

## The sensory perception as “experiencing-as” in John Hick’s philosophy of religion – selected issues

### Percepcja zmysłowa jako „doświadczenie-jako” w filozofii religii Johna Hicka – wybrane zagadnienia

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**Abstrakt:** W artykule prezentuję rolę koncepcji poznania zmysłowego w filozofii religii Johna Hicka. Przedstawiam argument Hicka za podobieństwem przekonań religijnych do wiedzy naukowej. Hick czyni to poprzez wprowadzenie elementu interpretacji w każdym z czterech obszarów wiedzy: zmysłowym, estetycznym, moralnym i religijnym. Następnie przedstawiam, jak w oparciu o wiedzę zmysłową Hick stara się wykazać racjonalność przekonań religijnych. Mówimy tu o racjonalnej wierze religijnej bez dowodów. Na koniec pokazuję, jak w oparciu o koncepcję poznania zmysłowego Hick proponuje tzw. hipotezę pluralizmu religijnego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** John Hick, wiedza, wiara, percepcja zmysłowa, hipoteza pluralizmu religijnego, teistyczna wiara bez dowodów

**Abstract:** In the article I present the role of the concept of sensory cognition in John Hick’s philosophy of religion. I present Hick’s argument for the similarity of religious beliefs to scientific knowledge. Hick does this by introducing an element of interpretation in each of the four areas of knowledge: sensual, aesthetic, moral and religious. Then I present how, based on sensory knowledge, Hick tries to demonstrate the rationality of religious beliefs. We are talking here about rational religious belief without proos. Finally, I show how, based on the concept of sensory cognition, Hick proposes the so-called the hypothesis of religious pluralism.

**Key words:** John Hick, knowledge, faith, sensory perception, religious pluralism hypothesis, theistic belief without proofs.

## Introduction

At the beginning, it is worth clarifying in what sense the words senses and sensory cognition will be used in the following article. The word “sense/senses” refers to sensual cognition. In this context, the role of the senses in learning the truths of faith or in justifying religious beliefs is analyzed. Thus, this is an epistemological and descriptive context. A reference will be presented to sensory cognition in the epistemological sense in John Hick’s philosophy. Due to space limitations, this presentation will be selective and partial. It will focus on Hick’s most important concepts. These include the epistemological status of religious faith, its rationality, the issue of evidence for the existence of God and the hypothesis of religious pluralism. The aim of the analyzes will be to show the role of the concept of sensory cognition, understood as ‘experiencing-as’, for the above-mentioned elements of Hick’s philosophy of religion. The article will also present critical remarks on the role of sensory cognition in the philosophy of religion of the author under discussion.

However, before presenting the analysis of the role of sensory cognition in Hick’s thought, it is worth discussing the philosophical and theological context in which Hick’s most important works from the early period of his career are created, i.e. the 1950s and 1960s. This is the time when the journal ‘The Philosophy of Science’ is still published by the founders of the Vienna Circle, and the intention to publish the ‘International Encyclopedia of Unified Science’ is still valid, although, as the future will show, it will never be fully implemented. The theses of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* clearly limited the scope of what the world was, and thus of what could be argued. Contained in the preface, ‘What can be said at all that can be said clearly; and whereof they cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’ will mark the boundary between sensible and senseless sentences/beliefs<sup>1</sup>. Verification and falsification became the criteria for crossing this border towards meaningful sentences/beliefs. Verification and falsification were based on the observation or empirical experiment. With such a criterion, moral, aesthetic and religious beliefs are on the side of the border where nonsense reigns.

Unsurprisingly, in some analytical philosophy inspired by neo-positivism, including the British one, the language of religion (or religious) will become the subject of criticism, as precisely not telling untruth, but saying nothing

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<sup>1</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, London 1922, p. 23.

at all. In addition, religious beliefs will turn out to be completely irrational compared to scientific beliefs. Hick's concept of eschatological verification attempts to demonstrate that there is a criterion for verifying religious claims and therefore they are meaningful. This criterion is the theoretical possibility of experiencing an eschatological state that will verify religious claims about the existence of life after death and the existence of God. Hick also tries to defend religious beliefs as rational by showing their epistemological similarity to scientific knowledge. Finally, recognizing that no evidence for the existence of God presented thus far has been convincing, the author in question presents an argument for recognizing that religious beliefs are rational despite being evidenceless.

