CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

God's creativity and religious diversity: a theistic argument for a transformative pluralism

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Abstract

In this article, my objective is to argue for the compatibility between religious diversity and Christian theism by invoking the concept of divine creativity. I propose that, if God is a being of infinite powers and infinite creativity, He is such that it is possible for Him to create different and varied realities in a continuous process of creation. More than that, given His infinite creativity, God can reveal Himself in the most creative and diverse ways possible. There is no need for Him to reveal Himself as one and in a unique way, as some scholars of Christian theism argue. Basing my discussion on these ideas, I suggest that from the infinite creativity of God, it is possible to develop an argument in favour of a transformative pluralist view in face of religious diversity.

Introduction

Schmidt-Leukel ([2017]) believes that religious pluralism can be approached in two different ways: (1) On the one hand, it can be viewed as an interpretation of religious diversity, in the sense of a theory or evaluation of this diversity which defends the view that religious truth exists or must exist in a variety of ways that are accessed by different religions in different and equally valid ways. (2) On the other hand, it is possible to understand pluralism as a religious interpretation that is developed within different religious systems and therefore is a religious interpretation of the diversity of beliefs. In other words, it is an interpretation that one or more religions offers when faced with religious diversity. This article is concerned with the second way of approaching pluralism and intends to expose a possible pluralistic interpretation of religious diversity, more focused on theism as understood within Christianity. My focus is the idea of divine creativity.

Traditionally, Western theistic belief, and especially Christian belief, understands God as a personal being with infinite powers such as omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. In this perspective, He is perfectly good, perfectly free, and eternal. More than that, God is the creator and maintainer of the universe; that is, all things that exist do so because of Him and depend on Him to continue to exist. In this conception, God has the power to make things appear and disappear according to His will.[1] Additionally, in Christian traditions, God is understood as having a personal relationship with humanity, having created it in His image and likeness. God maintains constant relationships with human beings, whether through alliances, miracles or personal relationships with

believers, or through personal experiences between God and humans.[2] He thus reveals Himself to people and this revelation is definitive and true.[3]

However, many different scholars from various schools of thought have in many ways questioned this traditional image of God.[4] This article is, in some sense, also a kind of criticism of the traditional image of God, but of one part of this traditional image: the part which affirms that God is a being who reveals Himself in a unique and definitive way to a single group of chosen people. I understand that this idea of God is extremely restrictive of the powers of an omnipotent being. Moreover, it constitutes a difficulty in face of the contemporary awareness of religious diversity. It is truly difficult, for example, to maintain that an omnipotent God has revealed Himself in a single and definitive way to a single human group, while letting all others live in 'error' – an 'error' that members of other religions have strong reasons to deny is an 'error'.

In this way, I propose that Christian theism should rethink its image of God as a being who reveals Himself in a unique and definitive way to a single group of people. Instead of focusing on this understanding of God, we should think of Him as a being who, given His immense power and capacity for creation, is a being of infinite creativity that continues to create and reveal meanings in His eternal creation. Basically, I argue that, given awareness of religious diversity, the traditional image of God struggles to explain why most people in the world did not have access to the same unique and definitive revelation of God that some theists professed. Instead of saying this happened because of a certain epistemic privilege of theistic religion A or B or by an arbitrary choice of God, we should examine our image of God. That is, we should leave aside some elements of the traditional image and foreground the idea that God is primarily a creative being, a being of infinite creativity. And, more importantly for the purposes of this work, He can manifest Himself, make Himself known, and reveal Himself in the most diverse and completely creative ways – even if, at times, these are incomprehensible, in their entirety, to human eyes.

I base my proposal on some Christian theistic beliefs, the first of which is that God is an omnipotent being. To believe that a being is omnipotent could be, merely, to believe that this being can do anything He wants, however He wants, whenever He wants. But this basic understanding of omnipotence does not hold theological unanimity within Christianity, since it has implications for other important ideas that Christians defend. For example, it affects the idea of human free will, or the fact that there are beings besides God that are also creative. There is no space for a lengthy discussion on this topic here. But, for the purposes of this work, I would like, approaching a notion defended by Hartshorne, to affirm divine omnipotence in an anti-determinist sense. Omnipotence must be viewed in such a way that 'God has the highest conceivable form of power and that this power extends to all things' (Hartshorne (1984), 26). This idea, however, does not imply that God determines everything at all times, as if the universe were a game in which God moves pieces in the way He wants, whenever He wants.[5]

Alongside this belief in omnipotence, a second Christian belief is important for my proposal in this work: the belief that God is creator, that is, He is able to create, and more than that, He has infinite power to create.[6] Finally, a third Christian belief important to my proposal is the affirmation that God reveals Himself to human beings, showing them the meaning, complexity, and beauty of His creation. On the basis of these three beliefs, I would like to suggest that God's infinite creativity could be an important argument in favour of a pluralist view in the face of religious diversity.

