



A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF PLANTINGA'S ARGUMENTS IN DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISM

UN EXAMEN CRÍTICO DE LOS ARGUMENTOS DE PLANTINGA EN DEFENSA DEL EXCLUSIVISMO RELIGIOSO

Richa Singh

Department of Philosophy,
Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar, U.K. India
1003.richasingh@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3383-268X>

DOI <https://doi.org/10.48204/2805-1815.6089>

INFORMACIÓN DEL ARTÍCULO	ABSTRACT/RESUMEN
<p>Recibido el: 28/08/2024 Aceptado el: 27/09/2024</p> <p>Keywords: Christianity, Judaism, religion, religious belief, theology</p> <p>Palabras clave: Cristianismo, judaísmo, religión, creencia religiosa, teología</p>	<p>Abstract: In "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism" Alvin Plantinga defends religious exclusivism from a variety of objections. In this paper I discuss two of those objections. First, where Plantinga set two grounds of their religious beliefs as exclusivist, they missed to mention a third important ground of exclusive believe which is 'Holy Scriptures'. In this paper I'll try to show that this third ground can change the scenario. Second, in the against of moral objections, like Exclusivists, are guilty of moral failures and arrogant, elitist, egotistical, unjust, oppressive, and imperialistic etc.; Plantinga reply that: Religious exclusivism is not necessarily a moral or intellectual failure and, (because?) given the human condition, some exclusivism is inevitable in our lives. In other words, there is no alternative to religious exclusivism. I argue, in contrast to Plantinga, that there is a contradiction in their argument and a version of this principle is not absolutely correct.</p> <p>Resumen: En "Pluralismo: una defensa del exclusivismo religioso", Alvin Plantinga defiende el exclusivismo religioso frente a una variedad de objeciones. En este artículo analizo dos de esas objeciones. Primero, cuando Plantinga estableció dos fundamentos de las creencias religiosas como exclusivistas,</p>

:	omitió mencionar un tercer fundamento importante de creencia exclusiva que son las Sagradas Escrituras. En este artículo intentaré mostrar que este tercer elemento puede cambiar el escenario. En segundo lugar, en contra de objeciones morales como la de los exclusivistas, son culpables de fracasos morales y arrogantes, elitistas, egoístas, injustos, opresivos e imperialistas, etc.; Plantinga responde que: El exclusivismo religioso no es necesariamente un fracaso moral o intelectual y, (¿por qué?) dada la condición humana, cierto exclusivismo es inevitable en nuestras vidas. En otras palabras, no hay alternativa al exclusivismo religioso. Sostengo, en oposición a Plantinga, que hay una contradicción en su argumento y que una versión de este principio no es absolutamente correcta.
---	--

Introduction

Exclusivists contend that specific doctrines are true and those incompatible with them are false. The major ethical complaints against religious exclusivism are that exclusivists are intellectually arrogant, or egotistical, or selfishly arbitrary or dishonest, or imperialistic or oppressive. In "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism", Alvin Plantinga well tried to defend religious exclusivism from a variety of objections. An attempt is made here to examine some of those arguments presented by Alvin Plantinga for religious exclusivism.

First, a brief description of the meaning and usage of the word exclusivism is being presented here following, in the light of which it would be possible to properly understand the arguments presented by Alvin Plantinga. In the 1980s, the 'Trichotomy' (Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism) used by Alan Race to explain the interrelationship of different religions became a standard. On this basis, for the first time 'exclusivist' or 'exclusivism' was used in the sense of religious exclusivity. Religious exclusivism, as according to its name; accepting the beliefs or beliefs of any one religion as "exclusive" like none other and declares it as the best and only (true theory or opinion), hence it is called 'religious exclusivism'. Theoretically "it is the antithesis of religious pluralism, which holds that all religions provide valid responses to the existence of God." (Meister, 2007, pp. 106-107)

In the term of exclusivism, almost all philosophers support the definition given by William Wainwright (2005): "'Religious exclusivism' or 'Religious exclusivity' is a doctrine or belief based on the fact that only a particular religion or belief system is true." (p. 345) The English word exclusivism is originally derived from the Latin word 'ex-cludier', which literally means - 'to exclude'. According to exclusivists, only their religion is the only true

and real religion, so there is no respect for the ideas and beliefs of other religion. According to this,

- Exclusivist believes, those who reject his way have false beliefs.
- Exclusivists believes, they have something of great value that others lack and are ignorant of.
- Exclusivists believe that, in this sense, they are privileged.

