however, is probably that of exclusionary criteria. If many, but not all, religions are true–as current forms of religious pluralism maintain–then how does one determine which ones? If one does not try to make a distinction between true and false religions, then one runs the risk of including among the "valid and effective forms of human awareness of and response to the Eternal One" such options as Nazism–which religious pluralists universally find morally reprehensible–and of thereby endorsing these options as valid. This is the problem of relativism. But if one does make such a distinction, then one is setting up a particular standard by which the truth or falsity of religious claims is to be judged–the very phenomenon of intellectual violence and imperialism against which this position is generally intended to protest. What is the way out of this dilemma?

If religious *plurality* is understood to be a phenomenon, then religious *pluralism*, is a philosophical (and, in some contexts, theological) position–an evaluative stance– *about* religious plurality which conceives of this phenomenon in positive terms. It is, more specifically, a position that conceives of religious plurality not as a mere effect of human ignorance or perversity, of the fact that we are either unable or unwilling to come to a consensus on the true nature of the cosmos and the meaning of our existence within it. It is a position which conceives of religious plurality, rather, as a good–as a fact which, by its existence, enhances and increases the total richness and beauty of the universe of which it forms an element.

As a position which conceives of religious plurality as a good thing, and of a plurality of religions as being, in some sense, true, and as potential vehicles for the attainment of human salvation–the highest possible human good–religious pluralism can be characterized as a position that expresses a fundamental optimism about humanity, a deep confidence in the ability of human beings to construct beautiful and compelling systems of

meaning, and in the subsequent ability of those systems to facilitate the attainment of the ultimate end (or ends) for which they were conceived.[28] Religious pluralism thus gives expression to what William James calls "the religion of healthy-mindedness," "the tendency which looks on all things and sees that they are good" (James 1982:78-126, 87).

But does religious pluralism truly see *all* things as good? In speaking of a plurality of true and salvifically efficacious ways of being religious, an ambiguity arises. This ambiguity of religious pluralism, or, as Griffiths calls it, "universalist perspectivalism" (Griffiths 1991:46-51), concerns the extent to which this position truly is a universalism. Do religious pluralists, in fact, affirm that *all* religions are, in some sense, true? Or do they claim only that a *plurality* of such religions exists–that many, but not all, religions are true?

According to Schubert Ogden's analysis, "with certain notable exceptions, religious pluralists have *not* usually claimed that all religions are true or have equal adequacy" (Ogden 1992a:23).[29] Setting aside, for the moment, the fact that affirming that all religions are true is not the same as claiming that they all have *equal* adequacy I would have to say, as a matter of empirical fact, that I agree with Ogden's assessment. Religious pluralists have not, for the most part, claimed that *all* religions are true. They have claimed only that there are *many*–a *plurality* of–true religions. In some instances, as Ogden points out, they have not even gone this far, but have made the more modest claim, essentially identical with Ogden's own position, that there *may be* more than one true religion, but that this is not *necessarily* the case (Ibid:24).

[28] This characterization of religions as human constructs is not intended to rule out the claim of any religion to contain or to consist of a divine revelation. It does reflect a conception of revelation which requires at least some level of human participation in any divine revelatory activity to human beings, which is seen as occurring through the (for human beings) necessary media of the human imagination and such human cultural constructs as language, though acting to transform these as well. For a fuller elaboration of a conception of revelation quite similar to my own, at least in this regard, see Ward 1994.

[29] Emphasis mine.

The hesitation of religious pluralists to embrace a true universalism arises, I think, from two confusions, which Ogden shares–that to say that a religion is *true* is necessarily to claim that it is *wholly* true, and that to assert a plurality of true religions is to assert a plurality of religions all true *in the same sense*. Because they wish to exclude from the realm of truth and salvific efficacy certain claims that they find morally repugnant, religious pluralists try to develop criteria of exclusion which will omit the claims of certain religious communities–those with whose claims they rightly feel moral discomfort–from this realm. As Griffiths writes:

> In brief: perspectivalists cannot apply an equivalence principle to all doctrine-expressing sentences (e.g., the equivalence principle that all, if assented to, are equally productive of desirable effects), or to all religious communities (e.g., that all are equally effective contexts for the salvific transformation of their members). If they attempt to do so, they end with the extremely undesirable conclusion that members of quasireligious communities such as the SS, or those followers of Jim Jones who died at Jonestown, are being salvifically transformed by their membership to just the same extent as are devout Sunni Muslims or Hasidic Jews. And once this absurdity is rejected, perspectivalists can no longer be properly called 'universalist' (Griffiths 1991:49).

The problem, as I see it, is with the understanding of the meaning of the term 'universalist' as necessarily involving the application of an *equivalence* principle to all religious claims (that they are all *equally* true and *equally* productive of desirable effects) and to all religious communities (that they are all *equally* effective contexts for the salvific transformation of their members). Because Griffiths and the religious pluralists share this understanding of the term 'universalist,' both distance themselves from the characterization of religious pluralism as a universalist position. Religious pluralists do so because they do not want to fall into the unpleasant situation which Griffiths describes of affirming the truth of claims or supporting the goals of communities which they rightly find to be morally reprehensible. They are also concerned to avoid the pitfalls of a nihilistic relativism (Race 1982:90)–which is ultimately, one may recall, a form of extreme agnosticism which denies the very possibility of evaluating truth claims at all. Griffiths claims that perspectivalism

cannot “be properly be called ‘universalist,’” while yet referring to this position as “universalist perspectivalism,” to highlight, I suspect, the fact that the application of an equivalence principle to *some* religions and religious claims, but not to others, with no strong criteria for exclusion as the basis for this distinction, exhibits a deep incoherence in the pluralistic position as it is currently formulated–an incoherence which Griffiths, as an opponent of religious pluralism, wishes to exploit; for a universalist perspectivalism which is not, in fact, universalist is, of course, a contradiction in terms.

I propose, however, to keep the term ‘universalist perspectivalism’ as a synonym for my own version of religious pluralism; for it is my view that an alternative understanding of the term ‘universalist’ which involves not a principle of equivalence, but a conception of the relativity of truth, of truth-expression as operating on a continuum, is possible. With this understanding, I shall argue, one may claim that *all* religions are, in some sense, true–though not wholly true or true in the same sense–and that all truth-claims are neither wholly true nor wholly false, but exist somewhere on the continuum of the relative adequacy of truth-expression. This is universalist because it applies strictly to *all* claims. There is no need to make exceptions or to establish criteria for exclusion; and, as I argued in the previous chapter, this claim applies to itself as well, so there is no self-referential incoherence. What is required, of course, is some standard of relative adequacy by which one may judge, for example, that at least some of the constitutive claims of the SS or of the Jonestown community do not express truth or effect salvific transformation with anything near the relative adequacy of the constitutive claims of Sunni Islam or Hasidic Judaism. An understanding of truth-expression as relative, as a continuum, can not only perform the work which Griffiths rightly claims current pluralistic criteria for exclusion cannot, it is also, I would claim, the only means by which a coherent religious pluralism can be formulated. Religious pluralism, in other words, in order to be coherent, *must* be universalist (in the qualified sense that I have described)–presupposing a

philosophy of universal relativity. The only alternative is the ad hoc introduction of exclusionary criteria into a system by which they are not necessitated, but which, in their absence, fails to make interpretive distinctions, some of which are of a most urgent ethical character. This conception of universal relativity is, of course, that of the Jains–and of Whitehead–which forms the basis for the reconceived religious pluralism that I propose.

2.12 Religious Pluralism or Universalist Perspectivalism? To Be or Not To Be (a Religious Pluralist)

One may, of course, wonder whether what I am proposing is really a modification of religious pluralism at all, or the creation of another, new response to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality: *universalist perspectivalism*–the claim that not only many, but *all* religions are, in some sense, true.

I believe that this objection may be valid. Its answer depends upon how well my position satisfies MacIntyre's third criterion for the resolution of epistemological crises (MacIntyre 1988:362): Does my position exhibit some fundamental continuity with the shared beliefs in terms of which religious pluralism has been defined up to this point, or is it something completely new? Does it change religious pluralism, or go beyond it?

Ultimately, I think, this is primarily a terminological issue. I call my position a 'religious pluralism' because it affirms the truth (albeit the relative truth) of a plurality of religions–which I take to be the fundamental, distinguishing claim of this position. I have found that, because my position incorporates the affirmation of an absolute along with–and in a relation of logical entailment to–its affirmation of universal relativity, some religious pluralists have perceived it as, "approaching pluralism…but not quite" (Wells [1997]). I, however, see no other way around the problem of relativism which current formulations of this position present–and the problem of relativism is, I think, the single most debilitating problem facing this position today. So central is this concern to my current project that another way of summarizing it could be as an attempt to repair this particular deficiency in

contemporary religious pluralism. Although contemporary religious pluralists seem to be pushed in the direction of relativism by their ethical imperative to oppose (illegitimate) absolutisms, my plea to them is to recognize that moving too much in a relativist direction in fact undermines the very ethical imperatives which motivate them–imperatives which need grounding in a definite metaphysical perspective if they are to be argued successfully. It is thus because I am in profound *agreement* with the ethical imperatives of contemporary religious pluralists that I disagree with them on the issues of relativism and metaphysics.

2.13 Conclusion: The Prospects for a Valid Religious Pluralism

Having explored religious pluralism as it is currently formulated and examining a number of the valid critiques which have been leveled against it–namely, the a priorism or lack of engagement critique, the lack of argument or meta-theory critique, the non-necessity for dialogue or superfluity critique, the intellectual imperialism or ideology critique, and the lack of exclusionary criteria or relativism critique–one can see how it might be possible to reconstruct this position in such a way as to render it a plausible option for belief, avoiding these critiques and fulfilling the specific conditions outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Regarding the a priorism critique, my claim is that an a priori affirmation of religious pluralism can be warranted on metaphysical grounds. It is my intention to produce just such a metaphysical argument for the validity of this position in this dissertation. The criticism is accepted, however, that such an a priori affirmation tells one nothing substantive about the actual content of the claims of the world's historical religions in the absence of the application of an interpretive system. The development of just such a system, therefore, is also an aim of this dissertation.

Regarding the lack of argument critique, its validity is accepted and traced to the mistaken assumption of many religious pluralists that such argument is inimical to the purposes of dialogue. Such argument, however, is recognized by other religious

pluralists, such as Paul Knitter, to be essential to the affirmation of their ethical imperative and is accepted as such. This is my position as well.

Regarding the non-necessity for dialogue critique, if one concedes the lack of argument critique, it also follows that religious pluralism is not a meta-theory or necessary condition for dialogue, but one position among others–a participant at the table of dialogue, rather than the table itself. This is also a critique which I accept and find coherent with my own affirmation of religious pluralism as an entailment of my own universalist religious beliefs. It is certainly a good thing to try to promote the cause of interreligious dialogue in one's scholarly work, but no single theoretical position is a precondition for such dialogue.

Regarding Kenneth Surin's ideology critique, it is also, like the lack of argument and non-necessity for dialogue critiques, well-taken. Particularly if one intends for one's theoretical perspective to be conducive to–indeed, to be a philosophy of–resistance against oppression, one must avoid the smoothing over of actual inequalities in one's work in the name of a harmony which does not yet, in fact, exist. Such one-sided emphasis on resemblances, I shall argue later, is not only politically questionable, but, on both a process and a Jain account, metaphysically incoherent–a form of *durnaya*, or *ekāntavāda*–though a philosophy of *absolute* difference, which would undermine the very real commonalities shared by human beings, and thus the possibility of communication between them, would be similarly one-sided. (I do not, however, think that this is what Surin advocates.)

Finally, and I think most seriously, regarding the lack of exclusionary criteria (or relativism) critique–this problem, which current versions of religious pluralism fail to coherently address, I seek to address with my affirmation of absolute relativity. If all religious claims can be shown to have some measure–though not necessarily equal measures–of both validity and invalidity, then the necessity for exclusionary criteria is removed–or rather, replaced–by the interpretive principle of relativity itself, as it is applied

to various claims to determine their conformity or non-conformity to necessary truths as these are revealed through the process of metaphysical reflection.

If the logical *possibility* of a plausible or valid religious pluralism has been established, then the next step is to make a negative case for this position by demonstrating the relative *im*plausibility of its alternatives. In other words, the question still remains to be answered, "Even if it is possible to construct a religious pluralism which avoids or even addresses the various objections that currently apply to this position, why go through the mental gymnastics? Why go to all the trouble of reformulating such a problematic position as religious pluralism when other, more compelling options are already available?" To address this question, to suggest reasons for believing that more compelling options are *not* available, is the point of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

WHY NO OTHER RESPONSE?

Weighing the Alternatives to Religious Pluralism

3.1 Making a Negative Case for Religious Pluralism: Other Possible Responses to the Fundamental Question of Truth and Religious Plurality

One of the first difficulties which one faces in attempting to develop an answer to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality is the fact that the possible ways of responding to it vary almost as much as do the world's religions themselves–arguably more so if one takes each of these religions to itself constitute an at least implicit response to this question. Why, out of all of these possibilities, should one opt for a pluralistic response? Why not opt for one of the alternatives to religious pluralism? Maybe all of these alternatives are wrong and a new kind of position is necessary.

Like anyone who takes a position on an issue, the religious pluralist who would successfully address this set of questions, who would justify taking a pluralistic position and not another, must try to show not only that a valid religious pluralism is conceivable but also that the alternatives to religious pluralism are problematic in ways that it is not, that it is the preferable option because it is, in terms of standards upon which even its rivals could conceivably agree, the superior–the more logically viable–position. One who wishes to make the strongest possible case for religious pluralism is forced, in other words, to engage in what Paul J. Griffiths calls "positive apologetics":

> Positive apologetics…is a discourse designed to show that the ordered set of doctrine-expressing sentences constituting a particular religious community's doctrines is cognitively superior, in some important respect(s), to that constituting another religious community's doctrines.…[It] tries to show, by cumulative-case arguments, that the conceptual system it is attempting to establish is more likely

> than not, or more likely than some specific competitor, to be true, both in its parts and as a whole (Griffiths 1991:14-15).

Whether a religious pluralist can do this in a way that is consistent with the constitutive pluralistic commitment to intellectual nonviolence, however, is an open question, and an issue that I think has yet to be satisfactorily resolved within the religious pluralist community. It is, in fact, due to the problems inherent in confronting this very issue that I suspect the vast majority of the difficulties with religious pluralism pointed out by its opponents to have arisen–the problems inherent in defending one view among others while claiming, *as one's view*, that all views have value.

I shall return to this issue–and propose my own response to it–later, in relation to my incorporation of the Jain doctrines of relativity into a revised pluralistic hypothesis; for these doctrines, it has been claimed, articulate a philosophy of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*,' of tolerance or nonviolence. It was, in fact, this very claim on their behalf that initially drew them to my attention as having possibilities for the reformulation of religious pluralism.[1] For now, I shall simply state, as a pluralist must, that to prefer one view over others need not entail a wholesale rejection of those other views. It can–and, I think, should–include an appreciation for what is valid in those views. Such an appreciation can, in fact, serve as the very basis for one's preference for one view over the rest–the view that is most coherently able to incorporate within itself the valid insights contained in all of the others as their 'higher synthesis.' It is my position that religious pluralism constitutes–or rather, that it *can* constitute–precisely such a synthetic view, and that it is on this basis that a logically viable pluralistic philosophy of religions can best be defended.

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[1] In Bimal Krishna Matilal's *Logic, Language and Reality: Indian Philosophy and Contemporary Issues* (Matilal 1990:313-314). The fact that this claim is historically problematic does not, in my opinion, diminish the possibility that these doctrines can *logically* function to articulate a philosophy of *ahiṃsā*. See Cort [1997] and Folkert 1993:215-227. This issue shall be explored in greater detail later.

It is also precisely because of my understanding of pluralism as a synthetic view, as a view inclusive of its alternatives, that I do not conceive of these alternatives as being *absolutely* false–or even of pluralism itself as being absolutely true, if this means that it is to be a closed system, with no room for growth, for improvement, for positive transformation. Rather than think in terms of absolute truth or falsity, I find it to be far more consistent with a pluralistic position to think in terms of a broad continuum or spectrum of truth and falsity, and to speak, after the manner of David Tracy, of the "relative adequacy" of ideas.[2]

To the possible charge that the very adoption of such a synthetic or potentially 'totalizing' view as I have suggested pluralism to be itself constitutes a form of violence toward other positions, I would respond that these other positions are in no way diminished by their inclusion in another; for the actual plurality of possible views is in no way decreased by this inclusion.[3] The emergence of this view, rather, *adds to* that total plurality; for it ultimately constitutes one more possible view among others, one more alternative, taking on the internal or 'subjective' form of a synthesis, but in fact joining the other views somewhere on the continuum of relative truth in the realm of possible ideas. This emergence thus acts as an instance of Whitehead's ontological principle: "The many

[2] As Tracy does consistently, for example, throughout the course of *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Tracy 1987), to which this dissertation owes its title.

[3] One could, of course, respond to this that there are views which insist that they cannot be so included, and that the attempt to do so therefore constitutes a form of hermeneutical 'violence.' On the understanding of truth operative in this dissertation, however, a true view is precisely one which *should* be incorporated into *all* other views–to the degree that its truth conditions theirs–and a necessary truth is a view which is necessarily included in all views by entailment. To the extent, then, that it is insisted that a view *cannot* be included in another, that view is, on this understanding, falsified. This is precisely the fallacy of one-sidedness, or *ekāntatā*, in the assertion of a view.

become one, and are increased by one" (Whitehead 1978:21). My synthesis of other views into my own constitutes my own unique perspective on the universe; and my articulation of this view constitutes its expression. The real violence occurs, I think, not when this expression seeks to add itself to the total plurality of articulated views, but when the attempt is made to silence *any* expression from without.

Bearing in mind the conception, mentioned above, of truth as a continuum, I would now like to give some sense of the possible responses to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality that are currently available, and what I see the position of religious pluralism to be on the continuum of truth-expression in relation to this broader set of possible views. My method shall be to list several possible ways of responding to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality–"What is the true religion?"–by beginning, after the manner of the ninth-century Jain monk and scholar Vidyānanda,[4] with

[4] Vidyānanda, *SatyaŚāsanapraŚasti*. This way of 'ranking' views, of listing them in order from least to most preferable (or vice versa), is not uncommon in traditional South Asian doxographical literature–Vedāntic and Buddhist as well as Jain. Another famous example is the Advaita Vedāntin Madhava's *SarvadarŚanasaṃgraha*. A Western version of it is, of course, engaged in by Hegel. The, I think, significant difference between my approach and that of Hegel, and of the Indian philosophers I have just mentioned, is that I do not find it proper to 'rank' entire religious or philosophical traditions in this way–due to their substantial complexity and internal diversity, as well as my assessment of their relative truth–but only specific propositions and sets of attitudes toward conceptual plurality in general.

Though he is not frequently cited within its pages, this project actually owes a great deal to Hegel, and could conceivably be seen as a work in the philosophy of religion in the Hegelian tradition. On my reading of Hegel, I agree with a great many of his claims, presuppositions, and goals–the dynamic and dialectical character of consciousness, the synthesis of pairs of contraries, the attempt to find a middle path between absolutism and relativism in relativity, the panentheism or qualified monism (*viŚiṣṭādvaita*) of his conception of the relationship between God and the world, the character of history as the field in which divinity comes to consciousness of Itself within human consciousness–but I also find that he tends to reduce the contingent to the necessary, resulting in his overly linear interpretation of the histories of religions and philosophies, and his offensively (from a contempoary perspective) Eurocentric philosophy of history. Long a 'fan' of Hegel, I have found both Whitehead and the Jains to express many of his same insights, while being free of what I take to be his fallacies, thus constituting a 'reformed Hegelianism.'

the one that I find the least compelling, the least expressive of truth among the options that I am exploring, and concluding, after proceeding along the continuum of truth-expression through a sequence of what I take to be progressively more adequate sets of views, with the position that I take to be the most adequate of all of these.

Bearing in mind, also, what I said earlier about appreciating the measure of validity in all views, and about utilizing this very appreciation as a criterion for preferring that view which is most inclusive of its alternatives over those alternatives themselves, it should be readily apparent that the evaluative norm around which I have organized these possible responses to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality is the degree to which they are inclusive of other views. I realize, of course, that this may seem like a circular method, presupposing the truth of religious pluralism–of the (partial) validity of all views–in order to justify placing it at the 'top' of my hierarchy. I mention it, though, not as an argument for the validity of this position, but in order to clarify the assumptions of the typology that I am employing.

What I offer here is clearly not a comprehensive or detailed summary of all the possible responses to this question. Many of the responses I have outlined refer, in fact, to a broad families of views. Those who hold these various positions often disagree as much with others within the same 'camp' (though on other issues) as they do with the adherents of other positions. Frequently, there are strong affinities between the views of particular thinkers in different camps, and intermediate positions, too, exist that do not quite fit into any of these categories, or which overlap several at once; so locating the view of a given scholar with respect to one of these positions can be an arbitrary matter. I nevertheless find this typology of views to be useful for conceptualizing the possible responses that the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality can evoke, and for positioning my own view–a form of religious pluralism–in relation to these.

In this chapter, it is my intention to engage with each of these positions in order to point out their relative inadequacies. This is an attempt to make a negative case for the validity of religious pluralism–that this position is not so inadequate a response to the question of truth and religious plurality as its many critics would maintain–for they have themselves been unable to come up with alternatives which are any less problematic.

Although this is the chapter in which I could be seen as 'going on the offensive,' it is my intention to carry out my critiques in a spirit of pluralistic charity, acknowledging the partial validity, as well as the invalidity, of the various claims that I examine. As Franklin I. Gamwell characterizes process metaphysics, for which he argues against other alternatives in his work, *The Divine Good: Modern Moral Theory and the Necessity of God*: "It is worth noting that the position for which this work seeks to argue is, relative to the others, constituted by its affirmations, so that other positions become problematic by virtue of their denials" (Gamwell 1990:158). This seems to me to echo the Jain affirmation that the invalidity of a particular perspective is constituted by its denial of what is valid in a contrary perspective. I find it interesting in this connection that an early Jain term for a heretical view is, in fact, *nihnava*, or 'denial' (Dixit 1971:129-130).

One of my fundamental assumptions in this dissertation is that the most adequate perspective is the one which incorporates what is true in all other perspectives within itself–though this 'most adequate perspective' is a speculative ideal, a necessary entailment of the principle of the universal relativity of truth-claims, approachable, as an actual perspective, only asymptotically, and never perfectly realizable this side of omniscience.[5] I am critical of the alternatives to religious pluralism, therefore, precisely in the senses in which they seek to deny something which I affirm. But in their positive affirmations, I hope to show, I

[5] In a sense, then, my inclusive pluralistic perspective is as far from the ultimate truth as any other–like *syādvāda* on Kundakunda's reading, in relation to the *niŚcayanaya*, the perspective of the ultimate. But it strives to be more adequate than other views on the mundane level (by including them), just as *syādvāda* is the most adequate (because it is the most inclusive) expression of the *vyavahāranaya*.

take them to be fundamentally correct, though partial, complementary perspectives, which I am more than happy to incorporate into my own worldview. My own perspective is itself admittedly, incomplete, but it seeks ever to overcome this incompleteness through listening to and adopting the insights of others. Hopefully this thereby already demonstrates the pluralistic interpretive principles of openness and relativity to which future chapters of this dissertation are devoted to developing.

3.2 Non-Religious Responses: Agnosticism and Atheistic Materialism

3.2.1 Agnosticism

I begin, then, with the response which involves the assertion, when confronted with the question of which, if any, of the world's religions offers a true account of the ultimate nature of reality and the meaning of human existence, that one does not know. I call this position *agnosticism*. Stronger versions of this position assert that *no one* knows–or even that no one *can* know–the answer to this question, or even that the question itself is meaningless, or that it is an improper question. One form of this last view is the view that such questions are ethically suspect because of the potential of their exploitation for political purposes. Subvarieties of this agnostic position include nihilistic forms of *relativism* or *perspectivism*, according to which no independent criteria whatsoever exist for determining the truth or falsity of any given set of conflicting views–a self-refuting position; for such a set could conceivably include this position itself. Regarding the issue of salvation, if, according to an agnostic position, one cannot know which, if any, of the religions is true, then it follows that one is probably also not in a position to determine which, if any, of the religions is capable of enabling one to attain salvation, or even which religious conception of salvation is the right one. It may even deny the validity of the question.

Although I have classified it as a non-religious response to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality, having in mind mainly post-Kantian philosophical responses to this question (such as the deliberate non-responsiveness of philosophers like Richard

Rorty), agnosticism also includes *fideism*, the view–which presupposes an externalist epistemology–that what knowledge we have is derived from the tradition into which we happen to have been acculturated, and that the attempt to answer the fundamental question of which tradition (or traditions) *ought* to inform our worldview and practice, independent of such coincidences, is a vain one. This view has recently been expressed with great eloquence by Paul J. Griffiths:

> Such searches [for the foundations of knowledge] suffice to prevent the prosecution of the intellectual enterprises they were designed to serve. They issue in the realization on the part of the clear-sighted…that the very most philosophy can do for and by itself is to demonstrate the impropriety and unrealizability of some intellectual ambitions. The deep and strictly idolatrous philosophical desire that informs the search for foundations is to find justifications for reading this and not that…doing this and not that…being this and not that…justifications that will carry conviction to all reasonable human beings. Such a desire cannot be realized, and is a direct outflow of the pride that turns from God and toward itself; in so doing, it empties its possessor's thought of all efficacy and, in the end, all existence. Its flames, such as they are, consume themselves and leave only a cold, fine-grained, smothering gray ash (Griffiths 1999:183).

My own position regarding such agnosticism is that, although it expresses a valid skepticism regarding the ability of human reason to penetrate, in any *final* way, to the depths of ultimate questions, it expresses this skepticism to an excessive degree–hence its relatively low position on the continuum of truth-expression. Such a position, it seems, fails to acknowledge the validity of the work of Whitehead and the arguments of process metaphysics, which, on the understanding that I propose, provide a grounding in reason reflecting on experience for traditional worldviews of the kind that scholars like Griffiths advocate. Fideism warns rightly against the idolatry of reason, but seems to disregard utterly the idolatry of *tradition*–against which religious pluralism is a bold protest. Neo-traditionalists, like Griffiths, rightly decry the anti-religious consensus which seems to predominate among contemporary intellectuals, and the foundationalist post-Kantian philosophy which has contributed to this situation. But the search for the foundations of knowledge, *properly pursued*, leads, on my view, beyond itself–to *brahmavidyā*, to the

experience of the truth based on a (relatively) correct view of reality (*samyagdarśana*)–and in this regard I am at one with the tradition of Neo-Vedāntic Hinduism. I therefore concur with Gamwell that it is not the modern commitment *as such* which has led to the current predominance of agnosticism and atheism in the academy, but rather specific substantive modern views which can be shown, *on a humanistic basis*, to be mistaken.

On the other hand, as a conceptual pluralist, I do affirm the sense in which even agnostic views express an authentic intuition into the relativity of knowledge–the truth that our knowledge, on the conceptual-linguistic level, is never perfect or complete. Agnostics like Griffiths offer a valid warning against, in Jain terms, mistaking the *vyavahāranaya* for the *niścayanaya*–the mundane perspective of reason for the direct *perception* of truth.

3.2.2 Atheistic Materialism

A second possible set of responses to the question of truth and religious plurality involves the positive assertion that *no* religion is true, that religion as such is purely social construction or mass delusion. I call these *atheistic* responses to the question of truth and religious plurality. In order to contrast these views with religious worldviews which do not include an *explicit* conception of God (such as some forms of Buddhism, Jainism, Daoism, and Confucianism), I shall refer to these religious worldviews as *nontheistic* rather than atheistic.[6] Regarding salvation, atheists generally find this term, as religiously defined, either meaningless or delusory; for it derives whatever meaning it has, so it is claimed, from a false system of belief, a false consciousness.

I find some atheistic interpretations of religion, such as those of Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud–the intellectual forebears of contemporary critical and deconstructive theories of culture–to be genuinely insightful, particularly with regard to the social, psychological, political, and economic dimensions of

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[6] I owe this helpful terminological distinction to Mary Pat Fisher (Fisher 1997:27-28).

religious belief and practice and the historical dynamics of religious institutions. Such interpretations of religion serve as powerful and necessary critiques of the abuse and oppression that often, perhaps inevitably, stem from religiously sanctioned institutional authority. Inasmuch, however, as these positions demand a wholesale rejection of the validity of religious claims *as such*, I find them, like agnosticism, excessive, and finally untenable, at least as total worldviews. Such responses are frequently guilty, I find, of the *genetic fallacy*–the error of judging the validity of truth claims solely on the basis of the historical processes that lead to their being made, rather than on their own merits as truth claims, in terms of their internal logic or credibility to human existence.

These positions, of course, embrace a vast family of diverse philosophical views, disciplinary methodologies, and political commitments. To attempt to address each of these schools of thought individually would require several dissertations. To simplify the matter, I shall therefore conflate these many diverse schools of thought; for I find that these views all share the same basic denial. They therefore commit the same basic error. My method will be to address this basic denial, thereby, hopefully, addressing all views which share it.

My brief response to these positions takes the form of a cosmological argument for the existence (and, by implication, the *knowability* of the existence) of God–an argument which implies, as Immanuel Kant correctly points out, the prior validity of an ontological or transcendental argument, an argument from the character of logical necessity to the existence of a necessary being (Kant 1978:35). My claim is essentially that the existence of God as conceived in process metaphysics–a concrete individual characterized by "complete relativity to all actuality and possibility" (Gamwell 1990:171)–is a necessary truth, that this truth is knowable through humanistically redeemable methods (and not only through the unique authority of some particular revelatory tradition, though it certainly does not rule out the possible existence of authentic divine self-revelations), and that it forms the logical, metaphysical foundation not only for any coherent conception of human (or non-human)

existence, but also for all ethical claims, such as those made by many atheists and agnostics who raise ethical objections to theistic metaphysical formulations.

This argument involves the claim, first of all, that the existence of some form of cosmic order is a necessary a priori condition for the possibility of any kind of experience. A coherent metaphysic–that is, a worldview which seeks to satisfy Whitehead's definition of speculative philosophy as "the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted" (Whitehead 1978:3)–must therefore include some notion of a "stable actuality whose mutual implication with the remainder of things secures an inevitable trend towards order," an actuality without which the universe would "be steadily relapsing into lawless chaos" (Whitehead 1967:115). This 'order' does not refer to a particular *physical* order, such as the kind that we are experiencing now, in our current 'cosmic epoch.' Indeed, according to Whitehead's cosmology, this order will eventually be superseded by another possible order, just as the current order, several billion years ago, superseded the previous one. The kind of order that is a necessary condition for the possibility of any kind of experience is a transcendental or *metaphysical* order, a unity in the plurality of perpetually arising and perishing events which relates them and gives them an organic cohesion, which constitutes them as a *universe*, rather than as a mere set of unrelated–and therefore, unknowable and unexperienceable–facts: in effect, non-entities. This unity takes the form of a center of experience characterized by absolute relativity to all actuality and possibility.

The 'stable actuality' of which Whitehead speaks, the concrete entity whose subjective experience is the objective ground of the world's existence, and which he calls 'God,' is a logically necessary being, a being whose existence is demanded by the logic of experience, "since there can be no determinate truth, correlating impartially the partial experiences of many actual entities, apart from one actual entity to which it can be referred" (Whitehead 1978:13). This, of course, is an abstract, metaphysical conception of God. It

need not be identified with any particular *religious* image or notion of the divine. Indeed, it may be–and I would argue that it is–logically compatible with particular conceptions of reality held by some secular worldviews, and by such nontheistic (or rather, non-*explicitly* theistic) religious worldviews as those of Buddhism, Jainism, and Daoism, which claim some form of necessary cosmic order to be foundational to the realm of human experience.

According to one version of the ontological argument developed by the medieval Christian philosopher, St. Anselm, a logically necessary being, such as God is proposed to be on this account, necessarily exists. Although this argument was later attacked by Kant–whose rejection of the classical metaphysical project, including its proofs for the existence of God, historically became the logical basis for the dominant antimetaphysical consensus against which I am arguing here–its validity is accepted by such process philosophers as Gamwell and Hartshorne. This is in part because the distinction between logical and ontological necessity which Kant invokes in his rejection of the ontological argument is invalid when applied to a being whose definition includes necessary existence. But it is also because the conception of God for which they argue is not the one rejected by Kant. The classical conception of God, which Kant criticizes, is of a *wholly* eternal and necessary being, with no contingent aspects and no real relations to the changing, temporal universe. The innovation of the process tradition, however, is to develop a revised, "neoclassical" conception of God as including a dimension of contingency and change. According to such process thinkers as Hartshorne, the ontological argument, reconceived as an argument for the necessary existence of *this* God, is valid. If this is the case, then it is the necessary existence of *this* God which is a necessary condition for the possibility of the existence of a coherent universe of the kind implied by human experience (Hartshorne 1962:28-117).

An agnostic, of course, may object that we do *not* live in a coherent universe. The response to this, again, is that some measure of coherence, of unity in plurality, is a necessary condition for any kind of experience, such as knowledge or communicative

activity–including the agnostic's expression of his or her own position. Most atheists, however, are not so radical in their denial. Many, in fact, are motivated by some ethical imperative or other. But as Ogden observes in his analysis of Sartrean existentialism:

> If God does not exist, or if there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to have a conception of human nature and so think a good *a priori*, everything is permitted, or there is no human nature and so also no *a priori* good. Assuming, then, the truth of atheism's claim that "God does not exist," one may infer by *modus ponens* that "Everything is permitted" is also true" (Ogden 19992b:129).

The atheist, however, who is motivated by an ethical imperative–such as to end the exploitation of human beings by other human beings–does *not* hold that "everything is permitted," and so cannot coherently hold, according to Ogden's argument, that God does not exist. As Gamwell similarly argues, any grounding for moral claims other than a metaphysical theism must be either empty or arbitrary (Gamwell 1990). Amoralist or ethically agnostic positions are similarly self-refuting; for, as Gamwell points out, "Everything is permitted," is, itself, a theory of practical reason (Ibid:157).

A wholly non-religious account of reality which seeks to affirm any kind of moral values at all, then, in which no ultimate being or source of value is acknowledged, finally suffers from metaphysical incoherence. This is emphatically *not* to say that all of the various perspectives which deny or ignore the truth of religion are *completely* untrue or without value. All of the various schools of thought which come under this heading offer, I think, some important insight into the nature of some facet of existence. But inasmuch as they deny the validity of *other* insights into reality, such as those offered by religious perspectives, they fail as comprehensive accounts of the nature of the universe. Whatever may be their truth regarding other dimensions of reality–the physical, the social, the psychological, or the political–inasmuch as agnostic and atheisic views deny the implied metaphysical foundations of their own normative claims, they thereby undermine themselves and finally, like relativism, collapse. This, again, does not mean that such views are wholly untrue, or that they could not be coordinated within a coherent, metaphysically

grounded belief system, but that they are inadequate, in and of themselves, as total worldviews.

3.3 Traditional Religious Responses: Exclusivism and Inclusivism

3.3.1 Religious Exclusivism: Does God Love Some People More than Others?

The third kind of response–a religious response–to the question of truth and religious plurality involves the assertion that one's own religion alone, whatever it may happen to be, is true, and that only those who give explicit assent to its beliefs and practices are eligible for salvation. Such a position has come to be called *religious exclusivism*. Numerous examples of it are to be found among the world's religions.

I find religiously exclusivist positions to be little more adequate than atheist ones–which are themselves, arguably, among the most exclusive positions of all, denying *any* religion the status of being 'true' and offering the possibility of salvation to none (unless this is conceived–as is arguably the case in Marxism–as a corporate this-worldly salvation, the creation of the just and equitable society). Similarly, just as atheistic views can be seen as forms of exclusivism, religious exclusivism can be seen as antireligious, in the sense that it expresses a negative judgment on all religions but one. It is anti-*other* religions.[7]

The exclusivist position, at least in its Christian form, is one which I have always found to be deeply problematic. On my reading, it raises an ultimately insoluble version of the problem of evil, according to which God necessarily predestines some human beings to salvation and others to damnation–a conclusion which I find to be irreconcileable with the concept of a worshipable deity. Most damning of all for this position, though, is the fact that it is not even consistent with the proclamation of God's love made by and in the very person it is intended–at least in its Christian guise–to elevate above all else: Jesus Christ.

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[7] In the case of Karl Barth's exclusivism, discussed earlier, even his own religion fares poorly–particularly poorly, in fact.

Regarding exclusivism, I concur with Ogden's assessment "that the case against it is exceptionally strong–as strong, in fact, as a theological case is likely to be" (Ogden 1992a:33). Ogden first critiques exclusivism on purely Christian theological grounds. This, I think, makes his case against exclusivism particularly damning; for it demonstrates that exclusivism, like agnosticism and atheism, is not even coherent on its own terms.

Ogden's summary and critique of the Christian version of exclusivism is worth quoting at length:

> According to the presuppositions of exclusivism, the predicament of human beings universally is a consequence of their sin, understood not merely as moral transgression, which is rather the result of sin, but as the deeper refusal of a human being to live, finally, in radical dependence upon God, solely by God's grace. Thus, while each and every person is created good and in God's own image, all human beings so misuse their freedom as to sin in this deeper sense of the word. In thus deciding for existence in sin, however, they forfeit their original possibility of existence in faith; and they have no prospect of ever actualizing this possibility unless God acts preveniently to restore it to them. But it is just this that God has in fact done in sending Jesus Christ and in thereby establishing the visible church with its proclamation of salvation. Anyone who is encountered by this proclamation is once again restored to the possibility of faith, sin notwithstanding; and actualization of this possibility through acceptance of the proclamation is salvation from sin and liberation from the human predicament (Ibid:40-41).

This is the positive statement of what Christian exclusivists believe, in accordance with orthodox Christian teaching: that God so loved the world that 'His only begotten Son,' Jesus Christ, was sent to restore what was lost when human beings chose to live in sin rather than in radical dependence upon God, in faith.

The belief that the salvation effected in Christ is *only* activated, exclusively, when one encounters and responds affirmatively to the explicit Christian proclamation, however, undermines the very 'good news' which this proclamation conveys: the nature of God as perfect, self-giving love. As Ogden, again, summarizes the implications of the position that only those who encounter the explicit Christian proclamation can receive salvation:

> It is just as true, however, that everyone else remains trapped in this predicament and without prospect of salvation. And this is the great difficulty; for it means, in effect, that the human predicament of some persons is radically different from that of others. Since the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Christian

> proclamation are events occurring at a particular time and place in history, only persons living after these events and somehow capable of being encountered by the proclamation have any possibility of being saved from their sin. But, then, the predicament of all other persons is not simply a consequence of their sin, in the sense of something for which they themselves, through the misuse of their freedom, are each individually responsible; it is also the predicament of having unfortunately been born at the wrong time or place, a matter of fate rather than freedom, in no way their own responsibility (Ibid:41).

On an exclusivist account, in other words, after the Christ event occurs, being born in a time and a place where the Christian proclamation is never heard, or coming from such a context and encountering this proclamation but not accepting it either because it is utterly foreign to the understanding of reality in which one has been acculturated or because it is the religion of one's colonial oppressors, becomes, in effect, a sin. God, on this account, apparently loves some human beings more than others; for some are offered the possibility of redemption as a credible option in their lives and others are not. God would seem more *just*, on such an account, had the possibility of salvation never been offered at all.

It seems to me that the most logically obvious way in which one can coherently conceive of the damnation of sinners *after* the emergence of the Christ event into human history on the sole basis of their rejection of the explicit Christian proclamation is through a doctrine of karma and rebirth, according to which persons are born in non-Christian cultures, in which their acceptance of the Christian proclamation is either impossible or highly unlikely, on the basis of some past culpability on their part which leads to their being born in a region in which salvific truth is either unavailable or unlikely to be believed because of its foreignness to local modes of existence. No Christian exclusivist has, of course, made such a move because Christians generally reject the notion of the pre-existence of the soul, at least since the year 553 C.E.–the time of the Second Council of Constantinople, in which the anathemas against Origen were pronounced. Such an account might, of course, be included in Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain forms of exclusivism. The idea of reincarnation preserves the notion of divine love central to the Christian proclamation because it holds out the possibility that one might, in a future life, be born in a region in which one could credibly

receive salvific truth. But it also thereby becomes questionable whether such a position could really be called an exclusivism. I would in fact argue that it is impossible for a position which accepts the possibility of a future rebirth in circumstances conducive to salvation to be considered an exclusivism in anything but a provisional sense.

The view, of course, does exist in some traditions which affirm the doctrine of rebirth that there are some beings who will still never attain salvation–such as the *icchāntika* doctrine of Buddhism (Strong 1995:305-306) and the *abhavya* doctrine of Jainism (Jaini 1979:140)–though these doctrines are not uncontroversial within their respective traditions. As a contemporary commentator on Jainism writes of the *abhavya* doctrine:

> Why the Jainas should harbor such a theory of absolute, permanent bondage for certain beings is not at all clear; it has been dogmatically accepted on the basis of scripture, and may simply reflect the commonplace observation that some individuals show no interest whatsoever in their salvation. Later Buddhist schools (the Yogācāra-Vijñānavādins, for example) held a similar view, comparing such unfortunate beings to "rotten seeds" forever incapable of spiritual growth (Ibid).

If these Jain and Buddhist doctrines of eternal karmic bondage are interpreted to mean that certain beings, by some kind of necessity, are condemned to this state, then they would, indeed, serve as counterexamples to the view that traditions which uphold a doctrine of rebirth cannot, finally, be exclusivist. If these doctrines, however, mean that some beings, through the exercise of their freedom, will simply never choose to pursue the path to salvation, then this is not incompatible with my own view, based on process metaphysics, of the universality of the divine salvific will; for the *possibility* of salvation is never denied these beings. For their own reasons, they simply never choose to actualize this possibility. Christian religious exclusivism, however, offers no hope of escape from eternal damnation for those who have not, since about 29 C.E., encountered the Christian proclamation, or who, having encountered it, have not given explicit assent to it.

There is, of course, the possibility, suggested by J.A. DiNoia, of a postmortem encounter between non-Christians and Christ, in which the option of faith would become

credibly available to non-Christians. This, however, would seem to imply that the events of one's life are finally not important in determining one's salvific state; for everything is decided in this postmortem encounter. At least on an account predicated upon the ideas of karma and rebirth, one's birth into a situation that is conducive to salvation is dependent upon one's choices in previous lives, rather than rendering those choices irrelevant with a single postmortem choice. It also gives rise to Ogden's second critique of religious exclusivism, according to which such a position is simply not credible to human existence. A credible metaphysical account of human experience, such as that offered by process thought, must account for the sense of importance we feel in our lives, that our decisions in some way matter in relation to the larger scheme of things, at least in terms of the creation of our own destinies. If our choices in this life are not important, then why choose to be good? Evil persons might ask: Why not exploit, rape, and murder, and then accept Jesus in the afterlife and go to heaven? An exclusivist account of salvation, which makes the ultimate *denouement* of our existence dependent upon historical contingencies which are only, in process terminology, externally related to us fails in its task of offering a credible account of our existence.

Another route which Christian exclusivists have sought to take in redeeming their view is the claim of God's 'middle knowledge.' This is the claim that God allows some people to be born in a setting in which they will never hear the Christian proclamation because, due to the divine omniscience, God knows that they would reject it anyway, even if they encountered it. Such a move, however, places one on a slippery slope in the direction of the, on my understanding, blasphemous doctrine of double predestination.

While it is true that the fact that God knows that someone will or will not make certain choices in the future does not *make* them do so, God's unique role in the universe as creator (either in a classical or a process sense of this term) does give God a certain measure of responsibility for everything that occurs. If God knows that certain beings will never

choose salvation, one could rightly ask, "Why does God create those beings in the first place?" God's foreknowledge of the choice of such persons would, it seems, give God the option of not creating those beings; for to create such beings in the foreknowledge of their eternal damnation would amount to creating them *for* eternal damnation–surely not the act of a loving God.

One could, of course, take this line of questioning too far–as, on my view, many atheists do–and ask why God creates beings who will suffer at all–as all beings in this world, in fact, do. But it is one thing to affirm that God creates beings who will suffer for a finite lifetime (or lifetimes) as a necessary precondition for their ability to freely choose a limitlessly better possibility which, when actualized, will be neverending–the infinite bliss of *nirvāṇa*/liberation/salvation. It is quite another to claim that God creates beings who will both suffer in this life and then experience eternal damnation. God's ways are, of course, mysterious, and the logic of freedom dictates that the possibility that *some* such beings might exist must be affirmed. Such beings, if they exist, presumably play an important role in the divine plan in order for God to countenance their eternal suffering–beings, if they exist, such as Satan or Māra or Morgoth who play a central role in the introduction of the possibility of evil into the world. But given the empirical reality that the vast majority of human beings throughout history have *not* been born in a context in which encountering the Christian proclamation as a credible option was a possibility, on an exclusivist reading, this fact would seem to indicate that God has created the vast majority of human beings for damnation. If one adds to this situation the Thomistic understanding that God's knowledge of creation is the same as God's *act* of creation–an entailment of the divine simplicity (*Summa Theologiae*, 1.14.8)–then one is left with the implication that the majority of human beings are damned because God has willed it to be so.

The 'middle knowledge' response thus becomes unavailable to the exclusivist. Its end result is still that God creates some beings for salvation and some for damnation–the

Calvinist doctrine of double predestination–which is invalid inasmuch as it consists of a denial of the universal love which is the very nature of God. One can, of course, deny that God is universal love–claiming that God does, indeed, love some people more than others–but, from a mainstream Christian perspective, this seems completely incompatible with the doctrine proclaimed in the gospel. It is similarly incompatible with the universalist impulse found in a number of other religious traditions. One must conclude, then, that when religious exclusivists use the word 'God,' they are actually referring to something quite different from the understanding of mainstream theistic traditions, and certainly of process metaphysical theism–perhaps a Demiurge, or the evil 'Antigod' of Manichaeism.

The difficulty with religious exclusivism as outlined here is not its claim that human persons can exercise their free will in such a way as to exclude themselves, perhaps indefinitely, from God's love–which may be called its fundamental insight–but its denial of God's neverending and non-exclusive offer of salvation. It may well be that some beings are damned–perhaps even damned forever–but this is their ongoing choice. To claim that it is due to the agency of God, to God's withdrawal of or failure to offer saving grace to any being at any time, strikes one as both metaphysically incoherent and blasphemous.

3.3.2 A Priori Religious Inclusivism: Karl Rahner's 'Anonymous Christianity'

Another religious response, to be contrasted with religious exclusivism, is *religious inclusivism*. Like religious exclusivism, this position is a form of *religious monism* inasmuch as it claims that only *one* religion is *wholly* true, that only one religion gives a fully adequate account of the nature of reality and of humanity's place within it. These two positions can also be paired together under the heading of *traditional responses* to the question of truth and religious plurality; for numerous examples of both are to be found in the traditional literatures of many of the world's religions.

According to inclusivist accounts, although only one religion is wholly true, and although it is only in the one wholly true religion that salvation is properly conceived–it being the only sure and proper way to such salvation–other religions may, nevertheless, contain partial truth–perhaps even a great deal of it–and salvation is possible for those who adhere in good faith to such partially true religions as well as to adherents of the one wholly true religion. Such a view is the official position of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to the question of truth and salvation in other religions. It is also illustrated by the Islamic characterization of Jews and Christians as 'People of the Book'–recipients of an authentic but incomplete divine revelation–and of some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as Jainism, which conceive of other religions as steps in the direction of their own, more adequate accounts of ultimate reality and the path to salvation. This position has both a priori and a posteriori versions. A priori religious inclusivism is represented in the Christian tradition most systematically in the work of Karl Rahner on 'Anonymous Christians.'

I find religious inclusivism to be an attractive position for a number of reasons. In its basic *logical* structure, though not in its specific content, it is quite close to the position for which I shall argue in this dissertation–a pluralism which essentially constitutes a form of universalist *metaphysical* (in contrast with *religious*) inclusivism–which judges the truth of religious claims not in terms of their conformity to the teachings of a particular religion, but to necessary metaphysical truths inasmuch as these are (relatively) determinable through the process of philosophical speculation pioneered by Whitehead.

Autobiographically speaking, as someone whose initial religious formation was in the Roman Catholic tradition, the inclusivist position is one which has long held an appeal for me. On its most liberal interpretation, the Catholic version of this position allows that religious truths can be expressed in other traditions which are not necessarily to be found in the explicit teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, though the rule of Catholic faith remains the norm by which all such truths are to be judged. Catholic

inclusivism thus makes possible such projects as Thomas Merton's appropriation of Hindu and Buddhist forms of meditation into Christian practice, or, more recently, Francis X. Clooney's explorations of the Advaita Vedānta tradition for insight into the nature of theology and, ultimately, of God, while yet retaining fidelity to the essentials of the Christian faith as defined by the teaching authority, or *magisterium*, of the Church. Growing up Catholic, but having at the same time an intense interest in the teachings and practices of other religions, and finding much that was appealing in these other traditions, the inclusivist option long seemed to me to be perfectly adequate to my own understanding of the presence of truth in multiple traditions of religious belief, besides having behind it the authority of the Second Vatican Council.

The inclusivist position, however, does not allow for the existence of truths from beyond the pale of Christianity which are incompatible with one or more authoritatively defined Christian doctrines. It does not, in other words, allow for truly radical theological innovation and reinterpretation of the tradition. This is not, of course, problematic, unless one's reason reflecting honestly upon one's experiences reaches seemingly inescapable conclusions which, prima facie, are incompatible with Church teaching.

I first encountered this fact on an existential level during my adolescence, when, in the years immediately following the death of my father, a complex series of experiences and reflections led me to conclude (despite the anathemas of the Second Council of Constantinople against Origen) that the doctrine of reincarnation as found in both Indian and ancient Greek thought was an essentially accurate account of the destiny of the human person after the death of the body. As a result, I came to find even the inclusivism of the Roman Catholic Church to be too narrow in its scope to provide an adequate account of truth and religious plurality, of the presence of truth in multiple traditions of religious belief, as I had come to understand it; for it failed to accommodate the beliefs which I had come to

hold about the pre-existence of the soul, as well as the Vedāntic christology, mentioned earlier, which I found to be most compatible with those beliefs.

Still a far more logically and ethically attractive option than religious exclusivism, the inclusivist option, as articulated in the work of its foremost exponent, Karl Rahner, affirms that a coherent account of humanity in relation to God–that is, a coherent theological anthropology–must recognize that all human beings are *intrinsically* related to God–that this relation is, indeed, constitutive of what it means, not only to be human, but to exist in the world at all. The fact of God's love, and therefore, according to Rahner, of salvation, impinges upon human existence at every moment, and is something which we are always, consequently, in a position to accept or to reject in the terms in which we understand it. Salvation is therefore available to all human beings, regardless of religious affiliation, so long as they are responding affirmatively to God's love inasmuch as this reality is knowable to them from within their given social, historical, and cultural contexts. To this extent, as described here, Rahner's position is identical with that for which I argue in this dissertation–an a priori affirmation of the saving reality of God's love as communicated to human beings through the cultural media available to them.

This position does not, of course, entail that all religious accounts of salvation are equally true, that all human cultural constructs provide equally adequate conceptual matrices for the communication of the reality of God's love to humanity. Some understandings of the character and meaning of human existence in relation to ultimate reality may, in fact, be almost overwhelmingly false, arising from a demonic consciousness which explicitly rejects God's gift of saving grace. Nazism, mentioned earlier, is probably a good example of such a largely false account of the ultimate character and meaning of human existence. On a Christian understanding, most accounts of reality will likely be distorted in some way by the effects of original sin upon the collective human psyche–not to mention the inherent limitations of all linguistically-based human concepts, which, on a Christian account, could

also be seen as effects of original sin. (This seems essentially to be the point of the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9).

Drawing upon the Thomistic tradition, Rahner's inclusivism affirms that God's grace is necessary to perfect the human understanding and guide it to those truths the attainment of which would be impossible by imperfect human reason alone. True religion, on this account, is revealed religion–Christianity (though there is a primordial revelation through natural reason as well, which is the province of 'natural theology')–and God's grace, the gift of salvation offered to all of humanity, *consists*–just as in the exclusivist position–of the event of the coming of God as Jesus Christ into human history. It is only through the norm of revealed religion, then, the Christian proclamation of the good news of Christ's coming by the Church which He established, that one can determine the degree of truth to be found in any religion. And it is only through the grace of God's self-revelation in Christ, whether or not He is explicitly acknowledged or recognized as such, that human beings are saved.

The chief problem with Christian inclusivism, as Ogden insightfully points out, is its constitutive christology–or, as I would wish to modify this critique, the way in which the historical person of Jesus is emphasized in this christology. On a coherent theistic metaphysical account, it is ultimately not the coming of Christ into history, but the eternal fact of God's love which constitutes–or rather, is the necessary condition for the possibility of–salvation for humanity.

In other words, it is not that God did not love human beings before the Christ event and then arbitrarily decided to begin saving them approximately two thousand years ago. God, properly understood, both for the sake of metaphysical consistency and in Christian terms, is perpetually characterized by certain intrinsic qualities, including the qualities of being the universally loving creator and source of salvation, potentially, for all. God's saving love can be said to be *revealed* or *manifested* temporally in the Christ event. But this

love can never coherently be said not to have been, or to be exhaustible by or wholly identifiable with any particular historical–and therefore, by definition, finite–event.

The caveat, of course, needs to be entered here that, if by the term ‘Christ,’ one understands, as many Christians have, not *only* the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but also an eternal, cosmic reality, the *logos*–or in process terms, the principle of divine creativity as present in the primordial nature of God–the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, then salvation *can* be said to be constituted by Christ–as identical with the love of God. But if one is referring not to the metaphysical Christ, but to the historical Jesus, the more coherent form of christology must then be a *representative* christology.

As it applies to the question of religious plurality, the problem with Christian religious inclusivism is that its claim that a particular historical event is constitutive of human salvation opens up the possibility that other contenders can make the same unadjudicable claim to being *the* salvific event in terms of which all others are to be evaluated. In other words, if Rahner’s position allows him to claim that all non-Christians of good faith are really ‘anonymous Christians,’ then what is to stop Buddhists from claiming that good Christians are really ‘anonymous Buddhists,’ or Hindus from dubbing all people of faith ‘anonymous Hindus’? What about the Islamic characterization of Jews and Christians as the ‘People of the Book’? Such moves have, in fact, been made historically; for, like exclusivism, inclusivism is an option available, in different forms, from within a variety of traditions, and not only Christianity.

If one takes them seriously, these competing claims about whose religion is most true–irresolvable in any non-circular fashion–lead one directly to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality to which this dissertation is ultimately addressed: Which one is right? Who is telling the truth?

For the person of faith convinced that her own religion is wholly true and adequate, these questions are already answered. The strength of the inclusivist position is that, for the

devout Christian who affirms that God wills the salvation of all human beings, but who also affirms the fullness of the divine self-revelation in Christ, non-Christians of good faith must logically be conceived of as something like ‘anonymous Christians.’ Similarly for the devout Buddhist, convinced that the most adequate understanding of reality available is that expressed in the teachings of the Buddha, and that final escape from *saṃsāra* is only available to those who practice the Buddhist path–good people who practice other paths may be on the road to salvation, but its final attainment will necessarily have to have a Buddhist character. All good non-Buddhists are therefore, in some sense, on the road to Buddhism.

Unlike many religious pluralists, who hold that such views reflect an inappropriate parochialism or a paternalistic attitude toward other religions, it seems to me that these conclusions on the part of these various people of faith are perfectly justified, given their beliefs and assumptions. If these people were to give up their conviction that their path was in some way, at least for them, superior to all others, then they would cease to follow it. They would cease to be Christians, or Buddhists, etc. In fact, many religious pluralists (I would number myself among them) exhibit precisely this same ‘paternalism’ towards those who reject a pluralistic interpretation of religion, holding a pluralistic view, ultimately, to be a superior vantage point. We must do so, or we would cease to be religious pluralists, opting for another view or withdrawing into agnosticism. The logic of inclusivism is finally the logic of having a position at all. This is the beauty of the inclusivist position, and the reason why religious pluralism itself must ultimately constitute, in terms of its logical structure, a form of inclusivism. “Indeed, we may say,” in the words of Wilhelm Halbfass, “that any kind of tolerance which is allied with, and committed to, religious absolutism, and which keeps itself free from relativism, scepticism or indifferentism, is by definition inclusivistic” (Halbfass 1988:416).

The fact, however, that their basic logical structure is sound does not mean that there is no problem with the substantive contents of the various forms of a priori religious

inclusivism. A person facing the epistemological crisis of having to choose among these competing visions of reality–one who perceives, in Hick's words, a 'rough parity' among them regarding their relative plausibility and their likelihood to be effective in achieving their respective salvific goals–still wants to know: Which one is *really* the true religion? If one comes to this question also holding the modern commitment to autonomous reason discussed earlier, and perceives that the choice of one of these various religious visions of reality over the rest can only be made arbitrarily, *at least in the absence of some prior metaphysical commitment on the part of the one doing the choosing*, then one is faced with three possibilities. One could simply choose not to choose–the agnostic option discussed earlier–on the assumption that the issue is simply irresolvable on the basis of reason. Or, one could conclude that these various religions are all false–their inability to agree constituting a fairly strong case for the inadequacy of religious worldviews generally–and become an atheist. Or, if one finds neither of these options to be adequate, if one believes that there are sufficient grounds for holding that religious faith in general has some validity, but if one is not convinced of the superiority of any one religion over the rest, one could posit the hypothesis that the various salvific realities which they all affirm–the 'Christ' who saves all people, anonymously or not, of Christianity; the 'Buddha Nature' which all beings possess, according to Buddhists, but which is known explicitly only in Buddhism; the 'Brahman' behind all divine names and forms affirmed in the Hindu tradition, etc.–are all simply various ways of comprehending the same incomprehensible salvific Mystery–the ultimately Real–underlying all (or at least most) religions.

This last is the route taken by John Hick in the formulation of his pluralistic hypothesis. Its character as a resolution of the situation created by religious inclusivism is one reason why he sees such inclusivism as being on a 'trajectory' headed toward religious pluralism (Hick 1987:22).

In general, I agree with Hick's assessment of the situation to which religious inclusivism must logically lead–to the proliferation of 'anonymous' religious communities and the necessity for a potentially arbitrary choice for one who sees all religions as more or less equally plausible alternatives. My main difference with Hick, which will be discussed in more detail later, is with respect to metaphysics. His postulation of the Real occurs not as an entailment of a metaphysical argument, but precisely in the absence of any prior metaphysical commitment, because of his denial of the possibility of metaphysics. My claim, however, is that such a postulate is only justifiable as an entailment of a particular metaphysical view.

3.4 Non-Traditional Religious Responses

3.4.1 A Posteriori Religious Inclusivism: Schubert Ogden's 'Fourth Option'

The danger already discussed, of course, of such a priori postulates is that they may be perceived to obviate the need for any kind of actual engagement with the claims made by the world's religions. More sensitive to the issues of interpretation–of understanding and evaluating the actual claims of the world's religious traditions–than either Rahner's a priori religious inclusivism or Hick's a priori postulation of religious pluralism as the logical resolution of inclusivism's proliferation of 'anonymous' religious communities is Schubert Ogden's position in the debate over truth and religious plurality, which I characterize as an *a posteriori religious inclusivism*–a position which *would* affirm, substantively, what a priori religious inclusivism affirms (that many religions express the same salvific truth as Christianity), but which defers judgment on the truth of this affirmation until after a thorough investigation of the actual claims of the world's religious communities.

As may already be evident from a number of citations made throughout the course my dissertation thus far, I am in profound agreement with much of what I take to be Ogden's approach to and analysis of the issues in this conversation. I am also deeply

appreciative of the clarity and precision of thought and expression which he brings to this debate. Like Ogden, I am also an adherent of Whitehead's process metaphysics. Our substantive views therefore overlap considerably. As I have said elsewhere, when Ogden affirms the existence of a "basic faith (or confidence) in the meaning of life" which "is a necessary condition of the possibility of all our self-understanding and praxis" (Ogden 1992a:7) and when I speak of the implicit sense in which all religions are necessarily true, I believe that we are talking about the same thing–that, up to this point, the only difference between our positions is a terminological one; for inasmuch as a faith in the essential meaningfulness of existence (and, by implication, the theistic metaphysic which this faith entails) is implied by the world's religions, I see this as being a sense in which they can all be affirmed to be true. Ogden, however, reserves the term 'true religion' for a religion whose *explicit* understanding of reality is also true in every respect.

Despite the many strong similarities between our views on religion, and our fundamental values and worldviews generally, I find Ogden's position, for a variety of reasons, less than adequate as a *conclusion* to the discussion of the issue of truth and religious plurality. My basic objections to his position are three in number: its hypothetical presupposition of the truth of Christianity (or, more accurately, its seeming *identification* of the truths of Christianity with the truths of process metaphysics), the monistic conception of truth which it employs, and its hesitation to draw conclusions about the truth of the claims of the world's religions from current levels of knowledge about these religions.

What is Ogden's basic position? In *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* Ogden claims, very much like Rahner, that "if the Christian understanding of God as unsurpassable in both goodness and power is really to be maintained, no woman or man can ever be without the possibility of existing in faith as soon and as long as she or he is a human being at all" (Ibid:52). According to Ogden, as we have already seen, an implicit

faith in the ultimate meaningfulness of existence "is a necessary condition of the possibility of all our self-understanding and praxis" (Ibid:7)–a faith which he argues, in earlier works, necessarily implies the truth of neoclassical theism, theism of the kind expressed in process metaphysics (Ogden 1992b).

To this extent, again, I am in complete agreement with him, except that I would emphasize the derivability of these conclusions from a humanistically redeemable metaphysics, rather than their affirmation on the authority of the Christian tradition–at least at this point in the discussion, before the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality (What *is* the true religion?) has been answered. For me, the authority of Christianity *is* the question–or at least part of it. As Ogden's language suggests–"the Christian understanding of God as *unsurpassable* in both goodness and power"–he has, as a process theologian (that is, as a Christian theologian who has appropriated the conceptual apparatus of process metaphysics in order to articulate a Christian self-understanding and worldview), identified the affirmations of process metaphysics with those of Christianity. A more traditional Christian understanding of God would very likely affirm God's *infinite* goodness and power. The process tradition, however, in its emphasis upon the temporality and mutability of God with respect to God's role as an actual entity (in contrast with the other divine role of eternal, abstract ground of all existence), claims not that God is *absolutely* good and powerful, but that, relative to the rest of creation, God is the *unsurpassably* good and powerful entity. God's goodness and power, moreover, are held to be increasing all of the time, as the divine knowledge–again, *qua* actuality, rather than in the abstract–expands with the universe, as, over time, new experiences and possibilities are added to the 'storehouse consciousness' (the *ālayavijñāna* of Yogācāra Buddhism) or 'cosmic database' which constitutes the consequent, relative nature of God (the more traditional, classical conception of God corresonding more to the absolute, or abstract nature of God, as the sum total of possibilities and metaphysical truths, on a process reading). The

point of my objection is not that Ogden's identification of the process conception of God with the God of Christianity is false or inappropriate–I believe it is neither–but that his basic position *could* be maintained without any reference to Christianity whatsoever. Given that, for the purposes of my project, the truth of Christianity is no more or less in question than that of any other religion, this is precisely what I intend to do.

Unlike Ogden, Rahner concludes, on the basis of the implicit faith which is available to all human beings–in combination with an anthropology which recognizes that such faith, in order to be consciously affirmed, must be affirmable in the terms of the cultures in which people actually exist–that the world's actual religious traditions must contain concepts that are, to some degree, adequate to the expression of that implicit faith (Rahner 1983:288-295). In this, I am in complete agreement with Rahner. This, again, essentially *is* my argument for the truth of religious pluralism. The only difference between my view and Rahner's, again, is that he bases his theistic claims upon the authority of the Christian tradition and sees the truth to which the religions point as being identical with the truth explicitly revealed in that tradition, whereas I base my theism on a humanistically redeemable metaphysical system and am open to the possibility–which, in light of my own engagement with the world's religions I take actually to be the case–that the truths to which the religions point, though logically compatible, are substantially different. Both of our views are a priori, based upon our respective theological anthropologies.

Ogden's a priori conclusion, however, is only that it is *possible* that religions other than Christianity *might* (explicitly) express the truth of God's love found in the original Christian proclamation (and articulated in process metaphysics). His view is that the determination of whether or not religions other than Christianity are *actually* true requires long and careful study, dialogue, and interpretation in order to determine whether or not they really do agree in their analysis of the 'existential question' of the meaning of human existence and if the answers they propose are the same as Christian answers to this question.

This is the sense in which his is an 'a posteriori' position. His view is thereby distinguished from the a prioristic approaches of all three standard positions in the intra-Christian debate–exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism–which prejudge the issue before ever really engaging substantively with the religions concerned. He stops short of the claim that there are *in fact* many true religions; for he maintains that ascertaining the truth of a religion is, in part, an empirical matter. It requires, as he puts it "actually encountering the specific religion and rightly interpreting what it asserts or implies about the meaning of ultimate reality for us" (Ogden 1992a:58).

If this is the case, then one cannot be justified in making, after the manner of most religious pluralists, the a priori claim that there are, in fact, many true religions. Again, one must first engage in long and careful empirical study, followed by hermeneutical and philosophical analysis of the religions in question, before being justified in arriving at such a conclusion. This, Ogden claims, has not yet been done to a sufficient degree to warrant the conclusion that religious pluralists draw: that there are *in fact* many true religions. His conclusion, then, is that while it may be *possible* that the claims of religious pluralists are true, the making of such claims is not *yet* justified.

Despite the validity of his view that a priori positions about the actual truth-claims of religions are inadequate as understandings of those claims–or, as I would say, that *purely* a priori religious pluralisms are incomplete projects which still need to be shown to be relevant to the interpretation of actual traditions–one might ask whether Ogden's view is itself really adequate to the notions of either truth or religion, or whether a more nuanced conception of truth–more nuanced even than his already very careful analysis provides–might need to be invoked in order to deal more effectively with the issues of truth and religious plurality. I am speaking of the concept of the universal relativity of truth-claims.

Ogden's understanding of what a 'true religion' is does not, it seems, admit of degrees. A religion, according to Ogden, can either be 'formally true'–that is, the formal

norm in terms of which all true religion is to be determined–or 'substantially true'–in substantive agreement with the claims of the formally true religion (which, in his role as a Christian theologian, he takes to be the gospel witness of the first Christian communities). In *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* at least, he does not discuss the possibility of a religion's being partially true and partially false, or mostly true, or slightly true. His understanding furthermore requires that, should it be the case that there are many true religions, they must "express substantially the same self-understanding," (Ibid:60) the same answer to the existential question of the meaning of human existence in relation to ultimate reality, in order to be true. Finally, then, despite his affirmation of the possible truth of religious pluralism–the possibility that there are, in fact, many true religions–Ogden's conception of true religion remains fundamentally monistic. There may be many true religions, but there is, in the end, only one truth, one formal norm in terms of which truth is to be evaluated–and for Ogden, this is Christianity, which is what marks his position as an inclusivism.

Might it not be the case, though, that the term 'true religion' could be applied not only to a *wholly* true religion, but could admit of degrees? The question asked of a particular religion would then become not "Is this religion true or not?" but rather "In what senses, if any, could this religion be seen as true and in what senses, if any, could it be seen as false?" Such an understanding of truth as admitting of partial expression–as relative–does greater justice, I think, not only to the considerable overlaps which in fact occur among the world's religions–the fact that there are 'families' of religions which share many of the same substantive claims–but also to truth itself. For might it not also be the case that the full answer to the existential question is sufficiently complex as to admit of a plurality, perhaps even an infinity, of valid responses? Might it not be the case that there are many authentic yet mutually compatible understandings of the ultimate meaning of human existence? Might it not be the case, as the process theologian John Cobb suggests, that there are, in a

sense, many ultimate realities–many 'mountains' up which the paths of the various religions lead–rather than only one? Or, if this violates the sense of the term 'ultimate' as something necessarily unitary and transcendent of all else, might not ultimate reality be conceived as complex–as a 'mountain range' rather than a single peak, which encompasses the totality of existence? Indeed, at least on my reading of Whitehead's metaphysical system (and, it seems, on John Cobb's as well), there are good reasons for claiming that this is, in fact, the case–that the character of ultimate reality is complex, and therefore, as the Jains conclude on the basis of their own understanding of the complexity (*anekāntatā*) of reality, capable accommodating a variety of seemingly contrary (though ultimately logically compatible) predications. Particularly given that he also accepts a broadly Whiteheadian philosophy and worldview, how might such possibilities as these affect Ogden's conclusion about truth and religious plurality? Why has he not given them consideration?

At first glance, it does not seem that these possibilities would necessarily affect Ogden's conclusion at all. His critique of a priori religious pluralisms would still stand; for it would still remain the case that the ascertainment of the *degree* to which a particular religion could be considered true would have to involve, first of all, existential encounter with and empirical study of the religion in question, followed by correct interpretation of its claims, and finally, the application of some philosophical or religious norm of truth to those claims in order to arrive at a conclusion about the extent to which that religion could be considered true. It would also remain the case, therefore, that the claim of religious pluralism that there are in fact many true religions would have to await such empirical, hermeneutical and philosophical analysis of the religions in order to be justified. Religious pluralism would thus remain only a possibility, and not an established fact.

On this reformulated version of Ogden's position, however, according to which 'true religion' means 'relatively true religion' and not 'wholly true religion,' it seems that the *likelihood* of a plurality of explicitly true religions becomes far greater than on Ogden's

current monistic understanding of truth; for the criteria that a religion must satisfy in order to be considered 'relatively true' are far less stringent than those which would be involved in assessing it as being true in every respect. His position, though, in either its original or modified form, is not about the *probability* of such a case, but only its *possibility*.

Regarding empirical probability, though, there is one more issue upon which I disagree with Ogden. Besides his claim that religions other than Christianity only *might* be true (which suggests that they also might *not* be true, which would lead us back to the situation of religious exclusivism, which he himself rejects) and his monistic conception of truth, I find Ogden's assessment of the level of knowledge available for making judgments on the truth of religious claims to be not merely cautious, but unduly pessimistic. Although his point is well taken that one ought to be careful and wary of making hasty assessments, one can, I think, still make *tentative* assessments with the understanding that one is never closed to new knowledge. Hegel's willingness, for example, to keep changing his assessments of various religions as his knowledge of them increased–as the dramatic revisions in his 1824, 1827, and 1831 lectures on the philosophy of religion indicate–while yet continuing to *make* assessments, is, I think, instructive here (Hodgson 1988:492-501). If one's interpretive scheme is open-ended, no judgment on the truth or falsity of a particular religious claim need be final. Such assessment can, in fact, take the form of an ongoing *dialogue* which is not only analytical, in terms of trying to understand and assess the views of the Other, but self-critical as well.

My intention in this dissertation is to pursue the issues of truth and religious plurality beyond the point at which Ogden's discussion ends. Ogden claims that it is possible that there are many true religions, but he never tells us in any detail what such a possible situation might look like. Given his monistic conception of truth, it seems that what such a possible situation would look like would probably be a variety of religious traditions

expressing essentially the same self-understanding, 'plurality' being reduced, very likely, to the cultural forms in which these understandings are expressed.

But if we substitute Ogden's monistic conception of truth with a more Whiteheadian sense of the complexity and internal relativity of ultimate reality, and if we continue to affirm the possibility, which Ogden maintains on the same Whiteheadian basis, that many religions are true, then this entails the possibility that we inhabit a particular kind of universe. Suppose it is ascertained, in some possible future, by methods which Ogden would accept as valid, that many religions are true–let us say, the religions which religious pluralists typically claim to be true, the major world traditions or 'axial' religions. Such a discovery would entail the existence of a particular kind of cosmos, and thus the truth of a particular metaphysic of the complexity of reality (*anekāntavāda*), a particular epistemology which would make possible a plurality of logically compatible authentic understandings of the nature of existence (*naya*s), and a conception of language (*syādvāda*) which would allow for the expression of these (in some cases prima facie incompatible) understandings in a way which would preserve both their distinctiveness and their common truth.

It could of course be argued that I have not really gone beyond Ogden's position at all, except to refine it; for my argument also does not finally 'prove' that there are *actually* many *explicitly* true religions, but only that this is a logical possibility. But it does seek to express this possibility in more concrete terms, and to give it greater likelihood. This possibility is pursued to something closer to what I take to be its logical conclusion by another process theologian who has contributed to this ongoing debate–John Cobb.

3.4.2 John Cobb's Transformationist Approach

Like Ogden, John Cobb rejects traditional Christian exclusivist understandings of religion as inadequate to the nature of God as revealed in Christ according to the Christian tradition. In a powerful statement to this effect, Cobb claims that:

> …[W]hen Christ becomes a principle of closedness, exclusiveness, and limitation, he ceases to be what is most important for the Christian and the appropriate expression of the efficacy of Jesus. In short, what would then be called Christ is in fact the Antichrist (Cobb 1975:19).