God's creativity and religious diversity

If God is a being who possesses infinite powers and infinite creativity, He is such that it is possible for him not to create just a single reality, but different and varied realities.[7] In

this way, the universe is not a ready-made and finished universe, but it is in constant creation and expansion. God makes new possibilities through what He has already created and what He continues to create. Each movement of God has its own rules and new rules can be created from these movements; they even create different realities. Each movement is a new reality on the stage of the universe. God, in this way, is a kind of supreme artist who can create infinite artistic movements unimaginable to beings of finite creativity.[8]

It is important to stress that I am proposing more comprehensive ways to see divine creativity than the traditional theistic and philosophical perspectives. Here, divine creativity should not be understood only as logical or mathematical creativity, as traditionally seen in the history of philosophy, but also as artistic freedom. In this sense, God is a mathematician, of course, but also a musician, a dancer, a painter, a poet, a choreographer, and so on. His creation, in turn, is much less mechanical than generally seen in tradition. God has infinite freedom[9] of creation in the most diverse ways of creating. He has any form of creativity we can imagine, as well as many others that are beyond our imagination.[10] I am therefore claiming that:

(1) God is a being of infinite creativity, and He can create different realities in infinite different ways.

Given (1), and that the Christian theistic traditions hold that God reveals Himself to human beings[11] in human history,[12] it is possible to think that God could reveal Himself to human beings in the most diverse and varied ways. A being that is infinitely creative and who communicates meaning through His creation can also communicate Himself in the most creative and diverse ways possible. It is possible for Him to reveal His creativity in the most varied ways to the most varied beings who can perceive His revelation.

There is no need for God to reveal Himself as one and in a unique way, as some scholars have argued.[13] Paralleling human creativity, a person with great creative abilities can communicate his creativity in the most diverse ways in different environments and to different audiences. Being creative is not purely repeating a single performance in a single way but creating different performances in different circumstances.[14] If we say this about human creativity, something much stronger can be said of divine creativity. If God is an omnipotent and infinitely creative being who reveals His work and the meaning of His work, He can reveal Himself in infinite possibilities. More than that, given the creative plurality of divine work, a plurality of ways to reveal such work is needed. Otherwise, the understanding of the work could be extremely confused or unsatisfying. In short, since God has infinite creativity, He is always creating new possibilities and new ways of transmitting meaning to those who can understand this meaning, namely, humanity. It is, then, possible to conclude that:

(2) God, in His infinite creativity, creatively reveals Himself, His work, and the meaning of His work.

Such creativity, both in creating and transmitting meaning, in my view, can be contemplated, not exclusively,[15] in religious diversity. Before examining this, however, it is necessary to draw attention to another important issue: namely, that humanity's perception of divine creativity is not a total perception of such creativity. Human beings are not able to contemplate all of divine creativity; they are not able to understand all the movements of God. The humans do not have a complete understanding of the divine nature and action.

Indeed, this is an important belief in theism: we humans, as finite beings, are unable to know the totality of God's work and intentions.

Christian traditions vary in the explanations they give for the impossibility of understanding the totality of the nature of God, of His intentions and the meaning of His actions. But undoubtedly the best known is the logical impossibility of a finite being knowing something infinite. Thus, given that the human being is a finite being in cognitive capacities, he is unable to understand the infinity of divine creativity.

There are, of course, other ways of thinking about such a human deficiency. We could appeal to the fact that the human being is limited by his language, by his historical-cultural context, by the reality in which he lives, or by the limits of his cognitive capacities. In all these justifications, we would fall into the fact of human finitude in the face of divine infinity. However, even if human beings cannot know the totality of divine works and intentions, they can partially know them. And it is in this knowledge that for me lies the origin of theistic religions. Religions are therefore human responses to the perception of some aspects of divine creativity and some aspects of God's creative movements.

Such contemplation or perception of some of God's creative movements is conditioned by human finitude in all its aspects: logical, cultural, linguistic, social, and cognitive. They result in different ways of worshipping, praising, and living according to insights into the different communications of divine creativity. So, there are different religions. These are the results of perceptions of different movements of God's divine creativity that are revealed in the universe and in human social and cultural life. However, different religions cannot be understood merely as perceptions of aspects of divine creativity. They are human historical-social constructions, resulting also from human creativity. I am claiming here, then, that *given divine creativity and its ability to communicate meaning in different realities in different ways, different religions arise from insights into God's creative actions*, but they are not pure insights of divine creativity. They are a mix of these insights with human socio-historical constructions.