Hick, as he himself states, interprets religion religiously, i.e. he believes that the statements of religious language cannot be entirely reduced to natural elements<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, according to Hick, religions speak of a really existing transcendence.

We can now return to the title issue. In the works of John Hick, reference to sensory cognition is found in several areas. It also plays a diverse role. In the first period of his work, Hick tries to demonstrate the similarity of religious beliefs to scientific knowledge by introducing an element of interpretation in each of the four areas of cognition: sensual, aesthetic, moral and religious. Religious faith is, in effect, understood as non-propositional and as 'experiencing-as'. On this basis, in the next period of development of his thought, Hick introduces the idea of the hypothesis of religious pluralism into the philosophy of religion. The justification for this hypothesis is based on the ambivalence of the world, the interpretive nature of cognition, including religious faith, and the context-shaped cultural apprehension of the sacred. Referring in turn to the question of the rationality of religious beliefs, Hick again refers to the analogy with sensory cognition.

I Presentation of Hick's selected views

## 1. Faith and knowledge

The first reference to sensory cognition that I want to mention here is in Hick's first book titled 'Faith and Knowledge'. This work primarily discusses the relationship between knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, and faith. The main goal of Hick's analyzes is to demonstrate that the epistemological status of scientific knowledge and religious beliefs do not differ enough to deprecate religious beliefs as irrational, that is, insufficiently justified.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, London 1988, p. 1–2.

Scientific knowledge and religious beliefs have one thing in common, which is that they are beliefs. It is usually propositional in nature, i.e. it is expressed in an affirmative or negative judgment. However, it may also have a dispositional value, i.e. expressed in action or evaluation. According to Hick, the way to arrive at convictions is broadly understood experience, the primary aspect of which is sensory cognition. Visual perception, as in turn the most important within these perceptions, is understood by Hick not as passive, but as containing an element of interpretation. Applying and extending Wittgenstein's concept of 'seeing-as', Hick states that all our cognition is 'experiencing-as'. It concerns three areas/levels: physical, moral/aesthetic and religious. In each of them, giving/discovering the significance of given sensations, or situations more broadly, takes place. Hence, the interpretation occurs. For clarification, we can use examples found in Hick's works. Jastrow's duck-rabbit or Keller's cup-faces as objects perceived in two different ways are, according to Hick following the aforementioned Wittgenstein, a sufficient proof of the interpretive nature of human cognition, already at the physical, sensory level of cognition<sup>3</sup>. Conversely, on the aesthetic level, perhaps the most obvious in terms of interpretability, it is possible to perceive the same object as beautiful or displeasing. In the area of morality, this interpretation can be seen when a person looks down from a cliff and sees a person threatened by the incoming tide. It is possible to have a situation in which, despite calling for help, our observer does not give the situation a moral call to help. In turn, the religious level abounds with the largest number of possible interpretations. Perceiving certain atmospheric phenomena (e.g. a rainbow) as signs from God or merely natural phenomena is a classic example. Similarly, the texts of the so-called holy books, for some are divine revelation and for others only human creation<sup>4</sup>.

According to Hick, moving from the sensual to the religious level increases the number of possible interpretations, and thus, as Hick puts it, cognitive freedom increases. The physical level quickly and sometimes painfully falsifies misinterpretations. Jumping from a skyscraper, believing that gravity does not exist, will be rather risky.

At subsequent levels, this freedom increases until it reaches its maximum in the area of religious or naturalistic interpretation<sup>5</sup>. The interpretation here may be of a total nature, which means that all aspects of life in this world take on a religious or naturalistic significance. Examples of the latter include the

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<sup>3</sup> J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion*, London 2001, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> J. Hick, John, *Faith and Knowledge...*, p. 95–119.

<sup>5</sup> In my opinion, Hick should talk about the worldview level rather than the religious level. This is supported by the fact that, according to his concept, the naturalistic perception of the world is also an interpretation, just like the religious one.

concepts of Ludwig Feuerbach, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx<sup>6</sup>. Since the nature of cognition, according to Hick, is ‘experiencing-as’, the world, especially its non-physical aspects have a feature of ambivalence, as they leave the possibility of various interpretations. Reality, according to Hick, does not settle which of the opposing interpretations (moral/immoral, beautiful/ugly and religious/naturalistic) is true<sup>7</sup>.

