**Notes on Hick**

**Ptolemy, AD 100 – c. 170, developed the Ptolemaic System of astronomy in which the earth was the center of the universe. This view dominated thought until the time of Copernicus and Galileo in late 1500’s and early 1600’s. One great difficulty in his theory was the use of epicycles, little circles, which planets did upon the big cycle of their apparent orbits around the earth.**

**Copernicus, 19 February 1473 – 24 May 1543) was a**[**Renaissance-era**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance-era)**mathematician and astronomer who formulated a**[**model**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathematical_model)**of**[**the universe**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial_spheres#Renaissance)**that placed**[**the Sun rather than the Earth at the center of the universe**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heliocentrism)**, likely independently of**[**Aristarchus of Samos**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristarchus_of_Samos)**, who had formulated such a model some eighteen centuries earlier.**[**[a]**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaus_Copernicus#cite_note-8)

**The publication of Copernicus' model in his book**[***De revolutionibus orbium coelestium***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_revolutionibus_orbium_coelestium)**(*On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*), just before his death in 1543, was a major event in the**[**history of science**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science)**, triggering the**[**Copernican Revolution**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copernican_Revolution)**and making an important contribution to the**[**Scientific Revolution**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_Revolution)**.**[**[8]**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaus_Copernicus#cite_note-9)

**Galileo death the death blow to Ptolemy when he discovered in early 1600’s that the moons of Jupiter revolved around Jupiter and not the earth, and the Copernican Revolution in astronomy was now definitely begun.**

**John Hick proposes that we need to have a Copernican Revolution in our thinking of religious truth; rather than evaluating other religions from the viewpoint of our own religion, we should evaluate all religions from the viewpoint of the greater truth of God, like the Sun around whom all religions orbit.**

**John Hick proposes that we reflect upon the creative, interpretative quality of our knowledge and faith, whether natural knowledge, moral knowledge, or religious faith and knowledge. As for natural knowledge, we cannot prove that our experience discloses an external world. Descartes' famous methodic doubt questioned whether he could tell the difference between a dream world and a real world and whether he could overcome the doubt that an evil spirit was tricking him into falsity in everything that he claimed to know. Many philosophers have found these doubts a labyrinth from which there is no escape. "As the history of modern western epistemology has established, there is no theoretical proof that we perceive a real world, or even that there is a real environing world to be perceived." Nevertheless, the human interpretation of our perceptual and emotional experience is that we do live in a natural world and that we can pragmatically interact with things and events in this world in order to survive and even flourish. All our perceptual experience has the character of experiencing-as. For example, we do not simply experience what is on the table as a pie-tin. We experience it as a container for a pie. We interpret the thing as meaningful within our causal interaction with it. Such interpretations are not fixated. For example, we can creatively interpret the pie-tin as a frisbee. In general, the interpretation that we do live in a natural world with which we causally interact works, but we cannot prove it conclusively.**

**So also for our knowledge of other persons. One significant question in twentieth century philosophy has been our knowledge of other persons. Just as Descartes raised the issue of how do we know the external physical world, a similar question derived from his method about how we know that other persons or minds exist. While we cannot prove that the external world exists, neither can we prove that other persons exist. Nevertheless, the fundamental interpretation of ourselves as living in interaction with other persons works and works very well. We are born without any concept of ourselves or others as persons, but we gradually learn to interpret our experience of our own body as the center of a consciousness that lives in relation to other bodies that are also centers of consciousness. This fundamental experience of others as persons "is so basic that someone who did not perceive in this way would probably have to be controlled in a mental hospital; for this way of experiencing-as is the basis of the moral and therefore of social life." In general, the interpretation that we live in a natural world with other persons and that we have moral responsibilities to them works and enriches our lives pragmatically, but we cannot prove this fundamental interpretation conclusively.**

**We can develop an example that shows the ambiguity of experience as capable of being interpreted on a natural level and on a moral level. Suppose someone is hit by a car and lies unconscious by the side of the road. An individual drives by, simply interpreting this event as having natural significance. An object was impacted by another moving object at a certain velocity and a specific angle resulting in an impetus to the first object off to the side of the road. This interpretation remains on the level of natural significance. To interpret this person as needing help and to interpret myself as morally responsible to help in some manner is to experience this event as having moral significance. Now it might be possible to train an individual by rewards and punishments to conform to a set of social rules in responding to such situations, but such conditioning would not conclusively prove to such an individual that one should adopt the inner attitude of morality. The inner attitude of morality requires, Hick affirms,**