More than that, religions are not finished processes; they are still under construction, still being created. Just as God is in constant movement of creation, humanity is also in constant construction: its practices and institutions are not ready and finished, but fluid and in constant becoming. If this is the case, and God is in continuous creation, He can reveal different aspects of His creativity to different religions and these, as processes under construction, must seek new insights regarding divine creativity.

It is important to realize here, however, that religions, in this sense of internal justification for the theism I am proposing, are not mere human understandings or human interpretations of a God who is completely incomprehensible.[16] Rather, they are the result of human perceptions of the various movements of divine creativity with human socio-historical construction. All of them express parts of God's revelation, not in the sense that a mere combination of these parts would permit us to see the totality of divine creativity,[17] but that the different religions contain insights into aspects of God's creativity, perceptions of different creative movements of God. Briefly, we can say that, given that God is a being of infinite creativity who creates different realities and different creative movements in the universe, and who communicates His creativity in creative ways; and that the human being, even if in a limited way, is able to perceive divine communication or some of the diverse movements of God,

(3) the different religions arise from human perception of the diverse creative movements of God,[18] of the different realities He created and communicated to those who are capable of perceiving Him, in this case, human beings.[19]

If we take different religions to be a result of different human perceptions of aspects of infinite divine creativity; appreciate that it is not possible for human beings to understand the totality of this creativity, its purposes and its meanings; and acknowledge that religions are all processes under construction that seek to understand divine creativity; then theisms, especially here Christianity, need to have a more open attitude towards other religions. This is because Christianity does not have the understanding of divine creativity and God, in His creative omnipotence, could have created different realities and revealed Himself in different ways to other religions. Such an open attitude would make it possible to see that, in contemplating different religions, theists are contemplating different aspects of divine creativity. And dialogue and interfaith relations would be ways to learn new insights into such creativity. In this sense, it can be said that:

(4) to contemplate religious diversity is to contemplate divine creativity embodied in the most diverse human insights regarding the varied and infinite creativity of God.

It is important to call attention to the idea that humans emerged in the universe as beings capable not only of contemplating divine creation, but also of participating in it.[20] God's creative capacities allowed Him to bring into the universe a being who is not only passive but also active in creation. In the same sense, the theistic tradition holds that humanity was created in the image and likeness of God, or, in Peacocke's (2009) perspective, humanity is a co-creator of creation. This also affects the issue of religious diversity, since it would take us beyond mere contemplation of diversity and put before us the possibility of creating, in human history, new ways of seeing God and His work.

Beyond contemplation: transformation

Until now, I have claimed that religious diversity can be justified, internally to Christian theism, as a result of the immense and infinite divine creativity that constantly creates new realities. Such creativity is revealed in the world, and human beings perceive the various creative movements of God in different realities. The different religions are, in the end, the result of this human capacity to perceive different manifestations of divine creativity – a creativity that has not ceased but that is still being realized in an infinite way. I have thus claimed that an attitude of contemplating different religions is also a way of contemplating God's infinite creativity.

But the idea of God as a being of infinite creativity brings about a realization of something more than the simple contemplation of different religions resulting from divine creativity. In my view, such an idea takes us a step further in the relationship of the theistic believer with other religions, and this step raises the possibility of a transformative pluralism.

If the various existing religions are products of human insights in the face of different aspects of divine creativity that is communicated in the universe and in human history, then the encounter and exchange of religious experiences could provide new insights into divine creativity. Different religions have different insights about God's creativity. When two or more religions meet, they can exchange these insights and enrich one another. Thus, we would open the doors to justifying the potential internal transformation of religious systems.

However, within the theistic tradition, there are many criticisms of the possibility of religious transformation from dialogue with other religions. Many of these are born precisely from the idea that God revealed Himself in a definitive and final way to a single group of people and that this group is the holder of the truth in terms of revelation.

But, if instead of focusing on the idea of a God who reveals Himself in a unique and definitive way, we focus on the idea of a God of infinite creativity, it is easy to understand why that criticism cannot be sustained. A God of infinite creativity who communicates meaning in His creation is not limited to communicating meaning in a single way. His creativity allows Him to create highly diverse realities and to communicate the sense of His creative diversity in different ways to beings with the capacity to perceive Him.