It is worth realizing that Hick, like John Henry Newman, starts his analysis of the nature of knowledge not from the ideal type (like John Locke, for example), but from the actual state of affairs, the way people realistically cognise. Religious and moral beliefs, as well as scientific knowledge are recognized by a specific entity thanks to psychological (subjective) certainty. Hence, Hick believes that the concept of infallible knowledge is incorrect. Actual human knowledge strives at best for objective certainty<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, all convictions/beliefs have the same epistemological status. Religious faith in this context is an interpretive element within the religious ‘experiencing-as’<sup>9</sup>.

With reference to the topic of this article, it is worth noting that the final justification of the nature of moral and religious beliefs is based on Hick’s original recognition that the nature of visual cognition is seeing-as.

## 2. Rational theistic belief without proofs

In the book ‘Arguments for the Existence of God’ Hick criticizes the most famous attempts to prove the existence of God: the ontological proof, Thomas Aquinas’ five ways, Kant’s attempt, cosmological proofs, etc. This criticism leads Hick to conclude that none of these proofs are convincing<sup>10</sup>. However, this does not mean that the belief in the existence of God is unjustified and irrational. Hick sides with epistemological realism. The world is as we perceive it. Sensory cognition/experience has two important features: a fixed and involuntary nature and the ability to act effectively on its basis<sup>11</sup>. According to Hick, these features, for the human psychophysical condition, constitute an irresistible argument for the rationality of beliefs built on the basis of sensory experience. If religious experience is considered to have similar characteristics, then one can, as Hick did, build an analogy between these experiences.

<sup>6</sup> J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, New York 2004, p. 190–209.

<sup>7</sup> J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge...*, p. 120–148.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., p. 200–211.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., p. 95–119; J. Hick, *Religious Faith as Experiencing-As*, [In:] “Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures 2”, London 1968, p. 20–35.

<sup>10</sup> J. Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God*, Herder and Herder, New York 1971.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit., p. 113–116.

Since a believing and practising person can find that he or she acts effectively on account of his or her beliefs, for example that his or her personality and relationships with people change positively, then, according to Hick, there is an analogy between these religious beliefs and sensory experience. It is the ability to act effectively based on these beliefs<sup>12</sup>. For the analogy to be complete and, in Hick's intention, convincing, we need to look at the first attribute of sensory experience, which is its irresistible nature. As one might guess, this is not only and primarily about the resistance presented by the physical world, visible in unsuccessful interpretations of this experience. The fundamental aspect is the one resulting from the reality of this knowledge – its obviousness.

Meanwhile, religious experience is not obvious. If it were, everyone would be a religious or non-religious person, but convinced of the existence of God (or some other type of transcendence). However, this is not the case. After all, there are people who are convinced that there is no God and therefore. In opposition to this, sensory experience is largely the same for everyone<sup>13</sup>.

Hick tries to alleviate this conflict by making the following distinction. Initially, religious experience, such as awareness of God's existence, is non-coercive in nature. However, as a person becomes increasingly conscious of God in a voluntary way, the experience becomes compulsory and irresistible. Thus, it can be concluded that the presented analogy is complete, but with the caveat that irresistibility in the case of religious experience applies to people who actually believe in the existence of God<sup>14</sup>.

According to Hick, the above objections do not limit the power of the analogy in question. Therefore, since we recognize that our beliefs based on sensory cognition are rational, then beliefs based on religious experience are also rational, although they do not have evidence. Hence the name *rational theistic belief without proofs*.

If we return to the main thread of the article, we will notice that similarly to the relationship between knowledge and faith, the main role is played by the approach to cognition, including sensory cognition, as interpretation.

### 3. The hypothesis of religious pluralism

Both the philosophical beliefs described above and the experience of cooperation with representatives of different religions constitute, in Hick's case, a good ground for proposing the hypothesis of religious pluralism (hereinafter

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<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., p. 114–116.

HRP)<sup>15</sup>. Its exhaustive presentation would require a separate publication. Here I will limit my deliberations to its basic features.

HRP is a philosophical attempt to understand the relationship between the traditions of the so-called world’s great religions and to explain the differences among them. HPR is therefore a response from the second-order language level, rather than the first-order language level, on which the languages of individual religions function.