For Cobb, faith in Christ entails openness to the possibilities of truth-expression in the traditions of others, and to inclusion of their truths into one's own understanding of truth. If the Christian who thinks in this way engages in dialogue with an interlocutor who is similarly open–on the basis of faith in, for example, Buddha Nature, or Brahman–to the truth of the Christian witness, a "mutual transformation" can result (Cobb 1982). Such mutual transformation is, for Cobb, the whole point of interreligious dialogue. For him, as a Christian, Christ constitutes the very possibility of such transformation. Coming, like Ogden, from the Whiteheadian philosophical tradition, Cobb identifies Christ as an image for the process of "creative transformation":

> Christ, as the image of creative transformation, can provide a unity within which the many centers of meaning and existence can be appreciated and encouraged and through which openness to the other great Ways of mankind can lead to a deepening of Christian experience (Cobb 1975:21).

Cobb, however, refers to his position as "transformationism" precisely to distinguish it from current forms of religious pluralism (Cobb 1994); for Cobb, like Ogden, holds that claims about the truth-value of the claims of other religions must await the process of dialogue and interpretation. Going further than Ogden, however, Cobb asserts that the truths possibly expressed in the world's religions may be different from, and complementary to, one other. He also goes so far as to suggest, in terms of process metaphysics, what those truths might be and how they might be related (Cobb 1996). The chief difference between Cobb's position and mine is that he does not 'take the plunge' and assert the *actual*, as opposed to the merely *possible*, truth of the world's religions.

3.4.3 S. Mark Heim's Postliberal Orientational Pluralism

What, then, of the option suggested by S. Mark Heim, in his book *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*? As I have examined each of the alternatives to religious pluralism, I have found each to come closer and closer to my own view of the situation–with absolute agnosticism being the furthest from my own position and Cobb's being the closest. Heim's view, arguably, is even closer still to the position that I ultimately wish to articulate with this project, because he actually suggests that there *are* many true, yet substantially different, religions. But unlike Cobb, Heim ultimately fails, I think, to articulate a coherent worldview in terms of which his claim would make sense.

Heim argues that common core religious pluralists are, in fact, not pluralistic enough. The standard positions, those of Hick, Smith and Knitter, which he summarizes admirably, all conceive of the truth and the salvation to which the many religions point as unitary–though Knitter's 'soteriocentric' view is the least monistic of these positions (Heim 1995:71-98). But why, Heim asks, have a Copernican revolution at all? Rather than saying that the many religions are many 'planets' orbiting a single 'sun,' why not make the further leap of conceding that each constitutes a separate universe of its own?

According to Heim, in other words, rather than saying that Christian salvation, Buddhist *nirvāṇa*, and Hindu *mokṣa* all point to the same, ultimate Reality and experience, one ought to affirm, after the manner of religious exclusivists of all traditions, that Christianity is the *only* way to salvation as Christians conceive of it, that the Buddhist path is the *only* way to *nirvāṇa*, and that the various Hindu *mārga*s are the only ways to *mokṣa*. The different religions offer different answers, Heim claims, because they ask different questions, and not because they are different means to the same end. In this way, exclusivists and pluralists both, in a sense, get what they want: the uniqueness and normativity of particular religious absolutes and a plurality of true religions. This position,

of course, raises a number of questions as well: the question, for example, of *which* salvation one ought to pursue–the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality.

Heim's position coheres well with–and is, indeed, based on–the view of truth as intra-systematic, the 'cultural-linguistic' model of truth, developed by George Lindbeck (Lindbeck 1984); for it argues that the various 'salvations' proposed by the world's religions should be understood solely in terms of how they are formulated within those traditions, conceived, more or less, as closed systems. This, of course, is another problem with this position; for, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith (Smith 1981) and numerous postmodern critics of this view of truth would argue, the world's religions are *not*, in fact, closed systems, but have boundaries which are quite permeable, and which allow for an ongoing historical process of dialogue, mutual appropriation, and mutual transformation not unlike what Cobb describes.

Heim's position is very close, in some respects, to the position that I intend to develop in this project, with the important exception that it fails to explain in what kind of a universe it would make sense for Christians to be attaining Christian salvation and Buddhists to be attaining *nirvāṇa* at the same time. Though Cobb does not claim that this is what is, in fact, happening, his Whiteheadian worldview allows him to explain how it *could* be the case. In this way, Cobb's view and Heim's complement and complete one another–and also anticipate the view which I intend to propose.

A desideratum for Heim's view, which I think a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics can supply, is a coherent account of a unitary world in which a plurality of substantially different yet logically compatible truths and salvations of the kind for which he argues could be shown to co-exist–a world in which one *could* conceive of Christians attaining salvation as conceived in Christianity and Buddhists attaining *nirvāṇa* as this is conceived in Buddhism, etc., while yet being able to communicate with and understand one another and one another's goals in a way that is coherent with the experience of

interreligious dialogue as it actually occurs in the real world, that does not contradict this experience with a false assumption of closed systems. Such an account of truth and religious plurality is what I intend to propose in this dissertation.

3.4.4 All Are One: The Perennial Philosophy

Even more inclusive, in a sense, than religious inclusivism is the response that has come to be called *perennialism*. According to this position, all religions, or at least the major world religions,[8] teach essentially the same truth–the *philosophia perennis*–which leads, in practice, to a common ground of salvific religious experience of one ultimate reality that is shared by all. Many religions, therefore, are true, properly understood, and all of these can lead, properly practiced, to salvation–the experience of the one, ultimate reality, known by all true mystics, toward which the many true religions point. Paul J. Griffiths refers to this position as "esotericist perspectivalism" (Griffiths 1991:51).

Perennialism is quite close to the position which I intend to defend in this dissertation. For a number of reasons, however, it still misses the mark, primarily in its failure to value genuine difference among the religions; for this position seems to presuppose that a necessary condition for affirming the truth of many religions is that these religions must express the *same* truth, rather than their being able to express, as I would want to suggest, a plurality of *logically compatible* truths.[9]

If Heim's view–so close to my own–errs on the side of affirming plurality without a corresponding unity, then this position–close to my own in a different way–similarly errs on the side of affirming unity without a corresponding plurality.

During my teenage and early college years, prior to my introduction to religious pluralism, I came to accept the view, advocated in Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial*

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[8] This is an ambiguity found in both perennialist and pluralist writings. My intention is to defend the universalist thesis that *all* religions are, in some sense, true.

[9] This is an error shared, as I have argued above, by Schubert Ogden's position.

Philosophy (Huxley 1944), that a common core of mystical experience runs throughout the world's various religions, connecting them like pearls on a string. Historical analysis of the world's religious traditions, however, along with a careful study of the phenomenology of mystical experience, does not seem to warrant the strong version of this position which Huxley proposes–at least as a historical thesis–a position which would seem to reduce all religiosity to a single kind of esoteric experience (Griffiths 1991:51-59).[10]

Perennialism, however, on a reconceived understanding, does seem to have possibilities as a *philosophical* position, a view of religious plurality which would conceive of the world's religions as participating, in some sense, in a shared *truth*–if not a common experience, then a common underlying reality. From my current perspective, the validity of perennialism can be affirmed to the extent that the many *different* truths of the world's religions can conceivably be coordinated in terms of a single, internally coherent view.

3.4.5 The Middle Way: Religious Pluralism

Finally, there is the response that has come to be termed *religious pluralism* . Like perennialism, religious pluralism asserts that many religions are true, and that these many true religions are all potential vehicles for human salvation. Unlike perennialism, however, pluralism does not deny or dismiss the very real differences among religions–though some (common core) pluralists may seem to do so.

The plurality of religions is, according to many religious pluralists, irreducible; but this plurality is not seen to undermine the fact that each tradition can be, in some sense, true, and can lead to salvation. The chief task for religious pluralists–and consequently, for this dissertation–is to give some coherent account of *how* it is possible that many different religions, frequently making prima facie incompatible claims, can all, nevertheless, be true,

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[10] Ironically, given its inclusivism, its esotericism makes perennialism, in another sense, a highly exclusive and elitist view–one which has, on occasion, become aligned with right-wing politics of a highly unpleasant sort. This fact was first pointed out to me by Hugh Urban (personal communication).

how an irreducible plurality can, in some sense, form a unity. This is the problem that I hope to resolve on the basis of a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics.

3.5 Conclusion: The Relative Inadequacy of the Current Alternatives to Religious Pluralism

My intention in this chapter has been to suggest the relative inadequacy of the various alternatives to religious pluralism as responses to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality: What is the true religion? Continuing the line of questioning that I began in the previous chapter, what I have tried to suggest in my discussion of each of the options I have explored is that each, in its own way, is problematic. Each denies some important truth or aspect of the discussion in such a way as to render itself an implausible alternative to religious pluralism–or at least to a reconceived religious pluralism which would not suffer from the deficiencies pointed out in the previous chapter. The point of this exercise has been to try to show that religious pluralism, despite its various problems as it is currently formulated, is not so much more problematic than its alternatives as to render it unworthy of reconsideration and reconstruction. This continues the line of questioning begun in the previous chapter because the point of that chapter was to argue that the reconstruction of religious pluralism in a way which would avoid the pitfalls of its current formulations was not an impossibility. The point of this chapter has been to argue that the construction of a valid religious pluralism is not only possible, but desirable–that current alternatives to this position finally fail to answer the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality in a satisfactory way.

The constraints of time and space and the desire to cover as wide a range of responses as possible have prevented me from doing any more in this chapter than to suggest, in a preliminary way, the problems from which these various responses suffer. I do not claim, in other words, that this chapter constitutes a decisive refutation of each of the positions I have discussed. What it does do, however, is suggest reasons why none of these

positions, at least in their current forms, constitute decisively compelling alternatives to the position of religious pluralism. It could also, I hope, serve as a catalyst for further discussion and dialogue among these perspectives.

I found agnosticism, first of all, to suffer from an excessive degree of skepticism regarding the ability of human beings to know the truth, and thus to be in a position to answer, at least tentatively, the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality. In its strong version, I believe this position refutes itself, by undermining the possibility of its own affirmation. Atheism I found to be similarly self-refuting, but in a more subtle way; for, adopting the arguments of Ogden and Gamwell, I tried to suggest that any atheistic belief system which attempts to affirm moral values (as most such systems do) contradicts itself in its denial of an ultimate norm and locus for such values.

Christian religious exclusivism I found to be deeply problematic, inasmuch as it negates the very proclamation of universal divine love that is at the heart of the religion for which it wishes to claim exclusive validity. Though I did not make a detailed survey of other versions of religious exclusivism, I suggested, tentatively, that they would suffer from a similar incoherence; for such exclusivism undermines the impulse toward universal relevance which characterizes many, if not most, religious traditions. Traditions which affirm a process of rebirth, I suggested, are incapable, finally, of being exclusivist (unless they hold that some people are simply incapable of reaching salvation); for such traditions typically affirm the possibility, in a future lifetime, of birth into circumstances which would enable one to attain salvation.

Religious inclusivism, in its logical structure, I found to be a much more adequate response than religious exclusivism. Indeed, a position which affirms a universal divine salvific will while also affirming the truth of a specific conception of reality is necessarily inclusivist in nature–including, logically, religious pluralism. The problem with an a priori inclusivism which affirms the salvific necessity of a particular historical event–such as

Rahner's concept of 'anonymous Christianity'–is that there is no non-arbitrary basis for discerning *which* historical event, among the many potential contenders, is the necessary one. The result is the proliferation of 'anonymous' religious communities, to which religious pluralism is proposed as a solution.

Ogden's affirmation of the possibility of the truth of religions other than Christianity, contingent upon actual interpretive engagement with their claims, suffers from the same monistic conception of truth as exclusivism and inclusivism. It does not allow that religions whose claims are substantially different from those of Christianity might also be true. Cobb's transformationism does allow for this possibility, which it affirms in terms of process metaphysics, but keeps this affirmation at the level of possibility. Heim's orientational pluralism does affirm the truth of many religions–on their own terms–but fails to translate this plurality into the terms of a unitary, coherent worldview. Perennialism, finally, goes to the other extreme of asserting the actual truth of many religions, but again claiming that this must be the same truth, a truth reserved only for a few religious virtuosi.

This brings us, then, to religious pluralism, which I conceive as a position which can affirm both a plurality and a unity of true religions, in terms of a complementarity of logically compatible accounts of the ulimate nature of reality and the meaning of human existence. The problem with this position as it is currently formulated is that it exists in two extreme forms–Panikkar's understanding, very much like Heim's, of the religions as constituting an irreducible plurality, and Hick's view, which, very much like perennialism, affirms their transcendent unity in terms of the Real.

My own view is that what Hick calls 'the Real' is not a *noumenon*, finally unexperienceable and unidentifiable with any particular religious absolute, but that the various absolutes collectively constitute a complex, multi-faceted Real, in which all human experience may be seen to participate. This is not unlike Panikkar's reinterpretation of the popular Hindu image of many paths going up the same mountain, according to which it is

the paths themselves which make up the mountain. The qualification needs to be made, however, that as the paths constitute the mountain, they similarly could not exist were not some kind of ground already 'there' on which they could be built. An *absolutely* irreducible plurality is incoherent as long as there is a universe. An analysis of these two complementary, but in themselves incomplete, insights forms the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

WHICH RELIGIOUS PLURALISM?
BALANCING THE MANY AND THE ONE

Raimon Panikkar, John Hick, and the Quest for a Middle Path

4.1 Dialogue-Based and Common Core Religious Pluralisms: 'Mādhyamika' and 'Advaitic' Approaches to Religious Plurality

In this chapter I shall analyze the work of two prominent religious pluralists–Raimon Panikkar and John Hick–in order to suggest how the basic insights underlying their respective positions might be synthesized in order to develop a stronger pluralistic interpretation of religion than either currently offers. This chapter constitutes a critique of the work of these two thinkers, inasmuch as it takes issue with aspects of their work as it stands; but it is also a continuation of this work, inasmuch as it seeks not to refute their respective views, but to reconstruct them in a way which will render them immune, as elements in a new synthesis, to the valid criticisms which can now be leveled against them.

Not all religious pluralists will, of course, agree with the approach that I take to the work of these two scholars. Many may see it as flawed by the same kind of absolutism or as constituting the same kind of intellectual imperialism which characterizes traditional forms of exclusivism and inclusivism. My intention, however, is to address the serious, and, I think, accurate charge of opponents of religious pluralism that, in the absence of an argument, a systematic defense on the basis of a set of explicitly stated philosophical presuppositions, this position degenerates into an incoherent relativism.

The point of this exercise is to clear the ground for the development of a 'reformed pluralistic hypothesis' and for its proposal as a valid alternative, not only to the religious

pluralisms which currently exist, but to their various rival positions, discussed in the previous chapter, as well.

My device for articulating what I take to be both the authentic insights and the shortcomings of the work of these two thinkers, and the role that I intend for my reconceived religious pluralism to play in relation to them, is an analogy with traditional Indian philosophy. I see Panikkar and Hick as each, respectively, articulating a philosophy of 'the Many' and 'the One.' By a philosophy of 'the Many,' I have in mind a philosophical perspective which emphasizes the dimensions of irreducible plurality and change in our common human experience, a view expressed in philosophies of process, of impermanence. In the West, such a perspective is associated primarily with Heraclitus. In traditional Indian philosophy, it is associated most prominently with Buddhism; and within Buddhism, the school of thought generally associated with its most logically rigorous and radical expression is the Mādhyamika school–founded by the first- to second- century philosopher, Nāgārjuna–and its doctrine of the 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*) of all entities. By a philosophy of 'the One,' I have in mind a philosophical perspective which emphasizes the dimensions of unity, coherence, and continuity in our common human experience, a view expressed in philosophies of substance, of permanence. Such philosophies have, since the time of Plato, tended to predominate in the West. They are similarly predominant in traditional Indian philosophy; but the most logically rigorous and radical expression of this perspective in a South Asian context is probably that of the Advaita Vedānta school, associated most prominently with the eighth- to ninth- century philosopher, Śaṅkarācārya.

Both Mādhyamika and Advaita Vedānta have traditionally been taken by representative intellectuals of the Jain tradition to articulate particularly extreme forms of absolutism, or 'one-sided affirmation' (*ekāntavāda*). According to Jain philosophy, a valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) consists of and must take into account all of the partial perspectives (*naya*s) that are pertinent to a particular topic or question. In his *Sanmatitarka*, the fifth-

century Jain logician, Siddhasena Divākara, from whom we heard in the first chapter, divides perspectives (*naya*s) into two broad categories–perspectives which affirm the existence of permanence or substantiality (*dravyāstikanaya*s) and perspectives which affirm the existence of change or process (*paryāyāstikanaya*s) (Dixit 1971:112)–in other words, philosophies of 'the One' and 'the Many.' According to Siddhasena, and to the mainstream Jain intellectual tradition as a whole, these are each *partial* perspectives. Each is appropriate to its own sphere, but neither is the final word on the character all of reality. These perspectives, as logical contraries, presuppose one another. In order, therefore, to be validly affirmed, they must be affirmed together, and not separately (*Sanmatitarka* 1:12).

On a Jain understanding, then, Nagārjuna's claim that all entities are absolutely impermanent and devoid of an essential nature (*svabhāva*) is a case of the extreme, exclusive affirmation of a *paryāyāstikanaya.* Similarly, Śaṅkarācārya's affirmation that all of reality is ultimately One–the inconceivable, qualityless (*nirguṇa*) Brahman–is a case of the extreme, exclusive affirmation of a *dravyāstikanaya*. Both claims, the Jains point out, issue in the conclusion that some essential component of our phenomenal experience, which includes dimensions of both change and continuity, is illusory (*māyāvāda*)–the Buddhist side denying the reality of continuity, the Vedāntic side denying that of change. An adequate account of experience, however–a Jain account–would, on this understanding, integrate both continuity and change, permanence and impermanence, into a coherent, synthetic account which would reduce no dimension of the complex nature of experience to the level of illusion, and which would privilege no particular dimension of experience over the rest. This is very much like Whitehead's conception of an 'integral' philosophy.

Returning, now, to the contemporary debate over truth and religious plurality, I see Raimon Panikkar's theology of interreligious dialogue, which is characterized by an insistence on the irreducible plurality and incommensurability of the world's religious traditions and a resistance to any attempt to articulate a systematic worldview underlying

this plurality of views, to parallel, in many respects, Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyavāda*). By the 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*) characterizing all entities, Nāgārjuna does not mean–as he is sometimes taken to mean–their non-existence, their fundamental unreality or mentally constructed character (the latter view being the position of the later Yogācāra school of Buddhism, which was intended, in part, to expand upon and clarify aspects of Nāgārjuna's teaching). By 'emptiness,' Nāgārjuna refers to the dependently co-originated nature of all things, to the traditional Buddhist understanding that nothing in the universe exists independently, without reference or causal relation to any other element in the universe (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24:18). Resisting the transformation of this claim into a universalist assertion about the necessary nature (*svabhāva*) of all things–which, in fact, by its logic, it seems to be–and therefore a possible object of the inappropriate grasping or desire which it is the point of the Buddhist soteriological path to eliminate, the Mādhyamika tradition speaks of the "emptiness of emptiness" (Huntington 1989), affirming that its own position is, itself, dependently originated, and so devoid of even its own essential nature.[1]

I find this Mādhyamika approach analogous to Panikkar's refusal to systematize his own pluralistic understanding of religion, claiming that, "a pluralistic *system* would be a contradiction in terms" (Panikkar 1987b:110)[2] and preferring an "open horizon" over a closed system (Panikkar 1993:13). Like Nāgārjuna, who worries that transforming his position into a 'view' (*dṛṣṭi*) will make it into an object of inappropriate grasping, Panikkar fears the transformation of his view into an imperialistic absolute system, like those of traditional Christian exclusivism and inclusivism, which could similarly be distorted into an ideology to serve the interests of the forces of globalizing greed and oppression.

[1] This, I think, is not unlike my own affirmation of the 'relativity of relativity,' which entails the absoluteness of universal relativity and thus becomes the logical grounding for its own affirmation.

[2] Emphasis mine.

I similarly see John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, which affirms the transcendent unity of the world's religions as a variety of paths leading to the realization of common salvific goal, to parallel the Advaita or 'nonduality' doctrine of Śaṅkarācārya. According to Śaṅkara's teaching, the apparent diversity and temporality of the phenomena of human experience is an illusion (*māyā*). The ultimately Real is an unchanging, unitary existence, which the Vedāntic tradition knows by the name of 'Brahman.' The character of Brahman is well summarized in the following passage by Swāmi Prabhavānanda, a contemporary representative of this tradition.

> Brahman is the reality–the one existence, absolutely independent of human thought or idea. Because of the ignorance of our human minds, the universe seems to be composed of diverse forms. It is Brahman alone.…This universe is an effect of Brahman. It can never be anything else but Brahman. Apart from Brahman, it does not exist. There is nothing beside Him. He who says that this universe has an independent existence is still suffering from delusion. He is like a man talking in his sleep. "The universe is Brahman"–so says the great seer of the Atharva Veda. The universe, therefore, is nothing but Brahman. It is superimposed upon Him. It has no separate existence, apart from its ground (Prabhavānanda 1947:70).

I see this conception of reality as analogous to Hick's postulation of a divine *noumenon*–the Real *an sich*–as the ultimate ground of the plurality of divine *phenomena* experienced in the world's religions. Though these various phenomena, according to Hick, "are not illusory but are empirically, that is experientially, real as authentic manifestations of the Real," finally, the "ultimate divine Reality…transcends all our varied visions of it" (Hick 1989:242, 236). Like Panikkar's desire to *avoid* systematizing his pluralistic understanding of religion into a single, clearly stated position (such as Hick's), Hick's postulation of the divine noumenon arises from a desire to avoid imperialistic negative judgments on the religious experiences of others:

> …[T]he divine noumenon is a necessary postulate of the pluralistic religious life of humanity. For within each tradition we regard as real the object of our worship or contemplation. If, as I have already argued, it is also proper to regard as real the objects of worship or contemplation within the other traditions, we are led to postulate the Real *an sich* as the presupposition of the veridical character of this range of forms of religious experience. Without this postulate we should be left with a plurality of *personae* and *impersonae* each of which is claimed to be the

> Ultimate, but no one of which alone can be. We should have either to regard all the reported experiences as illusory or else return to the confessional position in which we affirm the authenticity of our own stream of religious experience whilst dismissing as illusory those occurring within other traditions. But for those to whom neither of these options seems realistic the pluralistic affirmation becomes inevitable, and with it the postulation of the Real *an sich*, which is variously experienced and thought as the range of divine phenomena described by the history of religion (Hick 1989:249).

Just as the traditional Jain approach to Mādhyamika Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta has been to affirm the intrinsic validity of the fundamental perspectives which they affirm (the *paryāyāstikanaya* and the *dravyāstikanaya*, the perspectives of the Many and of the One, respectively), while yet criticizing the exclusivistic partiality of these perspectives, the affirmation of each to the exclusion of the other, my approach to the respective visions of religious pluralism articulated by Panikkar and Hick will take the form of a recognition of what is valuable–the central insights–in each of their versions of this position, while yet criticizing what I take to be the one-sidedness of both of their views.

According to traditional Jain philosophy, the exclusive affirmation of a particular perspective at the expense of its contrary–in the absence of a recognition of the principle of relativity that contraries, properly understood, imply rather than negate one another–leads to internal contradictions and other inadequacies within one's position. Bringing such contrary perspectives together into a logical synthesis, however, leads one to a more comprehensive vision of the truth, a higher vantage point for understanding.

Analogously to Mādhyamika Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta, which both lead to the conclusion that our phenomenal experience of either unity or plurality, the One or the Many, respectively, is an illusion, Panikkar's theology of dialogue and Hick's pluralistic hypothesis both finally refuse, in the name of avoiding intellectual imperialism, to articulate a particular vision of the nature of ultimate Reality.

While the point is certainly well-taken–and indeed, wholeheartedly endorsed–that such a vision must always be tentative and provisional, and while the desire to avoid intellectual imperialism, like the desire to avoid error in general, is fundamentally correct,

such a vision–such a specific metaphysical conception–is, I believe, at least implicit in any inquiry into the truth, or any attempt to resist evil.

Such a conception, transformed into a philosophical construct and taken absolutely, can be oppressive; but used properly, with a sense of its own relativity, it can be liberatory as well. The attempt to express one's metaphysical presuppositions in words will inevitably be distorting, and this must always be recognized if intellectual imperialism, or intellectual idolatry, is to be avoided. But the Buddha was not always silent.

4.2 The 'Mādhyamika' Approach: Raimon Panikkar's Theology of Dialogue

In 1991, my final year as an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame, I had the privilege of writing an honors thesis on the thought of Raimon Panikkar. A self-proclaimed 'Catholic/Hindu/Buddhist,' Panikkar, a Roman Catholic priest and the son of an Indian Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother, is among the most highly regarded, on all sides, of the contributors to the ongoing debate over truth and religious plurality. At the time that I wrote my thesis, his religiously plural self-designation held an immediate appeal for me, being quite similar to the 'Hindu Catholic' label which I had appropriated for myself at the time. But the profundity of his reflections, based on an evident depth of religious experience in all three traditions, as well as a penetrating intellectual insight, was what I found–and continue to find–most compelling about his work.

Called by John Hick a "true pluralist,"[3] Panikkar articulates a theology of interreligious dialogue in which Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism are neither reduced to one another (as in religious inclusivism), nor synthesized into a single system (as in common core religious pluralism), but are held in a kind of creative tension for the sake of an 'internal dialogue.'

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[3] In a conversation we had in Chicago in November 1993.

This internal dialogue is made possible, according to Panikkar, by an 'invisible harmony' among these religions on an experiential level. This 'invisible harmony' stands in contrast with a 'visible harmony,' or a systematic elaboration of superficial external similarities. In fact, according to Panikkar, it exists despite profound differences–even incommensurabilities–between the religions. The existence–or rather, presence–of this invisible harmony could thus probably never be conclusively proven or fully understood logically. It is not something which a scholar of religion could locate or isolate by means of a comparative study. It is a harmony, rather, which must be encountered in the depths of one's inner experience of the world's religions.

Panikkar sometimes describes this invisible harmony as a transcendental principle which, as a Christian, he calls by the name of 'Christ.' He does not identify this principle in any exclusive way with the historical person of Jesus, though he does affirm the traditional Christian doctrines of incarnation and redemption. The invisible harmony, rather, is a 'christic principle' common to Panikkar's experiences of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, a 'theanthropocosmic principle' or 'cosmotheandric reality' that is fully divine, fully human, and universal, encompassing the entirety of creation:

> The mystery that is at the beginning and will be at the end, the alpha and omega by and through which all has to come into being, the light that enlightens every creature, the word that is in every authentic word, the reality that is totally material, completely human, and simply divine, which is at work everywhere and elusively present wherever there is reality, the meeting place at the crossroads of reality where all realms meet, that which does not come with fanfare and about which one should not believe that it is here or there, that which we do not know when we perform a good or an evil action and yet is "there," that which we are–and shall be–and which we were, that symbol of all reality not only as it was or is, but as it still shall freely be, also through our synergy, is what I believe to be the Christ (Panikkar 1987b:113-114).

Panikkar's approach to explicit religious concepts, to religious doctrine, could be characterized as an experiential-expressive approach, as one which emphasizes the lived experience of the religions over their explicit, propositional claims, which, he quite frankly recognizes, are frequently mutually incompatible–at least, I would add, prima facie. The

underlying harmony of which he speaks remains 'invisible'–a matter of experience, rather than of dry intellectual analysis or speculation; for it exists, in his terminology, not so much on the explicit, linguistic level of *logos*, as on the more emotive, experiential, and ultimately spiriual level of *mythos*–though he does hold that these dimensions of reality are ultimately inseparable (Panikkar 1996:271). But it is also a *transcendental* harmony in the technical philosophical sense of the term–a necessary condition for the possibility of the kind of dialogue, internal and external, in which he engages. It is the basis for his "cosmic confidence" (Panikkar 1987a:118-148), the faith which underlies his openness to the *experience* of truth in a variety of traditions. It is, in this sense, very much like Cobb's understanding of Christ as an image for the process of creative transformation.

Panikkar's published *oeuvre* includes more than three hundred articles and over thirty books, and the substantive content of his views has changed significantly over the years. There are, however, a number of themes which run consistently throughout his work, and he has gone to some effort to clarify his views in recent articles.[4] The summary of his position that follows, therefore, must be inadequate; but it does, I think, give at least a general impression of the overall trajectory and emphasis of his theological work.

In an analysis of this work, Kana Mitra writes of Panikkar that he, "is not a systematic theologian. All his theological thinking developed in the context of the plurality of world religions. Christianity proclaims that there is only one truth, one light, one way," namely Christ, "yet there is an enormous variety of traditions in the world. Panikkar starts his theological thinking from this existential situation" (Mitra 1987:41). A devout Catholic, Panikkar works consistently from within the context of a Christian faith commitment. His self-identification as a Catholic/Hindu/Buddhist is intended to indicate that his experience of religion has, nevertheless, been indelibly marked by plurality, that he has experienced and observed religiosity from within all three of these traditions. He "searches for the authentic

[4] Such as Panikkar 1996.

core of Christianity and of Hinduism," as well as Buddhism, "not from the outside, but from within, and from within both at the same time" (Ibid:iii). He engages in a dialogue marked by a highly positive (though not blindly uncritical) attitude of empathy toward Hinduism and Buddhism, a "cosmic confidence" (Panikkar 1987a:118-148) in their worth and in his own ability to understand them as their adherents do. He advocates an *empathetic* form of dialogue. Convinced that a religious tradition can only be fully understood from within, through direct experiential contact, he attempts, to the extent that this is possible for a committed Christian, to view Hinduism as a Hindu, and Buddhism as a Buddhist. In fact, on Panikkar's understanding, as for Cobb, it is precisely *as a Christian*, that he is able to engage in such a dialogue; for his conception of Christ is as a symbol for the 'invisible harmony' among religions, the 'christic principle' which he sees as being at the experiential core of all three traditions–Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. For Panikkar, *this transcendental christic principle, or condition for the possibility of interreligious dialogue, is significantly* not *a conceptual formulation*, expressible in a doctrinal or philosophical claim. It is a quality of experience, a 'Mystery' which, though common to the religions, does not undermine or efface their differences.

Panikkar, in other words, does not claim to give simultaneous assent to the *beliefs* of Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism–which he takes to be a logical impossibility–nor does he attempt to formulate a common core of beliefs shared by all of them–in the manner of perennialists and some common core pluralists–or attempt their logical synthesis on the basis of a philosophy of relativity–as I am attempting to do. He sees these religions, as systems of belief, to be incommensurable (Panikkar 1987b:110). What Panikkar claims to have experienced is the Mystery *beyond* doctrine which he claims is at the heart of all religious experience: Catholic, Hindu, or Buddhist.

Rather than constituting a systematic theology, Panikkar's works read more like the diaries of a spiritual pilgrim on a quest among the religions of the world in search of deeper

insight into his own pluralistic faith–and into his own particular multicultural identity. This is the theme consistently underlying his writings–from the relatively cautious and fairly orthodox first edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Panikkar 1964), which articulates a position that is, essentially, a form of Rahnerian inclusivism–to the more radical, but still 'christocentric' vision outlined in his more recent writings. Rich in metaphorical imagery–the 'many paths' up the proverbial mountain actually constituting the mountain, or the 'three rivers' (the Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges) representing 'three kairological moments of christic self-consciousness' (Panikkar 1987b)–Panikkar's writings chronicle and reflect his experiences with interreligious dialogue. Such dialogue is, for him, as much an interior dialogue as a dialogue among the representatives of different religious traditions. His writings invite the reader to participate in this enterprise–an enterprise which Panikkar claims is demanded not only by recent historical circumstances, but by the Christian faith itself. In other words, religious pluralism, for Panikkar, is not so much a critique of Christianity, engaged in from the perspective of the modern commitment, as an *entailment* of his living Christian faith. As he explains:

> Dialogue is not bare methodology but an essential part of the religious act par excellence: loving God above all things and one's neighbor as oneself. If we believe that our neighbor lies entangled in falsehood and superstition we can hardly love him as ourselves.…Love for our neighbor also makes intellectual demands (Panikkar 1978:10).

Panikkar therefore finally takes his mandate for interreligious dialogue from within the Christian tradition itself, which he never abandons for a modernistic, tradition-neutral stance, or "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986), like Hick's "religious but not confessional interpretation of religion in its plurality of forms" (Hick 1989:1). In this way, therefore, his position is quite distinct from that of common core religious pluralists, such Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. More specifically, he takes his mandate from the Second Vatican Council, with its call for "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions" (*Nostra Aetate*)–dialogue and collaboration for which, with his multicultural background, he

is particularly well qualified. Since the time of the Council, he has argued for "an ecumenical ecumenism," that is, "an ecumenism among world religions following the same spirit and ground rules as the ecumenism among Christian churches." He defines the goal of this ecumenical ecumenism as the affirmation of "unity without harming diversity." Like Christian ecumenism, "it presupposes and works out of a common origin and goal, a 'transcendent principle' or mystery, a basis for shared experience that is active within all the myriad diversity of the world religions." This shared mystery is "the fundamental religious fact." It "does not lie in the realm of doctrine or even of individual self-consciousness," and it "well may be present everywhere and in every religion.…This fundamental religious fact is the mystery known in every authentic religious experience," but it is "always more than that experience can feel and say" (Knitter 1985:153).

As we have already seen, common core religious pluralism has been attacked repeatedly as constituting a capitulation to modernity that no religious person–Christian or non-Christian–should make, involving a compromise of central normative claims which goes so far in the direction of relativism as to be indistinguishable from it, gutting the world's religions of the substantive claims that have traditionally been taken to be constitutive of them by their representative intellectuals and other authorities (Griffiths 1991:46-51). It has also been claimed that religious pluralism of this kind is no less–and is arguably more, on an intellectual level–imperialistic than those positions of which it forms a critique, expressing an ideology not of interreligious harmony and dialogue, but of global capitalism and the consequent homogenization of world culture as one, giant 'supersystem' (Surin 1990). Finally, it has been argued that a pluralistic approach to religion is by no means, as some of its adherents have claimed, a necessary condition for either interreligious harmony or dialogue, both of which have occurred in its absence far more often than not historically; and that, in fact, that dialogue is ultimately more productive and interesting which occurs when its participants are fully committed to their respective

normative views than one in which those views have been compromised by a 'watered down' pluralistic interpretation (Moltmann 1990)–the "pallid, platitudinous, and degutted" discourse lamented by Griffiths (Griffiths 1991:xii).

Panikkar's position, however, seems to be less subject to these particular criticisms than those of other religious pluralists–an assessment with which a number of the critics of religious pluralism concur.[5] His theology of dialogue, or 'ecumenical ecumenism,' seeks to preserve authentic religious diversity by being rooted not in doctrine, but in the transcendent. It does not demand that the world's religions find a shared belief or set of concepts to which they can all give assent, much less that they 'water down' their doctrines or practices to a lowest common denominator which might theoretically be acceptable to all, but which would in fact be palatable to none and say nothing. In other words, as in intra-Christian ecumenism, the participants in ecumenical ecumenism are expected to come to the dialogue with all of their unique particularities intact, fully committed to their respective points of view, but with an equal conviction that there is *something* that all hold in common, that dialogue is not solely in the interests of one's own tradition (proselytizing being no less forbidden than watering down), but should be a beneficial and rewarding experience for all. Every tradition will, of course, understand this common Good in its own language, on its own terms. A Christian might perceive it as the salvific activity of Christ, whereas a Buddhist might understand it as the unfolding of the Buddha Nature. A Hindu might experience it as the One, ineffable Brahman, manifesting as Īśvara, the Lord, by His power of *māyā*, in countless diverse forms. But the point of dialogue for Panikkar is not to adjudicate these differences or reduce them to a single, shared understanding.

The goal and purpose of dialogue, on Panikkar's understanding, is not for its participants to try to convince one another of their perceptions, that one is correct and the others are not, or to create a universal theory which would somehow encompass them all,

[5] See, for example, Williams 1990.

but to assist and challenge one another to a deeper awareness and experience of these perceptions. The Christian, then, would become more fully, more authentically Christian as a result of such dialogue, the Buddhist more truly Buddhist, and the Hindu a better Hindu, by seeing through the eyes of one another. The same would be true for a Jew, a Muslim, or anyone else of any tradition who would engage in such dialogue.

The hope of attaining this empathetic, multireligious vision, with its resultant enrichment of the persons and traditions involved, would be the motivating ideal behind such dialogue. This motivation is twofold, involving dimensions of both self-interest–concern for the preservation, betterment, and authentic representation of one's own tradition and personal religious consciousness–and an equally loving, empathetic interest in the integrity and growth of the traditions and values of others, as though they were one's own. Again, interreligious dialogue, as Panikkar envisions it, is rooted in Jesus Christ's injunction to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

This is what Panikkar means by ecumenical ecumenism: a dialogue that results in "mutual fecundation" (Panikkar 1981:12). This is not unlike the 'mutual transformation' of Buddhism and Christianity of which Cobb speaks. Perhaps most significantly of all, such dialogue is not only interreligious–between different persons of different traditions–but also intrareligious, as well as interior to each individual participant. The hoped-for result of this dialogue, its goal, like its motivation, is twofold: a deeper understanding of the Other and the tradition of the Other and of oneself and one's own tradition. In the words of James D. Redington, S.J., of Georgetown University:

> Interreligious dialogue necessitates not only a mutual revealing of beliefs, symbols, and values, but an interior dialogue within each dialogue partner as well. In this interior dialogue the truths which are being revealed are weighed, tested, and, it is hoped, reconciled into each person's faith and commitment (Redington 1983:587).

This is the 'mutual fecundation' of which Panikkar speaks: the enrichment of one's own tradition and personal spirituality born of insight from that of another.

It becomes clear, then, why neither a watering down of religious traditions nor proselytizing are permissible in the dialogue that Panikkar envisions. If one partner in the dialogue compromises something in his/her tradition simply to avoid offending the Other, or to come to some kind of artificial, inauthentic consensus, the Other is cheated, for the Other is then deprived of the full challenge and richness of insight the one's tradition might afford him/her in understanding his/her own tradition, as well as him/herself. To compromise one's own religion is not to respect–not to love–oneself, with the result of being a withholding of oneself, of one's love, from the Other.

Similarly, if one participant sees the dialogue simply as an opportunity to promote his/her own religious tradition rather than as a genuine learning and potentially transformative experience, such a one fails to empathize with the Other, thus missing out on any new insight that the point of view of the Other may hold for him/her. This is a disrespect for the Other which results in one's depriving oneself of potentially illuminating and transformative insights because one believes that one already has all the answers. In either event–withholding one's own expression or failing to listen to the views of the Other–empathy cannot occur, and the participants in the dialogue miss out on its potential rewards. Such a dialogue, according to Panikkar's criteria, would not be authentic dialogue.

Both a full commitment to one's own tradition and a full empathy with the other participants and their traditions–a love for neighbor as for self–is necessary on the part of all if the dialogue is to succeed. Such a balance is the key to the twofold goal: to see through the eyes of the Other, and furthermore, to critically analyze oneself on the most intimate level through those eyes, while allowing the Other the opportunity to do the same

from one's own perspective. It is this process through which Panikkar claims to have gone, and which forms the basis for his self-designation as a 'Catholic/Hindu/Buddhist'–a 'true pluralist,' in Hick's words, for having seen through the eyes of the Other.

The dimension of interiority is the key to the entire dialogical enterprise as Panikkar conceives of it. In his own words:

> I would like to begin by stressing the often-neglected notion of an *intra-religious* dialogue, i.e., an inner dialogue within myself, an encounter in the depth of my personal religiousness, having met another religious experience on that very intimate level. In other words, if *interreligious* dialogue is to be real dialogue, an intrareligious dialogue must accompany it, i.e., it must begin with my questioning myself and the *relativity* of my beliefs (which does not mean their *relativism*), accepting the challenge of a change, a conversion and the risk of upsetting my traditional patterns. *Quaestio mihi factus sum*, 'I have made a question of myself,' said that great African Augustine. One simply cannot enter the arena of genuine religious dialogue without such a self-critical attitude.…My point is this: I shall never be able to meet the other as he meets and understands himself if I do not meet and understand him in and as myself (Panikkar 1978:40).

In short, in order for interreligious dialogue to be genuine and successful, a mutual conversion must always be possible (though not, of course, necessary; for no foregone conclusion about how a truly open dialogue will end is possible until it has actually occurred). Such must be the openness–the honesty–and the intimacy of the dialogue. A truly mutually empathetic, loving experience, interreligious dialogue, as Panikkar envisions it, is no mere academic exercise, but an intense and substantial exchange between or among committed believers and their traditions on the deepest experiential level. Such is the dialogue which Panikkar advocates, and such is the dialogue which he has attempted in his lifetime. It is in this empathetic, dialogical sense that he calls himself a Hindu and a Buddhist, whereas Catholic Christianity is finally where his faith commitment lies.[6] Christianity is his own. Hinduism and Buddhism he has made his own, through the interior

[6] For this very reason, Panikkar is, in Alan Race's assessment, a religious inclusivist (Race 1982:59). The earlier writings upon which this assessment is based, such as the first edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Panikkar 1964), can be read in this way. Panikkar's thought, however, has undergone a considerable development and transformation over the years–as one would expect if the dialogue in which he is engaged is as he describes. I doubt if he would any longer be assessed as anything other than a religious pluralist, though there is definitely an element of his thought which could be interpreted as a modified version of more traditional Christian religious inclusivism–his use of the name 'Christ' to designate the cosmotheandric reality, or mystery, at the heart of his multicultural religious experience.

process of interreligious dialogue. When Panikkar speaks of the *relativity* of his beliefs (and contrasts this with their *relativism*), he speaks of the realization of the provisionality of all of one's current views–while yet continuing to hold them as one's views–that is essential to such an open dialogue.

Panikkar's approach to interreligious dialogue, with its emphasis on preserving diversity and avoiding universalization, bears a marked contrast to other pluralistic models for dialogue–common core approaches–proposed and promoted by other Christian theologians over the years. Indeed, at a talk presented at a conference entitled "Toward a Universal Theology of Religion" held in 1984,[7] he calls into question the very premises upon which the conference is itself based, claiming that the well-intentioned thrust toward a universally acceptable religious language–which he characterizes as a 'Tower of Babel' (Panikkar 1987a:120)–is itself based upon a Western assumption, and is no less of a cultural imposition than are more traditional Western intellectual, religious, and political imperialism:

> The thrust toward universalization has undoubtedly been a feature of Western civilization since the Greeks. If something is not universal, it looms as not really valid. The ideal of humanity of the Greeks, the inner dynamism of Christianity, the feats of the Western empires, the emancipation of philosophy from theology in order not to be tied to a particular confession, the definition of morality by Kant, the modern cosmological worldview, and so forth, all are explicit examples claiming universality. *Plus ultra* was the motto of imperial Spain, and following it the Spaniards could reach America. World government, global village and global perspective, planetarian culture, universal net of information, world market, the alleged universal value of technology, democracy, human rights, nation states, and so on–all point to the same principle: universal means catholic, and catholic means true. What is true and good (for us) is (also) true and good for everybody. No other human civilization has reached the universality that the Western has. The way was prepared since the Phoenicians, prefigured by the Christian empires, and made actually geographically possible by the technocratic complex of present-day civilization (Ibid).

Panikkar here anticipates the ideology critique raised by Kenneth Surin (and discussed two chapters ago) against religious pluralism of a common core variety, seeing

[7] The papers from this conference were later published as Swidler 1987.

such pluralism as being part of the same culturally particular (that is, Western) phenomenon as not only the thrust toward omnipresence of contemporary global capitalism, but of a more ancient thrust toward universality traceable to the ancient Greeks. He also thereby locates it, accurately I think, in modernity, which is itself, arguably, a continuation of the ancient Western (Greek) cultural pursuit of claims with universal relevance.

Panikkar also, in this way, expresses another criticism of common core religious pluralism[8]–also a valid criticism of modernity–which is that, although it claims to represent a non-particular, universal perspective, the very desire to articulate such a perspective is itself a culturally particular (Western) desire, with a particular history and–what is probably most important for Panikkar and for dialogical religious pluralists generally–a fairly destructive legacy vis-a-vis both the many colonized peoples which it has sought to bring within its 'universal' scope, and the earth itself, which still bears the scars inflicted by modern technology and its attempted universal exploitation of nature. From the perspective of Panikkar's theology of interreligious dialogue, one of the most grave–perhaps the most grave–and potentially the most destructive error into which one can fall is the (mis)taking of one's own limited, relative perspective for the absolute truth–and in this respect, Panikkar is in complete agreement with the Jain tradition. This recognition of the relativity of one's own view is not, he claims, a relativism, because one's perspective still remains one's perspective. He recognizes the incoherence of relativism, saying that, "Relativism destroys itself when affirming that all is relative and thus also the very affirmation of relativism" (Ibid:127).[9] A committed Christian, he maintains, can remain a committed Christian while

[8] This criticism took the form of two critiques in my earlier analysis–the lack of argument or meta-theory critique and the non-necessity for dialogue or superfluity critique.

[9] Though, as I have argued, if the 'relativity of relativity' is taken to mean the sense in which relativity is absolute, it is not incoherent at all, but, in fact, gives itself a logical grounding. I take Panikkar to have in mind here the kind of nihilistic relativism that I also reject.

yet being open to the possibilities for truth-expression in the traditions of others. Recall that, on Panikkar's understanding, it is precisely *as* a Christian that he must be so open.

Panikkar's ecumenical ecumenism, or theology of interreligious dialogue, thus avoids the pitfalls of universalization to which common core religious pluralisms are subject, because Panikkar recognizes, *pace* the dominant consensus of modernity, that there is no such thing as an objective, non-relative point of view, at least not for ordinary human beings. Every statement one makes is conditioned by one's unique, particular cultural and historical context. Context and particularity are finally inescapable. In this sense, Panikkar could be considered a postmodern theologian.

Nor, according to Panikkar, is it necessarily desirable to escape particularity, to strive for some imagined pure, objective, absolute point of view. In Panikkar's theology plurality is a good thing: not an unhappy historical accident, but a positive value. In no sense a solipsist, Panikkar maintains that, through the existence of many different, substantially 'Other' points of view, and through the ability to empathize with these diverse viewpoints, one can arrive at a deeper level of insight than would be possible if one's own perspective was the only one possible, the only one in existence, the only way to truth.

This is the paradox at the heart of Panikkar's theology of dialogue: In addition to the inescapable fact of plurality, he also affirms that genuine, empathetic dialogue between divergent viewpoints is possible, that one is capable of entering fully into the experience of another while yet retaining–though substantially challenging–one's own culturally and historically determined attitudes, beliefs, commitments, and assumptions. He claims that differences cannot be avoided or ignored, but that they can be transcended in the depths of religious experience.

How, though, is this possible? When it is said that Panikkar emphasizes and preserves diversity, one is next compelled to ask that, if the goal of ecumenical ecumenism is the affirmation of unity without harming diversity, how does unity enter the picture?

What is Panikkar's unifying principle, connecting the world's religions without ignoring, yet despite, all of what he takes to be their irreconcileable differences on the level of *logos*, of articulated doctrine? Where does the unity come from that enables persons of divergent traditions to engage in dialogue with one another? What, specifically, is the presupposed "common origin and goal," the "transcendent principle," the "basis for shared experience that is active within all the myriad diversity of the world religions," the "fundamental religious fact," which Panikkar identifies with Christ, which this ecumenical ecumenism presupposes as a necessary condition for the possibility of its occurrence? These are all different ways of formulating the question, finding the answer to which is the next logical step in understanding Panikkar's theology: Where is the meeting place for interreligious dialogue, the One place where the Many come together? Panikkar does, indeed, answer this question, and his answer is highly instructive.

Panikkar consistently takes pains to distinguish his dialogical approach to religious pluralism from those of common core religious pluralists such as John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. In a fairly recent article, he writes that, "I do not speak of 'a pluralist model' or of 'the validity of many religions'" (Panikkar 1996:277). His claims, again, are not on the level of the propositional truth of doctrinal claims, of which he is speaking here. He is interested, rather, in a shared experiential 'Mystery,' which he elsewhere calls "the cosmotheandric experience" (Panikkar 1993), a consciousness which brings together the universe (*cosmos*), God (*theos*), and humanity (*anthropos*), and which he perceives to be at the experiential core of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. "Nor do I feel touched by the charge," he continues, "of defending in a colonialistic spirit the uniqueness of the christian event. I have stated time and again that any event is unique and that within the myth of history the christic event has its 'unique' relevance" (Ibid). He therefore distances himself from the insistence of more traditional Christian theologians on the unique decisiveness of the Christ event for human history–underscoring this distancing with his

refusal to capitalize the words ‘christian’ and ‘christic.’ “The ‘something in common’ I am alleged to defend,” the commonality among religions that they must have as a necessary condition for the possibility of the kind of dialogue he recommends, “would be, if at all, empty nothingness, *śūnyatā*” (Ibid). Like Nāgārjuna, then, the One which, for Panikkar, holds together the Many, the unity in the plurality which he affirms and which gives it coherence, is the very conditioned and plural nature of the Many, without which they would not exist as the Many, but would be reduced to a unity. What the many religions have in common, in other words, is precisely their irreducible plurality. On this understanding, the attempt to articulate a unity underlying this plurality would end up negating it. Like Nāgārjuna, then, Panikkar resists the transformation of his perspective, his theology of dialogue, into a ‘One,’ a view (*dṛṣṭi*) which could become an object of inappropriate grasping–or, more pertinently for Panikkar, of continued Western triumphalist universalism, seeking to subsume all forms of knowledge into a single system.

The problem with this approach, as we shall see in the next section, is that Panikkar *does* make, or at least imply, universal claims in his theology of dialogue; for the kind of dialogue of which he conceives and in which he participates–like all human activity–does presuppose a metaphysic, a specific conception of reality which claims universal relevance no less than any other metaphysical system. Though Panikkar would not necessarily deny this–indeed, in many of his writings he evinces a keen awareness in this regard–he does express strong reservations about articulating this metaphysical conception in words, his concern being, again, not so much the falsity of such a system–though he also expresses a keen awareness of the inherent limitations of human linguistically-based conceptual constructs–as its transformation into a potentially oppressive absolutism. The question is whether this need necessarily be the case, or whether, in some contexts, the ability to articulate one’s presuppositions–to *argue* with evil–could be conducive to human liberation.

4.3 Some Critical Reflections on Dialogue-Based Theology

Profound and insightful as it is in many respects, Panikkar's approach to religious plurality is not, I think, without its problems. In my undergraduate thesis on Panikkar, I wrote of his self-description as a 'Catholic/Hindu/Buddhist' that:

> This self-description does not mean that Panikkar practices or advocates any kind of synthetic or syncretic religion or theology. He does not believe in a 'universal religion,' a single 'universal system' or 'umbrella' under which Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism are subsumed and all true plurality vanishes. On the contrary, Panikkar argues vehemently against such a 'universal system' that would absorb or encompass different religious traditions. He asserts that "Pluralism does not allow for a universal system. A pluralistic system would be a contradiction in terms. The incommensurability of ultimate systems is unbridgeable" (Panikkar 1987b:110). Panikkar's theology of dialogue is self-consciously not such a universal, 'pluralistic system' (Long [1991]:3).

At the time that I wrote this thesis, Panikkar's refusal to reduce religious plurality to a single, all-encompassing 'super system' or 'meta-theory' seemed to me to be a virtue. It also underlies, I think, the high esteem in which his position is held even among Christian opponents of religious pluralism; for, unlike other pluralists, he does not subordinate Christ (or Brahman or Buddha) to any kind of ostensibly neutral principle or standard external to the world's religions artificially generated for their evaluation. In other words, he is, as Hick says, a 'true pluralist,' refusing, for the sake of dialogue, to identify his position with any particular systematic point of view, but affirming the irreducible plurality of all religious traditions and worldviews.

Over time, however, Panikkar's assertion of the 'unbridgeable incommensurability of ultimate systems' began to trouble me. Taking seriously the meaning of the word 'incommensurable,' how–despite the fact that Panikkar claims that "this is not an argument for schizophrenia or irrationality" (Panikkar 1989:xii)–could one logically hold in tension in one's mind truly incommensurable ultimate systems and retain sanity? One could, I suppose, suspend judgment on the claims of these systems indefinitely, or engage in the kind of inner dialogue that Panikkar advocates, deepening one's understanding of each worldview by bringing it into conversation with one's own and others.

Panikkar, however, does not claim to be interested, primarily, in the truth of claims made on the doctrinal level, the level of *logos*, but to be more concerned with the level of *mythos*, and of the deeper existential awareness, the primordial intuitions beyond doctrine, which he finds to underly Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism–and this is fair enough. Given his primary commitment to Christianity, it would make sense if his views, in the doctrinal realm, were mainly informed by the Christian tradition, though with an openness to the insights of Hinduism and Buddhism which could come from an empathetic dialogue of the kind he recommends.

But I wondered, in the months after writing my thesis, what if one *did* have an issue with truth-claims–as I did? What if one's commitment was not to any particular tradition, and the question of which set of truth-claims one should believe *was* one's question? In such a case, so it seemed to me, one would eventually have to choose–though the choice need not be irrevocable–among one's various options–or, better yet, generate one's own option which could integrate into a coherent yet open worldview the genuine insights discovered in the course of one's internal and external dialogues–the judgment of genuineness itself, of course, presupposing an at least implicit prior commitment to some set of norms of validity. My suspicion, in other words, was that even if there did exist a plurality of true religious conceptions of the universe, and that even if one did try to handle all of these empathetically, in the manner of Panikkar, the universe is, nevertheless, one, and has particular characteristics which some systems of thought presumably describe better than others. By suspending judgment and deferring systematization indefinitely, Panikkar's approach thereby becomes inadequate, finally, for answering what is, for me at least, the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality, even if it is in every other respect profoundly insightful and, indeed, as I have found it, useful as a guide for conducting one's inner search. If it amounts to the claim that this question is *wholly*

unanswerable, or an inappropriate question, then it becomes identical with agnosticism or relativism–positions from which I know Panikkar would wish to distance himself.

In order to clarify my point, I would like to make use of the very example that finally drove me to adopt a pluralistic approach to religion in the first place: the doctrine of reincarnation. Put bluntly, either something like the phenomenon of the transmigration of the soul actually occurs or it does not (even if, as the Jain tradition would affirm, it could be said to occur in some senses and in others not). If it does occur, in any sense, then a worldview which accepts and expresses this fact is more adequate, at least in this regard, than one which explicitly rejects it. If it does not occur, then the reverse is the case. Either way, if one simply holds these two views in tension with one another indefinitely, whether for the sake of dialogue or out of a genuine agnosticism, one moves no closer to the truth of the matter.

One also, of course, avoids the risk of moving further away from the truth by making the wrong choice. But choice, like dialogue, always involves risk. I am not, of course, suggesting that such choices are final or irrevocable. One can, and should, continue both the interior and exterior dialogues; for the truth is finally approachable, as Whitehead says, only asymptotically (Whitehead 1978:4). The belief that one already knows everything and has nothing further to learn from listening to others seems to be a sure sign of error. (Unless, like Mahāvīra, one really is omniscient!) But in order for one to advance beyond sheer agnosticism (presuming one wishes to do so), such choices must, at some point, be made. One may, of course–and I suspect that most human beings do–live a perfectly happy and productive life without making any choices of this kind
whatsoever, at least not on an explicit or conscious level: choices about what to believe about the afterlife or the ultimate metaphysical character of the universe. But for those unfortunate souls, such as myself, who find the pursuit of answers to such questions to be one of the driving forces of our existence, such indefinite suspension of belief is

unconscionable. It asks us to deny both our experience and our reason. (Panikkar, of course, and the Buddhist tradition generally, might just say that I have the ‘philosopher’s disease’ of inordinate attachment to ‘views.’ I am quite open to this possibility!)

Ultimately, however, I believe that Panikkar and I are no different in this regard. He, too, has definite views about the nature of reality which he asserts consistently throughout his published *oeuvre*. He believes very deeply, for example, in the ‘christic principle,’ in the ‘invisible harmony’ among the religions, the ‘cosmotheandric reality,’ the existence of which is the necessary presupposition that makes possible the kind of dialogue he advocates and that justifies the ‘cosmic confidence’ underlying it. Even though he claims that “a pluralistic system would be a contradiction in terms,” his assertion of the existence of a cosmotheandric reality that is fully divine, fully human, and universal, encompassing the entirety of creation, *implies* a system of thought, a mental picture of the cosmos, a metaphysic, in which all such claims are given meaning. In the end, I think, Panikkar actually bridges the gap between ‘incommensurable’ systems that he claims is ‘unbridgeable.’ He must; for, as both Donald Davidson and Paul J. Griffiths, have argued, the very fact of cross-cultural communication implies that true incommensurability among systems is incoherent, in the sense of being literally inconceivable (Davidson 1991:183-198; Griffiths 1991:27-31). If a system of thought were truly incommensurable with my own, not only could I not understand it, I would probably not even recognize it as a system of thought. Incommensurability is thus like untranslatability. Even though it must be granted that correspondences between systems are never perfect, and are perhaps even more often than not quite imperfect, a large enough measure of commonality must exist between us, as human beings inhabiting a particular kind of universe, to render communication, and even meaningful disagreement of the kind we actually experience, possible. In the end, then, Panikkar’s view implies the truth of precisely what he claims to be a contradiction in terms: a pluralistic system, an understanding of the world in which it

makes sense for dialogue of the kind he advocates and engages in to occur. Indeed, in its affirmation of an inexpressible cosmic Mystery at the heart of religious experience, it is a system, as we shall see momentarily, not unlike that proposed by Hick, with its divine noumenon underlying the phenomena of the world's religions.

Panikkar's main interest, and that of most religious pluralists, is, of course, to promote interreligious dialogue, to foster peace, harmony and respect among religious communities through mutual understanding and possible mutual transformation and conversion. Religious pluralism, particularly for dialogical pluralists, is "not a system of speculative philosophy" but a "stance," an attitude with which one approaches the Other for the purpose of engaging in dialogue (Wells [1997]). In Panikkar's words:

> I understand by pluralism that *fundamental human attitude* which is critically aware both of the factual irreducibility (thus incompatibility) of different human systems purporting to render reality intelligible, and of the radical non-necessity of reducing reality to one single center of intelligibility, making thus unnecessary an *absolute* decision in favor of a particular human system with universal validity–or even one Supreme Being (Panikkar 1996:252-253).

However, even though its explicit formulation may not be necessary for the purposes of dialogue, such a "fundamental human attitude"–especially if it *is* a fundamental human attitude, or, as I have called it elsewhere, a primordial intuition–must imply some specific metaphysical conception of reality as the necessary condition for the possibility of its occurrence, as well as for its conceptual validity. The possibility, and appropriateness, of formulating this metaphysical conception in language as even a provisional system of ideas is finally the main point of disagreement between Panikkar's theology of dialogue and the reconceived religious pluralism that I am trying to construct in this dissertation.

As another dialogical religious pluralist, Harry Wells, articulates the essentially Mādhyamika Buddhist conception of reality underlying Panikkar's position, "Pluralists see the presently arising interrelatedness as the very nature of being" (Wells [1997]). "But," he continues, this presently arising interrelatedness "cannot be reified into an independent

entity, because it is not a precondition separable from the event." In typical Mādhyamika fashion, in other words, Wells rejects the transformation–in his words, the "reification"–of this claim into a definite metaphysical perspective, or "precondition separable from the event." This, of course, is not understood to be a nihilistic relativism; for just as the Mādhyamika tradition distances itself from annihilationism, Wells does not deny that there is an element of metaphysical realism in his affirmation of the reality of the presently arising interrelatedness of all entities. But the refusal to pursue this is a matter of philosophical principle. In his words:

> It is not that there is no conviction that this utter interdependency is ultimately a unified one, but to posit any notion of it does something we cannot do. To say that the various religious insights are angles or perspectives on reality is to imply, by that language, having circumscribed that reality in such a way as to know that. Pluralists, rather, place their faith in the utterly interdependently arising realities, ever aware of more possible relational realities to emerge, and that pluralism, which is realism and reality, is a horizon in which all things are situated but which itself can never be objectified (Ibid).

This, however, does not seem to me to be entirely correct. Though the Jain affirmation of the relativity of perspectives is logically predicated upon the absolute perspective of the omniscient *kevalin*, which *is* claimed to have circumscribed reality, and though process metaphysics postulates the necessary existence of God, conceived as characterized by "complete relativity to all actuality and possibility" (Gamwell 1990:171), to posit the *logical necessity* of such an absolute perspective is not the same as to claim that one actually *possesses* such a perspective. As we have already seen Whitehead observe:

> Philosophers can never hope finally to formulate these metaphysical first principles.…There is no first principle which is in itself unknowable, not to be captured by a flash of insight. But, putting aside the difficulties of language, deficiency in imaginative penetration forbids progress in any form other than that of an asymptotic approach to a scheme of principles, only definable in terms of the ideal which they should satisfy (Whitehead 1978:4).

On my view, one can have an *idea* of the necessary character of existence, and even articulate it and base other views upon it, and seek to harmonize it with one's various other convictions and practices, while yet being open to the possibility–indeed, the likelihood,

given the limitations of human linguistically-based conceptual constructs–that this idea is finally inadequate to the reality. Indeed, if the principle of the universal relativity of truth-claims is, itself, true, such a construct *must*, in the end, be inadequate, or rather, only relatively adequate. To *identify* one's idea with reality would be to commit the cardinal sin of both Jain philosophy and religious pluralism: *ekāntavāda*, or absolutism. But to deny all such ideas would simply be to commit this same sin with a contrary proposition.

In other words, to affirm relativity is not to embrace an absolute skepticism. In response to the claim of dialogical pluralists that the presently arising interrelatedness is the very nature of being, I would ask: Is this a necessary truth? Or is it, in Whitehead's terms (Whitehead 1967:111), a "mere description?" Or a "conventional interpretation?" If it is either of the latter two, then dialogical pluralism simply dissolves into an incoherent relativism or agnosticism–which is certainly not the intention of its adherents. But if it is affirmed as a necessary, metaphysical truth, as foundational to a total worldview, it gives power and purchase to the moral claims that this position *does* make in abundance–claims against the absolutization of religious, political, economic, and yes, even metaphysical systems–so long as it is understood, on its own terms, to be a provisional claim, open to the possibilities yielded in further dialogue, and not *identical* with the absolute to which it gives expression. The teachings of the second- to third-century Digambara Jain *ācārya*, Kundakunda, and the subsequent reaction of the Jain tradition to these teachings, may be instructive here. Kundakunda, like many Hindu and Buddhist thinkers (whom he may have influenced) and Panikkar, affirmed a core of religious experience, beyond the ability of linguistically-based concepts to comprehend, which he called the 'ultimate' or 'certain perspective' (*niścayanaya*). He contrasted this perspective with what he took to be the inadequate level upon which traditional Jain philosophy operated–the 'conventional' or 'mundane perspective' (*vyavahāranaya*). Later Jain philosophers accepted this distinction, *but they did not hold it to wholly invalidate their intellectual activity on the mundane level.*

It may be, in the end, that my conception, borrowed from Whitehead and the Jain tradition, of an asymptotic approach to truth and Panikkar's conception of the truth as an 'open horizon,' as well as our views about 'relativity,' are not substantially different.[10] But just as Panikkar, in the spirit of Nāgārjuna, eschews the explicit affirmation of a unity in plurality, I would want, in the spirit of the Jains, to affirm the inseparability of the two.

4.4 The 'Advaitic' Approach: John Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis

If Raimon Panikkar's theology of dialogue can be seen as a philosophy of 'the Many'–valid, so far as it goes, but finally one-sided and inadequate as an overall picture of reality, given its refusal to articulate the unitary conception of existence underlying it–we turn now to John Hick's philosophy of 'the One'–similarly valid, I think, in terms of the fundamental insight it seeks to express, but in the end falling prey to a similar one-sidedness of approach. Even if Hick might object–which, as we shall see, is a possibility within his system of ideas–that his conception of 'the Real' at the foundation of all authentic religious experience is not a 'One,' but a noumenon, to which substantive qualities such as number are unattributable, claiming that it, "cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, substance or process, good or evil, purposive or non-purposive. None of the concrete descriptions that apply within the realm of human experience can apply literally to the *unexperiencable* ground of that realm" (Hick 1989:246), his approach

nevertheless remains, broadly speaking, 'Advaitic.'[11] Indeed, as the scholar of Hinduism, Alain Daniélou observes, the concept of *advaita*, or 'non-duality,' translates not so much as

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[10] His introduction to *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (Panikkar 1993:3-19) suggests to me that this, in fact, is the case–that our substantive worldviews are, in the end, very similar in most respects.

[11] This, in fact, was Hick's response when I suggested to him, during his visit to the University of Chicago in November of 1993, that in his formulation of the concept of the Real he had, in effect, articulated the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman.

'unity,' but as a state or an entity, very much like Hick's 'Real,' beyond the concept of number. "A supreme cause has to be beyond number, otherwise Number would be the First Cause" (Daniélou 1985:6).

John Hick has been among the most prolific writers in the field of the philosophy of religion in the latter half of the twentieth century. Long before he became associated with issues of plurality and interreligious dialogue, Hick was known for his work on such traditional philosophy of religion topics as theistic arguments and the problem of evil. Among his more well-known works on these subjects are *Evil and the God of Love* (Hick 1970), in which he develops his theodicy; *The Many-Faced Argument* (Hick 1967), a collection of articles on St. Anselm's famous ontological argument for God's existence (an argument invoked against agnosticism and atheism in the previous chapter); *Arguments for the Existence of God* (Hick 1971); and *Death and Eternal Life* (Hick 1976). A thoroughly modern philosopher of religion, heavily influenced by the views of Immanuel Kant, William James, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hick's main contributions to the philosophy of religion have been in the area of religious epistemology, particularly his notions of the religious ambiguity of the universe, of faith as a rational choice, and of 'experiencing-as'–his term for the highly interpretive mode in which all human experiencing occurs.

Initially an evangelical Christian of a fairly conservative bent, and a religious monist, Hick's life and faith were radically transformed by a move to the culturally diverse city of Birmingham, England:

> …[I]n wrestling with the problem of evil I had concluded that any viable Christian theodicy must affirm the ultimate salvation of all God's creatures. How then to reconcile the notion of there being one, and only one, true religion with a belief in God's universal saving activity?…A move at that time to Birmingham, England, with its large Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu communities, as well as its older Jewish community, made this problem a live and immediate one. For I was drawn into the work which is variously called "race relations" and "community relations," and soon had friends and colleagues in all these non-Christian religious communities…And occasionally attending worship in mosque and synagogue, temple and gurdwara, it was evident to me that essentially the same kind of thing is taking place in them as in a Christian church–namely, human beings opening their minds to a higher divine

> Reality, known as personal and good and as demanding righteousness and love between man and man (Hick 1982:17-18).

Hick's encounters with persons of deep faith committed to religious worldviews and practices very different from his own sparked a lifelong interest in those religions, and, consequently, in the conceptual issues surrounding truth and religious plurality. This led to the gradual formulation of his 'pluralistic hypothesis,' the 'Copernican revolution' discussed earlier, which he proposed for Christian theology and developed in such works as *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1974) and *God Has Many Names* (1982).

With his new cross-cultural perspective, Hick came to view religious exclusivism as inadequate to the God of love proclaimed in the Gospels and demanded by his own reflections on the problem of evil, and, ultimately, as un-Christian. Inclusivism he perceived as no less flawed than exclusivism inasmuch as it exhibits, apart from its perceived paternalism, the same culturally-specific, ethnocentric arbitrariness; for if people of good faith of other traditions can be called 'anonymous Christians,' what is to prevent Christians from being proclaimed 'anonymous Buddhists' or 'anonymous Hindus' (which has, in fact, been done)? Given the religious ambiguity of the universe–his term for the perception that a variety of more or less equally plausible and compelling world views are rationally conceivable–and the fact that adherence to one of these views is largely an accident of birth, on what valid basis could one possibly adjudicate such claims? In the same vein of thought, Hick maintained that the constitutive christology underlying both exclusivist and inclusivist Christian accounts of salvation is not a credible option in a pluralistic age. Making a case not unlike that of Ogden, Hick argued that it is God's eternal love for humanity, and not any specific historical event, that is the real source of human salvation, although this love could be *communicated*, *manifested* or *represented* in such an event (Hick 1990:106-125; Hick 1993). From a christological perspective, this was the insight underlying his Copernican shift to a theocentric, and finally to a Reality-centered, model of salvation. Neither Christ, nor any other historically particular religious

manifestation, could ever exhaust the possibilities of the divine Reality, nor be adequate to the pluralistic vision of many valid salvific loci. Hick, therefore, had to postulate 'the Real,' the ultimate ground of all genuine religious faith and experience, of religion as such, abstracted from all the particular ultimates–the Christs, Buddhas, and Gods–of the world's various historical religious traditions.

In 1986 and 1987, Hick delivered the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. These were published in 1989 as *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. This work is something of a grand summary of Hick's entire systematic *oevre*, including not only his work on religious pluralism, but his reflections on epistemology and theodicy as well. Hick begins *An Interpretation of Religion* with a straightforward and unambiguous assertion of the purpose of his work, "namely the development of a field theory of religion from a religious point of view" (Hick 1989:xiii), "a religious but not confessional interpretation of religion in its plurality of forms" (Ibid:1). His concern, in other words, is to speak as a person of faith, but as a person of faith who has experienced the pluralistic theological 'Copernican revolution,' the realization that the particular faith tradition in which he was raised and to which he adheres is only his because he happens to have been born in a particular place and time and to particular parents. One sees here the liberal theological strategy, referred to earlier, of defending religious faith against modernity by accommodating it–by accepting, in this case, the modern insight of the fundamentally arbitrary character of at least most religious adherence (conversion being a relatively rare phenomenon).

But on what basis, one might ask, does Hick maintain his religious faith? What is the difference between being "religious but not confessional" and not being religious at all? Is this not something like trying to speak, as a postliberal would ask, but in no particular language? Of what, precisely, does a "field theory of religion from a religious point of view" consist? Can it have any specific content?

Hick defines 'religion,' first of all, in terms of "a family-resemblance concept" (Ibid:3). Borrowing from Wittgenstein's example of games–"These have no common essence. Some are solitary, others competitive; some individual, others team activities; some depend on skill, others on chance; some are capable of being won or lost, others not; some are played for amusement, others for gain; some are played with balls, others with cards, sticks, etc." (Ibid:4)–Hick adopts a family-resemblance approach to the world religions as the method most appropriate to the inherent complexity of his subject matter:

> Using this analogy it is, I think, illuminating to see the different traditions, movements and ideologies whose religious character is either generally agreed or responsibly debated, not as exemplifying a common essence, but as forming a complex continuum of resemblances and differences analogous to those found within a family (Ibid).

With this considered imprecision of definition, Hick is able to accommodate a wide range of phenomena–including Marxism–under the rubric of 'religion.' Some criterion of exclusion, however, is necessary.

> …[A]s in the case of 'game' we need a starting point from which to begin to chart this range of phenomena. No one would look, for example, to the act of childbirth or to the act of murder for an example of a game; and no one would look to a teapot or a post office for an example of a religion (Ibid:4).[12]

Hick suggests Paul Tillich's concept of 'ultimate concern' as an appropriate starting point for characterizing phenomena as 'religious':

> For religious objects, practices and beliefs have a deep importance for those to whom they count as religious; and they are important not merely in the immediate sense in which it may seem important to finish correctly a sentence that one has begun or to answer the telephone when it is ringing, but important in a more permanent and ultimate sense. This quality of importance pervades the field of religious phenomena. Not everything that has more than transient importance is religious; but all authentic as opposed to merely nominal religiousness seems to involve a sense of profound importance (Ibid).

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[12] On the murder issue, Hick probably should have said "no sane person." And with regard to the teapot, I suppose he did not have the Zen tea ceremony in mind when he wrote this passage! His point, however, is fairly clear: Religion, like pornography, is notoriously difficult to define, but there does seem to be a general consensus about the clearly religious character of a large number of phenomena.

Within this very broadly defined field of loosely related phenomena called 'religion,' Hick claims, scholars are free to focus upon whatever facet (or facets) of religion interest them: the historical, the social, the economic, the psychological, the political, or the purely conceptual. As a religious scholar of religion trying to develop a "field theory of religion from a religious point of view," Hick chooses to focus upon the phenomenon of belief in the *transcendent*, "a salvific reality that transcends (whilst also usually being thought of as immanent within) human beings and the world, this reality being variously conceived as a personal God or non-personal Absolute, or as the cosmic structure or process or ground of the universe" (Ibid:6).

Hick claims, however, that belief in the transcendent is not "of the essence of religion." In terms of religion being a family-resemblance concept, "there is no such essence" (Ibid). Most religions, however, according to Hick, have affirmed "an awareness of and response to a reality that transcends ourselves and our world, whether the 'direction' of transcendence be beyond or within or both" (Ibid:3) so that this orientation toward the transcendent is a valid starting point for his scholarly reflections.

As a direct consequence of Hick's choice of starting point, the particular religions upon which Hick ultimately focuses are those that he characterizes as 'post-axial,' invoking the notion of the 'Axial Age,' a period around the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. which, on Hick's account, saw the emergence of a number of religious movements that were either the predecessors of or have continued on in the form of the major world

religions of today–Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Ibid:29-31).