Additionally, beings who have this capacity are, like the creator, capable of creativity, of creating, even if in an infinitely less powerful way than God. These beings' creativity, unlike divine creativity, is one that makes new things out of what has already emerged in the universe. We are co-creators from what divine creativity has allowed to emerge. In this sense, our creativity derives from divine creativity. If this is so, and the various existing religions are, ultimately, the result of human perception of different movements of divine creativity, interreligious encounters and dialogues, and the potential transformations that could result from them, can be considered human creative processes that allow religious believers to see more and new aspects of divine creativity.

More than that, the transformations can be ways to enrich limited views of God into broader views of divine creativity, through blends of beliefs, practices, and rites with different religious systems. These blends can creatively help a particular religion to have a more accurate perspective of God's creative possibilities and to develop ways to contemplate, praise, and worship (through rites transformed by these blends) such divine creativity. Instead of being condemned, the processes of transformative encounters could be considered beneficial in the human process of contemplation and understanding of infinite divine creativity. This is because they can enrich and even transform our conceptions of the divine creativity communicated in the universe.

Advantages and charges of my approach

So far, I have emphasized that focusing on the divine attribute of creativity opens up the possibility for theisms, especially Christianity, to see religious diversity more positively than it is generally seen within those traditions. But my approach has further advantages for theism in relation to religious diversity.

The first advantage is to promote a certain idea of humility in the face of God's creative power. That is, given that God is understood internally to theism as a God with infinite attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, in addition to others such as being extremely good, totally free, and so on, it seems important for believers (finite beings in their potentialities) to understand that they cannot know all divine intentions and creations. In this sense, the exclusivist thesis – that there is only one true religion because God has revealed Himself to only one group of people in a unique and definitive way – sounds as if humans are party to the totality of the knowledge of God. The idea that I present here, on the contrary, extolls theism to reinforce the view on infinite divine creativity. This creativity is still in action; it created and creates an infinite diversity of realities and movements that are impossible for human beings to fully perceive. To recognize such infinite creativity is to place oneself in a position of humility before this creation and recognize that God could reveal Himself in the most different ways in the different realities He created. Additionally, beings who perceive Him in these different realities and manifestations are not in error; on the contrary, they are contemplating aspects of divine creativity in their own realities, just as others are contemplating other aspects in their other realities.

My approach, then, has advantages internally to theism, but also in relation to some pluralist theses, especially Hick's (2004) already classic pluralist interpretation. Hick justifies religious diversity with a distinction – borrowed from Kant – between phenomenal

reality and noumenal reality as his starting point. For Kant, only phenomenal reality is knowable. The thing itself, or noumenal reality, is something we cannot know or have access to. Hick applies this distinction to the question of plurality in religious beliefs, separating the Real[21] (equivalent to the noumenal) from the various ways in which the Real has been thought of or experienced in different religious contexts (equivalent to the phenomenal world). This distinction is only possible because religious manifestations are not merely human projections; they involve a response to a transcendent reality. That is, all the great religions of the world utilize the idea of transcendence, and more than that, agree that describing such a transcendent reality is impossible. For Hick, then, the diversity of world religions has come about through attempts to describe the ultimate reality understood as the Real. The Real is something to which no religion has access, or better, no religion can say that it has a complete description of, because it is transcategorial; it is beyond the categories of our understanding. In turn, any attempt to describe it as it really is will always fail because the forms of our understanding limit our ability to know it, making it inaccessible.[22]

Hick's ideas, as Harrison (2006) puts it, seem to make the idea of revelation impossible. In revelation, God would have to give Himself to the believer, and this does not seem possible if we treat God as noumenal reality. In this sense, most religious statements would be 'mythological' (or 'practically true'). But the idea that God reveals Himself and the human being perceives that divine revelation is extremely important for theisms. Unlike Hick, however, I am proposing that internally to theism we focus on the idea that, given infinite divine creativity, God could reveal Himself in different ways in different realities. In other words, my approach takes the idea of revelation seriously and states that different religions have access to this revelation. They can perceive the movements of God – although they cannot perceive the totality of the creative movements of this being. I therefore hold that different religious traditions have different perceptions of different revelations from God. This is undoubtedly a radical pluralism, but at the same time, it respects theistic traditions in that God has revealed Himself to them and that they have knowledge about God.

Finally, another advantage of my approach is that it can promote dialogue, the exchange of experiences, and even religious transformation.[23] Concerning dialogue, that theistic religions are open to the idea that God is infinitely creative and therefore able to create different realities and reveal Himself in different ways in these other realities, provides a kind of epistemic humility[24] in the face of other religions. Thus, instead of a given religion posing as one that has the absolute truth about God, it stands before other religions as one among many that hold insights into aspects of divine revelation. Such humility can result in an attitude of searching for the truth, and the search can take place through dialogue and knowledge of other insights about God.