The basic statements of the hypothesis under discussion are:

All world’s religions recognize, express and worship the same ‘Transcendence’, called by Hick – *the Real an sich*, in different ways, depending on the context of language, culture, history, economic conditions, etc.

As Hick puts it, ‘For the religious traditions always centre upon the Real as humanly thought and experienced in some particular form – as the Adonai of Judaism, or as the Holy Trinity of Christianity, or as the Allah of Islam, or as the Vishnu or the Shiva of theistic Hinduism, or as the Brahman of advaitic Hinduism, or as the Dharma or Nirvana or Sunyata of Buddhism, or as the Tao, and so on. But if we grant the rough parity of the great traditions as contexts of a salvific human transformation from self-centredness to reality-centredness (which is another of the legs on which religious pluralism stands), we are led to see them as responding to different phenomenal manifestations of the ultimate noumenal Real’<sup>16</sup>.

To understand HRP, the terms *the Real* and *the Real an sich* must be clarified. Since Hick recognizes that religious experience is rational, although he originally related this claim to the experience of theistic religions, after analyzing the similarities and differences among the world’s great religions, he concludes that ‘each of the world great faiths, theistic and non-theistic, is epistemically equally well based, supported by religious experience, supposed revelation, revered scriptures, inspiring role models and a more general uplifting effect in people’s lives; and natural theologies that would exclude the non-theistic faiths by proving a personal Creator do not succeed in doing so’<sup>17</sup>.

If so, a serious difficulty arises as to how to recognize diametrically different religious beliefs as rational and, consequently, legitimate and true diametrically opposed religious beliefs: a personal God and impersonal approaches to transcendence (some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism); divine forgiveness and the law of karma; the individuality of the human person and pan-consciousness; bodily-spiritual union and reincarnation; monotheistic, polytheistic and tri-personal understanding of transcendence. Hick sees a way out

<sup>15</sup> J. Hick, *An Autobiography*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford 2005, p. 159–227.

<sup>16</sup> J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy...*, p. 91–92.

<sup>17</sup> Op. cit., p. 41.

of these contradictions or opposites in the intellectual construction proposed by Kant. As we know, the latter captures the human perception of reality and, to some extent, the ontic structure of the world on two levels. Sensual forms of perception and categories of the intellect construct, independently of human will and in the same way for each cognizant subject, an image of reality that is unknown as to whether it differs from reality itself (*Ding an sich*). Reality in the cognitive aspect consists of noumena and phenomena. The cognizing subject has access only to phenomena. Hick extends this intellectual model to the realm of religious experience. Phenomenal approaches to what, according to Hick, actually exists and what is completely noumenal, transcendent and beyond the possibility of expression in human cognitive categories, constitute the claims of individual world religions. The images of transcendence contained in them (Yahweh, Allah, Brahman, the Holy Trinity, etc.) are the equivalent of phenomena in Kant's concept. In HRP they are referred to as *the Real*. What is their foundation, the equivalent of Kant's noumenon, is called by Hick *the Real an sich*.

The aforementioned religious interpretation of religion leads Hick to recognize that phenomenal apprehensions are not merely a human invention, but a derivative of the impact of this transcendence on human minds. Differences among religions are therefore explained by Hick as derivatives of apprehending *the Real an sich* through a given cultural context. It is he who causes God and Transcendence to be understood differently in the world's great religions.

The application of Kant's construction is logically based on the interpretative character of religious faith, understood as 'experiencing-as', previously adopted by Hick. It is worth explaining at this point how exactly Hick understands this. Religious faith is an interpretive element within the religious 'experiencing-as'. As Hick writes, 'The religious mind experiences both objects (the bread and wine in the eucharist, statues of saints, of the Virgin Mary, of Hindu gods, the sacred icons in an Orthodox church, Buddhist *stupas*, the tombs of Sufi saints, and so on) and situations (from life as a whole to particular occasions – the birth of a new life, the closure of a life in death, the experience of worship, of human goodness, 'miraculous' recoveries and escapes from injury, viewing the starry heavens above and being conscious of the moral law within, being struck by the beauty of nature – as mediating the presence of God or the enlightenment of the dharma or the requirements of heaven or awareness of the Tao . . .). In experiencing in this way, the religious person is making a (usually unconscious) cognitive choice'<sup>18</sup>. Generalizing the examples of religious and non-religious perception of the world, Hick states, 'And I identify this voluntary interpretive element within our conscious experience

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<sup>18</sup> Op. cit., p. 4.



as faith. It follows that the purely naturalistic experience of the world is as much a matter of faith as the religious; for *all* our conscious experience is experiencing-as'<sup>19</sup>.