**... mutuality, or the acceptance of the other as another person, someone else of the same nature as oneself. The fundamental moral claim is accordingly to treat others as having the same value as myself. This is in effect a transcription of the Golden Rule found in the Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Zoroastrian, Jain and Christian scriptures and in the Jewish Talmud and the Muslim Hadith ... , and is likewise a translation of Kant's concepts of a rational person as an end and of right action as action which our rationality, acknowledging a universal impartiality transcending individual desires and aversions, can see to be required.**

**Just as there is a creativity involved in our perceptual experience of natural objects as having potential meanings for our interaction, so also is there a creativity involved in our moral experience of other persons as having potential meanings for our interaction. But this freedom in how we interpret our experience of other persons in moral ways is much greater than our freedom in interpreting our perceptual experiences. Morally, we might limit our sense of mutuality to our own family or ethnic group or nation. Pre-literate tribal societies and even slave-owning societies until the nineteenth century typically did not interpret people outside of their tribe or outside of their racial grouping as entitled to the same moral considerations as people of their own group. Even today, our "perception of the human person as an end in him- or herself, as a neighbor to be valued as we value ourselves, is an ideal seldom achieved." It cannot be conclusively proven that we ought to value all humanity as an end in itself. We have a significant degree of freedom and creativity in our consciousness of our moral responsibility to others, and it is reasonable to say that moral conversion to a more inclusive sense of mutuality for all persons is what we are called to by the better possibilities of human nature.**

**Just as there is some creativity in our perceptual experience and a greater degree of creativity in our moral experience, there is an even greater degree of creativity in our experience of the ultimate meaning of our natural and moral experience. On the one hand, we have seen that it is reasonable to interpret our natural and moral worlds as religiously significant. The theist sees the natural world and moral responsibility as deriving from the God who creates matter, energy and life and who inspires moral responsibility and moral conversion to a life lived in the spirit of the Golden Rule, even loving all humanity as God loves all humanity. On the other hand, we have also seen that it is reasonable to interpret our natural and moral worlds naturalistically. The atheist holds that it is reasonable to interpret the natural world without God as an explanatory hypothesis. The atheist also holds that it is reasonable to interpret our moral responsibility to all human beings as ends in themselves as revealing the better possibilities of our nature. Even if God does not inspire morality or does not punish evil-doers, still moral values are ends worth seeking for their own sake. Their future realization can deeply motivate human beings even though they do not believe in an almighty personal being who is Perfect Truth and Perfect Love. Our cognitive freedom, our creativity, in interpreting the ultimate significance of our natural and moral worlds is very great. If we understand "religious experience very broadly, as the whole experience of persons in as far as they are religious, then the element of free responsive choice within this would seem to lie at the heart of faith...." Faith in this broad sense is defined in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's well-known account as:**

**an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at a more than mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension.**

**While there are, of course, theistic interpretations of faith in Western religions and pantheistic interpretations of faith in Eastern religions, it is important to recognize that there have been atheistic, non-realist interpretations of faith by such thinkers as Ludwig Feuerbach, John Dewey, John Herman Randall Jr., Julian Huxley, R. B. Braithwaite, and many others. Such non-realist interpretations of the transcendent dimension of human experience grasped in faith seem, Hick affirms:**

**to offer everything that is of indubitable value in religion--the quest for inner peace and purity of heart, the development of love and compassion, the outgrowing of the natural ego with its obsessive cupidity and corrosive anxieties--without the encumbrance of a system of supernatural beliefs which has lost its plausibility for many modern minds.**

**Consequently, we cannot charge the atheist with ignoring the transcendent faith dimension of human life. The atheist can interpret a religious dimension to the universe and morality but still do so naturalistically. We cannot resolve the argument between the theist and the atheist with conclusive proof. Socratically, we need to acknowledge our own ignorance at the very heart of our interpretations of the ultimate significance of the natural and moral worlds.**