The orientation of post-axial religion, Hick claims, is 'soteriological' in nature. This is in contrast with 'pre-axial' religions, which "were intended to keep the life of the community on an even keel and the fabric of society intact" (Ibid:28). Pre-axial religions,

"the 'primal,' 'pre-literate,' or 'primitive' religions of stone-age humanity and the now extinct priestly and often national religions of the ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece and Rome, India and China" (Ibid:23) were, on this account, focused upon the maintenance of the cosmic order, including the social order, through the ritual repetition of the original (and originative) cosmogonic event–a conception of such religions that Hick draw from his readings of the work of Mircea Eliade (Eliade 1971).

Given their potentially exclusionary character, the notions of 'pre-axial' and 'post-axial' religion are, of course, deeply problematic in the study of religion. Even on a purely empirical level, elements of both forms of religiosity are so evident in all religious traditions that the decision to define some as 'pre-' and others as 'post-' axial can, in the end, only be arbitrary. Furthermore, given the implication that 'pre-axial' traditions are, in some sense, less developed or 'primitive' religions, this distinction has also proven to be marginalizing for those traditions so designated, such as the indigenous traditions of North and South America, Africa, and Australia. The necessity for Hick to seize upon the 'pre-' and 'post-axial' distinction and make it the basis for his focus upon particular religious traditions underscores the problem of exclusionary criteria, discussed eariler, from which pluralistic systems tend to suffer–the fact that they do not, by their inner logic, suggest such criteria, but that these criteria have to be introduced in a rather unsystematic, ad hoc manner. Hick's choice to focus upon post-axial traditions is the particular form this problem takes in his pluralistic interpretation of religion.

Post-axial religion, as Hick describes it, focuses more upon the individual than the community–or more specifically, upon the radical transformation of the individual from his or her initial, unsatisfactory state–conceived variously as sin, *avidyā*, or *dukkha*–to a limitlessly better state of salvation, liberation, or *nirvāṇa*. This transformation, having certain common characteristics observable across traditional boundaries, is characterized by Hick as the transition from a selfish, "ego-centered" state to an agapic "Reality-centered"

state, "the Real" being the transcendent, salvific ultimate Reality–conceived variously as a personal god or as an impersonal ultimate state of affairs or cosmic order–who/which is the necessary condition for the possibility of this transformative salvific process, a process which, however, requires the freely chosen acceptance, cooperation, or participation of the saved individual in order to be effective (Hick 1989:36-55). Hick finds this common soteriological structure in all of the post-axial traditions, traditions characterized by a "cosmic optimism"–echoing Panikkar's 'cosmic confidence'–because of their affirmation of the possibility of a limitlessly better state for human beings, an infinitely superior form of existence to that experienced generally in the present world (Ibid:56-69).[13]

At this point in his discussion, 'the Real' is deliberately defined by Hick in religiously neutral terms because he is using it in a purely formal way, as a placeholder for that transcendent reality–whatever it may be–which makes possible the radical transformation of the human condition from a limited and unsatisfactory ego-centered state to a Reality-centered state of cosmic consciousness, according to the differing accounts of the various religious traditions. He is speaking here in a purely descriptive, empirical mode of the soteriological structure of post-axial religion generally, and not yet in a normative mode about the actual character of the Real as It exists in fact. The normative importance of the Real becomes fully apparent only in the formulation Hick's pluralistic hypothesis.

Being a religious person, of course, and discerning that one's life is undergoing radical transformation through one's orientation to some ultimate Reality, is not the only mode of human being-in-the-world. There are many persons who claim no religious affiliation or belief and understand their environment and their lives solely in terms of events and causes explainable with no reference whatsoever to any transcendent reality.

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[13] This "axial shift" to an emphasis not on maintaining the cosmic order of this world, but of escaping it for a limitlessly better possibility, is the shift critically analyzed by Nietzsche in such works as *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals* as the shift from a Dionysian, life-affirming ethos to a priestly ethos which looks beyond this world for its rewards.

What, according to Hick, is the basis for religious belief, in contrast with more 'naturalistic' modes of human existence?

According to Hick's religious epistemology, the universe is religiously ambiguous. "By the religious ambiguity of the universe I do not mean that it has no definite character but that it is capable from our present human vantage point of being thought and experienced in both religious and naturalistic ways" (Ibid:73). Heavily influenced by Kant, Hick does not believe that any of the traditional arguments for the existence of God are compelling, rejecting the ontological, cosmological and design arguments, as well as the moral argument and the philosopher of religion Richard Swinburne's probability argument (Swinburne 1979). Nor, however, does Hick believe that any argument can conclusively refute the existence of God (or the validity of other religious interpretations of reality, such as that of Buddhism). His thesis is that both religious and naturalistic interpretations of reality have prima facie equally compelling internal warrants for their acceptance or rejection, that experience can be interpreted coherently either way, and that to believe or not to believe is a matter of rational choice. Primarily, however, it is a matter of how one chooses to interpret one's experience.

But what does 'experience' mean here? Hick defines 'experience' as "a modification of the content of consciousness" (Hick 1989:153). All experience, according to Hick, has a highly interpretive character. All experiencing is 'experiencing-as,' a term Hick develops from Wittgenstein's concept of 'seeing-as':

> Wittgenstein was particularly concerned with puzzle pictures: we may see an ambiguous figure as, for example, the picture of a duck facing left or of a rabbit facing right. But in fact all our seeing is seeing-as and, more broadly, all conscious experiencing is experiencing-as. For in the recognition of objects and situations as having a particular character, setting up a particular range of practical dispositions, the mind/brain is interpreting sensory information by means of concepts and patterns drawn from its memory. When we recognise what is before us on the table as a fork…or the figure moving towards us as a human being…we are experiencing an object *as* having this or that character or meaning: that is, as a reality in relation to which we are prepared to behave in a certain range of ways appropriate to its being the kind of thing that we perceive it to be (Ibid:140).

The 'natural' or 'physical' meaning of a particular experience is, of course, largely forced upon us. If we had too much freedom to interpret the physical meaning of our experiences we would not be very likely to have survived as a species. It is important, to say the least, to be able to tell the difference between an experience of an edible plant coming into our range of vision and one of a sabre-toothed tiger (Ibid:129-143).

But in other realms of meaning our cognitive freedom is somewhat greater. Hick cites ethical and aesthetic meaning as kinds of meaning which, in a given situation, though there may, indeed, be a fact of the matter–for example, one comes upon the scene of an automobile accident in which people need help and one's moral duty is fairly clear–there is nevertheless more room for interpretation than in the realm of physical meaning. One may have an internal argument with oneself about whether or not to assist the accident victims or to wait and let the professional paramedics handle the matter; but there is no doubt about *what* one is in fact seeing–a smashed car and injured persons. Similarly, in the realm of aesthetic meaning, some works of art are, by some set of standards, more beautiful than others; but there is, relatively speaking, a great deal of flexibility and scope for subjective preference in choosing which set of standards one will apply and how (Ibid:144-152).

Religious meaning, is, according to Hick, another example of a realm in which our cognitive freedom is relatively great. Because of the religious ambiguity of the universe, the same experience can be interpreted by one reasonable person as a natural event, or a coincidence, and by another as an event of profound religious significance, such as a message from God. Hick defines *faith* as "the interpretive element in religious experience" (Ibid:158). It is the interpretive response by which one opens oneself to the possibility of a transcendent, transformative reality–which has already been termed abstractly by Hick 'the Real'–by means of which one experiences reality 'as' including a transcendent element.

Following William James's view that, in the absence of compelling evidence either way, one is free to believe as one wishes, Hick affirms the epistemic right of religious

persons to hold their beliefs, not as a consequence of rational proof or argumentation, but on the basis of their religious experiences, their experience of the world 'as' including the existence and activity of the transcendent, however they may conceive of it. "…[I]f in the existing situation of theoretic ambiguity a person experiences life religiously, or participates in a community whose life is based upon this mode of experience, he or she is rationally entitled to trust that experience and to proceed to believe and to live on the basis of it" (Ibid:228).

A similar thesis has been thoroughly elaborated in the work of the philosopher of religion William P. Alston (Alston 1991). In an article in which he analyzes Alston's work, Hick points out that two objections can be raised against this claim: "…[F]irst, whereas sense experience is universal and compulsory, religious experience is optional and confined to a limited number of people, so that whilst sensory reports can in principle be confirmed by anyone, religious experience reports cannot" (Hick 1997:608). As Hick goes on to point out, however, a possible answer is available to Alston to this first objection:

> …[W]hereas our basic freedom as persons is not undermined by a compulsory awareness of the natural world, it would be undermined by a compulsory awareness of an unlimitedly valuable reality whose very existence lays a total claim upon us. Thus the difference on which the objection is based is matched by a corresponding difference between the putative objects of sensory and religious experience respectively. Hence it is appropriate for consciousness of God not to be forced upon us, as is our consciousness of the physical world; and it is accordingly possible for many people, as a result of upbringing or of a conscious or unconscious choice, to shut it out (Ibid:608-609).

There is another problem, however, with the view that people are justified in trusting their religious experiences to form bases for their beliefs, and it is this problem which leads directly to Hick's formulation of his pluralistic hypothesis:

> The second objection…is more formidable. Alston claims (as do many other philosophers who adopt the same kind of apologetic) that because it is rational to base beliefs on religious experience, Christian religious experience entitles those who participate in it to hold distinctively Christian beliefs. But it is obvious that by the same principle Islamic religious experience entitles Muslims to hold distinctively Islamic beliefs, Buddhist religious experience entitles Buddhists to hold distinctively Buddhist beliefs, and so on (Ibid:609).

If religious persons from a plurality of traditions, all affirming different, and sometimes mutually conflicting, beliefs, are all justified in holding these beliefs on the basis of their religious experiences, what is one to conclude? One possible conclusion (toward which Alston, in fact, displays some sympathy (Alston 1991:264-266)) is the pluralistic view that all of these religious persons are experiencing the same transcendent reality as conceived and *per*ceived from within the context of their respective religious belief systems. This, at least, is the route taken by Hick in his formulation of the pluralistic hypothesis, "that the great post-axial faiths constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied visions of it" (Hick 1989:235-236).

The pluralistic hypothesis, as Hick formulates it, is based upon a Kantian-type distinction between the Real as it is in itself–the divine *noumenon*–and the Real as it is experienced by human persons from within the contexts of their various religious traditions–the divine *phenomena*. Recall that, according to Hick, all experiencing is 'experiencing-as.' All human acts of experiencing contain an interpretive element–some more so than others. We experience the world based upon the 'cognitive filters'–the whole range of conceptual apparatus, some of it apparently inherited as part of the physical brain, some of it apparently learned–with which we approach it. Religion, according to Hick, is just such a cognitive filter for the experiencing of the Real. In and of itself the Real is unknowable, transcending any possible human experience or understanding. This is just as well, according to Hick's theodicy; for if we had full cognition of the Real, then human freedom, that which allows us to *choose* the good as good, would be eliminated. We experience the Real as we have been taught from within whatever religious tradition we happen to have been raised. Jews, Christians, Muslims and theistic Hindus, therefore, experience personal divinities–Yahweh, Christ, Allah, Śiva or Viṣṇu–called by Hick *personae* of the Real–and Advaitic Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Daoists experience impersonal absolutes–Brahman, *nirvāṇa*, *śūnyatā*,

the *jīva*, the Dao–called by Hick *impersonae* of the Real–but all of these personae and impersonae ultimately refer beyond themselves to the Infinite, the Great Mystery, the unknowable Real *an sich*, the divine noumenon (Ibid:233-296).

The problem, of course, is how to differentiate between authentic experiences of the Real and delusory ones. Having recourse to William James's account of the saintly person, Hick claims that one can be sure that the Real is transforming someone's life if they exhibit qualities such as "generous goodwill, love" and "compassion" (Ibid:316). He also points to the universality of the "Golden Rule" among the post-axial religions and suggests adherence to the ethical principle of reciprocity as an indication that a given tradition is a genuine locus of salvific transformation and experience of the Real (Ibid:313-314).

With regard to the evident doctinal incompatibilities among the world's religions, Hick suggests that this incompabitility is of three kinds: in the realm of that which is "unanswerable"–topics which have no way of being adjudicated except, perhaps, eschatologically–in the realm of myth, and in the realm of incompatible historical claims (Ibid:343-376). In any case, according to Hick, the primary function of religious doctrine lies with its experiential-expressive role, its function as part of a total way of life which acts to transform one's character from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness and opens one to the possibility of experiences of the Real. Doctrinal incompatibility, in other words, only occurs in realms that really are irrelevant to salvific transformation.

Regarding the issue of propositional truth, then, it may, in fact, be the case, according to Hick, that there is only one true religion, that one of the world's post-axial traditions–perhaps Hinduism or Christianity–is actually the only one that teaches the truth about the nature of the universe and the ultimate character of the Real as it is in itself. But given the religious ambiguity of the universe, there is no way of knowing with any certainty which, if any, of the religions it is; and, since all of the major post-axial traditions are loci

for salvific transformation in any case–since they are all expressive of truth in an *experiential* sense–ultimately, it does not really matter.

On the understanding of truth and religious plurality articulated in Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, then, plurality itself, as a phenomenon–indeed, *precisely* as a phenomenon–is ultimately irrelevant. What is ultimately important for a religion, on this understanding, is not its unique particulars, except inasmuch as these serve to facilitate what *is* important–the process of salvific transformation, conceived as ultimately identical for all human beings, of radical reorientation from an ego-centered to a Reality-centered state, with the transcendent Real facilitating this process being conceived as ultimately one and the same for all.

If Panikkar's theology of dialogue articulates a philosophy of the Many–affirming the irreducible plurality of religions and refusing to conceive of this plurality in terms of a unified vision of reality–then Hick's pluralistic hypothesis can be seen to articulate a no less extreme philosophy of the One, affirming, in the manner of the Advaita Vedānta tradition, the ultimate relevance of only one common underlying reality–conceived by the Vedāntic tradition as Brahman and by Hick as the Real–which both transcends and informs the diverse divine phenomena which constitute Its expression in the world. And just as both kinds of philosophy are criticized by the Jains for the incoherences to which their respective forms of one-sidedness lead, Hick's view, like Panikkar's, is not without its problems.

4.5 Some Critical Reflections on the Pluralistic Hypothesis

In the form of his pluralistic hypothesis, Hick, like Panikkar–though with a very different approach–offers what I take to be one of the strongest cases for religious pluralism yet proposed in the current debate. I say this because Hick's version of this position brings into the clearest and sharpest focus the epistemological issues that are, in my opinion, one of the more philosophically substantive objects of the pluralistic attack on the more traditional positions of exclusivism and inclusivism. In a religiously ambiguous universe, how does one know if one's religious beliefs are true? What right does one have to criticize and reject

a priori the beliefs of others, considering that one could have, by a different accident of birth, *been* one of those others in some possible world? And yet, given the power of the religious experiences many of us have had, what right have we *not* to believe? How can we not accept that some higher, transcendent reality is guiding us when every deliverance of our experience confirms again and again that this is the case? Religious pluralism is appealing, as I mentioned earlier, as a strategy for religious persons to cope with modernity. If it informs one's existence at the profound level which, for many, it does, one cannot give up one's religious faith. But one, similarly, may not find credible, in light of greater knowledge of other religions, any of the traditional bases for holding one *particular* faith and not another, thus becoming a religious pluralist, and holding that many paths lead to the same, ultimate end.

Is Hick's way, however, the best way to go? Despite its many virtues, I find it, like Panikkar's approach, finally to be unsatisfactory for reasons arising largely from its repudiation of metaphysics. It has been claimed by some critics of religious pluralism that, in order for this position to avoid becoming a thoroughgoing relativism–a self-referentially incoherent position with which no religious pluralist wishes to be identified–it must impose some specific set of normative criteria in terms of which to evaluate the world's religions. It must, in the end, become a form of inclusivism. This is the same difficulty that can be perceived in Panikkar's position, well formulated by Schubert Ogden:

> Claims of pluralists to the contrary notwithstanding, pluralism in no way offers an alternative to employing some norm of religious truth, and thus to making some one religion or philosophy normative for judging all the rest. Provided that pluralism is distinct from complete relativism, there is simply no other way to make good its claim that more than one specific religion is formally true (Ogden 1992a:77).

Religious pluralists, however, reject this conclusion because of the arbitrariness which they perceive as inevitably being involved in choosing a normative standpoint. They nevertheless end up doing so–though sometimes covertly–because their very rejection of

exclusivism and inclusivism is based on normative ethical claims to which they are strongly committed.

Hick's version of religious pluralism exhibits this very incoherence. He begins with the religious ambiguity of the universe, and, in a sense, ends with it–at least when it comes to the incompatible truth-claims of the various religious communities. Yet he must make some evaluative claims about the world's religions in order to avoid relativism and agnosticism. He does this with his ethical criteria for the determination of salvific transformation. Leaving aside, for the moment, Ogden's valid criticism that there is no valid inference from one's ethical behavior to one's spiritual state (Ibid:67), what is the source of Hick's ethical criteria? If he claims that they come from the religions themselves–which he does, in order to establish that he is not imposing a system upon them from without–he is trapped in a viciously circular argument, for it is the evaluation of the religions themselves that is here in question. In order to avoid this circularity, Hick's criteria must come from some external set of commitments which he has determined, independently, to be normative. They *appear* to come from modern liberal commitments about what constitutes a good person; but Hick never makes an explicit case for these commitments. He seems to be *covertly* (and perhaps unconsciously) applying an external standard without making an argument for it.

Hick also makes a number of interesting metaphysical claims–about the Real and the nature of Its existence, and about how we experience It and why we experience It in the ways in which we do–for which he fails to make properly metaphysical arguments. He, instead, seems to deduce these claims from what must be the case, given the empirical facts of the matter combined with his views about the veridicality of religious experience. Agreeing with many of these claims, but not with the way in which they are argued, a reformulated version of religious pluralism would take a specific metaphysical position from which the existence of the Real and a pluralistic account of human experience of It could be

deduced. Hick does not wish to do this because of the religious ambiguity of the universe, the arbitrariness of normative commitment–which he must affirm because of his denial of the possibility of metaphysics in its pre-Kantian sense. Yet he *does* have normative commitments–that the Real exist, that it has the properties he claims it to have, and that human beings experience It as he claims that they do–and with these commitments I largely agree. He also has a commitment to the dominant modern consensus which rejects the possibility of metaphysics and accepts Kant's assessment of the traditional arguments for the existence of God–a commitment to denials with which I disagree strongly. Hick, I think, is forced into a choice between an agnostic total relativism–implied by his claims about religious ambiguity, if these really are to be taken seriously–or a form of inclusivism, according to which some specific set of claims is made normative for the interpretation of religious experience. His commitment to a *religious* worldview and mode of experiencing prohibits him from adopting the first position, so he opts for the second, only not explicitly.

Pluralist qualms about making firm metaphysical commitments stem, of course, from the perceived arbitrariness of choosing a world view from among the plurality of possibilities and the possible intellectual imperialism this could involve. But the choice of a metaphysic need not be arbitrary, nor absolute, in the sense the pluralists find objectionable. The selection need not be from among the world's religions, with their geographic, historical and cultural particularities which make their imposition as normative standards problematic–the very imposition by Christians against which religious pluralism is a revolt. Whitehead's process metaphysics, I think, in combination with the traditional Jain approach to conceptual plurality, holds the potential for acting as a matrix for the integration not only of a plurality of religious world views, but also of religion and naturalistic science, providing its own internal warrant in the form of its coherence and applicability without recourse to any arbitrary, historically conditioned religious authority. It is also an open system, which need not be applied imperialistically, but which, rather, contains internal

warrants for its own self-relativization. The deployment of Whitehead's metaphysics as the basis for a metaphysically coherent religious pluralism is the thought experiment to which the remainder of this dissertation is devoted, and is one of the main devices by which I intend to embark upon the reconstruction of religious pluralism.

The adoption of a process metaphysic resolves a number of other conceptual difficulties faced by Hick's pluralistic hypothesis as well. The apparent religious ambiguity of the universe, first of all, can be explained on a process account as an effect of the real metaphysical *complexity* of the universe entailed by process philosophy. The various possible accounts of the universe then become conceivable as valid perspectives upon a complex reality, their validity demonstrable through modalization–an enunciation of the specific senses in which, in terms of process metaphysics, they can be said truly to articulate some aspect of a multi-faceted reality. This kind of metaphysical perspectivism, an historical example of which can be found in the strategies developed by Jain intellectuals for evaluating other South Asian schools of philosophy, or *darśana*s, is superior to Hick's pluralistic hypothesis inasmuch as it allows one actually to *engage with* the doctrines of a variety of religious communities. It permits one to interpret them and to assign them–at least provisionally–to their various spheres of relative validity within the overarching system provided by process thought, rather than relegating, as Hick does, conflicting doctrinal claims to the realm of myth, or postponing the adjudication of all the really interesting philosophical issues between religious communities for 'eschatological verification.' A religious pluralism with a properly metaphysical basis could generate an interpretive system which would allow one to engage with religious doctrines in a substantive way–as propositions–rather than one-sidedly focusing upon their experiential-expressive function alone.

The most glaring example of the way in which Hick's pluralistic hypothesis inhibits substantive engagement with religious doctrines is his concept of the Real *an sich*. His

interpretation of the transcendent finally renders the concept of ultimate reality devoid of content. The Real, according to Hick, is a *noumenon*, an a priori and by definition unknowable reality. This is quite different from the claim–which I would far prefer to advance–that the Real is infinite, that no concept can exhaust It nor word adequately capture Its concrete reality in any final way. Hick's hypothesis postulates an unbridgeable gap between the affirmations that religious persons make about the Real–that It is a loving, personal God, or a Creator, or ultimate Being, or the essenceless emptiness (or *śūnyatā*) that is, paradoxically, the essence of all things–and the reality of the Real as It is in Itself– 'the Real *an sich*.' As Hick himself writes:

> …[I]t cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, substance or process, good or evil, purposive or non-purposive. None of the concrete descriptions that apply within the realm of human experience can apply literally to the *unexperiencable* ground of that realm (Hick 1989:246).[14]

According to Hick, of course, the postulation of the Real *an sich*, the divine noumenon, is a necessary move in order to neutralize the very real incompatibilities among the doctrine-expressing sentences of actual religious communities when taken at their face value. This is necessary, according to Hick, because, according to his epistemology, all human beings are at a more or less equivalent epistemic distance from the true character of ultimate reality, which it is only possible for finite minds to experience through the kinds of 'cognitive filters' which the world's religious and philosophical traditions provide, allowing the Real to be 'experienced as' a personal deity, for example, or an impersonal absolute. Hence the phenomenon which Hick describes as the 'religious ambiguity of the universe,' the fact that, as he claims, a variety of prima facie incompatible, but more or less equally plausible accounts of reality, both naturalistic and religious, are possible for the human mind to generate, and, in fact, occur historically.

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[14] Emphasis mine.

But might it be possible that the religious ambiguity which Hick describes is a product not so much of humanity's epistemic distance from the truth as of an actual metaphysical complexity of reality, a multi-faceted (*anekānta*) character of the universe? In such a universe, might it not be possible to account for the plurality of religious and philosophical views by recourse to this complexity? In other words, might it not be possible to resolve the apparent incompatibilities of the world's various systems of thought not by deferring such adjudication to the end of time–awaiting 'eschatological verification' of all the really interesting religious concepts, such as the nature of the afterlife, or of ultimate reality–nor concluding, after the manner of Kant (to whom Hick is heavily indebted for the basic structure and assumptions of his epistemology) that such truths are a priori unknowable and strictly beyond the scope of any possible human awareness, but to resolve these differences, rather, by committing ourselves to a metaphysic capable of incorporating within itself the variety of religious and philosophical views of the world's many traditions in a way which demonstrates their apparent incompatibilities to, in fact, constitute a complementarity? To neutralize their differences not by dissolving them into a divine noumenon or ineffable experience, but by preserving them in a synthesis, a true perspectivism? What this project proposes, in short, is a shift of the basis of the pluralistic hypothesis from a Kantian epistemology–which severely limits the possibilities of human knowledge and experience of the divine in ways which even Hick cannot fully accept–to a Whiteheadian epistemology, which conceives of knowledge and thought as fundamentally perspectival, as effects of the real internal relations between emergent subject and prehended object (or 'superject'), thus making possible the kind of project which I hope to begin in this dissertation–the tentative 'mapping' of concepts generated in diverse religious traditions onto the conceptual grid or coordinate system provided by process metaphysics in the manner of and in synthesis with the Jain philosophy of relativity.

4.6 Conclusion: Toward a Whiteheadian 'Jain' Approach

to Religious Plurality

Panikkar and Hick offer differing understandings of religious pluralism–in some ways complementary, in some ways at odds–both of which can provide insights for a reconceived version of this position, and both of which exhibit shortcomings that make such a reconception desirable.

On a purely stylistic level–speaking now both of how they write and the approach they take to their subject matter–the differences between the two scholars are striking. Panikkar writes and thinks like a continental philosopher–poetic and paradoxical–whereas Hick's writing and thought are marked by the crystal clarity and precision associated with the British analytic tradition of which he is a product. Panikkar writes as a believer, a spiritual pilgrim on a profoundly personal quest for whom dialogue and reflection are themselves religious acts. Hick, too, is a believer, and a pilgrim. But he presents his views, to the extent possible, as objectively true, backed up by empirical facts and logical argument. Panikkar is clearly a postmodern, and Hick a modern, thinker. Both are deeply committed to the pluralistic vision which they both share–however different their expressions of it may be–of a just and peaceful world in which religious communities not only tolerate, but feel a deep appreciation for, one another's respective perceptions of ultimate Reality.

The main Western thinker from whom I take my own philosophical bearings exhibits an interesting blend of the characteristics of both Panikkar and Hick. In many ways profoundly modern, yet exhibiting postmodernity's awareness of the limits of linguistically-dependent conceptual thought at a time long before the term 'postmodern' had gained widespread currency, Alfred North Whitehead developed a philosophical system articulated in the language and style of the analytic tradition–with one of whose central figures, Bertrand Russell, he actually collaborated–but with deep substantive affinities with both continental existential phenomenology and American pragmatism.

Although he lived at a time before the public debate among Christian theologians and philosophers of religion on the issues of truth and religious plurality had begun, there is little doubt, at least in my mind, about which side he would have taken in this debate. In his chapter on 'God' in *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead writes, "He has been named respectively, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, Order of Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being, Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the experiences of those who have used it" (Whitehead 1925:179). In a sense, a deeply religious person–though claiming, for many years to be an agnostic–Whitehead's spirituality was expressed in the development of his own, distinctive conception of ultimate Reality, rather than in adherence to any particular religious institution (Lowe 1990:189). This is not to say that he refused to commit himself "to any particular vision of resistance and hope" (Tracy 1987:90), but that, as an adherent of the modern humanistic commitment, discussed earlier, to the autonomy of reason reflecting on experience, the vision to which he committed himself was his own, rather than one accepted on the authority of a particular tradition. In this way, I feel a strong affinity with Whitehead, as well as, on a personal note, with regard to the events of his life which led to his turn to a religious philosophy–the death of his son, Eric, in the first world war. As his biographer, Victor Lowe, writes:

> An agnostic will ask, what if the religious vision is a persistent illusion? Whitehead gave his answer once. Apart from this religious vision, he said, "human life is a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience" (Lowe 1990:188).

Stylistic affinities, an experiential foundation in a personal spiritual pilgrimage, and what may broadly be called a pluralistic attitude toward the world's religions are not the only features of his thought with respect to which Whitehead blends certain characteristics of both Panikkar and Hick. In terms of his substantive philosophical positions, like the Jain tradition in relation to Mādhyamika Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta, Whitehead's approach to metaphysics can be seen as integrating the valid insights of Panikkar and Hick into a

coherent synthesis, exhibiting none of the one-sidedness of either thinker alone.

Panikkar's valid objections to philosophical absolutism find expression in the tentative, open-ended character of Whitehead's metaphysical inquiries, what may be called the self-relativization of process thought, and its almost dogmatic rejection of any dogmatic insistence on the finality of one's own conclusions and formulations. Indeed, Panikkar's conception of truth as an 'open horizon,' as well as his preference for an open-ended 'synthesis' over a closed 'system,' and his affirmations of the relativity of his own view, may, in the end, be substantively identical to Whitehead's approach.

Hick's systematic approach, on the other hand, and his claim of the existence of an ultimate common ground of religious experience, similarly find expression in Whitehead's affirmation of the necessary existence of God as the ultimate ground of not only religious, but of all human, experience–or, for that matter, of any possible experience whatsoever. Whitehead's detailed account of the relationship between God and the actual entities which make up the universe allows, I think, for a richer interpretation than Hick is able to give, with his Kantian understanding, of the complex interrelations both among the world's religious and philosophical understandings and between those understandings and the complex realities which they mediate to human experience.

Finally, the recognition that the Jain approach to religious plurality is fundamentally that which Whitehead's worldview entails allows for the transformation of this worldview into a coherent yet open pluralistic system, or interpretive synthesis, which integrates the respective insights of plurality and unity that Panikkar and Hick each express–insights which, given the one-sidedness and the denial of the possibility of metaphysics which both their views share, neither view, on its own, is able to explore fully to its logical conclusion.

In this and the preceding two chapters, my objective has been to lay the groundwork for the reconstruction of religious pluralism by exploring the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary approaches to religious plurality and suggesting the ways in which a new

approach would both resemble and differ from these current approaches. The remaining chapters of this dissertation will be devoted to developing this new approach.

Part III

TWO PHILOSOHIES OF RELATIVITY AND THEIR SYNTHESIS:

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Chapter 5

THE JAIN PHILOSOPHY OF RELATIVITY

An Exercise in Rational Reconstruction

5.1 Methodological Issues

To speak of the Jain philosophy of relativity–or, for that matter, of 'the' Jain anything–is to speak of an abstraction. Despite the fact that the Jain intellectual tradition is remarkable for its coherence and continuity–a continuity which stands in marked contrast to the incredible internal variety, both synchronic and diachronic, which characterizes the Hindu and Buddhist traditions–Jain philosophy, like all other aspects of Jain cultural and religious life, does display some degree of internal diversity and transformation over time.

Numerous examples of this diversity and transformation can be cited. The Jain doctrines of relativity–*anekāntavāda*, *nayavāda*, and *syādvāda*–exist largely only implicitly in the oldest Jain texts available to contemporary scholarship–the Āgamic or scriptural literature of the Śvetāmbara community, composed in Ardhamāgadhi Prākrit–but they are explicitly developed to a level of high sophistication in later Sanskrit philosophical texts. The second- to third-century Digambara philosopher and mystic, Kundakunda, offers an interpretation of *nayavāda* substantially different from that of the mainstream Jain tradition, both Digambara and Śvetāmbara. The interpretation of the *saptabhaṅginaya*, or sevenfold method of *syādvāda*, offered by Siddhasena Divākara in his *Sanmatitarka* differs from that proposed by Samantabhadra in his *Āptamīmāṃsā*. And Haribhadrasūri's approach to what could probably be legitimately called 'religious' plurality–the plurality of *yoga*s–in his *Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya* seems to be without parallel in the Jain tradition, affirming, as it

does, the ultimate unity of the goals of various yogic paths–including non-Jain paths–in a manner not unlike John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis of the transcendent unity of religions.

The Jain philosophy of relativity of which I speak in this dissertation is finally my own conceptual construct, distilled from my readings of a variety of Jain philosophical texts, ranging from the Āgamic literature of the Śvetāmbaras–some of which, arguably, is traceable to the fifth century before the common era (Dixit 1971:30-31)–to the works of such twentieth-century scholars of Jain philosophy as Satkari Mookerjee, Nathmal Tatia, Y.J. Padmarajiah, Bimal Krishna Matilal, and Ācārya Mahāprajñā. I do not claim to be an authority on Jain philosophy–to have *adhikāra*, which Francis Clooney claims ought to be a goal of one who reads in a tradition (Clooney 1990b:304). I regard myself as a mere *śiṣya*–a student, a beginner–in my understanding of the Jain tradition.[1] It may well be, in terms of its own self-understanding, that I am profoundly mistaken in my reading of this tradition and what I take to be its central philosophy. But what I *have* understood of this tradition takes the form presented here–a form distinguishable, I think, by its internal coherence and consistency, as well as its congeniality to appropriation as a central element in the conceptual basis for a reconstructed religious pluralism.

The primary concern of this project is philosophical–that is, it is concerned with the coherence and mutual compatibility of concepts and the arguments and intuitions upon which those concepts are based. It is not primarily an historical project–that is, it does not take historical issues as its central concern, except inasmuch as these are of philosophical relevance. It is, however, a concern of this project, as part of its larger concern with truth in general, not to make historically inaccurate or inappropriate claims or assumptions–hence the importance of my pointing out that by portraying the Jain tradition as a relatively unitary

[1] And this only by way of analogy; for I have not actually 'read' Jainism, in the full 'Clooneyan' sense, as an initiated *Śiṣya* under the authority of a *guru*. I am self-taught (and my errors are therefore my own).

and cohesive system of thought my intention is not to present this portrait as 'history.' I am portraying, instead, a system of ideas abstracted from specific Jain texts which I happen to find useful in the construction of a pluralistic interpretation of religion; though I would make the modest claim that this system does have *some* foundation in the historical Jain tradition. I would also venture to claim that I am aided in my project of abstracting the conceptual system of the Jains from its historical contexts for philosophical purposes by the fact that, as a religious community, the Jains have, at least to all appearances, maintained a remarkably cohesive and clear tradition of doctrinal and metaphysical speculation over the centuries.

In support of this claim I would cite three recent historians of the Jain tradition–Padmanabh S. Jaini, the late Kendall Folkert, and Paul Dundas–the work of all of whom has been devoted to tearing down the stereotypes of Jainism promoted by much of the early modern scholarship on this tradition, including the stereotype of Jainism as monolithic and unchanging. Given the propensity of historians to look for interruptions and disjunctures, and to be suspicious of apparent continuities, regarding the internal consistency of Jainism over time I find the claims of these scholars to be particularly credible. Jaini writes that:

> [The Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras–the two most prominent subdivisions of the Jain community] have been very alike in their remarkable unwillingness to depart from their basic doctrines and practices.…[T]he basic Jaina doctrines thus show extraordinary uniformity through the centuries; indeed, it is possible to consider them as a coherent whole, with little reference to questions of interpretation or chronology (Jaini 1979:88).

Folkert writes, with regard to the numerous sectarian divisions of the Jain community, that:

> The good reason for our ignorance of these divisions is that the Jain tradition is indeed remarkably unitary as concerns fundamental doctrines. Leaving the *gacchas* aside [localized groupings of Jain monks and nuns with distinctive histories and practices, analogous to the monastic orders of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions], one is even hard pressed to find major doctrinal differences between the Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras (Folkert 1993:157).

Finally, according to Paul Dundas, author of *The Jains*:

> Throughout the centuries there has not been any radical reinterpretation of basic Jain metaphysical teachings. Disputes and disagreements have taken place about certain technical matters and various sectarian groups have sometimes chosen to emphasise some aspects at the expense of others, but the doctrine has remained remarkably stable (Dundas 1992:74).

The scholarly consensus on the internal cohesiveness of the Jain tradition is thus fairly clear.

5.2 The Term 'Relativity'

The set of concepts which I am calling 'the Jain doctrines of relativity' represent a complex of three distinct doctrines–though the terms which designate these doctrines are frequently used interchangeably in both primary and secondary texts. Called, in Sanskrit, *anekāntavāda*, *nayavāda*, and *syādvāda*, these three doctrines collectively, taken as an internally coherent, complex whole, constitute what I intend to signify by my use of this term. By the term 'the Jain philosophy of relativity' I intend to designate the basic principle underlying the Jain doctrines of relativity, the total view which arises as a consequence of seeing these doctrines as forming a coherent whole.

I have chosen the term 'relativity' rather than 'relativism' to translate the sense of this complex view because I wish to distinguish it from the self-referentially incoherent view to which the term 'relativism' has come to refer in both contemporary scholarly and popular discourse; that is, the nihilistic position, discussed earlier, which affirms either that there is no truth, or that the truth, whatever it may be, is something that is altogether unknowable by human beings, 'truth' being *solely* a function of one's perspective, and an account of the historical causes leading to a claim's being made being exhaustive of that claim's knowable truth-value.[2]

[2] Paul Dundas, Ramakant Sinari, and others have translated the Jain approach to conceptual plurality as 'relativism'–a translation with which I disagree for the reasons indicated.

By the term 'relativity,' the sense I intend to convey is of a worldview which–like relativism–affirms the vital importance of the perspective from which a claim is made in determining its truth-value, but which does not *reduce* truth to a mere matter of perspective. Such a view sees perspectives as the media by which knowledge of an actually existing, objective reality is known, albeit imperfectly, rather than as exhaustive of what is the case. Relativity, on this understanding, thus implies a metaphysical realism, as opposed to a solipsism, or a worldview which would relegate any dimension of experience to the realm of *pure* construction. Such an understanding is, I think, true to the basic Jain position.

5.3 Locating the Jain Doctrines of Relativity

The doctrines that I analyze in this chapter are to be found primarily in texts written in Sanskrit from roughly the first to the seventeenth centuries of the common era. These texts are exclusively the work of Jain monks of both the Śvetāmbara and Digambara sects. The period during which these texts were written was one marked by intense and creative debate among the various schools of Indian philosophy. It was a period rich in the production of philosophical texts–a period which saw the rise of the now famous Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita schools of Vedānta, the flowering of Mādhyamika and idealist Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy in debate with Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsa realism, and eventually, the arising of the Navya-Nyāya or 'New Logic' school of philosophy.

Extensive debate with all of these schools of thought was to have a profound effect upon the Jain intellectual tradition. This context of intellectual ferment and exchange was highly productive for the Jains no less than for the other schools of Indian philosophy, and the Jain contribution to the philosophical literature of this period is considerable. The distinctively 'Jain' themes of Jain philosophical literature–apart from the pan-Indian themes of this period, such as the nature of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and the refutation of the views of rival schools of thought–were the elaboration of the distinctive Jain *karma* theory, the doctrines of relativity, and the collection of the doctrines of many schools of thought in

doxographical compendia.[3] The Jain doctrines of relativity, in particular, rather like the positions of religious pluralists today, were subjected to harsh criticism from rival schools of thought during this period–and were consequently developed to a level of considerable sophistication by the time of the seventeenth-century Jain author, Yaśovijaya.[4] As a set of doctrines which may be said to presuppose a plurality of already existing schools of thought, it would also make some sense if these doctrines should reach their highest degree of sophistication once these rival systems were already well established. This is, in fact, the case; for much of the development in Jain philosophy occurred after many Buddhist schools of thought had already formed, and after the fundamental texts of the Brahmanical Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and (Pūrva) Mīmāṃsa schools had been composed.

Passages which appear to describe or to presuppose a comparatively unsystematic or 'embryonic' form of the concepts which would, during the period of Sanskrit literature just discussed, be transformed into a fully developed system of relativity, appear in the earliest extant Jain literature–the *āgama*s, or *Siddhānta*, of the Śvetāmbara Jains–canonical literature written in Ardhmāgadhi Prākrit over the course of a period lasting from roughly the fifth century before the common era to the tenth century of the common era. Although the final redaction and enumeration of these texts was problematic and controversial–their canonicity being, in fact, rejected by the Digambaras–they do very likely contain strata of material attributable to a very early period of the history of Jainism–according to Śvetāmbara tradition, to the original eleven disciples (*gaṇadhāra*s) of Mahāvīra himself.[5]

[3] Other traditional Indian schools of thought did produce doxographies, but none with the apparent frequency and intellectual fairness of the Jains. This is generally taken to be an indication of the distinctive Jain approach to the fact of the diversity of perspectives in the society around them. Probably the most famous of the Jain doxographies is Haribhadrasūri's *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* (c. 8th century C.E.).

[4] For non-Jain critiques of these doctrines, see Padmarajiah 1963:363-378 and Matilal 1985:309-311. For a relatively thorough account of the significant Jain philosophical literature here described, see Dixit 1971.

[5] See Jaini 1979:47-52 and Dundas 1992:53-73. Much of the original Jain canonical material, according to the tradition itself, was forgotten before it was ever

Finally, although it has been relatively neglected by Western scholars, a wealth of literature on Jain philosophy–particularly the doctrines of relativity–has been produced by both Jains and non-Jains in India in the twentieth century. Particularly prominent authors in this field have been Satkari Mookerjee and his student, Nathmal Tatia, Y.J. Padmarajiah, and Bimal Krishna Matilal. All of these authors argue in defense of the Jain philosophy of relativity. They are therefore particularly helpful for one who wishes to make a case that this position is a viable one for contemporary philosophers of religion to adopt.

5.4 Conceptual Context: An Overview of the *Jainadarśana*

An adequate understanding of the Jain philosophy of relativity and the doctrines in which it is expressed requires an understanding of the conceptual context from which it emerges–the context of the total Jain worldview, or *darśana*.

Derived from the verbal root *dṛś*, or 'see,' the Sanskrit term *darśana*, along with its modern Hindi equivalent, *darśan*, is most commonly translated into English as 'philosophy.' Indeed, when contemporary Hindi authors wish to translate the English word 'philosophy' into Hindi, they use the word *darśan*.

Like all translations, however, this one is not exact. As one might expect, there is a complex story behind the translation as 'philosophy' of a word whose original meaning has to do with sight in its most literal sense. The best way to understand the translation of *darśana* as 'philosophy' is by means of an analogy with the English word 'view.'

'View' can, of course, mean literally to see or to look at something (as in 'to view a painting') or the way a particular thing appears from a certain perspective (as in 'to enjoy the view'), but it can also refer to an opinion or belief on a particular issue (as in 'her view on abortion') or to a set of such beliefs (as in 'the Catholic view'). The word *darśana*, or

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committed to writing. The Digambaras have their own body of authoritative texts; but, with regard to philosophy, there really are few significant differences in the doctrines accepted by the Digambaras and those upheld by the Śvetāmbaras. See also Dixit 1971:1-3.

darśan, has the same kind of double meaning, applying both to sight in a literal sense and to sets of opinions or beliefs–to 'views'–on a particular issue or issues. In contemporary Indian religious practice, the act of literally viewing an icon or a holy person continues to be designated by the term *darśan*, and the modern Hindi word for television–*dūrdarśan*–like the original Greek from which the English word is derived, literally means 'view from a distance.' But it is also the case that the traditional South Asian schools of systematic reflection on the meaning and character of existence–of what has come to be called, in the West, 'philosophy'–have been and continue to be called *darśana*s–views, or perspectives, on reality. Hence the eighth-century Jain doxography of Haribhadrasūri which delineates the positions of six systems of Indian philosophy is entitled *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya*, or 'A Collection of Six Views (*darśana*s).'

The translation of *darśana* as 'philosophy,' however, also raises issues relating to the meaning of the English term. Philosophy–derived from the Greek *philosophia*, or 'love of wisdom'–originally seems to have meant, in its ancient Greek context, not only a systematic inquiry into the nature of reality, encompassing both metaphysics and what would eventually come to be termed 'natural philosophy,' or science, but also a way of pursuing the good life, a soteriological goal, including, but not limited to, systematic ethical inquiry. In other words, philosophy, at least for Plato and his successors, as well as for his Pythagorean antecedents, was a way of life, and a philosopher was one who pursued this way of life, a way of life that included spiritual exercises, rituals, and an element that could be termed 'faith.' Philosophy, in its origins, thus seems to have been more akin to what has come to be termed 'religion' than to the academic profession followed by those who now teach and pursue scholarship in contemporary departments of philosophy; for, over the course of its roughly two thousand five hundred-year history, philosophy has undergone a profound transformation. This transformation, having to do, in part, with the rise of Christianity, and, in even larger part, with the onset of modernity, has resulted in a

predominant conception of philosophy as largely an academic exercise, having more to do with abstract conceptual issues than with the kinds of existential concerns which typically characterize religion.

Bearing this history in mind, then, the problem with the translation of the Sanskrit term *darśana* as 'philosophy' can be characterized in the following way: The phenomenon to which the term *darśana* refers, in a traditional Indian context, has far more in common with philosophy as understood in its ancient Greek context–with *philosophia*–than with the abstract academic pursuit termed 'philosophy' at the close of the twentieth century. A *darśana*, on a traditional South Asian understanding–like the *philosophia* of Plato and Socrates–encompasses a total worldview and way of life. More holistic in scope than contemporary philosophy–arguably more akin to what is usually meant by 'religion' than to an academic exercise–the *darśana*s of ancient India included both Buddhism and Yoga.

But then, one might ask, why translate *darśana* as 'philosophy?' Why not just translate it as 'religion?' *Darśana* does include religious elements–but also concerns which, in modernity, have become the province of the physical sciences, such as the fundamental composition of the cosmos and the character of sensory perception. In reply to this question, one could recur to the fact that philosophy, in its origins–*philosophia*–is a term encompassing roughly the same semantic range as *darśana*. Religion, however, from the Latin *religio*, originally refers, as recounted by Cicero, to rituals performed out of piety in order to please divine beings, corresponding better to the Sanskrit term *dharma* than to *darśana*–though the terms 'religion' and *dharma* raise an even more complex set of conceptual and historical issues than philosophy and *darśana*. The importance of raising the issue of terminology at all is simply to make clear that the use of the term 'philosophy' to denote the conception of reality under discussion should not be taken to suggest that this worldview is wholly of the kind associated with the abstract, specialized activity that this term denotes in modernity–though it certainly includes such an abstract, specialized

dimension. *Darśana*, rather, claims an existential relevance of the kind associated more with philosophy *in its origins* than with its modern academic successors.[6]

The *Jainadarśana*–or Jainism, as this system of belief and practice has come to be termed in modernity–has its origins in ancient South Asia. In terms of its own self-understanding, it is co-extensive with the nature of reality itself–with the true nature of things (*tattvārtha*) as proclaimed by a beginningless and endless series of omniscient teachers, or 'Fordmakers' (*tīrthaṅkara*s) who appear periodically among human beings in order to build a 'ford' or 'crossing' over the ocean of birth, death, and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) to the 'further shore' of liberation (*mokṣa*) from this beginningless and potentially endless cycle. Twenty-four Fordmakers appear over the course of a single *kālpa*, or cosmic epoch. Jainism, in its present form, was founded by the twenty-fourth Fordmaker of the current epoch–Vardhamāna Jñātṛputra, or Mahāvīra, the 'Great Hero' (c. 599-527 B.C.E.).

The Jain belief that Mahāvīra was preceded by a series of twenty-three earlier Fordmakers can be neither validated nor invalidated by contemporary historical methods. The first Fordmaker of the current epoch, ¿ṣabha, 'the Bull'–who is believed to be the founder of human civilization as well as the Jain religion, a kind of Jain Prometheus–is believed by some to be mentioned independently in the *¿g Veda*, the most ancient of the Brahmanical or 'Hindu' scriptures (though the identification of the Vedic ¿ṣabha with the Jain Fordmaker of the same name is not uncontroversial), and the profusion of bull symbolism in the remains of the pre-Vedic Indus valley civilization (which existed from approximately 2500 to 1500 B.C.E.) is taken by some to be an indication of the existence of ¿ṣabha in a period of great antiquity (Jaini 1979:32-33). The only other Fordmaker prior to Mahāvīra for whose existence there is currently independent evidence is his immediate predecessor, the twenty-third Fordmaker, Pārśvanātha, who is believed to have lived

[6] For a thorough discussion of this entire nexus of translation issues, see Halbfass 1988:263-309.

approximately two hundred years prior to Mahāvīra (c. 900-800 B.C.E.). According to Jain tradition, Mahāvīra's parents were followers of the religion taught by Pārśvanātha, an ascetic tradition characterized by both Jain and Buddhist texts as the 'Fourfold Restraint' (*cāturyāma-saṃvara*), involving abstinence from "injury, nontruthfulness, taking what is not given, and possession" (Ibid:16).

Both Pārśvanātha and Mahāvīra lived at a time of major cultural transformation in South Asia. According to conventional Indological wisdom, beginning around 1500 B.C.E., a major migration spanning several hundred years occurred in which semi-nomadic pastoralists gradually entered the Indian subcontinent from the northwest. These pastoralists, who referred to themselves as *ārya*–meaning 'good' or 'noble'–spoke an Indo-European language which was to become the basis for classical Sanskrit. They practiced a sacrificial nature-oriented religion–bearing a number of resemblances to the religions of ancient Iran, Greece, and Rome–the beliefs and practices of which are preserved in a literature called the *Vedas*. According to the Vedas, the ancient *ārya*s organized their society hierarchically into four *varṇa*s, or estates (though the degree to which this literature is prescriptive–delineating an ideal social order, the official *āryan* ideology–or descriptive of actual social realities is unclear). These *varṇa*s were the *brāhmaṇas* (priests, ritual specialists), *kṣatriyas* (warriors, political rulers), *vaiśyas* (farmers, merchants, artisans, 'commoners'), and *śūdras* (servants). As the *ārya*s entered the subcontinent, their religion and system of social organization, or *dharma*, took root, combining with indigenous elements and undergoing its own internal transformations as well, and gradually evolving, largely, it seems, under the direction of the *brāhmaṇas*, into the ideological basis for what would eventually become Hindu orthodoxy: Brahmanism.

In the early centuries of the first millennium B.C.E., an ascetic movement began to develop in northern India which involved men (and some women as well) renouncing their obligations under the *varṇa* system and taking up lives of wandering mendicancy and

solitary meditation. Connected with this movement was a cosmology which affirmed that the broader context of human existence was a beginningless cycle of births, deaths, rebirths, and redeaths–a process of reincarnation or transmigration called *saṃsāra*. This process was held to be fueled by a principle of moral cause and effect called *karma*, or 'action.' According to the concept of *karma*, it is the nature of the universe that all action–good or evil–creates a corresponding good or evil effect upon the agent who performs it. Since the moral effects of actions clearly do not all come to fruition within a single human lifetime (that is, since the good suffer and the wicked flourish), a series of lifetimes must be posited in which this fruition occurs, a process which continues as long as there is action.

This concept of action, or *karma*, as found in the Vedic literature, appears first in a sacrificial context. Action, in the early Vedic literature, is primarily *ritual* action. The intended effect of such action, on a Brahmanical understanding, is some specific benefit for which the ritual is intended–such as health, wealth, progeny, long life, and, most relevantly to the development of the cosmology of *saṃsāra*, a good afterlife. Such ritual action, however, has a limited efficacy; so an afterlife in heaven (*svārga*) produced as an effect of the performance of a Vedic sacrifice will eventually end and one will be reborn on earth.

Over the course of time, the idea began to develop that *all* moral action–all *karma*– and not only ritual action, produces concomitant good and evil effects. As long as one engages in *any* good or evil action, therefore, one will continue to produce future good or evil effects, and the process of life, death, birth, and rebirth will be prolonged indefinitely. Rather than being viewed as something positive, as a kind of immortality, this potentially endless cycle of transmigration came to be viewed as a terrible burden, as a kind of imprisonment in a situation in which one is condemned to repeated death, suffering, and continual separation from and forgetfulness of one's loved ones from previous lives. The supreme goal therefore became liberation–or *mokṣa*–from the chains of action and rebirth.

The process of rebirth being fueled by *karma*–or action–the logical conclusion came to be drawn that the path to liberation involved either reducing one's activity to a minimum, or alternatively, that it involved the realization of a state of being which would negate the natural effects of *karma*–a state of transcendence of the world of cause and effect. Or it could involve a combination of the two, of asceticism and realization, usually in some kind of mutual dependence upon one another. These beliefs corresponded with the ascetic movement toward the renunciation of life in society–life which necessarily involved one in moral activity and obligation and further entangled one in the web of *karma* and *saṃsāra*.

The development of this cosmology and the shift from the old Vedic worldview–the chief aim of which was the betterment of one's worldly existence through the correct performance of ritual action–to a worldview in which the supreme goal became precisely to *escape* from the world created by action–and ultimately by the desire motivating action–is chronicled in the *Upaniṣads*. The *Upaniṣads* are esoteric Brahmanical texts, the bulk of which were composed from roughly the ninth to the fifth centuries B.C.E., which claim to reveal the true, inner meaning of the Vedas–namely, the realization of *Brahman*, the ultimate Reality underlying the illusory world of *karma* and *saṃsāra*–a realization which leads to liberation from the cosmic process. The concepts of *karma*, *saṃsāra*, and *mokṣa* which these texts proclaim were the shared inheritance of the entire renunciant movement.

The issue of the exact origins of these concepts is, it seems, irresolvable, given the scarcity of available data on this period of South Asian history. Whether they developed, as I have depicted them–and as conventional Indological wisdom understands them–from within the Brahmanical tradition, as gradual elaborations of and a drawing of logical conclusions from the original Vedic worldview (for the Brahmanical texts are the only texts which survive from this early period of South Asian history), or whether they reflect, as Jain scholars would claim, a much older, pre-Vedic tradition gradually influencing and finding its way into the Brahmanical ideology, or whether the truth is somewhere in the middle, the

concepts of *karma*, *saṃsāra*, and *mokṣa* came to dominate the religious imagination of South Asia, and were firmly established by the time of Mahāvīra.[7]

The ascetic movement which promoted these concepts included both *brāhmaṇas*, who saw their cosmology and their *yogic* practices, as depicted in the *Upaniṣads*, as reflecting the true inner meaning and end of the *Veda*–the *Vedānta*–and anti-Vedic ascetics, or *śramaṇas*, who rejected the cosmology underlying the Brahmanical organization of society into *varṇas*, accepting members from all levels of society into their ranks, and who affirmed an ethic of *ahiṃsā*, or noninjury, denouncing in very strong terms the animal sacrifices that many Vedic ceremonies involved. The *śramaṇa* movement consisted of an enormous variety of groups, including even agnostics and materialists. Each of these groups interpreted and evaluated the concepts of *karma* and *saṃsāra* in its own way.

The extent to which the distinctively Jain version of this shared cosmology owes its existence and character to Pārśvanātha, to Mahāvīra, or to later interpreters of the Jain tradition, is a matter for historical speculation. We do know with some degree of certainty that Pārśvanātha was an ascetic, with both ascetic and lay followers, who advocated a form

[7] The historical case for the Jain view–that this cosmology and the techniques for self-realization associated with it, rather than being logical developments from the Vedic worldview, reflect an ancient, pre-Brahmanical tradition which the *brahmaṇas* gradually appropriated–contains three primary components. The first of these are archaeological remains from the pre-Vedic Indus valley civilization which appear to depict figures seated in meditation postures and the bull images which, as we have already seen, are argued to refer symbolically to the first Fordmaker. The second of these are references within the *¿g Veda*, again, to ¿ṣabha, and to ascetics called *vrātyas* who reject the Vedic religion and who are argued to be proto-Jain monks. The third component of this argument, finally, consists of the fact that groups of non- or anti-Brahmanical ascetics–or *Śramaṇas*–such as Jains, Buddhists, and the now-extinct Ājīvikas, tended to predominate in the eastern portion of the Ganges river valley where the *āryan* migration presumably reached last and where orthodox Brahmanical culture was weaker than in its northwestern homeland, which suggests that the earlier tradition of which the *Śramaṇas* are supposed, according to this theory, to constitute a remnant, was stronger in this region. None of these arguments, however, is conclusive.

of moral restraint with the aim in mind of reducing karmically effective activity, the ultimate goal of such karmic reduction being the cessation of the process of rebirth. According to the canonical texts of the Śvetāmbara community,[8] Mahāvīra's parents were followers of

Pārśvanātha's sect who supported the values of the renunciant movement. In contrast with his junior contemporary, the Buddha, who had to flee from his father's palace in the night, Mahāvīra's mendicant career is depicted as having his family's blessing (Ibid:11).

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[8] The division of the Jain community into its two major sects–the Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras–is shrouded in historical obscurity. This division seems to have occurred near the beginning of the common era, probably around the second or third century. According to a Digambara tradition, though, it occurred much earlier, in the third century before the common era, during the lifetime of the first Maurya emperor, Candragupta I. According to this tradition a group of monks, led by the patriarch Bhadrabāhu, fled the traditional homeland of Jainism in the eastern half of the Ganges valley, migrating south to Shravana Belgola, near Mysore, in the modern Indian state of Karnataka, in order to avoid a famine. Centuries later, when members of this southern monastic community re-established contact with the Jain monks of the north, they found the northern monks–the Śvetāmbaras–to have lapsed in their practice of the Jain path and to have distorted the Jain scriptures (Jaini 1979:4-6). From a Śvetāmbara perspective, the Digambaras are a heretical group with unnecessarily severe views about what is required for the attainment of liberation. Their fundamental worldviews being identical, the differences between the Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras are the following: The Digambara ('sky-clad') Jains hold that a monk must renounce *all* possessions, including clothing, and that the practice of nudity is therefore a necessary condition for liberation. Connected with this claim is the view that women are incapable of attaining liberation (though they may, of course, attain it in a future birth as a man). The Digambaras also maintain that Mahāvīra, after his attainment of *kevalajñāna*, was so transformed that he did not eat or speak, or need to engage in any normal human bodily functions. Because the Ardhamāgadhi canon accepted by the Śvetāmbaras depicts Mahāvīra as engaging in such activities it is also rejected by the Digambaras, who claim that the scriptures have been irretrievably lost. (Interestingly in this regard, even the Śvetāmbaras concede that their collection of scriptures is incomplete). The Digambara 'scripture' is a summarized version of Mahāvīra's teachings called the *ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama*, or 'Six-Part Scripture,' which is in fundamental agreement with the Ardhamāgadhi canon in terms of the basic worldview that it presents. The Śvetāmbara ('white-clad') Jains hold that women are capable of attaining liberation in this life–even maintaining that the nineteenth TīrthaŚkara, Mallinātha, was a woman–and that Mahāvīra, even after attaining *kevalajñāna*, continued to engage in normal bodily functions until his physical death, the exhausting of his *nāma* and *ayus* (lifespan-determining) karma (Dundas 1992:40-52). Śvetāmbara monks wear simple white clothing, holding that only *attachment* to possessions prohibits liberation. For an extensive and excellent summary and analysis of Digambara-Śvetāmbara debates on the spiritual liberation of women, see Jaini 1992.

According to Jain tradition, after twelve years of rigorous ascetic practice and meditation, Mahāvīra attained the goal of the Jain path of purification. Having conquered the passions (*kaṣāya*s) of his lower self, he became a *Jina*, a 'victor' or 'conqueror' (hence the name *Jaina* or Jain, for a follower of Mahāvīra). At this point, at the age of forty-two, he is believed to have attained *kevalajñāna*–absolute knowledge, or complete omniscience. It is on the authority of this absolute knowledge that the Jain tradition proclaims its doctrines and fundamental worldview–the teachings of Mahāvīra as preserved in the scriptures. Therefore, despite its later emphasis on the validation of its teachings through logic, this tradition "in actuality shows many of the characteristics of a revealed religion of the Judaeo-Christian-Moslem type" (Dundas 1992:77).

Of what do these doctrines and worldview consist? As we have already seen, the South Asian renunciant movement of the first millenium B.C.E. of which Jainism was a part held a common worldview consisting of the affirmation of a beginningless series of lifetimes–of births, deaths, and rebirths–called *saṃsāra*. This process was held to be fueled by moral action and its effects–by *karma*–and the highest soteriological goal of the renouncers and their lay supporters was release from this process–or *mokṣa*.

As mentioned earlier, each of the various renunciant groups had its own distinctive vision of this shared cosmology. Brahmanical renouncers–the forerunners of what would eventually be called Hinduism–held release from the process of rebirth to be a result of an experiential realization of the ultimate unity of Being, the identity of one's own inner self, or *ātman*, and the selves of all entities, with *Brahman*, the universal Self. The Buddhist tradition, which seems to have arisen shortly after Jainism (the Buddha being, based on current evidence, a junior contemporary of Mahāvīra), held *mokṣa*, or *nirvāṇa*, to arise from a realization of the interdependently arising and finally essenceless or empty (*śūnya*) nature of all things–a perspective which gives rise to the doctrine of no-self (*anātman*), the denial

of a self of the kind affirmed by the Brahmanical tradition. The fatalist Ājīvikas held that everyone has an allotted number of lives, after which *mokṣa* follows automatically.

According to the Jain view, proclaimed by Mahāvīra, all of these views are, in some sense, true, and in another sense, false. The Jain tradition affirms a universe (*loka*) consisting of five basic kinds of entities, the *dravya*s or *pañcāstikāya*s: *jīva* (soul), *pudgala* (matter, in the form of atoms), *dharma* (the medium of rest), *adharma* (the medium of motion), and *ākāśa* (space), with a sixth, *kāla* (time), being added later (Ibid: 80). The first- to second-century systematizer of the *Jainadarśana*, Umāsvāti, reduces these ontological categories to two: *jīva* (soul) and *ajīva* (non-soul) (*Tattvārtha Sūtra* 1:4). *Jīva*s are infinite in number–the *loka* being full of them–and their essential characteristics are infinite bliss (*sukha*), energy (*vīrya*), and consciousness (*jñāna*).

From beginningless time the *jīva*s have been associated with *karma*, a form of matter (*ajīva*, or *pudgala*) which adheres to the *jīva* like dust to a damp cloth. The 'water' which causes this karmic 'dust' to adhere to the 'cloth' of the soul, which makes the soul 'sticky,' is passion (*kaṣāya*). Passion gives rise to action, which, in turn, attracts more *karma* to the soul. When this *karma* comes to fruition, it produces a good (*puṇya*) or evil (*pāpa*) effect, corresponding to the action which attracted it. This good or evil effect gives rise to an experience of pleasure (*sukha*) or pain (*duḥkha*), which, in turn, gives rise to more passion, in the form of attraction (*rāga*) or aversion (*dveśa*), and the entire cycle repeats itself. This is the basic Jain account of the mechanics of the bondage (*bandha*) of the soul. Taking to its most radical, logical conclusion the inference that, if action is the cause of bondage, the cause of liberation must be the cessation of action, Mahāvīra proclaimed a rigorous ascetic path of spiritual purification aimed at stopping the inflow (*āsrava*) of karmic particles into the soul through a life of minimal activity and the calming of the passions through meditation, and encouraging the dissipation (*nirjarā*) of karmic particles currently existing in the soul through severe physical mortifications. At the end of this path, the true, innate

character of the soul–until now obscured by deluding (*mohanīya*) passions and karmic particles–shines forth. One now experiences perfect bliss and omniscience, and, after one's physical death, eternal life as a Jina–release from *saṃsāra*.

The actions which arouse the strongest passions, according to this tradition, and which are therefore the greatest obstacle to liberation, are those involving violence toward other living beings. The Jain path is therefore characterized by a particularly strong emphasis upon an ethic of *ahiṃsā*, or noninjury in thought, word, and deed, toward all living beings.

The Jain community has long been characterized by its aversion to the taking of life of any kind. The Jain opposition to the animal sacrifices involved in a number of Vedic ceremonies (such as the *Aśvamedhayajña*, or Horse Sacrifice) is well-attested in ancient sources, and Jain beliefs, along with those of the *śramaṇa* movement generally, about the sanctity of life very likely led to the widespread practice of vegetarianism common among many Indians–including most Hindus–today. The Jain doctrine of *ahiṃsā* had a profound influence in the twentieth century on the ideals and methods of Mahātma Gandhi (Jaini 1979:314-315) and Jains continue to be prominent in contemporary India in charitable movements both for the promotion of human welfare and in opposition to cruelty toward animals. Though concessions have been made over the centuries for laypersons, the pursuit of whose livelihood necessarily involves some measure of violence toward other beings–and upon whom the monastic community is dependent for its own physical survival–for the building of temples (which involves the destruction of organisms in the earth), and for self-defense, the highest ethical ideal of Jainism has always been that of the Jain monk, an ideal which has not changed substantially for two and half millennia:

> *jāvanti loe pāṇā tasā aduva thāvarā* |
> *te jāṇam ajāṇaṃ vā na haṇe no va ghāyae* ||

> As many moving or unmoving beings as there are in the world is the number of beings a monk should not injure or cause to be injured, either consciously or unconsciously (*Daśavaikālika Sūtra* 6:10).

Such is the *Jainadarśana*, the conceptual context from which the Jain philosophy of relativity emerges. In the next section, I will trace the historical process by which this philosophy arises from the conception of reality I have described here.

5.5 The Jain Philosophy of Relativity: Its Historical Development

5.5.1 Relativity in the Śvetāmbara *Āgama*s: Mahāvīra's Inclusive Middle Path

What was the historical process by which the representative intellectuals of the Jain community developed their position of relativity? As mentioned earlier, the Jain doctrines of relativity developed over the course of centuries of debate with rival schools of Indian philosophy as well as internal discussion within the Jain community on the nature of proper philosophical discourse. But what was the form of the first stage of this process? In order to address this question, one must turn to the earliest strata of the Jain canonical literature, to the Ardhamāgadhi Prākrit *Bhagavai Sutta*, or *Bhagavati Sūtra*.

Jainism originated (taking Mahāvīra to be the historical founder of this religion) in approximately the same time period and geographic location as Buddhism–roughly the sixth century before the common era, in the region of India now encompassed by the states of Bihar and West Bengal and the eastern half of the state of Uttar Pradesh, in the eastern portion of the Ganges river valley. References abound in the Ardhamāgadhi texts to the same geographic locations, persons, and–most relevantly for our purposes–intellectual currents as are mentioned in the Buddhist Pāli canonical literature (Bhaskar 1972).

A common problem faced by both the Buddha and Mahāvīra, according to the texts of their respective religious communities, was the positing of *avyākata*, or unanswerable, questions by their followers–metaphysical and cosmological questions which were major sources of controversy among the various schools of thought existing at the time. The Buddha, as portrayed in the Pāli literature, often refused to answer these questions, viewing

them as not conducive to edification. But when he did choose to answer them, the method by which he dealt with such questions came to be called the *vibhajya*, or analytical, method. This method involves relativizing the terms in which the questions are phrased. According to B.K. Matilal, the Jain doctrines of relativity developed from a similar strategy engaged in, according to the earliest extant Jain texts, by Mahāvīra (Matilal 1981:19-29).

As translated by Matilal, the Buddhist *Majjhimanikāya* (*CŪlamālunkya Sutta*) lists the ten *avyākata* questions as follows (Ibid:12):

1. Is the *loka* (world, man) eternal?
2. Is the *loka* not eternal?
3. Is it (the *loka*) finite (with an end)?
4. Is it not finite?
5. Is that which is the body the soul? (Is the soul identical with the body?)
6. Is the soul different from the body?
7. Does the *Tathāgata* [the Buddha, a liberated being] exist after death?
8. Does he not exist after death?
9. Does he both exist and not exist after death?
10. Does he neither exist nor not exist after death?

As depicted in Buddhist texts, the Buddha viewed passionate attachment to particular philosophical views on questions such as these as being no less of a hindrance to spiritual progress than other kinds of passionate attachment, such as greed or lust. From a Buddhist perspective, attachment to such views (*dṛṣṭi*s) is, in a way, more dangerous than other kinds of attachment–for those who are attached to a particular view may be under the illusion that this view will lead them to liberation. This intuition gradually developed into the negating dialectical method of Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika school of Buddhism.

The Buddha's approach to the *avyākata* questions, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to avoid philosophical extremes, to walk a 'middle path' between the various views

current at the time by refusing to embrace any of them. The first four questions, about the world's having or not having a beginning or an end, he simply refused to answer. The fifth and sixth questions, regarding the identity or non-identity of the soul and the body, he addressed with his *anātman* doctrine, which denies an independently existing soul, but is not a materialism or a physicalism either. The remaining four questions he answered in the negative, giving rise to the *catuṣkoṭivinirmuktatvam*, or Fourfold Negation, of Buddhism.

Matilal suggests that the Jain doctrines of relativity developed from an analogous strategy on the part of Mahāvīra, as portrayed in the Jain *Āgama*s, for dealing with the *avyākata* questions. Unlike the Buddha, however, Mahāvīra replied to these questions in the affirmative, by answering the *avyākata* questions with a qualified "Yes" rather than a "No"–an approach taken by the Jains to demonstrate his omniscience. Matilal characterizes this Jain approach as an "'inclusive' middle," in contrast with the Buddhists' "'exclusive' middle," path. The Buddha avoids exclusivistic attachment to particular views by rejecting all of them. Mahāvīra avoids such attachment by incorporating all views equally into his own. The eventual development of *anekāntavāda*, *nayavāda*, and *syādvāda*, roughly around the time of the rise of Mādhyamika Buddhism, can be seen as a Jain parallel to the Buddhist Mādhyamika dialectic. Mahāvīra's positive use of *vibhajyavāda*–the analysis of the *avyākata* questions into their component parts–is illustrated in the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*:

> *bhagavaṃ mahāvīre jamāliṃ aṇagāraṃ evaṃ vayāsī…sāsae loe jamālī | janna kayāi ṇāsi ṇa kayāi ṇa bhavai ṇa kayāi ṇa bhavissai bhuviṃ ca bhavai ya bhavissai ya dhruve ṇiie sāsae akkhae avṭṭhie nicce | asāsae loe jamālī | jao osappiṇī bhavittā usappiṇī bhavai | ussappiṇī bhavittā osāppiṇī bhavai | sāsae jīve jamālī | jaṃ na kayāi ṇāsi jāva ṇicce | asāsae jīve jamālī | jannaṃ neraie bhavittā tirikkhajoṇie bhavittā maṇusse bhavai maṇusse bhavittā deve bhavai |*
>
> [T]he Venerable Mahāvīra told the Bhikkhu Jamāli thus:…[T]he world is, Jamāli, eternal. It did not cease to exist at any time. It was, it is and it will be. It is constant, permanent, eternal, imperishable, indestructible, always existent.
>
> The world is, Jamāli, non-eternal. For it becomes progressive (in time-cycle) after being regressive. And it becomes regressive after becoming progressive.

> The soul is, Jamāli, eternal. For it did not cease to exist at any time. The soul is, Jamāli, non-eternal. For it becomes animal after being a hellish creature, becomes a man after becoming an animal and it becomes a god after being a man (*Bhagavatī Sūtra* 9:386).[9]

According to the Jain tradition, because of his omniscience, a *kevalin*, such as Mahāvīra, is able to see the complexity of reality from all of its various perspectives, and thus to answer metaphysical questions from all of these various relatively valid points of view. From the perspective of permanence–of the fact that "it did not cease to exist at any time…it was, it is and it will be"–the world is, according to Mahāvīra, eternal. From the perspective of change, on the other hand, the world is affirmed to be "non-eternal." (The "progressive" and "regressive" time-cycles of which Mahāvīra speaks–the *utsarpiṇī* and *avasarpiṇī*, respectively–are periods of increasing good and bad qualities, each of which characterizes half of a *kalpa*, or cosmic epoch (Jaini 1979:30-32)). From the perspective of its innate qualities, the soul, or *jīva*, is eternal. "It did not cease to exist any time." But from the perspective of its karmically determined experiences of *saṃsāra*, its rebirths in numerous different forms, it is non-eternal. The point of view of the omniscient *kevalin* encompasses all of these various perspectives. As a result, Mahāvīra can address these and many other *avyākata* or unanswerable questions in all of their various dimensions.

Its initial foundation in the affirmation of Mahāvīra's omniscience underscores the importance for the Jain philosophy of relativity of the existence of a unique, absolute perspective (another translation of *kevala* being 'unique') from which the relative validity of all other perspectives can be perceived and proclaimed. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, it is the existence of such an absolute perspective which constitutes the transcendental foundation, the necessary condition for the possibility, of the affirmation of a philosophy of relativity such as what the Jain tradition proposes.

Its affirmation of the existence of such an absolute perspective is why this philosophy, despite its affirmation of relativity, is not a *relativism*; for it maintains the

[9] Translation by Matilal. Quoted from Matilal 1981:19.

existence of an absolute perspective which grounds the relativity of all other perspectives, a perspective *to which* all other perspectives are relative. But this is also why this philosophy, is characterizable as a heteronomous tradition, affirmed on the authority of 'faith' (*samyagdarśana*) in the perspective of another–the omniscient *kevalin*–rather than on the authority of autonomous reason. As we shall see though, later Jain philosophers, affirming something very close to the modern commitment to the redemption of claims on the basis of human reason alone, deduced the necessity of an absolute perspective from the logic of their philosophy of relativity.

5.5.2 Systematic Ontological Foundations: Umāsvāti's *Tattvārtha Sūtra*

The Jain āgamas, or scriptures, do not constitute a unitary, coherent, or systematic presentation of the worldview taught by Mahāvīra and his immediate followers. On the contrary, these texts include a diverse variety of materials, ranging from biographical accounts of Mahāvīra and other *Tīrthaṅkara*s, cosmological treatises, minutely detailed accounts of the kinds of beings that exist in the world (including a variety of microscopic organisms), extensive treatments of ethics, monastic discipline, physiology, astrology, collections of prayers, 'mythological' narratives about gods and demons, and accounts of the various kinds of *karma*, as well as discourses which could properly be called 'philosophical,' on ontological and epistemological issues.