Returning to the main topic of the article, it should be noted that the concept of faith as 'experiencing-as' is based on the prior assumption of this nature of knowledge in general. This, in turn, is founded on the approach to sensory cognition as seeing-as, or more generally 'experiencing-as'. As can be seen, in the hypothesis of religious pluralism, the role of the prior notion of the nature of sensory cognition plays an important role.

The second claim of the HRP is that all world religions are equally true and equally salvific.

As Hick puts it, 'As I shall now try to show, these are variations within different conceptual schemes on a single fundamental theme: the sudden or gradual change of the individual from an absorbing self-concern to a new centring in the supposed unity-of-reality-and-value that is thought of as God, Brahman, the Dharma, Sunyata or the Tao. Thus, the generic concept of salvation/liberation, which takes a different specific form in each of the great traditions, is that of the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness'<sup>20</sup>.

Since the forms of salvation are conceptualized differently in individual major world religions, Hick generalizes the ideas of salvation and reduces them to *self-centredness* and *the Real-centredness*. As a result, salvation is understood as *liberation from self-centredness*.

There is no need to detail the rationale that underlies HRP. However, a brief presentation will help to understand how Hick justified his hypothesis.

In order to be able to reduce the world's great religions to one approach to transcendence and salvation, certain rudimentary similarities among them must be demonstrated. This is what Hick does. Several publications are devoted to this<sup>21</sup>. For example, he shows the similarity in the approach to transcendence as personal, unique and full of love in Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Sikhism and Hinduism<sup>22</sup>. Similarly, analyzing the mystical trends of world's religions, Hick states that in each of these religions there is a consensus on the transcategorical and, in effect, ineffable nature of transcendence. Transcatego-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> J. Hick, *God Has Many Names. Britain's New Religious Pluralism*, London 1980; J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, New York 1985; J. Hick, P.F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll 1987; J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, New York 1989; J. Hick, *The Rainbow of Faith. Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism*, London 1995.

<sup>22</sup> J. Hick, *God Has Many...*, p. 29–34.

riality means that the cognized object (here the Transcendent Being) is beyond the reach of human comprehension<sup>23</sup>.

The premises of HRP also include the already mentioned:

- a. the assumption of a religious rather than naturalistic interpretation of religion;
- b. the recognition that experience, including religious experience, is the first method of knowledge, both in its methodological and genetic aspects;
- c. the claim that religious faith is an interpretive element within religious 'experiencing-as';
- d. the claim that conceptual schemes, religious language, forms of worship, and even the very forms of religious experience depend on culture and nature.

In my opinion, constructing HPR, while simultaneously asserting the rationality of religious beliefs, would not be possible were it not for Hick's basic claim about the interpretive nature of knowledge.

#### 4. Conclusions

Hick's views received numerous positive comments and inspired cultural and scientific initiatives aimed at promoting and developing the hypothesis of religious pluralism. However, a large group of philosophers criticized individual ideas of Hick's philosophy and HRP. The concept of epistemological equalization of knowledge and faith is criticized by, among others, C.R. Bråkenhielm, as well as D. Cheetham and J.H. Gill<sup>24</sup>. The understanding of the concept of 'seeing-as' and then 'experiencing-as' and, as a result, faith as 'experiencing-as' and its interpretative character are criticized by, among others, B.L. Keeling and M.F. Morelli, T.R. Mathis, R.W. Perrett, P. Slater and P. Strzyżyński<sup>25</sup>. Philosophical problems of the hypothesis of religious plural-

<sup>23</sup> J. Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy...*, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> C.R. Bråkenhielm, *How Philosophy Shapes Theories of Religion*, University of Uppsala 1975; C.R. Bråkenhielm, *Problems of Religious Experience*, University of Uppsala 1985; D. Cheetham, *John Hick. A critical Introduction and Reflection*, Aldershot 2003; J.H. Gill, "John Hick and religious knowledge", [In:] *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 2, Nr. 3 1971, p. 129–147.

