

APPENDIX C

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Abridged from "How Can Christ Be the Only Way to God?" by Dr. William Lane Craig

"How can Christianity claim that other religions are wrong?"

It is frequently asserted that it is arrogant and immoral to make any kind of exclusive religious claim because one must then regard all persons who disagree with one's own religion as mistaken. This appears to be a textbook example of the logical fallacy known as argument ad hominem, which is to try to invalidate a position by attacking the character of those who hold to it. This is a fallacy because the truth of a position is independent of the moral qualities of those who believe it. Even if all Christians were arrogant and immoral, that would do nothing to prove that their view is false. Not only that, but why think that arrogance and immorality are necessary conditions of exclusive religious claims? Suppose I've done all I can to discover the religious truth about reality and I'm convinced that Christianity is true, and so humbly embrace Christian faith as an undeserved gift of God. Am I therefore arrogant and immoral for believing what I sincerely think is true? Finally, and even more fundamentally, this objection is a double-edged sword. For the pluralist also believes that his view is right and that all those adherents to non-pluralistic religious traditions are wrong. Therefore, if holding to a view that many others disagree with means you're arrogant and immoral, then the pluralist himself would be convicted of arrogance and immorality.

Or to give another example, it is frequently alleged that Christianity cannot be correct because religious beliefs are culturally relative. For example, if a Christian believer had been born in Pakistan, he would likely have been a Muslim. Therefore his belief in Christianity is untrue or unjustified. But this again seems to be a textbook example of what is called the genetic fallacy: trying to invalidate a position by criticizing the way a person came to hold that position. The fact that your beliefs depend upon where and when you were born has no relevance to the truth of those beliefs. If you had been born in ancient Greece, you probably would have believed that the sun orbits the Earth. Does that therefore imply that your belief that the Earth orbits the sun is false? Evidently not! And once again, the pluralist pulls the rug from beneath his own feet: had the pluralist been born in Pakistan, he would likely have been someone who believes in a non-pluralistic religion. Thus, on his own analysis his pluralism is merely the product of his being born in late twentieth century Western society and is therefore false or unjustified.

In these ways, the common pluralistic arguments against Christianity frequently found in literature can be shown to be rather unimpressive. Once we see through the thin pluralistic arguments, we can move from the endless uncertainty of pluralism and on to the business of actually seeking with the potential of finding some answers. Using our rationality to consider the evidence presented in this course, we can have hope that it is actually possible to have a reasonable amount of confidence in the truthfulness of a particular worldview, such as Christianity.