The systematization of Jain doctrine was left to Umāsvāti, "of whose career the tradition has preserved virtually no information, either historical or hagiographical" (Dundas 1992:74). Probably living in the second century of the common era, when a variety of Indian philosophical schools had begun to coalesce and enter into extensive debate with one another, Umāsvāti composed the first known Jain doctrinal treatise in Sanskrit, his *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, thus arguably signaling a desire to communicate knowledge of this tradition beyond the Jain community to a broader audience of South Asian intellectuals.

This was the period in which Buddhists, too, began to write Sanskrit *sūtra*s. By writing in Sanskrit, Jains and Buddhists were able to enter into debate with Brahmanical traditions, and with one another, rather than remaining in their respective Ardhamāgadhi and Pāli ghettoes, writing solely in languages which only they understood.

The *Tattvārtha Sūtra* is one of the very few texts held to be authoritative by both Śvetāmbara and Digambara Jains, very likely being composed before the differences between these two groups had solidified into sectarian distinctions. The authoritative status of this text for both communities may, to some extent, be responsible for the degree of doctrinal continuity, commented upon earlier, for which the Jain tradition is noted.

The *Tattvārtha Sūtra* takes themes and ideas found throughout the Ardhamāgadhi canon (and in the Digambara *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama*), summarizes them concisely, and translates many of them into the terms of the broader Indian philosophical discussion of the time. Its contribution to the development of the Jain philosophy of relativity is in giving explicit and systematic expression to the fundamental ontological assumptions implicit in the doctrines of the early Jain community and in the discourses attributed to Mahāvīra just discussed. As an early systematic formulation of the Jain metaphysical position, this text was to become a touchstone for all future Jain philosophical discourse, its definitions and characterizations of issues taking on a "quasi-scriptural status" (Ibid:75).

Most relevant to the Jain philosophy of relativity are the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*'s systematizations of the notions of *satsāmānya*, *nikṣepa*, and *naya*. *Satsāmānya* means 'existence-' or 'being-universal.' It refers to the general characteristics shared by everything that exists. These are, according to Umāsvāti's famous formula, which could be fairly characterized as the fundamental statement of Jain ontology: "Emergence, perishing, and duration" (*Tattvārtha Sūtra* 5:29). The importance of this formula for the Jain tradition has to do with the character of the soul, or *jīva*, and the process of its liberation. Unlike the Brahmanical tradition, which affirms the ultimate permanence of Brahman as the underlying

ground of all reality, and Buddhism, which affirms radical impermanence and the *lack* of any underlying ground as the defining characteristic of existence, Jainism affirms the concommitance of permanence and impermanence, identity and difference, in the nature of the *jīva*; for the *jiva* is held to be, in one sense, permanent–eternally possessing the innate characteristics of infinite bliss, energy, and consciousness which constitute its intrinsic identity–but in another sense, impermanent–inasmuch as its status vis-a-vis its karmic accretions is constantly changing and different from moment to moment. In contrast with both Brahmanical and Buddhist tendencies toward idealism, the Jain tradition thus affirms a metaphysical realism which accepts the phenomena of the emergence, perishing, and (finite) duration of all entities as fundamental to its soteriology.

The pluralistic character of reality which Jainism affirms–its claim both that there are a variety of entities (*dravya*s) constituting the world and that these entities have a variety of aspects (aspects having to do with their emergence, perishing, and endurance over time)–gives rise to the variety of perspectives from which a philosophical issue can be validly addressed: the various relative perspectives from which Mahāvīra is depicted as addressing metaphysical questions in such texts as the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*. Though it is not yet called this in the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, this conception of reality as having many facets, or aspects, is the doctrine of *anekāntavāda*. The perspectivalism which it entails as its epistemological correlate is eventually expressed in the doctrine of *nayavāda*. This perspectivalism is articulated in the Ardhamāgadhi literature, and systematized by Umāsvāti, in the two interrelated concepts of *nikṣepa* and *naya*.

A *nikṣepa*, or 'gateway of investigation,' is a topic in terms of which a particular entity can be analyzed. Umāsvāti lists the *nikṣepa*s as *nāma* (name), *sthāpanā* (symbol), *dravya* (potentiality), *bhāvatā* (actuality), *nirdeśa* (definition), *svāmitva* (possession), *sādhana* (cause), *adhikaraṇa* (location), *sthiti* (duration), *vidhānatā* (variety), *sat* (existence), *saṃkhyā* (numerical determination), *kṣetra* (field occupied), *sparśana* (field

touched), *kāla* (continuity), *antara* (time-lapse), *bhāva* (states), and *alpabahutva* (relative numerical strength).[10] *Naya*s are philosophical perspectives from which a particular topic can be viewed and which determine the conclusions that can be reached about it. Umāsvāti lists them as seven–*naigamanaya* (common person's view), *saṃgrahanaya* (generic view), *vyavahāranaya* (practical view), *ṛjusūtranaya* (linear view), *śabdanaya* (literal view), *samabhirūḍhanaya* (etymological view), and *evaṃbhūtanaya* (acuality view).[11] Umāsvāti's commentators see these seven *naya*s as partial views which collectively make up a valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) (Tatia trans. 1994:8). But as we shall see, the concept of *naya* was to undergo extensive elaboration in the subsequent Jain philosophical tradition.

5.5.3 Mundane and Ultimate Perspectives: Kundakunda's 'Two Truths'

The first of these elaborations–and arguably the most peculiar, in terms of the later development of the Jain tradition–was that of the second- to third-century Digambara *ācārya* ('teacher') and mystic, Kundakunda.[12] Possibly a contemporary of Umāsvāti, in such works as his *Pravacanasāra* ('The Essence of the Doctrine') and *Samayasāra* ('The Essence of the Soul'), Kundakunda proposes a distinction between what he calls the *vyavahāranaya* or 'mundane perspective' (not to be confused with Umāsvāti's 'practical' *naya* of the same name) and the *niścayanaya* or 'ultimate perspective,' also called 'supreme' (*paramārtha*) and 'pure' (*śuddha*).

In order to understand Kundakunda's distinction between these two perspectives, recall the Jain doctrine of the complex nature of the *jīva*: It has both a substantial, unchanging aspect (*dravya*), characterized by intrinsic qualities (*guṇa*s), such as infinite

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[10] Translation by Tatia. Quoted from Umāsvāti (Tatia trans.) 1994:7-9.

[11] Translation by Tatia. Quoted from Umāsvāti (Tatia trans.) 1994:23.

[12] Whether the various writings attributed to Kundakunda are the work of a single author by this name or of a school of thought claiming him as its founder is an as yet unresolved historical question. For a discussion of the issues this question raises, see Johnson 1995:91-97.

bliss, energy, and consciousness, and a constantly changing, karmically determined aspect which includes its embodiment in various forms and its experience, from moment to moment, of various emotive and cognitive states (*paryāya*s), release from which is the ultimate goal of the Jain soteriological path. It is this distinction, fundamental to an orthodox Jain understanding of the soul, that Kundakunda takes as his point of departure.

As defined by Kundakunda, the *vyavahāranaya*, or mundane perspective, which could also be called the perspective of epistemological relativity, is ultimately the less reliable of the two perspectives. It is the karmically determined perspective through which one perceives reality as characterized, in Umāsvāti's terms, by emergence, perishing, and duration. It is the perspective, in other words, of 'normal,' non-omniscient persons who are still trapped in *saṃsāra* and who have not yet experienced the eternal bliss and omniscience which is the true, substantial nature of the soul. Such deluded persons consequently misunderstand the nature of the reality that they experience, mistaking spiritually extraneous karmically determined activity for innate soul activity:

> *dravyaguṇasya cātmā na karoti pudgalamayakarmāṇi* |
> *tadubhayam akurvaṃs tasmin kathaṃ tasya sa kartā* || 111 ||
>
> The soul does not cause the nature of substance or attribute in material *karma*s. Not causing these two in that [karmic matter], how [can the soul be] the doer of that [*karma*]?
>
> *jīve hetubhŪte bandhasya ca dṛṣṭvā pariṇāmam* |
> *jīvena kṛtaṃ karma bhaṇyate upacāramātreṇa* || 112 ||
>
> But seeing the modification of karmic bondage by the [auxiliary] cause of [the mundane] soul's thought-activity, it is said from the mundane point of view that *karma*s have been caused by the soul (*Samayasāra* 111-112).[13]

[13] All translations in this section are based on that of J.L. Jaini (Jaini 1930). Sanskrit scholars may find it odd that the terms *jīva* and *ātman* are both consistently translated in this dissertation as 'soul,' and are used, functionally, as synonyms, and that *pudgala* is translated here as 'matter.' In the better known tradition of Vedānta, the *jīva* and the *ātman* are *not* identical–with the *jīva* typically referring to the empirical soul or ego–the 'self'–and the *ātman* referring to the 'Self,' the transmigrating entity which is ultimately identical, at least in Advaita Vedānta, with Brahman, or Ultimate Reality. Similarly, *pudgala*, in the Buddhist tradition, refers to the concept of the 'person,' introduced–illicitly according to the mainstream tradition–by the Pudgalavādins to

On the other hand, the ultimate perspective, according to Kundakunda–the true or 'certain' (*niŚcaya*) perspective–is the *niŚcayanaya*, which perceives the soul in its intrinsic, unchanging nature: as eternally blissful, energetic, and omniscient. This, according to Kundakunda, is the perspective which the aspirant on the Jain path must try to cultivate. The *vyavahāranaya*, on the other hand, is deluded and must be finally be superseded. The understandings of reality which it yields are relative and uncertain. The *niŚcayanaya*, however, reveals things as they truly are. The understanding of reality which this ultimate perspective yields, in contrast with those derived from the mundane perspective, is certain and authentic. One who bases one's perceptions upon it believes rightly:

> *vyavahāro'bhŪtārtho deŚitas tu Śuddhanayā* |
> *bhŪtārthamāŚritā khalu samyagdṛṣṭirbhavati jīvā* || 13 ||
>
> The mundane perspective does not yield the real meaning. But the pure perspective has been said to give the real meaning. The soul dependent on the real perspective is a right-believer (*Samayasāra* 13).

In terms of soteriology, Kundakunda's approach can be seen to resemble both Buddhist and Vedāntic models of salvation which locate the roots of spiritual bondage in ignorance, or *avidyā*, a false *consciousness* of the true nature of reality, rather than in an actual state of affairs, external to consciousness, which *causes* such ignorance, such as the mainstream Jain tradition affirms with its doctrine of material *karma*s which obscure the true, omniconscious nature of the soul; for he seems, sometimes, to be saying that it is not the bondage of the soul by karmic matter, but rather, the *perception* of it as being so bound,

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account for the sense of 'self' to which the combination of the five *skāndhas*, or aggregates (matter, sensation, perception, volition and consciousness) gives rise according to early Buddhist thought. (To the rest of the Buddhist tradition, this concept looked too much like the self, or *ātman*, denied by the Buddha in his *anātman* doctrine, and the Pudgalavādins came to be regarded as heretics.) In the Jain tradition, however, *jīva* and *ātman* are typically synonymous. Both refer to the inherently omniscient, blissful, and energetic entity whose nature is obscured by karma and the experience of the true nature of which is constitutive of liberation–the entity which I am calling the 'soul.' *Pudgala* refers, in Jainism, to matter–specifically, to atomically-constituted matter, in contrast with non-atomic forms of *ajīva*, like space (*ākāśa*) and the principles of motion and inertia (*dharma* and *adharma*).

that is the real problem which must be overcome. As W.J. Johnson elaborates, for Kundakunda:

> …[L]iberation is seen to be attained not by the destruction of that *karman* which (very tenuously) has been said to bring about *moha* [delusion], but by the destruction of *moha* itself through meditation on the essential purity and complete separateness of the soul. In other words, it is lack of knowledge of the true nature of the self which really *constitutes moha*; consequently, it is the knowledge (gnosis) and realisation of the self's true nature which banishes *moha* (*aŚuddhopayoga*) and, by revealing and realising the inherent purity of the soul, accomplishes liberation. The role of material *karman* in this mechanism of bondage and liberation has thus for all significant purposes been forgotten. And it can be forgotten because the logic of the system no longer requires it (Johnson 1995:141).

With regard to liberation, then, Kundakunda seems to take a position–like that of Buddhism and Vedānta–which holds that it is *transcendence* of the realm of action–of *karma*–through gnosis which leads to liberation rather than the mere minimalization and eventual cessation of action through ascetic practice. The Jain tradition, however, at least in its early form, seems to have leaned quite radically in the other direction (Ibid:4-45). From this perspective then, Kundakunda's views could be seen as constituting a major departure from early Jain teaching.

This is not the only respect in which Kundakunda's teachings could be seen, from a more mainstream Jain position, to be unorthodox; for his two perspectives are not, like the seven *naya*s of mainstream Jainism, simply alternative valid ways of viewing the soul. The *niŚcayanaya*, rather, is a *true* perspective, and the *vyavahāranaya*, as an impediment to liberation, is ultimately a *false* one. Kundakunda could therefore conceivably be read as having committed the cardinal sin of the Jain philosophy of relativity, at least as it was eventually developed by the later tradition–*durnaya*, or *ekāntavāda* (absolutism):

> *evaṃ vyavahāranayā pratiṣiddho jānī hi niŚcayanayena* }
> *niŚcayanayasaṃlīnā muninā prāpnuvanti nirvāṇam* || 290 ||
>
> Thus know that the mundane perspective is contradicted by the ultimate perspective. Saints absorbed in the ultimate perspective attain *nirvāṇa*.
> (*Samayasāra* 290).

Kundakunda's interpretation of *nayavāda* does seem, at first glance, to be at odds with the mainstream Jain tradition, which affirms the partial validity of *all naya*s. Resembling the 'two truths' theories of both Nāgārjuna and ŚaŚkara, this approach seems to affirm the truth of one view at the expense of another, as well as to embrace a Buddhistic or Vedāntic illusionism–or *māyāvāda*–in its account of the character of reality as perceived by ordinary, non-omniscient persons–for such ordinary perception is ultimately delusory, and indeed a hindrance to liberation.[14] As we have already seen, by conceiving of such deluded perception, or *moha*, as *definitive* of spiritual bondage rather than as an *effect* of such bondage, Kundakunda could be seen to embrace a similarly Buddhistic or Vedāntic gnosticism with respect to soteriology, in contrast with what could be called the 'karmic realism' of traditional Jainism. Moreover–and I think, significantly–Kundakunda identifies the entire system of relative *naya*s affirmed by the mainstream Jain tradition with the deluded mundane perspective, or *vyavahāranaya*, which, on his gnostic account, is responsible for spiritual bondage and which it is the function of the *niŚcayanaya* to transcend:

> *samyagdarŚanajñānam etallabhata iti kevalaṃ vyapdeŚam* |
> *sarvanayapakṣarahito bhaṇito yā sa samayasārā* || 151 ||

[14] Regarding the resemblances of Kundakunda's *vyavahāranaya/niścayanaya* duality to 'two truths' models such as those affirmed in Mādhyamika Buddhism (such as when Nāgārjuna affirms the identity, on the ultimate level of *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 25:20)) and in Advaita Vedānta (such as when Śaṅkarācārya affirms the ultimate identity of *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* Brahman), the direction of historical influence (if this is, indeed, a case of such influence) may well have been in the other direction. That is, it may not be that Kundakunda represents a 'Buddhistic' or 'Vedāntic' form of Jainism, but that his form of Jainism subsequently influenced Buddhists and Vedāntins to adopt their own 'two truths' models of reality. This is more likely the case with Vedānta than with Buddhism–Kundakunda preceding Śaṅkara, if traditional dating is at all reliable, by at least five centuries, and both inhabiting a south Indian (Tamil) milieu. The case with Buddhism would be harder to make, Kundakunda and Nāgārjuna being, according to traditional dating, near contemporaries, and the case for Nāgārjuna's having a south Indian origin being far from conclusive. If this is a case of direct historical influence, it may be that the Buddhist 'two truths' theory actually came first. Or perhaps it is not an issue of influence at all, but of highly creative thinkers coming up, independently, with very similar analyses of reality. See Dundas 1992:92-93.

> That which is said to be above the different perspectives [*naya*s], [and which] alone deserves the name of this right belief and knowledge is the essence of the soul (*Samayasāra* 151).

But was Kundakunda, from a mainstream Jain perspective, a heretic? Interestingly, despite the fact that, on a strict interpretation of early Jain doctrine, his ideas about the nature of liberation and the relationship of the mundane and ultimate perspectives could be seen to depart from standard interpretations in several ways, Kundakunda nevertheless remained a figure of central importance for the tradition, particularly for the Digambaras, though commentaries were written on his works by Śvetāmbara authors as well. Though the 'one-sidedness' of his emphasis on the ultimate perspective at the expense of the mundane was criticized by some, such as the seventeenth-century Śvetāmbara intellectual, YaŚovijaya (Dundas 1992:94), his fundamental distinction between the soul as it exists in its intrinsic nature and as it is experienced by karmically bound beings was nevertheless held to be valid; for it is, indeed, warranted by an orthodox Jain understanding of the complex nature of the soul.

My own view is that, in terms of the possible charge of heresy, a close reading of the later Jain philosophical tradition largely vindicates Kundakunda. At first glance, the approach which Kundakunda takes to his two *naya*s could appear to contradict the dominant understanding of the mainstream Jain intellectual tradition. Unlike the standard system of seven *naya*s enumerated by Umāsvāti, which are conceived as partially valid and roughly equivalent relative perspectives which collectively constitute a wholly valid cognition–an understanding which could be seen as foundational to later Jain formulations of a perspectivalism or philosophy of relativity–Kundakunda's two *naya*s are conceived in fairly absolutist terms: one as being ultimately inadequate and relative, the other as being certain and absolute.

As we have already seen, though, the Jain philosophy of relativity does logically presuppose an absolute perspective from which its affirmation of relativity can be made.

Kundakunda's two *naya*s are not, on my analysis, comparable to the partially valid perspectives of the kind typically affirmed by *nayavāda*, in Umāsvāti's standard list of seven *naya*s. I find, rather, that these two refer to the absolute and relative perspectives of Jainism taken as respective totalities. What is taken by some authors, therefore, including some from within the Jain tradition itself, to be Kundakunda's quasi-heretical, absolutist interpretation of the *naya*s, is really, I would like to suggest, a usage of the term *naya* to refer to something slightly different from the many possible relative perspectives available on a given issue to which this term usually refers. The differences between Kundakunda's version of *nayavāda* and that of the mainstream tradition thus become largely a verbal matter. This, I would suggest, is one reason why this figure could remain so central to the later tradition, despite his seemingly idiosyncratic philosophical position–because his views were not, in fact, incompatible with mainstream Jainism. What I take to be the fundamental compatibility of Kundakunda's 'two truths' approach to *nayavāda* and that of the mainstream tradition could be illustrated schematically in the following way:

Kundakunda's Position		Mainstream *nayavāda*
niŚcayanaya	corresponds to:	*kevalajñāna*/absolute perspective of a Jina
vyavahāranaya	corresponds to:	The traditional seven *nayas*, taken collectively.

Samantabhadra, a later Digambara author (though without making any mention of Kundakunda) asserts that the distinction between omniscience, or *kevalajñāna*–which would correspond, on my reading, to Kundakunda's *niŚcayanaya*–and the knowledge attainable through the *naya*s, through the method of *syādvāda*–which Kundakunda himself identifies with the *vyavahāranaya*–is that the former is an immediate, whereas the latter is a linguistically and conceptually mediated, form of knowledge (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 105). Even though, on Samantabhadra's reading, this does not render the more conventional perspective represented by *syādvāda false*, as Kundakunda would seem to have it (indeed,

Samantabhadra claims that the *only* difference between *syādvāda* and *kevalajñāna* is the mediated character of the former, and that this difference is *avastu*, or immaterial), it does preserve the basic distinction that Kundakunda makes, and that the tradition itself maintains, between an absolute (omniscient) and a relative (non-omniscient) perspective. Historically, though, despite the fact that, for the reasons indicated, Kundakunda's basic distinction between mundane and ultimate perspectives was not rejected out of hand by the tradition as a whole–such rejection itself being contrary to the entire spirit of the Jain philosophy of relativity as it eventually developed–his two-*naya* approach nevertheless remained fairly peripheral to the subsequent development of *nayavāda*. In particular, his characterization of the *vyavahāranaya* as essentially false never seems to have taken root; for *syādvāda*, conceived as the surest path to truth this side of omniscience, was still to be developed to a high level of sophistication by such later authors as Siddhasena Divākara, Samantabhadra, and HaribhadrasŪri.

It seems that the real source of potential conflict between Kundakunda's view and Jain orthodoxy–for which Jain intellectuals relentlessly attacked Buddhist and Vedāntic adherents of similar views–is its prima facie downplaying of 'mundane' orthopraxy in favor of an experience of gnosis. Regarding this question, with few exceptions, most of Kundakunda's followers and commentators seem to have read him as affirming not that outward religious practice (*dravya*) is unnecessary, but that, without a corresponding inner transformation or the appropriate inward disposition (*bhāva*), such practice is ultimately fruitless–which is a perfectly orthodox interpretation, especially if one recalls Umāsvāti's affirmation that the path to liberation includes right 'faith,' 'insight,' or 'intuition' (*darŚana*), right knowledge (*jñāna*), *and* right conduct (*caritra*) (*Tattvārtha Sūtra*:1:1).

But it was his emphasis upon the importance of the interior life that would eventually become Kundakunda's chief claim to fame. He is remembered in the Jain tradition chiefly as a great mystic, whose philosophical positions were based not so much upon intellectual

reflection as upon his direct experience of the nature of the *jīva*. As he writes of himself in the *Samayasāra*:

> *tam ekatvavibhaktaṃ darŚaye'ham ātmanā svavibhavena* |
> *yadi darŚayeyaṃ pramāṇaṃ cyuto bhavāmi chalaṃ na grāhyam* || 5 ||

> I describe that absolute oneness of the soul on the strength of my [own self-realisation]. What I describe should be accepted [after verification by your own experience]. If I err, [it] should not be considered a deception (*Samayasāra* 5).

In terms of the subsequent history of Jain philosophy, then, Kundakunda could be seen as little more than an historical oddity, representing a gnostic 'wing' of the Jain tradition, but not its main line of development, and therefore as not warranting the relatively lengthy treatment I have given his position in this chapter. The importance of his position, however, particularly with regard to the larger project of the reconstruction of religious pluralism to which this dissertation is dedicated, is twofold.

It constitutes, first of all, probably the strongest insistence found within the Jain tradition upon the importance of the affirmation of an absolute as foundational to the relativity of all other perspectives–thus helping, I would suggest, to refute the possible notion that the Jain position represents a form of relativism in the contemporary sense that has already been mentioned.

On the other hand, it also constitutes a particularly striking instance of the self-relativization of this tradition with respect to its cognitive claims on the mundane level. In this way, I think, it can serve as a model for the construction of a coherent yet open-ended pluralistic approach to religion. The pluralistic matrix, like Kundakunda's *vyavahāranaya*, *points to* the ultimate truth, but is not identical with it.

5.5.4 Relativity as the Integration of Contraries: Siddhasena and Samantabhadra

The second major post-Umāsvāti elaboration upon the concept of the *naya*s–one which, unlike Kundakunda's approach, was to have a profound impact upon succeeding formulations of the Jain philosophy of relativity–was that proposed by the fifth-century

monk, Siddhasena Divākara. Probably a member of the now-extinct Yāpanīya sect–an 'intermediate' group of Jains, with similarities to both of the major sects–Siddhasena, like Umāsvāti, is claimed as an authority by both the Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras (Jaini 1979:83). Unlike Umāsvāti, an extensive hagiographical literature exists on his life and deeds (Dundas 1992:112). He is particularly famous for having miraculously made a statue of a *TīrthaŚkara* appear from inside a stone Śiva-*liŚgam* and for being expelled from the Jain monastic community for a period of twelve years of penance for suggesting that the Jain scriptures be translated into Sanskrit–a story which clearly refers to the increasing desire among both Jains and Buddhists at this time, mentioned earlier, to reach a wider audience by writing their philosophical and religious texts in this language rather than in the more traditional Ardhamāgadhi and Pāli Prākrits (or vernaculars). As this story, however, suggests, this trend was not uncontroversial within these religious communities. In this regard, it is particularly interesting that Siddhasena's *magnum opus*–his *Sanmatitarka*, or *Sammaitakka*–was written not in Sanskrit, but in Prākrit.

With regard to the Jain philosophy of relativity, Siddhasena's major contribution is in the form of his *Sanmatitarka*, 'The Logic of the True Doctrine,' in which he divides the traditional seven *naya*s into two major categories: those which affirm the substantiality of existence (*dravyāstikanaya*s) and those which affirm the impermanent, changing aspects of existence (*paryāyāstikanaya*s). In this text, Siddhasena sets the tone for the rest of the Jain tradition by affirming that both substantiality and modality, permanence and impermanence, identity and difference, are necessary elements in an adequate account of reality. As one may recall, this understanding has its origins in Jain beliefs about the nature of soul as having a permanent, intrinsic character while simultaneously undergoing a series of constantly changing, karmically determined states. Beginning with Siddhasena, however, this understanding of reality as complex, as characterized by a variety of seemingly contrary

aspects, was to become the chief criterion in terms of which all philosophical claims would be assessed–the essence, as it were, of the Jain philosophy of relativity.

Two further innovations in the interpretation of *nayavāda* which Siddhasena introduces in this text are, first of all, to affirm, while yet retaining the traditional list of seven *naya*s, that the number of *naya*s, or perspectives on reality, is potentially limitless. In this regard, his distinction between the *dravyāstikanaya* and the *paryāyāstikanaya* becomes definitive, in a sense, of extreme polarities, between which a vast range of views can exist on a spectrum and be ranked in terms of their adherence to one or another of these extremes, with the Jain position being established firmly in the middle.

Secondly, he goes on to identify the *naya*s with the positions of various actually existing schools of thought, thus setting the stage for what would become the standard Jain criticism of alternative views as advocating one or another extreme position to the exclusion of the rest. He also defines the criterion by which the validity of the use of a *naya* is to be assessed as the extent to which that usage is in conformity with traditional Jain doctrine. All of these ideas, as set forth in the following verses from the *Sanmatitarka*, were to become standard for the subsequent Jain philosophical tradition:

> *parisuddho nayavāo āgamamettatthasāhao hoi* |
> *so ceva duṇṇigiṇṇo doṇṇi vi pakkhe vidhammei* || 46 ||
>
> A well presented view of the form of *naya* only lends support to the Āgamic doctrines while the same, if ill presented, destroys both (i.e. itself as well as its rival).
>
> *jāvaiyā vayaṇavahā tāvaiyā ceva hoṃti ṇayavāyā* |
> *jāvaiyā ṇayavāyā tāvaiyā ceva parasamayā* || 47 ||
>
> There are as many views of the form of *naya*s as there are ways of speaking, while there are as many rival (non-Jaina) tenets as there are views of the form of *naya*s.
>
> *jaṃ kāvilaṃ darisaṇaṃ eyaṃ davvaṭṭhiyassa vattavvaṃ* |
> *buddhoaṇataṇassa u parisuddho pajjavaviappo* || 48 ||
>
> Kāpila's philosophy [Sāṃkhya] is a statement of the *dravyāstika* viewpoint while Buddha's that of the *paryāyāstika*.

dohi vi ṇaehi ṇīaṃ satthamulŪeṇa taha vi micchattam |
jaṃ savisappahāṇeṇa aṇṇoṇṇaṇiravekkhā || 49 ||

> As for Kaṇāda [the founder of the VaiŚeṣika school of philosophy, which upholds the existence of both substances (*dravya*s) and qualities (*guṇa*s), but as independently existing entities in a relation of "inherence" (*samavāya*)], his doctrine, even if supported by both viewpoints is false inasmuch as each here gives primacy to itself and is independent of the other (*Sanmatitarka* 3:46-49).[15]

Finally, in this text, Siddhasena sets forth *syādvāda*, the "maybe doctrine," and its method of sevenfold predication (*saptabhaŚginaya*). We shall return to this doctrine and discuss it in greater detail later.

Siddhasena's affirmation of the necessary complementarity of contraries in the description of an entity in his *Sanmatitarka*, and the basic agenda for Jain philosophy which it outlines, is taken up and further elaborated by his contemporary (or near contemporary), Samantabhadra, a fifth-century Digambara monk (from whom we shall hear more later), in his *Āptamīmāṃsā*, 'An Examination of the Authoritative Teacher.' As K.K. Dixit writes:

> Samantabhadra had a clear consciousness of what constitutes the central contention of *Anekāntavāda* [or *syādvāda*], viz. that a thing must be characterised by two mutually contradictory features at one and the same time. He also realised that the doctrine was applicable rather universally; that is to say, he felt that taking any thing and any feature at random it could be shown that this thing is characterised by this feature as also by the concerned contradictory feature (Dixit 1971:136).

This is, essentially, is what Samantabhadra does in the *Āptamīmāṃsā*: He applies a conception of reality as necessarily involving contrary attributes to the resolution, through synthesis, of a variety of philosophical topics–being and non-being, unity and plurality, permanence and impermanence, identity and difference, idealism and materialism–thereby setting the stage for centuries of philosophical analysis of the prima facie incompatible claims of diverse schools of thought by his successors in this tradition.

5.5.5 Haribhadra and the Plurality of *Yoga*s

By the eighth century of the common era, Siddhasena, Samantabhadra, and other Jain intellectuals such as Mallavādin and Jinabhadra (Dixit 1971:114-132), had paved the

[15] Translation by Dixit (Dixit 1971:110-111).

way for the application of the Jain philosophy of relativity to the claims of various rival schools of thought as expressing partial truths, partially valid perspectives on the character of reality articulated fully only in the *JainadarŚana*. Siddhasena's conception, in particular, of the *naya*s as being divisible into those perspectives affirming substance (*dravyāstikanaya*s) and those perspectives affirming process (*paryāyāstikanaya*s) enabled the Jains to interpret the fundamental conceptions of reality expressed by such Brahmanical schools of thought as Sāṃkhya and Vedānta and those of the Buddhists as respective examples of these two kinds of partial perspective on reality (*Sanmatitarka* 3:47-3:49). Samantabhadra, though not actually naming other schools of thought in his *Āptamīmāṃsā*, claims to demonstrate the superiority of *syādvāda* over a variety of one-sided (*ekānta*) views identifiable with specific Indian philosophical traditions (Dixit 1971:136-138).

The eighth-century Śvetāmbara monk and scholar (and convert from Brahmanism), HaribhadrasŪri, continued the trend of evaluating the tenets of rival schools of thought in terms of the Jain philosophy of relativity as expressing, in contrast with Jainism, only partial truth in such works as his *Anekāntajayapaṭāka* ("Victory-Flag of Relativity"). Haribhadra's work as a whole, however, is noteworthy for another approach to philosophical and religious plurality in ancient India, also entailed by the Jain philosophy of relativity–an approach with which this philosophy has come largely to be identified in the twentieth century. This approach emphasizes not the *partiality* of the validity of alternative approaches to truth, but that validity itself. It seeks to interpret the views of other schools of thought as fairly and as charitably as possible. A particularly noteworthy text in this regard is Haribhadra's *Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya*, or 'Collection of Views on Yoga,' a text which, like his famous doxography, the *ṣaḍdarŚanasamuccaya*, displays a remarkably in-depth knowledge of the teachings of a variety of non-Jain systems of thought.

In this text, Haribhadra argues that the experience of *mokṣa*, or liberation, is essentially one, but is described differently by the great masters of various traditions who

have attained it in order to meet the needs of their particular disciples and the times in which they lived. The proper attitude, therefore, to hold toward all the great founders of the various paths to liberation, or *yoga*s–such as Kāpila and the Buddha, whom he refers to as 'omniscient ones'–is veneration and respect. Disputation with rival schools is thus to be avoided as non-conducive to the supreme and common goal of *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*:

> *saṃsārātītatattvaṃ tu paraṃ nirvāṇasaṃjñitam* |
> *tad dhy ekam eva niyamāc chabdabhede'pi tattvatā* || 129 ||
>
> The ultimate truth transcending all states of worldly existence and called *nirvāṇa* is essentially and necessarily one even if it be designated by different names.
>
> *sadāŚivā paraṃ brahma siddhātmā tatheti ca* |
> *Śabdaistad ucyate'nvarthād ekam evaivamādibhi¯* || 130 ||
>
> It is this very entity that is designated by words like SadāŚiva, Parabrahman, Siddhātman, Tathatā, etc.–words which have got the same meaning and a proper meaning at that.
>
> *tallakṣaṇāvisaṃvādān nirābādham anāmayam* |
> *niṣkriyaṃ ca paraṃ tattvaṃ yato janmādyayogatā* || 131 ||
>
> For there is no dispute about the definition of this ultimate truth (i.e. of the ultimate state of the soul's existence) inasmuch as it is (unanimously) said to be free from all disturbance, free from all ailment, free from all activity, and that on account of its undergoing no birth, etc.
>
> *jñāte nirvāṇatattve'sminn asaṃmohena tattvatā* |
> *prekṣāvatāṃ na tadabhaktau vivāda upapadyate* || 132 ||
>
> Having comprehended by means of *asaṃmoha* [calm composure] the essential nature of the truth called *nirvāṇa* it is impossible for thoughtful persons to quarrel as to how to express one's loyalty to this truth.
>
> *sarvajñapŪrvakaṃ caitan niyamādeva yatsthitam* |
> *āsanno'yam ṛjur mārgas tadbhedas tat kathaṃ bhavet* || 133 ||
>
> Since it is a necessary truth that *nirvāṇa* is open to an omniscient person alone, the short path leading from omniscience to *nirvāṇa* ought to be straight. How, then, can there be a difference (of opinion) among those possessing omniscience?
>
> *citrā tu deŚamaiteṣāṃ syād vineyānuguṇyatā* |
> *yasmād ete mahātmāno bhavavyādhibhiṣagvarā¯* || 134 ||

Their teaching exhibits diversity of types parallel to the diversity of levels possessed by the understanding of the disciples concerned; for these great personages are competent physicians in relation to the ailment called worldly existence.

yasya yena prakāreṇa bījādhānādisaṃbhavā |
sānubandho bhavaty ete tathā tasya jagus tatā || 135 ||

They thus enlightened different types of disciples in different manners, only keeping in mind that in each case the sowing of seed (of religious faith) was possible and the remaining operations were so performed that the plant would go on growing smoothly (and would ultimately bear fruit).

ekā'pi deŚanaiteṣāṃ yadvā Śrotṛvibhedatā |
acintyapuṇyasāmarthyāt tathā citrā'vabhāsate || 136 ||

Or we might say that their teaching is really one and the same but that it appears different to the different members of the audience owing to the inscrutable capacity of the virtuous acts earlier performed by them (i.e. performed by these members of the audience or by these teachers in their earlier births).

yathābhavyaṃ ca sarveṣāmupakāro'pi tatkṛtā |
jāyate'vandhyatā'pyevam asyā¯ sarvatra susthitā || 137 ||

This teaching thus turns out to be beneficial to all–but to each in a way that specially suits him. That again is how this teaching well demonstrates its fruitful character in each and every case.

yadvā tattannayāpekṣā tatkālādiniyogatā |
ṛṣibhyo deŚanā citrā tanmŪlaiṣā'pi tattvatā || 138 ||

Or we might say that the teaching in question–though essentially rooted in omniscience–has come forth from the sages themselves in a diversified form due to the diversity of standpoints [*naya*s] (adopted by the various sages) or to the diversity in the periods of time (when the various sages preached) or some other diversity of a kindred type (*Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya* 129-138).[16]

Though atypical, this approach to a plurality of views is frequently cited by modern scholars who wish to argue that Jain philosophy is a form of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*.'

5.5.6 Later Formulations and Modern Interpretations

But by no means all Jain intellectuals held the charitable estimation of non-Jain paths evidenced by Haribhadra; though the fact that the Jain philosophy of relativity is logically capable of supporting such a liberal approach is, I think, significant for one who wishes to appropriate this philosophy in the service of the reconstruction of religious pluralism.

[16] Translation by Dixit (Dixit 1970:66-69).

Haribhadra was, of course, not alone in the Jain intellectual tradition in his concern to represent the teachings of other traditions in as fair and objective a manner as possible for a committed Jain. A number of Jain monks produced doxographies, some even more detailed than Haribhadra's. The distinctive trait of these doxographies is their tendency to depict the Jain tradition as one more tradition among many, and to depict the views and practices of other schools of thought, to the best of our currently available scholarly knowledge, with almost no polemical distortion, sometimes even displaying firsthand knowledge of the literatures of the schools of thought concerned (Folkert 1993:341-409). Though the production of such doxographies and activities like the use of non-Jain sources as proof-texts (as in YaŚovijaya's citations of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* in his *Adhyātmasāra* (Kansara 1976)) need not be seen as an application of the Jain philosophy of relativity–they are certainly *not* such an application in any systematic sense, and other schools of thought, such as the Buddhists, were also prolific in the area of doxographical production–such activities, and the positive estimations of other traditions which they *could* suggest, are certainly justifiable in terms of it.

Though not rejecting or calling into question the openness of such thinkers as Haribhadra to other traditions, many Jain intellectuals after his time, such as the renowned twelfth-century scholar Hemacandra and his commentator, MalliṣeṇasŪri, continued to write polemical texts and to depict the claims of other traditions as lacking in coherence and completeness in comparison with the more comprehensive vision offered by the *JainadarŚana*. This more polemical stance, in fact, seems to be predominant in premodern Jain writings on other traditions–and in this way the Jains are no different from most other *darŚanas* of premodern South Asia. It has only been in modernity–and only then, it seems, in response to similar Neo-Vedāntic claims about the universality and tolerance exhibited by the Hindu tradition–that the Jain doctrines of relativity have been claimed to express a

philosophy of ‘intellectual *ahiṃsā*.’ This is a topic to which we will have occasion to return later.

5.6 The Jain Doctrines of Relativity

5.6.1 *Anekāntavāda*: The Ontology of Relativity

Turning now from intellectual history to an analysis of the doctrines themselves, as mentioned earlier, the terms *anekāntavāda*, *nayavāda*, and *syādvāda*, though frequently used interchangeably in both primary and secondary texts, can be seen to denote three distinct doctrines which collectively constitute the systematic philosophical position which I am calling the ‘Jain philosophy of relativity.’

Anekāntavāda, first of all, may be translated literally as ‘non-one-sided-doctrine,’ ‘many-sided doctrine,’ or ‘doctrine of many-sidedness.’ I find Satkari Mookerjee's translation, ‘philosophy of non-absolutism’ useful up to a point, but ultimately deceptive, inasmuch as it might be taken to imply that there is *no* absolute viewpoint within Jain philosophy. But according to Jainism such a viewpoint does exist–namely, the viewpoint which encompasses all others, the viewpoint of fully enlightened and liberated omniscient beings (*kevalin*s), such as Mahāvīra, whose souls (*jīva*s) have been liberated from all inessential defiling matter (*karma*) and so shine forth in their true, essential nature–perfect knowledge (*jñāna*), energy (*vīrya*) and bliss (*sukha*)–and hence the inappropriateness of either ‘relativism’ or, ultimately, of ‘non-absolutism’ to translate ‘*anekāntavāda*.’[17]

Anekāntavāda is an ontological doctrine. Its fundamental claim, as it eventually came to be understood by the tradition, is that all existent entities have infinite attributes. As Haribhadra summarizes it in the section on Jainism in his *ṣaḍdarŚanasamuccaya*:

> *yenotpādavyāyadhrauvyayuktaṃ yatsattādiŚyate* |
> *anantadharmakaṃ vastu tenoktaṃ mānagocarā* ||

[17] ‘Non-absolutism’ is, however, a fine translation of *anekāntavāda* if it is taken to apply only to the epistemic situation of non-omniscient beings.

> Existence is accepted as that which is characterized by emergence, perishing, and duration. On account of this, it is said that an entity has infinite (*ananta*) attributes and is the object of an instrument of knowledge ([*pra*]*māna*) (*ṣaḍdarŚanasamuccaya* 57).

This claim stems from the ontological realism which characterizes the Jain position–that is, according to Jainism, reality is essentially as we perceive it. The apparent contradictions–the Kantian antinomies–which our perceptions involve–continuity and change, emergence and perishing, permanence and flux, identity and difference–actually reflect the interdependent, relationally constituted nature of things. Reality is a synthesis of opposites. This multi-faceted (a good translation of '*anekānta*') character of reality is reflected in the definition of existence presented in the *Tattvārthasūtra*:

> *utpādavyāyadhrauvyayuktaṃ sat* |
>
> Emergence, perishing, and duration constitute existence (*Tattvārtha Sūtra* 5:29).

Consequently, it is not inconsistent with the nature of reality to affirm contrary attributes of any given entity. The number of possible predications which can validly be made of an entity is heightened to infinity by the fact that, unlike other Indian (and Western) notions of a substance as having no real relations with any other entity, Jainism affirms a definition of an entity which includes within itself the entity's relations, both of being and of non-being, with every other entity constituting the cosmos. A pot, therefore, is related to all other pots, in part, by having all of the qualities which go into making a pot a pot (that is, a member of the category 'pot'); but it is also related to pens, in part, (albeit negatively) by its not possessing pen qualities (Mookerjee 1978:23-48). It can therefore be asserted that, from a certain perspective (that of being a pot), the pot exists; whereas, from another perspective (that of being a pen–that is, having pen-qualities) the pot does not exist–that is, it contains within its definition non-being with respect to pen-qualities. It does not exist *qua* pen. The

Jain definition of an entity thus includes, in the form of its internal relations with them, both positive and negative, every other entity in the cosmos.[18]

5.6.2 *Nayavāda*: The Epistemology of Relativity

Epistemologically, *anekāntavāda*, with its affirmation that every entity possesses infinite attributes, entails *nayavāda*, which is best translated as 'perspectivalism' or the 'doctrine of perspectives.' The gist of this doctrine has already been presented above: all entities possessing infinite attributes–some of which, such as emergence and perishing–are prima facie incompatible–one may make infinitely many, and sometimes prima facie mutually incompatible, claims about the character of an entity–such as, "It is the nature of an entity to endure over time," or "It is the nature of an entity to perish." The truth of one's affirmations about any entity depend upon the perspective from which those affirmations are made. Truth–and, consequently, knowledge–is a function of one's perspective (*naya*). This doctrine of *naya*s enables the Jains to avoid the charge of self-contradiction in their attribution of prima facie incompatible characteristics to a given entity. No violation of the law of non-contradiction is entailed; for it is not the case that the Jains make incompatible predications of an entity in the same sense, but in different senses, from different *naya*s. In other words, the Jains do not claim, for example, that an entity both exists and does not exist in the same sense. But in different senses, from different perspectives, the entity *can* be said both to exist and not to exist (*qua* pot, for example, but not *qua* pen).

This doctrine is illustrated famously by the example of the golden crown.[19] Recall the definition of existence as characterized by origination, cessation and endurance. A

[18] One account of the meaning of *kevalajñāna* is thus to have complete *self*-knowledge. If one knows oneself, one's *jīva*, *fully*, this will include knowing all of its relations to the rest of the entities in the cosmos. *Je egaṃ janai so savvaṃ janai* | *Jo savvaṃ janai so egaṃ janai* || "He who knows one, knows all. He who knows all, knows one" (*Ācārāṅga Sūtra* 1:3:4). See Tatia 1951:70 and Jaini 1979:91, 267.

[19] This example is used by Samantabhadra in his *Āptamīmāṃsā* (*Āptamīmāṃsā*: 59) and by Manibhadra in his commentary on Haribhadra's *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya*. It is also used by the Mīmāṃsikas to illustrate a similar position of ontological realism.

golden crown comes into the possession of a king. His son, the prince, wants to keep the crown, but the queen wants it melted down and made into a necklace. The king acquiesces to the wishes of his wife and the crown is melted down. The queen is delighted to have a new necklace. The prince is disappointed that the coveted crown has been destroyed. The king, however, is indifferent, for the amount of gold in question has remained the same. These three are viewing the entity in question from the perspectives, respectively, of emergence, perishing, and duration. The former state (*paryāya*) of the substance (*dravya*) of the gold has passed away–the crown. A new state has taken its place–the necklace. But the substance, the gold, constituted by its essential qualities (*guṇa*s), persists.[20] In one sense, a new entity has come into being. In another, an entity has been destroyed. And in yet another, no change has occurred. This illustrates the complex character of reality.

As indicated earlier, the perspectives of emergence, perishing, and duration are not the only *naya*s affirmed in Jain philosophy. According to later interpretations, the number of *naya*s is potentially infinite. "Reality is many-faced (*anantadharmakātmakaṃ vastu*) and intelligence is selective. There are, therefore, as many ways of knowing (*naya*s) as there are faces to reality" (Rao 1963:196). As we have seen, though, a standardized list of seven *naya*s is articulated in a number of Jain philosophical texts, like the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*. Though explanations of the items on this list vary in their particulars from text to text, Kendall Folkert provides the following "compromise account" of the *naya*s, which gives one a good general sense of the Jain epistemological project as it is expressed in this list:

naigamanaya : the viewpoint from which the general and particular properties of the object are inadequately distinguished; a

[20] *guṇaparyāyavad dravyam* | "A substance is that which possesses qualities and modes" (*Tattvārtha Sūtra* 5:37). The understanding of a substance as consisting of the *locus* of qualities and modes, which conceives of all three of these categories of entity as existing in a relationship of mutual dependence, is presented by the Jains in opposition to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika doctrine of *samavāya*, or the inherence of qualities and actions in substances conceived as independently existing entities. This is the chief distinction between the Jain position and other forms of ontological realism in traditional Indian philosophy–its attempt to coordinate and synthesize entities and their characteristics.

commonsense, concrete way of looking at an object [like Robin Horton's notion of "primary theory" (Horton 1993)].

saṃgrahanaya	:	the viewpoint that takes primary account of the generic properties of the object.
vyavahāranaya	:	the viewpoint that regards an object only in light of one's practical experience of it, i.e., in terms of "false particulars."
ṛjusūtranaya	:	the viewpoint that takes account only of the present mode of an object, or sees it only as the present agglomerate of particulars.
Śabdanaya	:	the viewpoint concerned with the relationship of word to object in general, i.e., the question of synonyms and their significance.
samabhiruḍhanaya	:	the viewpoint concerned with the etymological relationship of word to object.
evaṃbhŪtanaya	:	the viewpoint that holds that language must conform to the function of an object at the moment in which a word is used of an object (Folkert 1993:221-222).

Anyone with some familiarity with Indian philosophy will recognize a number of well-known Indian philosophical positions associated with particular schools of thought in this list. The *ṛjusūtra* (literally, 'straight thread') *naya*, for example, bears a distinct resemblance to Buddhist metaphysical positions; and the *evaṃbhūta* ('existing thus') *naya* has resonances with Mīmāṃsa views of the relationship of language and object in a Vedic ritual context. One can clearly see, then, the potential uses of *nayavāda* in Jain attempts to conceptualize the fact of a diversity of philosophical perspectives in the society around them, and as a polemical tool. This doctrine is, in fact, employed for both uses in Jain philosophical texts.

A famous narrative illustration of the Jain use of *nayavāda* for conceptualizing doctrinal diversity is the story of the four blind men and the elephant. Four blind men, representing competing schools of thought, come upon an elephant, which represents reality. Attempting to ascertain what the character of this entity is, they proceed to feel it and to compare it with other entities with which they are familiar. One blind man, feeling the trunk

of the elephant, says, “It is like a snake.” Another, feeling its tail, says, “No, it is like a rope.” The third, feeling one of the elephant’s legs, says, “You are both wrong. It is like a tree-trunk.” Finally, the fourth, feeling the elephant’s side, says, “You are all three mistaken. It is like a wall.” All of the blind men are, of course, right from their respective points of view, and wrong inasmuch as they exclude the perspectives of the others; for the elephant, in fact, possesses all of the attributes which the blind men have ascribed to it.

This brings us, then, to the Jain theory of error, at least according to the dominant understanding of *nayavāda*–dominant, that is, both within the tradition itself and in twentieth-century scholarship on Jain philosophy. The worst philosophical error that one can commit, according to this account, the error which, finally, is the root of all error, is *ekāntatā*–one-sidedness, or exclusivism–in making one’s philosophical assertions.

A common illustration in Jain texts of the limitations of *ekāntatā* is the dispute–quite heated in Indian philosophical discourse–between *nityatvavāda* and *anityatvavāda*. *Nityatvavāda*, or eternalism, the view according to which there is such a thing as a permanently enduring substance–the view of such substance-affirming schools as the Naiyāyikas and VaiŚeṣikas and, extremely so, of monistic Advaita Vedānta–is correct if affirmed from the perspective of the enduring nature of a thing, but incorrect inasmuch as it rules out its antithesis. Similarly, the contrary view, *anityatvavāda*, or the affirmation of impermanence as the essential nature of things–the view of Buddhism–is correct if affirmed of the constantly changing modal nature of things, but incorrect inasmuch as it rules out the permanently enduring aspect of a substance. The truth, of course, is *nityānityatvavāda*. Reality is, in different senses, both eternal and non-eternal, according to the synthesizing Jain perspective.

The Jain conceptualization of alternative schools of thought, then, is of these schools as representing partially correct, but incomplete, *ekānta naya*s. Like Alfred North Whitehead, the Jain tradition can be interpreted as affirming that, “The chief danger to

philosophy is narrowness in the selection of evidence" (Whitehead 1978:337). This is the realist thesis that any metaphysical system which bases itself on only one dimension of experience errs inasmuch as it rules out the validity of all other possible perspectives. According to the Jain version of realism, *ekāntatā* leads to *māyāvāda*–the thesis that the bulk of human experience, such as the element of change, or of continuity, is the result of illusion (*māyā*)–a view rejected by the Jains as destructive of human religious and moral aspirations and activities (Tatia 1951:178).

5.6.3 *Syādvāda*: The Dialectic of Relativity

On the basis of the foregoing account, one can see that the concerns of the Jain intellectual tradition are not confined to the realm of philosophy, in the straightforward sense of inquiry into the nature of reality, but extend to the realm of 'meta-philosophy' as well–that is, to reflection upon and discussion of what constitutes the proper nature of philosophical discourse itself (Gopalan 1991). This brings us, finally, to a discussion of *syādvāda*, translatable literally as the 'maybe doctrine,' but more more accurately as the 'doctrine of conditional or qualified assertion'–the doctrine of the proper formulation and analysis of philosophical propositions in light of the philosophy of relativity.

In the discussion of *nayavāda*, it was stated that, according to the dominant Jain theory of error, one commits falsehood only by stating propositions exclusivistically or one-sidedly, as reflecting the only possible truth of the matter at hand, as exclusive of any possible antithesis. Consequently, according to later Jain thought (at least from the time of the writing of Samantabhadra's *Āptamīmāṃsā*, very likely the first text to introduce *syādvāda* in the form which was to become normative for the mainstream tradition), one states a true proposition only when one speaks in a non-exclusive manner. The mark of this non-exclusive, non-absolutist form of speech is the qualification of one's philosophical statements with the Sanskrit modifier '*syāt*,' hence the name '*syādvāda*,' or '*syāt*-doctrine,'

for the Jain doctrine of the proper formulation and expression of philosophical claims (Matilal 1981:52-53).

What does the word '*syāt*' mean? In ordinary Sanskrit usage, '*syāt*' is the third-person singular optative form of the verbal root *as*, meaning 'exist.' '*Syāt*' thus normally means 'it could be,' 'it should be,' 'maybe,' or 'it is possible that…' But in the context of its usage as a technical term in Jain philosophy, it is stipulated that *syāt* is *not* the third-person singular optative form of 'exist,' but an indeclineable particle (*nipāta*). In its normal usage, *syāt* conveys a sense of indefiniteness. But this sense is not adequate to what the Jains intend when they use this term to qualify philosophical claims. Quite an opposite meaning is, in fact, intended by the Jains in their techincal use of this word; for the point of *syādvāda* is ultimately to *dis*ambiguate language, to coordinate the exclusive, one-sided claims made by various competing schools of thought with partially valid perspectives, or *naya*s, understood as such in terms of the broader or higher perspective held to be provided by the *JainadarŚana*–a perspective which, in turn, is itself based upon the absolute or omniscient perspective of the Jina. As Samantabhadra explains:

> *vākyeṣv anekāntadyotī gamyaṃ prati viŚeṣanam* |
> *syānnipāto'rthayogitvāt tava kevalināmapi* || 103 ||
>
> In the sentences of the position of relativity there is a movement towards specificity (*viŚeṣanam*). [This occurs] due to the connection of the meaning of the particle (*nipāta*) '*syāt*' with Your [Mahāvīra's] absolute perspective.
>
> *syādvādā sarvathaikāntatyāgāt kiṃvṛttacidvidhi¯* |
> *saptabhaŚganayāpekṣo heyādeyaviŚeṣakā* || 104 ||
>
> Due to its renunciation of absolutism, *syādvāda* [could be taken to mean] 'somehow' or 'sometimes' [in other words, to convey a sense of indefiniteness]. But in the method of sevenfold predication [to be explained shortly] it means 'in some specific sense' (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 103-104).

In Jain technical usage, then, *syāt* conveys the meaning 'in some specific sense, or from a some specific perspective, it is certainly the case that….' According to Ācārya Mahāprajñā, a contemporary representative of the living Jain intellectual tradition, in order

for a statement to be valid according to *syādvāda*, to convey a true understanding, it must include not only the modifier '*syāt*'–which, as we have seen, in ordinary usage conveys a sense of indefiniteness–but the modifier '*eva*' as well. In a sense the opposite of '*syāt*' in ordinary Sanskrit usage, *eva* is typically used to give emphasis, to indicate that something is *certainly* the case, or that what is being said is of special importance. It tends to have the same function as the old English word 'verily,' and is frequently translated as such in early English renditions of Sanskrit texts. The pairing of *syāt* with *eva* is intended to convey the synthesis of the relative and the absolute that it is the purpose of *syādvāda* to effect–the idea that the truth of a claim is relative to the perspective from which it is made, but that, given this specification, definite truth-claims are possible. In the words of Ācārya Mahāprajñā:

> In the absence of relativism [i.e. relativity] indicated by the phrase 'in some respect' (*syāt*) the use of the expression 'certainly' (*eva*) would confer an absolutistic import on the propositions. But by the use of the word '*syāt*' (in some respect) indicative of relativism [i.e. relativity], the expression 'certainly' (*eva*) loses the absolutistic import and confers definiteness on the intended attributes predicated in the propositions (Mahāprajñā 1996:18-19).

According to Siddhasena, there are seven possible applications of '*syāt*' which exhaust all of the claims that can be made regarding the truth of any given proposition. These seven applications of *syāt* do not correspond to the traditional seven *naya*s, but their purpose is the same: to situate various views as parts of the whole constituted by the synthetic perspective of Jain philosophy. According to Samantabhadra,[21] the seven possible truth-claims that can be made with respect to any given proposition *p* are:

1. In a sense/from one point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) true.

[21] Siddhasena's earlier formulation of the sevenfold method, or *saptabhaṅginaya*, of *syādvāda* places the fourth 'limb' (*bhaṅga*)–inexpressibility–third and gives it a somewhat different meaning–that the entity is inexpressible from the perspective of foreign properties. Samantabhadra, however, places inexpressibility fourth and defines it as the simultaneous application of positive and negative predications (as opposed to the successive predication which he identifies with the third limb). He identifies the second limb, non-existence, with the non-existence of foreign properties in the entity in question (in the manner of Siddhasena's conception of inexpressibility). Samantabhadra's formulation of *syādvāda* is the one which eventually became authoritative for the Jain tradition (Dixit 1971:25-26).

2. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) not true.

3. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) both true and not true.

4. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) inexpressible.

5. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) both true and inexpressible.

6. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) both not true and inexpressible.

7. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) true, not true and inexpressible.

In order to illustrate the function of *syādvāda* in the analysis of a proposition, let us return to our friend, the pot, and analyze the unqualified proposition "The pot exists":

1. In a sense (that of possessing the defining characteristics of a pot), the pot certainly does exist.

2. In another sense (that of possessing some characteristics incompatible with those of a pot, such as the characteristics unique to a pen), the pot certainly does not exist (that is, it does not possess those non-pot characteristics).

3. In another sense (the two aforementioned senses taken in successive conjunction with one another), the pot certainly both does and does not exist. (It exists with respect to some characteristics and not others).

4. In another sense (the first two senses taken in simultaneous conjunction with one another), the character of the pot certainly is inexpressible. (This is the sense in which the concrete character of the pot cannot be captured in words but, in Wittgenstein's terminology, can only be "shown"–the point at which the limits of language are surpassed.)

5. In another sense (the first sense combined with the fourth), the pot certainly both exists and is inexpressible.

6. In another sense, (the second sense combined with the fourth) the pot cerainly does not exist and is inexpressible.

7. In another sense (the third sense combined with the fourth) the pot certainly both does and does not exist and is inexpressible.

This sevenfold application of *syāt* is taken to be universally applicable–to apply to all possible propositions–and to be exhaustive of the possible truth-values that a given proposition can convey. *Syādvāda* is, in fact, applied by Jain logicians to a wide variety of

topics. It represents Jain dialectical logic at its most sophisticated, and is yet elegantly simple. As Matilal summarizes it, "Add a *syāt* particle to the proposition and you have captured the truth" (Matilal 1981:3). The seven applications of *syāt* are not, according to the tradition, arbitrary–unlike, it could be argued, the standard list of seven *naya*s presented earlier–but really do reflect the possible number of truth-claims which can logically be made with respect to a given proposition; for further combinations of the first four applications (e.g. "In a certain sense, *x* is true, true, not true, and inexpressible.") are redundant, while it is argued that applications five, six, and seven amount to distinctive truth-claims, and not mere repetitions of the first four distinct possibilities (Mookerjee 1978:117-120).

The only limitation on the universality of the application of *syādvāda* is that placed by the insistence of the tradition that the seven possible truth-values of a given proposition–the senses in which a given proposition can be said to be true–as well as the perspectives (*naya*s) from which these truth-values can be affirmed, must be consistent with the Jain worldview. As Siddhasena has asserted, "A well presented view of the form of *naya* only lends support to the Āgamic doctrines while the same, if ill presented, destroys both (i.e. itself as well as its rival)" (*Sanmatitarka* 3:46). This suggests a dual sense in which error can, according to the Jain philosophy of relativity, be committed. The chief error, of course–the cardinal sin–is the absolute affirmation of the truth of a single perspective to the exclusion of its contrary. But another misuse of a *naya*, or *nayābhāsa*, would be to affirm the truth of a proposition in a sense incompatible with the logic of the larger perspective of the Jain tradition. The test, in other words, of whether *syādvāda* has been applied correctly is the extent to which the conclusions derived therefrom are compatible with the normative claims of the Jain tradition, taken to provide a kind of fixed point among the relativity of views which ensures that one does not stray from the truth in the course of accommodating a plurality of perspectives–a fixed point itself founded upon the absolute perspective of the enlightened Jina. The introduction of a normative standard into this philosophy of relativity

is what prevents it, again, from being a form of relativism. It is not the case that *any* proposition can be true in *any* sense, but only in senses specifiable from within a correct understanding of reality.

The sevenfold application of *syāt*, taken together with its metaphysical basis in *anekāntavāda* and *nayavāda*, completes the complex of concepts which I have labeled the 'Jain doctrines of relativity' and which articulate the Jain philosophy of relativity. This philosophy has applications relevant to the modern study of religion–and to the question of truth and religious plurality in particular–which, in my opinion, gives it an importance that has yet to be matched by a corresponding Western scholarly interest. It now remains to address possible logical objections to this position as I have outlined it.

5.7 Objections and Responses: The Charges of Incoherence and Relativism

Before one can begin to argue in favor of either an application or an appropriation of the Jain philosophy of relativity in a pluralistic interpretation of religion, there are a couple of possible objections to this position which must first be met.

There is, first of all, the criticism leveled most consistently by the traditional opponents of the Jain position, the other schools of Indian philosophy–most notably the Buddhists and the Vedāntins–that the Jain position is incoherent, that the ascription of contrary attributes to a single entity is self-contradictory (Matilal 1985:309-311).

This criticism, however, is easily met with the recognition that it is based on a misunderstanding of the system of *naya*s. As mentioned earlier, the Jain position is not that contrary attributions can be made of an entity *in the same sense*, but only in different senses and from different perspectives–perspectives which the Jains spend a great deal of time and energy delineating.[22] One may add, furthermore, that the schools which make the charge of self-contradiction most insistently–the Advaitins and the Buddhists–themselves articulate

[22] See, for example, Folkert's account of the 363 possible philosophical positions in Folkert 1993:215-337.

classic examples of what the Jains would call *ekāntavāda*–for the Advaitins affirm that only one entity can be coherently said to exist in the cosmos, the changeless and formless *nirguṇa* Brahman, and the Mādhyamika Buddhists that the nature of reality is *śūnyatā*, or void. The point of mentioning this is simply to suggest that since each of these schools ultimately only accepts one facet of existence–continuity and change, respectively–as a proper basis for metaphysical reflection, they would, of course, object to any philosophical position which accepts other principles as actually indicative of the character of reality–and this is, in fact, the case; for these idealist schools of thought marshal similar charges of incoherence against the realist Naiyāyikas, VaiŚeṣikas, and Mīmāṃsikas on the same basis–the perceived impossibility of attributing, in *any* sense, contrary properties to one and the same entity.

Another criticism which has been leveled more in modernity against the Jain philosophy of relativity is that it operates in what could be called a "moral vacuum" (Sinari 1969:59-64)–that it cannot give an adequate grounding to moral claims. With *syādvāda*, for instance, how can one claim–as the Jains do perhaps more strongly than any other school of Indian philosophy, or for that matter, any religion in the world–that violence is evil? Does not *syādvāda*, if taken seriously, entail that violence is evil from one point of view, not evil–or good–from another point of view, both good and evil from another point of view, of inexpressible moral character from another, etc? This, essentially, is the charge that this philosophy constitutes a form of relativism in the modern sense–a charge which has frequently been accompanied by the, I think, peculiar view that this philosophy articulates a form of skepticism (Ibid; Padmarajiah 1963:363-378).

This criticism, however, seems, like the first, to be based on a fundamental misconception of the Jain position. Recall the second rule of philosophical interpretation using *syādvāda*–that the *naya*s, the senses which one invokes to articulate a truth-value for a given proposition, must be in harmony with the Jain conception of reality based on the absolute perspective of the *kevalin*, or Jina, Mahāvīra. Samantabhadra, in fact, addresses the

question of violence in his *Āptamīmāṃsā*–the *locus classicus* for the application of the Jain philosophy of relativity to a whole range of philosophical and moral issues:

> *pāpaṃ dhruvaṃ pare du¯khāt puṇyaṃ ca sukhato yadi* |
> *acetanākaṣāyau ca badhyeyātāṃ nimitatā* || 92 ||
>
> Violence [literally, causing pain] to another is always evil, while causing [another] happiness is [always] good. Both unintentional and deliberate destruction [are evil].
>
> *puṇyaṃ dhruvam svato du¯khāt pāpaṃ ca sukhato yadi* |
> *vītarāgo munirvidvāṃstābhyāṃ yuñjyānnimittatā* || 93 ||
>
> Causing pain to oneself is always good, while [causing oneself] happiness is evil. Wise monks renounce attachment to both [pleasure and pain] (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 92-93).

Samantabhadra's approach to the question, "Is violence, in some sense, good?" reflects both the Jain philosophy of relativity as articulated in *syādvāda* (although he does not actually, in these particular verses, use the word '*syāt*,' in the larger context of his text it can be taken as implied) and the basic Jain commitment to ascetic values as the conceptual touchstone in terms of which he expresses his answers. Violence, in one sense (*syāt*)–the sense in which it is directed at others–is certainly (*eva*) evil. Violence, in another sense (*syāt*)–the sense in which it is directed at oneself in a Jain ascetic context, such as when one fasts or remains in uncomfortable meditation postures for extended periods for the purpose of 'burning off' bad *karma*–is certainly (*eva*) good. (Similarly, causing happiness to others is good, a source of merit, while (selfishly) pursuing one's own happiness–or better, one's own *pleasure*–is evil, an impediment on the path to liberation.) In these first two senses combined, violence is both evil and good. And finally, in another sense, the moral character of violence is inexpressible; for the Jina has transcended the pursuit of both pleasure and pain, and so, like the wise monk, is indifferent to both (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 95).

But has Samantabhadra really avoided the implications of relativism in his formulation of relativity? One might ask, once the truth-values of a given proposition, such as "Violence is evil," have been specified whether further specification is possible. Having established that violence directed at others is always evil, is it possible to apply *syādvāda*

again to this claim? The result of such a second-level application would then be that violence directed at others is, in a sense, evil, but that, in another sense, it is good. This is where the test of correspondence with the normative claims of Jainism must again play its role. The conclusion that violence directed at others is, in a sense, good, could conceivably be upheld by the assertion that such violence is justifiable if it is engaged in for the purpose of self-defense–or better, for the defense of another (such as a Jain monk). Indeed, such claims have historically been made by the Jain community on behalf of both self-defense and the existence of Jain kings, who necessarily engage in violence as part of the pursuit of their royal duties (Jaini 1979:313). But it could be argued that such claims are simply false, given the normative Jain commitment to *ahiṃsā* (which seems to be Jaini's position). Clearly, *syādvāda* lends itself to some form of situational ethics–and rightly so. But what if one is confronted with the specific claim, "Violence directed at others for the sake of one's own pleasure is good?" Short of the possibility that such violence, engaged in to sufficient degrees, would eventually so sicken one that one would renounce it and adopt a life of nonviolence–as the Buddhist tradition claims happened in the case of King AŚoka–one would be hard-pressed to find a perspective acceptable from within the Jain worldview supportive of such a claim. Again, the limiting factor upon the universalization of the Jain philosophy of relativity is the fact that the perspectives from which particular truth-claims can be affirmed must finally be coherent with the total Jain worldview.

The objection, of course, could be leveled at this point that the introduction of this principle of limitation–the absolute perspective of the enlightened Jina–is ad hoc and finally incoherent with the philosophy of relativity as a whole. This objection, however, is met with the claim that the necessity of an absolute perspective is itself an entailment of the philosophy of relativity, consistently applied. Ācārya Mahāprajñā explains this in the following passage:

> It has been said that the sevenfold predication can be applicable with respect to each and every attribute of a substance. If so, is the non-absolutism…itself available to the system of sevenfold predication? If the reply is in the affirmative, the predication of negation (that is, the second among the seven propositions) would be a kind of absolutism. And in this way non-absolutism would not be a universally applicable doctrine.…The propounder of non-absolutism…admits both non-absolutism and absolutism in their proper perspective. This is why the system of sevenfold predication is applicable to non-absolutism…itself in the following manner:
>
> 1. There is absolutism in some respect.
> 2. There is non-absolutism in some respect.
> 3. There are both absolutism and non-absolutism in some respect.
> 4. There is indescribability in some respect.
> 5. There is absolutism and indescribability in some respect.
> 6. There is non-absolutism and indescribability in some respect.
> 7. There is absolutism, non-absolutism, and indescribability in some respect (Mahāprajñā 1996:30-31).

The affirmation of an absolute perspective in the Jain philosophy of relativity is thus not an ad hoc introduction, but an *entailment* of this philosophy applied consistently *to itself*.

In response to this claim, of course, one might still object that, with respect to the question of violence, it is not the claim of non-absolutism itself that needs to be exempted from relativization, but a second-order claim about the acceptability of violence. It must be pointed out here, though, that the *JainadarŚana* as a whole is conceived as an internally coherent system in the full Whiteheadian sense, and the various second-order claims which constitute it to imply one another. The absoluteness of non-absolutism is taken by this tradition, ultimately, to refer to the totality of its claim–to the absolutely relative, integrating perspective of the Jina. *Ahiṃsā* thus remains a constant within this system of relativity.

5.8 *Āhiṃsā* or Assimilation? The Question of Intellectual 'Violence'

As alluded to earlier, *syādvāda* has frequently been characterized and promoted by its twentieth-century interpreters and apologists as a form of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*,' a form of nonviolence extended to the realm of philosophical discourse, a kind of charity towards other philosophical positions and their possible insights into the character of reality, rooted not in mere notions of 'tolerance'–often connected, in modernity, with the privatization, which arguably entails the trivialization, of religion–but in the very nature of the cosmos

itself, in both the fact that reality is multi-faceted (*anekānta*) and thus amenable to multiple, non-exclusive perspectives, and that nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) is an essential component of the Jain path to liberation, rooted in the metaphysics of the soul (*jīva*) and the fact that violent, delusory passions (*rāgadveṣamohā*) such as those involved in one-sided attachment to particular views, attract soul-obscuring karmic matter to the *jīva* and hinder its progress toward *kevalajñāna*–the absolute knowledge, or omniscience, that one experiences upon attaining liberation, the ultimate soteriological goal of Jainism (Jaini 1979:226-273). In other words, one who engages in philosophical debate and makes assertions without qualification, affirming the exclusive truth of only one point of view, not only fails to express the truth by failing to take into account the many possible perspectives from which a proposition may be validly asserted, but also runs the risk of arousing unwanted passions (such as competitiveness, defensiveness, or anger) in the course of one's discussion and thus further enmiring oneself in the process of *saṃsāra* (birth, death, and rebirth). This, essentially, is the logic of the argument of those who claim that the Jain philosophy of relativity articulates an ethic of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*.' It is also the case, however, that this doctrine has historically served as a powerful polemical weapon in the hands of Jain logicians against the adherents of rival schools of thought–portrayed as examples of *ekāntavāda*. Indeed, it may be argued that the characterization of Jain doctrines of relativity as constituting a form of intellectual *ahiṃsā* is a false one. This charge is two-pronged; that is, it can be made from two perspectives–one historical and the other philosophical.

In much of both the scholarly and the popular literature of the last couple of centuries on the religions of South Asia, a great deal has been made of the supposedly 'tolerant' character of these religions, particularly in contrast with the alleged doctrinal rigidity (or stability, depending upon the author's evaluative stance) of the monotheistic traditions of the West: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In this literature, the indigenous traditions of South Asia–primarily Vedāntic Hinduism–are typically depicted as capable of accommodating

within themselves an enormous variety of doctrines and practices, an internal diversity which would, it is generally presumed, never be countenanced by the orthodoxy-obsessed (or internally coherent, depending, again, upon the evaluative stance of the author) religions of the West. The Neo-Vedāntic characterization of Hinduism, for example, as "not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance," (Radhakrishnan 1927:18) and its Indological equivalent, the image of Hinduism as "a vast sponge, which absorbs all that enters it without ceasing to be itself" (Spear 1958:57) are well-known expressions of the view that accommodation of diversity is definitive of Hindu religiosity.

Probably less well-known than these depictions of Hindu accommodation of diversity, but arising from similar historical circumstances and concerns, is the twentieth-century depiction of Jainism, too, as a religion characterized throughout its history by peaceful toleration, in the realm of philosophy, of multiple points of view (Dundas 1992:195). It has been claimed that Jainism possesses a system of philosophical analysis that embodies 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*'–that is, the extension of the central ethical principle of the Jain faith, *ahiṃsā*, or nonviolence, into the realm of religious and philosophical discourse. In particular, the Jain doctrines of relativity have been claimed by a number of twentieth-century scholars to articulate an ethic of tolerance, or 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*,' toward other, non-Jain religious and philosophical perspectives, whose assimilation within a Jain intellectual framework they also serve to facilitate (Folkert 1993:224-227). But is this an adequate reading of these doctrines?

One might, of course, have suspicions about whether or not the concept of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*' actually reflects the orientation of the authors of the premodern Jain texts in which these doctrines of relativity are formulated. Might the 'discovery' of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*,' of an ethic of religious toleration articulated in the philosophical doctrines of a pre-modern South Asian school of thought, be a product of such typically modern concerns as nation-building and harmony among the diverse religious communities

inhabiting the modern Indian nation-state? This clearly seems to be the case with modern formulations of Hinduism as “not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance,” of the Vedāntic Brahman as the ocean into which the streams of all the world’s various religions pour, or the peak of the mountain up which all paths lead. This is primarily an historical question.

Furthermore, because they do allow for the incorporation of non-Jain perspectives into a Jain philosophical framework, might the doctrines of relativity represent not an ethic of toleration, of ‘intellectual *ahiṃsā*’ toward other communities of religious and philosophical discourse, but, in fact, an assertion of the superiority of the Jain *darŚana* over all other schools of thought as the locus in which the various one-sided (*ekānta*) insights of other belief systems find their true, conditional expression? If this is case, then these doctrines are simply one more example of the not uncommon pre-modern South Asian rhetorical strategy of inclusivism, found in Buddhist and Vedāntic philosophical texts as well, in which one’s own system is depicted as the final truth toward which all other paths point–or, as is the case with Jain inclusivism, the sum total of all the truths taught in other systems of thought (Halbfass 1988:403-418). This is more of a philosophical question–a question about the logical implications of the basic conceptual structure of Jain philosophy, and the Jain approach to religious plurality.

Finally, for the Jains, might not such inclusivism be, in fact, a defense mechanism, a philosophical survival strategy on the part of a community which, throughout most of its history has been, with only occasional exceptions, a tiny (though influential) minority?