Regarding religious transformations, although internally to theism these are often seen in a negative light, my approach allows us to see that religious blends can be important ways for human creativity to provide means for a greater understanding of divine creativity. This can happen through the overlapping or blending of beliefs from different religious systems to enrich the systems' knowledge of divine creativity. In this sense, instead of blends of beliefs being seen as something negative, they become a natural part of the religious history of trying to understand various aspects of divine revelation.

Despite these advantages, my approach cannot evade criticisms. One of these would be to say that such a conception is extremely strange for the theist tradition, especially Christianity. In this tradition God would be unique and revealed in a unique way. In response, an in-depth study of Christianity's history and texts shows us that God is understood in different forms, or rather, different adjectives have been attributed to Him. In the Bible itself, an attentive reading shows that God sometimes reveals Himself as a judge, sometimes as a father, and at other times as a being of pure love, and so on; not to

mention that, of course, the Trinitarian Unity of God clearly shows God's creativity in revealing itself in the universe. God is unique and, at the same time, He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and can reveal Himself to us in these three forms.[25] In this sense, the idea of a God who is creative and reveals Himself in a diverse creative way rather than reveals Himself in a single form does not constitute any great novelty for Christianity.

A second criticism could be that, given the image of God focused on creativity, the ability of this creativity to allow God to reveal Himself in different ways in different realities, and given that different religions are the results of insights from these revelations, anyone could say that he had access to a divine revelation no matter how absurd that 'revelation' is. Upon being accused of absurdity, one could retort that, although it seems absurd to human eyes, it is the result of a divine revelation, of the infinite creativity of God in revealing Himself. In this case, we would have a kind of 'anything goes' that would not permit any religious criticism.

This is an interesting criticism, but one that in my view could also be applied to theism in its classic and exclusivist tradition if it had no internal criteria for deciding what is reasonable and what is not reasonable for divine revelation. So, in defending the creativity and diversity of divine revelation, I am not saying that different religions should accept all kinds of beliefs. In general, theologies have internal criteria that allow them to differentiate between a reasonable and an unreasonable belief. In the above case, among the criteria to assess whether a belief is valid, Alston's (1991) proposal that the belief in question has significant self-support and that it is socially established could be interesting.[26] That is, it bears fruit within theism and is accepted by the community of believers.

A third criticism could arise from the proper idea of a God of infinite creativity who reveals Himself in different ways. One could say that one even agrees that God can reveal Himself differently but cannot agree that God could be the source of contradictory beliefs – and when we speak of religious diversity there are contradictory beliefs. If God is the source of those contradictory beliefs revealing themselves in different ways from different human groups, it seems unreasonable to believe in such an image of God. This criticism is quite reasonable and potentially has the strength to overturn my entire argument so far. But the philosophical tradition can provide an answer for it.

Some contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the contradiction does not apply when we are talking about different belief systems. Wittgenstein (1972), for example, draws attention to the fact that when a belief system A and a belief system B have apparently contradictory beliefs, there is really no contradiction because the statements have criteria of truth and falsity that are constructed differently in different belief systems. In other words, different internal criteria apply, and the possible contradictions are only apparent as the result of our poor understanding of how our language and beliefs work.

Putnam (1992) also calls attention to this. For him, different conceptual systems create different realities and meanings for these realities. Therefore, the objects that supposedly exist are dependent upon a conceptual scheme, and more than that, the very idea that 'something exists' is dependent on the conceptual scheme adopted. The idea of truth, therefore, is some type of 'rational (idealized) acceptability' that presupposes a coherence of our beliefs with each other and with the experiences that are represented in our belief system. It is thus not possible to compare beliefs from conceptual system A with beliefs from conceptual system B, in that these beliefs are contradictory. However, while apparently contradictory, they are in fact beliefs with internal criteria of truth and falsehood.[27]

These ideas from Wittgenstein and Putnam could be a response to the criticism of contradiction because of the idea that contradiction can only be applied inside a belief system and not between belief systems. But two problems could arise here. (1) If I appeal to the idea of conceptual systems or belief systems, I would be relativizing my own idea

that God is a being of infinite creativity, and (2) even though we are talking about different belief systems with different ways and criteria for correcting beliefs, my central thesis presupposes something that would exist in all these systems: God. He would be one being 'inhabiting' a variety of systems, and it would be strange for Him to contradict Himself even if in different systems. I will start by responding to the first of these objections.