Thus, it supposes that exclusivists are guilty of moral failures like arrogant, elitist, egotistical, unjust, oppressive, and imperialistic.

Although, religious exclusivism is the doctrine held by a particular faith or set of beliefs that only it can attain salvation, while groups that do not share their faith will be denied the blessings associated with it. In its more extreme form, religious exclusivism teaches that only members of one religion or sect will reach heaven, while all others are subject to eternal damnation. For example , "In the Roman Catholic Church, the exclusivist idea of 'no salvation outside of the (Christian) church' (Latin: Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus) has roots as early as the Christian patriarch." (Dale, 2015) In this context, the doctrine of religious exclusivism offers the exact opposite of religious pluralism, according to which all will ultimately receive the infinite blessings of God or the heavenly realm. According to American religious professor, Diana Eck: "Exclusivism is more than simply a conviction about the transformative power of the particular vision one has; it is a conviction about its finality and its absolute priority over competing views". (Pratt, 2007, p. 296)

Arguments presented in the defense of exclusivism

Alvin Plantinga uses two pillars to present his theological views in his article "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism". In his words,

I find myself with religious beliefs, and religious beliefs that I realize aren't shared by nearly everyone else. For example, I believe both:

- The world was created by God, an almighty, all-knowing, and perfectly good personal being (one that holds beliefs; has aims, plans, and intentions; and can act to accomplish these aims).

- Human beings require salvation, and God has provided a unique way of salvation through the incarnation, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of his divine son. (Plantinga, 2009, p. 305)

Criticism. Its noteworthy here that Alvin Plantinga in his article has mentioned only two grounds in relation to exclusive faith - Father (God) and Son - (Prophet) but he has given the third main basis of exclusive faith which is Holy Scripture in his article. The role of Holy Scriptures is very important in exclusivism because on this basis the principle of 'Divine revelation' works, which is the crux of religious exclusivity. Therefore, Alvin Plantinga's above presented argument seems to be an offering due to not giving place to religious scriptures as the basis of religious exclusivist belief. 'Divine Revelation' is accepted as an eternal and self-evident source of knowledge independent of both sense experience and reason. According to Hick (1989) " Revelation is the importing to men of divinely authenticated truths." (p. 2) Thus, it is divinely given, hence all the attributes of God are present in it, that is, this truth, is eternal and supernatural, for the accomplishment of which neither arguments nor proofs are required.

The religious scriptures are not just a means of knowledge, but are considered to be worship able, supernatural, inviolable, unobjectionable and unchangeable, because all those qualities are attributed to the religious scriptures which are found in the personality of the founder of the religion or in the experience of divine revelation. Though this reason, every sentence is 'Brahmavakya' (The word of God), therefore every opinion, every letter of that scripture is considered as an article of law. Even raising questions on these comes under the category of blasphemy in some religions, for which there is evidence of even death penalty in our history and examples of this can be easily seen in some places even today. It is noteworthy that the attitude of Islam religion has been the strictest in this matter, where condemnation and questioning are far away, there even the interpretation and translation of the scriptures can be considered against religion. Judaism and Christianity are not separated from it. For example, the Catholic Church not only talks about the inerrancy of Scripture but also believes in the 'doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture'. (Gray, 2013, p. 287)

On this basis, the Second Vatican Council declared that "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors asserted by the sacred writers must be held to be the Holy Spirit, it follows that book of Scripture must be acknowledged teaching solidly, faithfully and without errors that truth which God wanted to put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation." (Paul VI, 1965) Thus, Dei Verbum 11 having made it clear that only propositions asserted in the Bible convey truths to be delivered. This section has been a point of controversy, as the Church's traditional understanding of the inerrancy of Scripture has come under attack in recent decades, and this particular passage can seem ambiguous on the point. Is Scripture without error (inerrant) generally, or is it without error only on matters concerning our salvation? However, A. Grillmeier (1969) state on that

First, even granting that Dei Verbum restricts inerrancy to matters of salvation, this isn't the same as limiting it to religious or moral truths. Historical or scientific assertions made 'for the sake of our salvation' would be inerrant too. Second, the theological commission at the Council stated that the term 'Salutaris' (for the sake of our salvation) doesn't mean that only the salvific truths of the Bible are inspired or that the Bible as a whole isn't the Word of God. (p. 213)