The lone voice of dissent against the characterization of Jain philosophy as a philosophy of ‘intellectual *ahiṃsā*,’ a view which has become something akin to the conventional wisdom among scholars of Jain philosophy–repeated as recently as 1993 in Christopher Key Chapple’s work, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions* (Chapple 1993)–has been the late Kendall Folkert. In *Scripture and Community*,

a collection of his works edited by John Cort and published posthumously, Folkert objects that the reading of 'tolerance' or 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*' into the Jain doctrines of relativity is a purely twentieth-century phenomenon, there being no clear pre-modern textual evidence that *ahiṃsā* was an explicit or even a primary motivation of the Jain intellectuals who formulated these doctrines, or that the two concepts–nonviolence and conceptual relativity–were ever even seen by pre-modern Jain intellectuals to be connected at all, at least not explicitly (Folkert 1993:224-227). The argument, of course, hinges upon what one takes 'tolerance,' precisely, to mean, and how well this notion corresponds with the claims of the Jain philosophy of relativity. As Folkert points out, the dominant Jain theory of error–that error is the result of *ekāntatā*, or exclusivity with respect to philosophical perspectives–is quite congenial to being interpreted as a form of 'tolerance' in what could be called a modern sense–an affirmation of the importance of openness to a plurality of perspectives, a rejection of arbitrary, irrational dogmatism. But this is not the only theory of error articulated in the Jain tradition–for there is also the insistence that perspectives, or *naya*s, must be employed in a manner consistent with normative Jain doctrine. The dominant theory fits well with the notion that this philosophy is a form of intellectual *ahiṃsā*; the other theory, however, does not, as Folkert elaborates:

> The fact that the *naya*s can be interpreted differently plays a role in the notion of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*.' Two interpretations of the problem of error in the *nayavāda* have been mentioned: first, that *naya*s err in being incomplete [*ekānta*]; second, that they are susceptible to active misuse [*durnaya*]. Under the first interpretation, when a *naya* is illustrated by a school of thought, it is possible to draw the conclusion that each school of thought contributes or partakes in a valid, though limited, view of matters, and that if these limited viewpoints can be synthesized one will have the means of understanding matters in their multi-faceted real status. Thus schools of thought are simply extensions of the fact that any one judgement is limited, and no odium need be attached to the various schools of thought except that they are one-sided while the Jain position is not.…Under the second nterpretation, where *naya*s are capable of being fallacious as well as limited, matters would be very different. What causes the existence of various schools of thought is not only the fact that judgements tend to be partial, but also that there can be error in those judgements. Thus it is not merely wrong-headed insistence on a particular viewpoint that lies behind the existence of various schools, it is also error itself (Folkert 1993:224).

As we have seen in this chapter, the Jain doctrines of relativity postulate a universe of multi-faceted (or *anekānta*) entities, capable of being characterized in an infinite variety of ways from a correspondingly infinite variety of perspectives (or *naya*s). The relational character of reality and knowledge posited, respectively, by the ontological doctrine of *anekāntavāda* and the epistemological doctrine of the *naya*s entails that the truth of any given claim about the nature of a particular entity is contingent upon–i.e. relative to–the perspective from which the claim is made–that is, that claims about reality are true not absolutely, but only conditionally: 'in a certain sense' (*syāt*), or from a certain point of view (Mookerjee 1978).

These doctrines allow Jain philosophers to take what B.K. Matilal calls an "inclusive middle path" (Matilal 1981:18) regarding ontological questions, questions about the ultimate character of reality and the entities which constitute it. Buddhist logicians, for example, typically claim that reality is ultimately characterized by impermanence, consisting of a series of causally connected momentary events. Adherents of Advaita Vedānta, however, claim that there is ultimately only one unchanging entity–Brahman–of which all of reality consists. Jain authors tend to incorporate both of these perspectives into a "meta-philosophical" view (Gopalan 1991), according to which reality is characterized by both change and continuity. According to the Jain, therefore, the Buddhist and the Vedāntin are both right from their respective points of view and wrong only inasmuch they assert their positions absolutely, without proper qualification, thus negating one another. Change and continuity presuppose one another, and the only properly comprehensive world view, according to Jain thought, is one which allows for both principles to operate as genuine elements of reality, reducing neither to the realm of *māyā*, or illusion, which the two extreme positions (or *ekānta naya*s) of Buddhism and Advaita each do to the other's ontologically privileged principle: the momentary state and the eternal Being.

The advocacy of the stable, continuous entity as the eminent reality, called by the Jains the 'perspective from which substance can be said to exist' (*dravyāstikanaya*), is embodied in its most extreme form by monistic Advaita Vedānta. The affirmation that the momentary state is what is most ultimately real, called by the Jains the 'perspective from which process can be said to exist' (*paryāyāstikanaya*), is expressed by the various schools of Buddhism. A mixture of both of these views which gives priority to permanence can be found in the Sāṃkhya school of philosophy, with its doctrine of the *puruṣa* as the eminent reality in contrast with *prakṛti*, from which it seeks to liberate itself. A mixture of both views which gives priority to particularity and change can be found in the Nyāya and VaiŚeṣika schools of thought, according to Jainism, which places itself firmly in the middle between the two extremes of eternalism and momentarism and their more moderate forms (Padmarajiah 1963:9-182). Jainism affirms the existence, equally, of both persisting substances and changing modes, and so depicts itself as the most comprehensive, the most inclusive, meta-philosophical view; and pre-modern Jain philosophical texts frequently include or consist of lists of all the possible perspectives from which a given question can be viewed and answered correctly, given the proper conditionalization. Of particular interest with regard to the question of premodern Jain attitudes toward religious and philosophical plurality is the fact that these texts, such as Siddhasena's *Sanmatitarka*, Samantabhadra's *Āptamīmāṃsā*, and Mallavādin's *Nayacakra* (c. 5th-6th cen. C.E.), often use the doctrines of non-Jain schools of thought, as I have just done, to illustrate the various *naya*s, or perspectives, which, only when taken collectively, constitute a whole, comprehensive, valid instrument of judgment (*pramāṇa*).

The fact that the doctrines of relativity thus enabled pre-modern Jain intellectuals to incorporate elements of non-Jain systems of thought into their own philosophical framework, and that Jains have been among the foremost composers of doxographies– compendia of the views of various schools of thought containing remarkably little polemic

and seemingly motivated by a genuine desire to depict these views accurately, without distortion (Folkert 1993:217-218)–combined with the modern historical trends which might lead a scholar to *want* to see toleration in the doctrines of a South Asian school of philosophy–the same trends which have led many to conceive of Hinduism as the most tolerant of religions–make it quite understandable that a twentieth-century scholar of the caliber of B.K. Matilal might come to the following conclusion about the Jain doctrines of relativity:

> Non-violence, i.e., abstention from killing or taking the life of others, was the dominant trend in the whole of [the] Śramaṇa movement in India, particularly in Buddhism and Jainism. I think the Jainas carried the principle of non-violence to the intellectual level, and thus propounded their *anekānta* doctrine. Thus, the hallmark of the *anekānta* doctrine was toleration. The principle embodied in the respect for the life of others was transformed by the Jaina philosophers, at the intellectual level, into respect for the view[s] of others. This was, I think, a unique attempt to harmonize the persistent discord in the field of philosophy (Matilal 1990:313-314).

Unfortunately, Matilal does not make a case for this conclusion on the basis of specific evidence from pre-modern Jain texts. It is apparently supposed to be obvious that a doctrine that involves the incorporation of the views of others into one's own expresses an ethic of nonviolent toleration of those others in fact. Is it possible that this is obvious only to a modern thinker, to whom issues of toleration and interreligious harmony are among the most pressing issues of the day? Is it possible that, because one's own existential situation is so characterized by the perceived need for a perspective conducive to peacemaking, the quest for such a perspective being conceived as, perhaps, a matter of national, or even global, survival,[23] one reads that need back into history and presumes that the authors of the texts one is studying were motivated by those same concerns as well?

One scholar who does try to make a properly historical case for the doctrines of relativity being an extension of the principle of *ahiṃsā* into the realm of philosophical discourse is Nathmal Tatia. It has been suggested by Tatia that *syādvāda* evolved from early

[23] Chapple's work exhibits this concern, also shared by religious pluralists.

Jain monastic rules regarding proper–that is, nonviolent–speech. Tatia quite rightly points out that in some of the earliest extant Jain texts, the Ardhamāgadhi Prākrit *Ācārāṅga* and *Sūtrakṛtaṅga* sūtras, dating from roughly the 5th to the 2nd centuries B.C.E., explicit admonitions against violence not only in body, but in speech and mind as well, occur (Tatia 1951:17-26). The early *Daśavaikālika Sūtra*, too, contains the following rules for Jain monks with regard to speech:

> *yā ca satyā avaktavyā satyāmṛṣā ca yā mṛṣā* |
> *sā ca buddhairanācīrṇā na tāṃ bhāṣate prajñāvān* || 2 ||
>
> A wise monk does not speak inexpressible truth, truth mixed with falsehood, doubtful truth, or complete falsehood.
>
> *asatyāmṛṣāṃ satyāṃ ca anavadyāmakarkaśām* |
> *samutprekṣāṃ asaṃdigdhāṃ giraṃ bhāṣate prajñāvān* || 3 ||
>
> A wise monk speaks after careful thought of things uncertain, even of truths, in a manner which may be free from sin, mild and beyond doubt.
>
> *tathaiva paruṣā bhāṣā gurumūtopaghātinī* |
> *satyāpi sā na vaktavyā yatā pāpasya āgamā* || 11 ||
>
> Likewise, he does not use harsh words, nor even truth that may cause deep injury, for even these generate bondage to negative karmas.
>
> *etenā'nyena vā'rthena paro yenopahanyate* |
> *ācārabhāvadoṣjñā na taṃ bhāṣate prajñāvān* || 13 ||
>
> A wise soul, conscious of evil intentions, does not speak words as prohibited above, or any other that may cause harm.[24]

It does not seem like a very big leap from rules about nonviolent speech such as those found in an early text like the *DaŚavaikālika Sūtra* to the claim of later texts like Samantabhadra's *Āptamīmāṃsā* that the proper way to express a proposition is to accompany it with the word '*syāt*' and the elaboration of the senses in which various, prima facie contradictory claims can all be said to be true by means of the doctrine of the *naya*s and the metaphysics of *anekāntavāda*. As Folkert points out, however, in his critique of

[24] *Daśavaikālika Sūtra* 7:2-3, 11, 13. Translation based on Lalwani 1973:134-135, 138).

Tatia's argument, this is an inference which the modern scholar must draw; for the connection between nonviolent speech and *syādvāda* does not seem to be made, at least explicitly, in any of the pre-modern Jain texts currently available to modern scholarship.

Is there no merit, though, in the position of those scholars who have perceived tolerance in the Jain doctrines of relativity? Although one may be convinced–as I am–by Folkert's case that the claim that the Jain doctrines of relativity developed as a direct consequence of the Jain concern with nonviolent speech is historically unwarranted, and that the reading of tolerance into these doctrines does not really do justice to the materials in which they are presented, one might, nevertheless, find oneself–as, again, I do–in profound agreement with the kind of modern-day ethical and political orientation which would *want* to see *ahiṃsā* in these doctrines. In partial defense, therefore, of the scholars of Jainism who have held that the doctrines of relativity are expressions of intellectual *ahiṃsā*–and they have been many in number–I would want to argue that there are two issues here which could easily become conflated. One is the *historical* question of whether or not the pre-modern formulation of the Jain doctrines of relativity did, in fact, constitute an extension of the principle of *ahiṃsā* into the realm of religious and philosophical discourse. In other words, did the Jain intellectuals who formulated these doctrines in fact do so out of a conscious spirit of what a modern thinker might recognize as religious tolerance, inspired by the unarguably central Jain ethical principle of *ahiṃsā*? The second is the *philosophical* question of whether or not, regardless of the actual motivations behind their historical formulation, the Jain doctrines of relativity *can legitimately be so interpreted* as to be capable of deployment in the name of religious toleration. In other words, whether or not they were originally conceived as expressions of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*'–arguably a thoroughly modern concept–can the Jain doctrines of relativity, by their internal logic as concepts, be deployed to provide the philosophical foundation for an ethic of religious toleration? Simply to pose the problem in the form of the question, "Do the Jain doctrines

of relativity express an ethic of religious toleration or do they not?" is to lose sight of what I take to be the crucial distinction between these two issues.

These two issues, however, though distinguishable, are interrelated. With regard to the first issue, the historical question of whether or not the doctrines of relativity were originally formulated primarily as a nonviolent response to the situation of religious and philosophical plurality in which Jain intellectuals found themselves, I tend to agree with Folkert's position that this was probably not the case–or at least that there is insufficient evidence for making the strong positive claim that many scholars of Jainism have made in this regard. Regarding the second issue, however, of whether the Jain doctrines of relativity might plausibly be used as elements in the making of an argument for religious toleration, I am strongly inclined to support the position that they can be so used; and, indeed, it is my intention with this dissertation to attempt to put these doctrines to just such a use. The historical and the philosophical issues are interrelated, however, inasmuch as textual evidence indicates that, historically, even if the doctrines of relativity were not necessarily designed with *ahiṃsā* in mind, there are Jain writers who did put them to what could be called 'tolerant' or 'nonviolent' uses, or interpreted them in a manner which could plausibly be so characterized, and Jain writers who did not. The very fact of multivocality on this issue in the textual tradition that we possess indicates, I think, that the answer to the question, "Do the Jain doctrines of relativity articulate an ethic or religious toleration or do they not?" cannot be an easy "Yes" or "No." I would like to argue, after the manner in which these texts themselves confront philosophical questions, that the best answer to this question is "In some sense yes, in another, no."

Regarding the attitude that is proper for Jains to hold toward non-Jain religious beliefs and practices, there is no consensus among pre-modern Jain writers. All Jains are, of course, normatively enjoined to live lives of nonviolence in body, speech and mind, entailing the avoidance of careers that involve the taking of human or animal life–though

Jain kings did exist–and the performance of acts of charity toward the larger community, both Jain and non-Jain. However, behaving nonviolently, or even kindly, toward others need not–though it can–entail acceptance of or even respect for their beliefs and practices. The range of Jain responses to, for example, the various deities worshipped by the Hindus has included everything from complete acceptance–the Jains, for example, offer *pŪjā* to Saraswatī, the goddess of learning also honored by Bengali Hindus, and even claim credit for introducting her worship–to ambivalence–Kṛṣṇa, for example, is regarded as residing in Hell for his violent deeds in the Mahābhārata war, but is claimed to be a relative of Nemi, the twenty-second of the Jain TīrthaŚkaras, who is supposed to have taught him all of the wisdom he passed on to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*–to loathing and contempt–particularly for Śiva, who is ridiculed in Jain texts for the drunkenness and the sexual exploits with which he is credited in Purānic and Tāntric literature (Dundas 1992:200-206).

In the realm of philosophy, the Jain doctrines of relativity have had applications with regard to issues of religious toleration at least as varied as the Jain responses to the Hindu deities in popular literature. For some, such as the celebrated Śvetāmbara philosopher, HaribhadrasŪri, the doctrines of relativity prove that there are fundamental truths in the teachings of the recognized masters of all traditions, including the non-Jain Kāpila (the traditional founder of the Sāṃkhya system of philosophy) and the Buddha. As we have already seen in his *Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya*, Haribhadra makes the argument–strikingly similar to that of a modern Neo-Vedāntin, as well as the Buddhist account of the doctrine of *upayakauŚalya*, or the Buddha's 'skill in means'–that the experience of *mokṣa*, or liberation, is essentially one, but is described differently by the great masters who have attained it in order to meet the needs of their particular disciples and of the times in which they lived. The proper attitude, therefore, to hold toward all the great founders of the various paths to liberation–the 'omniscient ones'–is veneration and respect. Disputation over matters of logic with the followers of rival schools is to be avoided as non-conducive to the supreme

goal of *mokṣa*,or *nirvāṇa*, which is the common aspiration of all (*Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya*:129-138). He also writes elsewhere, in terms reminiscent of the modern humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason, "I do not have any partiality for Mahāvīra, nor do I revile people such as Kāpila [the founder of the Sāṃkhya system of philosophy]. One should instead have confidence in the person whose statements are in accord with reason (*yukti*)" (*Lokatattvanirṇaya* 38).[25]

One may, however, contrast Haribhadra's attitude toward non-Jain *darŚana*s with that of another celebrated Jain thinker of the Śvetāmbara tradition, Hemacandra, author of the *Anyayogavyavacchedika*–a possible translation of the title of which is 'The Ripper-Apart of Other Systems of Thought.' In this text, further elaborated by the commentary of his disciple, MalliṣeṇasŪri, the *Syādvādamañjarī* ('The Flower-Spray of the Doctrine of Conditional Predication'), Hemacandra, while affirming that Jainism contains within itself the genuine insights of all other systems–and thereby, implicitly, that other systems do contain genuine insights–seeks primarily to refute the doctrines of those systems, demonstrating their absurdity either on the basis of self-contradiction or conflict with the data of experience, as well as the standard Jain charge of 'one-sidedness' (*ekāntatā*); for Hemacandra was also an upholder of the dominant interpretation of *nayavāda*, and articulates it in this very text (*Anyayogavyavacchedika* 30). The following verse, sometimes cited as evidence for the nonviolent character of Jain philosophy, sounds, in this context, more like a form of Jain philosophical triumphalism:

> *anyo'nyapakṣapratipakṣabhāvād yathā pare matsariṇā pravādā¯* |
> *nayānaŚeṣānaviŚeṣamicchan na pakṣapātī samayastathā te* || 30 ||
>
> As, because of being alternatives and counter-alternatives one to another, the other prime doctrines are jealous; not so is Thy [the Jina's] religion, in desiring the Methods [*naya*s] in totality, without distinction [or] given to partiality (*Anyayogavyavacchedika* 30).[26]

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[25] Quoted in Dundas 1992:196.

[26] Translated by Thomas (Thomas 1968:164).

For Hemacandra, the doctrines of relativity demonstrate the clear superiority of the Jain *darŚana* over all other schools of thought, its ability to assimilate the genuine insights of other religions and philosophies to itself.

Do the Jain doctrines of relativity, then, articulate an ethic of *ahiṃsā*, of nonviolent toleration for the views of others, seen as each expressing a genuine insight into truth? Or do they constitute a rhetorical strategy of assimilation, by which the central teachings of other schools of thought are 'swallowed up' into Jainism, which comes out on top as the superior, all-inclusive perspective? The evidence seems to indicate that the answers to these questions depend upon who is deploying the doctrines in a given situation. One thing, however, is clear: for all of the authors in question, these doctrines are logical entailments of the metaphysical system accepted by the Jain tradition as a whole–that articulated in the early Jain scriptures and systematized in Umāsvāti's *Tattvārtha Sūtra*–and not only, or even primarily, responses to the religiously plural situation in which the Jains have always existed. This text expresses the basic account of existence underlying all the various formulations of the Jain doctrines of relativity as their ontological basis.

There remains, however, a philosophical issue: Even given the dominant interpretation of *nayavāda* applied consistently, can the way in which Jain doctrines of relativity conceptualize philosophical and religious diversity be truly said to be intellectually 'nonviolent?' Is it truly charitable? Does it not, instead, interpret the doctrines of religious communities in a way foreign to their own self-understanding, subsuming them within an intellectual framework to which they would probably not self-consciously acquiesce? By relativizing them, does it not distort doctrines beyond recognition, so that it can be said not, in fact, to provide a framework for genuine understanding of the 'other,' but rather for absorption and appropriation of a constructed 'other' with little resemblance to the genuine article? Do not the Jain doctrines of relativity constitute a kind of theological imperialism? And would not this character persist if they were to be appropriated into a pluralistic

interpretation of religion, itself an attempt to subsume the insights of the world's religions–including Jainism–as 'general truths' in a universalist (and, by implication, hegemonic) metaphysical system?

These are serious charges, and must be answered by one (such as myself) who would appropriate this system of logic as a framework for the analysis of religious doctrines and for the conceptualization of religion in general. To some extent, I would claim that the issue must be conceded–that *anekantavāda*, *nayavāda*, and *syādvāda*–even in their ideal-typical form–do not interpret the doctrinal claims of other schools of thought without some distortion, without imposing foreign categories of understanding upon them. I would also maintain, however, that this is an epistemological inevitability for anyone, from any perspective, who attempts to understand other points of view using their own categories of understanding–especially, I wish to emphasize, if one's categories are derived from strong normative commitments about the nature of the cosmos and the project of understanding itself. I would, furthermore, wish to emphasize that this principle applies to non-religious, historical theories of religion and culture no less than to the perspectives of philosophers–or, for that matter, to those of the religious communities themselves.

In *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, Wilhelm Halbfass provides what I find to be a useful discussion of the concept of inclusivism as a way of understanding the position which a tradition of thought that is bound, on the one hand, by commitment to certain absolute, normative claims, and on the other, by injunctions of tolerance and nonviolence, must logically assume:

> In a thoughtful discussion of the relationship between Christianity and tolerance, the theologian U. Mann defines the potential of tolerance which he finds in early Christianity as "kerygmatic inclusivity," i.e. as inclusivism in a positive, dynamic sense. "Early Christianity understands itself as the 'religion of fullness' ('Religion der Fulle'). In its self-understanding and in its understanding of religion, it is inclusive." According to Mann, such "kerygmatic inclusivity" exemplifies tolerance in its fullest sense; and he claims that this kind of tolerance is to be found only in religions "which have risen to the self-understanding of the absolute religion." Mann recognizes that this applies to Christianity but also to other religions, in particular

> Buddhism. Indeed, we may say that *any kind of tolerance which is allied with, and committed to, religious absolutism, and which keeps itself free from relativism, scepticism or indifferentism, is by definition inclusivistic* (Halbfass 1988:416).[27]

Halbfass furthermore recognizes that, of the possible varieties of inclusivism, some are, in a sense, more inclusive than others, and that the Jain system of relativity is something of a model in this respect:

> In addition to the "vertical," hierarchical model of inclusivism, there is also a "horizontal" model, which is typified by the Jaina doxographies. The Jainas present their own system not as the transcending culmination of lower stages of truth, but as the complete and comprehensive context, the full panorama which comprises other doctrines as partial truths or limited perspectives. Although these two models are not always kept apart in doxographic practice, they represent clearly different types of inclusion. The subordination of other views to the Vedāntic idea of *brahman* or the Madhyamaka viewpoint of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) postulates an ascent which is at the same time a discarding and transcendence of doctrinal distinctions; the inclusion and neutralization of other views is not a subordinating identification of specific foreign concepts with specific aspects of one's own system, but an attempt to supersede and transcend specific concepts and conceptual and doctrinal dichotomies in general. The Jaina perspectivism, on the other hand, represents a horizontally coordinating inclusivism which recognizes other views as parts and aspects of its own totality. Of course, the Jainas, too, claim a superior vantage point, and a higher level of reflection (Ibid 414).

I shall argue later that Halbfass's description of 'Jaina perspectivism' as a 'horizontally coordinating inclusivism which recognizes other views as parts and aspects of its own totality' provides a fairly accurate characterization not only of Jain philosophy, but also of Whitehead's approach to other, non-process philosophical positions as well. I also concur with his assessment that the logical structure of an inclusivism is that required by a philosophy which would eschew the extremes of both absolutism and relativism–such as a pluralistic philosophy of religions conceptually grounded in a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics. I would maintain that such an inclusive 'middle path' between absolutism and relativism is the most internally coherent response to the question of what could be taken to be the epistemic violence involved in the pluralistic interpretation of religions.

5.9 The Significance of the Jain Philosophy of Relativity for the Reconstruction of Religious Pluralism

[27] Emphasis mine.

Beyond providing the basic horizontally coordinating inclusivist logical structure appropriate to a pluralistic method for the interpretation of religion based on Whitehead's metaphysics–a claim for which an argument has yet, at this point, to be made–what is the significance of the Jain philosophy of relativity for the reconstruction of religious pluralism? This question can be asked in several senses.

It should, first of all, be fairly clear how this interpretive method would operate. With regard to the various prima facie incompatibilities which exist between the world's religions on the level of doctrine, one could use something like the method of *syādvāda* to argue for the senses in which the doctrines of different religions both are and are not true. Taking, for example, the question of theism, one could say that, in one sense, God does exist, that in another, God does not exist, that God both does and does not exist, that God's existence is inexpressible in human linguistically-determined concepts, etc. If such an approach were based on Whitehead's metaphysics, the senses of these various truth-claims would be derived from this metaphysical system, rather than from Jainism.

But this, itself, raises two further questions: First of all, given that the Jain philosophy of relativity is based upon the distinctively Jain conception of reality, it would have to be demonstrated that Jain and process metaphysics are logically compatible on a very deep level, at least in the senses that a Whiteheadian appropriation of the Jain approach to philosophy would require. I claim that this, in fact, is the case; and in a later chapter I will be presenting an argument to this effect.

Secondly, though, the question arises: Why bring Whitehead into the picture at all? Given the internal coherence of Jain philosophy and its ability to integrate a plurality of prima facie incompatible claims into a logical synthesis–indeed, to show the necessary metaphysical complementarity of such claims–is it not by itself sufficient to consitute an approach to religion of the kind desired by this dissertation, one which avoids the extremes of relativism and the consequent incoherences from which current pluralisms suffer?

The brief answer to this question is that the inner logic of religious pluralism, as discussed earlier, is both *modern* and *theistic* in character–that is, it entails, and is therefore most directly and consistently argued from, a metaphysical theism which is itself humanistically redeemed, and this is process metaphysics. Jainism, however, presents itself as a nontheistic system of belief based on faith in the absolute authority of a historically particular revelation. Simply to appropriate Jain inclusivism as an approach to religious plurality would therefore render this approach subject to the same logical critique, discussed earlier, to which other religious inclusivisms are subject. From a perspective which accepts the humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason, on what a priori basis ought one to accept the authority of Mahāvīra over that of Jesus or the Buddha? To claim that one can do so on the basis of the fact that Mahāvīra's system is able to incorporate what is valid in all others is, I think, on the right track, but ultimately in error; for it is to presuppose the truth of one of the constitutive claims of the position for which one is arguing–and Christians and Buddhists can and do make similar claims about the all-inclusiveness of *their* systems of belief. The claim that an inclusiveness of the kind that Mahāvīra's system provides is a desideratum for a system of philosophy–the "mark of truth" (*satyalāñchanā*), as Samantabhadra affirms (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 112)–would require a prior argument on a humanistically redeemable basis for the logical coherence–its mutual implication with other necessary metaphysical claims–of such an inclusive approach.

Process metaphysics, however, as I hope to show in the next chapter, provides just such an argument for the truth of the pluralistic intuition which the Jain philosophy of relativity articulates with, to my way of thinking, unsurpassed depth and clarity. It is my view that these two metaphysical systems can, in fact, be shown to imply one another–that the Jain approach to conceptual plurality is that entailed by process metaphysics and that the theistic wroldview articulated by process metaphysics is entailed by the Jain conception of

reality, this despite the explicit rejection by the Jains of more conventional forms of theism (which process metaphysics itself finds problematic). But this remains to be demonstrated.

Chapter 6

RELIGIOUS PLURALITY AND THE UNIVERSAL LOVE OF GOD

A Deductive Argument for Religious Pluralism from Whitehead's Theistic Metaphysics

For what can be known about God is perfectly plain to them, since God has made it plain to them: ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things.

Romans 1:19-20

6.1 The Problem: Making Religious Pluralism Work

One of the most outspoken and incisive of the critics of religious pluralism, or universalist perspectivalism, at least as this position currently stands, has been the Roman Catholic philosopher and scholar of Buddhism, Paul J. Griffiths. Some of his criticisms–or contributions to criticisms–of this position were discussed earlier, such as the Lack of Argument or Meta-Theory Critique and the Non-Necessity for Dialogue or Superfluity Critique, and the Lack of Exclusionary Criteria or Relativism Critique.

I find the most worrisome of these critiques to be the last one–the Lack of Exclusionary Criteria or Relativism Critique of religious pluralism, which points out the incoherence of current religious pluralists' application, after the manner of conceptual relativists, of an equivalence principle to *all* religious claims, combined with their attempts to distance themselves from relativism with the ad hoc introduction of exclusionary criteria which are, *ex definitio*, incompatible with this equivalence principle. By an 'equivalence principle,' I mean a view that all religious claims must be *equally* true, or true to the *same* degree and in the *same* sense.

The Lack of Argument Critique shall hopefully be addressed by the argument presented in this chapter, and the Non-Necessity for Dialogue Critique has been conceded.

Regarding the Relativism Critique, though, I have already rejected the general application of an equivalence principle to religious claims as unnecessary to religious pluralism's affirmation of the truth of many religions. Exclusionary criteria, too, have been rejected, their role in a pluralistic system being assumed by a conception of truth-expression as occurring on a continuum of relative adequacy, rather than being limited to the binary opposites 'true' and 'false'; for I find that only such a conception of truth-expression as relative is at all adequate to the complexities of the relations between logic, language and reality disclosed in both Jain and process metaphysics. As Whitehead writes, in specifying the problem with the traditional approach, "The distinction between verbal phrases and complete propositions is one of the reasons why the logicians' rigid alternative, 'true or false,' is so largely irrelevant for the pursuit of knowledge" (Whitehead, 1978:11).

The thesis of the reconceived pluralistic hypothesis for which I am arguing here is that *all* religions are, in some sense, true–though not necessarily in the *same* senses, or to the *same* degree. I see this conception of the truth of religions as more adequate to the complexity of actual religious traditions–and of reality–than that expressed in Ogden's claim that true religions "must express substantially the same self-understanding" (Ogden, 1992:60); for it may be the case–and my intention is to argue that it *is* the case–that reality is of such a nature that a plurality of logically compatible, but substantially different, true conceptions of it are possible, and that a plurality of these true conceptions are expressed in the doctrines of the diverse religious communities of the world.

Moreover, I hope to connect my affirmation of the relative truth of a plurality of religions–that they articulate, to a relative degree, the true character of reality in their doctrine-expressing sentences–with an affirmation of their salvific character. I intend to argue not only that there are many true and salvifically efficacious religions, but that it is precisely *because* all religions must, in some sense, be salvific, that they must therefore also, in at least some minimal sense, be true.

The task remains, though, of actually presenting a case for this version of religious pluralism; for even if, as I hope I have shown earlier, the objections raised against the pluralistic position are not decisive, and the various alternatives to this position that exist are, themselves, no less problematic than religious pluralism, the question still remains: Why should anyone believe it to be the case? What reasons are there for thinking this reconceived pluralistic hypothesis, or any pluralistic hypothesis, is, as this dissertation claims, a basically true or relatively adequate response to the question of truth and religious plurality? For even after suggesting that religious pluralism need not *necessarily* be false, my own analysis also revealed significant difficulties with the pluralist position as it currently stands. Let us return to Paul J. Griffiths, who offers the following characterization of common core religious pluralism:

> The view requires that there is a single religiously ultimate reality, and that it is of a kind capable of being effectively mediated through a wide variety of incompatible doctrine-expressing sentences. It means, to take an example from Buddhism and Christianity, that ultimate reality must be such that it can be characterized *both* as sets of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes but without any substantial independent existence, *and* as an eternal changeless divine personal substance. While it may not be impossible to construct some picture of ultimate reality that meets these demands, it is far from easy to see how it might be done (Griffiths, 1991:47).

How, according to Griffiths, do religious pluralists typically respond to this problem?

> What one usually finds in the writings of those who adhere to universalist perspectivalism on the question of how it is that the same ultimate reality can be characterized in apparently contradictory ways is a bow in the direction of ineffability: since the ultimate reality transcends all our characterizations of it, we have to make a fundamental distinction between it as it is *an sich* and it as it is apprehended by us. While it may indeed be the case that ultimate reality is, in and of itself, just the kind of thing that can be characterized and mediated in the ways suggested above, the prior probability of this being true seems distressingly low; some powerful collateral reasons to support it are needed (Ibid:48).

This is clearly a reference to John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, as is the following description of the reasons that are typically offered for holding such a view:

> First, one finds an ex post facto justification of the possibility of the truth of universalist perspectivalism, a justification that assumes that it is true. This usually has the following form: if there really is a single transcendent reality, one would

> expect human characterizations and descriptions of it to differ, perhaps even, allowing for the radical effects of contingent social and cultural factors upon such conceptualization and description, to differ drastically. So the fact that we do find such drastically differing descriptions of the putative ultimate reality is not troubling (Griffiths, 1991:48).

This should call to mind Hick's conception of faith as a rational choice: The universe is religiously ambiguous. Multiple possibilities for belief, all more or less equally compelling in terms of their internal coherence and explanatory power, exist. One is therefore justified in holding any view that resonates with one's experience, so long as it is capable of passing minimal tests of internal coherence and plausibility. According to Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, this is what one should expect if the nature of the ultimately Real is, in and of itself, inexpressible.

The flaws that Griffiths points out in Hick's version of religious pluralism have already been discussed. They are, essentially, the same two flaws that I found with Hick's hypothesis: a lack of grounding in a coherent system of metaphysics, and a consequent reliance on a Kantian model for the interpretation and evaluation of religious claims. Griffiths refers to the first flaw, a lack of grounding in a coherent system of metaphysics, when he speaks of the fact that the collateral reasons typically offered in support of religious pluralism are weak "ex post facto" justifications that assume the truth of the claim they are intended to support. He refers to the second–the problematic Kantian interpretive model discussed earlier–when he speaks of the pluralist "bow in the direction of ineffability": Hick's doctrine of the Real *an sich*.

The point of this and the following chapters is to reconceive Hick's pluralistic hypothesis–to give a coherent account of both *why* and *how* the same ultimate reality can be characterized adequately, *both*, for example, 'Buddhistically,' "as a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes" *and* "Christianly," "as an eternal changeless divine personal substance." In order to do this, the two flaws mentioned above must be addressed. Addressing the first flaw–grounding religious

pluralism in logical argument, in a definite, metaphysical conception of reality by which it is logically entailed–is the concern of this chapter. Succeeding chapters, with their development of an alternative method for the interpretation of religious claims–based on Jain, rather than Kantian, philosophy–will address the second.

6.2 Religious Doctrine, Cultural Mediation, and the Salvific Will of God: The Basic Structure of the Argument

The argument of this chapter can be summarized in the following way: The ongoing debate over religious pluralism can be seen to arise from a fundamental disagreement over the nature and function of religious doctrine. Religious pluralists tend to be *experiential-expressivists*, concerned with the transformative, salvific character of doctrine. Their opponents tend to be either *propositionalists*, concerned with the cognitive content of doctrine and the ontological truth of its claims; *cultural-linguists*, concerned with the intrasystematic integrity of religious traditions as cultural systems; or some combination of the two. All of these, I claim, after the manner of the Jains, are one-sided (*ekanta*) views of doctrine. A more adequate conception of doctrine–and one which will both entail and be entailed by my argument for religious pluralism–is one which encompasses and affirms all three of these dimensions of doctrine to the exclusion of none: a 'three-dimensional,' rather than a 'one-' or 'two-dimensional' theory of doctrine.

The problems with pure experiential-expressivism have already been illustrated in my critiques of both Raimon Panikkar and John Hick. A purely experiential-expressivist conception of doctrine deprives the religions of their claims to express the ultimate character of reality for the communities who believe in them–one of the main purposes of religion, according to Ogden's definition, which I, too, am using (Ogden, 1992a:5)–as well as their regulative functions for the lives of those communities.

Giving emphasis only to the other two dimensions of doctrine, however, to the exclusion of experiential-expressivism, ignores the potentially salvific character of religion,

or confines it to mere assent to a specific set of propositions. It neglects the personally transformative element of religious doctrine, the enacting of it in such a way as to make it effective in the lives of those who give assent to it, rather than a mere laundry list of propositions. Worse yet, if existing in conjunction with commitment to a particular set of (exclusivist) religious propositions, it opens up the possibility of implying that vast numbers of human beings are deprived of salvation because they hold wrong views, because they give assent to propositions which are, prima facie at least, incompatible with those affirmed by one's own community, assent to which constitutes salvation on such a view–a possibility which propositionalists who are also religious exclusivists happily embrace. This last possibility is disturbing, however, only in light of a theistic commitment which predicates a universal salvific will of God–or some conception of ultimate Reality which predicates of this Reality a will or drive or potentiality to bring all beings to the ultimate fulfillment of their existence. This is the hidden theistic assumption of religious pluralism which I hope to bring 'out of the closet' in this chapter with my deductive argument for this position.

The option of arguing openly for religious pluralism on the basis of a universally salvific divine will is currently unavailable to many religious pluralists precisely because it requires the adoption of a particular worldview, the appropriation of a particular religious or philosophical stance from which to justify their position. This, these religious pluralists claim, they cannot currently do because it is precisely on the basis of their charge that the adoption of such a stance and its utilization as a basis for making normative judgments is arbitrary and imperialist that they have become religious pluralists. The contradiction in religious pluralism, however, is that current religious pluralists eschew engagement in traditional apologetics on behalf of normative claims precisely on the basis of a normative claim–or at least a normative assumption, which, I would want to claim, is theistic in character–and end up in a position arguably no less 'imperialist' than that of those

philosophers and theologians whom they criticize. The shunning of the adoption of a particular normative worldview is also the reason such religious pluralists as John Hick have become experiential-expressivists, relegating the ontological claims of the world religions to the realms of "myth," "mystery," or "the unknown" (Hick, 1989:343-361).

In fact, however, as critics of religious pluralism such as S. Mark Heim point out (Heim:101-110), common core religious pluralists like Hick *do* adopt a particular normative stance, though perhaps not consciously or reflectively–namely, that of liberal modernity, the mainstream current of Western thought since the time of the Enlightenment, the humanistic 'tradition' whose particular character is precisely to question tradition-based authority and to seek in principle universally available norms for the evaluation of all claims. The pluralistic charge of the arbitrariness of using the norms of any particular religious tradition to evaluate the rest is precisely the modern liberal claim that all norms should be universally available, at least in principle, to all rational beings, that "our understandings can be redeemed only by appeal in some sense to human experience and reason as such" (Gamwell 1990:5). This is why Hick formulates his pluralistic hypothesis on the (seemingly) neutral ground of modern Western philosophical and sociological critiques of religion rather than on the basis of any particular religious vision of reality.

The antipluralist charge that, by adopting the norms of liberal modernity, the pluralist is thereby just as arbitrary as the traditionalist can be met with the countercharge that the traditionalist, by taking this line of attack, has, in fact, conceded the charge of arbitrariness. By attacking it in this way the traditionalist thereby presupposes the validity of the modern commitment (Ibid:13). The pluralist charge of arbitrariness against those who use the norms of a particular religious tradition to evaluate all others–at least without a prior humanistic evaluation of those norms–thus stands.

The problem, however, with the pluralist adoption of liberal modernity (or rather, the recognition that it is from liberal modernity that pluralistic convictions can arise), with

its attendant dominant consensus, on the basis of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, that metaphysics, in the traditional sense, is no longer possible, and that theistic claims cannot be validated on a humanistic basis, is that it undermines the ability of the religious pluralist to coherently defend the theistic claim which, I believe, underlies religious pluralism as a position–that it is somehow objectionable, for metaphysical reasons, to concede the possibility that salvation might be unavailable to large numbers of human beings simply on the basis of their birth beyond the bounds of a particular cultural tradition in which true religious propositions happen to be propounded. In defense of this intuition, one is left only with experiential-expressivism and Panikkar's 'Mystery,' or Hick's Real *an sich*.

All hope, however, is not lost for religious pluralism; for, according to Franklin I. Gamwell, the dominant antimetaphysical consensus within liberal modernity is mistaken. A theistic metaphysics is therefore possible within the modern humanistic commitment which can form the basis for a logically and metaphysically coherent religious pluralism–a theistic metaphysics which, according to Gamwell, is the proper completion of the modern project, all attempts at formulating coherent ethical theories within modernity in its absence issuing in either incoherence or empty, formal and arbitrary claims (Ibid:185-194). This is the system of neoclassical or process metaphysics developed by Alfred North Whitehead and further refined and elaborated by Charles Hartshorne. It is on the basis of this system of metaphysics, in conjunction with insights from contemporary cultural anthropology, that I shall formulate the following deductive argument for the truth of the claim that all religions are necessarily, in some sense, true:

1. God–a concrete individual characterized by "complete relativity to all actuality and possibility" (Ibid:171)–necessarily exists (argument from process metaphysics).

2. Speaking anthropomorphically, God is possessed of a universally *salvific* and *efficacious* will (elaboration of the nature of God as disclosed in process metaphysics).

3. Salvation, for human beings, is defined as the free choice to participate consciously in the divine *telos* of maximizing the total creative expression of the universe (deduction from process metaphysics).

4. A necessary condition for any distinctively human knowing is participation in some cultural-linguistic system or systems (deduction from contemporary cultural anthropology).

5. God wills the salvation of all human beings (entailment of 2).

6. Whatever God wills is always and everywhere possible (entailment of 2).

7. The salvation of human beings is possible whenever and wherever there are human beings (5 and 6).

8. Human salvation requires some degree of knowledge of the divine *telos*, in order that it might be freely chosen (entailment of 3).

9. All human beings possess some degree of knowledge of the divine *telos* (7 and 8).

10. On the assumption that some human beings may have access to only one cultural-linguistic system, all cultural-linguistic systems in some way make possible some degree of knowledge of the divine *telos* (4 and 9).

11. Religion is a form of cultural-linguistic system (definition of religion).

12. All religions in some way make possible some degree of knowledge of the divine telos (10 and 11). All religions are therefore, at least to this extent, true.

As indicated in the parentheses, the first three steps of this argument are derived directly from process metaphysics. The logical foundation of this argument–its first step–is the reformulated version of St. Anselm's ontological argument, mentioned earlier, which is accepted by such process philosophers as Hartshorne, Ogden, and Gamwell as establishing the necessity of the existence of God–not the classical conception of God as wholly eternal, necessary, and immutable, but God as reconceived by process metaphysics as containing both an eternal, necessary, and immutable 'abstract' or 'conceptual' nature and a temporal, contingent, and constantly changing 'concrete' or 'consequent' nature (Hartshorne 1962; Ogden 1992b; Gamwell 1990). It is not my intention in this dissertation to attempt to provide a defense or my own reformulated version of this argument–thus making my project even more vast in scope than it already is–but simply to take its validity as having been established by the authors I have just cited, the conclusions of whose arguments I

essentially accept. It is my claim, however, that *if* the reformulated version of this argument works–if its premises are true and its logic valid–and *if* the argument I have outlined here, on its basis, similarly works, then this dissertation constitutes a case for the *logical necessity* of the truth of religious pluralism.

The fourth step of my argument–the definition of distinctively human knowing as necessarily involving participation in some cultural-linguistic system or systems is, as I indicate, imported from contemporary cultural anthropology as one of its fundamental assumptions. I take this assumption, though, to be fully compatible with–and arguably entailed by–Whitehead's account of the relational character and structure of consciousness in such relatively complex organisms as human beings (Whitehead 1978:266-280).

6.3 The Nature of Doctrine Reconsidered: The Necessary Interdependence of Propositionalism, Experiential-Expressivism, and Intrasystematic Coherence

In the writings of Western theologians, philosophers, and other scholars of religion over the centuries, at least three primary functions or dimensions have been attributed to religious doctrine: the *cognitive* or *propositionalist*, the *experiential-expressive*, and the *intrasystematic* or *cultural-linguistic*. These functions are well elaborated in George A. Lindbeck's book *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*.

The chief difficulty, though, with Lindbeck's exposition of these three functions is his seeming perception of them as conflicting alternatives or models for how the nature of doctrine ought to be conceived.[1] This, of course, is how these models have typically functioned, historically, in the works of theologians and philosophers of religion who have concerned themselves with the topic of doctrine.[2] My own view, though, is that an

[1] Lindbeck's own preference is for the intrasystematic function.

[2] In fact, it is mainly the first two functions, the propositionalist and the experiential-expressive, which seem, historically, to have been the main concern of theologians and philosophers of religion. Lindbeck is, to my knowledge, the first theologian to have proposed an intrasystematic conception of doctrine, though this idea has long had currency among cultural anthropologists (Geertz 1973:87-125).

adequate conception of doctrine integrates all three of these dimensions into a single, complex understanding which is capable of encompassing the entire variety of functions which doctrine, in fact, performs in actual religious communities. Such a complex conception is, I would claim, more adequate to reality than are one-sided conceptions of doctrine which exclude or marginalize the others. I would claim, furthermore, that it is only on the basis of such a complex conception of doctrine that a logically viable religious pluralism can be developed.[3] Such a complex or integrated conception of doctrine, I hope to show, is more adequate than its various one-dimensional alternatives to a conception of the process of human salvific transformation as involving the whole human person, in all of his or her aspects–mental, emotional, and social (and others as well).

Of what, specifically, do these three functions or dimensions of doctrine consist? The cognitive or propositional function of doctrine is to convey some fact, some ontological truth, about the universe. I conceive of this dimension of doctrine as exhibiting its most obvious, straightforward and literal aspect. To illustrate this function, let us take two fine examples of doctrine, utilized in Paul Griffiths's characterization of religious pluralism, namely: "Ultimate reality is a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes," and "Ultimate reality is an eternal changeless divine personal substance." The cognitive or propositional function of these two doctrines is to communicate, to all who understand them, the information, respectively, that "Ultimate reality is a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes," and that "Ultimate reality is an eternal changeless divine personal substance." To function as properly *religious* doctrines, of course, knowledge of these claims must also be seen as somehow important to the salvation, the ultimate felicity, of human beings

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[3] The author who comes the closest to articulating the integrated conception of doctrine that I have in mind is probably Schubert Ogden.

(Griffiths, 1991:9). But, beyond this specification, the cognitive function of religious doctrines is, essentially, to convey ontological truth.

The experiential-expressive function of doctrine has already been discussed at some length. It is to this function of doctrine that religious pluralists such as Raimon Panikkar and John Hick typically appeal in order to explain how it is possible that prima facie incompatible claims made about the nature of ultimate reality can all be regarded as 'true'–not true in an ontological or propositional sense, but 'true' in the sense of pointing to, for Panikkar, the experience of a deeper divine 'Mystery,' or being, for Hick, 'cognitive filters' through which salvifically transformative experiences of the Real can be mediated. It is also, as discussed earlier, the function of doctrine to which liberal theologians generally have appealed in order to accommodate the dominant claims of modernity against traditional Christianity. When, in the wake of the Enlightenment, central Christian claims were no longer held to be tenable by many religious intellectuals–at least not in a literal, propositional sense, in light of the findings of modern science and the arguments of modern philosophers–they were relegated to the realm of 'symbolic' or 'mythological'–experiential-expressive–truth.[4]

The most obvious ways in which such claims as "Ultimate reality is a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes," and "Ultimate reality is an eternal changeless divine personal substance" can be seen to function in an experiential-expressive fashion is by informing religious practice–particularly, one might expect, contemplative practice aimed at the transformation of consciousness, of the evocation of some kind of subjective experience of the ultimately real and the subsequent public expression of that experience (though more mundane kinds of religious experience

[4] For a classic example of such a move, see Paul Tillich's article "Religious Symbols and Our Knowledge of God" (Tillich 1955).

are, of course, informed by doctrine as well). If ultimate reality is a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes, or an eternal changeless divine personal substance, it is presumably the kind of thing that will evoke distinctive kinds of affective response when engaged with as an object of contemplation or worship–affective responses presumably held–and this is an important point for my argument–to be salvifically significant by the religious communities which strive to cultivate them through the perpetuation of particular doctrines and practices.

This leads us, then, to the intrasystematic or cultural-linguistic dimension of doctrine, the emphasis of which is the fact that particular doctrines take on meaning precisely within the larger context of a system of doctrine and a way of life. The intrasystematic truth of a doctrine is the truth that it expresses precisely as a function of its 'syntactic' relations with the rest of the system in which it operates. Doctrines are not, in this sense, abstractable, as the propositionalist conception of doctrine would have it, from their systematic context; for, as Griffiths dramatically illustrates, it is this very context which gives them meaning:

> Imagine a crusader uttering the sentence *christus est dominus* ["Christ is Lord."] while lopping off the head of an infidel: it would seem that the intrasystematic incoherence of the action with the verbal expression of a discipleship that requires sacrificial peacemaking as an essential component makes the utterance intrasystematically…false. Or imagine a Buddhist taking the ten precepts while seducing his friend's wife. Since the precepts include a vow to abstain from sexual activity of all kinds, in this case also there is an intrasystematic incoherence between the utterances involved in taking the precepts and the actions involved in the seduction. Conversely, the utterances in question might be true if spoken in a situation wherein they cohere with the total context (Griffiths, 1991:40).

Lindbeck takes intrasystematic truth to be a necessary condition for ontological truth (Lindbeck 1984:65). As Griffiths, of course, points out, given the examples that he utilizes, such a claim does not seem to be warranted. It may very well be the case, for example, ontologically, that *christus est dominus*. If so, then this seems to be a fact independent of any utterances that human beings may happen to make on the matter–unless

one holds, and this is the chief danger of Lindbeck's position from the perspective of the religious believer, that religious claims are *only* cultural-linguistic constructs, with no extra-linguistic ontological referent. (This is clearly not Lindbeck's own view. He is a believing Lutheran theologian.)

Sharing Griffiths's objection to Lindbeck's understanding of intrasystematic truth as a necessary condition for ontological truth, I would like, for the purposes of my own project, to suggest a revision of the concept of the intrasystematic truth of religious claims. According to this revised understanding, it is the coherence of a religious claim *when taken in a propositional sense* with the larger system of (ontological) claims in which it participates that is a necessary condition for the ontological truth *of that system as a whole*. In other words, the claims "Ultimate reality is a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes," and "Ultimate reality is an eternal changeless divine personal substance" may or may not be ontologically true in isolation; but if they function within systems of claims with which they are logically incompatible as ontological claims, then those systems cannot, taken in their entirety, be ontologically true. Intrasystematic coherence, then, in this revised sense, as the internal logic of a system of claims taken to express propositions, *can* be claimed to be a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the ontological truth of a system of claims, such as the doctrines of a religion. The sense of intrasystematic coherence advocated by such scholars as Lindbeck, though, could still be seen to be valid inasmuch as the *meanings* of the terms deployed in doctrine-expressing sentences are derived from the system in which they function, taken as a whole. The ontological truth of *christus est dominus*, for example, though it may be independent of the context of its particular utterances, can only be determined if one first understands what it is taken, normatively, to mean. This can only be known with reference to the tradition, the system of belief, in which it functions.

That an adequate conception of doctrine must encompass all three of these dimensions seems to me to be fairly obvious, even if only on an empirical level. It seems fairly clear that when religious persons, outside of a ritual context, utter sentences such as *christus est dominus*, or "Ultimate reality is a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes," or "Ultimate reality is an eternal changeless divine personal substance," their surface meaning, at least, is to be taken at face value: The person making the utterance believes something like its content to be the case, as a propositionalist would hold. It similarly does not seem to be terribly controversial to claim that many, though not necessarily all,[5] religious utterances function to create a particular kind of disposition towards their object in those who utter them, and to express, symbolically, particular experiences difficult to conceptualize in any other way, as in the experiential-expressivist model of doctrine. Finally, it does not seem controversial–and is, in fact, axiomatic to entire sub-fields of the study of religion–to claim that religious claims derive their *intelligibility*, though not their ontological truth, from the systems of meaning in which they operate, as in an intrasystematic account of doctrine. On the contrary, it seems that the burden of proof is on any theory of doctrine which would deny any of this.

But what, one might ask at this point, is the relevance of this excursus on the nature of doctrine to an argument for religious pluralism? Its relevance is this: For the most part, the opponents of religious pluralism have presupposed either neo-propositionalist or intrasystematic models for the interpretation of doctrine, or some combination of the two, and religious pluralists have tended to opt for experiential-expressive models. Underlying my argument for religious pluralism is the contention that the inadequacies of both current pluralist and antipluralist interpretations of religion can be shown to stem from their various exclusivist understandings of the nature and function of religious doctrine. The version of

[5] For a critique of very strong formulations of experiential-expressivism, see Griffiths 1991:36-39.

religious pluralism which I intend to develop seeks to avoid these inadequacies, in part, with its incorporation of all of the functions of doctrine into its understanding of religion.

Interpretations of religion which focus, first of all, exclusively upon the ontological truth of religious claims, as determined, first, by the criterion of intrasystematic coherence (in the revised sense that I have outlined above), and secondly, in terms of some more generally available logical criteria, neglect the important experiential-expressive dimension of religious doctrine, the sense in which such doctrines act–and, I think, on this point, John Hick is entirely correct–as 'cognitive filters' for human experiences of the divine, as media for salvific transformation. Such limited interpretations of religion may also become vulnerable to the pluralistic charge of arbitrariness, given the possibility that a plurality of intrasystematically coherent *and* credible, but prima facie incompatible, religious visions of reality are available, and that the basis upon which a given interpreter of religion will tend to select criteria for the determination of the truth of these will inevitably be a function of that interpreter's accidental birth and/or acculturation into a historically particular religious community. Such an approach to the interpretation of religious claims will therefore, inevitably, issue in the circular conclusion that one's own tradition, alone, is true (unless, as Ogden suggests is possible, another tradition happens to make substantially the same claims). Its "epistemic circularity," to borrow a term from William Alston (Alston 1990), therefore renders it invalid as an approach to the interpretation of religion. I shall focus first upon this problem of arbitrariness–though, as we shall see, it is not unrelated to what I take to be the deeper problem, the problem of salvation.

6.4 The Question of Arbitrariness, Epistemic Circularity, and the Necessary "Locatedness" of Philosophical Reflection: A Critique of a One-Sided Intrasystematic Propositionalisms and Experiential-Expressivisms

It seems logical that the representative intellectuals of a particular religious community–let us call it 'C'–who set out to evaluate the propositional truth of the claims of the world's other religions would begin their project with the evaluation of the claims of their own community, the C community, as true (or else they would either abandon them for other claims, thereby ceasing to define themselves as members of the C community, or they would redefine C beliefs in such a way as to render those beliefs substantially different from C beliefs as they were normatively defined prior to this 'great doctrinal redefinition'). We may begin, therefore, by assuming that belief by members of the C community in the constitutive claims of the C religion is, at least prima facie, justifiable–that C's themselves, at least for the moment, find compelling reasons sufficient to convince them that ongoing membership in the C community and assent to the propositional claims explicitly and implicitly entailed by such membership is, at least for them, the most authentic expression of the nature and meaning of human existence available.

But when the representative intellectuals of the C community turn their attention to the task of evaluating the claims of other religious communities, by what criteria is this evaluation to proceed? This would probably depend upon the criteria by which C claims are themselves evaluated as true by the C community. The intellectuals of this community could evaluate their claims as true based on their redeemability in terms of the humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason reflecting on experience. That is, C intellectuals could evaluate C claims as true in terms of the intrinsic reasonableness and coherence of these claims as well as their compatibility with human experience, their relative adequacy as a total account of the nature and meaning of such experience. But they could also evaluate them as true on the heteronomous basis of the authority of a teacher, institution, text, or body of teaching specified as normative by the C tradition. Schubert Ogden terms these

two sets of criteria, respectively, “credibility” and “appropriateness” (Ogden 1992a:36-37). If C is like most modern religious communities, its representative intellectuals will probably hold their views on the basis of both sets of criteria–a mixture of autonomy and heteronomy–a combination of credibility to “common human experience and reason” (Ibid) and appropriateness to the normative self-understanding of the C tradition. If it is a sufficiently ancient and widespread community, there will probably be a spectrum of available views and schools of thought about what, precisely, constitutes the authoritative basis for affirming the truth of C claims, with a ‘liberal’ school of thought emphasizing the primacy of reason, a ‘conservative’ school emphasizing the authority of tradition, and a mainstream tradition upholding the ultimate compatibility and mutually supportive character of both reason and faith. Depending upon the ‘branch’ of the C tradition to which our hypothetical representative intellectuals adhere, it seems that the criteria they apply to the evaluation of the propositional claims of other religious communities will vary accordingly.

Clearly, the criteria which these intellectuals employ will determine, perhaps decisively, the outcome of their investigations; and different sets of criteria will logically yield different results. The employment of the criterion of credibility, for example, could yield a wide range of possible outcomes, indeterminable prior to the investigation. It may be, in terms of intrinsic reasonableness and conformity to the character of human existence inasmuch as this is available to experience and reflection that a plurality of religions will be found to be no more nor less true than C. (This may also lead a large number of C intellectuals to become religious pluralists, particularly if they are of a “liberal” persuasion which emphasizes humanistic over tradition-specific criteria; for they will then face the epistemological crisis of seeing their own tradition as only one relatively adequate option among many.) It may also be the case that, in the course of their investigations, the C intellectuals will discover a fairly clear heirarchy of more and less true religions, the location of C on this heirarchy not being a foregone conclusion, so long as the criteria

employed are strictly humanistic in nature. Or finally, C could end up being evaluated as the one true or the most true religion–the one that happens to provide the most adequate account of the nature and meaning of human existence as determined on a purely humanistic, autonomous basis. Most importantly, though, there would be no way of telling until the investigation actually occurred what its conclusions would be.

The employment of tradition-specific criteria, though, would appear to lead our C intellectuals inevitably to the conclusion that only the doctrine-expressing sentences of one tradition–the C tradition–are fully expressive of truth. Let us assume that the normative claims of the C tradition are contained in a text–*The Book of C*–and that this text contains the life history and teachings of the founder of the tradition–the 'Great C.' Let us also assume that faith in the teachings of the Great C, as found in *The Book of C* is taken by the C tradition to be constitutive of both true religious belief and membership in the C community. Now, given the inevitable cultural particularity of this text and its founder–the fact that both emerged in a particular time and place, were products of a particular history, and involved the use of particular cultural idioms not necessarily shared by the rest of humanity–let us assume that large numbers of human beings adhere to religious beliefs formed in other cultural contexts, holding other texts and traditions to be definitive of truth. If the C representative intellectuals who embark upon the project of evaluating the propositional claims of these other religions use as their criterion adherence to the teachings of the Great C as found in *The Book of C*, it seems almost inevitable that all other religious traditions would end up being evaluated as false. If belief in the teachings of the Great C as found in *The Book of C* is definitive of truth–and also of membership in the C community–and if other religions are, by definition, systems of belief which uphold the truth of texts and/or traditions other than those established by the Great C, then our group of C's must logically become religious exclusivists–for only in C is the truth, by definition proclaimed.

There may, of course, be other religious communities whose teachings are considered partially true, even on this tradition-specific basis–perhaps the J's, who believe in the first half of *The Book of C* but not the second half, or the M's, who believe in the Great C, but who also believe that other, later teachers superseded her. Mainstream C's, who hold their beliefs on the basis of both faith in the deliverances of the C tradition and unaided human reason may become inclusivists, finding that the teachings of many, or even most, other religions are largely compatible with those of the Great C–even that some express 'substantially the same' worldview–but that faith in the teachings of the Great C, being definitive, ultimately, of truth, only in the C community is the full truth to be found.

The circularity inherent in this tradition-based approach, it seems to me, gives a certain arbitrariness to the C evaluative project. Not only does it prejudge the issue before any actual engagement with the world's other religious traditions, it gives us no way of resolving the issue of which religion really is true; for it is equally likely that the members of other religious communities–the A's, the B's, the J's, and the M's–will make similar unadjudicable claims based on adherence to their own tradition-specific criteria–adherence to the teachings of the Great A, the Great B, the Great J, or the Great M. This, of course, is not a problem for the C's, who are already convinced that their claims are true. But it is a major problem if they hope to convince anyone else. As Griffiths rightly points out, "appeals to community-specific self-guaranteeing authority sources can have no place" in interreligious apologetics. "Such appeals, if made, will almost inevitably make it impossible for the benefits of a proper apologetic to be realized" (Griffiths 1991:82). Only more widely available, non-tradition-specific criteria seem, prima facie, able to escape from the epistemic circularity to which tradition-specific criteria are subject.

This, of course, does not mean that the C religion is not true, or that its adherents are not warranted in utilizing (C) tradition-specific criteria in evaluating claims–for, at least from the perspective of C adherents, the truth of C criteria has already been established.

Let us assume, for the moment, that it *is* true, and that the Great C was an omniscient teacher and her words were accurately recorded in *The Book of C*: If the sole criteria invoked for this truth are tradition-specific, if they require one to already believe in the authority of the Great C, they issue in a circularity which renders them, by humanistic criteria, incredible to one who does not already accept the claim they are intended to establish. The utilization of criteria specific to one's own tradition, the tradition into which one happens to be born or acculturated, *solely on the basis of the authority of that tradition* rather than on that of more widely available, humanistically redeemable criteria, are inadequate to the task at hand–the task of demonstrating the truth of the claims of one's tradition to one not already committed to those claims.

Given the spatio-temporal and cultural particularity of religious belief, the application of tradition-specific standards for the evaluation of other traditions is therefore necessarily inconclusive–such as conformity to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ for Christians, or to the eternal Veda for many Hindus (moving away now from hypothetical traditions to actual ones). It is certainly inadequate to addressing the question of truth and religious plurality–the question of which, if any, of the religions is (or are) true–for it presupposes, like many of the positions in the debate from which religious pluralism has emerged, a partial answer to this question: that at least one particular religion is true.

The use of such tradition-specific criteria also constitutes the very phenomenon against which religious pluralism, as a Christian theological position, is a reaction: the viciously circular judgment on the part of Christian exclusivists and inclusivists, on the basis of the norms of their own tradition, that other religions are either wholly false or are necessarily less expressive of truth than Christianity. This theological provincialism is quite rightly rejected by religious pluralists on the basis of the fact that, in the absence of some independent set of criteria for evaluating religious truth-claims, the relativity of all religious perspectives–that is, their *cultural* relativity, the understanding that the members

of other religious communities are no less justified in holding their particular beliefs than are Christians, given their cultural location–renders negative judgments on the truth of the doctrine-expressing sentences of other religious communities both epistemically invalid and, according to many religious pluralists, ethically inappropriate.

The pluralist charge of arbitrariness and epistemic circularity that I am advancing can, of course, be met with the countercharge that the search for universally available, non-culturally particular criteria is, itself, culturally particular and epistemically circular–being a product of the European Enlightenment and a characteristic preoccupation of liberal modernity. This charge of pluralism's own particularity and circularity is buttressed by the fact that such pluralists as John Hick typically opt for the liberal theological move of resorting to the experiential-expressive dimension of religious claims, to the exclusion of their cognitive and intrasystematic dimensions, in order to insulate those claims from modern critiques of religion, such as those of Hume and Kant, which such pluralists (arguably) accept uncritically. Such a move is a product of a particular history, namely, that of religion in the West and its interactions with modern philosophy.

The religious pluralist who admits this is thereby faced with the truth "that pluralism in no way offers an alternative to employing some norm of religious truth, and thus to making some one religion or philosophy normative for judging all the rest" (Ogden, 1992a:77). This is the realization that the necessary 'locatedness' of philosophical reflection in some particular cultural context renders some degree of circularity, some amount of rational arbitrariness, an inevitability of the human epistemic condition.

Typically, there have been two kinds of pluralist response to this situation. One has been to abandon the evaluative project altogether as contrary to the ethics of respectful dialogue: The point of religious pluralism is not to evaluate, but to appreciate. This is essentially the approach taken by such dialogical pluralists as Panikkar. Another approach, that of Hick, has been to adopt (though it is not clear if he does this deliberately or

unconsciously) the standards of liberal modernity–a basically Kantian philosophy–as the standards by which to judge all religious claims, assuming the universality of these, in fact, historically and culturally conditioned and particular standards. It is from these modern, bourgeois standards that Hick's ethical exclusionary criteria are drawn, and it is also on their basis that some religious claims are relegated to the realm of the 'mythological,' or the 'unanswerable questions' irrelevant to salvific transformation. The result, of course, is the kind of interpretive system which Hick actually develops, with all of its various problems which have already been discussed at length. Such an approach, to paraphrase S. Mark Heim, makes modern critiques of Christianity the norm for all religions (Heim 1995:101). This is the very kind of Western intellectual imperialism against which most pluralists react.

The accommodation of the dominant consensus of modernity on the part of religious persons leads inevitably to the relegation of religious claims to the experiential-expressive realm, where the validity of their cognitive content remains indeterminate. If the point of the question of truth and religious plurality is, in part, to ascertain *ontological* truth–if it includes, that is, the question of what really is the case, and which religion (or religions) best express(es) this situation–then such a modern liberal response is inadequate to this question. This was precisely the point of the earlier critique of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis: that it ultimately leads to fideism and the stripping of religious claims of all but their experiential-expressive–and a thin, ad hoc layer of ethical–content.

My approach, at this point, would be to suggest a third alternative for religious pluralists–an alternative both to abandoning the quest for truth altogether and to gutting the religions of their substantive claims by adhering uncritically to the dominant form of liberal modernity as one's 'tradition,' assuming the universality of what are, in fact, also culturally particular and epistemically circular criteria.

I would suggest beginning by making the countercharge against antipluralists that, by charging religious pluralism with the same kind of epistemic circularity and arbitrariness

which characterizes their own positions, they are, in fact, conceding the pluralists' point that evaluating the claims of other traditions on the basis of the authority of any one particular tradition is arbitrary and circular. They do not thereby, in other words, refute the charge of the circularity of their own positions. I would affirm, with Gamwell, that the humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason and experience as the ultimate criteria by which claims can be redeemed which underlies liberal modernity–though not necessarily the dominant substantive modern worldview–is, in fact, universalizeable and irreversible, "that all resistance to the formal affirmation of autonomy is self-refuting, because it cannot avoid presupposing the modern commitment in the very act of questioning it" (Gamwell 1990:13).

Traditionalists, of course, can respond to this countercharge by claiming that epistemic circularity is not a defect, but is, in fact, an epistemic inevitability–therefore, again, even humanistic criteria must exhibit it. As Griffiths affirms:

> No interesting and complex belief-forming practice proves capable of justifying its own reliability without already assuming that reliability. This is true of elementary logic: you can't show that *modus ponens* (*if p then q; p; therefore q*) is valid without using it in the argument that purports to show its validity; it is true of sensory perception: you can't show that this is generally reliable as a means of producing true beliefs without assuming that it is; and it is also true of every particular instance of religious reading: an attempt to show that it is reliable as a producer of true beliefs will already assume that it is, or it will fail. That religious reading already implies this epistemic stance is therefore a profound advantage rather than a damaging drawback (Griffiths 1999:75-76).

Broadly speaking, it seems, this point must be conceded; for epistemic circularity is even inevitable in a humanistically-based metaphysics, such as Whitehead's. Whitehead, like Griffiths, sees such circularity as a desideratum; for the coherence of a conceptual system, on Whitehead's understanding, is precisely the mutual implication of its various elements (Whitehead 1978:3). A necessary truth–a metaphysical truth–is, by definition, a truth which one cannot but presuppose without self-contradiction.

How, though, is one to distinguish between a vicious circularity and the inevitable circularity of an internally coherent system? How is one to evaluate multiple internally coherent systems of thought in order to choose among them? Traditionalists, such as Griffiths, reject this foundationalist project. It seems, however, that *if* there are necessary metaphysical truths (again, epistemic circularity is not avoided–the existence of such truths must be presupposed in order for the project to proceed), then these would have to obtain *within* any valid epistemic system and could thereby provide a (relatively) tradition-neutral set of criteria in terms of which the claims of particular systems could be evaluated. Epistemic circularity is not thereby circumvented, but it is minimized–for the set of necessary metaphysical truths is, by definition, the broadest possible set of criteria in terms of which any project of evaluation can occur. Due to their necessity, these criteria are also non-arbitrary (though they remain relatively arbitrary inasmuch as their expression in words prevents them from doing more than approximating actual necessity–therefore requiring the open-endedness and self-relativization of such an interpretive matrix). It is on this basis that I would recommend the religious pluralist to proceed.

The only remaining problem is that, while such an approach may justify the pluralist charge that traditionalist approaches to the question of truth and religious plurality are (relatively) arbitrary, it does not refute the propositionalist project of evaluating religious claims straightforwardly–that is, in terms of their truth or falsity in relation to some predetermined set of criteria: if not appropriateness to tradition, then credibility alone. It does not yet ground the pluralistic insistence on the *salvific* character of religious belief as an element in a transformative experiential process, rather than a mere assent to a set of claims, or make this insistence relevant to the project of truth-determination. It only vindicates the objection of rational arbitrariness.

6.5 The Question of Salvation: The Need for a Synthesis of Intrasystematic Propositionalism and Experiential-Expressivism

This brings us, then, to the second difficulty with an exclusively propositionalist project of religious interpretation. The question of truth and religious plurality raises not only the issue of the ontological *truth* of the world's religions, but also that of the possibility of *salvation* from within them. Setting aside, for the moment, the question of what, precisely, 'salvation' means–taking it for the sake of the immediate discussion to refer formally to the ultimate human end, the state of ultimate felicity that it is the goal of religious persons to attain–I take the chief *theological* objection of religious pluralists to any exclusivist view of salvation–a view according to which salvation is only possible by means of explicit assent to the doctrine-expressing sentences of one particular religious community–to be the incompatibility of such a view with a conception of God (or of whatever conception of the ultimately Real is operative within a particular religious tradition) as benevolent, merciful and just. There is a sense among religious pluralists, in other words, that, given the cultural relativity of religious belief–the fact that, in the absence of some overriding independent set of criteria for evaluating religious truth-claims, the members of all religious communities are all more or less equally justified in holding the particular beliefs that they do–a divine being, or (for non-theistic religions) an ultimate state of affairs, by which the members of any religious community would be deprived of ultimate felicity, *solely on the historically accidental basis of their membership in that community*,[6] would be unjust by any rational ethical standards, and therefore an unworthy object of worship or religious belief. It is for this very reason that Ogden asserts the incredibility of religious exclusivism to most modern persons (Ogden, 1992a:36).

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[6] It is actually non-membership in one particular community–their own–that is seen by exclusivists as ruling out the possibility of one's salvation. My phrasing here implies not being a member of one community to entail membership in another, even if this is only the 'community' of non-believers.

Such a recognition of the incompatibility of exclusivism with the ethical character of divinity, with its consequent rejection of exclusivism is, of course, not confined to religious pluralists. It also underlies the position of religious inclusivism, according to which people of all religious communities can be saved *despite* their membership in their particular communities, due to their implicit faith in the essential salvific truths articulated explicitly only in the one, true religion.[7]

This position, too, is rejected by religious pluralists on the basis of the arbitrariness–considering, again, the cultural relativity of all religious belief–of its *a priori* affirmation that any particular religion is closer to the truth than the rest. Hindus, for example, can (and do) claim that non-Hindus are really 'anonymous Hindus' no less than Christians can claim that non-Christians are really 'anonymous Christians.'[8] On what independent basis are either of these claims to be evaluated?

While sharing this objection to traditional religious inclusivism, I would like to add to it that the concept of a salvation obtained on the basis of an implicit faith, to which one's explicit, conscious beliefs are irrelevant, is incoherent.[9] One's explicit beliefs will always

[7] For the classic Roman Catholic version of this position, see Rahner 1974:390-398. "But when we have to keep in mind both principles together, namely the necessity of Christian faith and the universal salvific will of God's love and omnipotence, we can only reconcile them by saying that somehow all men must be capable of being members of the Church" (Ibid:391). In "On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," Rahner, in fact, argues that non-Christians do not only attain salvation *despite* their membership in other religious communities, but *because of* this very membership. Rahner's insight is that salvific truth, like all truths mediated to human beings through their culturally and linguistically determined consciousness, is *necessarily* mediated to persons, if it is mediated to them at all, through the religious belief systems that they actually hold. So it is not only despite, but *because of* their explicit adherence to whatever religionn they actually profess, even if it is not Roman Catholicism (though so long as it is a 'lawful religion'), that salvation is made available to them. This is essentially the argument that I am making in this chapter, though, as a religious pluralist, I am taking process metaphysics, a (religiously) neutral philosophical position, rather than Christian doctrine, as the basis for my claim for the existence of a universal divine salvific will.

[8] See, for example, Radhakrishnan 1927.

[9] Note that it is not the concept of implicit faith as such, but only the extrapolation

express, I think, one's implicit faith–even if they are prima facie incompatible with it.[10] According to the concept of salvation that I take to be coherent with both process philosophy and the teachings of most religions, salvation is an option that is freely chosen–even worked for–by human beings, in cooperation with the freely offered saving grace–the 'divine persuasion'[11]–of God (even if conceived in terms of an impersonal cosmic order which is *conducive to* salvation). In order, therefore, for it to be a truly free choice, salvation must be based upon *some* consciously held knowledge, rather than the imposition from without of the divine will–an act of violence which would make of human beings mindless and soulless automatons.[12]

If the only issue at stake in addressing the question of truth and religious plurality was the truth or falsity of religious doctrine-expressing sentences, then its solution would be fairly straightforward, taking the form of the propositionalist project. But this project, operating, as it does, like most traditional apologetics, on the assumption that doctrine-expressing sentences are either absolutely true or absolutely false, entails that the religious beliefs of large numbers of human beings might be found to be completely mistaken, and

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from this concept to the view that such faith renders one's explicit beliefs irrelevant, that is being rejected here.

[10] The strongest case for this claim of which I am aware is, in fact, presented by Ogden in his refutation of atheism in Ogden 1992b:120-143.