At the beginning of this article, I said that my work would be concerned with understanding pluralism as a religious interpretation, internally to Christian theism. It would not be an interpretation of religious diversity, in the sense of a theory or evaluation of this diversity which defends the view that the religious truth exists or must exist in a variety of ways that are accessed by different religions in different and equally valid ways. This differentiation is important for the response to the objection that my own thesis would be relativized. My proposal is not a general thesis on diversity, but a philosophical justification internal to Christian theism itself for religious diversity. In this sense, I do not need to commit to a strong thesis that all religions need to recognize God as an infinitely creative being for my internal justification of theism be valid. My thesis only proposes that it is possible to justify such an idea internally to Christian theism, but not that this idea is presupposed in all religions.

Again, my proposal is not a general theory to explain religious diversity, and, in this sense, it also escapes from the common criticism of some pluralistic theses that they distort religious traditions in an attempt to make them compatible with a specific idea of religion. My proposal does not ask that any other religion leave its idea of God or religious beliefs in favour of an idea of an infinitely creative God. On the contrary, the idea that God can reveal Himself in the most diverse forms in different realities allows us to understand better, internally to theism, the variety of divine images and religious beliefs of the most different religions. My proposal only asks Christian theism to look more closely at divine creativity and argues that this look can generate a different understanding, internally to Christianity, about the fact of religious diversity.

On the second problem, an analogy with the human being can provide a good answer to this objection. The human being acts in different aspects of his life in different ways. A subject X is, despite being the same person, a father, a worker, a friend, a dancer, a client, and so on. In each of these situations, he acts according to the system's rules and ways of acting. To an external viewer it might seem that this subject is most strange and contradictory in his actions, when one compares his actions as a friend with his actions as a philosophy professor, or father, for example. But what seems contradictory when comparing two different forms of action may not be so if we look at the internal rules of each role that the subject plays in each practice.[28] If that is possible in human beings, imagine in God's case a being who, according to theistic belief, exists in all realities and, according to what I have argued, is constantly creating different realities and different ways of communicating meaning in these realities. A being with these attributes without a doubt could act in different ways in different realities and situations, even though it can sometimes seem contradictory to human eyes.

Here, of course, a question would still remain about God's purposes in revealing Himself in this way. That is, why would God prefer to reveal Himself in different ways, to different people, and in different realities instead of making Himself known to humanity in His entirety? An answer to this question needs to start by recalling the fact, cited above, that as finite beings we do not have access to the divine nature or to the totality of its purposes. Even so, it is possible to respond, even if partially, to this criticism. In my view, such an answer could take at least two different forms.

The first appeals to the proper idea of divine creativity. One of the possible reasons for God to create and reveal Himself differently is that a complex and diverse world appears

to be more beautiful and perfect in its possibilities than a single and uniform world. God, as an omnipotent being with infinite creative freedom, must prefer to use all His powers and creative abilities to create the most beautiful and complex world possible. Even for finite beings like us, it seems easy to understand that it would be a waste of our creative capacities if we always did things in a single way. Creativity involves the ability to see new possibilities. With our same constrained creative capacities, we can perceive that a world with a greater supply of creative acts is a better world than one with fewer such acts. That is, a world that is populated with beings capable of doing various things in different ways makes that world more interesting – surely few people would disagree with that. But, beyond the response focused on the attribute of divine creativity, there is a second possible approach.

This way points to our role in creation. Christian theistic belief allows us to say that we are beings who participate in divine creativity; that is, we are co-participants of creation and not mere contemplators of it. On the face of it, it is possible to find a moral or spiritual advantage in the diversity of the world created by God.[29] The religious diversity present in the world can lead us to develop important moral and epistemic virtues for the creation of a kingdom of God in which all our capacities flourish. Through the awareness of diversity and the encounter with it, we can develop virtues such as humility, tolerance, and respect. Possessing these virtues seems to be something good and desirable and is therefore better than not having them. Undoubtedly, these virtues are developed in a diverse and plural world. In this sense, I want to emphasize that one of God's purposes with the creation of a diverse world may be little by little to make us better and more perfect beings both morally and spiritually. This improvement in our lives would happen, of course, through our participation in God's creative work – our own creative participation.

Conclusion

I have argued in favour of a possible Christian theistic argument to religious pluralism, focusing on the idea of divine creativity. I propose that we need to focus on the idea of God as a being of infinite creativity who is able to create different and varied realities and reveal Himself in them in different ways. In what I presented, I showed that such an image of God makes religious diversity more palatable to theism. This is because the different existing religions originate from the human perception of divine creativity and, in view of that, to contemplate religious diversity is to contemplate different insights regarding God's infinite creativity. More than that, I suggested that if this image of God is taken seriously, the doors open to a kind of transformation inside theism. This transformation would be a result of human creativity in creating new insights about God and His creativity from encounters with different views of divine creativity, that is, encounters between different religions.