<sup>25</sup> B.L. Keeling, M.F. Morelli, "Beyond Wittgenstein Fideism: an examination of John Hick's analysis of religious faith", [In:] *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 8, No 4, December 1977, p. 250–262; T.R. Mathis, *Against John Hick. An Examination of His Philosophy of Religion*, University Press of America 1985; R.W. Perrett, "John Hick on Faith: A Critique", [In:] *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 15 (1984), p. 57–66; P. Slater, "Seeing as, seeing in

ism are demonstrated, among others, by G. Chrzanowski, G. D'Costa, K. Rose and W. Rowe<sup>26</sup>.

Concluding the analysis of the problem of the role of sensory cognition in Hick's philosophy of religion, it should be emphasized that the reliance on its irresistibility and the practical action associated with it served to demonstrate the rationality of religious faith and the fact that its epistemic nature is similar to knowledge, including scientific knowledge. The interpretive nature of sensory experience, this 'seeing-as' extended to the whole of experience, proved crucial in this regard. The unattainability of certainty (if one can say one hundred percent) and the subservience to probability, as it turns out, applies not only to faith, but, contrary to scientism, also to scientific knowledge.

However, when Hick develops the hypothesis of religious pluralism, wishing to defend it against the charge of underestimating the differences between personal and impersonal concepts of transcendence, he introduces the quasi-Kantian notion of *the Real* and *the Real an sich*. The corresponding concepts of phenomenon and noumenon and the concept of transcategoriality lead to what D'Costa called transcendental agnosticism<sup>27</sup>. For, according to Hick, there is no possibility of declaring anything about what is Real except that it is good. Although Hick tries to answer this objection, the doubts raised by D'Costa are worth noting.

It has been shown above that the element of interpretability, which is inherent in Hick's nature of cognition (sensual, aesthetic, moral and religious), has its positive and negative consequences for Hick's concept.

The initially interpretive nature of sensory experience allows Hick to propose arguments in defence of the rationality of religious beliefs. The concept of faith as an interpretive element in 'experiencing-as' enables an understanding of faith as non-propositional, more consistent with the biblical message. Comparing religious faith to sensory experience serves to argue for the rationality of the belief in the existence of God, despite the lack of proof of His existence. Despite the philosophical criticism of the individual components of Hick's philosophy, it must be recognized that as a whole it is largely logically coherent. In this respect, using sensory experience understood as 'experiencing-as' as the foundation of the philosophy of religion seems to be beneficial

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and seeing through", [In:] *Sophia*, 19/3, (1980), p. 10–21; P. Strzyżyński, *Koncepcja wiary teistycznej w filozofii religii Johna Hicka*, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań 2009.

<sup>26</sup> G. Chrzanowski, *Zbawienie poza Kościołem. Filozofia pluralizmu religijnego Johna Hicka*, Poznań 2005; G. D'Costa, *J. Hick's Theology of Religions. A Critical Evaluation*, Lanham 1987; K. Rose, *Knowing the Real. John Hick on the Cognitivity of Religions and Religious Pluralism*, New York 1996; W. Rowe, *J. Hick's Contribution to the Philosophy of Religion*, in: *God, Truth and Reality. Essays in Honour of J. Hick*, Sharma Arvind (eds.), St. Martin's Press, New York 1993.

<sup>27</sup> G. D'Costa, *J. Hick's Theology of Religions...*, p. 172.

and intellectually fruitful for this philosophy. However, at the stage of the pluralism hypothesis it leads to serious difficulties.

Yes, it allows us to talk about different and equal interpretations of the same transcendence, interpretations expressed in the so-called world's religions. Conversely, it leads to undermining the certainty of one's own religious faith as right and salvific, and instead makes one treat it as one of the possible interpretations, which, from the point of view of an individual believer, seems virtually impossible.

The desire to build a general theory explaining the multiplicity of religions also leads Hick to the problem of the inexpressibility (transcategorization) of transcendence. The charge of transcendental agnosticism, even if exaggerated, nevertheless says something about Hick's philosophy of religion. Namely, that reliance on the concept of 'experiencing-as' may lead to a blurring of the content of interpretation. Moreover, as shown above, merely referring to the cultural context does not seem to be sufficient. This is because a given context also contains opposite and/or contradictory elements. In constructing a religious vision of the world, the cognitive abilities of a particular subject are also important.

Nevertheless, it can certainly be said that John Hick's philosophy of religion owes much to the understanding of sensory cognition as 'experiencing-as'.

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