[11] For the concept of 'divine persuasion,' see Whitehead 1967:160-172. The divine persuasion, as conceived by Whitehead, operates upon all entities–the 'brute forces' which constitute the world–including unconscious entities such as stones and electromagnetic waves. I have in mind here a particular sub-species of the divine persuasion which operates in such a way as to elicit, through cultural mediation, a conscious human response–the salvific response being happily and freely chosen cooperation with the divine *telos*.

[12] The similarities between my concept of salvation and that of the Roman Catholic tradition in which I was raised has been pointed out by several of my friends as a 'genealogical' critique of my position. I do not deny this resemblance, nor the fact that, autobiographically speaking, it is probably the case that my conceptualization of salvation has been influenced profoundly by the tradition of my upbringing. I take this observation, however, to be irrelevant to the truth or falsity of this concept.

their salvation, consequently, in question. It is not, of course, unreasonable to assert that large numbers of human beings can be drastically mistaken about a great many things. Consider, for example, the variety of beliefs that people have held about the physical structure of the cosmos. But if the model of salvation presented here–as the freely given and freely accepted gift of God, conceived as willing the salvation of all beings–is correct, then it must be the case that the beliefs that people explicitly hold–particularly their religious beliefs, which explicitly inform their soteriological practices and aspirations–are in at least that measure of harmony with the actual nature of reality as to enable the orientation of human beings in a salvific relation to God. In other words, religious belief as such must be, in some sense, true.[13] Furthermore, from a Whiteheadian perspective, I am dissatisfied with the assumption of propositionalists that people hold different–sometimes mutually, or even internally contradictory–beliefs simply as an effect of the possibility of error, that beliefs, in other words, are only either true or false. I would like to explore the possibility that the very fact of religious plurality is metaphysically significant, that as an "element in our experience" it must have "the character of a particular instance of the general scheme" of process philosophy (Whitehead 1978:3), that the laws of identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle, though indubitably true, might stand in need of fine-tuning, after the manner of the Jain tradition, and its docrine of *syādvāda*. As Dan Arnold argues in a recent article, "*commitment to process metaphysics entails a more complex way of arguing for beliefs*" than that exhibited in more traditional approaches to philosophy (Arnold 1998:32). Religious doctrines perform complex, and, I think, salvific roles in the lives of those who assert them. In the argument that I shall present below, I hope to develop a conception of religion which integrates both the salvific and the purely cognitive dimensions of doctrine, to the exclusion of neither; for, as shall become evident, each of these depends upon the

[13] This emphatically does *not* mean that *all* religious beliefs are *equally* true, or true in exactly the same explicit senses.

other in order for religion to perform its salvific function. The character of salvation as a freely chosen gift requires some propositional, cognitive element in order for it to constitute a credible choice for human beings. Some concept, therefore, of salvation must be available for human beings in order for them to choose it. But this choosing itself also involves an experiential-expressive dimension. It is not simply assent to propositions which constitutes salvation, but a life lived in accordance with and in enactment of those propositions.

6.6 Religion within the Vast Expanses of Reason Alone: The Humanistic Commitment and the Theistic Logic of Religious Pluralism

Pluralistic claims, then, about the arbitrariness of traditional religious affiliation, its dependence on an accident of birth, carry force only when accompanied by another set of claims about the nature of salvation, and, by implication, of divinity. Recall John Hick's characterization of the arbitrariness of any doctrine that would make salvation contingent upon membership in a particular historical community:

> …[A] "hermeneutic of suspicion" is provoked by the evident fact that in perhaps 99 percent of cases the religion to which one adheres (or against which one reacts) is selected by the accident of birth. Someone born to devout Muslim parents in Iran or Indonesia is very likely to be a Muslim; someone born to devout Buddhist parents in Thailand or Sri Lanka is very likely to be a Buddhist; someone born to devout Christian parents in Italy or Mexico is very likely to be a Catholic Christian; and so on. Thus there is a certain non-rational arbitrariness in the claim that the particular tradition within which one happens to have been born is the one and only true religion. *And if the conviction is added that salvation and eternal life depend upon accepting the truth's of one's own religion, it may well seem unfair that this saving truth is known only to one group, into which only a minority of the human race have had the good fortune to be born* (Hick, 1997:610).[14]

The 'unfairness' of such a view suggests that there is some standard by which fairness, with regard to the issue of salvation, can be determined. This standard is, of course, the characterization, just discussed, of God as possessed of a universal salvific will–or at least, more minimally, of a sense of justice with regard to salvation's distribution. From where

[14] Emphasis mine.

is this standard derived? Clearly, for religious pluralism, which is, in its origins, a Christian theological position, it comes from Christianity, from particular Christian views about the nature of God as love. It is significant in this regard, that the ‘Copernican revolution’ proposed by Hick was initially termed a shift from a ‘christocentric’ to a ‘theocentric’ model of salvation. That the nature of *God* demands the truth of religious pluralism is the important insight–the truth–upon which pluralists have stumbled. It is a stumbling block precisely because the pluralism which current religious pluralists affirm does not allow for its explicit expression as the philosophical foundation of their position.

That this creates problems for religious pluralism as it is currently formulated is, of course, clear; for if it is the case that such pluralistic theories as Hick’s, which depict themselves, modernistically, as being based on tradition-neutral ground, in philosophical, rather than explicitly theological, argumentation (such as that of Kant), then the importation of assumptions from any particular religious tradition, such as Christianity, is, for such a position, an illegitimate move. This is why the term ‘theocentric’ to characterize the pluralistic revolution eventually had to be corrected to the more religiously neutral term, ‘Reality-centered.’ But it was an incoherence that was never really purged from religious pluralism, existing, as it did, at the heart of its very *raison d’etre*: the perception of the inadequacy of a religiously arbitrary model of salvation to a specific conception of divinity as possessed of a universally salvific will.

But does this assumption *necessarily* need to come from Christianity? Can it possibly be based in a tradition, a system of thought *other than modern liberalism* which takes reason alone, reflecting on the content of our common human experience, as its basis? My claim is that this basic insight of religious pluralism can be reformulated, in a logically coherent way, as an entailment of specific claims of a humanistically grounded metaphysics that is not subject to the charge of arbitrariness leveled by religious pluralists against more traditional apologists of religion. I intend to argue that a coherent theism

necessarily entails that God both exists and has a universally salvific will, and that what God wills is, by definition, always possible. I shall also argue that distinctively human salvation involves a conscious choice to conform oneself to the divine will. The possibility of such a conscious choice must, therefore, always be available to human beings. It is therefore *necessarily* the case that culture (including religion) *as such* is mediatory of salvific truth–for the possibility of a human being's choosing salvation requires some (culturally constructed) concept of that salvation as a necessary condition for its being available as a possible live option.

This argument is possible for the purpose of redeeming the pluralistic claim because a system of reflection other than that of the dominant form of liberal modernity that claims, as its basis, reason alone, unaided by any particular historical tradition of revelation–and so escaping, to the extent humanly possible, the pluralist charge of arbitrariness–exists. This is the system of 'natural' or 'philosophical theology.'

Natural, or philosophical, theology differs from traditional theology, which "is constituted as such by critical reflection on the validity claims of this or that specific religion" (Ogden, 1992a:34), in that it consists of philosophical reflection on the claims of religion as such, taking as its data not the claims of any particular religion, after the fashion of 'Christian theology' or 'Islamic theology,' but data available, in principle, to all human beings: the general character of experience and reason as such. It is thus largely coextensive with metaphysics–reflection on the necessary conditions for any possible experience.

Philosophical theology in the Western tradition fell upon hard times with the coming of the Enlightenment. Modern thinkers, culminating with Kant, focused upon incoherences in such fundamental Western philosophical doctrines as substance and the static, changeless character of being and concluded that the entire metaphysical project ought either to be abandoned or so radically reconceived as to be only a pale imitation of its

historical predecessor–becoming epistemology, or later, linguistics. Consequently, much of Western philosophy and scholarship in general since Kant–apart from that of such scholars as MacIntyre, Griffiths, and Alvin Plantinga, who continue to reformulate the claims of the earlier tradition–has operated on the assumption that metaphysics is not a valid project, and that such activities as generating arguments for the existence of God are pointless–or, worse yet, positively harmful. The acceptance by many religious pluralists, such as John Hick, of these widespread assumptions of modernity has been the cause of their inability to produce a stronger defense of their position, a defense grounded in metaphysical argumentation as this is traditionally conceived (Hick, 1989:73-125).

Philosophical theology, however, has emerged in a new form–a form which takes account of the valid criticisms offered by modern philosophers, but which responds critically to the widely unacknowledged errors of these philosophers as well–in the work of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne and the tradition of 'process' or 'neoclassical' philosophy–which includes, interestingly, Christian 'process theologians' such as Schubert Ogden and John Cobb as well. It is this reborn and revitalized tradition of philosophical theology, purged of the errors of the older tradition of classical metaphysics, which I believe can form the basis for an argument for a logically viable religious pluralism, thus correcting the fundamental flaw in Hick's hypothesis–namely, its lack of grounding in a coherent metaphysics.

The validity of the argument which I shall present here rests, in part, upon the validity of the system of neoclassical, or process, metaphysics developed–in such works as *Science and the Modern World*, *Religion in the Making*, *Process and Reality* and *Adventures of Ideas*–by Alfred North Whitehead, and further elaborated and refined–in such works as *The Divine Relativity*, *The Logic of Perfection*, and *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*–by Charles Hartshorne. According to this system of thought, God is not a wholly eternal and metaphysically necessary being, unrelated to the world of

temporality and change, but has a contingent, temporal aspect as well. An argument on the basis of the logic of moral claims for the validity of this modern theistic metaphysical system is presented by Franklin I. Gamwell in *The Divine Good: Modern Moral Theory and the Necessity of God*.

In *The Divine Good*, Gamwell argues convincingly that the pervasive disagreement (and consequent tendency toward relativism) that characterizes modern moral theory is due largely to a dominant consensus among modern moral philosophers which mistakenly rejects the possibility of metaphysics–that is, philosophical inquiry into the character of reality as such–and which therefore dissociates the validity of moral claims from that of theistic claims–that is, claims about the nature and existence of God. This antimetaphysical consensus, according to Gamwell, has arisen largely under the influence of Immanuel Kant, who is widely held to have refuted the classical metaphysical project–including its theistic 'proofs'–in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.[15]

According to this dominant consensus, the validity of metaphysical claims–including that of theistic claims–is beyond the grasp of human reason. Such claims, therefore–claims about the nature of reality as such, or of being qua being–are held to be an unacceptable basis for modern moral reflection. Because the validity of theism is so widely held to be irredeemable through humanistic argument, recourse to a theistic grounding for moral claims is typically viewed as an authoritarian appeal to tradition, or blind faith, incompatible with the modern commitment to rational debate. Consequently, according to

[15] Kant (Smith trans.) 1965:485-531. "In my judgment, no single thinker is more responsible for the consensus in modern ethical theory than is Immanuel Kant" (Gamwell 1990:8). Kant, of course, does not claim to have refuted metaphysics, but to have circumscribed its parameters in such a way as to redefine it as an inquiry into the character of human subjectivity, rather than of being itself. It is this latter, classical project of inquiry into the nature of reality as such that he finds untenable (Ibid:15-16).

this consensus, the validity of moral claims–if it is to be affirmed at all[16]–must be grounded in something other than metaphysics. Modern moral theory is therefore characterized by the attempt to find non-metaphysical grounds for the validity of moral claims.

According to Gamwell, however, this modern quest for a non-metaphysical basis for moral reflection has been–and must remain–futile. Its inevitable result, Gamwell argues, is a contending set of ethical theories which render the ground of moral claims either empty or arbitrary (Gamwell 1990:157). Consequently, modern moral theory is characterized by irreconcileable differences among moral philosophers–irreconcileable, that is, precisely in the absence of any substantive common ground for their adjudication. Modern ethical theory thus lies vulnerable to the criticisms of relativist, amoralist, and nihilist philosophers who reject "the moral enterprise as such" (Ibid:10). Ironically, on Gamwell's reading, it is the one thing upon which modern moral philosophers seem to agree–that metaphysics is impossible–that makes their pervasive disagreement on practically every other issue inevitable. "Because its alternatives are inherently problematic, the dominant consensus as such prevents the completion of modern moral theory" (Ibid:157). One can see clear parallels here between modern moral theory and the ongoing debates between religious pluralists and antipluralists–who are torn between making the basis for their claims either empty (humanistically redeemed but not metaphysical) or arbitrary (tradition-based).

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[16] Gamwell acknowledges that there is also a considerable amoralist strand in modern philosophy which shares with the dominant consensus in modern moral theory its rejection of theistic metaphysics. As he writes, "[I]ntellectual history within the modern commitment has also included a considerable tradition for which moral thought independent of Western religious beliefs is impossible. With few exceptions, however, representatives of this tradition are not theists, who seek to retrieve religious ethics, but rather amoralists, who conclude that moral claims cannot be validated at all.… Moreover, there has been a recurring nihilistic proposal in modern philosophy which perhaps preeminently expresses the repudiation of the moral enterprise as such" (Gamwell 1990:9-10).

But in rejecting the dominant anti-metaphysical consensus among modern moral philosophers, Gamwell is rejecting the amoralist and nihilist stances in modern philosophy as well. These positions are, on his reading, self-refuting; for their constitutive claim–that one ought only to follow one's inclinations, rather than any theory of the good–is, itself, a theory of the good–namely, that the good life is the life led solely in accordance with one's own desires. "Amoralism is self-contradictory because the character of practical reason is prescriptive; a theory of practical reason is a moral theory" (Ibid:156-157). Though a critic of modern ethical theory, Gamwell's goal is to retrieve, not to repudiate, the modern moral enterprise.

It is for this reason that Gamwell also does not advocate an abandonment of the modern project as such in favor of a return to pre-modern modes of thought–that is, to heteronomy, or blind faith in tradition. For although he does reject the specific material claim that most modern philosophers make or presuppose, following Kant, regarding the impossibility of theistic metaphysics, he also makes a distinction between this material claim–which he rejects–and what he calls "the modern commitment" as such–which he accepts (Ibid:3). By "the modern commitment," Gamwell means the formal, constitutive claim of modernity–namely, the commitment to humanistic argument and autonomy which "insists," as distinct from tradition, "that reasons for validity are not established by the conviction of some individual or some particular community" (Ibid:4-5). "In other words," according to this commitment, "our understandings can be redeemed only by appeal in some sense to human experience and reason as such" (Ibid:5). This commitment, of course, does not rule out the validity of the claims of any particular community. It does not deny the possibility that the claims of a particular community, held by the members of that community on the basis of their belief in traditional authority, might happen to be true and humanistically redeemable as such. But it does rule out the authority of that community or its tradition as a sufficient reason for believing its claims to be true.

The retrieval of the moral enterprise on the basis of theism, then, on Gamwell's reading, need not involve an authoritarian appeal to blind faith in tradition–an appeal which he holds to be rationally arbitrary. It must, therefore, be redeemable through humanistic argument. A distinctively *modern* moral enterprise, then, must still be possible which does not conform to the dominant modern consensus regarding the possibility of theistic metaphysics.

But what kind of a theistic metaphysic, then, does Gamwell endorse? It cannot be one which rests on the arbitrary authority of some particular historical community–though it may correspond, in its particulars, to one which does so rest. It must be one redeemable by humanistic argument, independently of its correspondence, or lack thereof, to the claims of any particular individual or institution. But which version of theistic metaphysics is compatible with the modern commitment to argument on the basis of human experience and reason alone?

Although the position that Gamwell advocates does involve a return to theistic metaphysics as a proper basis for moral reflection, it is not metaphysics in its pre-Kantian, classical sense–at least not in terms of its specific material claims–for Gamwell accepts Kant's critique of the classical metaphysical conception of God as a static being, absolutely necessary in every respect, completely free from contingent elements such as change and real relations with the world. "In other words," says Gamwell, "Kant was quite correct to reject the traditional arguments or 'proofs' for the existence of this God. Since it implies the absence of all real differences, the notion of a completely necessary being is in truth completely negative, and one cannot argue for the existence of something that cannot be positively identified" (Ibid:175).

But this does not mean–as the dominant modern consensus holds–that Kant was successful in refuting the pre-Kantian metaphysical project as such–that is, the project of inquiring into and describing the true character of reality–or that he had permanently

foreclosed the possibility of proving the existence of God. In other words, an alternative, *neoclassical* conception of God is possible that is free from the errors in the classical conception rightly pointed out by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (though wrongly identified by him with the classical metaphysical project as such). One can still, in other words, validly pursue the pre-Kantian metaphysical project of inquiring into and attempting to describe the true nature of reality while avoiding the mistakes of classical metaphysics. It is for the necessary existence of God as conceived in *neoclassical* metaphysics–God as distinguished by "complete relativity to all actuality and possibility" (Ibid:171)–that Gamwell argues in *The Divine Good*, and for neoclassical–or *process*–metaphysics as the proper basis for modern moral reflection–metaphysics, that is, as conceived in the work of Alfred North Whitehead and further refined and elaborated by Charles Hartshorne.

God, as conceived in this metaphysical system, is not, as mentioned earlier, completely eternal, necessary, and immutable–as the classical metaphysical system attacked by Kant maintains–but contains both an eternal, 'abstract' or 'conceptual' nature and a temporal, 'concrete' or 'consequent' nature. This dipolarity of the nature of the divine reality is conceived, in process metaphysics, as a logical entailment of the affirmation that God is, on the one hand, the one metaphysically necessary being, and on the other, that the existence of God is in some way foundational to cosmic order as such–that is, to any possible cosmic order, rather than to any particular ordering of the cosmos. God, for Whitehead, is the locus of what he calls the 'eternal objects' in which all actual entities participate–or rather, which are actualized in them. These 'eternal objects,' in Whitehead's essentially Platonic scheme, correspond to the realm of forms of classical philosophy, but with an important difference. Whereas the Platonic forms were considered the most real entities, the changing realm of process having only a derivative reality, like shadows on the wall of a cave, for Whitehead, it is the temporal world that is *actual*. The eternal objects have actuality inasmuch as they are 'prehended' by actual entities. God, for Whitehead, is

the locus of the eternal objects, and therefore a metaphysically necessary being. But in order to make the eternal objects available to entities for actualization, a concrete nature of God is also required whose internal relations with all actual entities constitute the ground for the realization by those entities of the possibilities which the eternal objects represent.

If Gamwell's "moral-metaphysical argument for the reality of God"[17] is valid (and I believe that it is), then it follows that its conclusion must also be valid–that God, essentially as described by process metaphysics, really does exist, and that both God and the universe, furthermore, have the character described in this metaphysical system. This conclusion, then, if it is valid, may be validly employed as a basis for further philosophical speculation on other issues–issues other than those taken up by Gamwell in *The Divine Good*. As Gamwell himself writes of his position as it is elaborated in this book, an answer to the philosophical question "What is the ground of any moral claim?" "implies answers to all philosophical questions, so that one cannot comprehensively argue for any such answer without explicitly formulating these implications and defending their coherence" (Ibid:1). My goal in this chapter is to render explicit what I take to be one of the philosophical answers implied in the conclusion of *The Divine Good*–and, by implication, in process metaphysics generally, as expressed in the works of Whitehead and Hartshorne–namely, the truth of the constitutive claim of religious pluralism that many true religions actually exist rather than only one, the answer to the question of truth and religious plurality.

6.7 A Deductive Argument from Whitehead's Theistic Metaphysics for the Necessity of There Being Many True Religions

In his *magnum opus*, *Process and Reality*, Whitehead defines speculative philosophy as, "the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element in our experience can be interpreted." By "interpretation," he means, "that everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed,

[17] Schubert Ogden, from a review quoted on the back cover of Gamwell 1990.

perceived, willed, or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme," and by "coherent," he means that, "it is presupposed that no entity can be conceived in complete abstraction from the system of the universe, and that it is the business of speculative philosophy to exhibit this truth." The method of speculative philosophy consists of "philosophical generalization," that is, "the utilization of specific notions, applying to a restricted group of facts, for the divination of the generic notions which apply to all facts" a creative process governed by "unflinching pursuit of the two rationalistic ideals, coherence and logical perfection" (Whitehead, 1978:3-6).

This rather ambitious definition of speculative philosophy is what Whitehead strives to fulfill in the development of his metaphysical system; although he immediately concedes that the articulation of a system of metaphysical first principles can never take place in any final way due to the limitations of language and the human imagination (Ibid:4). The search for the goal of speculative philosophy, then, its approach to truth, must be ongoing, "asymptotic" (Ibid), and ever open to new experiential data and modes of philosophical expression. As Whitehead's biographer, Victor Lowe, explains:

> When the system fails to accommodate some recurrent experience, the system must be revised. Whitehead made none of the claims to have proved the truth of his system that were made for the great metaphysical systems of the past. He offered a bold, complex hypothesis and said, "Take it from here." The methodology of his "speculative philosophy," as he called it, was cautious and sophisticated. The system he offered was original, and larger in scope than any that is actively entertained today.…William James said, "Systems must be closed." Whitehead's position was that a system must be open to revision. It should be constructed as a speculative theory, not as a set of truths calling for vital commitment. Commitment should come later, as a result of comparing available philosophies (Lowe 1985:4; 1990:266).

If, as Whitehead affirms, a *perfectly* adequate conceptual system is a human impossibility, one might, of course, ask, "What is the point?" Why attempt to develop a system of metaphysical first principles at all if it can never finally be done? Why pursue such an ultimately futile project, particularly given its difficulty? Rather than being seen, though, as an exercise in futility, or as grandiose or overly ambitious–as more mainstream

modern philosophers have tended to see it, dismissing it as essentially a continuation of the classical metaphysical project which they take Kant to have refuted–Whitehead's method is better perceived as an attempt to recover the *holistic* character of premodern philosophy–of *philosophia*–which he found to have been lost in modernity, the ancient conception of philosophy as not only an abstract, intellectual exercise, but as an activity concerned with exploring every facet of human existence–rather like traditional South Asian conceptions of *darŚana*, as we saw in our earlier discussion of Jainism.

After beginning his scholarly career as a mathematician–publishing his *Treatise of Universal Algebra* in 1898 and the three-volume *Principia Mathematica*, on which he collaborated with Bertrand Russell, from 1910 to 1913–and moving on to the philosophy of science with such works as *The Principles of Natural Knowledge* (1919), *The Concept of Nature* (1920), and *The Principle of Relativity* (1922)–Whitehead found that the modern sciences and the post-Kantian philosophies which accompanied them failed to incorporate the dimension of *value* into their conceptions of reality–a dimension which he found to be integral to our common human experience. He found, in other words, that the realms of 'objective' fact and 'subjective' valuation had been sundered, with the second realm tending to be reduced to the first in the minds of many. The overwhelming success in modernity of the scientific method, of empirical investigation, in a wide variety of fields had led to the phenomenon of *positivism*, of the empirical methods of science becoming regarded as normative for all knowledge, with the non-empirical aspects of human existence, the aspects of value and meaning, becoming increasingly perceived as constituting a purely subjective and non-rational realm, and traditional religious and metaphysical claims being assessed, literally, as 'nonsense' by analytic philosophers, many of whom were Whitehead's own colleagues. The positivistic conception of reality was both materialistic and atheistic, reducing everything, ultimately, to 'bits of matter.'

Whitehead, however, perceived a contradiction between the conception of reality as ultimately valueless and meaningless which positivistic philosophers and scientists advanced and their efforts on its behalf, once observing dryly that, "Scientists animated by the purpose of proving that they are purposeless constitute an interesting subject for study" (Whitehead 1929:16). The philosophy–which would become process philosophy–which he began to develop after the death of one of his sons in the first world war was an attempt to reintegrate the various dimensions of human experience which modernity had compartmentalized, to develop a total, non-reductionist philosophy of nature–a "pan-physics," he initially called it, though it was not a "physicalism" (Lowe 1990:110-118)–which would encompass every aspect of existence to the exclusion of none. Although such an attempt at a totalizing–and therefore implicitly hegemonic–system of thought may be viewed, initially, with suspicion by some (such as those in the Foucaultian tradition, with its 'power/knowledge' equation), the potentially liberatory character of such a system, its character as a critique of the dominant assumptions of modernity, has not been lost on such critical theorists of culture as Herbert Marcuse of the Frankfurt school:

> Whitehead's propositions seem to describe the actual development of Reason as well as its failure. Or rather they seem to suggest that Reason is still to be discovered, recognized, and realized, for hitherto the historical function of Reason has also been to repress and even destroy the urge to live, to live well, and to live better [the urge, the fulfillment of which, according to Whitehead, is the function of reason (Whitehead 1929:4-8)]–or to postpone and put an exorbitantly high price on the fulfillment of this urge (Marcuse 1964:228).

The single most compelling feature of process philosophy, on my assessment, is precisely its attempt to take every element of our experience, to the exclusion of none, as the data for its reflections–"its insistence," which it shares with existentialism, "upon considering the whole experience of living" (Lowe 1985:6). More traditional philosophical systems generally elevate a single facet of experience–or, to use Whitehead's terminology, an 'ultimate notion' which is manifested in experience–to ultimacy at the expense of the rest: the permanent over the impermanent (as in philosophies which take some notion of

substance as their ultimate category), the impermanent over the permanent (Buddhism, the philosophy of Heraclitus), mind over matter (idealisms), matter over mind (materialisms), God over the world (classical theism), or the world over God (again, materialism, or reductionistic, scientistic positivism–any philosophy which sees the world as nothing but the product of the sheer random collisions of physical 'brute forces' or 'bits of matter'). Process metaphysics seeks to articulate the principles exhibited in all experience: change *and* continuity, sheer materiality *and* the experience of the intrinsic beauty and value in the universe. As such, it seeks to disclose the principles involved with every element of experience equally, to the exclusion of none.

This, for Whitehead, includes the category of divinity. "In the first place," he writes, "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification" (Whitehead 1978:343). The inherent contradictions of traditional theism, according to Whitehead–its assertion that God is the absolutely perfect creator of an imperfect world, that the world is related to God but that God is not related to it, and its failure to provide an account of *why* God created the world that amounts to anything more philosophically satisfying than saying "because he wanted to"–are primarily functions of its tendency to pay "metaphysical compliments" to God (Whitehead 1925:179), to postulate God as a being so radically different in kind from every other entity in the universe as to betray the metaphysical project of developing a coherent, self-contained system of necessary ideas in terms of which *every* element of our common experience can be interpreted. It is, in fact, the very tendency of philosophies *not* to integrate the various aspects of experience into a coherent whole which ultimately leads both to the classical conception of God as wholly necessary and immutable and to the relegation of some facets of experience to the level of illusion–rather like the philosophies of *māyā* (*māyāvāda*) of traditional South Asia criticized by the Jains:

> The vicious separation of the flux from the permanence leads to the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality. But if the opposites, static and fluent, have once been so explained as separately to characterize diverse actualities, the interplay between the thing which is static and the things which are fluent involves contradiction at every step in its explanation. Such philosophies must include the notion of 'illusion' as a fundamental principle–the notion of '*mere* appearance.' This is the final Platonic problem (Whitehead 1978:346-347).

God, according to process philosophy, is, like the God of classical philosophical theism, the one metaphysically necessary being on whom the entire world depends for its existence. Unlike the classical account, however, and in resolution of this account's various contradictions, process philosophy asserts that God, too, is dependent upon the world; that the world, too, is necessary, and not the mere result of the arbitrary whim of a deity with more of the character of a human tyrant than of the morally perfect being demanded by an ethically sensitive theistic religious faith.[18] Process philosophy postulates a 'primordial nature' of God, which, as the divine conceptualization of all possibilities–the 'eternal objects,' which play a role in Whitehead's metaphysics analogous to that of the forms in Plato's philosophy–is the eternal, necessary being presupposed by each new moment of the existence of the world, and a 'consequent nature' of God which is conscious, which feels and experiences along with the world and is concerned for its greater good, constituting the fulfillment of the world's existence from moment to moment–the 'kingdom of heaven'–the perpetual consummation or 'objective immortality' in the divine life with which the life of the cosmos forms a new creative unity at each moment of its existence (Ibid:342-351). This is the 'creative advance' of the universe: "The many become one, and are increased by one" (Ibid:21).

The universe, according to Whitehead, consists of an infinite, beginningless and endless series of creative moments, "events," or "actual occasions" (Ibid:73). In this

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[18] Whitehead's insights into conventional theism as reflective of a monarchical ideology are quite radical and merit further exploration by critical students of culture. The works of greatest interest in this regard are *Religion in the Making* (Whitehead 1926) and *Adventures of Ideas* (Whitehead 1967).

sense, process philosophy can be seen to have affinities with classical Indian philosophy (particularly Buddhist, but also Jain and some Brahmanical, thought). But process philosophy, like classical Western thought (and 'Hinduism'), is theistic as well. God, according to Whitehead, is the creator of the universe, not in the sense of having created it from nothing at a particular, arbitrarily defined beginning-point in time, but in the sense of being the initiator of each new moment in the beginningless and neverending temporal stream, and, indeed, the co-creator of these moments with all of the elements–the "actual entities" or "occasions" (Ibid:18)–which collectively constitute it. "In this aspect," Whitehead writes, God, "is not *before* all creation, but *with* all creation" (Ibid:343).

Why is it necessary for Whitehead to postulate the existence of God? Some concept of order in the cosmos is a necessary presupposition of the experiential fact of knowledge. "Apart from a certain smoothness in the nature of things, there can be no knowledge" (Whitehead 1967:109). Whitehead divides the ways in which this order, or 'Law,' has been conceptualized in various philosophical systems into four categories: "the doctrine of Law as immanent, the doctrine of Law as imposed, and the doctrine of Law as observed order of succession, in other words, Law as mere description, and lastly the doctrine of Law as conventional interpretation" (Ibid:111). The doctrine of Law as immanent is expressed in atheistic (or pantheistic) thought systems such as Buddhism, Jainism, the philosophy of Spinoza, and Marxism, according to which the order of the universe is one of its inherent features and requires no source of explanation beyond the system of the universe itself. The doctrine of Law as imposed is characteristic of deism and more traditional theism, particularly as embodied in such religions as Islam and such versions of Christianity as would find themselves articulated in works such as Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." According to the doctrine of Law as imposed, the order of the universe is entirely the imposition of the will of an all-powerful God upon subordinate matter, created by God from nothing, and existing in a one-sided relationship

of absolute dependence upon God's will. The doctrine of Law as observed order of succession, or as mere description, is expressed in the method of modern science, which presupposes the order of the universe as a necessary condition for its explanatory activity, but does not seek to explain the phenomenon of order itself, being confined, rather, to particular instances of this order as they are deducible from reproducible facts, and leaving metaphysics to the philosophers. Finally, the doctrine of Law as conventional interpretation is expressed by such thinkers as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Richard Rorty, and some theorists of culture, according to whom order is not "of the universe" at all, but merely a function of discourse–an inherently arbitrary, humanly constructed way of speaking and thinking.

In his attempt to frame a coherent metaphysical system, adequate to every element of our experience, Whitehead finds the doctrine of Law as mere convention inadequate to "our direct intuitions which we enjoy prior to all verbalization" (Ibid:139). That we enjoy such intuitions at all may be seen to be the fundamental issue upon which he disagrees with those who hold that order is a matter of mere convention. We see, again, the Whiteheadian position involving an affirmation, whereas the contrary position involves a denial.

The doctrine of Law as mere description characteristic of modern science, on the other hand, does not even address itself to the character of Law as such, but merely presupposes its existence. Though it need not involve a denial of metaphysical questions, it simply does not concern itself with them.

Whitehead opts for an intermediate doctrine, combining elements of the doctrine of Law as immanent and the doctrine of Law as imposed. The doctrine of Law as immanent has the quality of internal coherence that Whitehead requires for his metaphysical system. But, as he writes:

> Apart from some notion of imposed Law, the doctrine of immanence provides absolutely no reason why the universe should not be steadily relapsing into lawless chaos. In fact, the Universe, as understood in accordance with the

> doctrine of Immanence, should exhibit itself as including a stable actuality whose mutual implication with the remainder of things secures an inevitable trend towards order (Ibid:115).

This "stable actuality" is what Whitehead calls 'God.'

According to Whitehead, this intermediate doctrine between that of Law as immanent and as imposed–of 'persuasion'–is articulated in the philosophy of Plato, specifically in the 'creation myth' of the *Timaeus*:

> More than two thousand years ago, the wisest of men [Plato] proclaimed that the divine persuasion is the foundation of the order of the world, but that it could only produce such a measure of harmony as amid brute forces it was possible to accomplish (Ibid:160).

The production of harmony among "brute forces"–the actual entities which constitute the world conceived solely as free agents, in the absence of some ordering principle–in a perpetually new creative synthesis is the divine *telos*, the purpose for which God as ordering principle exists. This *telos* is all-encompassing in the sense that every actual entity which constitutes the universe at any given moment is an element in God's harmonizing activity. God "does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness" (Whitehead, 1978:346).

In this role, God, for all other beings, is the ultimate good, the ideal, "the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire. His particular relevance to each creative act as it arises from its own conditioned standpoint in the world, constitutes him the initial 'object of desire' establishing the initial phase of each subjective aim" (Ibid:344). God establishes the ultimate goal and purpose of each new free and creative act which constitutes the cosmos, of each new moment in the life of the universal organism.

According to a Whiteheadian account of the universe, of what would the phenomenon of 'salvation' be properly said to consist? There is a sense in process philosophy in which all entities are perpetually–that is, repeatedly, at the culmination of each new moment of the creative advance of the universe–'saved,' inasmuch as they are

received into the consequent nature of God and achieve "objective immortality," the status of "a new objective condition added to the riches of definiteness attainable, the 'real potentiality' of the universe" (Whitehead 1978:223). For those "personally ordered societies" (Ibid:34), or streams of actual occasions which constitute, on a macrocosmic level, conscious enduring entities such as human beings, however, salvation, in its full richness, must define a quality of experience perceptible at the full level of intensity of which such enduring entities are capable: in other words, freely chosen and intentional cooperation with the divine *telos*. This, however, requires some further explanation.

According to Whitehead's metaphysics, creatures are free, but God's role in creative activity, in which creatures participate, consists of the divine act of 'persuasion' which occurs at each new moment of the concrescence of a new actual entity–of which macroscopic creatures, such as human beings, are composites over time. This divine persuasion consists of a disclosure to each entity, in the initial phase of its concrescence, of God's ideal for that entity, of the maximal beauty, harmony and intensity of experience to which it is capable of contributing by its own free choice, which constitutes its secondary phase. The entity is not thereby forced to pursue this divine ideal, but 'prehends' it as one of the data of its initial phase, thus making it possible for the entity to contribute, through its own free choice, to the fulfillment of the divine *telos*, the maximization of beauty and harmony in the universe. On my reading of Whitehead's system, this freely chosen cooperation with the divine *telos* constitutes a salvific response for such an entity.

The free choice which all actual entites make from moment to moment either to cooperate with or to otherwise respond to the divine *telos* is not, according to Whitehead, necessarily a conscious one. Consciousness is an emergent quality which requires highly complex interactions among entire societies of actual entities. Consciousness is therefore distinctive only to particular kinds of beings, such as animals (and, arguably, some kinds of plants, as well as some micro-organisms)–integrated composites of more fundamental

actual entities. Because humans are such complex, high-grade conscious beings–whose experience is informed by a multitude of actual entities–distinctively human salvation must include the *conscious* choice to cooperate with the divine *telos*–to say "yes," at each new moment, to the divine will, inasmuch as this is available to one; for conscious experience is the richest, most complex form of experience of which we are capable, which is distinctive to our form of existence. Human consciousness, in particular, involves the deployment of articulable concepts, themselves derived from the collective experience both of the person and of the species, as well as of the particular society of humans of which one is a member. This collective experience is *culture*, which includes, at its most fundamental level, language and basic survival skills, but is also inclusive of religion, art, morality, science, philosophy and theology–the various dimensions of our existence which go into the constitution of our distinctively human consciousness.

God, the necessary being on a Whiteheadian account, wills the maximal complexity and intensity of experience possible for all actual entities–including, therefore, human beings. If God wills such experience for all entities, including humans, and if God's will is always capable of realization, because of its integration into each entity at its initial phase, and if the human choice to cooperate with this divine *telos* must, in order to achieve its maximal realization, be a conscious one, then, given the necessity of culture as a condition for the possibility of distinctively human consciousness, the knowledge which would enable conscious salvific choices on the part of human beings must be conveyed, on some level, by all forms of culture. Culture *as such*, in other words, and therefore religion as such, must necessarily bear the imprint of the divine persuasive activity which is constantly acting upon human beings, in the form, on some level, of the salvific knowledge which it is its purpose to convey.

The precise form this knowledge takes will vary, of course, from cultural system to cultural system. Minimally, it could take the form of the implicit faith, of which Ogden

writes, in the ultimate meaningfulness of existence which all human activity necessarily manifests and presupposes, the "basic faith (or confidence) in the meaning of life" that is "a necessary condition of the possibility of all our self-understanding and praxis" (Ogden 1992a:7). This would be the minimal sense in which a particular religion, for instance, could be said to be 'true'–that by its very existence, it points to the higher purpose which gives meaning to all existence, the fundamental Truth at the heart of all truth, of truth itself–a sense of truth analogous, perhaps, to the Augustinian conception of existence itself as a good. That is, by the very fact of its existence, a religion points to the truth, even if it be, in every other respect, a 'false religion,' explicitly denying the fundamental faith which underlies it as a human activity. It may possibly even be destructive, in practice, of life and creative possibilities, but such destructiveness would contradict the implicit faith at the foundation of the process of its ongoing existence. Maximally, on the other hand, a religion would be true if its doctrines gave explicit expression to the ontological truths underlying its existence, if it exhibited intra-systematic coherence, and if, in practice, its concepts and symbols gave expression to certain primordial intuitions of the community that held it (the experiential-expressivist sense of truth). The *degree* of truth-expression among the religions, on this account, can vary enormously. But all, if the argument is valid, must necessarily exhibit it. As discussed earlier, the conception of truth-expression as forming a continuum which this pluralistic understanding of religion presupposes does away with the need for exclusionary criteria. What it requires, however, is some set of criteria by which the relative adequacy, the relative degree of truth-expression of religious claims, can be evaluated. As David Tracy says, "The great pluralists of religion are those who so affirm plurality that they fundamentally trust it, yet do not shirk their responsibility to develop criteria of assessment for each judgment of relative adequacy" (Tracy 1987:91). The development of such criteria would logically take as its starting point the concept of salvation upon which this pluralistic conception of religion is based.

How does such a concept of salvation translate into more concrete terms? As the process philosopher, Charles Hartshorne, writes of the ethical position appropriate to process metaphysics:

> First, the [hu]man [being] in the moment of choosing to serve God would himself enjoy the deep satisfaction of pursuing a purpose that his whole understanding recognized as the genuinely ultimate or adequate purpose. Second, the way to serve and glorify God is to promote the creative process, to contribute to the general welfare or common good, in which the man's own future happiness would be included so far as compatible with that of others. Thus the man could retain the natural human sympathy for his own future possibilities, just as he would retain the natural human sympathy for other persons. But all these values, including the joy of serving them, would be viewed as contributory to one achievement, the enrichment of the divine life. For if we enjoy serving God, this our enjoyment of serving him is itself a service, since God, too, is a sympathetic being and delights in our delight. Thus in being utterly devoted, altruistic, in relation to God, we would include all the self-interest that has a right to be included in the ultimate purpose. We should be willing to be damned for the glory of God, but should know that in the very act of so willing, we should, for that moment, enjoy essential salvation (Hartshorne 1948:133).

Salvation, then, consists of conscious participation in the creation of the universe in harmony with all other beings, in which the interests of oneself and of the whole are undifferentiated. Such salvation is conceived as willed by God for all beings capable of it–conscious, willing beings, or moral agents–for the divine *telos* extends to all that exists.

We can see, then, on the basis of our analysis of process metaphysics, that the first three steps of a deductive argument for the truth of religious pluralism–specifically, for the claim that all religions are necessarily, in some sense, true–are now in place. Let us turn now to an examination of these steps.

1. God–a concrete individual characterized by "complete relativity to all actuality and possibility" (Gamwell 1990:171)–necessarily exists (argument from process metaphysics).

God, as the pre-eminent exemplification of the necessary truths of the universe according to process metaphysics, necessarily exists on this account of reality. The arguments offered in the process tradition for this claim are numerous, including Whitehead's cosmological argument, which I have summarized in some detail,

Hartshorne's reformulations of St. Anselm's 'ontological' or 'modal' proof of God's existence, and, most recently, Gamwell's 'moral-metaphysical' argument.

2. Speaking anthropomorphically, God is possessed of a universally *salvific* and *efficacious* will (elaboration of the nature of God as disclosed in process metaphysics).

God 'saves' all beings necessarily, as part of the divine function of ordering the cosmos, but this is not automatic. The particular character it takes from moment to moment is a result of cooperation between the divine 'will' and the free choices of the actual entities constituting the universe at any given moment. Similarly, the divine will is efficacious in being present to all actual entities in the initial phase of their emergence in the form of their initial aim, hence becoming an element in the existence of those entities–their concrescence–and, forever after, in the future entities which prehend it as an element in *their* concrescences through inheritance. And finally:

3. Salvation, for human beings, is defined as the free choice to participate consciously in the divine *telos* of maximizing the total creative expression of the universe (deduction from process metaphysics).

Distinctively human salvation consists not of simply being absorbed into the divine or cosmic 'memory' constituting the consequent nature of God, analogous to the 'storehouse consciousness,' or *ālayavijñāna* of Yogācāra Buddhism. It is a free and conscious choice, renewed from moment to moment, reflecting the complexities of our evolution to a form of consciousness distinct from that of God, in order that we might become self-conscious 'co-creators' of the universe through our own, divinely valued and nurtured abilities.

The next, fourth step is a fundamental assumption of contemporary cultural anthropology, and much of contemporary culture studies. It is, I think, coherent with process metaphysics, with its emphasis upon the emergent, contextual character of all knowledge:

4. A necessary condition for any distinctively human knowing is participation in some cultural-linguistic system or systems (deduction from contemporary cultural anthropology).

With these four premises in place, as well as an understanding of religion as a form of culture, a species of cultural-linguistic system (an understanding which Ogden's definition of religion provides), the rest of the argument follows logically:

5. God wills the salvation of all human beings (entailment of 2).

6. Whatever God wills is always and everywhere possible (entailment of 2).

7. The salvation of human beings is possible whenever and wherever there are human beings (5 and 6).

8. Human salvation requires some degree of knowledge of the divine *telos*, in order that it might be freely chosen (entailment of 3).

9. All human beings possess some degree of knowledge of the divine *telos* (7 and 8).

10. On the assumption that some human beings may have access to only one cultural-linguistic system, all cultural-linguistic systems in some way make possible some degree of knowledge of the divine *telos* (4 and 9).

11. Religion is a form of cultural-linguistic system (definition of religion).

12. All religions in some way make possible some degree of knowledge of the divine telos (10 and 11). All religions are therefore, at least to this extent, true.

The understanding underlying this deductive argument is that the universally salvific will of God acts constantly, in cooperation with the various cultural systems which everywhere create the necessary conditions for human knowledge, in order to transform those systems into systems for the communication of salvific knowledge, and thus into settings in which human salvation can occur–conceived as life lived in free and conscious cooperation with the divine *telos* of maximizing the beauty and harmony of the creative expression in the universe. The condition for the possibility of this transformation of culture–a constant and ongoing process–is the primordial experience of God, in the form of their subjective aim, which characterizes all actual entities; for God is a primary element, whether we are conscious of it or not, of every moment of our experience. The sense in which *all* religions are true–for the claim is made of religion *as such*, as a subset of culture,

and not with reference to any particular religion–is the sense in which they communicate the salvific knowledge which God is constantly seeking to introduce and integrate into human consciousness by means of the 'divine persuasion,' the divine disclosure to each entity, in the initial phase of its concrescence, of God's ideal for that entity, which then becomes integrated into the subjective form that it passes on to its successors.

One way of expressing the minimal sense in which, according to this argument, all religions–indeed, all cultural activity–must be true is by means of Ogden's concept of "basic faith (or confidence) in the meaning of life," which is, on Ogden's analysis, "a necessary condition of the possibility of all our self-understanding and praxis" (Ogden, 1992a:7). A religion, by its very existence as a human activity, implies this faith in the meaning of life, and thereby, ultimately, the locus of all meaning–the reality of God and the divine *telos*. In this minimal sense, then, all religions are both true and salvific. The possibility, of course, exists that there are religions which are true and salvific in a more fully developed sense–which express the character of the divine *telos* and make it real to human beings in more explicit ways. And, as I said just prior to summarizing my argument, it is also a possibility that religions exist which do this to varying degrees, which are more or less, or *relatively*, true. Demonstrating this, though, requires the introduction of an interpretive method, based on the Jain philosophy of relativity, and its application to actual religious traditions in order to determine the degree of their possible truth–a task beyond the scope of this chapter, which simply argues for the validity of the fundamental pluralistic claim on the basis of Whitehead's theistic metaphysics.

At this point, then, my position is essentially identical to that of Ogden, discussed earlier, according to whom it is *possible* that there are many true religions, a possibility which a Whiteheadian conception of God (which Ogden identifies with a Christian conception) requires us to affirm, as I hope I have shown here. The significant difference, at this point, between my position and Ogden's is, I think, largely verbal; for I see the

existence of the implicit faith underlying all religions as a sense in which they are *true*, whereas Ogden reserves the term 'true' for *explicit* affirmations of truth. In our conception of God, however, and God's potentially saving relation to all human beings, and all cultural forms, I believe our views are identical. Such a conception, in Ogden's words:

> gives one every reason to look for signs of the actuality of the pluralism whose possibility is securely grounded in the completely universal reality of God's love, which is savingly present throughout all human existence and, therefore, is also at work in all religions (Ibid 103).

How is it, though, that a religion performs its salvific function by affirming truth? What is the relationship between the cognitive and salvific dimensions of religion? How, in other words, does religion 'work' on this understanding? How does this conception integrate the three dimensions of doctrine–the cognitive, intrasystematic, and experiential-expressive–discussed earlier? This is our next topic of discussion.

6.8 Particularizing the Universal and Universalizing the Particular: Religion as a Cultural Medium for the Communication of Abstract Metaphysical Ideas

What are the causes of the credibility of religious beliefs for most people? As a consequence of the human epistemic situation, of the fact that we are bound to begin all of our reflections–all of our believing and knowing–with what is immediately available to our experience, we generally hold the beliefs that we do on the basis of the culture–"the concepts and symbols in terms of which we understand our existence and act to maintain and transform ourselves together with others" (Ogden 1992a:7)–which surrounds us and which constitutes our immediate conceptual environment. Religion, due, in part, to the supreme importance of its subject matter, as well as its embeddedness in the very cultural symbols by means of which we come to know ourselves, to construct a self-concept, constitutes a form of culture that is particularly persuasive in its ability to shape our experiences, our very identity, and consequently, to instill belief in us.

Schubert Ogden defines religion as "the primary form of culture in terms of which we human beings explicitly ask and answer the existential question of the meaning of ultimate reality for us" (Ibid:5). By his use of the term "ultimate reality," Ogden (along with Whitehead) has in mind William James's pragmatist definition of "reality" as "'what we in some way find ourselves obliged to take account of'" (quoted in Ibid:17).

The existential question, more commonly referred to as the question of the 'meaning of life,' is arguably the most fundamental of all questions. As such, it is a question which "we must be asking and answering…at least implicitly in all our self-understanding and praxis and thus in anything that we think or say or do" (Ibid:7). Consequently, the existential question is an at least implicit element in all human cultural activity.

This fact need not, however, render the term 'religion' useless or without meaning, an arbitrarily defined subset of culture indistinguishable, in fact, from other cultural forms. As Ogden explains:

> Assuming…that by "culture" is properly meant the concepts and symbols in terms of which we understand our existence and act to maintain and transform ourselves together with others, we may say that all forms of culture, including religion, must at least implicitly ask and answer the existential question. The distinctive thing about religion, however, is that it is the primary form of culture in which this question is also asked and answered explicitly, in concepts and symbols whose express function is to mediate authentic self-understanding (Ibid:7-8).

In other words, while the asking and answering of the existential question occurs in–that is, by means of–all forms of culture, religion is that primary form of culture to which the formulation of this question is proper. That is, no other primary form of culture exists explicitly for this purpose, though all, in fact, serve it in their respective ways.

But what, then, of philosophy and theology, both of which are clearly concerned, in very explicit ways, with the character of ultimate reality? These activities are called, in Ogden's terminology, 'secondary' forms of culture because they presuppose, due to their being constituted by reflection upon, logically and temporally prior, and therefore,

‘primary’ forms of culture. Philosophy takes “all of the primary forms” of culture, “including religion, as the data of its reflection” (Ibid:8)–hence the existence of philosophies of science, of religion, of art, of language, etc. Theology is “critical reflection on the validity claims of some specific religion” (Ibid), which is usually taken as providing its own normative criteria for the evaluation of its truth claims, such as conformity to some specific set of texts or body of traditional knowledge–the criterion of ‘appropriateness’ to a tradition, discussed earlier. But theology can also have recourse to more universal standards of evaluation, such as logical coherence and conformity with common human experience, which are appropriate primarily to philosophy.[19]

Such secondary cultural activities could be characterized, without the intention of a pejorative sense, as parasitic upon the primary forms of culture; for they are generally elite activities, consisting of deliberate and systematic reflection upon activities which are apparently, at least for most people, natural and spontaneous–though, of course, socially constructed and, in their specifics, acquired–such as the speaking of particular languages, the creation of particular kinds of art forms, and membership in a particular religious community and belief in a particular religion. While the explicit function of formulating

[19] Traditional theologies, on this account, avoid being considered a subset of philosophy–philosophies of religion–inasmuch as they utilize the norms provided by the particular religions upon which they constitute reflection in addition to the more universal norms of logical coherence and conformity with common human experience that philosophy employs to the exclusion of other norms. ‘Philosophical theology’ I take to refer to an intermediate project, ‘between’ theology and philosophy in terms of its relations to universal and particular elements of experience, that utilizes specifically traditional theological (i.e. tradition-specific) norms along with the more universal norms proper to philosophy in its reflections, but that is distinct from traditional theologies in its not being confined to reflection on any particular religion, but consists of reflection on questions relevant to all religions, or to ‘religion in general’ (which is, of course, an abstraction). It is distinguished from the philosophy of religion(s) by its use of the norms that religions set for themselves in its reflections as well as–i.e. in a dialectical relation with–the universal norms proper to philosophy. It recognizes, with Ogden, that, “[O]ne must allow that the truth in any philosophy not only has to confirm that in any religion, but also has to be confirmed by it” (Ogden, 1992a:72). For this reason, as shall become clear, I take my own project, according to this set of definitions, to be an exercise in philosophical theology.

and addressing the existential question is what distinguishes religion from other primary forms of culture, it is the 'primariness' of religion–its 'naturalness,' its rootedness in a particular cultural, spatial and temporal locale–which distinguishes it from the deliberate and systematically 'denaturalizing' activities that constitute philosophy and (though to a somewhat lesser extent, because of its attachment to a particular historical tradition) traditional theology.[20]

The concept of religion, as defined by Ogden, implies the concept of true religion. Implicit in the asking of the existential question, and implicit, therefore, in religion, is the presupposition that this question does, indeed, have a correct answer–that is, that there is such a thing as "true religion," defined as an authentic account of "the meaning of ultimate reality for us." In Ogden's words:

> Underlying this question [the existential question] as its "basic supposition" is the faith that there is such an authentic self-understanding–that the ultimate reality of one's own existence together with others in the whole is such that some way of understanding oneself is uniquely appropriate, or authorized, and that one both can and should understand oneself accordingly....I speak of this faith as "basic faith (or confidence) in the meaning of life," and on my analysis it is a necessary condition of the possibility of all our self-understanding and praxis (Ogden, 1992a:6-7).

Furthermore, according to Ogden, all religions claim to be true. "In other words, it belongs to a religion to claim to be *the* true religion, and hence the formal norm by which all other true religion, if any, has to be determined" (Ibid:13). This is part of the logic of what a religion is. To attempt to answer a question–especially one so momentous as the existential question–as well as entailing the supposition that the question has a true answer, also entails that the answer one attempts to give to it ought also to be a true one (or else one would be uttering falsehood).

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[20] These distinctions are to some degree, of course, ideal-typical. Are a Buddhist *abhidharma* text, or the *Summa Theologiae*, religious or philosophical works? The distinction between religion and philosophy clearly points out logical elements of, in fact, complex activities. I do take religion, however, as the primary form of culture, to represent the broader category, containing philosophical elements within itself, but not, except for the intermediate case of philosophical theology, vice versa.

What is distinctive about the means by which religion, as a primary form of culture, formulates and addresses the existential question, doing so in a compelling way, so as to instill and articulate beliefs which are convincing to those who hold them? Unlike the 'secondary' forms of culture which are also concerned with asking and answering the existential question, religion, rather than striving toward universal truths by means of generalizing abstraction[21] from the particular experiences which exhibit them, expresses these truths *by means of*, and becomes thereby inextricably embedded in, those very particulars which provide the occasion for its emergence. While philosophy aims at the articulation and validation of universal truths through the process of denaturalization, of abstraction from the merely local to the general, religion claims *for its very particularistic elements*–a particular tradition, a particular community, a particular authoritative text, a particular founding figure, a particular sacred history, a particular holy place, etc.–universal relevance. This involves a paradox, as Whitehead writes:

> The peculiar position of religion is that it stands between abstract metaphysics and the particular principles applying to only some among the experiences of life. The relevance of its concepts can only be distinctly discerned in moments of insight, and then, for many of us, only after suggestion from without. Hence religion bases itself primarily upon a small selection from the common experiences of the race. On this side, religion ranges itself as one among other specialized interests of mankind whose truths are of limited validity. But on its other side, religion claims that its concepts, though derived primarily from special experiences, are yet of universal validity, to be applied by faith to the ordering of all experience (Whitehead 1926:20-21).

Its embeddedness in particularity is one reason why religion is not *reducible to* philosophy–that is, to an abstract philosophical system. Although it does contain philosophical elements in the form of doctrines (and also implicit philosophical claims in its

[21] 'Abstraction' here is taken to mean not 'complete abstraction from the system of the universe,' an undesirable logical impossibility in a Whiteheadian philosophical schema, but systematic generalization from particular circumstances to a field of universal relevance, and hence, in a qualified sense, 'denaturalization.'

other elements),[22] non-(explicitly)propositional elements, such as (mythical) narrative, ritual, and symbol are no less a part of a religion than its doctrine-expressing sentences. Without these irreducible, non-propositional elements a religion would lack the greater part of its emotive force, its ability to evoke experiences of the 'sacred,'[23] as well as the unique 'flavor' which characterizes it in lived human experience. Similarly, just as it finds itself embedded in them, religion shapes those particulars which provide the context for its emergence, defining them and infusing them with value, such as its founding figures and its sacred times, places, and objects.

Because of its particularistic character, the unique associations which it has with a wide variety of human experiences–emotions, memories, sights, sounds, smells–one's religion is inextricably associated with how one perceives oneself, not only conceptually, but in a very embedded and embodied way. Like one's language and membership in a family or a community, one's religion (at least prior to further reflection)[24] becomes 'natural' to oneself. It becomes, in other words, intrinsic to one's social identity, and therefore, ultimately, to the complex which constitutes one's unique individuality. This is a major source of its ability to constitute a convincing form of self-understanding.

Yet it is the very contextual embeddedness of religion which is also the source of its limitation–its relativity, despite the universality of its claims–its membership among the "specialized interests of mankind whose truths are of limited validity," and the arbitrariness

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[22] Doctrines, too, as *doxa*, as beliefs held by a particular community at a particular time and place, are, of course, no less historically emergent or socially constructed than the other elements of a religion. But they partake, due to their being expressible in a propositional form, of the abstract, generalized, denaturalized character of a successful philosophical discourse in a way which these other elements of a religion do not.

[23] I have in mind here the understanding of this term articulated in the history of religions by such scholars as Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade.

[24] I primarily mean 'logically prior,' though I think that for most people this statement is true in a temporal sense as well.

and epistemic circularity of adherence to its claims based upon its authority alone. For religion, "never exists in general or simply as such, but always and only as some specific religion or religions" (Ogden, 1992a:10). It "is thoroughly historical and, therefore, is 'natural' only in the sense that, while it is evidently the nature of human beings to be religious in one way or another, none of these ways may fairly claim to be the natural way of being religious. On the contrary, all religions show themselves to be historical emergents enjoying de facto authority only within some limited social and cultural group" (Ibid:10-11). Religion, as a primary cultural system, whatever may be the truth of its doctrinal claims, differs little in the manner of its transmission from languages and other primary forms of culture transmitted across time from generation to generation and across space from region to region.

Consequently, the manner in which human persons generally adopt the religion they do–although exceptions, such as conversion on the sole basis of the compelling arguments which a religion can marshall in its favor, do occur–has more to do with its historically emergent, 'natural' qualities–such as its predominance in a particular geographic region during a particular historical epoch–than with the validity of its doctrinal claims as these would be evaluated by a philosopher of religion or a theologian. Philosophy and theology, again, are generally elite activities–'secondary' forms of culture, requiring special education for their pursuit within a given community. Religion, however, is universal in the way that language or art are universal. Its appropriation need not be a matter of a particular competence,[25] but only of accidental exposure–that is, exposure contingent upon accidental historical events, such as one's being born in a particular time and place and to parents of a particular religious community. This observation, as we have

[25] Although religious, like linguistic and artistic, virtuosi exist, and standards for the evaluation of religious, like linguistic and artistic, competence exist in every community.

already seen, is expressed by the Renaissance thinker Michel de Montaigne when he writes that:

> …[W]e receive our religion…not otherwise than as other religions are received. We happen to have been born in a country where it was in practice; or we regard its antiquity or the authority of the men who have maintained it; or we fear the threats it fastens upon unbelievers, or pursue its promises.…Another region, other witnesses, similar promises and threats, might imprint upon us in the same way a contrary belief.…We are Christians by the same title that we are Perigordians or Germans.[26]

In this way, religion, as a primary form of culture, stands in contrast with secondary forms of culture, such as philosophy and theology.

Unlike religion, philosophy (and theology inasmuch as it is, like philosophy, a denaturalizing form of discourse) consists precisely of the attempt to escape from contingently determined, and therefore arbitrary and epistemically circular, belief in order to arrive at universally valid grounds for the claims that one asserts, an attempt that includes the possibility that one will modify one's beliefs in light of one's reflections. This goal is never, of course, achieved in any final way. It can only be, at most, approached asymptotically; for philosophy and theology are, like religion, contextually embedded and historically emergent forms of culture, whose particulars vary from location to location and impose limitations upon the thought processes of those who engage in these activities. These secondary cultural activities, however, unlike religion, consist of the self-conscious attempt to escape from their embeddedness in particularity in order to grasp at universal relevance and validity–philosophy more so than traditional theology (which still confines itself to reflection on the claims of a particular religious community, and thus holds itself back from a thoroughgoing project of denaturalization). As the philosopher of religion Paul Griffiths describes these activities, "…[A]s intellectual practices…they are necessarily located in institutional structures, influenced by sociocultural determinants, and so forth;

[26] Michel de Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond," from *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, Frame trans. 1957:324-325.

but…they are determined by their own inner logic to extract themselves from their natural locations and contexts, to *denaturalize* themselves" (Griffiths 1990b:61).

Logically speaking, denaturalized discourse–pre-eminently philosophy–because of its ability to extend itself beyond the contingent and the local to the necessary and the universal, seems a far more certain guide to truth than adherence to the religious beliefs prevalent in the culture into which one was accidentally born. But just as the ability of philosophy to abstract itself from particularity is what gives its claims a more universal validity than the relative–because locally determined–claims of religion, it is precisely the embeddedness of religion in particularity which enables it to be convincing to those who believe in it. As the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, defines it, religion is:

> (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1973:90).

Inasmuch as religion "formulates conceptions of a general order of existence"–that is, inasmuch as it seeks to provide a universally true answer to the existential question–it is like philosophy. But as a primary, 'natural,' rather than a secondary, 'denaturalizing' form of culture, religion deploys the immediately available, particular cultural forms with which its believers are familiar in order to "clothe its conceptions with such an aura of factuality" that the "moods and motivations" associated with them "seem uniquely realistic." As Whitehead expresses the same basic concept:

> Religion should connect the rational generality of philosophy with the emotions and purposes springing out of existence in a particular society, in a particular epoch, and conditioned by particular antecedents. Religion is the translation of general ideas into particular thoughts, particular emotions, and particular purposes.…Religion is an ultimate craving to infuse into the insistent particularity of emotion that non-temporal generality which primarily belongs to conceptual thought alone (Whitehead 1978:15-16).

The fusion of the generality of philosophical concepts with the particulars of one's own personal existence gives religious belief its sense of immediacy, its peculiarly convincing

quality. Unlike philosophy, then, religion can call to its defense not only the standards appropriate to the determination of logical validity, but also the concrete religious experiences–instances of the 'living faith'–of actual human beings.

Speaking metaphorically, if philosophy can be said to be addressed to the 'head,' then religion is addressed to the whole person. It is as whole people, located in a particular place and time, with particular cultural presuppositions and sets of unique experiences, that religion addresses us; and it is as such that we, not inappropriately, find it convincing, rather than as disembodied minds, on the humanistic basis of logical argumentation *alone*. As the philosopher of religion, William P. Alston writes:

> Perhaps it is a mistake to look for a foundation of one's faith that stands infallible, indubitable, and incorrigible, in no need of support from any other source. Perhaps no system of belief can be grounded in that way. Perhaps a more reasonable aspiration for the human condition is to have multiple sources of support such that although each can be questioned and none renders any of one's beliefs absolutely certain, they lend support to each other as well as to the beliefs they are invoked to support; so that in the way the whole assemblage fits together we have sufficient reason to take the beliefs to be true (Alston, 1991:306).

The realization that all religious persons, and not only the members of one particular community, are possessed of such 'multiple sources of support' from their respective cultures for the beliefs that they hold, that one's own tradition is not privileged in this regard, that "Persons living within other traditions…are equally justified in trusting their own distinctive religious experience and in forming their beliefs on the basis of it" (Hick, 1989:235), is the realization of the *cultural* relativity of religious belief.

This is one of the two central insights of religious pluralism, the other being the infinite salvific will of God, which forms its metaphysical foundation. Given the cultural relativity of religious belief and the infinite salvific will, the universal love, of God, no blame can possibly be attached to one's (accidental) religious adherence, as exclusivists would have it. The exclusivist claim that salvation is dependent upon membership and

acculturation into one particular religious community is both metaphysically unwarranted and idolatrous, making religion itself, rather than its ultimate object, absolute.

If the metaphysical and anthropological accounts given here are correct, the truth of religious pluralism follows; for on these accounts, God is working constantly for the salvation of all–and therefore all human–beings, introducing to their consciousness the possibility of existence in cooperation with the divine creativity, and this consciousness is necessarily mediated through cultural forms–including, though not limited to, religions.

6.9 Conclusion: The Possibility of the Necessity of the Truth of Religious Pluralism

If the premises of the argument presented here and the conception of religion which it entails are convincing, that is, if the relativity of religious belief can be demonstrated to be a consequence of the necessary embeddedness of the human epistemic situation in cultural particularity, and if process philosophy's theistic account of the cosmos is compelling, then one is led, I believe, to the inescapable conclusion that religious pluralism is the best option available for conceptualizing the nature of religious truth and salvation. If human beings are, by and large, justified in holding the beliefs that they do, and if salvation is both willed by God for all human–indeed all–beings and is conceived as a freely chosen and conscious act of participation in the creative process of the universe, then the knowledge necessary for human beings to be able to choose salvation must be conceived as available to them as a plausible option for belief from within the systems of belief which they actually, inevitably, hold–including, but not, of course, limited to, their religions.

We see all three dimensions of doctrine at play in this conception of the nature of religious belief. The cognitive dimension of doctrine gives an explicit propositional form to the implicit faith underlying human existence–a faith which involves an ultimate meaning behind all activity, the divine *telos*. The culturally systematic dimension of doctrine gives religious belief its uniquely compelling character as incorporating every aspect of one's

human existence. The experiential-expressive dimension, finally, is the dimension in which the actual *experience* of one's connectedness with the divine reality, through the medium or 'cognitive filter' of one's religious beliefs, occurs.

We conclude, then, that it is possible that all religions are *necessarily*, in some respect, true (if the premises of the argument are true). Making sense of this claim in light of the prima facie incompatibility of many religious doctrine-expressing sentences–the task of interpretation–is the primary task of a pluralistic philosophical theology; and developing a method for such interpretation appropriate to the truth of religious pluralism is the task to which the next chapter of this dissertation is devoted.

Chapter 7

RELATING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM TO THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

The Question of Interpretive Relevance

The great pluralists of religion are those who so affirm plurality that they fundamentally trust it, yet do not shirk their responsibility to develop criteria of assessment for each judgment of relative adequacy.

David Tracy
(*Plurality and Ambiguity*)

Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them.

Donald Davidson
(*On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*)

7.1 What Has and Has Not Been Proven: The A Priorism Critique Revisited

If the argument of the preceding chapter is logically valid, then it has been demonstrated that a plausible case can be made for the central claim of religious pluralism–the claim that a plurality of true and salvifically efficacious religions exist.

Like the similar claim of one of the pluralistic interpretations of religion which it takes as its point of departure, that of John Hick, the claim for which I have argued is made a priori, without reference to any empirical or hermeneutical engagement with the actual claims of historical religious communities. It is a purely formal claim–a claim about religion *as such*–based upon a deductive argument from Alfred North Whitehead's system of process metaphysics in conjunction with an anthropological account of culture.

The conditions for the truth of what this argument seeks to prove are, of course, the truth of the version of Whitehead's metaphysics and of the anthropological account of culture which it employs. These are not, themselves, so much proven as presupposed and explicated, the point of the argument as a whole being not so much to prove the truth of

religious pluralism in any conclusive way as to demonstrate its plausibility. If I have at least been able to explicate this metaphysic and this account of culture in such a way as to show that they do not contradict themselves or one another, that they at least pass their own tests of internal coherence, then I believe their plausibility, though not necessarily their truth, has been sufficiently demonstrated to make my point–that religious pluralism need not be the 'massively implausible' and hopelessly incoherent position which its many critics depict, but that its claims can follow as logical entailments from plausible, non-contradictory, metaphysical and anthropological accounts of reality and of culture.

As I have mentioned earlier, though, I believe that this argument does point to the possibility of a stronger kind of argument, a 'positive apologetic' for the absolute logical and metaphysical *necessity* of religious pluralism. *If* Charles Hartshorne is correct, and if his version of the ontological or modal argument for God's existence can prove the necessary existence of the kind of God postulated by process metaphysics, then the necessary truth of process metaphysics will have been demonstrated; for the God it postulates is the primary exemplification of the principles which this metaphysical system expresses (Hartshorne 1962:28-117). *If* this should be the case, then the argument of the preceding chapter, if it works, would prove the necessary truth, rather than the mere plausibility, of the claims of religious pluralism; though such an argument is not offered here. Even this argument, however, would not constitute *conclusive* proof; for its assumptions are far from universally acknowledged. As the Jain tradition affirms, all truth-claims are finally conditional.[1]

But back to the main argument–what, exactly, is it that has been demonstrated to be plausible? As I just mentioned, the claim whose plausibility–and possible necessity–I have demonstrated is of a purely formal, a priori, nature. Substantive metaphysical and

[1] Including the claim itself that all truth-claims are finally conditional.

anthropological grounds are, of course, given for it; and it is my hope that this reconceived pluralistic hypothesis can therefore stand up better under logical scrutiny than Hick's original hypothesis, of which mine could be seen as a revision. The claim itself, however, remains a purely formal one: all religions are necessarily, in some sense, true.

The a priori status of the claim for which I have argued puts it, in a sense, in the same category as Hick's; for I have not yet developed what could be called a 'working' pluralistic interpretation of religion, one which could be applied to actual religious claims in order to say something substantive and detailed about their possible truth or falsity. I have simply demonstrated that it is plausible to assert (and may be necessary to assert) that all religions are necessarily repositories, in some (as yet relatively vague) sense, of salvific knowledge, and are therefore, in at least this sense, true.

How, one might now ask, does this tell us any more about the truth-content of *specific* religious claims than Hick's experiential-expressivist assertion that such claims serve (in some unspecified way) to inform a salvific mode of life, to facilitate the salvific transformation of human beings from an ego-centered to a Reality-centered mode of existence? How is this finally an improvement over Hick's original pluralistic hypothesis? What makes it a substantive, and not a vacuous, claim? These objections recall similar objections to the a priori nature of religious pluralism, and of the apparent desire of its advocates "to be freed from the demands of interpretation," (Tracy 1987:90) made by such postliberal critics as Griffiths and Clooney, by critics of this position from within the tradition of process thought, such as Ogden and Cobb, and by such attitudinal or dialogical religious pluralists as Panikkar and Tracy. If the applicability of a pluralistic interpretation of religion to actual religious claims is to be a criterion for its plausiblitiy–if it must really *interpret* those claims–then it is clear that more work needs to be done. The development of this system is not complete until it can be applied to actual religious doctrine-expressing

sentences in order to determine the specific senses in which they may or may not be true. It must account for the real *differences* and prima facie incompatibilities among them.

Why, one might ask, is this important? If the point of this pluralistic interpretation of religion were, like those developed by other pluralists, simply to promote interreligious dialogue by fostering mutual respect among the representatives of diverse religious communities through the idea that all religions are, in some sense, true, perhaps I could stop here. As I have already discussed, however, it is not at all clear that the view that all religions are, in some sense, true is a necessary condition for mutually respectful and productive interreligious dialogue. Empirically, in fact, this would seem to be a false claim; for, as we have seen, such dialogue seems to occur more often than not in the absence of pluralistic presuppositions. But if this interpretation represents, as it must, one distinctive worldview among others, then it must itself be able to *engage with* those views–to be a *participant* in dialogue, rather than a necessary condition for it–if, in fact, it is to be relevant to such dialogue at all.

My intention in this chapter is to begin the project of arguing that the system of interpretation appropriate to the truth of a religious pluralism of the kind for which I argued in chapter six is essentially that developed by the Jains, which I described in some depth in chapter five. This argument has two main phases. The first phase of this argument involves arguing that its basic claim is, in fact, true: that the interpretive method appropriate to a Whiteheadian argument for religious pluralism of the kind I have provided is essentially the Jain method. The second phase involves arguing that the basic metaphysical presuppositions of Whitehead's metaphysics and of the Jain interpretive methodology are logically compatible–that the Jain methodology can be shown to be entailed by Whitehead's metaphysical system and vice versa. The first phase of this argument will occur in this chapter and its second phase–the demonstration of the logical compatibility of Jain and process metaphysics–will occur in the chapter which follows.

7.2 Charity and Coherence: Contrasting Interpretive Principles

The question now is how I propose to generate a system for the interpretation of actual religious claims from the kind of a priori argument for religious pluralism that I developed in the previous chapter. Such a system, if it is to remain pluralistic, must remain grounded in the a priori claim of the truth and salvific efficacy of many religions which the argument of that chapter tries to establish. But if it is not to degenerate into a "debilitating relativism" (Race 1982:90), if it is to provide any kind of substantive contribution to human knowledge, it must also be able to go beyond this claim by generating standards for the evaluation of particular religious claims in order to determine the precise senses in which they are true–beyond the minimum which must be affirmed–for the many prima facie incompatible religious world views about which this claim is made cannot all be validly asserted to be true in the same sense. It must therefore logically engage in a project of interreligious apologetics like that advocated by postliberal critics of religious pluralism, integrating elements of both of these approaches to the interpretation of religious claims–contemporary pluralist and postliberal–into itself. This integration is a continuation of the idea that all of the dimensions of doctrine must be incorporated into an adequate understanding of the complex character of religious belief.

Regarding the issue of interpretation, religious pluralism, as it is currently conceived, and the postliberal project of interreligious apologetics, could be seen to embody two distinct and prima facie incompatible paradigms for the interpretation of religion. Contemporary forms of religious pluralism presuppose, as discussed in the preceding chapter, an experiential-expressivist conception of doctrine. They are a prioristic positions which presuppose a particular function of doctrine which gives sense to the pluralistic claim that many apparently incompatible sets of religious claims can all be true.

The kind of postliberal apologetic and cross-cultural reading projects advocated by Griffiths and Clooney, respectively, and MacIntyre's tradition-based epistemology, concern themselves primarily with the intrasystematic and propositional, or ontological, dimensions of doctrine.[2] These projects emphasize the differences, the prima facie logical incompatibilities, among different sets of religious claims–differences in the absence of which such projects, arguably, could not function (Griffiths 1991:50). They thus provide a stark contrast with pluralist experiential-expressivism, with its emphasis on interreligious commonalities.

As recounted earlier, most of the current intra-Christian debate over the question of truth and religious plurality–as this question is conceived within that tradition–is between scholars holding either a pluralist or a postliberal view. Postliberal critiques of religious pluralism have been particularly strong, emphasizing the a priori nature of this position and its seemingly excessive reliance upon an exclusively experiential-expressivist conception of religious doctrine at the expense of other dimensions of such doctrine (Griffiths 1990a). But is either project, pluralism or postliberalism, alone adequate to the task of interpreting religious claims, of determining the truth-content of religious doctrine-expressing sentences? If the argument of the last chapter *and* current critiques of religious pluralism are both sound, aspects of both projects, pluralist and postliberal, are required, in a dialectical relation of synthesis, in order to formulate an adequate system for interpreting the claims of the world's religions; for neither is then alone adequate to this task.