To conclude, it is necessary to emphasize that such an approach is a theistic perspective on religious diversity. In other words, it is not intended to be a general theory of pluralism, but a justification internal to Christian theism, from a pluralist perspective in relation to religious diversity. This justification focuses on divine creativity and, in my view, shows that if we focus on the idea of God as a being who is always creating, can create different realities, and can reveal Himself in different ways, theism does not need to understand religious diversity in a negative way. Rather, it can be seen as an opportunity to enrich theistic insights into God's infinite creative power.

Notes

1. See, for example, Swinburne ([1996](#)).
2. See, for example, Alston ([1991](#)).
3. See, for example, Hooft ([1963](#)), and Netland ([1997](#)).
4. See, for example, McFague ([1987](#)), Kaufman ([2004](#)), and Peacocke ([2009](#)).
5. In this sense, the image of God that I am proposing here is very close to ideas about God defended by some scholars of process theology and can represent an argument in favour of such theology in the face of religious diversity. Moreover, such an idea of omnipotence, as will become clear later, takes into account human free will and creativity. That is, given the existence of beings with free will and creativity, God does not completely determine the choices and creative possibilities of these beings.
6. The idea that God is a creative being is not new in theology and philosophy. On the contrary, there are many ways of approaching the issue of divine creativity, from pantheistic perspectives such as Spinoza's, to more contemporary notions such as those of process theology (Cobb and Griffin, [1976](#)), or of God as serendipitous creativity (Kaufman, [2004](#)), or Peacocke's idea according to which God is 'always Creator – he is creating at every moment of the world's existence in and through the self-perpetuating creativity of the very stuff of the world' (Peacocke ([2009](#)), 105).
7. I am not stating that God necessarily needs to create different realities or possible worlds, but that He could do it, given His powers. In this sense, I am stating neither that God could not have created a unique and infinitely complex reality, nor that different realities cannot emerge from divine creation and other creative beings in an infinitely complex world. As will become clear later, the different realities that permeate human existence are the result of both infinite divine creativity and the human co-creative power. In this sense, the different realities, in which co-creative beings flow and are shaped by both divine creativity and the creativity of these beings, are the result of a process in which reality shapes these beings while these beings shape reality. Different human communities are a good example of this: living according to the environment that surrounds them, but also modifying this environment with their creativity.
8. In this sense, the image of God as a leader of a dance, with the dance being the universe, as Peacocke ([2009](#)) points out, can help us to understand this. God as a dancer does not only create a single choreography, but choreographies as varied as His creativity allows, worlds so varied that they do not fit in the finite human imaginative creativity. Whitehead's ([1978](#)) idea of God as the poet of the world is also illustrative of what I mean here.
9. I understand freedom here as similar to artistic freedom, in the sense of freedom to imagine, create, and distribute your creations freely.
10. In fact, just as many theistic traditions emphasize that the nature of God, in its entirety, cannot be known to human beings, so His infinite creativity in all its forms and manifestations cannot be fully known by human beings, due to our finitude before God.
11. I am not saying that all divine creation is directed solely and exclusively to human beings. I agree with Peacocke that 'the creative role of chance operating upon the lawful "necessities" which are themselves created has led us to accept models of God's activity which express God's gratuitousness and joy in creation as a whole, and not in man alone' (Peacocke ([2009](#)), 111). What I mean is just that theistic traditions have in them many accounts of direct communication between God and human beings, in human social and cultural life. In this sense, although creation is not only focused on human beings, I believe that it is possible to think that divine creativity also enters human personal, social, and cultural life.
12. Peacocke, for example, claims that God's creativity can even be recognized in the human being as a co-creator or co-author of creation. For him, the 'Creator can be immanent in man at the fully personal level. But since God is Creator, and still creating, then we must conclude that the continuing incarnation of God "in us" is identical with God's creative work in and through us.' In this sense, divine creativity is also present in human actions, in the creative history of humanity 'in the arts, science, and literature, or social relation, in general' (Peacocke ([2009](#)), 307), and consequently, I would add, also in religiosity. This idea is interesting, because, if we take the idea of God as *semper creator* and that divine creativity can be immanent in the human being, we open space to see different human creations as a result of the immense divine creativity. In this sense, just as contemplating the dance of the cosmos is contemplating the dance of divine creation, contemplating human creativity, in its most varied forms, is contemplating divine creativity embodied in the only being that emerged with the possibility of perceiving the meaning that God communicates with His creativity.
13. See, for example, Hooft ([1963](#)), and Netland ([1997](#)).
14. Leonardo da Vinci is a good example in this regard. It is undeniable that we attribute to him great creativity for his important ideas in different areas of human life. The same happens with several other historical figures who contributed, in their lives, to the arts, philosophy, and sciences. With this, I am not saying that people who

are creative in a single area of human life are less creative. I am just focusing on the fact that people we consider extremely creative exhibit an extraordinary performance in various areas.