It is worth mentioning here that according to Catholic religion, John Hick has considered the nature of divine knowledge to be propositional and according to Protestant religion, he has considered the nature of divine knowledge to be non-propositional. The meaning of propositional is that it accepts certain truth like deductive logic, whereas on the other hand, non-propositional means that in it the truth is not completely certain like inductive logic. (Hick, 1989, p. 5) The roots of religious exclusivity are the promissory principle of divine revelation works in it, which is equally accepted by both Christianity and Islam. In this context, Gavin D'Costa says- "pluralists have two main critiques of exclusivists: that they do not know their own scriptures well enough, and people of other religions are good and loving." (D'Costa, 1996, p. 225)

This is the root cause of essence of religious exclusivity in these religions is presented in the harshest form in relation to us. Therefore, when Plantinga does not place the Holy Scriptures in the ground of their religious belief, his arguments do not look appropriate from the exclusivist point of view. It may be possible for a person to believe

in the Father but not in the Son or to believe in the Son but not in the Father or in neither; but being an exclusivist and specifically being a believer of an Abrahamic religion, it is not possible for a person not to believe in the Holy Scriptures. If a person does this, then he himself comes out of the category of exclusivism.

Again, in their discussion on behalf of these two religious beliefs, he shows that there can be almost three types of people in the world:

- (i) Those who can agree with me on the first belief but not on the second. They are followers of a non-Christian existential religion.
- (ii) Those who may agree with neither the first nor the second, but still believe that there is something beyond the natural world, that something which is necessary to depends for keep human welfare and salvation in a right relationship.
- (iii) He shows that after the Enlightenment, there are some people, especially in the West, who do not believe in the above three views, they can be called Naturalists.

Alvin Plantinga believes that when a person becomes aware of these three types, then it starts affecting his own religious belief. In this regard he raises the question that- "The question I mean to ask here is, what does the awareness of religious diversity mean of should mean for my religious beliefs?" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 305) is to continue to believe in what you have always believed in. The second is –you learn about this diversity but continue to believe in it. Here Alan raised the question is that– "None there are several possible reactions to awareness of religious diversity. One is to continue to believe- what you have all also believed; you learn about this diversity but continue to believe that is, take to be true."(Plantinga, 2009, p. 305)

As a result of awareness of religious diversity, both of these propositions have been accepted by Plantinga as the basis of religious exclusivism where he tries to show that no matter which of these two propositions we choose, we find ourselves stand in the category of so-called religious exclusivism. Regarding this way, he says that- "The exclusivist holds that the tents or some of the tents of one religion — Christianity, let's say — are in fact true; he adds, naturally enough, that any propositions, including other religious beliefs,

that are incompatible with those tenets are false." (Plantinga, 2009, p. 305) Plantinga bases his argument on the key questions raised on religious exclusivism, such as the epistemological, intellectual and/or moral failure, and attempts to show that these questions are entirely relevant to our human condition, seems inevitable. The major ethical complaints against religious exclusivism are that exclusivists are intellectually arrogant, or egotistical, or selfishly arbitrary or dishonest, or imperialistic or oppressive. Plantinga offers some arguments in response to these charges:

- (i) Can a person be justified in all these allegations just because he is an exclusivist, are to blame?
- (ii) He uses the term exclusivism in a different context. Where a person is not fully aware of other religions, that is, of the existence of other religions and their claims until they are brought to your attention by some force or objective, that person may not be treated as xenophobia, can be counted.
- (iii) Third, to admit that you do not know of any argument that would necessarily persuade the most conscientious and intelligent dissenter of all.

In this regard, he gives the example of his grandmother, but we can be seen in the context of any other ordinary person. For example: A farmer, irrespective of any religion he may be a follower of, knows only his religion to believe in. It doesn't matter to him what his religion has that other religions don't have or what he can learn from other religions? This situation supports all the above mentioned three arguments of Plantinga; hence the imposition of any kind of moral faults on such a person is not appropriate and cannot be kept in the category of exclusivism. Believing only in one's own religion, no matter what religion it may belong to, proves innocent of any kind of moral or intellectual charges. Plantinga strongly believe that - "These people are not, I think, properly charged with arrogance or rather moral flaws in believing as they do." (Plantinga, 2009, p. 306)

Criticism. I argue that Planting's argument is not appropriate here. It should be noted that out of the three arguments presented by Alvin Plantinga, the first and second arguments create a situation of "Contradiction". If attention is paid to the second argument, then according to him, until a so- called exclusivist person becomes aware of other religions and beliefs, he cannot be counted in the category of exclusivism, and in this way, any kind

of egoism etc. cannot be imputed. If this argument is accepted, then an exclusivist person is one who supports the claims made by their own religion while being aware of others. In this situation his first argument gets refuted that being an exclusivist can a person be accused of being arrogant, selfish, egoistic? Now, since to be an exclusivist here it means to be fully aware of others and strongly support one's own opinion, in such a situation every exclusivist person would be fully responsible for all the moral defects that fall on exclusivism.