As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, I believe that much of the debate over religious pluralism is really a debate over the differing conceptions of doctrine of these two approaches to interpretation, and of the differing views of the proper relationship between religion and modernity that these conceptions of doctrine express. Experiential-

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[2] Among these three, Griffiths's position in particular exhibitis this last concern most prominently (Griffiths 1991:39-44).

expressivism is the preferred model of religious liberals, who wish to insulate traditional religious claims from modern criticism. Propositionalist and intrasystematic accounts, however, are preferred by postmodern traditionalists–postliberals–who wish to confront and refute those modern claims, such as the claims of religious pluralists, which they find incompatible with the claims of their traditions.

Process thought, however, as I also mentioned earlier, occupies a peculiar kind of middle ground in this debate between modernity and tradition. It is, on the one hand, thoroughly modern inasmuch as it explicitly links itself to the Enlightenment–to the basic modern humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason–and conceives of itself as the proper issue thereof, as Whitehead's extensive treatments in *Process and Reality* of Spinoza, Descartes, Locke, Hume and Kant and the relations between his conceptual system and theirs clearly indicate (Whitehead 1978:7, 130-156), as well as Gamwell's arguments from the perspective of moral philosophy (Gamwell 1990). Whitehead speaks, in *Process and Reality*, of "how deeply the philosophy of organism [or process philosophy] is founded on seventeenth-century thought," (Whitehead 1978:130) with its emphasis on the primacy of reason, its commitment to the humanistic redemption of claims.

Whitehead completes this sentence, however, with a reference to, "how at certain critical points it [process philosophy] diverges from that thought [Enlightenment thought]"; for process metaphysics also represents, in many ways, a return to premodern modes of thought. As Whitehead, again, writes:

> The history of philosophy discloses two cosmologies which at different periods have dominated European thought, Plato's *Timaeus*, and the cosmology of the seventeenth century, whose chief authors were Galileo, Descartes, Newton, Locke. In attempting an enterprise of the same kind, it is wise to follow the clue that perhaps the true solution consists in a fusion of the two previous schemes, with modifications demanded by self-consistency and the advance of knowledge (Ibid:xiv).

Particularly with its doctrine of God, first introduced by Whitehead in *Science and the Modern World* (Whitehead 1925:173-179), process metaphysics represents a departure

from modern thought–such as modern thought's rejection following Hume and Kant, for example, of the proofs for God's existence, a rejection accepted by Hick and other liberals–and a return to the modes of thought of the classical philosophical theology of such thinkers as Anselm and Aquinas. This is most dramatically illustrated by such works of the process philosopher Charles Hartshorne as *The Divine Relativity* and *The Logic of Perfection*–works primarily on theistic arguments and the nature of God which they entail. Hartshorne's own awareness of this fact led him to coin, as a synonym for process thought, the term 'neoclassical metaphysics.'

Accordingly, one may conclude that an interpretation of religion which takes its bearings from process thought must also occupy a kind of middle position between modern and traditional thought, including elements of both liberalism and postliberalism, following Whitehead's "clue that perhaps the true solution consists in a fusion of the two previous schemes, with modifications demanded by self-consistency and the advance of knowledge." But what would such an interpretation look like?

In the previous chapter, I presented a case for a reconceived pluralistic hypothesis that is, in many ways, similar to Hick's current hypothesis. According to both of these hypotheses, one must assume that the prima facie incompatible doctrine-expressing sentences of various religious communities are all, in some sense, true when engaging in their interpretation. This truth is taken to be a necessary condition of the ability of these sentences to mediate salvific knowledge to those who believe in the propositions which they express–to, in fact, constitute such knowledge. The reconceived pluralistic hypothesis that I have proposed could therefore be designated, in this sense, a form of experiential-expressivism, its main concern being not the precise content of religious doctrine-expressing sentences, but their soteriological function–though my version is a departure from Hick's, in its assertion that doctrine-expressing sentences must express, or at least

imply, some propositional truth about the character of the divine, or cosmic, *telos* in order to be salvifically efficacious.

Such a characterization of this interpretation as experiential-expressivist would not, however, be wholly accurate, for the argument that yields my pluralistic claim is based on a propositionalist metaphysics and an intrasystematic anthropological conception of culture. But, again, the pluralistic claim which it yields is formally of the same kind as that yielded by Hick's wholly experiential-expressive conception of doctrine. Both my argument and Hick's yield the a priori claim that many (in fact, all, in the case of my argument) religions are, in some sense (an experiential-expressive sense in Hick's system, a mixed experiential-expressive, propositionalist and modified intrasystematic sense in mine), true and salvifically efficacious. They therefore exhibit the same principle of interpretation–which I shall call an interpretive principle of *charity*–according to which one must presume, a priori, that the religious claims which one encounters must necessarily express truth in some sense. Minimally, this is the sense in which they imply the basic faith at the foundation of all human activity. Maximally, it would include the explicit articulation of metaphysical principles in the form of specific religious doctrines and symbols.

I take this principle to be analogous, though not identical, to the interpretive principle of charity suggested by the philosopher, Donald Davidson, in his article entitled "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (Davidson 1991:183-198). According to Davidson's principle, we must always assume that people who speak differently from ourselves are as intelligent and inhabit the same universe of medium-sized objects as we if we are to be able to understand anything that they say. "Charity is forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters" (Ibid:197). This presupposed broad agreement is what makes meaningful disagreement, or, for that matter, any communication whatsoever, possible among human beings. I take my principle of charity to be analogous to Davidson's in the sense that, like

Davidson, I do not assume that people always agree all of the time–for me, this would amount to the claim that all religions are actually saying the same thing, the perennialist position which I criticized earlier–on the assumption, however, that people of all cultures are all more or less equally intelligent and insightful[3] and that they inhabit the same universe–a universe described with relative adequacy by the categories of process metaphysics–in which they participate in a common, collective salvific project, then their various, prima facie conflicting beliefs must be capable of coordination, in some sense, with the actual nature of things. In other words, they must all be, in some sense, true.

With the principle of charity alone, however, one is incapable of articulating in precisely *what* sense or senses a particular doctrine-expressing sentence might be true. This is why religious pluralists have typically been unable to formulate a coherent account of the truth of many religions.

Let us return, for example, to the 'pluralistic hypothesis' of John Hick, the "most articulate protagonist of the acceptance of religious pluralism as a systematic position in Christian theology as well as in the philosophy of religion" (Pannenberg 1990:97). According to Hick, the world's religions consist of "different human responses to the one divine Reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances" (Hick 1982:19). This is the primary insight, constitutive of religious pluralism, which I also seek to express with my project. The precise manner in which Hick reconciles the fact of religious diversity with his affirmation of a common transcendent Reality to which the religions are responses, though, is by emphasizing the experiential-expressive function of religious beliefs and practices, the

[3] That is, that intelligence and insight are variables independent of participation in any particular cultural system. See Tanner 1997:23: "If cultural context was now the explanation for differences among peoples, biological capacities would have to be uniform and insufficient of themselves to determine values, customs and beliefs. Innate intellectual capacities would also have to be much the same among every people but the direction and results of their exercise fundamentally conditioned by particular cultures."

manner in which these form an epistemic lens through which one views reality, and by which, consequently, one's character is formed, at the expense of the truth-expressive, cognitive and intrasystematic functions of these beliefs and practices (Hick 1989:140-142). He then postulates his pluralistic hypothesis, according to which the common reality to which the religions are responses is, in the manner of Immanuel Kant's postulated *noumena*, strictly unknowable with regard to its true nature. It can only be said to serve as the "noumenal ground" for the "phenomena" actually experienced by religious persons by means of their respective cognitive filters (Ibid:233-251).

Because of the particular way in which it is formulated, this hypothesis robs religious doctrine-expressing sentences of what, to all appearances, has traditionally been their primary function: to convey propositional truth. This, of course, is to deny neither the fact nor the importance of the experiential-expressive function of religious belief and practice, which I also affirm. Apart from his assertion of the unknowability of the true character of the Real *an sich*, I take Hick's phenomenological account of religious experience to be, in many ways, quite sound and insightful, and, in fact, to constitute an expression in philosophical language of the presuppositions of the phenomenological project of the history of religions, particularly as this is found in the works of Mircea Eliade, whom Hick quotes extensively. But, like Kant's transcendental idealism, upon which it is modeled, Hick's hypothesis, if true, effectively ends the project of speculative philosophy, which becomes the a priori futile effort to know the unknowable. There is, furthermore, an ad hoc quality to Hick's metaphysical assertions, his assertions about the ultimate character of the Real. They are made not on the basis of reflection on the necessary character of human experience, but as a relatively easy solution to the problem of reconciling an enormous set of prima facie conflicting truth claims: their rendition as irrelevant, as truth claims, to the all-important process of salvation, which they facilitate not by mediating any important metaphysical truths to their believers, but only by molding their

character in such a way as to transform them from ‘ego-centered’ to ‘Reality-centered’ agents–a process never explained with any great specificity. Finally, the pluralistic hypothesis is only able to articulate one half of the pluralistic position as I have been characterizing it in this paper–that there are many *true* and salvifically efficacious religions. Hick’s position finally amounts to the claim that there are many salvifically efficacious religions, but that the question of truth (in a more conventional, propositional sense) is irrelevant, so long as salvation is accomplished (Ibid:343-376).

This analysis of Hick’s thought, which I take to be the most thoroughly systematic and consistent articulation available of an interpretive principle of charity applied to the world’s religions, should be sufficient to demonstrate that, in order to render some account of the sense in which the prima facie incompatible claims of many religions can be said to be true, it is necessary to invoke another principle, besides that of charity, to supplement one’s interpretive project. I call this the interpretive principle of *coherence*.

As my analysis of Hick’s hypothesis hopefully demonstrates, the application of a principle of charity, in the absence of a principle of coherence, results in the position of religious pluralism as it currently stands, embodied, in its most systematic form, in Hick’s work. This position is clearly inadequate to the task of interpreting religious claims, due to its inability to account for what it actually means–in an ontological sense–for many, apparently incompatible religious doctrinal claims to be true. It tells us nothing, finally, about the nature of the ultimately Real; for it claims that nothing can be said about It, except for the purely formal claim that It is the salvific ground of all genuine religious experience–and the only criteria offered for evaluating the genuineness of religious experience are insufficient to their task (Griffiths 1991:48,50; Ogden 1992a:67). Finally, such a position ends up making the uncomfortably imperialistic-sounding claim that when, throughout history, the representative intellectuals of the world’s religious communities believed that the substantive (as opposed to the purely formal) doctrinal claims about the ultimate nature

of reality which they articulated were, in fact, describing the ultimate nature of reality, they were all deluding themselves.

This does not, however, mean that the principle of charity is entirely without foundation or merit. The argument of the previous chapter was, in fact, designed to demonstrate the possibility that it articulates a necessary truth, an entailment of the metaphysical character of the universe and the epistemic situation of humanity. What we have seen, however, is that, in the absence of a principle of coherence, it is inadequate to the task of determining the *propositional* truth-value of particular religious claims.

The principle of coherence, on the other hand, applied in the absence of the principle of charity, results in the traditional apologetic project. This project, in its current form, must also, like contemporary religious pluralism, finally be rejected as an option fully adequate to the task of interpreting doctrine-expressing sentences, due precisely to its lack of recognition of the need for a principle of charity: the need demonstrated by the argument of the preceding chapter, according to which, given the culturally conditioned relativity of religious belief and the character of both God and salvation which the argument presupposes, the evaluation of doctrine-expressing sentences as either *absolutely* true or false could not possibly be adequate to the reality of either plurality itself–conceived as an inherently interesting fact with possible metaphysical implications–or to the universal saving activity of God. The evaluation of religious claims cannot, therefore, be, as advocates of interreligious apologetics presume, as straightforward a matter as determining their simple truth or falsity in terms of their coherence or incoherence with some predetermined set of criteria. It must, rather, be the more complex hermeneutical process of plumbing their depths for the primordial intuitions into the nature of reality which they necessarily, if my argument is correct, express, even if only implicitly.

Again, however, as with the principle of charity, this criticism is not intended to suggest a complete rejection of the principle of coherence. Interpretation is a necessity if

the truth is to be known, and some criteria of evaluation are necessary if the question of truth and religious plurality is to be addressed in an adequate fashion.

The question, of course, which a pluralistic system must address if it seeks to engage in a substantive fashion with the claims of actual religious communities is the same as that faced by the apologetic project: What criteria are to be used in determining coherence? What is 'coherence' to mean in this system? Clearly it cannot mean adherence to the norms of a particular *religious* perspective; for this would render a pluralistic interpretation ultimately identical with the apologetic project. It would entail the loss of the principle of charity, unless this religious perspective could itself be shown to entail such an interpretive principle. It is, of course, entirely possible that such religious perspectives exist, perspectives which entail the universality of a primordial salvific knowledge or revelation.[4] It is, in fact, the claim of contemporary religious pluralists that Christianity, properly understood, constitutes just such a perspective. But, as discussed in the previous chapter, the adoption of one of the historical religions as the standard of coherence for the interpretation of religious claims necessarily involves epistemic circularity. The reply to this charge, of course, was that the application of *any* norm–whether it be taken from religion or from philosophy–would necessarily involve such circularity, and that the charge of circularity itself must be made from some particular perspective from which such circularity is negatively evaluated, and is therefore, itself, subject to its own charge.

This problem is, of course, analogous to that faced by William Alston in *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*,[5] in which he argues that all doxastic

[4] Empirically, such perspectives certainly exist, in a wide variety of traditions, from the Baha'i Faith to the Western tradition of natural theology, to the Jain doctrine of the inherent luminosity of the soul (*jīva*), to the Buddhist doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha* (usually translated, 'Buddha Nature'), to the *Sāṃkhya* and *Yoga* doctrines of the already-liberated state of the *puruṣa*, or person.

[5] This analogy was pointed out to me by Griffiths (personal communication).

practices are infected by epistemic circularity, and that, therefore, the charge of secularists that Christians are not justified in trusting their putative perceptions of God because these perceptions occur within the context of epistemically circular doxastic practices is unwarranted, for common sense-experience is similarly circular (Alston 1991). Alston acknowledges that the most serious objection facing his claim that Christians are warranted in trusting their religious experiences is the fact that, if his argument is valid, the members of other religious communities, holding beliefs which may be prima facie incompatible with those of Christians, are also similarly justified in trusting their experiences (Ibid:255-285). With regard to the possibility of a pluralistic interpretation of religious experience, he even goes so far as to say "that Hick's position has much to be said for it as an attempt to come to grips with the persistent fact of religious pluralism [sic], without giving up the idea that religious experience, thought, and activity involve a genuine contact with a transcendent reality" (Ibid:265). He finally, however, rejects this option, characterizing it–accurately I think–"as a proposal for a reconception of religious doxastic practices, rather than as a description and evaluation of those practices as they are," (Ibid) and concludes that religious persons generally, including Christians, are justified in persisting in those doxastic practices which they find to be reliable, without reinterpreting their experiences in the radical manner that a pluralistic interpretation entails, simply on the basis of the existence of a plurality of such prima facie incompatible practices.

But while such a conclusion may be comforting to someone firmly grounded in a particular religious tradition and doxastic practice, it is clearly inadequate for one faced with the question of truth and religious plurality–of which, if any, particular religious doxastic practice is the right one. If, however, Alston's argument is correct–and I think that it is–that no (wholly) non-epistemically circular 'neutral ground' exists for resolving this question, then how is one to choose a ground on which to stand, from which to evaluate particular religious claims?

This is essentially the same problem that was raised in the previous chapter, in the form of the question of which metaphysical system one should employ as the basis for affirming the fundamental claim of religious pluralism. I opted, in that chapter, for Whitehead's system of process metaphysics on the basis of several factors. Conceding the point that no wholly non-circular, objective standpoint existed from which this claim could be made, it did seem to me that–contrary to MacIntyre's assertion that the 'tradition' of liberalism is the strongest candidate for such a position available[6]–process metaphysics, as a contemporary continuation of the classical tradition of philosophical theology, offered a worldview both sufficiently comprehensive in its scope and substantive in its metaphysical claims–as well as taking for its basis the authority of reason reflecting on experience, rather than that of a particular historical tradition–to provide the closest humanly possible thing to a tradition-neutral basis for religious pluralism available–completing, according to Gamwell, the modern project in ways in which more mainstream modern philosophies have been found wanting.

That the problem of epistemic circularity is not thereby altogether circumvented (because it cannot be) is a point I would readily concede; for it is conceded by the very system of thought I have adopted. As Whitehead explains the determinative power of language, and human limitation generally, upon philosophical reflection and expression:

> Philosophers can never hope finally to formulate these metaphysical first principles. Weakness of insight and deficiencies of language stand in the way inexorably. Words and phrases must be stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage; and however such elements of language be stabilized as technicalities, they

[6] MacIntyre 1988:346: "From the fact that liberalism does not provide a neutral tradition-independent ground from which a verdict may be passed upon the rival claims of conflicting traditions…it does not of course follow that there is no such neutral ground. And it is clear that there can be no sound *a priori* argument to demonstrate that such is impossible. What is equally clear, however, is that liberalism is by far the strongest claimant to provide such a ground which has so far appeared in human history or which is likely to appear in the foreseeable future. That liberalism fails in this respect, therefore, provides the strongest reason that we can actually have for asserting that there is no such neutral ground…"

> remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap.…There is no first principle which is itself unknowable, not to be captured by a flash of insight. But, putting aside the difficulties of language, deficiency in imaginative penetration forbids progress in any form other than that of an asymptotic approach to a scheme of principles, only definable in terms of the ideal which they should satisfy (Whitehead 1978:4).

Process thought, however, seems to offer the best available candidate for an underlying conceptual structure with which one can tie together the various intuitions and insights found in the plurality of religious traditions into a single coherent system of belief, something like Davidson's presupposed ground of agreement underlying all human communication, or Walter Benjamin's conception of a "pure language" underlying all particular languages (Benjamin 1992:76). It is also particularly congenial to the kind of worldview underlying Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, its ability to articulate this world view in a fashion more consistent than that attempted by Hick himself. If one wished, as I did, to develop a metaphysically realist alternative to Hick's Kantian pluralistic hypothesis, Whitehead and Hartshorne's account of God as possessed of an eternal, impersonal, conceptual pole and a dynamic, relational, personal pole seemed to be the perfect way to ground the phenomena Hick describes as the *personae* and the *impersonae* of the Real (Hick 1989:252-296).

Given these various strengths of process metaphysics, I suggest relative conformity to the system of the universe as this is conceived within process metaphysics as the ultimate test of coherence in the version of religious pluralism proposed in this dissertation. This is also consistent with the fact that it was from process metaphysics, in conjunction with an anthropological account of culture, that the fundamental claim of religious pluralism was deduced in the preceding chapter. That argument was based on the conditional claim of the truth of process metaphysics: *If* Whitehead's metaphysical system, or at least my reading of it, is a relatively adequate account of the nature of reality, and *if* the culturally constituted epistemology I employed in conjunction with it was also relatively adequate and consistent with process thought, then the claim that all religions are, in some sense, true, follows. In

proposing relative conformity to Whitehead's metaphysical system as the standard of coherence in the interpretive system appropriate to this reconstructed version of religious pluralism I am thereby continuing the 'thought experiment' of the preceding chapter. Such relative conformity will thus constitute the possibility of truth in this interpretive scheme.

7.3 The Jain Philosophy of Relativity: The Logical Synthesis of Charity and Coherence

The taking of process philosophy as the normative element in the interpretation of religious doctrine-expressing sentences, of course, raises a number of questions, not the least of these being the question, discussed above, of the basis for choosing this system as one's norm of coherence. It could lead one to ask, first of all, "How is this system of interpretation then different from other process polemics, such as that of Charles Hartshorne, or L.V. Rajagopal,[7] which evaluate concepts not in full conformity with process philosophy, after the manner of the logicians that Whitehead derides, as absolutely false?" The difference, of course, lies with this system of interpretation's synthesis of coherence with process philosophy with the interpretive principle of charity: the principle that religious doctrine-expressing sentences as such must be presupposed, a priori, to be, in some sense, expressive of truth, on the basis of the argument presented in chapter three.

But how, precisely, does this synthesis of charity and coherence work? How does one utilize coherence with process philosophy as a normative standard and yet evaluate claims that are prima facie incompatible with process philosophy as, in some sense, true? The answer lies with the utilization of process philosophy not as an *absolute* normative standard–in the manner of traditional apologetic projects–but as a conceptual map or coordinate system of the universe upon which prima facie contradictory points of view may be plotted and the extent to which they express truth conveyed. The synthesis of the

[7] Rajagopal 1993. This text presents a strongly polemical critique of all three of the major schools of Vedanta–Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita–from the perspective of process philosophy.

principles of charity and coherence, in other words, yields an interpretive principle of *relativity*, of doctrine-expressing sentences as expressive of partial truth and partial falsehood, rather than their ever being absolutely true or false. The senses in which they can be seen as true shall be constituted by the extent to which they can be rendered coherent with some element of process philosophy, the senses in which they can be seen as false shall be constituted by the extent to which they cannot, and the 'openness' of the system shall consist of the degree to which this coherence is indeterminate.

What this means, of course, is that this pluralistic interpretation of religion inevitably takes on the logical structure of an *inclusivism*. The only other alternative for religious pluralists is for their position to become the kind of relativism from which they generally, and rightly, wish to distance themselves.

The problem with turning pluralism into an inclusivism for the sake of coherence is the danger of thereby abandoning the principle of charity. This is the fear of religious pluralists, and the ethical reason for the fact that, as Griffiths charges (Griffiths 1991:50), they tend to avoid presenting arguments for their position as a coherent system–the kind of system that I am trying to develop in this dissertation. This is also the reason this system will very likely be rejected by many religious pluralists. As Harry Wells of Humboldt University wrote in response to a preliminary version of this system which I presented at the American Academy of Religion in 1997, under the title "Complex Ultimates: The Three-Bodied Buddha, the Two-Natured Brahman, and the Dipolar God":

> …[A] pluralist chooses not to posit a notion of an Absolute as Hick, and I would argue Long, and even most process philosophy, does. It is not that there is no conviction that this utter interdependency [which process philosophy, and Wells, citing Panikkar and Nāgārjuna, claims to be the fundamental character of reality] is ultimately a unified one, but to posit any notion of it does something that we cannot do. To say that the various religious insights are angles or perspectives on reality is to imply, by that language, having circumscribed that reality in such a way as to know that…[T]o speak of a true perspectivism means the assumption of an Absolute at which one is looking (Wells [1997]).

But how, one might reply to this objection, does a position which rejects all absolutes avoid becoming an incoherent relativism? According to Wells, whom I would categorize as a dialogical or attitudinal pluralist, this is not an issue; for, like many religious pluralists, his main interest is less in developing religious pluralism as a total worldview than in promoting interreligious dialogue. A priori assumptions, of the kind which Hick and I make, of a 'higher' perspective from which we may make claims about the relative adequacy or the senses of the truth-expression of the claims of other religious communities are, on this view, inappropriate for dialogue. "From the framework of a [dialogical] pluralist, such assumption is a colonization of another, a subtle form of violence.…That is why pluralism is more a stance, a mode of encounter, than a speculative metaphysics."

The question this raises, of course, is whether it is at all possible for *anyone* with substantive normative commitments to engage in nonviolent dialogue as Wells conceives of it. A traditional Christian, it seems, so long as s/he remains such, must necessarily be committed to the view that whatever is true or salvific in the religions of others must have its foundation in Christ–even if this violates the self-understanding of those others. Similarly, a Buddhist must find all truth in other religions to be in some way compatible with the teachings of the Buddha–and so forth, for all religions. Granted, one may be open to modifying one's views radically, perhaps even to the point of conversion, when one embarks upon interreligious dialogue. But I must disagree with the claim that one must do away with all such a priori assumptions at the outset of such dialogue. One's perceptions of the religiously other are inextricably bound up with one's other normative commitments– including those commitments which may lead one to hunger and thirst for justice, or to devote one's life to open and mutually respectful interreligious dialogue. To expect one to shelve such commitments at the outset of dialogue seems, itself, to be a form of violence, as well as to contradict the 'rules of dialogue,' offered by such dialogical pluralists as Panikkar, according to which one must come to the dialogue table with one's beliefs fully intact, in

order to allow the other to encounter *them*. It also makes one wonder how interesting such a dialogue, in which normative commitments and their entailments are left at the door, could possibly be, were it ever to occur. Then there is also, of course, the problem of self-referential incoherence which such a position raises–for is not the claim that normative claims ought not to be made itself a normative claim?

I therefore disagree with the view that one cannot bring prior commitments about the ultimate character of reality, or the implications which those commitments may have for what one is willing to accept as true or false in the views of others, to a nonviolent or open-minded dialogue with those others. What nonviolence, or interpretive charity, consists of, on my understanding, is a prior commitment to the view that the claims of others, however outlandish, obviously wrong (from one's current standpoint), or even incomprehensible they may appear at first sight, *necessarily*, because of the universal salvific will of God and the way that this will operates through human cultures, contain some truth, bearing some imprint of the divine persuasion which acted upon those who developed them. But this belief is rooted in a specific metaphysical conception of reality with which those others may disagree–though, if it is true, it necessarily entails that *their* beliefs have some truth, even if the sense this is given is not one which they would easily recognize or accept.

As far as Wells' valid concern that such an approach presupposes that one already knows the *whole* truth–arguably an arrogant, and perhaps even a violent, assumption in the context of dialogue–process metaphysics (or at least Whitehead's original conception of it), as I have already mentioned, contains within itself a self-awareness that it is not–as a human linguistic construction–the final word in the articulation of first principles. One of the very points of dialogue, of applying the pluralistic vision which takes process thought as its basis, is to enrich this system of thought with concrete insights for which it provides

only the bare, skeletal, abstract framework–to transform process philosophy through the process of interpretive engagement, or dialogue, with the views of others.[8]

The kind of interpretive principle of relativity, or universalist *metaphysical* inclusivism, which I am proposing, as well as the conception of interpretive charity, or nonviolence, which it involves, is directly modeled upon the traditional Jain conception of the conditional truth of all claims. According to the Jain doctrine of *syādvāda*–literally, the 'maybe doctrine,' though more helpfully, the 'doctrine of conditional predication,'–all claims are, in some sense, true, depending upon the perspective from which they are made. This is not a relativ*ism*, but a doctrine of *relativity*–in the sense that I am trying to give this word as implying gradations of truth for claims *relative to* a given system of (provisionally) absolute claims in terms of which all claims can be shown to make some sense.

The Jains, of course, derive the senses in which various claims can be said to be true from their own system of doctrine, which they take to be absolutely true. The possible degrees of truth-expression for any given claim, are according to *syādvāda*, seven in number–hence the alternate term, *saptabhaṅginaya*, or 'sevenfold method,' for this doctrine. These possible truth-values, as we saw earlier, are the following:

1. In one sense (*syāt*), claim C is certainly (*eva*) true.
2. In another sense (*syāt*), claim C is certainly (*eva*) false.
3. In another sense (*syāt*), claim C is certainly (*eva*) both true and false.
4. In another sense (*syāt*), the truth of claim C is certainly (*eva*) inexpressible.
5. In another sense (*syāt*), claim C is certainly (*eva*) both true and its truth is inexpressible.
6. In another sense (*syāt*), claim C is certainly (*eva*) both false and its truth is inexpressible.
7. In another sense (*syāt*), claim C is certainly (*eva*) true, false, and its truth is inexpressible.

[8] As Frank Reynolds once wittily characterized this particular aspect of my project, "Process is in process." Personal communication.

If these seven logical possibilities are transferred to an interpretive system taking process philosophy, rather than Jain doctrine, as its basis and asserting that all claims are, in some sense, true, seven similar possible combinations of truth and falsity for a given doctrine-expressing sentence, S, can be generated for such an interpretive scheme:

1. In the sense or senses in which S can be correlated with process philosophy, S may be true.

2. In the sense or senses in which S cannot be correlated with process philosophy (that is, inasmuch as it involves a denial of some aspect of process philosophy), S may be false.

3. Inasmuch as S is both correlatable and not correlatable with process philosophy, it may be both true and false.

4. Inasmuch as the truth of S cannot be determined by correspondence with process philosophy, the truth of S may be inexpressible.

5. In the senses in which S is both correlatable with and incapable of having its truth determined by correspondence with process philosophy, S may be true and its truth may be inexpressible.

6. In the senses in which S is both not correlatable with and incapable of having its truth determined by correspondence with process philosophy, S may not be true and its truth may be inexpressible.

7. In the senses in which S is correlatable, not correlatable and incapable of having \its truth determined by correspondence with process philosophy, S may be true, not true and its truth may be inexpressible.

These seven statements exhaust the possible senses in which the truth of a given doctrine-expressing sentence, S, can be articulated using the principles of charity and coherence with process philosophy.

This articulation of possible truth-values, modeled upon that of Jainism, is, I think, quite compatible with process thought. The fourth possibility–that the truth of a doctrine-expressing sentence might not be capable of determination by means of correlation with some element of process philosophy–could be seen as a function of the fact, expressed by Whitehead, that process philosophy, as a human linguistic construct, cannot, by definition, be the final word in the articulation of metaphysical truth (Whitehead 1978:4). To assume

that it might be so would be to assume an attitude which Whitehead himself found to be inappropriate to the project of determining truth–an attitude of "dogmatic certainty" which he took to be "an exhibition of folly" (Ibid:xiv).

This recognition also opens up the possibility that process philosophy could, itself, be continually modified in light of the insights articulated in the various doctrine-expressing sentences that it is utilized to examine. To correlate a particular religious concept with the system of process metaphysics is not necessarily to say that this concept must already be found explicitly formulated within this system. This, indeed, would render this interpretive method a *closed* system, affirming, in the manner of many traditional inclusivisms, that all of the significant truths of divine and human existence are already to be found explicitly formulated in process metaphysics. A wide variety of conceptions of the afterlife, for example, are logically compatible with process metaphysics. Correlation with process metaphysics will be a matter of specifiying in what senses these various conceptions can all be logically affirmed to be true. All of these specific conceptions can then be incorporated into the philosophical matrix or skeletal conceptual framework provided by process metaphysics. This is the pluralistic "openness" of this system of interpretation. A concept will only be regarded as false inasmuch as it explicitly *denies* or *excludes* some facet of the truth affirmed by process metaphysics.

A similar conclusion, with regard to the general relevance of religious truth to philosophy, is expressed by Schubert Ogden when he writes that, "[O]ne must allow that the truth in any philosophy not only has to confirm that in any religion, but also has to be confirmed by it" (Ogden 1992a:72). This can be seen as an extension of the principle of charity beyond the realm of abstract conceptual thought–of philosophy–to the more concrete realm of religious belief and practice.

7.4 Whitehead's Pluralistic Attitude

One might ask if there are sufficient warrants within process philosophy itself, as articulated by Whitehead, for deploying it in a pluralistic project of this nature. I believe there are indications in Whitehead's writings that he conceived of the possibility of his system being so deployed, or at least that such a deployment is not incompatible with it.

Whitehead holds a progressive view of philosophy, according to which all philosophies express some degree of truth, reflective of some insight into the nature of the cosmic system, awaiting later thinkers to verify that truth and to demonstrate its place in the overall scheme of things–a process of progressive refinement that, like the process of the universe itself (according to this metaphysic), is neverending:

> In its turn every philosophy will suffer a deposition. But the bundle of philosophic systems expresses a variety of general truths about the universe, awaiting coordination and assignment of their various spheres of validity. Such progress in coordination is provided by the advance of philosophy; and in this sense philosophy has advanced from Plato onwards (Whitehead 1978:7).

Whitehead himself engages in such "coordination and assignment" to "various spheres of validity" with respect to those philosophers with whose philosophical positions he compares his own throughout his account of the development of Western philosophy (Ibid:68-77, 130-156), rejecting those aspects of various thinkers' views that conflict with his own coherent account of the universe, but commending those fundamental insights that are consistent with–and, indeed, underly–his "philosophy of organism," and giving credit for these insights where it is due:

> A more detailed discussion of Descartes, Locke, and Hume…may make plain how deeply the philosophy of organism is founded on seventeenth-century thought and how at certain critical points it diverges from that thought.…The scheme of interpretation here adopted can claim for each of its main positions the express authority of one, or the other, of some supreme master of thought–Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant. But ultimately nothing rests on authority; the final court of appeal is intrinsic reasonableness (Ibid:198, 39).

The 'grand picture' which one ultimately can perceive in Whitehead's depiction of the positions of other philosophers throughout history–particularly in *Adventures of Ideas,*

his account of the history of Western philosophy–is of these positions as expressive of some general truths about the nature of the cosmos, arrived at through culturally specific historical processes, but finally coherent when viewed within the larger framework of Whitehead's own instrument of understanding–process philosophy. One may call this account charitable because it does not deny that, if the cosmos does exhibit a certain necessary structure, and if we assume human beings are all more or less equally intelligent and insightful in every historical epoch and cultural location, then it would be reasonable to expect some general truths about the necessary structure of the cosmos to have been discovered in every place and time in which human beings have engaged in contemplation of the nature of their experience. And if the nature of philosophy *is* progressive, and if process philosophy does, indeed, articulate the most coherent, logical and adequate–though not, of course, final–account of the necessary character of the cosmos currently available to human beings, then one may conclude that it is possible to engage in the experiment of evaluating all previous philosophical expressions in terms of this philosophy, and to assign these expressions their proper sphere of validity within its 'categoreal scheme.'

Finally, and most decisively for the question of religious pluralism, in *Science and the Modern World*, in which he first introduces his metaphysical concept of God, Whitehead, in a passage strongly reminiscent of Hick (and Haribhadra), explicitly identifies God with the ultimate reality toward which all religions point:

> What further can be known about God [beyond purely abstract metaphysical speculation] must be sought in the region of particular experiences, and therefore rests on an empirical basis. In respect to the interpretation of these experiences, mankind have differed profoundly. He has been named respectively, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, Order of Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being, Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the experiences of those who have used it (Whitehead 1925:178-179).

This passage also indicates strong reasons from within process thought to develop an interpretive system, taking process as its metaphysical basis, for application to the actual claims of historical religious communities. As we have already seen religion, for

Whitehead, represents something 'between' abstract, speculative philosophy and the more specialized, concrete activities of humanity (Whitehead 1926:20-21). Extrapolating from this conception of the relationship between metaphysics and religion, the relationship that I am proposing here, within this interpretive system, between process philosophy and the claims of the world's religions is a relationship between abstract and concrete, not unlike the relationship Hegel conceived between his "concept of religion" and the actual, "determinate religions" of the world (Hegel (Hodgson trans.) 1988).

The important difference between the system proposed here and Hegel's system is that Hegel's system represents what Wilhelm Halbfass calls a "vertical" inclusivism, whereas this system represents a "horizontally coordinating inclusivism" (Halbfass 1988:414). The proposal here is not to depict process metaphysics as the ultimate truth, toward which all religions ultimately point–as Hegel conceived of his own system, and as Vedāntic Hindus and Mādhyamika Buddhists, according to Halbfass, have conceived of theirs–but, after the manner of the Jains, as the metaphysical background against which all religious experiences have, if this metaphysic is true, necessarily occurred. In not rejecting other views as completely false, but instead claiming, a priori, that they must be, in some sense, true, the Jains exemplify what I mean by an interpretive principle of charity. In not lapsing into relativism, but trying to coordinate the truths of others with their own normative convictions, the Jains exemplify the interpretive principle of coherence. They affirm the *relative* truth of all claims. This is what I mean by an interpretive principle of relativity applied to religious plurality. As Halbfass affirms, inclusivism is the necessary outcome of a synthesis of interpretive principles of charity and coherence, or as he calls them, "tolerance" and "absolutism" (Ibid:416).

The question, however, may remain of whether such an inclusivist approach, even a 'horizontally coordinating' one, which does not seek to hierarchize the religions, but rather sees all of their claims as participating, in different senses, in the total truth, of which one's

own system is an approximation, is truly charitable or nonviolent; for it will inevitably involve the distortion of those claims, at least from the perspective of those who hold them in an absolutist or exclusivist manner. The Jain doctrines of relativity were initially drawn to my attention by B.K. Matilal's account of these doctrines as expressive of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*,' or nonviolence extended into the sphere of philosophical debate (Matilal 1990:313-314). But is this account of these doctrines accurate? Is it adequate?

7.5 Conclusion: The Synthesis of Jain and Process Metaphysics as the Logical Basis for a Pluralistic Interpretation of Religion

The conclusion of my analysis, in an earlier chapter, of this issue was that the Jain doctrines of relativity were formulated neither as an expression of 'intellectual *ahiṃsā*,' nor as a rhetorical strategy of philosophical assimilation, but as entailments of the fundamental account of reality offered by the Jain tradition put to both creative uses at various times by the representative intellectuals of this tradition in response to the situation of religious and philosophical plurality in which they found themselves. They could, however, be logically deployed to articulate an ethic of 'toleration,' or, to use the terminology developed in this chapter, an interpretive principle of charity; for they have, in fact, been so deployed by some Jain intellectuals, both premodern and contemporary, and their internal logic, I believe, lends them to such a task. These doctrines could conceivably constitute the structural foundation for a 'relational' or 'organic' religious pluralism, an alternative to current pluralisms which suffer from the various conceptual problems that have already been discussed at some length. Such an incorporation of concepts from Jain philosophy into a pluralistic interpretation of religion can also contribute to the project of making religious pluralism 'more pluralistic,' which S. Mark Heim advocates, rather than absolutely dependent upon the categories of Western thought. As Heim writes:

> One would suppose that the pluralistic ranks would be enriched by entries that took as central categories for defining and interpreting religions some which were culturally shaped by forces other than Christianity and the Enlightenment, and which contrast with the accepted norms of Western modernity. This would give us some

> examples of how the faiths of pluralists and our own current cultural norms would look if recast to count as 'true religion' on someone else's terms, to go with these numerous examples of how the other traditions are recast to count as true religion on pluralistic terms (Heim 1995:121-122).

It is by this aim that my investigation of these doctrines has largely been inspired.

In the next chapter I shall explore the logical compatibility of these doctrines with process metaphysics, with the aim in mind of synthesizing these two systems of thought into a single, internally coherent, pluralistic 'open system' for the interpretation of religious claims, an 'organic universalism,' or 'universalist inclusivism.'

Chapter 8

MULTIPLE ASPECTS AND ULTIMATE NOTIONS

A Synthesis of Jain and Process Metaphysics

The task of reason is to fathom the deeper depths of the many-sidedness of things.

Alfred North Whitehead
(*Process and Reality*)

8.1 The Point of the Synthetic Exercise

If the argument of the preceding chapter is correct, then the approach to the interpretation of the explicit claims of actual religious communities–or, for that matter, of all truth-claims–which is appropriate to the pluralistic understanding of religion which I deduced from Whitehead's metaphysical system two chapters ago is essentially that articulated in the Jain doctrine of conditional predication, or *syādvāda*, according to which all claims have seven possible truth-values, each of which is enunciated in one of the seven "limbs" of the sevenfold method (*saptabhaṅginaya*) which *syādvāda* entails.

My argument in the last chapter, essentially, was that the truth of the pluralistic conclusion–that all religions are, at least in an implicit sense, true–which I take process metaphysics to entail implies the need for an interpretive principle of *relativity* if one wishes to interpret and evaluate the explicit claims of actual religious communities, to determine the specific senses in and the degrees to which their particular claims may be true. I conceived of this interpretive principle of relativity as a synthesis of two other interpretive principles–a principle of *charity* and a principle of *coherence*–that I found to be individually inadequate to the task of pluralistic interpretation.

The interpretive principle of charity, based on an exclusively experiential-expressive conception of doctrine, I found to be essentially the same as that employed in contemporary pluralistic interpretations of religion, according to which religious claims generally, even if prima facie incompatible, must be regarded as true because of their importance in the salvific transformation of those who give assent to them. This interpretive principle I found, though based on a fundamentally correct intuition–the same as that for which I argued in my sixth chapter–to be inadequate as a *total* interpretation of religious claims; for it neglected the level of propositional truth, rendering questions about the true character of ultimate reality in a literal, cognitive sense wholly unanswerable. The inadequacies of this interpretive principle I found to be essentially those of contemporary religious pluralism.

The interpretive principle of coherence, based exclusively on propositionalist and intrasystematic conceptions of doctrine, I found to be essentially the same as that employed by contemporary critics of religious pluralism, particularly those of a 'postliberal' or neo-traditionalist persuasion. This interpretive principle, according to which religious claims are to be evaluated–in terms of their logical coherence, appropriateness to a particular tradition, or both–as either 'true' or 'false' I found to be similarly inadequate; for it neglected the importance of the salvific, experiential-expressive dimension of religious belief, opening up the possibility that vast numbers of human beings give assent to religious beliefs which are simply false, those human beings therefore, possibly, being excluded from the possibility of salvation–a conclusion incompatible with a coherent theistic metaphysics–a metaphysics which affirms the universality of the divine salvific will, the all-inclusive saving love of God–and a coherent conception of human freedom.

The alternative principle for which I argued involved the integration of these two interpretive principles into an interpretive principle of *relativity*, which would be charitable in the sense that it would operate from the a priori presupposition (argued for on the basis of Whitehead's metaphysics in chapter six) that all religious claims must, in some sense, be

true, but which would also be logically coherent inasmuch as it would insist that the sense or senses in which the possible truth of such claims can be affirmed must be capable of specification in terms of the logical compatibility or correlation of those claims with process metaphysics. In its logical structure, I argued, this interpretive principle of relativity was essentially the same as that articulated by *syādvāda*, and that religious claims may be seen as true (inasmuch as they can be shown to be compatible with process metaphysics), false (inasmuch as they explicitly deny some aspect of process metaphysics), both true and false, of inexpressible truth-value (inasmuch as their correspondence or non-correspondence with process metaphysics may be indeterminate), true and of inexpressible truth-value, false and of inexpressible truth-value, or both true and false and of inexpressible truth-value.

As I hope I showed in chapter five, the Jain doctrines of relativity, including *syādvāda*, arise as logical entailments of the total Jain worldview. Specifically, they arise from the Jain conception of the soul–and ultimately, of all actual entities–as characterized by "emergence, perishing, and duration" (*Tattvārtha Sūtra* 5:29). The Jain approach to conceptual plurality which these doctrines articulate is therefore inextricably bound up with a particular metaphysic which affirms the complex (*anekānta*) nature of all entities and an epistemology which affirms the existence of multiple partially valid perspectives (*naya*s) on the basis of which truth-claims can be made.

The question that arises, then, is whether the Jain approach to conceptual plurality can be appropriated from a Whiteheadian perspective as the approach proper to the interpretation of prima facie incompatible religious claims using the interpretive principle of relativity that I have just described. It would seem, prima facie, that they can–for, if the claims of the preceding chapter are true, if my characterization of the interpretive principles appropriate to a religious pluralism based on process metaphysics is a correct one (and I shall assume that my argument works and that it is), then it seems that *syādvāda*, or

something very much like it, is logically entailed by this metaphysical system, at least on the reading of it that I have used in my argument for religious pluralism.

In fact, there seems to be no reason, in principle, why two different conceptual systems could not possibly arrive at the same conclusions, though using somewhat different arguments and logic–the conclusion being, in this case, that a "horizonally coordinating inclusivism," in which one takes one's own philosophical system to constitute a panoramic perspective which includes all others, is the interpretive approach most appropriate to the evaluation of a plurality of other perspectives (Halbfass 1988:414).

The problem, however, is that if these two conceptual systems are *very* different–that is, if they are logically incompatible–then even if the conclusion they have both reached is correct, at least one of them must have arrived at it through faulty reasoning; for one cannot arrive at a true conclusion from false premises if one's logic is sound. If two different conceptual systems, *A* and *B*, arrive at the same conclusion through logical argument, then, assuming that this conclusion is true, there are four possibilities:

1. One of the two systems, *A*, is a true system and the other, *B*, is false, and the true system, *A*, arrived at the true conclusion through sound reasoning and the false system, *B*, arrived at the true conclusion due to logical error.

2. *B* is true and *A* is false, and *B* arrived at the true conclusion through sound reasoning and *A* arrived at it through logical error.

3. *A* and *B* are both true, and both arrived at the true conclusion through sound reasoning.

4. *A* and *B* are both false, and both arrived at the truth due to logical error.

My view is that, with respect to Jain and process metaphysics and the conclusion that an interpretive principle of relativity is the most appropriate evaluative approach to take to a plurality of views, that the third possibility is, in fact, the case: that Jain and process metaphysics are both true and that they have both arrived at the true conclusion–the appropriateness of an interpretive principle of relativity–through sound reasoning.

If both of these conceptual systems are true, this, of course, means that they are also logically compatible, that the claims of both of these systems can coherently be held to be true at the same time. This is precisely what I intend to argue in this chapter. I intend, moreover, as one may recall from earlier chapters, to bring these two systems of thought together into a third, new system–a synthesis–which shall form the logical basis for the reconceived religious pluralism which it is my aim to develop in this dissertation.

That this could very likely raise more than a few eyebrows should be evident from the fact that, prima facie, these two conceptual systems have very little in common. One is the conceptual system developed largely by the monastic followers of a very ancient tradition of religious practice in South Asia which is nontheistic and held to be true on the basis of faith in the authority of an omniscient teacher. It teaches that the aim of life is ultimately to escape from worldly existence and experience the pure bliss which is the intrinsic nature of one's soul. The other is a modern form of theistic metaphysics based on the humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason reflecting on experience and developed by a twentieth-century English mathematician and philosopher of science and subsequently adopted by a group of Christian theologians. It teaches that the aim of life is the maximization of beauty and harmony which is ultimately the *telos* of the entire universe.

Both of these philosophies, however, are philosophies of *relativity*–both in the interpretive and propositional senses which I have already discussed at length and in a deeper ontological sense as well. Both affirm, in their understanding of the nature of existence, an *ontological* principle of relativity. In his philosophy, Whitehead puts this principle into words in the following way:

> That the potentiality for being an element in a real concrescence of many entities into one actuality is the one general metaphysical character attaching to all entities, actual and non-actual; and that every item in its universe is involved in each concrescence. In other words, it belongs to the nature of 'being' that it is a potential for every 'becoming.' This is the 'principle of relativity' (Whitehead 1978:22).

In Jain ontology, this principle is articulated in very different ways, but the fundamentally *relational* conception of existence which Whitehead describes is, I hope to show, clearly entailed in the Jain doctrines of relativity as well. Corresponding with their respective ontological conceptions of relativity are the interpretive dimensions of relativity with which these two philosophies approach conceptual plurality. The multiple aspects of an object (*vastu*) affirmed by Jainism and the contrary ultimate notions which go into making up an actual entity for Whitehead, I intend to argue, are one and the same thing.

One may still ask, however, even if their fundamental ontological conceptions can be shown to be fundamentally compatible–perhaps even identical–are there not still numerous incompatibilities between Jain and process metaphysics? What about Whitehead's doctrine of God, which is the very basis upon which I have argued for the truth of religious pluralism? If Jainism is nontheistic, does this not undercut any attempt to incorporate its doctrines of relativity into a pluralistic interpretive system? Does it not, perhaps, push one in the direction of the first or second of the logical options mentioned above–that the Jains have possibly arrived at their philosophy of relativity on the basis of false premises and erroneous logic?

This, I shall argue, after discussing the fundamental ontologies both of Jain and process metaphysics, need not be the case. On my readings of both Jainism and Whitehead, the conception of God found inadequate by the Jain tradition is not that for which Whitehead argues. It, in fact, is close to that which Whitehead also finds inadequate in his criticisms of classical metaphysics. It is the doctrine of a wholly transcendent creator upon whom the world depends completely but who depends upon the world for nothing which both Whitehead and the Jains find absurd. While it is true that the Jains do not go on to address the question of *why* there is a coherent world at all, the question of the transcendental basis for the cosmic moral order which they do affirm, it could be argued that in so affirming, the Jain metaphysical tradition *implies* the existence of a God much

like what Whitehead *explicitly* affirms. Especially pertinent in this regard will be a discussion of the senses in which Jainism *is*, broadly speaking, theistic–in its doctrine of the omniscient Jina, whose vision of reality could be said to *constitute* the universe, much like the subjective valuation of all actuality and possibility by God in process thought. This is not an entailment which the Jain tradition seems to have actually pursued, but clues do exist which suggest its possibility. The deduction of an absolute perspective from the logical application of the Jain philosophy of relativity to itself, which we have already seen, also suggests an affinity with process thought.

Finally, it could be objected that, according the pluralistic interpretation of religion which I have developed on the basis of process thought, *all* religious and philosophical positions ultimately imply theism; for this is the implicit sense in which I claim that all religions are true–that they imply the faith in the meaningfulness of existence which necessarily underlies all human activity, and, by implication, the divine *locus* of all such meaning, and are therefore, at least in this sense, true. Jainism is therefore not exceptional in this regard; and a reading of Jainism as implying theism could be taken as a first instance of the application of this reconceived version of religious pluralism to the interpretation of the claims of an actual religious tradition. To this possible objection I have no rejoinder. It, in fact, anticipates the next step in the line of argument I intend to pursue in this chapter. The interpretation and incorporation of Jain ideas *is* the first application I intend to make of the pluralistic interpretive system which I am seeking to develop in this dissertation. The formal, a priori claim of the truth of religious pluralism which my deductive argument from process metaphysics allows me to make–that all religions are, in at least an implicit sense, true–can be made without any reference whatsoever to the actual truth of the world's historical religious traditions. It is, in this sense, no different from all other a priori positions on the issue of truth and religious plurality. As I mentioned in my sixth chapter, it is also substantially identical to Ogden's claim. All religions *imply* the truth of theism,

but, a priori, it is not possible to say more about the *explicit* truth of many religions except that it *may* exist. The point of engaging with Jainism and showing that the interpretive principle implied by a pluralistic reading of Whitehead is essentially the same as that developed by the Jains is to allow this form of religious pluralism to go beyond a priori claims and actually begin to engage with the world's religions, to give some sense of what it would *mean* for many religions to be true, thereby giving greater specificity to Ogden's claim of their possible truth. Where better to start this process than with Jainism itself, the tradition whose method will allow this pluralistic system to 'get off the ground' in the first place?

8.2 Points of Compatibility: The Nature of a Real Thing as a Concrete Temporal Synthesis of Contrary Abstract Particulars

As has already been discussed at several junctures earlier in this dissertation, the pre-eminent point of compatibility between Jain and process metaphysics is the insistence of both of these traditions on not excluding any dimension of experience from analysis or relegating any such dimension to the realm of illusion, on incorporating all aspects of existence as essential elements in their respective accounts of reality. One may again note the striking compatibility of the Jain position on the issue of the ultimacy of change or permanence with Whitehead's position on the same philosophical issue:

> Ideals fashion themselves round two notions, permanence and flux. In the inescapable flux, there is something that abides; in the overwhelming permanence, there is an element that escapes into flux. Permanence can be snatched only out of flux; and the passing moment can find its adequate intensity only by its submission to permanence. Those who would disjoin the two elements can find no interpretation of patent facts (Whitehead 1978:338).

This is highly reminiscent of the insistence which we find in Siddhasena's *Sanmatitarka* on the inseparability of the perspective which affirms permanence or substantiality (*dravyāstikanaya*) and that which affirms impermanence or modality (*paryāyāstikanaya*):

> *davvaṃ pajjavaviuyaṃ davvaviuttā ya pajjavā ṇatthi* |
> *uppāyaṭṭhiibhaṃgā haṃdi daviyalakkhaṇaṃ eyaṃ* || 12 ||

> There is no modality without substantiality, and no substantiality without modality; certainly the triad of emergence, perishing and duration constitutes the defining characteristic of existence (*Sanmatitarka* 1:12).[1]

According to the dominant understanding of the Jain tradition, an entity, or 'substance' (*dravya*), consists of certain permanent, intrinsic qualities (*guṇa*s) which undergo a series of constantly changing states, or modalities (*paryāya*s). It is therefore the character of an existent entity–of all existent entities–to be characterized by emergence and perishing (of temporary modes) and duration (of essential qualities). This conception, again, emerges from the Jain doctrine of the soul, or *jīva*, with its intrinsic qualities of bliss, energy, and consciousness and ever-changing karmically determined modes.

For one familiar with the process tradition, this characterization of the Jain position should immediately set off a 'red alert' signal, particularly if it is being claimed that Jain and process metaphysics are fundamentally compatible in their respective ontological conceptions–for Whitehead's metaphysics is especially noteworthy in the Western philosophical tradition for its *rejection* of the category of substance, and of the notion of a substance as an intrinsically static entity which undergoes only 'accidental,' or non-essential, change. The Jain tradition, however, at least prima facie, appears to embrace the very substance ontology which the process tradition rejects.

A closer look, however, at what both of these traditions actually affirm about the character of an entity will reveal that this difference is finally a verbal one; for the Jain position also involves a *critique* of a conception of substance–that held by the Brahmanical Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school of philosophy–very close to the dominant Western Aristotelian conception criticized by Whitehead. Whitehead's position, furthermore, is not so much a *rejection* of the Aristotelian conception as an attempt to further refine it–to argue that it is,

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[1] Translation based on Dixit 1971:112.

indeed, descriptive of reality on a certain level, but that, as a *metaphysical* account of the ultimate nature of real things, it is finally insufficient to its stated task.

According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school of thought (the result of a merger of two pre-existing schools–Nyāya, largely a system of logic and debate, and Vaiśeṣika, which affirms a realist ontology which could be characterized as a form of 'physics,' broadly construed), much like for Aristotle, *dravya*, or substance, is one of the six fundamental categories (*padārtha*s) of existence. The others are quality (*guṇa*), motion (*karman*), universal (*sāmānya*), particularity (*viśeṣa*), and inherence (*samavāya*). Some later authors add a seventh, nonbeing (*abhāva*), to this list (Halbfass 1992:70-71). Everything that exists, according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology, is one of these six kinds of thing.

Of particular interest to the Jains are the categories of *dravya* and *guṇa*, substance and quality, which are terms that they employ, as we have already seen, in their own metaphysical system, and the category of *samavāya*, or inherence, which they do not. Jain logicians are, in fact, quite relentless in their criticism of this last category–a fact which is of major significance for understanding the Jain conception of substance in comparison with Whitehead's anti-substantialist views.

According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology, *dravya* and *guṇa*, substance and quality, are independently existing entities. The necessity for positing an independent existence of substances and qualities arises from the fact that certain qualities are seen to be associated with quite different substances. Let us take, for example, the color green–a good example of a quality, or *guṇa*. This quality is shared by a good many different kinds of substance. There are, for example, green apples and green leaves. But an apple is not a leaf and a leaf is not an apple. The fact of 'greenness' is independent of both 'appleness' and 'leafness.' Even though it may be intrinsic to the existence of particular apples and leaves, the quality 'green' is something conceivable in distinction from these substances. In order to explain how the independently existing quality 'green' is related to particular substances, such as

green apples, the philosophers of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school posits a relation of 'inherence,' or *samavāya*, as existing between substances and their qualities.

The independent existence of substances and qualities and the relation of inherence between them posited by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school was mercilessly attacked by its traditional philosophical opponents, Buddhist and Jain. These attacks frequently took the form of *reductio* arguments, the most common of these being that, if a relation of inherence must be posited in order to account for the co-presence of qualities and substances, then further relations of the same kind must be posited in order to account for the connections between the relation of inherence itself and its relata, and further relations to account for the connections between those relations and their relata, and so on to infinity.[2] The adherents of inherence were basically being accused of unnecessarily multiplying ontological categories, of creating fictitious conceptual entities not warranted by experience.

The Buddhists, of course, being opposed to all conceptions of substance, are thoroughgoing in their rejection of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika categories, affirming, instead, the reality only of momentary events. The Jain position, however, is more nuanced.

The Jains argue, essentially, that a substance simply *is* the locus of qualities and modes. In other words, it is not that there are two independently existing entities called 'substance' and 'quality,' but that substances are *constituted by* the coming together of their qualities in a particular way at a particular moment in time. The Jain complaint against the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika position is that it is inadequately integrated, that it has not analyzed the character of the phenomena disclosed in experience with sufficient precision to avoid the positing of independently existing entities where none in fact exist. The Jain conception of the relationship between substance and quality could be seen, like that of Plato, as one of

[2] This line of argument, among others, is pursued by Malliṣeṇasūri in his *Syādvādamañjarī* (Thomas 1968:37-39).

participation (though this term is not actually used by the Jains), rather than as a connection of inherence between two otherwise unrelated entities. As Siddhasena, again, writes:

> *dohi vi ṇaehi ṇīaṃ satthamulūeṇa taha vi micchattam* |
> *jaṃ savisappahāṇeṇa aṇṇoṇṇaṇiravekkhā* || 49 ||

> As for Kaṇāda [the founder of the Vaiśeṣika school of philosophy] his doctrine, even if supported by both viewpoints [the *dravyāstikanaya* and the *paryāyāstikanaya*] is false inasmuch as each here gives primacy to itself and is independent of the other (*Sanmatitarka* 3:49).[3]

The Jain conception of substance arguably shows the influence of Buddhist critiques of this notion. The Jains argue that analyses in terms of *guṇa* and *dravya* are adequate on the level of everyday existence, for the purpose of analyzing the properties of medium-sized objects–which corresponds to the *naigamanaya,* the *vyavahāranaya,* and the *saṃgrahanaya* (which collectively constitute the *dravyāstikanaya* on Siddhasena's reading) of the traditional Jain listing of seven *naya*s, or methodological perspectives. But such objects are further analyzable into momentary states, or *paryāya*s, from a more penetrating analytic perspective–the *ṛjusūtranaya*, or *paryāyāstikanaya* of Siddhasena.

The analysis of reality provided by the *ṛjusūtranaya*, as depicted in traditional Jain texts, is essentially that of Buddhism–as consisting of a series of causally connected momentary states (Padmarajiah 1963:319-320). The Buddhists reject any notion of these states as constitutive of more abstract entities, such as substances, out of soteriological concerns–the concern to prevent attachment to such substances as one's own personality, misconceived as a 'self,' so as to promote the attitude of detachment conducive to *nirvāṇa*–with the Mādhyamika school going so far as to deny a *svabhāva*, or essence, even to these momentary states. But the Jains, in an attempt to avoid 'one-sidedness,' or *ekāntatā*, in their analysis of reality affirm the appropriateness of presuming the existence of substances on an everyday, macrocosmic level, and do not reject the use of the term *dravya*

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[3] Translation based on Dixit 1971:111.

for this reason. This also has to do with *Jain* soteriological concerns; for the Jains see belief in certain intrinsic characteristics of the soul, or *jīva*, as essential to *their* pursuit of *nirvāṇa*. But on the analytic level, the Jains concur with the Buddhist affirmation that all entities are ultimately reducible to momentary states, even accepting the Buddhist atomic conception of time. In this, we can see that the Jains also concur with Whitehead. Just as the Jain notion of 'substance' is compatible with Buddhism inasmuch as it accepts the Buddhist analysis of substances into more fundamental units, it is also, and for similar reasons, compatible with Whitehead's conception of a momentary 'actual entity.'

Whitehead's rejection of the term 'substance' is bound up with his rejection of the subject-predicate relation as descriptive of reality on an ultimate, ontological level. One of the difficulties which many readers face in trying to understand his thought for the first time is his use of neologisms–terms such as 'prehension' and 'actual entity'–which are not familiar to one trained in more mainstream Western philosophy. The point of his deliberate choice to refrain from using more conventional terminology–such as substance-quality terminology–is to avoid having his concepts confused with more conventional ones which he found to be inadequate. But he is also willing to concede that such terminology has validity on the level of everyday discourse about medium-sized objects, and that there is an endurance of certain traits of an object over time (due to inheritance from moment to moment). The Jain definition of substance as *constituted by* qualities and modes, in opposition to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika doctrine that qualities and modes *inhere in* substances, would seem to indicate a similar rejection of the subject-predicate relation as descriptive of the ultimate character of things. But the continued use of substance-quality terminology in the Jain tradition points to a willingness, similar to Whitehead's, to accept the validity of the concept of substance on a macrocosmic level in the name of avoiding 'one-sidedness.'

The problem, though, for both Whitehead and the Jains (and the Buddhists) is addressing the question which the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition seeks to address with its

samavāya doctrine: What is the ontological status of recurrent qualities–and of universals, or species-characteristics–which occur repeatedly in different entities and kinds of entities but which are yet conceptually distinguishable from them? In some sense, it seems that a distinction must be made between qualities and substances, and between universals and the actual beings which instantiate them–Aristotle's 'primary substances'–and that something like the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika doctrine of inherence is therefore inevitable. How do Whitehead and the Jains address this question?

The Buddhist tradition, insistent on the momentary character of all entities, rejects completely the notion of the independent existence of universals, explaining the recurrence of qualities and species-characteristics in terms of a doctrine of similarity. The Jain tradition has tended to follow the Buddhists in this regard, as Satkari Mookerjee explains:

> We must confess that the Jaina conception of universals, as represented by such eminent writers as Jinabhadra, Akalaṅka, and Vidyānandi, down to Yaśovijaya Sūri, has been systematically given a turn which smacks of profound influence by the Buddhist philosophers.…According to these commentators, whose views have created a uniform tradition in subsequent Jaina speculations, the universal is rather a qualitative aspect of the individuals numerically different in different individuals. The unity of universals is set forth as more or less a conceptual figment, which they seek to equate with the concept of similarity. Individuals belonging to a class are similar to one another and the similarity, though numerically different, is accorded the status of the universal (Mookerjee 1978:266).

However, as Mookerjee points out, an alternative–and on both Mookerjee's reading and my own, more adequate–approach to the problem of universals is available within the Jain tradition. This is the approach of Samantabhadra, who applies the methodology of *syādvāda* to the question, arguing that, in a sense, there are independently existing universals, and that, in another sense, there are not. As he writes in his *Āptamīmāṃsā*:

> *kāryadravyamanādi syāt prāgabhāvasya nihnave* |
> *pradhvaṃsasya ca dharmasya pracyave'nantatāṃ vrajet* || 10 ||
>
> Effects and substantial properties are, in a sense (*syāt*), eternal, rather than spontaneously emergent [numerically different from moment to moment, having no prior existence (*prāgabhāva*)]. [Otherwise], despite the perishing of properties [from moment to moment], their perpetual re-emergence would be excluded (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 10).

On Samantabhadra's reading, as for the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition, there must be a sense in which qualities and universals are 'eternal,' having an existence independent of their particular instantiations in the actual world, or else their repeated re-occurrence could not be explained. Their perpetual perishing, from moment to moment, is already affirmed, after the manner of the Buddhists; and in this text Samantabhadra, like the Buddhists and the majority of Jain thinkers, rejects the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika notion of inherence as well (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 66). So what is the character of his 'sense' in which universals are eternal? And what is the relationship between these 'eternal' universals and their instantiations?

Samantabhadra does not spell out the character of this relationship in great detail, but from what he does say, and from the consensus of the rest of the tradition, it is fairly clear that something like a relationship of *participation*, rather than *inherence*, is intended here. The implication of inherence which the Jain tradition uniformly rejects is the notion that universals and their instantiations–or, if we may call them this, potentialities and actualities–are independently existing realities rather than integrated wholes. And yet, we have Samantabhadra's 'sense' in which potentialities must be said to be distinct from their actualizations, or else their re-occurrence over time and in different entities could not be explained.

It seems to me that the most coherent reading of Samantabhadra's position–of his 'sense' in which universals are eternal–involves, even though he does not use this terminology, making a distinction between *actuality* and *possibility*. In *actuality*, we never find universals and their instantiations in independence of one another. This is why the Buddhists and the mainstream Jain tradition reject the notion of universals numerically distinct from their instantiations. It is also why Aristotle rejects Plato's doctrine of the independent existence of the forms. Yet there remains the problem of the recurrence of such properties over time and in different entities. The 'sense' which Samantabhadra may have in mind–or at least which he *should* have in mind–in which universals *do* have an

independent existence, is not in the realm of actuality, but in the realm of *possibility*; for it is as *possibilities* that these entities may be said to have an ongoing existence distinct from their actual instantiations. If this is the case, then Samantabhadra's universals can be seen to correspond to Whitehead's 'eternal objects,' which are defined as "pure potentials for the specific determination of fact, or forms of definiteness" (Whitehead 1978:22).[4]

Whitehead's metaphysical system is, broadly speaking, Platonic, and he conceived of it, explicitly, as a continuation of the philosophical project of Plato, "the wisest of men" (Whitehead 1967:160), taking into account subsequent developments in both science and philosophy. Whitehead's 'eternal objects' or 'forms of definiteness' are analogous to the Platonic forms which, in Plato's thought, are the eternal, static realities in which the fluid entities of the temporal world 'participate.' Structurally, Whitehead's view is identical, but the relative valuation he places on the realm of the eternal forms and the temporal world is the opposite of Plato's. For Plato, the forms are the highest realities precisely because they do not change, whereas the constantly changing entities of the temporal world have only a derivative reality. For Whitehead, however, the eternal objects, though a logical necessity, are, in and of themselves, "deficiently actual" (Whitehead 1978:34). They could be said to exist for the benefit of the perpetually becoming actual entities which constitute the temporal world, as possibilities for actualization, and not the other way around.

The participatory relationship between actual entities and eternal objects is denoted for Whitehead by the term 'prehension.' A prehension, or 'feeling,' is a relation which an

[4] Charles Hartshorne has argued that the possibilities, or forms of definiteness, which correspond to the traditional philosophical doctrine of universals are best conceived not as strictly 'eternal,' but as emergent qualities which have become incorporated into the consequent nature of God, and so Whitehead's term 'eternal object' is not an entirely appropriate designation. But even if this modification of Whitehead's thought is accepted (and I think that Hartshorne gives us good reasons to accept it), the fundamental distinction between existence *qua* possibility and existence *qua* actuality (which is my main concern here) is retained in Hartshorne's 'corrected' version of process metaphysics (Hartshorne 1983:65-66, 128).

actual entity has with a particular quality or possibility. This can either be via a relation it has with another, previous actual entity in which that possibility has already been realized–a "physical feeling"–or it can be a direct relation with an eternal object–a "conceptual feeling" (Ibid:23). There are both 'positive' and 'negative' prehensions. That is, all actual entities are related to every other entity–both possible and actual–in the universe. Those relations which involve the entity incorporating some possibility or aspect of another actuality into itself are positive prehensions. Those which exclude such possibilities or aspects are negative prehensions. An actual entity, therefore, is essentially a unique nexus of internal relations, both positive and negative, with every other actuality and possibility in the cosmos.

In this respect, in his affirmation of the essentially relational character of existence, the similarities between Whitehead's conception of reality and that of the Jains become most evident; for the Jains similarly affirm that what makes a particular entity what it is at a particular moment in time are its relations, positive and negative, with particular qualities. Recall the earlier discussion, in the chapter on Jainism, of the pot and the pen. What makes a pot a pot–what defines its existence–is, according to the Jain tradition, *both* its possession of pot-qualities *and* its non-possession of non-pot qualities. This is what it means, according to Samantabhadra, to say that an entity, in some sense, exists, in another, does not exist, etc. It exists with respect to the characteristics which make it what it is–which it instantiates–and it does not exist with respect to the characteristics which it does not instantiate (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 17-18). It seems that it would not be at all difficult to translate this conception of an entity into Whiteheadian terms: It exists with respect to the possibilities which it prehends positively and it does not exist with respect to the possibilities which it prehends negatively.

According to both Jain and process metaphysics, an entity is a synthesis of positive and negative relations. This is why both philosophies are able to incorporate prima facie

contrary attributes into their accounts of an entity. Indeed, they *insist* on incorporating such attributes. This is the sense in which both philosophies are fundamentally realist in their ontologies. Contrary phenomena such as change or permanence are not relegated to the realm of illusion because the other has been determined, a priori, to constitute the true character of existence. All phenomena, rather, are sought to be integrated by both of these philosophies into an internally coherent synthesis. Their fundamental agreement on the nature of a real thing as a concrete temporal synthesis of contrary abstract particulars, of positive and negative internal relations to possibilities, is, I think, the major point of compatibility between Jain and process metaphysics which makes their synthesis possible.

A philosophy based on such a conception of reality, I believe, is the strongest logical basis for a reconceived religious pluralism–for a pluralistic interpretive approach to religious claims, and to truth-claims in general. Such a conception of reality entails a principle of relativity in two senses: an ontological sense and a propositional and interpretive sense. In an ontological sense, the principle of relativity implied by both Jain and process metaphysics is the principle that what an entity *is* is essentially a nexus of *relations* to all actuality and possibility–which is different from a relation of inherence *between* entities and their qualities, conceived as existing independently. To again cite Whitehead's definition of his 'principle of relativity,' it is the principle:

> That the potentiality for being an element in a real concrescence of many entities into one actuality is the one general metaphysical character attaching to all entities, actual and non-actual; and that every item in its universe is involved in each concrescence. In other words, it belongs to the nature of 'being' that it is a potential for every 'becoming.' This is the 'principle of relativity' (Whitehead 1978:22).

The 'one general metaphysical character attaching to all entities,' the *satsāmānya*, or 'being-universal,' according to Jainism, is that they are characterized by 'emergence, perishing, and duration' (*utpādavyāyadhrauvya*). This clearly can apply to Whitehead's 'actual entities' as well–for these are also marked by an initial phase of emergence, a final phase of perishing, in which they become possibilities for future actualization, and a brief

moment of duration, from the time of their emergence to the point of their "satisfaction" (Ibid:25-26). But non-actual entities, or possibilities, according to Samantabhadra and Whitehead, are, in a sense, eternal–that is, *as possibilities*, though once they are actualized they are subject to the same temporal process as are all other actualities. We could thus see Whitehead's principle of relativity as the broader definition of existence, applying to all entities–actual and possible–and the Jain definition of existence as a definition of *actuality*. That this is not incompatible with the Jain tradition's own self-understanding is evident when one looks at the nature of an entity according to *syādvāda*–it both exists, inasmuch as it actualizes some possibilities, does not exist, inasmuch as it does not actualize others, etc. The Jain definition of existence, at least on Samantabhadra's reading of the tradition, can thus be seen to exist against the backdrop of a larger conception of existence which includes possibility as well (although the tradition has not yet chosen to pursue this particular implication of its philosophy).

The ontological principle of relativity implied in the Jain and process accounts of reality entails another principle of relativity–a principle of propositional and interpretive relativity–as well. This is most fully developed in the Jain tradition–for the complex and interdependent nature of all entities, articulated in *anekāntavāda*, is seen to imply *nayavāda*. The complex and interdependent nature of real things gives rise to a corresponding complex of possible perspectives from which a real thing can be viewed, and from which predications about it can be made. This perspectivalism–or *nayavāda*–gives rise to a corresponding relativity of senses in which particular predications can be both true and false, the specification of which is the province of *syādvāda*–which, as I argued in the preceding chapter, is also the systematic expression of the interpretive principle of relativity to which the application of process metaphysics to the fundamental question of truth and religious plurality gives rise.

The shared conception of ontological relativity affirmed by both Jain and process metaphysics–of the character of an entity as a complex synthesis of positive and negative internal relations–thus gives rise to a corresponding principle of interpretive relativity, the realization that the truth or falsity of any given claim depends upon the sense in which that claim is affirmed, the facet of complex reality to which it is intended to refer. Such a philosophy of relativity can become the logical basis for a pluralistic approach to the interpretation of religious–and other–truth-claims; for it gives an ontological grounding to the conception of the relativity of truth. It is able to explain how prima facie incompatible claims, such as those made by many of the world's religious communities can be simultaneously true–true in different senses, based on the different ontological perspectives from which they are affirmed, the facets of reality to which they can be seen to refer.

A difficulty, however, yet remains. As was argued earlier, the inner logic of religious pluralism is ultimately theistic in character; that is, religious pluralism is a position which necessarily presupposes the reality of an ultimate locus of value and source of salvation, the reality of what process philosophers term 'God.' For this very reason, it was on the basis of what I took to be a coherent understanding of the reality of God, the understanding provided by process metaphysics, that I argued for the truth of religious pluralism.

The Jain tradition, however, is not theistic, at least not explicitly so; and many of its representatives have presented strong arguments *against* the existence of at least some forms of divinity. Is this a serious incompatibility with process metaphysics? Is it sufficient to undermine the project of synthesizing these two systems of thought? Or is Whitehead's conception of God immune to Jain critiques? Can this prima facie incompatibility between Jain and process thought be resolved satisfactorily?