15. There are other ways to contemplate the creativity of God such as contemplating the cosmos. In this sense, to contemplate religious diversity is one of the ways to experience such creativity.

16. Here, my approach differs from the interpretation of the religions proposed, for example, by Hick (2004). This will be clarified in the final section.

17. This would be impossible because divine creativity is infinitely greater than the human capacity to perceive it.

18. Here it is important to draw attention to the fact that I am not interested in a strict definition of religion, but in how it is possible to understand the different religions of Christianity, internally to this, in the light of the image of God as a being of infinite creativity. Thus, despite recognizing that there is an important philosophical dispute over what counts or not as a religion (Harrison, (2007); Lebens (2022)), I do not need, for the purposes of this work, to have an exhaustive definition of the concept of religion. In this sense, an understanding of religion, as I have set out elsewhere (Spica (2018)), as a complex system of beliefs and practices that directly influence the believer's life and action is sufficient for my goals here. Of course, one could say that this understanding is very open and would contain belief systems and practices that are not commonly understood as religion, like certain political and cultural ideologies, for example. My answer is that, ultimately, from a really pluralistic perspective it is up to each system of practices and beliefs to recognize itself or not as a religion. This criterion would avoid arbitrariness common to the philosophical definitions of religion. For a view of this arbitrariness and how it affects a pluralistic approach to religion, see, for example, Burley (2020).

19. Here again we have the idea that in the existence of beings with creative abilities, God and these beings are co-creators. That is, divine creation and revelation shape in some sense the reality of such beings while the creativity of these beings changes this reality.

20. See Peacocke (2009), 304.

21. The Real is treated by Hick as transcategorial in that it is something beyond the categories of our understanding.

22. For Hick (1995 and 1982), no intrinsic attribute may be assigned to the Real. For example, I refer to it in the singular rather than the plural because of the limitations of our language. Our concepts cannot reach the ultimately Real.

23. I am aware that different religions have important different perspectives on, for example, moral and social issues, theologically very well established internally to their system of beliefs and practices. In this sense, when I speak of the possibility of transformation, this could lead to an idea that we should put all these ideas aside and suspend judgement about our established beliefs. But that is not what I am asking. What I argue is simply that encounter between different religions is possible, from a perspective that God and humans create different and varied realities. These encounters can provide spiritual and religious enrichment in the most diverse aspects of spiritual and religious life that can transform our ideas about God, humanity, and nature. There is no way of knowing what ideas and concepts will be transformed; it is the encounter itself and the dialogue that will provide or not such transformations in one or other religion. As I have argued (Spica, 2018) based on some ideas of Wittgenstein, religions, as well as other belief systems and practices, have some fluidity, although they maintain certain beliefs as unquestionable. This fluidity allows them to be modified internally during their histories of experiences with the natural, social, and interreligious world. However, it is not possible to know in advance which modification or transformation will actually occur. It is in the very historical unfolding of the different religions that transformations and solidifications of concepts, beliefs, and theories are being performed.

24. Here I understand epistemic humility following Trigg (2014).

25. See, for example, Augustine (1991).

26. It is important to recall that Peacocke's theology of nature recognizes that religious belief systems have ways of testing their beliefs in the community, and beliefs are reformulated or new beliefs added to systems according to the internal criteria of religions. I agree with this point. Therefore, I understand that as a function of each religion within its belief system, and it is up to that system to decide whether a possible revelation from God is really a revelation from God or an illusion.

27. Harrison (2008) applies Putnam's ideas to religious diversity in a very interesting way in his defence of internalist pluralism concerning religious diversity.

28. Even the human being inhabits different systems of beliefs and practices, and it is these systems of practices and beliefs that determine the rules of action. With this, I am not saying that God would be limited by the realities that He Himself created. I am just stating that given the different realities that God creates, He can act and reveal Himself in different ways within these diverse realities.

29. Many thanks to Kelly Clark for calling my attention to this point.

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