But, unlike his grandmother or that ordinary farmer who had no knowledge of other religions and thought of believers in other religions as heathens.

- (1) She/He didn't know any better as ignorant of other religions.
- (2) Plantinga understands that there is real piety and religion in many religions other than Christianity.

Again, Plantinga argues in response to the allegations like 'Oppression' and 'Imperialism' in relation to exclusivism that- "I venture to say that there are some of you who reject some of my sayings; I do not believe that you thus oppressing me, even if you don't believe you have an argument that convinces me. It is conceivable that exclusivism may contribute to oppression in some way, but it is oppressive in itself. Is not. Dare said there are some...in itself oppressive." (Plantinga, 2009, p. 306)

In this reference Plantinga quotes Wilfred Cantwell Smith in support of his view, according to him- "... except at the cost of insensitivity or delinquency, if it is morally not possible actually to go out into the world and say to devote, intelligent, fellow human beings: ... believe that we know God and we are right; go believe that you know God and you are totally wrong."(Smith, 1976)

In fact, Alvin Plantinga, in his arguments about the arrogant and repressive nature of religious exclusivism, tries to show that any exclusivist accepts that the two basic beliefs he holds (mentioned earlier) are true and Those who do not believe that both beliefs are wrong (as some nihilists accept) accept this as a natural human reaction. Because it also hides the fact that people who do not believe in these two basic beliefs, whatever may be the reason for their prohibition, remain deprived of a deep and important subject. Formally

believe that he has some knowledge that is denied by others. He should see himself as privileged in relation to those people. Is it appropriate in this way? Answer to this question he holds that- "There is no real alternative there is no reflective attitude that is not open to the same strictures." (Plantinga, 2009, p. 307) In this regard, Alvin Plantinga tries to show that there can be three types of options before an exclusivist

1. I can continue to hold it.
2. I can Withhold it.
3. Believing neither it nor its denial, and I can accept its denial.

If this third opinion is accepted, then it comes under the ambit of pluralism. If the second view is accepted, it goes beyond the ambit of exclusivism. Hence, in this situation only the first opinion is possible to be selected by the exclusivists. So, he says that on this basis how can he be accepted as arrogant? In this regard John Hick writes - "Well as an exclusivist, I relies on that I can't convince other that they should believe as I do- but I none the less continue to believe as I do- the charge is the I am as a result, arrogant or egotistical, arbitrarily preferring my way of doing thing to other ways." (Hick, 1989, p. 17) Here, the opinion of Douglas Pratt is also noteworthy in this regard. According to him - "Exclusivism is more than simply a conviction about the transformative power of the particular vision one has is a conviction about its finality and its absolute priority over competing views." (Pratt, 2007, p. 296)

Conclusion

Close and depth study the arguments presented by Alvin Plantinga in defense of exclusivism, I found that he has done unprecedented work on this subject, however in my evaluation, I also observed that some of their arguments are inconsistent and somewhere do not stand the scale of practicality. Nevertheless, he has done a very difficult task of trying to make free exclusivism from arrogance and oppression, which is very relevant even in the present times assuredly.

References

- Dale, T. (2015). Theories of Religious Diversity. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://iep.utm.edu/reli-div/>
- D'Costa, G. (1996). The Impossibility of a Pluralist view of religion. *Religious Studies*. 32, 223-232.
- Gray, L. (2013). *The Leaders Are Coming*. West Bow Press.
- Grillmeier, A. (1969) The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of sacred Scripture, In *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, vol. 3*. Edited by Herbert Vorgrimler. New York.
- Hick, J. (1989). *An interpretation of religion: human responses to the transcendent*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Lambert, G. (2003). *The Leaders Are Coming*. West Bow Press.
- Meister, C. (ed.) (2007). *The Philosophy of Religion Reader*. Springer.
- Paul VII. (1965). *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. Dei Verbum*.
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html
- Plantinga, A. (2009). *A Defense of Religious Exclusivism. Exploring Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford University Press.
- Pratt, D. (2007). Exclusion and Exclusivity: A contemporary theological challenge, *Pacifica Australian Theological Studies*, 20(3), 291-306. Doi: [10.1177/1030570X0702000304](https://doi.org/10.1177/1030570X0702000304)
- Smith, W. C. (1976). *Religious Diversity*. Harper & Row. 23-232
- Wainwright, W. J. (2005). *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford University Press.