8.3 The Question of God

Given what could be called the fundamentally Platonic character of Whitehead's metaphysics–its general conception of actualities as participating in eternal forms, or possibilities, which give them a particular character of definiteness–it is possible to see the full importance of God in his system as providing the necessary grounding for the 'ingression' of possibilities into the actual world. More specifically, God, for Whitehead, at least God's eternal, conceptual nature, is the 'locus' of the 'eternal objects,' of the possibilities in which the actual world participates:

> Everything must be somewhere; and here 'somewhere' means 'some actual entity.' Accordingly the general potentiality of the universe must be somewhere; since it retains its proximate relevance to actual entities for which it is unrealized. This 'proximate relevance' reappears in subsequent concrescence as final causation regulative of the emergence of novelty. This 'somewhere' is the non-temporal actual entity. Thus 'proximate relevance' means 'relevance as in the primordial mind of God.'…It is a contradiction in terms to assume that some explanatory fact can float into the actual world out of nonentity. Nonentity is nothingness. Every explanatory fact refers to the decision and to the efficacy of an actual thing. The notion of 'subsistence' is merely the notion of how eternal objects can be components of the primordial nature of God. …But eternal objects, as in God's primordial nature, constitute the Platonic world of ideas (Whitehead 1978:46).

As discussed earlier, however, the conceptual or eternal 'pole' of the reality of God–the divine envisionment of possibilities–is only the abstract portion of the divine reality. God is also, according to Whitehead, an actual entity (or rather, a personally ordered society of such entities), and so has a concrete, temporal pole as well. In fact, it is only as an actual entity, containing within Itself the conceptual valuation of all possibilities, that God can make those possibilities available to the actual entities which constitute the world, and so enable the world to continue in its existence. "The only alternative to this admission, is to deny the reality of actual occasions" (Whitehead 1925:178).

The concrete, or consequent, nature of God is the aspect of the divine reality that is related to the world, and, in a sense, dependent upon the world–for, in God's supreme relativity to all actuality, in God's knowledge of the actual world, God undergoes change

as the world undergoes change. It is the consequent nature of God which pursues the divine *telos* of maximizing the harmony and beauty of actual existence, of pursuing the fulfillment of the possibilities of perfect harmony and beauty which are envisioned in the eternal nature of God. Just as God, in God's eternal aspect, is the necessary condition for the existence of the actual world–the world constituted from moment to moment by actual entities–the world, for the consequent, or supremely relative nature of God, is the necessary condition for the fulfillment of the divine *telos*, for God's experience as actuality, rather than as mere possibility, the infinite possibilities of existence. God, as temporal, experiences *through* us. We therefore have a truly ultimate responsibility to pursue the good, to optimize our own creative potentialities and the possibilities for all beings to contribute their own parts to the divine play–the *līlā* of Hinduism. All entities, as we have seen, are constituted by their relations to all actuality and possibility. But God is *completely* relative to all actuality and possibility–knowing us, to paraphrase Augustine, better than we know ourselves–and, in a sense, depending upon us to actualize the infinite possibilities envisioned in the divine mind. As Whitehead writes of the relations of mutuality between God and the world, in terms highly reminiscent of *syādvāda*:

> It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.
>
> It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.
>
> It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.
>
> It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.
>
> It is as true to say that God transcends the world, as that the World transcends God.
>
> It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God (Whitehead 1978:348).

The question is: Is this conception of God compatible with the worldview of Jainism? If we focus upon the basic *function* of God in process metaphysics as the necessary foundation for any possible cosmic order, I believe that an argument can be made that this conception is fully compatible with–is, indeed, implied by–traditional Jain cosmology. Though apparently unfamiliar with Jainism, Whitehead, indeed, affirmed of the function of God as the foundation for cosmic order that, "This function of God is analogous to the remorseless working of things in Greek and in Buddhist thought" (Ibid:244). I believe a similar claim can be made with regard to Jainism, this claim being that the Whiteheadian conception of God is implied by the traditional Jain understanding of the universe, even though the representative intellectuals of this community never chose to pursue this particular entailment of their belief system. God, in other words, is an answer to a question which the Jains have simply never chosen to ask–though, as I hope to show, there are hints that even this is not necessarily the whole story.

Returning briefly to Samantabhadra's unspecified 'sense' in which universals must be eternal (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 10)–if, as I suggested in the preceding section, this 'sense' must logically refer to their existence as possibilities, and if, as Whitehead insists, "everything must be somewhere," "somewhere" being, in the case of possibilities, the primordial mind of God, then we have at least the foundations for an argument that Samantabhadra's conception of the eternality of universals implies the existence of God, as conceived by Whitehead.

The problem, of course, is that the Jain tradition rejects the existence of God–at least of God conceived as a wholly transcendent creator and moral orderer. But is the 'God' which the Jains reject the same as Whitehead's God? I believe that it is not. I would, in fact, suggest, that it is essentially the same 'God' rejected by Whitehead as well.

The traditional Jain arguments against theism–specifically, the theism of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, which we have already seen 'beaten up' for its doctrine of the relation of

inherence between independently existing universals and substances–are to be found, among other places, in Malliṣeṇasūri's *Syādvādamañjarī* (Thomas 1968:29-36). These arguments are directed exclusively against a conception of God as the absolutely perfect creator of the universe. Such a conception is rejected by the Jains, first of all, because they maintain that the universe, or world, is eternal, that it has always existed, and therefore does not stand in need of a creator.

Process metaphysics, however, also maintains the beginninglessness of the cosmic process. God, in process thought, is not a creator in the sense of bringing a universe into being at a particular time prior to which there was nothing. God is conceived as directing–or, more appropriately, influencing–the ongoing process of the universe through the 'divine persuasion,' the presentation, from moment to moment, of possibilities to entities for actualization. God, in this sense, is a creator, if 'creation' is understood as a beginningless and endless process, and if the actual entities are seen as participating in this process, rather than merely being acted upon by an external force. For example, according to Whitehead, God, "does not create eternal objects; for his nature requires them in the same degree that they require him. This is an exemplification of the coherence of the categoreal types of existence" (Whitehead 1978:257). God is a *participant* in the cosmos.

The Jains also reject the notion of God as creator because, in the words of P.S. Jaini, "Creation is not possible without a desire to create, and this implies imperfection on the part of the alleged creator" (Jaini 1979:89). This is an attempt to show an incoherence in the theistic position; for it is traditionally claimed by theists, both Western and South Asian, that God is not only the creator of the world, but that God is also perfect. Such 'perfection' is typically taken to include a complete indifference to what occurs in the world, a lack of desire or affect toward what goes on in the creation. This, however, would seem to contradict the act of creation, which implies, as the Jains point out, a desire or need to create. For the Jains, this incoherence in the traditional theistic position is a

basis for rejecting theism itself as incoherent. Process thought, however, responds to this situation by dropping the classical notion of perfection. Inasmuch as God is 'perfect' in the traditional sense, God is "deficiently actual" (Whitehead 1978:34). The divine 'perfection,' on a process reading, consists precisely of God's being deeply involved with what goes on in the universe from moment to moment (without being thereby diminished in any way), and, indeed, 'desiring' the maximization of harmony and beauty–a desire which is the foundation of the divine salvific will, which, in turn, is the logical basis for the truth of religious pluralism. Clearly, there is a disagreement here between the Jain and process traditions on the meaning of perfection, with the Jains holding a view closer to that of the classical Western conception of perfection as involving indifference to the affairs of the world, a complete lack of desire. Because, however, the process tradition drops this notion of perfection, the Jain argument against theism on the basis of the imperfection implied by the divine creative act does not apply to the process conception of God. Process theists do not claim a perfection for God which would contradict God's involvement with the world, as classical theism does. The Jain argument therefore points to a contradiction within classical theism which the process tradition also finds problematic, though it proposes to modify, rather than reject, classical theism on this basis.

Finally, the Jains reject the notion of God as wholly transcendent of the order of the world–specifically the moral order expressed in the doctrine of karma. As Jaini, again, elaborates, "If karma is relevant in the destinies of human beings, then God is irrelevant; if he rules regardless of the karma of beings, then he is cruel and capricious" (Jaini 1979:89). Again, however, this objection reflects an an objection also raised by Whitehead against the classical conception of God as a divine monarch. Whitehead's God is not an arbitrary, immoral tyrant, whimsically intervening in the affairs of the world, but is foundational to the world's order, including the moral order. In Jain terms, Whitehead's God could be seen as the transcendental foundation of the law of karma. Again:

> This function of God [as foundation for order in the world] is analogous to the remorseless working of things in Greek and in Buddhist thought. The initial aim [of each entity, which God provides] is the best for that *impasse*. But if the best be bad, then the ruthlessness of God can be personified as *Até*, the goddess of mischief. The chaff is burnt. What is inexorable in God, is valuation as an aim towards 'order'; and 'order' means 'society permissive of actualities with patterned intensity of feeling arising from adjusted contrasts' (Whitehead 1978:244).

It seems, then, that we can conclude that traditional Jain arguments against the existence of God do not apply to God as conceived in process metaphysics, and that it may be possible to move forward with the conclusion that such a God is, in fact, implied by the claims of the Jain tradition, such as Samantabhadra's conception of the eternality of universals (taken to imply the mind of God as a locus for such universals), the conception of a morally ordered universe expressed in the doctrine of karma (taken also to imply the existence of God as its necessary foundation), and finally, as we saw in a previous chapter, the entailment of the Jain philosophy of relativity, when applied consistently to itself, of the existence of an absolute perspective which both synthesizes and transcends all other, partial perspectives (Mahāprajñā 1996:30-31)–the experience of the liberated Jina.

In this last connection, it is worth mentioning that there is an analogue to theism in the Jain tradition, in the form of the liberated Jina who has realized the true, omniscient nature of the soul, or *jīva*, which is itself conceived in what could broadly be called theistic terms. As Paul Dundas writes:

> One of the most common terms used in Jainism to describe the self in its purest, unconditioned and karmicly free state as sole object of contemplation is *paramātman*, the 'supreme soul' [a term also used by Hindus to designate the divine Brahman]. The liberated *jīvas* have reached their culminating state by a realisation of the *paramātman* and it is therefore an object of reverence for all Jains. While Jainism is, as we have seen, atheist in the limited sense of rejection of both the existence of a creator god and the possibility of the intervention of such a being in human affairs, it nonetheless must be regarded as a theist religion in the more profound sense that it accepts the existence of a divine principle, the *paramātman*, often in fact referred to as 'god'…existing in potential state within all beings. Jain devotional worship of the fordmakers, who are frequently also referred to by the designation 'god,' should be interpreted as being directed towards this and as an

acknowledgement of the spiritual principle within every individual (Dundas 1992:94).[5]

It could, of course, be objected that *jīvas* are conceived as being many in Jainism, rather than one, and so this analogy with God cannot be pushed too far. Samantabhadra, however, claims, using *syādvāda*, that *jīvas*, in a sense, are many, but that in another sense–that of possessing certain common intrinsic traits–they are one (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 29). And, as we have already seen, Haribhadra, in his *Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya*, takes this a step further and claims that the experience of liberation–in Jainism, the experience of the pure nature of the *jīva*–as conceived within different traditions is also essentially one, because of being described in similar terms (*Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya* 129). And finally, we have seen Whitehead claim that, "It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many" (Whitehead 1978:348). Also noteworthy in connection with the possibility of identifying God with the pure nature of the *jīva* is the fact that a popular etymology among Jains for the Sanskrit word for the world–*loka*–derives it from the verbal root *lok*, or 'see,' explaining it as referring to "that which is seen by the omniscient ones" (Dundas 1992:77). Could this be seen as an articulation of the insight that the existence of the world requires an absolute, unifying perspective, provided in process thought by God, but in the Jain tradition by those who have realized the pure nature of the *jīva*? It is also interesting in

[5] On a personal note, I was quite surprised, during my own pilgrimage to Shravana Belgola, a prominent Jain holy place in the state of Karnataka, near the city of Mysore in southern India, to be frequently greeted by Jains with the phrase, "God bless you." I had understood Jainism to be a nontheistic religion. I was even more surprised to hear a Jain tour guide explaining the concept of the fordmaker, or *TīrthaŚkara,* to a group of Western tourists in terms strongly reminiscent of the Vaiṣnava (Hindu) concept of the *avatār*, claiming that "God" had appeared on earth twenty-four times to show people the way to liberation. This suggests, to me, a strong theistic bent in the interpretation of the Jain tradition, at least among some contemporary Jain laypersons. I frequently heard similar comments among Jains in New Delhi, where I lived for over a year and a half. Such comments can, of course, also be taken simply as an attempt by Jains to 'translate' their tradition to a predominantly theistic audience. But the fact that they do take it to be translatable in theistic terms may be suggestive of more than merely surface-level similarities between the concept of the Jina and the concept of God.

this regard that there is a Jain tradition according to which there must always, somewhere in the universe, be at least one liberated soul teaching the Jain path (Ibid:78).

If the *jīva*, then, in its intrinsic nature as blissful and omniscient, or the liberated being who has realized this intrinsic nature, can be conceived as ultimately referring to the same God described in process metaphysics, then, in process terms, the Jain path of purification could be seen as a process of learning to positively prehend God in a complete and perfect way, to actualize a divine consciousness within a concrete human existence. (Other traditions–particularly, but not limited to, Indian traditions–which prescribe a process of attaining to a state of union with a divine reality or realities, or of realizing a pre-existing state of unity of which one has previously been unaware, could, it seems, be similarly conceived in terms of process metaphysics). The entire Jain cosmology could then be reconceived in process terms. *Karma* would then become identified with the totality of the antecedent actualities which condition the character of the emergence of a particular entity at a given point in time. As in the doctrine of *karma*–in its Hindu and Buddhist, as well as its Jain, forms–an actual entity is free to decide its own final character, but this freedom is conditioned by its relations to the totality of the past which it inherits. This is like the freedom an entity has to choose among its karmically determined options, themselves a product of past karmically determined choices. 'Purifying' oneself of *karma* in terms of process metaphysics would then become the process of making choices in such a way as to enhance and increase one's positive prehension of divinely offered possibilities so that one would be less conditioned by, and therefore relatively less bound by, the conditioning effects of the past. This could be seen as essentially the same process conceived in more conventionally theistic traditions as learning to discern the will of God for oneself and seeking to conform one's own will perfectly to the divine will. If one were able to take this process to a conclusion, to *fully* prehend God, then one would have essentially *become* divine; for the fundamental characteristic of divinity is "complete

relativity to all actuality and possibility" (Gamwell 1990:171). This would be the meaning of the Jina's 'victory' conceived in terms of process metaphysics.

It seems, then, that the theistic affirmation of process metaphysics need not be regarded as a point of major incompatibility between this system of philosophy and the Jain tradition. On the contrary, it seems that bringing these two systems of thought into conversation with one another could lead to an enriched understanding of both–which is, of course, the whole point of interreligious dialogue. Going beyond this conversation, though, and bringing these two philosophies of relativity into a synthesis which will become a participant in, more such 'dialogues' does not seem to be a logical impossibility.

8.4 Cosmological Questions: The First Application of the Pluralistic Interpretive Method

But despite their logical compatibility, there are still a great many *differences* between Jain and process metaphysics. Compatibility, in other words, is not the same as *identity*. This, of course, is the whole point of the reconceived version of religious pluralism that I am working to construct in this dissertation–that a plurality of substantially different, yet ultimately logically compatible, worldviews are possible. The first example of two such worldviews that I am proposing here is that of Jain and process metaphysics. I take arguing for the logical compatibility of these two systems of thought to be the first application of the pluralistic interpretive method which I am trying to develop. Future applications will take this one–this synthesis–as their logical basis, with the theistic intuition of process metaphysics providing the justification for the pluralistic method (in the form of the argument of chapter six) and the corresponding Jain philosophy of relativity providing the method itself.

Examples from the Jain tradition of what I mean by differences which are not necessarily incompatibilities between Jainism and process thought–which can provide an example of the method I have in mind to apply to other traditions of thought as well–take

the form of its basic cosmology, elaborated in chapter five: the cosmology of souls, karmic matter, and rebirth. There is no reason, in principle, that a Whiteheadian account could not be given of the phenomena described in these terms by the Jain tradition–that souls could not be be explained in terms of 'personally ordered societies' of actual occasions, that karma could not be explained in terms of an entity's inheritance from its past, and that the phenomenon of rebirth could not be explained in terms of 'objective immortality' and the prehension by future personally ordered societies, though not necessarily on a conscious level, of the lifetimes of those who have gone before, preserved in the 'cosmic memory' constituted by the consequent nature of God. The senses in which Jainism could be said to be true relative to process metaphysics could thus be specified, and process metaphysics itself thereby enriched by the incorporation of the experiential 'data' of the Jain tradition.

This is what I mean by a coherent pluralistic interpretation of religious claims–and ultimately, of all claims–using an interpretive principle of relativity. *Relative to* the system of the universe revealed in humanistic metaphysical reflection–process metaphysics–the claims of a wide variety of belief systems, conceived as vast repositories of human experience, perhaps even including authentic divine revelations, can be interpreted. The presupposition that all of these systems of belief must, in some sense, be true–the interpretive principle of charity, which is a component of the interpretive principle of relativity–is established on the basis of the universal salvific will of God, as shown in chapter six. The interpretive principle of coherence is served by the insistence that the senses in which particular claims are true be explainable in terms of process metaphysics. In this way, process thought becomes a conceptual matrix, in terms of which claims can be interpreted and evaluated. On the assumption that claim *x* must be true in some sense, that sense must, in terms of process metaphysics, be the following…

That this is an 'open' and not a 'closed' system is a function of the fact that, due to its abstraction, its potential applicability to any possible experience, a wide range of diverse

experiences and interpretations of experience are capable of being accommodated within it, as I hope to show in the next chapter. The total view which it constitutes is thereby transformed and enriched. Process metaphysics, applied in this way to the constitutive claims of the Jain tradition and brought into a logical synthesis with those claims, comes away a very different system, inclusive of ideas like the *jīva, karma*, and *saṃsāra*. Those ideas themselves, in turn, interpreted within the matrix of process thought, take on new forms and meanings which they would not have had within a Jain conceptual system alone.

What I believe such an interpretive system depicts–hopefully in a logically coherent fashion–is the process of 'interior dialogue,' discussed earlier, which such dialogical religious pluralists as Raimon Panikkar advocate: the encounter of two systems of belief within one's mind, their consequent mutual transformation (to borrow a term from John Cobb), and their synthesis in the worldview of the one in whom the dialogue has occurred.

8.5 The Significance of the Synthesis of Jain and Process Metaphysics for the Reconstruction of Religious Pluralism

The synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics is able to ground the *pluralistic intuition*, along with the principle of *propositional relativity* which it entails–the views, respectively, *that all propositions can express some truth, some insight into the ultimate nature of reality,* and *that these propositions can all, in principle, be coordinated within a larger, more encompassing, yet internally coherent worldview*. The justification for the pluralistic intuition takes the form of the argument, offered in chapter six, for the truth of the fundamental claim of religious pluralism on the basis of the universal love of God affirmed by process metaphysics. The principle of propositional relativity is based on the conception of the complex, relational character of an entity which is shared by both Jain and process metaphysics and on the basis of which the Jains develop their "horizontally coordinating inclusivism" (Halbfass 1988:414). If, as I have tried to show in this chapter, the fundamental conceptions of reality proposed by Jain and process metaphysics are logically

compatible–indeed, identical–and if Whitehead's doctrine of God is not incompatible with the claims of the Jain tradition, and may even be implied by them, then it seems that these two metaphysical systems, these two philosophies of relativity, could be brought together into a synthesis which could form the basis for a reconceived religious pluralism which would avoid the problems that plague contemporary versions of this position.

Ultimately, whether this system 'works,' whether its claims are valid or true, is a matter to be decided by the authority of neither the Jain tradition nor of Whitehead, but of reason reflecting on experience. In the words of Haribhadra, "I do not have any partiality for Mahāvīra, nor do I revile people such as Kāpila [the founder of the Hindu Sāṃkhya system]. One should instead have confidence in the person whose statements are in accord with reason" (Dundas 1992:196). And in the words of Whitehead, "Ultimately nothing rests on authority; the final court of appeal is intrinsic reasonableness" (Whitehead 1978:39).

Chapter 9

RECONCEIVING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS UNIVERSALIST INCLUSIVISM

Coherence, Openness, and the Organic Principle

9.1 The Beginning of the End (of the Beginning)

In this, my concluding chapter, I shall argue that a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics can constitute the basis for a new, reconceived religious pluralism which addresses the criticisms to which current versions of this position are subject while yet preserving the basic pluralistic intuition–with the theistic insight of process thought forming the ontological basis for this intuition and the Jain philosophy of relativity forming its systematic expression. I shall also discuss the worldview which such a religious pluralism–reconceived as a *universalist inclusivism*–entails, exploring its implications for the nature of ultimate reality and the afterlife, as well as the question of community–of *where* one fits, as a religious person, if one holds such a view. I shall then conclude with a brief outline of what I call a 'cosmological vision' of salvation.

In my first chapter, I wrote that in this dissertation I would be arguing, on the basis of a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics that *there are, in fact, many true religions–all religions necessarily being true in at least an implicit sense–and many of these religions express substantially different truths (though with some degree of overlap) on an explicit level as well, but it is nevertheless possible to coordinate these various truths within a more encompassing worldview in terms of which they can be seen to be both logically compatible and complementary*. Over the course of this dissertation, I have attempted to build my case for this claim, exploring, in its second part, contemporary approaches to

religious plurality and suggesting ways in which they could be improved, and in its third part, developing my own approach. It now remains to finish what I have started.

9.2 Conditions for the Truth and Validity of Religious Pluralism Revisited: Answering the Critics

In my second chapter, I outlined a number of criteria which I claimed a valid and compelling religious pluralism must fulfill and a number of questions which it must be able to answer. Having now developed, at least in broad outline, the conceptual basis for what I hope will be such a valid and compelling religious pluralism, I now return to those criteria and questions to see how well the system I have developed fulfills and answers them.

A valid religious pluralism must, first of all, include a coherent account of what, exactly, it means *for a religion to be true and conducive to salvation. This means that it must include particular understandings of truth and salvation, as well as religion, and of how religions express truth and facilitate the salvific transformation of human beings. All of these concepts–truth, salvation, and religion–must also be so related as to exhibit an organic interconnectedness, an interdependence that will give coherence to the account as a whole; and they must all be articulated in a logically valid, non-self-contradictory fashion.*

I believe that my reconceived version of religious pluralism does include such an account. A religion can be true in at least three senses: a propositional sense (that is, its claims, at least to some degree, can describe reality as it actually is), an intrasystematic sense (that is, its claims can be logically compatible with one another), and an experiential-expressive sense (that is, its claims can express the experiential dimensions of religious life, the relations which religious people experience between themselves and the sacred reality or realities to which a religion supposed to be conducive). Religions facilitate the salvific transformation of human beings in all of these ways: by communicating–at least implicitly, but possibly more explicitly–the existence of a divine *telos* in which all beings are invited to participate, by doing so in an intrasystematically coherent fashion, and by

facilitating actual participation in the divine *telos* through the lived practice of their beliefs.

Truth, salvation, and religion are interconnected in the following way: Salvation is achieved by being freely chosen, which is only possible if some concept of it–some salvific truth–is available to one, and religion communicates such concepts by being "the primary form of culture in terms of which we human beings explicitly ask and answer the existential question of the meaning of ultimate reality for us" (Ogden 1992a:5).

Such an account can then address a set of questions raised by the pairing of truth and salvation that it involves. What is the relationship between these two? Why are both *truth-expression and salvific efficacy to be affirmed of many religions? Are these two somehow inextricably linked? Does a pluralistic interpretation of religion perhaps require what could broadly be called a* gnostic *account of salvation? In other words, does salvation necessarily involve, or perhaps presuppose, the possession of a certain kind of knowledge? Must a religion therefore be, in some sense, true, in order to be salvific? Must it convey knowledge of a certain kind? Is soteriology dependent upon epistemology?*

Soteriology is, in a sense, dependent upon epistemology. Truth and salvation are inextricably linked. The relationship between truth and salvation, again, is that salvation, at least for human beings, being dependent upon a free and conscious choice, requires some concept of it to be available to one, in the terms of the culture in which one actually exists, in order for it to *be* a viable option, a viable object of conscious choice. This is, therefore, in a broad sense, a 'gnostic' conception of salvation, of salvation as involving a form of knowledge. Both truth-expression and potential salvific efficacy are to be affirmed of many–indeed, all–religions because religion *as such*, as a form of human cultural activity, entails the faith in the ultimate meaningfulness of all such activity which is a necessary condition for its occurrence. Because God wills the salvation of all human beings, our free and conscious participation in the ongoing creative process of the cosmos, knowledge–salvific truth–which would enable us to make such a choice is available to us everywhere;

for it is implied in our very existence, and in all of our cultural activity. That more explicit cultural formulations of the nature of the divine *telos* will exist is to be expected. Our reason, in the form of process metaphysics gives us cause to hope for it. But the a priori affirmation that all religions must, in at least an implicit sense, be true, does not, at this point, justify us in saying more about the actual claims of historical religious communities.

Closely related to the issue of a theory of truth, a pluralistic account of religion must also be able to explain the senses *in which many different religions, giving expression to a variety of prima facie incompatible claims, can all validly be said to be true–senses presumably determined, at least in part, by the theory of truth that the account employs. Are many religions true because reality itself is ultimately amenable to a variety of true, though seemingly incompatible, descriptions? Or is it the nature not so much of reality, but of language, that creates the possibility of a plurality of apparently disparate, but nevertheless true, religious expressions of its ultimate nature? Similarly with salvation–are many religions salvific because, as Hick claims, salvation can be achieved in many ways? Or is there, in fact, as Mark Heim suggests, a plurality of salvations, for which the world's various religions provide correspondingly effective vehicles (Heim 1995:129-157)?*

The senses in which many different religions, giving explicit expression to a variety of prima facie incompatible claims, could all validly be said to be true are determined, in the manner of *syādvāda*, by discerning their logical compatibility with the claims of process metaphysics. The complexity of reality as disclosed in this metaphysical system does lend itself to a variety of possibly true, though seemingly incompatible, interpretations. The imperfection, as well as the creativity inherent in, language also contributes to the multiplicity of authentic meanings which can be predicated of reality. The multiplicity of perspectives on truth leads to a corresponding plurality of paths to salvation. Is there, as Hick claims, one salvation attainable in many ways? Or is Heim right, that there are actually many salvations, for which the world's religions provide correspondingly effective

vehicles? Applying *syādvāda* to the conception of salvation appropriate to the worldview of process metaphysics–freely chosen cooperation with the divine *telos*–I would say that salvation is, in a sense, one, and in another sense, many. It is one inasmuch as a description can be given, such as I have attempted, which seeks to encompass all forms of this phenomenon. But the particular character which this one salvation will take as a lived experience will vary from individual to individual–and, within an individual, from moment to moment, as new actual entities which constitute the personally ordered society which makes up the individual emerge and perish–not to speak of variations across cultures and historical epochs. How we each instantiate the divine will for ourselves in our lives is ultimately a matter of our own creativity, in cooperation with the will of God. Given the divine drive towards novelty, which Whitehead argues is an essential element in the divine *telos*, one would expect an enormous plurality of human conceptions of salvation, of harmonizing human existence to the divine will–a plurality much like what one actually observes to be the case.

Also related to both truth and salvation is the question of which *religions are true and salvific. If many religions are both true and salvific, which ones, and in what senses? And if only some, but not all, religions are true, by what criteria are some to be judged true and others not? If* all *are true, again, given the apparent incompatibilities of their many aims and contents, in what senses can this be validly affirmed?*

Again, the minimal sense in which *all* religions can be said to be true is the sense in which, as human activities, they all imply the meaningfulness and purposefulness which underlies all activity in the cosmos: the divine *telos*. It is in this sense that they are all potentially salvific as well. On the explicit level, though, the determination of the degree to which the particular claims of actual religions can be true is the task of interpretation. The criterion of relative adequacy is compatibility with the claims of process metaphysics. The possibility that many prima facie incompatible worldviews could possibly be evaluated as

simultaneously true, though in different senses, is a function of the complex nature of reality which this metaphysical system entails, and its corresponding interpretive principle of relativity. Again, one could hope, in light of the doctrine of the divine persuasion, that one would find explicit formulations of truth widely dispersed among the world's religions.

Any adequate attempt to answer these questions must also involve an interrogation of the validity of the very standards of truth employed by the pluralistic account itself. How are the standards that this account applies to the world's religions themselves to be justified? On what logical and moral grounds can they be applied?

Whitehead replies to this set of questions when he writes that, "ultimately nothing rests on authority; the final court of appeal is intrinsic reasonableness" (Whitehead 1978:39). Are the claims of this system internally coherent? Is it a logical system? Moreover, and arguably more importantly, do they cohere with human experience? The repeated application of this interpretive systems to sets of claims–claims which, arguably, reflect the experiences of large portions of humanity–is, in a sense, a repeated and ongoing test of the system itself, which must ever be open to new insights, new realities which it has yet to take into account, or to which its categoreal scheme is inadequate, while yet retaining its commitment to the basic insights which form its foundation. This 'balancing act' between openness and coherence, both of which are ultimately a matter of moral commitment, is the essence of the interpretive principle of relativity.

Related to this set of questions is yet another issue. Some account must also be given of why *it is the case that one can validly affirm that there are many (in some sense) true and salvific religions. What justifies one in making this assertion? From what point of view is it made? What kind of a universe is presupposed by such a claim? Addressing this issue adequately, of course, involves either the development or the deployment of an itself valid metaphysical system with which the claim can be shown to cohere–or, better yet, from which it can be shown to follow as a logical entailment.* This issue, essentially, is addressed by the

complex conception of reality, shared by both Jain and process metaphysics, which this interpretive system presupposes as its metaphysical basis.

Finally, the question remains of what one can do *with such a pluralistic account of religion once it has been constructed. What purposes can it serve? This question is raised with two possible kinds of purpose in mind–a scholarly purpose and a political one (though these are not, of course, separable in any ultimate way). On the scholarly side, can this account be usefully applied as an instrument for the interpretation of religious claims? Does it contribute anything substantive to our understanding of the world's religions? Or does it prejudge all issues of interpretation prior to any such application? On the political side, whose interests does such an account serve? Given its relativization of traditional sources of religious legitimation of authority, is it, as many contemporary religious pluralists would claim, an account that is liberatory for human beings? Or is it itself potentially complicit in concealing the application of oppressive power, in ideological domination?*

On the scholarly side, it seems that the chief sense in which this reconceived version of religious pluralism could be seen as an improvement over its predecessors is the sense in which it makes substantive claims at least about the cognitive content of the world's religions. Like such 'pluralistic hypotheses' as that of John Hick, it does prejudge some issues. Like Hick, who affirms that religions act as loci for salvific transformation, conceived as a shift from 'ego-centeredness' to 'Reality-centeredness,' I also affirm the ultimately salvific character of religions, their conduciveness to a life lived in consciously chosen harmony with the divine *telos* (which, interestingly, involves, as a necessary precondition, a shift of the kind Hick describes, from identification with one's own selfish ego concerns to identification with the good of the entire universe–which, of course, includes oneself and one's ego, though as a very, very tiny element). But, as has already been discussed, Hick's concept of the divine noumenon specifically does not allow one to

say anything substantive about the character of ultimate Reality. My system, however, I hope to show, does allow one to make such substantive claims–including the claim that there is a sense, with which Hick's perspective could, perhaps, be identified, in which the character of ultimate Reality is inexpressible.

The main objections on the scholarly side, however, to substantive claims of the kind which I intend to make I envision as coming most likely from those branches of the study of religion and culture which object in principle to the making of any normative claims. But because such an objection is, itself, a normative claim, such objections suffer from an incoherence which, in my judgment, renders them ultimately invalid as serious objections. Objections of a different kind, coming from those who simply disagree with my worldview, or with the approach I have taken, are to be expected, and are part and parcel of the scholarly enterprise–the respectful exchange of ideas, particularly with those with whom one disagrees, for the sake of correcting and refining one's own views and moving further along one's asymptotic approach to the truth, wherever it may lead.

On the political side, I would argue that the position I have taken is firmly on the side of human liberation. Like contemporary forms of religious pluralism, it does relativize traditional sources of religious legitimation of authority, taking its stand on the humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason reflecting on experience in the making of claims. In my judgment, in fact, it goes further in this regard than contemporary forms of religious pluralism by articulating this relativization–this ideology of resistance–in terms of a particular worldview for which it is willing to argue. More specifically, as I discussed in chapter one, this is a worldview which entails an ethic of both social justice and nonviolence. It advocates the construction of a society in which the freedom of all beings to

optimally pursue their creative expression, in harmonious mutual cooperation, without obstructing or being obstructed by others, would be a central value.[1]

9.3 A Reformed Religious Liberalism

It could be argued, however, that the modern commitment to the humanistic redemption of claims is already the dominant ideology in the world–and far from ushering in a 'new age' of peace, harmony, and creative expression, it has produced the most violent century that humanity has experienced, along with the cult of the totalitarian state, ethnic violence, and the hegemony of the 'free' market. In terms of human suffering, the two world wars and the various 'low intensity conflicts' which followed them arguably make the Crusades and the Inquisition pale in comparison. The destruction of the physical environment wrought by unbridled consumerism is of truly staggering proportions. Is an interpretation of religion based on this commitment, then, truly liberating? Or is it, as has been alleged of contemporary versions of religious pluralism, particularly common core pluralism, simply the latest version of the totalizing ideology of modernity, the theological face of global capitalism, just as the 'church militant' was the theological face of nineteenth-century European imperialism?

In response to this point, I would emphasize the distinction which Gamwell makes between the modern humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason, in its formal sense, and particular material understandings which base themselves upon it (Gamwell 1990:7-8). The dominant consensus of modernity, which has accepted Kant's rejection of the traditional metaphysical project and embraced scientistic positivism (which has been rejected by most scholars, including scientists, but still seems to reflect the dominant worldview of contemporary society), and upon which global capitalism is based, is, I believe, deeply mistaken. God does exist, and does have a particular metaphysical

[1] For a more detailed account of the kind of political philosophy a process metaphysic entails, see Gamwell 1990:185-211.

character which is knowable and redeemable on a humanistic basis, and this character entails the rightness of a mode of being in the world which, I believe, is quite different from that which now seems to prevail throughout most of the planet. I believe, therefore, that the pluralistic interpretation of religion which I have developed is quite different from those which seem, at least implicitly, to support an ideology of global capitalism.

By its internal logic, the conception of modernity dominant in the world today forces two equally undesirable options upon human beings. The first is assimilation to the dominant culture of modernity, which involves the privatization of one's religious beliefs (if one has such beliefs), and the implicit acceptance of consumerist values. This option, in fact, is all but inevitable if one participates–as one almost, as a matter of physical necessity, must–as a consumer in the capitalist economy. The second is the assertion of one's beliefs on antimodern, heteronomous grounds, such as the authority of some particular sacred text, teacher, or tradition–the phenomenon of 'fundamentalism'–which often seems to be the only recourse religious persons see themselves as having to resist assimilation.

I conceive of process metaphysics–and, by implication, the pluralistic understanding of religion which I have sought to develop in this dissertation–as offering a third way out of this contemporary situation, at least on a conceptual level: namely adherence to a religiously-informed worldview precisely *on the basis* of the humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason reflecting on experience which the dominant consensus of modernity claims as its basis as well. In moving beyond and questioning this dominant consensus, I see my project as 'postmodern'–but as modern in the sense of accepting the modern commitment in its formal sense, as the commitment which gives rise to my own religiously plural worldview. One need not accept the modern consensus, with its attendant skepticism about ultimate values, or leave one's mind at the door and embrace a fundamentalism. A middle path exists: a 'reformed religious liberalism,' analogous to the "reformed political liberalism" advocated by Gamwell, also on the basis of process

metaphysics (Ibid:194). This reformed religious liberalism, unlike its 'Schleiermacherian' predecessor, does not embrace an exclusively experiential-expressive approach to religious doctrine, but affirms the literal truth, though on a humanistic basis, of certain basic theological claims, such as claims about the existence and necessary metaphysical character of God. Such a liberalism is also pluralistic–but, again, unlike its predecessors in this regard, it bases its pluralism not on *uncertainty*–on the *inability* of a particular tradition, such as Christianity, to assert its claims in light of modernity–but on a positive worldview which is, in part, a critique of dominant modern views, and claims to stand on the same foundation of reason. Finally, this pluralism is also, to use Heim's term, 'more pluralistic' than current versions of this position–at least the common core versions informed by liberal modernity. Rather than reducing the teachings of the world's religions to the purely subjective bare minimum which the dominant modern consensus will allow, it incorporates them in their full propositional sense into its synthesis–logically beginning this process, of course, with Jainism, the historical source of its interpretive method.

9.4 The Distinctive Worldview and Method of Universalist Inclusivism

I call the method entailed by the reformed religious liberalism, the reconceived pluralistic hypothesis, which I advocate a 'universalist inclusivism.' This distinguishes my approach from traditional religious inclusivisms–which, as we have already seen, are rendered untenable by the arbitrariness involved in choosing, at least in the absence of a prior commitment to a particular metaphysic, *which* tradition is to be conceived as truly all-inclusive–as well as from contemporary versions of religious pluralism.

The intended contrast of the word 'universalist' is with the cultural and historical particularity of the various visions of ultimate reality offered by traditional inclusivisms: ultimate reality as mediated by, for example, Jesus, the Buddha, the Qur'an, the Veda, or Mahāvīra. It locates this inclusivism, essentially, in the modern commitment to the redemption of claims on, in principle, universally available grounds, rather than those of a

particular culture. This, of course, is not to say that ultimate reality might not be mediated by Jesus, the Buddha, the Qur'an, the Veda, or Mahāvīra–and a good many other such culturally particular realities as well. In fact, it is precisely as a *universalist* inclusivism that this system holds that *all* of these culturally particular entities are authentic mediators of the character of ultimate reality, on the basis of the argument from the universal divine salvific will entailed by a humanistically redeemed theism that I offered earlier in this dissertation.

The intended contrast of the word 'inclusivism' is with contemporary versions of religious pluralism which, in effect, deny their character as inclusivisms, but which nevertheless remain so in their logical structure; for, as I argued earlier, the logic of inclusivism is the logic of having a position at all, of not being a relativist. Inasmuch as they deny their character as inclusivisms, contemporary versions of religious pluralism suffer from a deep conceptual incoherence, pointed out by such critics of this position as Griffiths, which I take my position to correct by embracing the inclusivist label–though qualifying it with the term 'universalist.' As I have already cited Ogden as affirming, religious pluralism must employ (or at least imply) some philosophical norm if it is to be at all distinguishable from relativism. In this sense, therefore, it is an inclusivism; though, again, a universalist inclusivism, rather than one which affirms the ultimacy of some culturally particular vision of ultimate reality.

The universalist vision itself, of course, is also culturally particular. It cannot *completely* escape this fact. Nor should it wish to; for to escape altogether from cultural particularity would be to 'escape' from the possibility of communicating at all with other human beings. As discussed earlier, the power and beauty of religion, its compelling quality, arises precisely from its ability to infuse ultimate, general meaning into culturally particular symbols. The universalist insight, however, which gives rise to the pluralistic intuition, is the insight that one's own culturally particular symbols are not identical with, nor do they exhaust, ultimate reality. God, to use theistic language, cannot be confined

within any particular symbol, religion, or philosophy. A God which could would not be God. The pluralistic intuition is the intuition that all perspectives can have some validity, and that all symbols can point to God. A religious pluralist, then, is one who seeks the experience of divine realities in a plurality of culturally particular loci, on the understanding that the reality of God is both immanent within, and yet transcendent of, all of these. The attempt to formulate a pluralistic philosophy of religion, a pluralistic philosophical interpretation of religious claims and phenomena, is the attempt to escape, to the degree humanly possible, cultural particularity, but only to the extent that this will enable one to convey one's understanding of the universal reality which one has known in a plurality of forms. This involves–again, to the degree humanly possible–the attempt to base one's claims upon a foundation sufficiently abstract to avoid, or at least minimize, the inevitable epistemic circularity which arises when one evaluates religious claims and experiences on the basis of a particular religious symbol or system. Alhough it will not be truly 'universal'–constituting, in fact, one particular view among the many which already exist, and a new one at that–universality will be the goal it will approach asymptotically, the absolute limit which its affirmations of relativity must logically presuppose.

The distinctive worldview of a universalist inclusivism is eclectic–or better, synthetic–in nature ('eclectic' tending to imply an unsystematic, piecemeal appropriation of aspects of different systems of thought). The particular universalist inclusivism for which I have argued in this dissertation is, first of all theistic in character. But the theism which it affirms is neoclassical, not classical, theism. It affirms, therefore, a complex nature of ultimate reality–and of all entities–as involving both an eternal, abstract, conceptual nature and a temporal, concrete, consequent nature. It therefore includes a conception of ultimate reality which one of the pre-eminent critics of contemporary religious pluralism, Paul J. Griffiths, claims that a religious pluralism must entail:

> It means, to take an example from Buddhism and Christianity, that ultimate reality must be such that it can be characterized both as a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes but without any substantial independent existence, and as an eternal changeless divine personal substance. While it may not be impossible to construct some picture of ultimate reality that meets these demands, it is far from easy to see how it might be done (Griffiths 1991:47).

It is done, essentially, by Alfred North Whitehead in the construction of a system of metaphysics which aspires to approach his ideal of speculative philosophy: "to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted" (Whitehead 1978:3).

On the basis of Whitehead's conception of God, universalist inclusivism develops an interpretive principle of relativity which is essentially that entailed by the Jain approach to conceptual plurality, developed in such doctrines as *anekāntavāda, nayavāda,* and *syādvāda*. In applying this interpretive principle to the claims of the world's religions and philosophies, the distinctive worldview which constitutes universalist inclusivism–its 'open system,' or, to use Panikkar's term, 'open horizon' of meaning–will expand and be transformed to include new insights and experiences in its understanding of reality. If this universalist inclusivism is conceived as the worldview of a single person, this ongoing process of transformation could be seen to correspond to the process of 'interior dialogue' advocated by such dialogical pluralists as Panikkar and John Cobb.

9.5 The Complex Nature of Ultimate Reality

What might such a transformative process look like? How would the interpretive system of universalist inclusivism approach the actual claims of the world's religious and philosophical traditions? One may recall that the fundamental claim for which this dissertation is an argument includes an empirical as well as a metaphysical dimension–that it involves the claim that many actual religions could be *relatively* true, true in different senses and to different degrees–as well as the claim that all religions are necessarily, in at least an implicit sense, true. In this and the following section I would like to make some

preliminary assessments of particular claims of actual religious traditions, to show how the distinctive worldview of universalist inclusivism acts as an open interpretive matrix which is itself transformed by engagement with the claims of the world's religions.

I would like to begin with the universalist conception of the complex nature of ultimate reality, just discussed in the last section, and the ways in which this conception can be used, by means of the interpretive principle of relativity, to evaluate a variety of prima facie incompatible religious conceptions of ultimate reality as all relatively true.

Beginning, then, with the conception of ultimate reality entailed by process metaphysics, we have seen that this conception involves a dipolarity of divine aspects–that God has both a changing, temporal pole and a static, eternal pole. Phrasing this conception in terms of *syādvāda*, one arrives at the following formulation:

1. In one sense, God is changing and temporal.
2. In another sense, God is static and eternal.
3. In another sense, God is both changing and temporal and static and eternal.
4. In another sense, the character of God is inexpressible.
5. In another sense, the character of God is changing and temporal and inexpressible.
6. In another sense, the character of God is static and temporal and inexpressible.
7. In another sense, the character of God is changing and temporal, static and eternal, and inexpressible.

Immediately, one is struck by the parallelism between the dipolarity of God affirmed in process metaphysics and another kind of dipolarity pointed out by John Hick in the formulation of his pluralistic hypothesis: namely, the dipolarity, or contrast, between conceptions of ultimate reality as personal and as impersonal, which Hick calls the divine "personae" and "impersonae" (Hick 1989:246). On the assumption, warranted by the argument for the truth of religious pluralism–the principle of charity-on the basis of the universality of the divine salvific will, that all conceptions of ultimate reality are, in some

sense, true, one can begin the process, demanded by the principle of coherence, of correlating these conceptions with the claims of process metaphysics. One could then begin with the hypothesis that the various divine personae of which Hick speaks correspond to aspects of the consequent, temporal nature of God–which represents, in Whitehead's philosophy, God's 'personal' qualities of relation to and concern for the universe–that the divine impersonae similarly correspond to the unchanging, eternal nature of God, and that conceptions of the nature of God also exist which convey combinations of these concepts, as well as claims about the inexpressibility of the divine nature. One could then construct a matrix for the interpretation of specific religious claims about the character of ultimate reality on the basis of Whitehead's conception of God, formulated in the manner of *syādvāda*, which might look like the following:

1. Conceptions of God as changing and temporal: Religious conceptions which affirm, pre-eminently, the activity of God in history; YHWH; Allah; the *avatār*s of Viṣṇu.
2. Conceptions of God as static and eternal: Religious conceptions which affirm the character of ultimate reality as an impersonal ground of existence; Brahman; the *dharmakāya*; Aristotle's Prime Mover; the One of Neoplatonism.
3. Conceptions of God as both changing and temporal and as static and eternal: Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta's conception of Brahman as both impersonal ground and personal God; the Trinity of Christianity, on some readings; process philosophy.
4. Conceptions of the character of God as inexpressible: Apophatic traditions.

Categories 5, 6 and 7 could be seen to consist of conceptions of God, or ultimate reality, which combine elements of 1 and 4, 2 and 4, and 3 and 4, respectively.

Using such a pluralistic matrix, one can establish senses in which diverse, prima facie incompatible conceptions of ultimate reality can all be seen to correspond to aspects of ultimate reality affirmed by process metaphysics. Process metaphysics thus serves as a kind of conceptual map of the universe, upon which a plurality of prima facie incompatible interpretations of reality can be 'plotted' and shown to be both authentic and, ultimately, logically compatible. Similar pluralistic matrices could be constructed contrasting such

ideas as unity and plurality ("God is both one and many"), necessity and contingency ("God is, in a sense, a necessary being, and in another sense, contains contingent elements"), transcendence and immanence, actuality and possibility, etc.

In addition to demonstrating the *senses* in which specific conceptions of ultimate reality can be true, this method could also be used to specify the *degrees* to which particular claims can express truth. Recalling the Jain principle that the limiting factor on the degree to which particular claims can be affirmed to be true is their compatibility with the normative Jain worldview, what if one were faced with a claim which blatantly contradicted the tenets of process metaphysics? Let us take an extreme example: the claim, "God is evil," the necessary contrary of the claim, "God is good." For Whitehead, evil, essentially, is that which contradicts the divine *telos* of the maximization of beauty and harmony in the cosmos, of creativity–namely, the destruction of beauty. Its possibility, however, is also a necessary entailment of the freedom to choose alternatives which is intrinsic to the nature of an actual entity. As he elaborates:

> The intermingling of Beauty and Evil arises from the conjoint operation of three metaphysical principles:–(1) That all actualization is finite; (2) That finitude involves the exclusion of alternative possibility; (3) That mental functioning introduces into realization subjective forms conformal to relevant alternatives excluded from the completeness of physical realization (Whitehead 1967:259).

Returning, then, to the evaluation of the claim, "God is evil," let us see how it would operate within the sevenfold conceptual matrix of *syādvāda*:

1. In one sense, God is good.
2. In another sense, God is evil.
3. In another sense, God is both good and evil.
4. In another sense, the moral character of God is inexpressible.
5. In another sense, the moral character of God is good and inexpressible.
6. In another sense, the moral character of God is evil and inexpressible.
7. In another sense, the moral character of God is good, evil, and inexpressible.

The sense in which God is good is fairly evident within process metaphysics: God is the ground of all that is good, the foundation of the universal drive toward beauty and harmony in experience. The only sense which can be given to the claim, "God is evil" is inasmuch as God allows what actual entities perceive as evil to occur–the exclusion of certain possibilities which leads to the experience of suffering. This, however, is a sense which seems to be almost overwhelmed by the sense in which God is good; for it is the divine goodness, the drive towards beauty and harmony, which ultimately determines the character of God's persuasive activity on the world. The degree, therefore, to which the sentence "God is evil" expresses truth is much less than that of the sentence "God is good," and religious and philosophical conceptions of God as good are correspondingly more adequate as total expressions of the character of God than conceptions of God as evil.[2]

The application of process metaphysics as a conceptual matrix using the Jain interpretive method of relativity clearly enriches the universalist inclusivist's worldview. One thereby moves from the realm of abstract metaphysics to the interpretation of concrete symbols which function to mediate the reality of God to persons from a diverse variety of cultural contexts; and all of these symbols become a part of universalist inclusivism without their actual plurality being thereby reduced in any way. "The many become one and are increased by one" (Whitehead 1978:21).

9.6 A Plurality of Destinies: The Question of the Afterlife

The same method can be applied to the issue of our ultimate destiny. Is there an afterlife? If so, which of the various conceptions of the afterlife, if any, offered by the world's many religions and philosophies, is true? Is there an eternal existence after physical death? Or does something like the phenomenon of rebirth, or transmigration of the soul,

[2] Though one must concede that the sentence "God is evil" could carry considerable experiential-expressive truth, at least for a time, for trauma victims, such as survivors of torture or sexual assault; for God could well be perceived as allowing such traumas to occur.

occur? To address this issue, let us use the sevenfold method of *syādvāda*, with process metaphysics providing the senses in which the various possible answers to these questions could be true. First, with respect to the question of whether there is an afterlife at all, the following results are produced:

1. In one sense, there is an afterlife.
2. In another sense, there is not an afterlife.
3. In another sense, there both is and is not an afterlife.
4. In another sense, whether or not there is an afterlife is inexpressible.
5. In another sense, there is an afterlife and it is inexpressible.
6. In another sense, there is not an afterlife and it is inexpressible.
7. In another sense, there is and is not an afterlife and it is inexpressible.

In what sense can there be said to be an afterlife in terms of process metaphysics? The clearest affirmation of an afterlife in Whitehead's metaphysics takes the form of his doctrine of 'objective immortality,' according to which all actual entities, after they have perished, become part of the consequent nature of God–which is, in this sense, analogous to the 'cosmic memory' or 'storehouse consciousness' (*ālayavijñāna*) of Yogācāra Buddhism. A substantial portion, however, of John Cobb's work, *A Christian Natural Theology Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Cobb 1965:47-91), is devoted to arguing that an afterlife in a more conventional sense, involving consciousness on the part of the deceased, is possible on a Whiteheadian account of reality; for the personally (that is, serially) ordered society of actual entities which make up the human person, or 'soul,' on Whitehead's understanding, is logically distinct from the functioning of the complex society which makes up the human body, and which serves as the dominant actuality's vehicle in much the same way that the human body is held to be the vehicle of the soul in the Platonic and Indian traditions. So one can affirm that there is an afterlife on the basis of Whitehead's process

metaphysics, that this conception is not logically incompatible with his system of philosophy.

In another sense, there is not an afterlife in terms of process philosophy. If by 'life' we mean the functioning of the complex society of actual entities which constitute the physical body, then, when this functioning ceases, life ceases as well.

Similarly, there can be said both to be and not to be an afterlife, if one takes into account both the endurance of the soul, or personally ordered society, and the functioning of the physical body.

Finally, there is the sense in which this is an 'unanswerable' question–rather like the Buddha's unanswerable questions. The person, on a process account, as on a Buddhist account, is, to some degree, an abstraction from more concrete, momentary actual entities, or events. From the perspective of these more fundamental units of reality, one can say that there is ultimately no 'person' from day to day or from moment to moment, much less from lifetime to lifetime. The question of the afterlife, from this perspective, loses its meaning.

Similarly, one can pose not only the general question of whether there is an afterlife at all, but the more specific question of the phenomenon of physical rebirth:

1. In one sense, there is rebirth.
2. In another sense, there is no rebirth.
3. In another sense, there both is and is not rebirth.
4. In another sense, the occurrence or non-occurrence of rebirth is inexpressible.
5. In another sense, there is rebirth and its occurrence is inexpressible.
6. In another sense, there is no rebirth and its occurrence is inexpressible.
7. In another sense, there is and is not rebirth and its occurrence is inexpressible.

The phenomenon of physical rebirth, attested in both Platonic and South Asian traditions, could be explained in terms of process metaphysics, again, by recourse to the

doctrine of objective immortality. If the events of a particular lifetime–let us say, a human lifetime–are forever preserved in the divine memory, in the consequent nature of God, there seems to be no reason, on a Whiteheadian account of reality, why a future personally ordered series embodied in a physical form–let us say, again, a human form, for the sake of being uncontroversial–could not positively prehend that lifetime as its own. This might not necessarily occur on a conscious level. Given that the vast majority of human beings seem not to be aware of having had any past lives, it, in fact, seems highly likely that it will typically *not* occur on a conscious level (though, according to Whitehead, very little in the universe *does* occur on a conscious level). If a serially ordered society has its beginning at the physical conception of the body, there is no reason not to read its positive prehension of earlier lifetimes retroactively as a 'reincarnation' of those earlier 'souls' as this one.

This particular conception of the mechanics of reincarnation opens up the possibility that several individuals may positively prehend the same past lifetime or lifetimes. Rather like some Buddhist accounts of the phenomenon of rebirth, it allows, in other words, for one person to be 'reborn' as several different people, or to have different aspects of oneself reincarnated in different individuals–the fundamental units involved being not 'souls,' but prehensions, or internal relations.

The senses of the remaining six possible truth-values of the claim, "Rebirth does occur," would, it seems, be the same as those for the general question of an afterlife.

This truly pluralistic approach to the question of the afterlife allows a variety of different positions to be, in different senses, true: the belief that this life is followed by an eternal afterlife, the belief that this life is followed and was preceded by a beginningless and endless series of lifetimes, and the belief that the end of this life is simply the end. All can be accommodated within the conceptual framework provided by process metaphysics. All can be entertained as coherent possibilities within this expansive worldview.

9.7 Ethical Entailments: The Principle of Reciprocity

I have referred earlier to the ethical entailments of a pluralistic interpretation of religion based on a synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics, of such a system as entailing some form of the ethical principle of reciprocity–the 'Golden Rule'–that one ought to treat others as one would wish for oneself to be treated–which further entails the doctrine of *ahiṃsā*, or nonviolence–the absence of even the desire to do harm. How can such an ethical principle be deduced from the logic of *syādvāda*?

A clue is provided by Samantabhadra in his *Āptamīmāṃsā* when he discusses the question of the unity and plurality of beings (*Āptamīmāṃsā* 24-36). Are beings many or one? This question is analyzed in the following way according to the logic of *syādvāda*:

1. All beings are, in a sense, one (inasmuch as they share common characteristics).
2. All beings are, in a sense, many (inasmuch as their characteristics are distinct).
3. Beings are, in another sense, both one and many.
4. The unity and plurality of beings is, in another sense, inexpressible.
5. In another sense, beings are one and their unity and plurality is inexpressible.
6. In another sense, beings are many and their unity and plurality is inexpressible.
7. In another sense, beings are both one and many and their unity and plurality is inexpressible.

Given this understanding of the unity and plurality of beings, how ought one being to treat another? The very fact that beings are, in a sense, many, creates a necessary condition for the very posing of this question–for if there were no other beings to treat in a particular way, the question of *how* to treat them would not arise. The contrary truth, however, is that all beings are in a sense, one. Other beings should therefore be treated as, in a sense, the same as oneself. This is the metaphysical basis of the Golden Rule: We must treat others as we would wish for ourselves to be treated because they, in a sense, *are* ourselves. They are

not *only* ourselves–mere extensions of ourselves to be treated without regard to their independent existence–but we are all fundamentally one.

9.8 The Reformed Pluralistic Hypothesis

The claim, of course, that the diverse conceptions of various aspects of reality, such as the character of ultimate reality and the afterlife, which are *possible*–that is, logically compatible–with and within the conceptual framework of process metaphysics are actually *true* requires something more than logical proof. Assuming we have already established that such conceptions must all be true in the minimal sense of implicitly mediating salvific knowledge to human beings–their experiential-expressive sense of truth–what of their more literal, propositional truth as explicit claims about reality? The interpretive principle of relativity, it seems, enables us to say in what senses, beyond the bare minimum, these claims *can* be true; but does it allow us to determine whether or not they *actually* are?

We have seen, for example, that a variety of conceptions of both God and the afterlife can all be shown to be logically compatible in terms of the encompassing worldview provided by process metaphysics using the Jain interpretive method of relativity–that they call *can be* simultaneously true, though in different senses. But are they *actually* true? Does the phenomenon of reincarnation really occur? Did YHWH really guide the people of Israel out of Egypt under the direction of Moses? Does Lord Viṣṇu really descend to the realm of human beings from time to time in order to protect *dharma*? Did Mahāvīra really attain a state of omniscience? Did Jesus really die for all of our sins? According to the reconceived pluralistic hypothesis which this dissertation is intended to develop, all of these claims *can*, in different senses, actually be true. Their fundamental metaphysical premises are compatible with those of process metaphysics. But how do we know, beyond the experiential-expressive sense in which they act as mediating symbols for metaphysical salvific knowledge, if they really are true?

The presumption of the interpretive principle of charity involved in this conception of religious pluralism is that the claims of the world's various religions and philosophies are not, fundamentally, deceptive. In this sense, this approach to conceptual plurality is the opposite of a 'hermeneutic of suspicion,' which holds that all claims are, in some sense, delusory. It could be called a 'hermeneutic of confidence,' that fundamental metaphysical truths rest at the heart of all claims. A hermeneutic of suspicion is also, of course, incorporable within this system; for, just as *syādvāda* affirms that all claims are, in some sense, true, it also affirms, as an entailment of its affirmation of propositional relativity, that all claims are also, in some sense, false–inasmuch as they exclude their contraries. The cardinal logical sin in this system, again, is one-sided exclusivism in one's affirmations of truth. The fundamental assumption, in other words, is that all of these various claims actually capture *some* aspect of the truth. The point of the interpretive project is to determine the *possible* scope of this truth.

But how is *actual* truth to be determined? It seems that beyond the demonstration of the intrinsic *reasonableness* of a worldview which incorporates a plurality of diverse claims about the character of reality, what is required is actual *experience* which confirms the truth, as well as the validity, of these claims–experience which, of course, many religious persons who affirm these claims claim to have had. Accepting Hick's modified version of Alston's claim, discussed earlier, that religious persons in general are *justified* in forming their beliefs based upon the religious experiences that they have does not yet get us to the conclusion that all such beliefs are actually true. Nor, however, does the addition of a principle of coherence to the principle of interpretive charity which such a position supports, according to which the senses in which all such claims could possibly be true must be specified in terms of correlation with process metaphysics, get us beyond the claim that all religions *may be* true, at least on an explicit propositional level. It seems, then, that this approach to religious plurality does not, in the end, get us much further than Ogden's position–that there

may be many true religions. This approach does make this conclusion more specific. It allows us to say in *what* particular senses specific religious claims may possibly be true, in terms of process metaphysics. It also allows us to say that *all* religions are actually true, inasmuch as they implicitly mediate salvific knowledge–an implication of Ogden's position which he chooses not to define as a sense in which a religion is 'true.' But it does not yet take us to the conclusion which contemporary religious pluralists wish to affirm that there are actually many true religions in a more explicit sense of 'truth.' (I say "wish to affirm" because, as we have seen, contemporary religious pluralism, in the end, does not give a sense of 'truth' to many religions beyond the experiential-expressive level. It therefore, ultimately, goes no further than Ogden either.)

The approach to the issue of the actual truth of many religions, on an explicit propositional level, which I would like to suggest at this point–and which could be said to constitute my 'reformed pluralistic hypothesis'–is to rephrase the question. It seems to me that to frame this question, as both Ogden and Hick tend to do–and as I have been doing up to this point–in terms of 'proof,' as an issue which requires empirical investigation and hermeneutical engagement, in the manner of the physical sciences, is perhaps too much of a positivistic approach–as if the explicit truth of religious claims is something which could be verified through experimental observation. Not that this view is wholly false, but Whitehead's approach to the interpretation of experience, it seems to me, suggests an alternative way of conceiving this issue.

My 'reformed pluralistic hypothesis'–which is a speculation, but one for which I think Whitehead's method could conceivably provide a sound justification–is that the actuality of the truth of the possibilities affirmed in the world's religions is a matter not so much of prior objective fact, though this *can* be the case, but of an actualized and objectivized subjective experience. In other words, by believing in the truth of particular religious claims, whose possibility can be demonstrated in terms of process metaphysics,

religious persons could be seen to *make* those claims true–to actualize the raw possibilities for the conceptualization of existence which the universe, as conceived in process metaphysics, provides.

This is not, as it may appear at first glance, an abandonment of metaphysical realism. The possibilities which may be actualized are delimited by the actual character of reality as revealed in metaphysical reflection. But by living and believing *as if* reincarnation occurs, *as if* YHWH guided the people of Israel out of Egypt under the direction of Moses, *as if* Lord Viṣṇu descends to the realm of human beings from time to time in order to protect *dharma*, *as if* Mahāvīra attained a state of omniscience, *as if* Jesus died for all of our sins–all possibilities translatable into the terms of process metaphysics–my hypothesis is that human beings thereby actualize those possibilities, in a sense refashioning the universe–which is, after all, the sum total of all possible and actual experiential realities–and exercising their creativity to transform both themselves and reality, and also thereby contributing to the divine *telos* of the expansion of creative possibilities in the universe, which is the essence of salvation on this account of existence.

This hypothesis does not, it is true, enable us to answer the question, before anyone actually starts believing in them, of which, if any, of these possibilities is really true in a propositional sense. This, it seems, as Ogden would affirm, is an empirical matter–a matter for experience and further reflection on the character of that experience and its implications. *Were* any of the religious possibilities I have used as examples true before people started believing in them? Each requires its own individual investigation.

In a way, my hypothesis suggests that this question is beside the point. In that way, it could be seen as open to the same charge I have leveled against Hick: of relegating the significance of religious truth to a purely experiential-expressive realm. Indeed, it could be claimed that what I propose is experiential-expressivism with a vengeance; for I propose not

only that religious belief is significant primarily as an expression of the subjectivity of human beings, but that, *as such*, it *actually transforms reality*.

In order to make it clear what, precisely, I mean by this, it is not that by believing, for example, that Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, one, in a sense, reaches back into time and makes it the case. Again, there is a sense in which this is an empirical question, with a definite, objective answer. My point is that, whether or not it actually occurred, the 'mental' or 'subjective' universe or 'parallel reality' in which it *did* occur–the 'universe' constituted by belief in its occurrence–is a definite contribution to the possibilities for actualization in which all entities participate on Whitehead's understanding of reality. The life lived in the faith that Moses *did* lead the Israelites out of Egypt is a definite contribution to the enrichment of human experience. This hypothesis thus gives a realist metaphysical basis to the plurality of universes of meaning affirmed by Panikkar's theology of dialogue, as well as a specificity to Hick's claim that religions act as 'cognitive filters' for mediating salvific experiences to human beings.

To illustrate this hypothesis further, some examples from the Hindu tradition may be useful. Did Rāma, the king of Ayodhya, really exist as an historical figure? Did the Mahābhārata war, in which Lord Kṛṣṇa delivered the teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* to Arjuna, actually occur? Equally devout Hindus who worship these figures as deities express a variety of opinions on these essentially empirical issues. Again, as empirical issues, they must ultimately be resolvable, if at all, through empirical methods.

But as objects of worship and religious belief, these deities *do*, in a sense, exist and possess the characteristics attributed to them by Hindu tradition. For devout Hindus, these deities give a definite form and expression to the infinite reality of Brahman in which they are held to participate. This is their primary function as objects of religious belief and devotion, and the sense in which they are held to be 'real,' regardless of their prior historical existence (or non-existence). When an image of a deity is consecrated, that deity, or form of

Brahman, is called down from its 'world,' or *loka*, in order to inhabit the physical image and serve as a medium for communion with divinity–a process which could be interpreted as the actualization, the 'making real,' of a definite divine possibility. The subsequent worship of the deity is seen as a form of interaction with a particular aspect of ultimate Reality. Regardless of whether Rāma or Kṛṣṇa actually ever lived as historical beings, they *become* real, or actual, in the context of Hindu worship as definite forms of the divine reality.

In terms of the reformed pluralistic hypothesis, the ground of the possibility of the 'making actual' of a form of divinity is the fact that it manifests a real aspect of God, defined metaphysically. Because God, according to process metaphysics, literally possesses a personal, temporal, concrete aspect, God is capable of being conceived in personal, temporal, concrete terms. The metaphysical realism of this hypothesis stands in contrast with Hick's Kantian transcendental idealism. God is knowable and experienceable as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa (and Śiva, and Saraswatī, and YHWH, Allah, and Christ) not because these are human projections onto an intrinsically unknowable divine noumenon, but because God *really does possess* a personal aspect, further divisible into an enormous variety of more such aspects, which in turn possess the characteristics of these many forms of divinity. God can be 'experienced-as' Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Saraswatī, in other words, because they *really do exist* as possibilities for actualization within God's consequent nature, (at least) subsequent to their formulation as such by human beings. Our conceptions of divinity, along with everything else which we experience and contemplate, become elements in the consequent nature of God, attaining 'objective immortality' forever after as definite possibilities for actualization in the context of worship, of communion with and contemplation of the divine.

Religion, according to this new hypothesis, is a creative process by which one imagines possibilities, giving them definite shape in terms of some specific cultural matrix, and returning these originally bare, abstract possibilities to God, through the medium of our experience, as forms of definiteness, thus enriching the total nature of God as an actual

being, the divine experience of the universe. On this reading, the salvific character of religion, indeed, rests precisely in its creative aspect. Religion is an ongoing process of self-creation and re-creation of the universe, ultimtely conceived, in broad outline, in definite terms as the universe disclosed in process metaphysics, the universe which constitutes the conditions for the possibility of such creative activity. By such creation of possibilities for relating to the divine, we participate in the divine *telos* of enhancing the totality of creative expression. We thus contribute to the beginningless and endless creative 'expansion' of the universe. We become, in a sense, 'co-creators' of the universe, along with God, which is the fulfillment of the purpose of our existence–or, as J.R.R. Tolkien found more appropriate, given the absolute necessity of God's role in the cosmic play, and our own radical contingency, we become 'sub-creators'; for God's vision is the vision of perfection, whereas our human perspective is necessarily limited:

> It does not follow that we shall use that [creative] power well upon any plane. We may put a deadly green upon a man's face and produce a horror; we may make the rare and terrible blue moon to shine; or we may cause woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of cold worms. But in such "fantasy," as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator (Tolkien 1966:49).

9.9 The Question of Community

The very real existential question which arises for one who adopts a worldview such as this is: *Where* does one fit, as a religious person? Is there any particular religious community which one can call home? The questioning of the absolutist affirmations of the religious community in which was born and raised can lead to strong feelings of alienation from that community, particularly if one's questions and speculations are met with hostility. John Hick writes eloquently and movingly, and from firsthand experience, about the situation faced by one who accepts some version of the pluralistic hypothesis:

> Let me now speak from within my own situation as a Christian who has already begun to see the religious situation of the human race pluralistically. Must there not be a tension, for those of us who accept a world ecumenism, between this and our continuing Christian loyalty? The answer, I think, is that there is indeed such a

> tension and that it is inevitable that there should be. It does not manifest itself primarily at the intellectual level. For forms of Christian belief, and in particular of Christology, Trinitarianism and atonement doctrine, have developed in our time which can claim to be true to the New Testament data and which yet do not entail the traditional Christian absolutism.…The tension comes rather at the level of the emotion and the imagination. For the idea of the absoluteness and the unique superiority of Christ, the Christian gospel and the Christian church is deeply embedded in our liturgies and cultural history as well as in the assumptions of so many of our fellow Christians. One participates in the liturgy, joins in singing the hymns, is part of the community and its history, and yet at the same time one does not share its still prevailing absolutist and exclusivist assumptions. Hence the tension; and all that we can do, I think, is to continue to live in this tension, accepting the moments of pain and turmoil that it can involve (Hick 1989:379).

Is there an alternative, though, to living in this tension? To accepting these moments of pain and turmoil? The alternative which I have sought–as someone who, like Hick, started out in the Christian tradition–has been to find a religious community whose worldview is closer to my own. As Hick, of course, writes, the tensions that one experiences in this situation are not primarily on an intellectual level. They are more emotional and interpersonal. For a very long time, in my own experience in the Roman Catholic Church, I felt no tension between my beliefs and those of the community around me. The community was warm and supportive and my beliefs were my own private interpretation with which others rarely sought to argue.

When I went to college, though, at a Catholic university, the tension increased. I found arguments on an intellectual level to interfere with my experience of the community, and began experiencing an increasing sense that the community supported neither me nor my beliefs. I identified my sense of personal alienation with the beliefs which made me stand out from the Christian community, as well as the social and political attitudes which I found to be appropriate to those beliefs and which were largely incompatible with the theologically and politically conservative environment in which I found myself. I sought to find a community whose beliefs were closer to my own, with a sufficiently expansive vision to accept my universalism, and to enrich it further with its own insights.

The community whose beliefs I have consistently found to be most compatible with my own has been the community of what could be broadly called modern liberal Hindus, or Neo-Vedāntins–though, in terms of philosophy, I find the synthesis of Jain and process metaphysics which I have presented here to constitute a more consistent logical foundation for those beliefs than traditional Vedāntic philosophy, though this philosophy certainly has its own sphere of validity. This is also a community with which I have developed strong personal connections–first, simply out of religious interest, but finally, through marriage, accompanied by a formal 'conversion' ceremony. Despite my necessarily marginal status as a 'convert' to a religion into which it is held, by overwhelming consensus, that one must be born, I also find that I have been warmly welcomed by this community.

Nevertheless, I would not want to identify my religious commitment, ultimately, with Hinduism in any exclusive sense. I remain, fundamentally, a universalist. To the extent that my faith commitment is to Hinduism, it is to Hinduism as understood by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan as "not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance" (Radhakrishnan 1927:18). I would want to draw a distinction between the 'universal religion,' or *sanātana dharma*, in which Hinduism participates and the worldly institutions which are called by this name. This distinction could be seen to be analogous to St. Augustine's distinction between the invisible 'Body of Christ' or '*civitate dei*' and the visible Christian Church; or Karl Barth's distinction between God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and Christianity as an historical, human construct; or Kundakunda's distinction between the *niścayanaya*, the pure, unobstructed experience of the *jīva*, and the *vyavahāranaya*, the karmically conditioned worldview of conventional Jainism. All religious communities, on my understanding, ultimately provide modes of participating in the same cosmic salvific process, contributing their own distinctive understandings back to this process, and thereby transforming it. This could be seen as my modified

Whiteheadian-Jain formulation of the contemporary Hindu doctrine that all paths, ultimately, lead to God:

> I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of these faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom all one and were all helpful to one another (Gandhi 1982:78).

With Mahātma Gandhi, I would want to affirm a solidarity with people of all faiths. The point, it seems to me, of a pluralistic interpretation of religion is openness–that is, a willingness to learn from others and to adopt their insights as one's own, thereby transforming both oneself and those insights, as these are adapted to fit a worldview other than that in which they emerged. This is the 'pluralistic attitude' about which such thinkers as Tracy, Panikkar, and Cobb have written with great eloquence. It is also an ongoing creative process, involving an openness to still more insights and transforming experiences. The system of thought which I find to most clearly and compellingly articulate my fundamental worldview, the self-understanding I have developed in the course of reflecting upon my life experiences, is process metaphysics, and the method of interpretation I find to be most coherent with this worldview is that of the Jain doctrines of relativity. My effort in this dissertation has been to show that these two systems of thought truly are compatible on a logical level. Together, I believe they constitute a systematic conceptual version or model of the kind of open-ended process of interior dialogue with the world's religions which has so enriched and challenged, and continues to enrich and challenge, my own existence.

9.10 The Organic Principle: A Cosmological Vision of Salvation

Finally, like Panikkar and Cobb, the transcendental condition for the possibility of the kind of interpretation of religion that I propose is ultimately an experiential one. Expressed by Panikkar as the 'christic' or 'cosmotheandric' principle, and by Cobb as the process of 'creative transformation,' I see the condition for the possibility of the kind of

pluralistic vision of reality which I propose as being the essential relatedness of all existence as affirmed in both Jain and process metaphysics.

Whitehead frequently referred to his philosophy as a 'philosophy of organism,' referring to the organic interrelations which make up all actual entities–and ultimately, the cosmos as a whole, including God. Just as the logic of a metaphysical system which affirms such a relational character of all existence implies an interpretive principle of relativity, in the manner of the Jains, similarly, this relational character can also be seen to make possible human salvation; for it is in our relatedness–to God, to one another, and to the rest of the universe–that we have our very being. According to Whitehead, this relatedness, this principle of relativity, is the one metaphysical truth which applies to all entities, actual and non-actual. This 'organic principle' is therefore the ground, as well, for our salvation; for through it and in it we are able to participate in the divine *telos*, in the ongoing process of the creative transformation of the universe, in the actualization of more and more of the infinite possibilities conceptualized in the primordial mind of God.

In *I and Thou*, Martin Buber writes that all relationships ultimately intersect in God (Buber 1970:123). In the divine relativity–the supreme relatedness of God to all beings, and of all beings both to God and to each other–the plurality of the perspectives and interpretations–the 'prehensions'–which make up the universe are perpetually reintegrated and creatively transformed. Any attempt to express this process in the form of a conceptual system must necessarily be inadequate to the reality it represents. But yet, by its very existence, as an act of creativity within the larger system of the universe, it participates in the very salvific process which it seeks to express.

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